

# OpenTheo

## Daniel: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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\*CONTENTS\*

00:00:00 - Chapter 1: Daniel Refuses the King's Food

00:12:44 - Chapter 2: Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Great Image

00:32:27 - Chapter 3: Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image and the Fiery Furnace

00:50:52 - Chapter 4: Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

01:07:12 - Chapter 5: Belshazzar's Feast and the Writing on the Wall

01:29:30 - Chapter 6: Daniel in the Den of Lions

01:50:36 - Chapter 7: The Four Beasts

02:12:08 - Chapter 8: The Vision of the Ram and the Goat

02:19:56 - Chapter 9: Daniel's Prayer and the Seventy Weeks

02:37:37 - Chapter 10: The Vision by the River Tigris

02:47:16 - Chapter 11: The Wars of the Kings of the North and the South

03:06:12 - Chapter 12: The Time of the End

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## Transcript

The book of the prophet Daniel divides into two natural parts. The first six chapters are historical narrative, and the second six chapters are prophetic visions. The first chapter of the book begins by setting the historical scene.

It's the third year of the reign of Jehoiachin, king of Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Neo-Assyrians in 722 BC. Over a hundred years later, the southern kingdom is still there, but on account of its unfaithfulness, it's ripe for judgment.

The prophet Jeremiah, active at this time in Jerusalem, has warned about imminent judgment. The actual exile takes place in a number of waves. First of all, Judah is reduced to the status of a puppet kingdom of other nations of the region.

Then in 605 BC, there's the first deportation of captives to Babylon. Another in 597 BC, the great final destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. And then again in 582 BC, there's a further deportation of captives after the collapse of the governorship of Gedoliah.

If one year were identified as the great turning point, it would be 605 BC. It's at that point that the regional geopolitics decisively turn. The Neo-Assyrians, the dominant power in the region for quite some time, have been waning.

The Neo-Assyrians in Egypt were defeated at Carchemish by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar became king that year, and with his ascent, the entire region came under Babylonian dominance. In the Book of Jeremiah, this is the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah.

Here, at the beginning of Daniel, it's spoken of as the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. Making sense of this seeming discrepancy requires consideration of numbering systems. First of all, what is the beginning of the year? The northern nation of Israel seems to have begun its year in Nisan, in March or April of the year.

And in the southern kingdom, it began in Tishri, in September or October. Consequently, the same event could be dated in different years, depending on whether one was following the dating system of the northern or the southern kingdom. A further thing, which is particularly important when working between Babylon and Judah, is the accession or non-accession year dating of kings' reigns.

The accession year is the year that the king comes to the throne. Some dating systems date the reign of the king from that year, whereas other dating systems date the king's reign from the first full year after his ascension year. Edwin Teeler's work on this subject is particularly important.

Accession year dating would inflate the number of years in a kingdom, as years where there was a change in the king would be counted twice, once as the year of the previous king and once as the year of the king that succeeded him. Recognising these quirks of dating systems can help us with some seeming anomalies in the text. For instance, in chapter 2, verse 1, it speaks about the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

However, in verse 5 of this chapter, it talks about standing before the king after three years. Yet, if we're working with non-accession year dating, this is not hard to explain. The second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar would be the third year of the exile of the young men.

At this point, the young men, likely of the nobility of Judah, possibly even of the royal house, would probably be around 13 to 15 years of age. Daniel comes to Babylon in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and he is still there, as we see at the end of the chapter, in the first year of Cyrus' reign. His presence in Babylon spans the whole period of the exile.

As Daniel and his friends are deported to Babylon at this early stage in their life, and as part of the first wave of deportation, the Lord will be using them to prepare a place for the later waves of exile that come along. Daniel is a contemporary of people like the prophet Ezekiel, who is also in the land of Babylon at this time. Ezekiel speaks of the faithfulness of Daniel within his prophecy.

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, Jeremiah the prophet is telling the people to submit to Babylon, not to look to Egypt for assistance, but to put themselves under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. Reading the prophetic message of Jeremiah against the backdrop of what God is accomplishing in Babylon through Daniel and his friends should give us a sense of the way that, if the people submit to his word, the people will find that the Lord has prepared a way for them, and that he will not abandon them as they are within the land of exile. This is one of many ways in which Daniel can be compared to the character of Joseph.

