INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel is a key document for the Christian faith. Not only does it contain significant prophecies concerning the future, Jesus Christ and the writers of the New Testament often referred to it as well. Jesus warned his disciples to be prepared to flee to the mountains when they would see "the abomination that causes desolation" in "the holy place" that "the prophet Daniel" had mentioned (Matt. 24:15–16 // Mark 13:14–15; cf. Dan. 9:27). Jesus also identified himself with the "son of man" figure in Daniel's first vision (Dan. 7:13; esp. Matt 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; 22:69). The angel Gabriel, who announced the births of John the Baptist (Luke 1:19) and Jesus (Luke 1:26), appears only in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament (Dan. 8:16; 9:21). The Pauline epistles sometimes refer to Daniel's book (1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Thess. 2:3–4 [cf. Dan. 11:36–37]). Until one is acquainted with Daniel 7–12 it is difficult at best to understand John's imagery in the book of Revelation.[1] One more example—Daniel has the clearest reference to resurrection in the Old Testament, an event which will result in either "everlasting life" or "everlasting contempt" for those "who sleep in the dust of the earth" (12:2).

Since Daniel's book is so foundational for Jesus Christ and the New Testament writers, it is important for believers to comprehend what it is all about. Whoever comes to study the book of Daniel, however, soon discovers that there are many introductory questions that cry out for examination before the contents of the book can be appreciated properly. In the pages that follow I will examine some of these significant questions.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book of Daniel divides into two main parts. The first part consists of episodes in the lives of Daniel and his three friends at the court of the king, recorded from the perspective of a narrator (chapters 1–6). The events of chapters one through four take place at the court of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon; chapter five concerns the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar; and chapter six ushers in the era of the Medes and Persians under "Darius the Mede" (5:31) and concludes with "Cyrus the Persian" (6:28). The second part of the book, chapters seven through twelve, contains Daniel's own visions recorded in first person style, although the voice of a narrator is not entirely absent (7:1; 10:1).

When the book of Daniel is examined in its standard form as embraced by Jews and Protestants (as opposed to an expanded form in the Greek Septuagint), the surprising fact emerges that it was written in two languages, namely Hebrew and Aramaic. The division is as follows:

1:1–2:4a in Hebrew

2:4b–7:28 in Aramaic

8:1–12:13 in Hebrew

It is apparent from the distribution that the Aramaic portion includes sections from both parts according to content. That is, the Aramaic section starts near the beginning of the chapter about Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream and continues through Daniel's first vision in chapter seven. The Hebrew parts, on the other hand, encompass both the

1 For example, the "beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads" (Rev. 13:1) draws heavily on the imagery of Dan. 7:3, 7–8.

introduction to the book, with the first story about Daniel and his friends, and also the remainder of Daniel's visions.

The way the book divides by language highlights three distinct sections. The introduction in Hebrew provides the general historical setting of the book and brings Daniel and his three companions onto the scene, at the same time explaining how these four Judean exiles gained important positions in the Babylonian court. The Aramaic section details the activities of these men in the court but also includes the first of Daniel's personal visions. Like Nebuchadnezzar's dream found in chapter two of the Aramaic section, Daniel's vision of chapter seven uses the same scheme of four successive kingdoms or empires to outline the remaining history of the world; and it brings the Aramaic portion to an end. The visions recorded in Hebrew for the rest of the book then give more detailed prophecies concerning the third or Greek kingdom as well as concerning the fourth and final kingdom.

Considering only the Aramaic chapters, it is evident that they are arranged in a *chiastic* or inverted literary pattern based on the contents of each chapter (Lenglet, 1972). Figure 1 illustrates this pattern with parallel contents shown by equal indentation. Chapter two, then, parallels chapter seven; chapter three parallels chapter six; and chapters four and five parallel each other.

The structure of these Aramaic chapters points to an important message that they convey. The outer chapters (2 and 7, 3 and 6) reveal significant issues about who God is. He reveals mysteries (chap. 2), and as the Ancient of Days he is Lord over all of history (chap. 7). Chapter three shows how Israel's God is able to deliver his faithful servants, and chapter six demonstrates his ability to exalt his servants over their enemies. The middle two chapters (4 and 5) then focus on human response to who God is. Whether foreign rulers, the people of Israel, or Daniel's modern readers, that response is either humility or pride. If we refuse to humble ourselves then God will humble us, according to chapter four. Chapter five shows the disastrous results when people attempt to exalt themselves over God. That is a central theme of the book—God will humble the proud and exalt the humble (cf. Prov. 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).[2]

The order of chapters one through six is chronological, but 7:1 has a date that places it in the first year of Belshazzar's reign, whereas the events recorded in chapter five occurred in Belshazzar's last year. Likewise chapter eight from Belshazzar's third year (8:1) follows chapter seven chronologically but also precedes chapter five. Thus literary structure—the chiastic arrangement of the Aramaic chapters—trumps chronology in the layout of the book.

LITERARY GENRE

On a general level there are two types of literature in the book of Daniel—narratives about Daniel and his friends in the royal court and apocalyptic style visions narrated by Daniel himself.

Court Narratives

As for the stories, they have a certain exaggerated quality about them, as though they were caricatures of the events. Daniel and his young companions, for example, were *ten times* wiser than *all* the wise men in Nebuchadnezzar's *whole realm* (1:21). Chapter three has constant repetition of lists of government officials, musical instruments, and terms for the general population. Even the names "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" occur over and over. The story about Belshazzar (chap. 5) uses a repeated pun to highlight his dismal failure as a king. He was in such terror at seeing the writing on the wall that the "knots" of his loins were "untied" ("his legs gave way" [NLT]; or,

2 See also Davis (2013, 22–24) for further ideas about the intricate structure of chapters 2–7.

loss of bowel control [Wolters, 1991b]; 5:6). Eventually Daniel was summoned because he was able "to untie knots" (i.e., "solve difficult problems," 5:12, 16). The king's embarrassment showcased Daniel's special ability to solve mysteries. In short, literary techniques like hyperbole, repetition, and word play heighten the emotional impact, increase the sense of wonder, and add to the entertainment value of the stories.

None of the literary techniques by which the stories are told has to mean that they were only folk legends (*contra* John Collins, 1993a, 44–45). Historical characters can also be caricatured and made to look larger than life. One could think of the separate accounts of David in Samuel and Kings versus that found in Chronicles. Both give accurate historical information, but the reader is left with a different impression of David in each. And even if one thinks of a narrator/editor who attached stories about Daniel and his friends to Daniel's own recorded visions, that also does not have to mean that the stories are fictitious. The miraculous elements are unusual but surely not beyond the God of Scripture, who often injects himself into human affairs in very marvelous ways. My assumption is that as a part of inspired Scripture it makes good sense to treat the narratives of Daniel as true stories that are told in a very entertaining and impressive manner.

Apocalyptic

Chapters seven through twelve of Daniel have been broadly described as "apocalyptic." Older studies tended to make lists of characteristics that would identify literature as apocalyptic (Russell, 1992, 9), but more recently the thought has been to view "a body of texts sharing a family resemblance" (Cook, 2003, 22). These features "interconnect family members, but they are not necessary, fixed features or any ultimate essence" (ibid.). John Collins (1979a, 9) famously defined the genre:

> "Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature within a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world. (emphasis his)

Daniel's visions are given in a "narrative framework" and involve interpreting angels who bring him special revelation from God. Also they climax in "eschatological salvation" when God's eternal kingdom supplants on earth all the kingdoms of this world. Daniel's "eschatological salvation" also includes "some form of personal afterlife" (John Collins, 1979a, 9) in that it refers clearly to a future resurrection (Dan. 12:2). So according to Collins's widely accepted definition, the visions in Daniel fit well the genre of an apocalypse.

John Collins (1979b, 22–23) also classifies Daniel with a group of Jewish apocalypses that according to him were composed between about 250 B.C. and A.D. 150. He further considers Daniel 7–12 a type of apocalypse that gives a survey of history that is presented as though it were revealed in advance by heavenly intermediaries. In reality, though, all the so-called predictions were past history for the author (*ex eventu* prophecy). Also "[t]he visionary is always pseudonymous" (ibid., 24). That is, the person who receives the vision is falsely claimed to be a great figure of the past, as for example Enoch in the books that bear his name (cf. Gen. 5:18–24). For reasons to be discussed shortly, however, I see that the book of Daniel differs from other Jewish apocalyptic visions in that a historical Daniel had real visions through which he received genuine revelations about the future.

Other biblical books also have apocalyptic features, such as angelic mediation and a theology of eschatological salvation. Examples would be portions of Ezekiel and

Zechariah. While apocalyptic features are more pronounced in Daniel (at least for chapters 7–12) than in other biblical books, that is due to Daniel's unique situation in Babylon and Persia. Being situated as he was among the wise men in the royal court, imagery that was latent with symbolic meaning conveyed through dreams would have been natural for him (cf. Oppenheim, 1956). The apocalyptic features of Daniel, then, can be related to features found in other books of the Old Testament but enhanced through the cultural milieu of the Babylonian court. God revealed himself through Scripture in ways that were reflective of the writer's own cultural situation, and that was true of Daniel's visions as well.

Wisdom and Prophecy

The German scholar Gerhard von Rad thought that Jewish apocalyptic literature arose from wisdom circles rather than from earlier prophetic works (Rad, 1972, 263–283). His view has not gone unchallenged. According to John Collins (1993a, 59), "There is no doubt that Daniel also stands in continuity with the prophetic tradition, especially as it developed in the post-exilic period." While I would argue that Daniel's connections should rather be with pre-exilic (e.g., Isaiah) or exilic prophets (e.g., Ezekiel), the debate illustrates well the variant positions of the book of Daniel within Jewish and Christian traditions. In Christian Bibles Daniel is placed as the last of the Major Prophets, while in Jewish Bibles the book is found in the section known as the "Writings" (*Ketubim*).[3] Daniel is thus included with biblical wisdom literature (Job, some Psalms [e.g. Psalm 1], Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon) in Jewish traditions.[4]

Prophetic analogs to Daniel's apocalyptic material would include Isaiah (see chaps. 24–25, 56–66), Ezekiel (see chaps. 37–39), Joel, and Zechariah. Wisdom material within Daniel is pervasive in the court narratives, with Daniel and his friends said to be wiser than all the other wise men at the Babylonian court (cf. Dan. 1:17, 20; 2:47–48; 4:7–9 [4–6]). Daniel appears at court as a wise interpreter of dreams, and in the apocalyptic material he receives his own dreams and visions, with an angelic interpreter. The reader first encounters Daniel and his companions among the מַשְׂכִּילִים or "wise ones" that Nebuchadnezzar placed in his Babylonian school (1:4), and the rest of the book demonstrates how perfectly Daniel fit that description. At the end of the book there is frequent reference to the מַשְׂכִּילִים who will give insight to others, and the reader has no doubt that Daniel is among them as well (11:33, 35; 12:3, 10). The theme verse of the book, 2:20–22, states that all *wisdom* comes from God and that he is responsible for removing and establishing kings. Daniel's own visions show how dependent he is on divine interpretation, and they show how God controls the movement of history through the ages as well. So while Daniel follows in the train of the prophets, he also blossoms as one of God's greatest wise men (cf. Ezek. 28:3). Both characteristics, wisdom and prophecy, show up in the book that he has bequeathed to Scripture.

The significance of the book's dual pedigree—prophets and wisdom—lies in its abiding message. If we focus only on the wisdom elements, then we could miss how the book centers our hope on God, who works not only in the

3 The Hebrew Bible has three sections: *Torah*; *Prophets*; and *Writings*. The *Torah* consists of the five books of Moses, and the *Prophets* division consists of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and *The Twelve* (Minor Prophets). All the rest of the books of the Protestant canon are in the *Writings*, including the book of Daniel.

4 For the view that it was only in the post-New Testament age that in Jewish tradition Daniel was classified among the Writings, see Finley (2008).

future but who also controls the future. And if we dwell only on the prophetic elements found in apocalyptic, we miss how the book can shape us in our faithfulness to God. Moreover there is a tension within the book between these two streams of revelation. In the narratives about the royal court the issue of human faithfulness comes to the fore, whereas in the apocalyptic visions God's sovereignty over all of history reigns supreme. And chapter nine heightens the tension when Daniel first prays for forgiveness but then hears about an historical framework that includes even greater hardship for the Jews in the future. This tension represents the human condition for the believer. On the one hand God's followers are responsible to remain faithful and to repent when they depart from his ways. Also their faithfulness can in some mysterious way influence the outworking of history. On the other hand they need to trust that God is always and everywhere in complete control of events, and that he will judge all wickedness in due time.

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK

In light of the significance of Daniel for the New Testament it may seem surprising to some that the most important controversy about the book concerns whether Daniel was even an historical person. The dominant view in critical scholarship holds that an unknown author living in the second century B.C. either wrote or compiled the book based on a legendary figure known as Daniel. The stories of chapters one through six are then merely entertaining and inspiring "tales," while the visions that comprise chapters seven through twelve were written by the author so as to appear that they are prophetic when in reality they simply record past history. Generally speaking, more recent scholars in the critical camp view the stories as composed earlier than the second half of the book, possibly as early as the third or even fourth century B.C. (John Collins, 1993a, 37).

In responding to this view of the book I will treat first some of the more specific arguments advanced in favor of a late dating of the book, and then I will give some positive reasons for accepting the book as a genuine work of Daniel who lived in the sixth century B.C.

Historical Issues

Does the book of Daniel get its historical information straight? According to those writers who posit an author who lived in the second century B.C., the answer is no—the author of the book was confused about historical facts concerning the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid period of Persian history and even about the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.). The date of the final composition of the book is pinpointed by assuming that it contains an accurate account of events surrounding Antiochus Epiphanes but inaccurate statements at 11:36–45 about his downfall. Since Antiochus died in 164 B.C. the book is dated to about 168–165 B.C. That is, the author could "prophesy" about Antiochus when the details of his statements were known to him, but when he tried to project into the future he got it wrong. In the exposition I will show that 11:36–45 do not refer to Antiochus. Here I will treat two significant issues. One that concerns the identity of Darius the Mede and the other that concerns chronological problems in Daniel 1:1–2. Additional issues will be handled as they arise in the book of Daniel.

The Identity of Darius the Mede

Who was Darius the Mede (Dan. 5:31 [6:1]; 6:1 [2], 6 [7], 9 [10], 25 [26], 28 [29]; 9:1; 11:1)? The king who conquered Babylon is known as Cyrus in extra biblical sources, and Darius the Mede is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible or in ancient sources outside of the Bible.[5] Thus many argue that the author of Daniel made a blunder

5 Some sources, such as Josephus (*A.J.* 10), are exceptions that had knowledge of the book of Daniel.

when he said that Darius the Mede "received the kingdom" of Babylon rather than Cyrus (5:31 [6:2]). Jeremiah 51:11 states that the Lord would use the Medes to conquer Babylon, so perhaps, according to the argument, the author of Daniel got the name from the biblical references to the later Persian king known as Darius (e.g., Ezra 4:5; cf. Rowley, 1959, 59). It should be noted, though, that the book of Ezra, which was written much earlier than the second century B.C., places Cyrus earlier than Darius Hystaspes (4:5 and 6:14), whereas in Daniel Darius the Mede is situated either at the same time as or prior to Cyrus (cf. 6:28 [29]).

Whitcomb (1959) attempted to equate Darius the Mede with a certain Gubaru who was appointed governor of Babylon by Cyrus. His view has two major problems. First, there is fairly general agreement that the names Gubaru and Ugbaru in the Nabonidus Chronicle refer to one individual, not two different persons as Whitcomb took them. They are simply phonetic variants of each other, and it is clear that this general who conquered Babylon for Cyrus died only some eight days after Babylon fell (Beaulieu, 1989, 227). Secondly and more importantly, according to some cuneiform sources Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, was appointed king of Babylon in the first year of Cyrus (Grabbe, 1988b, 201–203; Shea, 2001, 97), and it was another individual named Gubaru who was appointed governor of Babylon only several years later (Nicolò, 1941, 63). It could also be objected that it is unlikely that a mere governor would be treated like a king as the sixth chapter of Daniel portrays Darius.

Recently Steven Anderson (2014) has revised an older view that Darius the Mede is to be identified with a certain Cyaxares, said by the ancient Greek writer Xenophon to be a maternal uncle of Cyrus the Great. The Greek writer Herodotus and the ancient soures written in Akkadian cuneiform do not mention Cyaxares, but Josephus (*A.J.* 10:248) and Jerome (1958, 55) agree with the family relation between Darius and Cyrus. Jerome cites Xenophon for his information, and it is quite likely that Josephus relied on Xenophon as well (Anderson, 2014, 4). If Cyaxares is indeed a different name for Darius the Mede, then his account differs from Daniel 6 by having Cyrus become ruler of Babylon immediately after conquering it. Anderson views Cyrus as subordinate to Cyaxares/Darius, but that is not a strong impression one gets by reading Xenophon's account. Most historians view Cyaxares as the uncle of Cyrus as a fiction (Rowley, 1935, 42). Anderson counters that "if Cyaxares were unhistorical, it would be inexplicable why Xenophon would have created him, given his aim in the *Cyropaedia* of presenting Cyrus as the ideal king" (2014, 28). Actually it seems necessary for Xenophon to have invented Cyaxares in light of his portrayal of Cyrus as always being gracious and compassionate to virtually everyone, even to his enemies when possible, and especially to his grandfather Astyages. Yet according to Herodotus, Cyrus led a Persian army to rebel against Astyages. Xenophon was able to maintain the integrity of his idealized Cyrus by inventing the character Cyaxares to give a different account of Cyrus's relationship to the Medes. This being said, there may be some possibility that a figure like Cyaxares could lie behind Darius the Mede in Daniel's book, but if so, a great deal of Medo-Persian history needs to be rewritten.The most ancient sources support Herodotus in viewing Cyrus as the conqueror of Babylon in 539 B.C.

A more likely solution to the identity of Darius the Mede was proposed by Wiseman (1965, 9–16), namely that Darius the Mede is an alternate name for Cyrus the Persian. This would entail reading Daniel 6:28 (29) with the marginal reading found in the NIV: "in the reign of Darius, that is, in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."[6] Such a reading is linguistically justifiable

6 Both of the ancient Greek versions (OG and Th) have *Cyrus* instead of *Darius* at Dan. 11:1.

and also assumes that *Darius*, a name born by three later Persian kings, was an alternate name for *Cyrus*. Precedent for dual names for a king is known from the Bible and from other ancient sources. For example, Tiglath-pileser was also known as Pul, as attested both in the Bible and in cuneiform inscriptions (1 Chron. 5:26; Grayson, 1992, 552). Both names even occur together in 1 Chronicles 5:26: "the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, *even* [Hebrew ו] the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser [i.e., Tiglath-pileser], king of Assyria." More to the point, Daniel and his companions had dual names; dual languages were used in the book; and "the Medes and the Persians" is best taken as referring to a single kingdom with two parts. Cyrus the Great conquered Media in 550 B.C., so when he conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. his kingdom could already be called *Medo-Persian*.[7] Prophets previous to Daniel also predicted the overthrow of the Babylonians by both the Medes (Isa. 13:17; 21:2; Jer. 51:11, 28) and the Persians (*Elam* in Isa. 21:2).

According to Herodotus (*Histories* 1:107–123), Cyrus's father Cambyses, who was Persian, married the daughter of Astyages, the king of the Medes. If Herodotus is to be believed, this would make Cyrus part Persian and part Median. At Daniel 9:1 the father of Cyrus is said to be Ahasuerus, but this may refer to his grandfather Astyages or to "an ancient Achaemenid royal title" given to one of Cyrus's ancestors (Wiseman, 1965, 15). While it is difficult to prove that Cyrus was also known as Darius without extra-biblical verification, until further data become known this appears to be the best solution to the identity of Darius the Mede (cf. Bulman, 1973; Steinmann, 2008, 290–296).

Chronological Issues in Daniel 1:1–2

The "third year" of Daniel 1:1 appears at first glance to be in conflict with Jeremiah 25:1 and 46:2. Those two verses equate the first year of Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh Neco's defeat at Carchemish with the fourth year of Jehoiakim. Many have consequently attributed an error to the author of Daniel (e.g., John Collins, 1993a, 131), but it seems odd that the author would contradict Jeremiah when he took such a strong interest in that prophet's book (Dan. 9:2). Solutions to this chronological issue concern both how the reigns of kings were calculated in ancient times and when a new year would begin. Since there is a difference of only one year between Jeremiah's "fourth year" and Daniel's "third year" for Jehoiakim, the apparent contradiction can be solved by assuming different methods of calculation and different starting points for a new year (see Millard, 2012, 263–266).

Another issue concerns what happened in Jehoiakim's third year. The text says that Nebuchadnezzar "besieged" (וַיָּצַר) Jerusalem, made Jehoiakim submit to him, and took vessels from the temple to Babylon. The historical issue here is that there is no independent account of these events either in the rest of the Old Testament or in the Babylonian records. Some have therefore said that the events as described are historically implausible in light of the Babylonian records that we do have (e.g., Gowan, 2001, 43).

According to 2 Kings 24:1–2 Jehoiakim was a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar for three years and then rebelled. Gowan thinks that the three year period "must have come at the end of [Jehoiakim's] eleven-year reign" (2001, 43), but the text nowhere indicates this. It could well be that Jehoiakim's three year period of servitude began late in 605 B.C. or that it was measured from early 604 B.C., the start of Nebuchadnezzar's official first year. All that Daniel indicates is that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in the third year of Jehoiakim; the actual capture could have taken some time and occurred only after

7 The Greeks often called Persians "Medes" (Tuplin, 1994, 235).

Nebuchadnezzar was forced to return to Babylon because of the death of his father.[8]

A more important issue concerns Jeremiah 36:9. If Jehoiakim was still loyal to Egypt in his fifth year and worried about an impending Babylonian invasion (Jer. 37:5–10), then it would contradict the import of Daniel 1:1. The text of Jeremiah mentions a fast but does not specify why it was done. Keil (1983a, 66; 1983b, 94–95) thought it was to commemorate the first taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar as described in Daniel 1:2. Nebuchadnezzar suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Egyptians in his fourth year (601 B.C.) and was forced to return to Babylon (Grayson, 1975, 101). This defeat can be correlated with Jehoiakim's submission to Nebuchadnezzar in late 605 B.C. if the three years of submission to Nebuchadnezzar mentioned in 2 Kings 24:1 were calculated from the start of Nebuchadnezzar's official first year. According to the *Babylonian Chronicle*, near the end of that first year of Nebuchadnezzar (November or December of 604 B.C.) "all the kings of Hattu [Syria-Palestine] came into his presence and he received their vast tribute" (Grayson, 1975, 100).[9] Jehoiakim would have become officially a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar at that time and then rebelled three years later, being emboldened by the Egyptian victory in 601 B.C.[10]

The Prayer of Nabonidus and Nebuchadnezzar

A fragmentary Aramaic scroll from the fourth cave of Qumran (4QPrNab ar) tells the story of how Nabonidus (spelled נבני, *nbny*), king of Babylon, prayed after contracting a severe skin disease[11] "at the decree of the god in Teman" (text and translation in Steinmann, 2008, 216–217). Teman in Arabia was where Nabonidus went for ten years, leaving Babylon in charge of his son Belshazzar. In his prayer he pleaded for forgiveness, after which a Jewish "diviner" (גזר) told him to give "honor and grea[tness and majesty] to the name of [the Most High G]od."[12] Then Nabonidus told how he had been struck with the skin disease for seven years. The end of the text is unreadable but probably described his recovery. The story reflects elements of both Daniel 4 and also of the Babylonian texts that describe how Nabonidus left Babylon to worship the moon god at Teman. Apparently there was a religious dispute between the priests of Bel/Marduk and Nabonidus, who wanted to restore a more ancient form of worship.

Scholars have given two radically different interpretations of the significance of this story for the book of Daniel. A common theory posits that the *Prayer of Nabonidus* represents an intermediate stage between the Babylonian accounts about Nabonidus and chapters four and five of Daniel. That is, a legend about Nabonidus contracting an illness and then conversing with a Jewish diviner was later transferred to the more well-known Nebuchadnezzar, with the malady also changing to a type of madness (see VanderKam, 2010, 177–178).

8 *Babylonian Chronicle* 5 states: "In (his) accession year Nebuchadnezzar (II) returned to Hattu. Until the month Shebat [January/February of 604 B.C.] he marched about victoriously in Hattu" (Grayson, 1975, 100). If Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem in December of 605 B.C., then he would already be king, though it would not be his "first" year yet according to the Babylonian reckoning.

9 That Hattu, a term that means something like Syria-Palestine, could include Jerusalem is clear from a later reference to Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year when he went "to Hattu" and immediately "encamped against the city of Judah," *i.e.*, Jerusalem (Grayson, 1975, 102).

10 Cf. Wiseman (1993, 328).

11 The Hebrew cognate for Aramaic שחן is used for the inflamed spots or boils of the sixth plague against the Egyptians (Exod. 9:9, 10), a sign of leprosy (Lev. 13:18, 19, 20, 23), Hezekiah's affliction (2 Kings 20:7; Isa. 38:21), and Job's skin inflammation (Job 2:7).

12 The square brackets mark places where the fragmentary text has gaps for which the text must be surmised.

Steinmann (2008, 219–225) proposed instead that the *Prayer of Nabonidus* depended on Daniel's book. It was intended "to supplement the book of Daniel and fill in a perceived … gap in Daniel: the era between the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and the fall of Babylon to the Persians" (ibid., 219). In this respect it would be similar to the apocryphal additions to the book. Steinmann offers the following support for his view:

1. Daniel mentions "the determination of watchers" (4:17 [14]), which could be misconstrued to give angels the power to make decrees. The *Prayer of Nabonidus* mentions only "the decree of God," thus removing "any perceived tendency toward polytheism" (ibid., 220).
2. The term "diviner" (גזר) "fits well in Daniel, but not in the prayer" (ibid., 222). That is, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Daniel to be "chief of … diviners" (Dan. 5:11), making it natural that he should be thought of as a diviner. In the Qumran document reference to a diviner has no obvious motive.
3. By referring to the "diviner" as "Jewish" (יהודי), the author of the *Prayer* may have intended for his readers to associate the diviner with one of Daniel's three friends rather than with Daniel himself.
4. "Honor" (יקר) and "greatness" (רבו) occur together in the *Prayer* as epithets of "[the Most High G]od," whereas they occur twice in Daniel for characteristics of Nebuchadnezzar (4:36 [33] and 5:18). This could be "a theological hypercorrection so that these qualities belong to God and not to a pagan king" (ibid., 223).
5. The text of the *Prayer* mentions "gods of silver and gold, [bronze, iron,] wood, stone, clay." A similar list occurs in Daniel 5:4, 23, making it likely that the *Prayer* and the book of Daniel are dependent on each other. "Clay," however, occurs only in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the human image, along with the other elements in the list. "By conflating all the elements of the statue and of the gods, the author of the prayer affirms his radical monotheism and denies that pagan gods possess any power, since they are composed of inert earthly elements" (ibid., 224).
6. The *Prayer* refers specifically to "seven years" (שנין שבע) for the king's illness, whereas Daniel makes it more mysterious with "seven periods of time" (שִׁבְעָה עִדָּנִין). This gives evidence that the *Prayer* is "an interpretation and reapplication of Daniel 4" (ibid., 225).

Steinmann has given some plausible reasons for thinking that the *Prayer of Nabonidus* is dependent on Daniel 4 and 5. I would add only that the author of the *Prayer* has taken the mental condition that Nebuchadnezzar suffered and turned it into a more physical malady suffered by Nabonidus. In searching for something different to apply to the case of Nabonidus he seized upon an affliction that is found in several places in the Bible.

Language Issues

Is it possible to determine the date of the book of Daniel based on the type of Hebrew and Aramaic found in the book? Despite S. R. Driver's confident assertion that the Aramaic of Daniel "permits" and its Hebrew "demands" a date in the second century B.C. (Driver, 1901, lxiii), there are good reasons to situate the Aramaic and Hebrew of the book no later than the third or fourth century B.C. For more detailed argumentation see the Digital Extra: Daniel's Two Languages.

Evidence for an Early Composition of Daniel

The historical and linguistic issues discussed so far have been a challenge for those who take seriously the historical setting that the book of Daniel itself sets forth. They can be resolved but mostly through historical and linguistic scenarios that are likely or possible rather than through the hard data of manuscripts that are earlier than the second century B.C. There are, however, certain facts that are extremely difficult to deal with if a Maccabean date (late second century B.C.) for the book is posited.

The Testimony of Jesus and the New Testament

What Jesus Christ taught about the book is of key importance for his followers. In his discourse on the Mount of Olives he referred to the phrase "abomination of desolation," which he said was "spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (Matt. 24:15; see Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). The most natural way to understand his statement is that he gives Daniel the authority of a prophet. If a second century B.C. writer was using the name *Daniel* as a pseudonym and framing as prophecy what was only history to him, then it is hard to understand how Jesus could have called Daniel a prophet. Moreover the adoption by Jesus of the title "Son of Man" from Daniel 7:13[13] also shows that he identified himself with that figure and saw himself as the fulfillment of the vision at some future eschatological point.[14] The use that Jesus made of Daniel's book cannot be reconciled theologically with a book whose main character is only legendary.

The Unity of the Book

While scholars who advocated a Maccabean date for the writing of Daniel previously tended to think of a unified book (cf. Rowley, 1952), more recently the consensus position among them is that of a combination of two separate parts. Collins (1993a, 33), for example, holds that though the court stories of Daniel 1–6 would have been relevant for the persecution the Jews suffered under Antiochus Epiphanes, "close consideration of the stories does not support the view that they were composed with that situation in mind." The relatively positive view of Nebuchadnezzar and "the hazards of the Jewish minority who sought to succeed in the gentile world" don't fit well with a situation of general religious persecution under Antiochus (ibid.). More strongly still, "there is no passage in Daniel 1–6 that is necessarily understood as an allusion to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes or is now generally accepted as such" (ibid.). For chapters seven to eleven, on the other hand, "there is no mistaking the allusions to the Maccabean era" (ibid.).

Chapter seven makes a unifying link between the two parts. Like chapters eight to twelve it presents a vision that Daniel experienced, but like chapters two to six it is composed in Aramaic rather than the Hebrew of chapters eight to twelve. Also it presents a scheme of four world kingdoms that parallels Nebuchadnezzar's dream as recorded in chapter two. Chapter one as an introduction in Hebrew makes for an additional linguistic connection with chapters eight to twelve, while its story of how Daniel and his friends found their way to the Babylonian court both introduces and parallels chapters two through six.

Since the two parts of the Hebrew-Aramaic book are in fact joined together, the argument that the first part has nothing to do with Antiochus Epiphanes can cut both ways. The time period of the first half of the

13 Matt. 19:28; 24:27–44; 25:31; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 12:40; 17:24, 30; 18:8; 21:27; 22:69; John 5:27; 13:31–32; Acts 7:56; Rev. 14:14.

14 For more detail about Jesus as the "Son of Man" seen in Daniel 7:13 as well as further influence of Daniel on the New Testament see France (1971, 144–150), Adela Collins (1993), Bock (2011), and Reynolds (2011).

book should be used to determine the time period of the entire book. Saying that reference to Antiochus Epiphanes in the second half must date it to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes is in reality to deny the possibility of predictive prophecy. A major theme in Daniel concerns the sovereignty of God (esp. 2:20–22), even to the point of sovereignty over history. He "gave" Jehoiakim of Judah into the power of Nebuchadnezzar (1:2). He "gave" Nebuchadnezzar kingdom authority on earth (2:37), only to remove it when Nebuchadnezzar refused to acknowledge God's sovereignty (4:31–32 [28–29]) and then restore it when the king acknowledged it (4:34–35 [31–32]). The same thought is found in the second part of the book when God sets a time frame for judgment to befall defiant rulers—8:14 for Antiochus and 9:27 and 12:11–12 for the final rebellious tyrant before God's own kingdom on earth. If God was unable to predict the times of Antiochus, then how could he have the kind of authority over history that the book of Daniel continually reinforces?[15]

Other motifs bind the book together into a tight unity. For example, that God grants wisdom to Daniel and his friends (esp. chaps. 1, 2, and 4) is matched in the second part by the "wise" (מַשְׂכִּילִים, *maskîlîm*) among the people who serve God (11:33, 35; 12:3, 10). Other themes and motifs could be mentioned here, but they will come up in the Exposition. Suffice it to say that since virtually all commentators agree that chapters two through six are earlier than the time of Antiochus (though not all agree to place them in the sixth century B.C.), the strong unity of the book should point to the predictive nature of the second half of Daniel as well.

The Qumran Scrolls and Daniel

Eight different scrolls containing fragments of the book of Daniel are known that came from the caves near the site of the ancient community of Qumran. A full list of the scrolls, their content, and their approximate date may be found in Steinmann (2008, 62, fig. 5) and in Ulrich (2002, 574). The earliest scroll (4QDanc) was copied sometime around 115–100 B.C. (Ulrich, 2000, 270; cf. Ulrich, 2002, 574). Notably it contains portions of chapters ten and eleven, the very chapters that mainstream scholarship dates to about 165 B.C. for its alleged date of original composition. Several other scrolls date to the first century B.C. (4QDana, 4QDand, and 4QDane). The rest were copied sometime during the first century A.D. but prior to A.D. 70.

The number of scrolls found as well as the reference in one of the sectarian documents to "Daniel the prophet" (4QFlorilegium, late first century B.C.[16]) indicate that the community of Qumran considered the book authoritative. Another document from the first century B.C. interprets Isaiah 52:7 on the basis of Daniel's prophecy at 9:25.[17] Considering the scenario painted by those who date Daniel to about 165 B.C.—that an unknown author used the name Daniel to compose the visions as though they were genuine prophecy but also tried and failed to make genuine predictions—it is quite remarkable that the book was copied within about fifty to sixty-five years of its alleged composition and given prophetic authority.[18] Surely many would have known about the true author or authors of the book. Other works from the third to

15 For "time" as a unifying motif in the book see the Digital Extra, "Time in the Book of Daniel."

16 For discussion and translation see Vermes (1997, 493–494).

17 11QMelchizedek; for discussion and translation see Vermes (1997, 500–502).

18 Hengel (2002, 95): "The fact that the book of Daniel, which originated only *c.* 165 BCE, was received so quickly and without hesitation seems to be almost a miracle given its late origins …."

first century B.C. whose authorship was in question, for example the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" or "Enoch,"[19] were not accepted into the canon of Scripture (cf. Hamilton, 2014, 37–39).

The Greek Translations of Daniel

Two ancient Greek translations of Daniel are known. One, called the Old Greek (OG), was done about 100 B.C.[20] The other is known as *Theodotion* (Th), a translation which replaced the Old Greek in the main manuscripts of the Septuagint.[21] Since the Old Greek was quoted in 1 Maccabees, it must have been translated at least as early as 100 B.C. and possibly even earlier (John Collins, 1993a, 8–9). Since the apocryphal additions to Daniel, found in both Greek versions, appear to be secondary to the Hebrew/Aramaic text, it is clear that the Hebrew/Aramaic text had to be in existence some time prior to 100 B.C. Thus the Old Greek of Daniel in combination with the Qumran Daniel scrolls at least complicates the frequent assumption that the book was not composed until the Maccabean era.

"Daniel" in the Book of Ezekiel

Three passages in the book of Ezekiel mention a figure named Daniel: Ezekiel 14:14, 20; and 28:3. Is it possible that Ezekiel knew of the Daniel of the book when both of them were in Babylon at the same time? The traditional answer is yes, Ezekiel is talking about the Daniel who was part of the court of Nebuchadnezzar. If so, then it becomes a strong evidence for an historical Daniel of the sixth century B.C.

Some problems with the traditional view have been noted (e.g., Eichrodt, 1970, 188–189). First, Daniel's name is placed between two figures of the ancient past, Noah and Job. Noah belonged to the era of the great flood, while Job appears to have lived in the patriarchal period. Second, both Noah and Job were non-Israelites, whereas Daniel was an Israelite of the tribe of Judah. Third, according to Ezekiel 28:3 it appears that Daniel was well known in Phoenicia as a wise man. A fourth but rather minor issue is the spelling of their names. In the book of Daniel it is consistently דָּנִיֵּאל (*Dānîyēl*); in Ezekiel the form written in the text (*kethiv*) is דנאל (possibly for *Dān'ēl*), which the Masoretes changed to the same form found in the book of Daniel (*qere*).[22] These are mere spelling variants.

The alternative to the Daniel of the court stories that some have proposed for Ezekiel's Daniel is a certain Dan'el known from the Ugaritic literature in the story of Aqhat.[23]

According to some, the stories in Daniel 1–6 are not historical and "Daniel was the name of a traditional, legendary figure" who appears in Ugaritic literature as "a righteous man who supplicates the gods and, as king, gives judgment

19 For these two works see Charlesworth, 1983. Ethiopic "Enoch" is considered authoritative by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

20 The OG of Daniel is attested in three sources: Papyrus 967 (2nd or 3rd cent.); the Syro-Hexapla (7th cent.); and the Chisian manuscript 88 (9th to 11th cent.). P967 preserves a pre-hexaplaric form of the text, but it was not discovered until 1931 and only fully published by 1976. It is utilized in the revised Göttingen edition of the Septuagint of Daniel edited by Ziegler and Munnich (1999).

21 Jerome attributed the later Greek translation of Daniel to Theodotion, who did his work in the second century. The translation must have been much older, however, because there are readings from Theodotion's translation of Daniel in the Greek New Testament (Hartman and Di Lella, 1978, 81).

22 *Kethiv* is an Aramaic term meaning *written*. It refers to the letters actually written in the manuscript that the scribe was copying. *Qere* means *read* and refers to the way the scribe intended the text to be read in the synagogue. Mostly the different forms are a resut of spelling differences, but sometimes they can indicate a different word that is either a textual variant or a euphemism.

23 The Ugaritic texts date to roughly 1400–1200 B.C.

for widows and orphans" (John Collins, 1993a, 1). Ezekiel's "Daniel" is then said to be derived from this legendary figure, so that "it is probable that features of the Daniel alluded to by Ezekiel have contributed to the depiction of the hero of the book of Daniel" (Day, 1980, 174).

The most difficult issue concerns Ezekiel 28:3. In a sarcastic tone the Lord said to "the ruler of Tyre": "Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; no secret amazes you." Could the ruler of Tyre at this point have known about the wisdom of the Daniel who was in Babylon? Ezekiel's oracle against the ruler of Tyre occurred between two dated oracles, the ninth and tenth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. (Ezek. 24:1 and 29:1), yielding a date of 587 B.C. (Block, 1997, 28–29). Since Daniel went into captivity in 605 B.C., that means he would have been in Babylon for about eighteen years. During this time he had at a minimum interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's first dream for him. The Old Greek assigned a date of the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar to the time when he had his second dream of the great tree (4:1 [3:4]). His eighteenth year makes it the very same year that his troops destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. While that date is not contained in the Aramaic text or Theodotion's Greek version, it is at least possible that Daniel interpreted the king's dream prior to the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. If it was a few years prior, then the letter that the king sent "to all the peoples, nations, and languages that live in all the earth" and that mentioned Daniel's wise interpretation and counsel would likely have gone to Tyre as well. The ruler of Tyre and Nebuchadnezzar were enemies at that time (cf. Ezek. 26:7–12), and the mention of Daniel's wisdom by Ezekiel would have given the king of Tyre pause. The contest would be between Daniel, whose wisdom stemmed from God, and the ruler of Tyre, whose wisdom stemmed from his own pride.

The "Dan'el" of Ugaritic literature clearly worshiped idols, and in the story of Aqhat there is no obvious indication of proverbial wisdom (Coogan, 1978, 27). It is said that Dan'el "judged the cases of widows, presided over orphans' hearings" (ibid., 35), but that was the expectation of rulers in the ancient world and did not necessarily indicate either righteousness or wisdom (Dressler, 1979, 154; *contra* Day, 1980, 176).[24] With the Daniel who was among the wise men in Babylon, though, there was no question about his righteousness (Dan. 1:8) or his wisdom (Dan. 1:20). Moreover, his wisdom was imparted by the God of Israel (Dan. 2:21); Daniel was not devoted to any pagan deity.

Conclusion Regarding the Date and Authorship of Daniel

While some scholars have raised some historical and linguistic objections to a date for the book of Daniel in the late sixth century B.C., reasonable responses can be given in favor of the sixth century date. That is, after all, the way that the book portrays itself. More decisive, though, is the near impossibility for a date as late as about 165 B.C. The evidence of language, of the unity of the book, of the early date of the Greek translations, of the mention of Daniel in the book of Ezekiel, and of the Qumran scrolls, the earliest of which dates to within only fifty years of 165—all these factors make such a late date nearly impossible. Most decisive of all, however, is the authority of Jesus Christ and the New Testament authors. For them Daniel was a real person and also a true prophet of God.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO DANIEL

The events in the book of Daniel took place within the Neo-Babylonian Empire and

24 The judge in the parable that Jesus told finally gave a widow justice not because he was righteous, but because she kept importuning him (Luke 18:2–6).

the subsequent Medo-Persian Empire. The Neo-Babylonian Empire was founded by Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, after he conquered and destroyed Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with the help of the Medes and other peoples in 612 B.C. The Assyrians set up a new government at Haran, the town in northwest Mesopotamia where Abraham had stayed until his father died (Gen. 11:31–32; cf. Acts 7:4). The end finally came for Assyria at Carchemish (northern Syria on the Euphrates River) in 605 B.C., where Nebuchadnezzar defeated the remnants of the Assyrian army. Neco king of Egypt was on his way to Carchemish to aid the Assyrians when Josiah king of Judah tried to stop him but was killed in the effort (2 Chron. 35:20–24). Shortly after the battle of Carchemish Nabopolassar died and Nebuchadnezzar hurried off to Babylon to be crowned the new king. It was during this period, either before Nebuchadnezzar was officially the king or shortly after, that he laid siege to Jerusalem and the Lord delivered Jehoiakim into his power (Dan. 1:2; see Hallo and Simpson, 1998, 141–147).

From contemporary sources it is clear that Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil-Merodach[25] reigned for two years after his father's death in 562 B.C. Neriglissar came to the throne next and reigned until 556 B.C.[26] He was followed by his son LabashiMarduk, who was assassinated after only a few months in a conspiracy that included Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar (Beaulieu, 1989, 95–98). In the third or fourth year of his reign Nabonidus left for a stay of ten years in Arabia and entrusted the kingdom to Belshazzar. Upon his return to Babylon Nabonidus resumed the duties of king and reigned another few years until 539 B.C. when Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon (Beaulieu, 1989, 149–160).[27] Near the end of his reign Nabonidus was campaigning outside of Babylon, and that would have been an opportunity for Belshazzar to again assume the duties of the king. Belshazzar was the monarch killed the night of a drunken feast (Dan. 5). Some historical evidence points to a small Median kingdom from the end of the seventh century B.C. to about 550 B.C. in central West Iran centered around modern Hamadan, ancient Ecbatana. Very little information exists about the ancient Medes. The fifth century Greek historian Herodotus (*Hist.* 1:97–130) describes the founding of a Median kingdom by a certain Deioces, who reigned for fifty-three years. He was followed by his son Phraortes who was in turn followed by his son Cyaxares. Cyaxares defeated the Assyrians but was then attacked and defeated by the Scythians, who "ruled Asia for twenty-eight years." Eventually the Medes defeated the Scythians and took Nineveh. Cyaxares was succeeded by his son Astyages, who had a daughter who married Cambyses, a Persian. Cyrus was born as a result of their union, and he eventually led a successful revolt against Median rule.

The account of Herodotus has been questioned, especially his narrative about Deioces and Phraortes, for which no independent evidence exists. Scholars dispute the full extent of the Median kingdom, or even if it should be considered a kingdom (cf. Muscarella, 1994; and Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1994). For biblical references to the Medes or to their country see 2 Kings 17:6; 18:11; Esther 1:3, 14, 19; 10:2; Isaiah 13:17; Jeremiah 51:11, 28; Daniel 5:28, 31 [6:1]; 6:8, 12, 15; 11:1; Acts 2:9.

The Medo-Persian empire, also known as the Achaemenid empire, was founded by Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539

25 Also known as Amel-Marduk, his name means "man of Marduk." He is mentioned twice in the Bible in parallel passages (2 Kings 25:27; Jer. 52:31).

26 Possibly Neriglissar is the Nergal-Sharezer of Jeremiah 39:3 and 13, only a Babylonian official in the time setting of Jeremiah's text.

27 Beaulieu's evidence is based on detailed analysis of documents contemporary with Nabonidus.

B.C. and died in 530 B.C. In one respect Cyrus, being the son of a Median mother and a Persian father, simply continued and expanded Median rule when he defeated Astyages, his grandfather, in 550 B.C. The Bible describes the conquest of Babylon as accomplished by the Medes (Isa. 13:1–17; Jer. 51:11, 28; Dan. 5:31 [6:1]), but it described as Persian the benevolent rule that the Jews experienced under the new regime (2 Chron. 36:20, 22, 23; Ezra 1:1, 2, 8; 3:7; 4:3, 5, 7, 9, 24; 6:14; 7:1; 9:9; Neh. 12:22). The continued unity of the Medes and the Persians is emphasized with reference to certain laws (Esther 1:19; Dan. 6:8, 12, 15, 28) and other organizational terminology (Esther 1:3, 14, 19; 10:2; Dan. 8:20). Occasionally there are also references in ancient Greek literature to the "Persians and Medes" or even to the "Medes" alone with reference to the Persian empire (see Hallo and Simpson, 1998, 147–149; Briant, 2002; and Allen, 2005).

THEOLOGICAL THEMES

Daniel 2:20–23 makes a succinct summary of the theme of the entire book; it is all about God and his sovereign reign over the world. He gives kingdom authority to whomever he pleases, deposing rulers and raising them up. He distributes wisdom and knowledge to people and sometimes frustrates the plans of rulers. Times are in his hands; as the Ancient of Days he is the Lord of time. His plans are mysterious, known only to him; but he reveals mysteries to whomever he chooses. The people in the book—kings, wise men, servants of the Most High—all must bow to his sovereignty and bless his name or suffer the consequences of their own pride. In the end his kingdom will replace all human kingdoms and endure forever.[28]

One of the more noticeable features of the book is its episodic character. Each chapter can somewhat stand on its own. The stories about Daniel and his friends at the royal court form tight units with little overlap between them. The characters and setting are common features; the events are self-contained stories. The only major overlap occurs between chapters four and five, when the queen mother reminds Belshazzar about what happened to his "father" Nebuchadnezzar (5:8–12), and Daniel reinforces her words by directly contrasting Nebuchadnezzar's reactions to God's chastisement with Belshazzar's reckless behavior (5:18–23). In this case chapter five cannot be fully understood without chapter four. Significantly chapters four and five stand at the center of the inverted structure (chiasm) discussed previously. The first chapter also provides key information for understanding who the various characters are and why they are in their particular settings.

The visions of chapters seven through twelve also have a similar character. The vision of the four beasts (chap. 7), like that of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the four parts of the image (chap. 2), gives the full sweep of history from Babylon to the eschatological end when God sets up his eternal kingdom. Chapter eight then gives more detail about the portion of history that extends from the Persians to the Greeks under Antiochus Epiphanes, with the latter king also foreshadowing another ruler who will arise shortly before the second coming of Christ (cf. Davis, 2013, 25–26). Chapter nine focuses particularly on the Jews, framing their history in terms of seventy periods of seven years each that will see the coming of the Messiah as well as the Antichrist in the period of the end. Daniel 10:1–12:4 forms a more integral unit, with chapter ten introducing the lengthy description of history from the Persians to the Antichrist that begins in chapter eleven. After a rapid view of rulers from Cyrus to Alexander the Great, the history progresses through a continual back and forth movement between a *king of the south* and a *king of the north*. Israel (Judea) is caught between all

28 For a summary of how Daniel's prayer in 2:20–23 relates to the rest of the book, see Table 2.2 (Daniel 2:20–23 as a Theme Verse).

the strife, as has been the case throughout history. The transition to the time of the Antichrist occurs at 11:36 and culminates in 12:1–4, when the archangel Michael delivers the people, and the righteous and the wicked are resurrected to their different fates. Then 12:5–13 comprises an epilog that deals with the question of timing as one waits for God's kingdom to arrive.

The episodic character of the book enables the reader to learn fresh lessons from each segment of text. From the first chapter one learns of God's sovereignty over history but also his intimate care for those who are faithful to him above all human loyalties. Chapter two then teaches God's omniscient knowledge of all mysteries as well as his revelation to his servants of all that they need to know in order to minister to others on his behalf. The third chapter illustrates how even the most powerful of rulers cannot thwart God's purposes. If God's servants choose to follow the dangerous path of complete faithfulness to him, he is able to deliver them through the means of his choosing. And he will be present with them through the most severe trial. Chapters four and five show opposite reactions to God's judgment of prideful behavior. Nebuchadnezzar "lifted his eyes to heaven" and was restored; Belshazzar refused to humble his heart despite what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar and was killed. And Daniel, God's faithful servant, was enabled to minister to both kings. Because of his close relationship with Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel could tell him that he needed to repent (4:27 [24]). Belshazzar's relationship with Daniel was different. It appears that Daniel didn't even have a place in the government under him, and when the king finally summoned him to solve the mystery of the writing it was too late. Daniel scathingly rebuked him before he read the message of doom. Chapter six focuses on Daniel's faithfulness to the sovereign God.

Chapter seven moves into the part of the book that contains Daniel's own personal visions. Its Aramaic language aids in the transition to the more apocalyptic type of narration. Now it is angels who explain the meaning of visions, not Daniel. The chapter's broad, universal outline of history lays the groundwork for the more particular prophecies to come. It presents the pattern of four kingdoms, repeated from chapter two, that will provide a framework for the additional visions. And when the Ancient of Days is seen as the Lord of time, it puts the various references to time in the rest of the book under his authority. Chapter eight details how the world of the Persians and the Greeks, the second and third beasts of chapter seven, will unfold in history. Through all the vicissitudes of life under the Persians and the Greeks that the Jews will experience, they can be confident that their God is still in control.

Chapter nine is the most unique chapter in the book, yet it is also the most theologically rich section. Up to this point the book has portrayed the dire circumstances of God's chosen people in exile. Now for the first time Daniel struggled in his lengthy prayer with the *why* question. It could not be because their God had failed them; it had to be because they had failed God. Daniel then confessed the sins of his people and pled fervently for the Lord to forgive them. The response that Gabriel brought in the prophecy of the seventy "weeks" was really a call for the people to wait patiently for God's timing. Jerusalem would be restored and the Messiah would come, but additional dark times would also lie ahead. Chapter ten presented a vision that reassured Daniel that God was present in their midst; he had not abandoned them. The bulk of chapter eleven (vv. 2–35) called for continued patience through a turbulent time of the changing fortunes of those who would have control of Judea. That time would culminate in the appearance of a terrible tyrant who would seek to overthrow the legitimate worship of God in Jerusalem. And he in turn would prefigure the most monstrous tyrant the Jews or even the rest of the world would ever see, the "king" introduced at 11:36. That one would place himself

above every god, including the God of the Jews. In the end he will perish, removed by the sovereign God. Finally chapter twelve promises victory through the efforts of the angel Michael as well as resurrection for all who have died. That will be good news for those who have remained faithful to God; they will be raised to "eternal life" (12:2). It will not be good news for those who have been enemies of God; they will be raised to "eternal shame."

The book wraps up with final instructions for Daniel and an additional mystery concerning the number of days that God's people will need to wait after the tyrant abolishes service of the Lord and sets up an "abomination that devastates" (12:12–13). Daniel himself would eventually die but then be raised to enjoy his place in God's kingdom (12:14).

For Daniel and his contemporaries to have an interest in events of the end of the age may not seem unusual, but why would they have an interest in details of events that are now past history but would happen over the course of the late sixth to the early second centuries B.C. and beyond? While it was not unusual for other writing prophets to have visions of the future, they typically confined their predictions to general details about the future time when the Lord would break into history and establish a new age of justice and righteousness. Frequently these visions also involved prophecies that could be considered "Messianic" in that they spoke of a ruler from the line of David. For example, Amos predicted a new Davidic age when the restored nation would enjoy unprecedented harvests on the land that the Lord had given to it (9:11–15), and Isaiah and Micah saw the temple mountain elevated above all mountains with all nations streaming to it to worship the Lord (Isa. 2:2–4; Micah 4:1–5). Prophets also foresaw various other events, such as the fall of Nineveh (Nahum) or the fall of Edom (Obadiah). Analogies to Daniel's detailed prophecies would be a prophetic prediction of the coming of Josiah to destroy pagan altars in Israel some three hundred years in advance (1 Kings 13:1–3) and Isaiah's prediction by name of the coming of Cyrus (Isa. 44:28; 45:1). So it would not be accurate to say that the prophets never made predictions about specific events in history. Even so the amount of detail in Daniel is unusual.

Ezekiel devoted some nine chapters (40–48) to describe in great detail a future temple with all of its furnishings and priestly service. This description would be of immediate interest to the people of the exile. It reassured them that the Lord was still active on behalf of his people even in Babylon and that the future would hold a more glorious presence of the Lord than they could ever have imagined. Daniel, however, hears from his interpreting angels about a king of Greece whose empire will be divided into four parts (8:21–22; 11:3–4), or about a marriage for political purposes that will fail to gain any advantage but will supply an heir to a throne (11:6–7). Why should details like these be of interest to Daniel or his audience?

The author of Daniel wrote for a Jewish audience, although the book records discussions with Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius the Mede as well. Clearly Daniel's Jewish contemporaries had been captives in Babylon, some of whom remained in the Babylonian area during the early years of the Persian empire. They would receive comfort from the book, knowing that the Lord was still in control of their world even though it was not Judea. The same would also hold true for later Jewish readers during the time of Alexander the Great, the period of a great persecution by Antiochus IV, and even into the Roman period. A fresh new era was inaugurated during the Roman period when the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, came in human form. The detailed prophecy of future historical events that Daniel received, then, would comfort God's people through various political situations down to the coming of the Messiah. And of course with his coming a fresh revelation would sustain the people of God through the "last days" that actually began with

the Christ event (Heb. 1:2).[29] Daniel's visions of the end were designed to encourage the Jews who lived from the time of Cyrus to the coming of the Messiah, but they also look to the period just before the Messiah sets up his kingdom on earth. That time will be a part of history but will also mark the advent of the new age when God's kingdom will supplant all other kingdoms, with the Messiah reigning from Jerusalem.

Ultimately all believers down through the centuries are the target audience for Daniel's book. For those who are on the present side of the coming of Christ the fulfillment of events prior to his coming serve as an assurance and a guarantee that God will keep his promise that Christ will come again.

PREACHING THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Though ancient, Daniel contains eternal truths that must be communicated and applied to contemporary life. The transitions from exegesis to theology to preaching should be rooted in the contours of each particular chapter. As one works through the book, it becomes clear that God's sovereignty is the preeminent message of the entire book. However, if each sermon speaks only generally to the sovereignty of God, the series will be repetitious, and the encouragement and particular aspects of God's sovereignty will be lost.

Each chapter in Daniel contributes to the overall message by offering a unique vantage point from which to see a particular aspect of God's sovereignty. Therefore, our approach to the preaching of Daniel will focus on the unique revelation of God's sovereignty contained in each chapter. For example, chapter one communicates that God is sovereign over the fall of Jerusalem and the rise of Babylon. In chapter two, God is portrayed as the sovereign revealer of mysteries. In chapter three, God is portrayed as the sovereign deliverer. Chapter after chapter reveals something specific about the sovereignty of God. By focusing on these unique revelations, you will keep your preaching from sounding repetitive and your audience from thinking, "Didn't he make the same point last week."

29 Peter also referred to the "last days" in relation to the birth of the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:17).

Daniel 1:1–21

Exegetical Idea
After handing the king of Judah over to the king of Babylon, God works on behalf of, and through, the faithfulness of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to demonstrate that he is sovereign over the Babylonian kingdom and superior to the Babylonian King.

Theological Focus
God works on behalf of, and through, the faithfulness of his people in order to demonstrate his sovereignty and supremacy.

Preaching Idea
Because God is sovereign, trust him to work for you and through you in difficult times.

Preaching Pointers
In light of the fact that God is superior to Nebuchadnezzar, it seems only logical that Daniel and his companions would be faithful to God. However, what makes the story interesting (and what will be a key to grabbing the attention of a congregation) is that at this early point in the narrative, we do not know how things will turn out. Will Daniel and his friends compromise out of fear or will they prove themselves faithful to their God? For that matter, what exactly does faithfulness look like in a pagan culture? And, if they choose faithfulness, is God able to act on their behalf? As you creatively raise these questions, and then progressively reveal the answers, you will unveil the meaning of this text for your congregation. Most importantly, you will want your people to see that God's sovereignty and superiority are primarily revealed through the trusting faithfulness of his people.

In order to make this point, you will want to home in on the fact that not everything that Daniel and his friends were asked to do was a compromise. Service in the Babylonian royal court, acceptance of Babylonian education and the assumption of Babylonian names were not issues of compromise. However, there was something about eating the king's food and drinking the king's wine that crossed the line. This is an important point to make. Though the text does not explicitly tell us why the food and wine would defile the Jewish youths, apparently there was something about the king's diet that would inappropriately identify Daniel and his companions with the king of Babylon rather than the King of Kings. By refusing to eat the food and defile themselves, the exiled youths proclaimed that they belong to God, trusted him and were faithful to him.

WHO'S IN CONTROL? GOD OR NEBUCHADNEZZAR? (1:1-21)

LITERARY STRUCTURE AND THEMES

As might be expected the first chapter of Daniel introduces the reader to the book. It sets the scene in the time of the Babylonian captivity, and it explains how Daniel and his three companions became involved in the affairs of the royal court.

The chapter contains three parts. The first part (1:1–2) tells how the Lord permitted Nebuchadnezzar to defeat king Jehoiakim of Judah and to deport some of the temple vessels to Babylon. Part two (1:3–19) deals with the fortunes of Daniel and his three companions as they are raised and educated for service in the Babylonian court. Taken from among the captives of Judah and given a Babylonian education, they nonetheless manage to maintain their Jewish identity through a test that involved their diet. And in light of their faithfulness, God granted them wisdom that impressed the king when they had their private audience after they completed their education (1:18–19). The final part of the chapter (1:20–21) summarizes the great wisdom of these youths and projects Daniel's career to the end of the Babylonian captivity in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia. No ordinary men, these four far exceeded the abilities of all the "magicians" and "enchanters" throughout the entire realm.

EXPOSITION (1:1–21)

God transfers the kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar (1:1–2)

As an introduction to the book as a whole, the first two verses indicate that the Lord transferred the arena of his main activity on earth from Judah to Babylon. This involved "a change in the story of God's dealings with men" (Koch, 2005, 36). The key thought here is that the Lord (אֲדֹנָי) is in charge of world history and gives authority to govern to whomever he chooses (cf. 2:21). The remainder of the book emphasizes a scheme of four successive world empires followed by God's own eternal kingdom.

Three verbs express the main actions in these opening verses. First Nebuchadnezzar "laid siege" (וַיָּצַר) to Jerusalem. Then the Lord "gave" (וַיִּתֵּן) Jehoiakim and some items from the temple in Jerusalem into Nebuchadnezzar's power (בְּיָדוֹ, "into his hand"). Then the king "brought them" (וַיְבִיאֵם) to the temple of his god in Shinar. The first verse gives the background for these actions. They took place in Jehoiakim's third year, at which time Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem. For a discussion of the historical issues associated with 1:1–6 see the Introduction.

The most significant statement in verse two is that "the Lord," that is, *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי), delivered or *gave* (וַיִּתֵּן) king Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar, along with some articles from the temple in Jerusalem. The divine name *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי) occurs only here and in chapter nine of the book of Daniel. The name Yahweh appears some eight times in the book but only in chapter nine, so Daniel's use of the names appears deliberate. *Adonai* means *Lord* or *Master* and stresses God's sovereign authority to deliver earthly kingdoms to whomever he pleases (Dan. 2:21).

It was not uncommon for a victorious king to take images of the defeated country as a symbol of his victory over their god(s). The

text makes it very clear—the Lord "gave" not only Jehoiakim but also these temple items to Nebuchadnezzar. The king of Babylon did not somehow gain a victory over Judah's God. The God of Daniel and his companions was still in control, and the proof for that would be their phenomenal success in the Babylonian court. God infused them with wisdom that confounded the wisest of the Babylonians and even brought Nebuchadnezzar himself to his knees. Later when Belshazzar dared to use some of the vessels for common purposes it cost him his kingdom (chap. 5; see Digital Extra: What Happened to the Temple Articles?).

Babylonia is called "the land of Shinar" in verse two. Used only eight times in the Bible, *Shinar* refers to the area of southern Mesopotamia that includes Babylon (Gen. 10:10; 11:2; 14:1, 9; Josh. 7:21; Isa. 11:11; Dan. 1:2; Zech. 5:5–11). All of these instances of Shinar fit well with Daniel 1:2 in that they deal with some kind of rebellion against God. It was only with God's permission that Nebuchadnezzar was able to take Jerusalem, but taking the temple articles to Shinar foreshadowed the king's pride that would be magnified according to chapter two and brought into submission according to chapter four (see Sidebar: The Land of Shinar).

Daniel and his companions remain faithful to their God (1:3–19)

The first thing that Nebuchadnezzar did was to issue a command regarding his captives. He appeared to be in control of the situation. But was he? He set up a training program for the elite among his captives, hoping to develop young men who could serve in administrative posts. God, however, had his own plans. The king wanted to take the very best of Israel's young men to become in all respects elite Babylonians whom he could consult regarding matters of the kingdom, but God planned to develop four of these young men as his own agents within the Babylonian government. Nebuchadnezzar issued orders, but his orders were subverted by the Lord in ways that actually proved beneficial even to Nebuchadnezzar in the long run. His three-year educational program was to be followed by a test to see if the pupils would be ready for public service, but God's program was to infuse these young Israelites with a special divine wisdom that would overpower anything that Babylon had to offer. And while these young men would learn Babylonian ways, yet they would also retain their Israelite identity through their diet. They might receive Babylonian names and instruction in Babylonian literature and language, but they would never become completely Babylonian. They would continue to do things God's way and to worship him alone. In the process they would become much more valuable to Nebuchadnezzar than even any of the other wise men who served him.

God arranged for Daniel to impress favorably the chief official put in charge of the captives so that he would not interfere with a test that would challenge Nebuchadnezzar's wisdom. The miraculous way that the four men looked so much better than the other young men after only ten days of their special diet proved that Daniel's God was acting behind the scenes. When the time for the crucial test before Nebuchadnezzar came it was not the Babylonian science and learning that created the wisest of captives; it was God himself who "gave" them their skill, even as he had "given" Nebuchadnezzar control of Jehoiakim and the temple vessels.

The king commands to raise and educate the young men (1:3–5)

The introduction to chapter one did not mention that Nebuchadnezzar brought the captives to Babylon. Does the text want the reader to assume that Nebuchadnezzar had brought them there along with the temple articles? Or did Ashpenaz have to go to Judah to fetch them? It was in Nebuchadnezzar's second year that Daniel was called in before him to interpret the king's dream. That could not have been later

than 602 B.C. (see Digital Extra: The Timing of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream). So the time when Nebuchadnezzar brought the temple articles to Babylon must have coincided with his order to Ashpenaz (cf. Keil, 1983a, 72; Miller,1994, 59; and Koch, 2005, 42). The abruptness of the text highlights that it was the Lord who delivered Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's power.

1:3–4. Most often the plural of יֶלֶד denotes the offspring of parents, whether young (Gen. 33:14) or grown (Ruth 1:5). Occasionally it can be used in the construct state for an idiom similar to "sons of," referring to a category of people (Isa. 2:6; 57:4). In another usage it means something like "minors" (Ezra 10:1; Neh. 12:43) or "boys" (Zech. 8:5). The closest parallel to Daniel's use occurs in the account of Jeroboam I seeking the counsel of "the young men" (הַיְלָדִים) he grew up with rather than the "elders" (1 Kings 12:8, 10, 14; 2 Chron. 10:8, 10, 14). Since it would take about three years to educate these יְלָדִים, they were probably teenagers. The best translation for Daniel's passage is "youths" or "young men." Since they were being educated for palace service they were most likely all males, given the culture of ancient Babylonia.

These young men were taken מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ("from the sons of Israel") since the Lord had just delivered the city into Nebuchadnezzar's power. It is interesting that the text says "the sons of Israel" rather than "the sons of Judah," as in verse six. "Israel" occurs only here and in chapter nine; elsewhere in Daniel the reference is always to "Judah." "Israel" can refer either to the northern kingdom as opposed to Judah (Hos. 1:1) or to the entire nation that God called out of Egypt, his special elect people (Jer. 25:15; Amos 3:1). When Daniel later prayed to the Lord on behalf of his people, he called them "Israel" (9:7, 11, 20). Here the use of "Israel" may further emphasize that God's dealings with his people will no longer be through the kingdom of Judah but through the Gentile powers. Later when the narrative focuses on Daniel and his companions they are called מִבְּנֵי יְהוּדָה ("from the sons of Judah," v. 4) to underscore their tribal heritage.

These Israelite youths were also of royal lineage (מִזֶּרַע הַמְּלוּכָה, "from the offspring of the kingdom") and from aristocratic families (מִן־הַפַּרְתְּמִים, "from the nobles"). In other words, some of these youths were members of the royal family and/or from the elite class of society.

In addition to concern about the birth heritage of the young men, Nebuchadnezzar also wanted youths who were physically perfect (אֵין־בָּהֶם כָּל־מאוּם, "without any blemish") and good looking (טוֹבֵי מַרְאֶה, "good with respect to appearance"). Then they were also to be highly intelligent and insightful. These qualities of mind and body needed to be of the sort that would enable them to serve in the royal court. An ancient Egyptian text (late thirteenth century B.C.) describes the ideal scribe: "choice of heart, persevering of counsel. … a youth distinguished of appearance and pleasing of charm, who can explain the difficulties of the annals like him who composed them" (Pritchard, 1969, 475).

"Wisdom" (חָכְמָה) often refers to various kinds of skills (Exod. 28:3; 31:3) as well as to different areas of knowledge (1 Kings 5:10–13). It is not entirely clear what י�ֹדְעֵי דַעַת ("knowers of knowledge") references. An identical expression occurs in Proverbs 17:27, where it indicates "one who has knowledge" (NASB) or "a knowledgeable person." As the NIV puts it, "well informed." The final expression that refers to the intelligence of these youths uses, like "knowers of knowledge," a form of the root ידע. *HALOT* glosses the term דַּעַת with *understanding*, and מְבִינֵי means "those who understand." Thus מְבִינֵי דַּעַת would have a literal sense of "those who understand understanding." The NIV perhaps captures the thought best with "quick to understand." All this considered, these terms emphasize that the king wanted these young men to have the kind of intelligence that would allow them to excel in the education that they would be given.

Their education was to include scribal arts and "the language of the Chaldeans" or Babylonian.[1] The term for "language," לָשׁוֹן, helps to clarify that "Chaldeans" refers to the Babylonians and not to the special class of Chaldean wise men as found elsewhere in Daniel (2:2, 4, 5, 10; 4:7; 5:7, 11). Most English versions take סֵפֶר, which normally means "written document," as "literature" and also modify it by "Chaldean" or "Babylonian." This skill would involve learning Babylonian literature and script, but it would include also the ability to write and communicate in Aramaic, important skills for a palace administrator in the neo-Babylonian empire.

1:5. Quality food and drink would be essential for these young men, and the king made sure that they received the very best. The term פַּת־בַּג is derived from an Old Persian word and means "food" or "provisions" (*HALOT*). It occurs only here and in Daniel 11:26 and probably implies some special food appropriate for a king (cf. "choice food" NASB). Also the wine was from the king's own special stock. Nebuchadnezzar obviously had a strong interest in seeing these young men develop healthy minds and bodies.

Ashpenaz was to raise the youths for a period of three years, at the end of which they would enter the king's service. The wording of the Hebrew could also imply that an audience with the king would occur after three years (cf. KJV and ESV). An audience did occur for the four Hebrew youths "at the end of the times that the king had commanded to present them" (1:18), and the term מִקְצָת ("at the end of") occurs in both places. So it seems likely that the primary referent for עָמַד in this case refers to that time when they would "stand" before the king. This was the king's way to assure himself that each candidate was worthy of an important position in the administration of the palace.

Daniel and his three companions undergo a test (1:6–19)

Among the young men that Ashpenaz assembled for Babylonian royal court training were four from the tribe of Judah. As Joseph had been sent ahead into Egypt to preserve Jacob's family in advance of their becoming a great nation, so Daniel and his friends would obtain high positions in the Babylonian government and ensure the survival of their people. Nebuchadnezzar had a plan to nourish and instruct his captives, but God also had his own plans for these four from Judah, and his plans were superior. These young men were able to thrive in a foreign land, because they were faithful to God, who in turn showed his faithfulness by endowing them with outstanding qualities that led to their success (cf. Gen. 39:2–9; 41:38–45). The stories of both Joseph and Daniel illustrate themes of God's sovereignty on the one hand and of the believer's faithfulness on the other hand. What would have happened if Joseph had surrendered to Potiphar's wife or exacted revenge on his brothers by having them executed? Or what if Daniel had quietly studied his lessons and consumed the king's food and drink? The issue of divine sovereignty versus human responsibility remains a mystery, but Joseph and Daniel illustrate how both elements work hand in hand.

They are selected and given Babylonian names (1:6–7).

The king determined that his charges must become good Babylonian citizens. Consequently the first order of business was to give them Babylonian names. As recorded in the

1 Keil (1983a, 74–78) showed that the "language of the Chaldeans" was Babylonian, not Aramaic. For the latter the Hebrew term was אֲרָמִית (see 2 Kings 18:26; Ezra 4:7; Isa. 36:11; Dan. 2:4). The term "Chaldean" is still sometimes used incorrectly for Aramaic. Perhaps the confusion stems from Daniel 2:4, but as John Collins (1993a, 156) points out: "Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Near East from the eighth century [B.C.]."

Hebrew these names require some reconstruction to determine their original form and meaning. While some of the names are not entirely clear, it is evident that they reflect Babylonian worship of other gods besides the Lord

Three possible derivations have been suggested for Daniel's new name of בֵּלְטְשַׁאצַּר (Belteshazzar): 1) *Balaṭ-su-uṣur*, "(The god) protect his life"; 2) *Balaṭ-šar-uṣur*, "(The god) protect the king's life"; and 3) *Bēlet-šar-uṣur*, "Lady [the god's wife] protect the king." The first option seems most likely in that it could have applied more directly to Daniel himself rather than to the king, although the second option is easier to explain linguistically.[2]

Shadrach's name (שַׁדְרַךְ) is difficult to explain. One suggestion is "I have been made to feel very much afraid" (*HALOT*), probably meaning fear of a god. "Command of Aku" has also been posited (BDB), although a divine name *Aku* is uncertain (Koch, 2005, 6). Meshach (מֵישַׁךְ) might mean "Who is like Aku?" or "Who belongs to Aku?" (cf. BDB; *HALOT* considers it unexplained). If either explanation is correct then Mishael's Hebrew name (מִישָׁאֵל), which signifies either "Who is like God?" or "Who belongs to God?" (*HALOT*), is the only name whose Babylonian meaning corresponds roughly to its Hebrew meaning. Abednego (עֲבֵד נְגוֹ) appears to mean "Servant of Nego," but there is no known Babylonian god *Nego*. The common opinion is that the name of the god "Nebo" has been altered by the scribes by changing the *beth* to *gimel*, the letter in the alphabet that immediately follows it (*HALOT*).

Daniel remains faithful by refusing to defile himself (1:8–16).

1:8. Daniel purposed "not to defile himself" (לֹא־יִתְגָּאַל) with the king's food or wine. The exact nature of the king's food is not clear, and it is described with a rare word, פַּתְבַּג, evidently a Persian loanword (*HALOT*). Many commentators have assumed that the king's food must have included meat that came from unclean animals (see Lev. 11), or animals that had not had their blood drained when they were killed (see Lev. 17:10–14), or animals that had been offered to idols. Likewise the wine could have been that which was poured out as a libation to the gods (Wood, 1973, 37; Miller, 1994, 66–67).

While it is true that Daniel was concerned about the issue of obeying the Law of Moses, is that what the text actually emphasizes? The text is explicit that it was the *king's* provisions and his *personal* stock of wine that Daniel refused. Later when Daniel asked for vegetables and water there is no reference to their source (1:12); they also could have been involved in idolatrous rites. With regard to wine, at a much later time Daniel fasted from food and wine (10:3), inferring that he did not abstain normally. So it does not seem as though "keeping kosher" or abstaining from food and drink offered to idols were the primary issue for Daniel.

Daniel feared that he would "defile himself" by eating and drinking that which came from the king's table. "Having to live in a foreign country is an inherently defiling experience" (Goldingay, 1989, 18). In refusing the Babylonian food and drink Daniel thereby refused to identify completely with Babylonian culture (Baldwin, 1978, 83; John Collins, 1993a, 143). Although Daniel's

2 Shea (1988, 74–76) thinks that Daniel's Babylonian name was actually the same as Belshazzar's, a later king of Babylon (chap. 5). A *ṭet* was added by a scribe in order to avoid the mention of the god Bel, even as Abednego was changed from an original Abednebo. Shea's further point that Daniel may be identified with another Belshazzar mentioned in Babylonian texts during the reign of Evil-merodach (76–80) is interesting but speculative. "Belteshazzar" is attested at 4:8, 9 (4:5, 6) in 4QDan[d], so any scribal corruption must have occurred prior to about 25 B.C.

name had been changed and he had been enrolled in a compulsory educational regimen, he purposed not to pledge allegiance to the king rather than to God. The parallel use of the same verb (וַיָּשֶׂם) for both "appointing" names to the men and for Daniel's "purposing" not to defile himself stresses the antithetical nature of the actions (Koch, 2005, 58). The names were meant to make the men Babylonians, while Daniel's resolve was meant to avoid assimilation to Babylonian religion and total loyalty to the king. Daniel chose to show his devotion to the Lord rather than to the king through the one thing he could control—his diet.

In many respects followers of Jesus Christ also live in an alien culture. Certain assimilations are perhaps unavoidable, but it is also important for the believer to purpose in his or her heart to be different in a way that matters. The lesson of Daniel is clear—God will honor those who choose to follow him completely.

1:9. According to a familiar Hebrew idiom someone either *finds favor in the eyes of* another or God *gives* or *puts* someone's *favor in the eyes of* someone else. The following two examples illustrate this common expression:

> וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינָיו
> And Joseph *found favor* in his eyes. (Gen. 39:4)

> וַיִּתֵּן חֶנּוֹ בְּעֵינֵי שַׂר בֵּית־הַסֹּהַר
> And [God] *put his favor* [Joseph's] into the eyes of the chief jailer. (Gen. 39:21)

The idiom in Daniel resembles the second example but also differs from it in several respects: "And God put Daniel to graciousness [חֶסֶד] and to compassion before the chief official." The thought is that God arranged for Daniel to experience not only graciousness but also compassion from the official. Nehemiah expressed a similar thought: "Place him [your servant] to compassion before this man" (Neh. 1:11). The NIV brings out the thought well: "Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel." When Daniel needed to ask a favor from such an important man as Ashpenaz, he also needed God to instill compassion and a gracious attitude in the official's heart. When God's servants need help from an outsider to do God's will, they can count on him even to work in the heart of that outsider.

1:10–16. Despite the grace and compassion that the chief official felt for Daniel, it was not enough to overcome his fear of displeasing Nebuchadnezzar. Not letting that stop him, Daniel proceeded to arrange for a test to be supervised by Ashpenaz's subordinate. Presumably Ashpenaz had to be agreeable to this test as well.[3] The reference to three tiers of leadership over the captives—Nebuchadnezzar, Ashpenaz, and the overseer—emphasizes God's sovereignty over the whole of the Babylonian empire. It extends from the least to the greatest of her authority figures.

The test was simple enough. For ten days Daniel and his companions would eat a vegetarian diet and drink only water. Then the overseer could inspect them to see how they looked in comparison to the others who hadn't followed such a diet. If they looked better than the others, then it would actually be to Ashpenaz's advantage to continue to authorize that diet for

3 In the OG it is still the "chief eunuch" (ἀρχιευνοῦχος) that Daniel deals with in v. 11. Instead of an equivalent for הַמֶּלְצַר (*the chief steward*), the OG has "Abiesdri," the name assigned by the OG to the "chief eunuch" known as Ashpenaz in the Hebrew. This eliminates the difficulty of the second official that Daniel and his companions encountered, but the MT supports the historicity of the passage. It seems unlikely that a fictional story would be so complicated as to have a threefold chain of command from Nebuchadnezzar through Ashpenaz and finally through the chief steward.

these young men. Rather than putting his life in jeopardy he would instead be commended for having done such a fine job of raising the youths. The message of the text is that these men prospered because of their God, not because of their diet *per se* as moderns might think. The diet showed their loyalty to God over against loyalty to Babylon.

God gives them their wisdom and skill (1:17).

All four of the men, including Daniel, received an education that surpassed that which the Babylonians were giving them. God himself granted them the necessary ability to understand *scribal skills* (סֵפֶר) and *wisdom* (חָכְמָה). It would be interesting to know exactly how this wisdom that God gave them went beyond that of their Babylonian instructors. Presumably it would include at least a divine viewpoint on their subjects of study. They would have understood that true wisdom and understanding must begin with "the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:7). The grounding point in education is crucial; the Babylonians had a polytheistic outlook that could accommodate foreign gods as long as their worshipers would subordinate themselves to the Babylonian gods. Daniel and his friends as worshipers of the one and only God could discern the true nature of what they were learning.

Even among the four Daniel stood out for his special ability to understand visions and dreams (see Digital Extra: Dreams and Visions and Their Interpretation). The reference to Daniel's skills anticipates how he would later interpret Nebuchadnezzar's two dreams (chaps. 2 and 4), solve Belshazzar's puzzling writing (chap. 5), and experience the visions described in chapters seven to twelve. In each instance Daniel was careful to ascribe his abilities to God rather than to his own skills. He told Nebuchadnezzar that "there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets" (Dan. 2:28). While the Babylonians also specialized in interpreting dreams, Daniel came to his interpretations through divine insight (see Walvoord, 1989, 41–42). The text emphasizes that God's ways are superior to the Babylonian ways.

Nebuchadnezzar tests them and finds them superior (1:18–19).

In his audience with the youths the king noticed that the four Judean men stood out from all the others. As a result they entered into the king's service. The situation has some irony to it. Nebuchadnezzar, who had ordered the finest Babylonian food and drink along with the best education for these young men, sees the top of the class. And who are they? They are the men who refused the king's choice foods and fine wine and who excelled because their wisdom came from God rather than from men.[4]

1:19. The section about the training of Daniel and his companions comes to its conclusion with the statement, "So they served before the king." The text could be translated "they stood" rather than "they served," but the context here indicates that they entered into the king's service (Péter-Contesse and Ellington, 1993, 26). Most of the English versions have something like the rendering of the NASB: "so they entered the king's personal service."

DANIEL AND HIS COMPANIONS ENTER BABYLONIAN SERVICE (1:20–21)

The last two verses of the chapter maintain continuity with the previous segment by continuing the theme that Daniel and his companions excel all others. Previously they were superior among their fellow students; now they are superior to all the Babylonian wise men. Since it

4 That true wisdom comes from God rather than from men is a common biblical theme (Gen. 41:38; 1 Kings 5:9; Job 28:20–28; Prov. 1:7; 3:5–8; 9:10; 1 Cor. 1:18–2:13; 3:18–19; Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:9; 2 Tim. 3:15; James 1:5; 3:13–17).

was the Babylonian king who inquired about matters of "wisdom and understanding," the terms here refer to skill or shrewdness in political or other official matters. Because God granted the wisdom and understanding, the young men gave answers to the king's questions that were "ten times better" than those that the Babylonian wise men gave. The expression "ten times better" is an idiom that emphasizes a high degree of superiority (cf. Gen. 31:7, 41; Num. 14:22; Neh. 4:12; Job 19:3).

The concluding remark about Daniel's service until the first year of Cyrus aptly refers back to the opening statement of the chapter. The kingdom passed from Jehoiakim to the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, and throughout that long period of Babylonian rule Daniel, a man infused with the wisdom of God, continued to serve as a high government official. God not only delivered the authority to rule the world to Nebuchadnezzar, he also put in place someone who could offer sound advice to all the Babylonian kings until the authority shifted once again to Persia under Cyrus.

1:20. An unusual form of emphasis occurs in verse twenty. The *waw*-consecutive imperfect verb always occurs at the beginning of its clause, but here a clause element ("Whatever matter of wisdom and understanding that the king sought from them") has been taken out of the clause and positioned before the verb with consecutive imperfect (cf. the Hebrew of Gen. 22:4). As a result the reader focuses on the part of the clause that has been positioned at the front. Regardless of the situation, the king found these men more articulate and wise than any of his other officials.

Most English translations have "magicians" for חַרְטֻמִּים, but the common use of the term refers to performers who use sleight of hand. Interpreters have various ideas about what the Hebrew actually means. *HALOT* recommends "soothsayer-priests." *Soothsayer* is not a common term, but it probably gets closer to the sense of the Hebrew than *magician* in that it refers to people who claim to be able to tell the future. *Soothsayer-priests* also has the advantage of associating religion with the people involved, a connection that was normal in the ancient Near Eastern world. The term חַרְטֻמִּים also occurs in the story of Joseph (Gen. 41:8, 24) and in the encounter between Moses and the wise men of Egypt (Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:3, 14, 15; 9:11).

Given that the soothsayer-priests and conjurers used divination to determine the meaning of a dream or to deflect any harmful effects of it, how is it that these four Jewish men who worshiped the Lord were "ten times better"? It is not that they were better at divination; it is that they got better results. The second chapter of Daniel illustrates this well. The Babylonian diviners insisted that Nebuchadnezzar tell them the dream so that they could then practice their divinatory arts to determine its meaning. Daniel and his friends *prayed* that God would reveal the matter to them, which he then did. These men didn't have to somehow manipulate the "gods" to get answers to Nebuchadnezzar's questions. They simply went directly before him through prayer.

Prayer is a key issue regarding wisdom in Daniel. He gained insight into Nebuchadnezzar's dream through prayer (2:17–23). As a customary practice he prayed three times a day (6:10), and he prayed earnestly to the Lord when he sought forgiveness for the national sins of Israel (9:2–23). This concept of praying for wisdom continued into New Testament times. James directed his readers to ask God for wisdom if they lacked it, being careful to trust him for the answer (James 1:5–6). Any believer who seeks wisdom concerning a difficult or puzzling issue may bring it before the Lord to discover an answer. Direct revelation of a general nature like what happened with the biblical writers does not normally happen today; God has spoken his complete revelation through the Bible. Believers do have the Holy Spirit, however, and he gives guidance and understanding

to those who seek it through prayer. As a scholar I also find it important to pray concerning my study. Specific items of exposition need to be a matter of study and research, but the significance of what I learn, how it is applied to the human heart, always relates to my own spiritual communion with the Lord.

1:21. Some perceive a chronological problem with "the first year of Cyrus," since Daniel must have lived until at least the third year of Cyrus (Dan. 10:1). Goldingay (1989, 27–28) connects the statement with the end of the exile as described in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 and Ezra 1, but more likely it marks the end of the Babylonian era, the first of the four kingdoms mentioned in Daniel 2 and 7. For Daniel the fact that the end of the Babylonian exile did not usher in a new era of independence for the Jews was problematic, and his passionate prayer concerning the issue resulted in the famous prophecy of seventy "weeks" in chapter nine.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The book of Daniel teaches the complete sovereignty of God over the nations and indeed, over history itself. The biblical doctrine of God's sovereign reign comes not so much from explicit teaching as from stories, from narratives regarding God's dealings with his people through time.

From the time when God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to the point where he permitted Nebuchadnezzar to exile the nation that descended from Abraham, the Lord had his plan that was working out through history. With the choice of Abraham he planned to establish a nation that would be in covenant relationship with him and to ultimately bless all the nations of the world through Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:1–3; 22:16–18).

Following Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the people were in captivity in Egypt until they emerged from their slavery to become a new nation. After the people wandered in the wilderness for forty years and settled the land, they were first led by "judges" and later by kings. When the nation split, the northern kingdom of Israel lasted until God raised the Assyrians to judge them for their sins. The southern kingdom of Judah continued until the rise of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, at which time God instituted a new phase in his plan that would last until the Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the age of grace that is still in effect.

Prior to Nebuchadnezzar the Lord had worked his will on earth mainly through Israel and Judah, using their kings, priests, and prophets to instruct and direct the people. When Nebuchadnezzar came to power in Babylonia, God shifted to Babylon the central focus of his work in the world. Rather than working through the king of Judah he now would grant wisdom and insight to his faithful servants held captive in Babylon and accomplish his purposes through them as well as through Gentile nations. In this way he would graciously maintain solidarity with his covenant people even though they no longer possessed the Promised Land but were exiles in foreign countries.

The key word in chapter one is *gave*. The Lord *gave* Jehoiakim and the temple vessels to Nebuchadnezzar (1:2). He *gave* Daniel and his companions favor in the sight of the king's chief official (1:9). And he *gave* these men their superior knowledge and wisdom (1:17). This theological concept of the Lord's control over who receives the kingdom and how his own followers will fare helps to prepare the way for the apocalyptic chapters (7–12) that map out the future for the Jewish people. When they find themselves oppressed under tyrannical rulers, they can be confident that the Lord is still in control. Even the worst tyrant cannot rule save the Lord has first given permission. The Lord's ways may be mysterious, but those who trust him can still prosper through small acts of favor and through the wisdom that he grants them. And even if they do not prosper but struggle under the yoke of slavery, they can still trust in

God whose plans are always ultimately for their good (Rom. 8:28).

The Lord uniquely positioned Daniel to assume the role of a wise man for all the kings of Babylon from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar and on into the Medo-Persian empire. Because Daniel and his companions were loyal to God first, God was able to use them to influence the Babylonian and Persian governments.

The relationship between God's sovereignty and human faithfulness is a recurring theme throughout not only Daniel, but the whole of Scripture. Clearly, God is sovereign, but Scripture also affirms that humans make choices and that these choices have consequences. As the book unfolds, each chapter of Daniel seems to highlight a different aspect of God's sovereignty and its interaction with human faithfulness. While the book of Daniel does not resolve the tension, it does offer insight into how God's people may live with the tension.

As chapter one brings into focus God as the Sovereign Lord who grants earthly sovereignty to various rulers of his choosing, it prepares the reader for the apocalyptic chapters seven through twelve. In the apocalyptic section each vision details how God distributes this sovereign political power to other nations.

PREACHING AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Exegetical and Theological Synthesis

In chapter one the faithfulness of Daniel and his friends introduces us to a major theme that runs throughout the book—the relationship between God's sovereignty and human free will. It's not so much that Daniel reconciles or explains how they can both be true; it simply affirms, repeatedly, that God is sovereign and that our faithfulness, or lack of it, makes a difference. Here in chapter one this is affirmed both through the actions of an unbelieving king (Nebuchadnezzar) and believing youths (Daniel and his three friends). Additionally, Daniel highlights the difference between the participation of believers and unbelievers in the sovereign plans of God; believers know that their faithfulness will be rewarded. Here in Daniel the rewards are immediate (success in the Babylonian royal courts). But this is not always the case. The Bible, church history and life experience teach us that often the rewards are not realized in this life. But, as the apostle Paul makes clear, the sovereign God of whom Daniel speaks will reward our faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Cor. 15:58).

In addition to future rewards, there is, in the present, a rest available to believers who realize that results are in God's hands and not theirs. Daniel and his friends were not on the hook for the fate of the remnant of Israel—God was. All they had to worry about was being faithful in the circumstances in which they found themselves. While the book of Daniel will not fully and finally reconcile the relationship between God's sovereignty and our choices, it will repeatedly reveal to us that our choices do matter and that no one, not even the most powerful man on earth, can do something that will thwart God's will.

These theological themes emerge from a text that was written long ago; though ancient, the text contains eternal truths that must be communicated and applied to contemporary life. The transitions from exegesis to theology to preaching, should be rooted in the contours of a particular text. Walking through Daniel chapter one, it becomes clear that the sovereignty of God is the central theme. In fact, God's sovereignty is the preeminent message of the entire book. Each chapter in Daniel contributes to this overall message by offering a unique vantage point from which to see a particular aspect of God's sovereignty.

Here in chapter one, the vantage point is from the chaos of exile and the struggle to remain faithful in a foreign and pagan culture. Chapter one communicates that God's sovereignty extends even to these situations. Because God is sovereign, chapter one says, he can, and

will, work through the trusting faithfulness of his people.

Preaching Idea

Because God is sovereign, trust him to work for you and through you in difficult times.

Contemporary Connections

What Does It Mean?

In nearly every sermon/text, listeners ask, "What does that mean?" Sometimes that question dominates their thinking, and sometimes it lurks in the background. Remember that the listeners have not had the opportunity to study the passage, so a knowledge gap exists, and preachers have only thirty minutes or so to bridge the gap. Expositors cannot explain everything they have discovered in their exegesis so they must pick and choose issues from the text which are crucial to building up the saints.

As the exegetical section noted, chapter one serves, in part, as an introduction to the book. It explains the setting (Babylonian captivity) and accounts for the ascent of Daniel and his companions in the Babylonian royal court. Because this sermon is likely to be the first in a series, revealing some of that background information will be a necessary foundation for the sermons that follow. However, care must be taken to present background material in a way that is engaging, enlightening, and memorable, not merely academic. Choose issues of background that help you highlight the author's purpose: extolling the sovereignty of God as motivation for our own faithfulness. As you preach Daniel one, this is what you will want to draw out for your people. What issues of background help communicate that message? Perhaps geography—Babylon was far away from Israel, but God is present in all places. Perhaps a timeline—Israel was under the disciplining hand of God, and was destined to remain in Babylon for seventy years, but God was using that time to refine his people. Perhaps the pagan culture of the court of Babylon—the young men were being trained to serve idol-worshipers, yet they never compromised their allegiance to the living God.

To teach in an engaging, genre-sensitive way from a narrative, try "showing" the truth as well as "telling" it. An excellent way to "show" truth is with visual aids. Maps, timelines, and pictures from antiquity are powerful learning tools. Google Images is a rich and efficient resource for locating pictures easily imported into Power Point (don't forget to give credit for copyrighted pictures). See below under "Creativity in Presentation" for more ideas on how to teach effectively.

In this chapter God is shown to be sovereignly superior to Nebuchadnezzar in three specific ways:

- First, the only reason Nebuchadnezzar was able to conquer Jerusalem is because "the Lord delivered Johoiakim king of Judah into his power" (v. 2).
- Second, with only vegetables and water, God produced young men whose appearance was superior to what Nebuchadnezzar could produce using the finest foods and wine.
- Third, the wisdom that God gave his four young men was "ten times beyond" anything Nebuchadnezzar could produce through a Babylonian "ivy-league" education.

Rather than focusing on Daniel's thoughts, as we in a psychology-laden, me-centered culture are apt to do, the text focuses on the grounds for Daniel's faith—the character and actions of God. As you expound the text, you will want to highlight this focus: because God is sovereign, Daniel and his friends can trust God to work on their behalf and through their faithfulness. Like Daniel, we too can trust that God will work on our behalf and through our faithfulness.

Is It True?

As people hear this story, three questions relating to proof/argumentation are naturally going to arise. First, they are going to wonder whether or not God truly is sovereign. In light of all the bad things that happen in the world today, and sometimes happen even to God's people, can they really trust that God is in control? The second question that people are going to wonder about is whether or not God still works on their behalf just as he did with Daniel and his friends. When we take a stand for God, can we expect that he will bless and protect us as he did for the four young men? The third question is in regard to God working through our faithfulness. Does God still work through our faithfulness in order to demonstrate his sovereignty? To all three questions the answer is a categorical "yes!" However, an intellectual, philosophical, or purely historical defense will not do much to convince people that this is true. Rather, they need to hear personal and contemporary examples of God's sovereign interventions on behalf of his people. To preach with power and relevance, "argue" your case (the *Bible's* case!) with concrete examples. Personal examples, your own and the congregation's, are best, but examples from the Bible and church history are also effective. Stories of missionaries who ministered in pagan cultures can convince people that the God of Daniel and his friends is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Whenever biblical preachers proclaim the sovereignty of God, we should assume that some of the listeners are skeptical. The problem of evil is ubiquitous, and listeners tend to judge the veracity of the Scriptures in light of their own experience of pain. It often appears that God is *not* in control, and this text provides an opportunity for preachers to acknowledge that with empathy. Surely Daniel and the friends were tempted to doubt and despair. But in the darkness they trusted what they had learned about God in the light—he is faithful and sovereign. They staked everything on that hope and thus experienced the grace of God.

Now What?

If it is true that God is sovereign and that he still works on behalf of, and through, the faithfulness of his people, listeners will want to know what difference it makes in their lives. We live in a self-absorbed culture that is consumed with the question, "Who am I?" Daniel chapter one implies that this is the wrong question; the pressing question according to Daniel one is, "Whose am I?" Living in a foreign country and serving in a foreign royal court presented ample opportunity for Daniel and his companions to compromise, but they did not waver. The reason they did not waver was because they knew that they belonged to the sovereign God. When people realize that they belong to a sovereign God, they are empowered to live faithfully. Thus a motivational sermon will address the heart—the amalgamation of beliefs, attitudes, values, and feelings from which our actions flow. A heart which says, "God is in control! He watches over the affairs of nations and individuals, kings and powerless young men. I belong to him!" will result in faithful living. We do not need to compromise out of fear. Once again, use examples to show what this confidence looks like: the listener who works in an office is empowered to tell the truth because he or she does not fear what a superior may think; God is ultimately in control. Listeners who hoard because of fear, are empowered to be generous with their resources because God is their sovereign provider. Preach God! The clearer people see God, the more likely they will be to faithfully follow him. The main purpose of this sermon should be to remind and inspire that our great God is indeed sovereign.

Creativity in Presentation

We make two recommendations for genre-sensitive preaching—narrative and visual communication. Because chapter one is such an

engaging story, we try preaching a narrative sermon that is inductive in structure. The advantage of an inductive sermon is that, like the passage itself, it will sustain the suspense until the end of the story. The listener has to listen to the end if she wants to hear how things resolve. Here are a few suggestions as to how this might be done.

- The introduction should raise questions that are going to be addressed later in the story. Specifically, raise questions that will cause listeners to wonder whether or not God is really in control. For example, when missionaries are murdered while trying to faithfully proclaim the gospel, is God really in control of such things?
- The introduction will also need to point out how closely our faithfulness is related to our fears. For example, we compromise on money matters because we fear financial ruin. We are tempted to compromise on matters of integrity because we fear that the truth will have consequences with which we cannot live. After the introduction, let the body of the sermon be a retelling of the story of Daniel 1. As you tell the story you will want to point out that trust in God's sovereignty allows us to live faithfully, free from such fears. Exhortations can be woven into the fabric of a narrative sermon, but those should be kept brief. Let the sermon, like the text, "show" the truth.
- God's sovereignty extends to kingdoms, presidents, and nations. God is in control of even global issues (v. 2).
- God's sovereignty is personal enough to influence the hearts of others on behalf of his people (v. 9).
- God's sovereignty means that his wisdom will ultimately be vindicated (v. 17).

Telling the story in such a way as to highlight these points, you will be suggesting, rather than asserting, your preaching/teaching idea. When listeners are left to infer the main idea, they are actually more apt to be persuaded because argument causes people to push back, but story causes them to lean in. While it is certainly possible to assert your preaching/teaching idea deductively, you might want to experiment with a more subtle form of communication—allowing the story to *show* the truth. That is, through skillful storytelling of the ancient narrative and by punctuating that telling with occasional modern examples of God's sovereignty, prompt your listeners to infer that allegiance to this God means that they belong to One who works on their behalf and through their faithfulness.

Our second suggestion is to use visual communication. As suggested above, the use of maps, timelines, and pictures would enhance the sermon by holding attention and answering the listeners' question: what does it mean? Of course, creating slides takes hours of preparation time, so you will need to decide if you care to use your time that way. A less cumbersome kind of visual aid, just as effective as the use of the screen, is simple objects. For example, a golden goblet could represent the exile (vv. 1–2 state that the vessels from the temple were transported to Babylon); a thick book could represent the training the young men were to receive; a plate of vegetables their determination to not be enculturated; and a crown to represent the audience with Nebuchadnezzar.

Another low-tech visual might be the use of the church's platform. Rather than showing a map (or *in addition* to showing a map) the preacher could use areas of the stage to demonstrate the background of Daniel: the destruction of the Temple summarized from one location, the deportation from another location, and so forth.