Joseph, who was sent ahead of his brothers to prepare a way for them, protecting them while in Egypt, is similar to Daniel, who through his wisdom and his interpretation of dreams, leads to the captives of Judah being protected in the land of their exile. Verse 2 quietly introduces some of the background and the elements of the story that follows. First of all, they are brought with some vessels of the house of God.

The Russian playwright Anton Chekhov is famous for his principle of Chekhov's gun. If a writer, in the first chapter of a work, mentions that a gun is hanging on the wall, by the end of that book, that gun had better have gone off. Mentioning the vessels of the house of God here is important.

Back in the book of 1 Samuel, the Ark of the Covenant had been taken by the Philistines,

brought back into their cities. It had resulted in the humiliation of their god Dagon, and also plagues upon many of their people. Later in the book of Daniel, the vessels of the house of God will reappear in the feast of Belshazzar.

There, the vessels of the house of God, first taken by Nebuchadnezzar, would be part of the means by which the downfall of the empire of Babylon would occur. A further important detail here, is that all of these things are brought to the land of Shinar. The land of Shinar is perhaps best known to us from Genesis chapter 11, where it is the site of the building of the tower and the city of Babel.

This attempt to gather all people together in a universal kingdom and build a tower between heaven and earth, was frustrated as the Lord descended and confused the people's languages, scattering them abroad throughout the world. This event also provided the backdrop for the call of Abram. The tower builders had sought to make their name great, but the Lord said that he would make Abram's name great.

The nations were formed by a curse at the time of Babel. Abram was told that he would be a blessing. This mention of the land of Shinar here is the first of numerous allusions to the story of Babel in the rest of the book of Daniel.

It's a book of the multiplication of languages. From chapter 2, verse 4 to chapter 7, the book will be written in a different language from the usual Hebrew of the Old Testament, in the language of Aramaic. Much of the book concerns confusion and the need to interpret, and Daniel being given the power to interpret different things for others who cannot.

The book has a number of different edifices that rise up and are brought down, whether that's the great image of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the image of the statue that he builds, or the great tree that represents him in his second dream. A further dominant theme in the book of Daniel is the attempt to establish universal empire. The quest for universal sovereignty is similar to the way that the people at Babel sought to gather all humanity together under a single rule.

Perhaps the greatest message of the book of Daniel is that the Lord alone has the kingdom. As we go through the book of Daniel, we'll see this confession on a number of pagan kings' lips. This period in Israel's history is one where they no longer have a kingdom of their own, but they are scattered abroad among other nations.

While their own power as a distinct polity is much reduced, we should recognize the ways that they are starting to fulfill the purpose of the Lord, declared at the time of the call of Abraham, through their blessing of the nations where they are placed. Figures like Daniel, Esther, Mordecai, and Nehemiah all hold some sort of high office and exercise considerable influence, blessing the Gentile empires in which they are found, and also protecting and advancing the people of God. The word of God is going out to the whole

world.

The kingdom of God is established in a more international way. While we may focus upon the humiliation of the nation of Judah and the nation of Israel before it, we should not miss the ways that this is an expansion and intensification of the Lord's active sovereignty among the nations. He has formerly allowed the nations to walk in their own ways, but now he is starting to rule over them more directly.

He will humble proud nations, much as he humbled the builders of Babylon, but he will also lift others up and use them for his purposes. This period of time is also one in which the people of God would face new temptations and challenges. Exiles of former periods in the house of Israel's history had assimilated to the nations in which they were placed, or had disappeared in other ways into their new societies.

Without a land and polity of their own, and things such as the Temple in Jerusalem, it was very easy for them to lose their identity. For Israel to be a distinct people in exile, it would be faithfulness to the law, perhaps above all else, that would mark them out as distinct. This distinctiveness through faithfulness is something that is very much in the foreground of the book of Daniel.

Daniel and his friends are tested in this chapter and elsewhere concerning their faithfulness. Will they assimilate to the people around them, or will they stand out in their loyalty to the Lord above all others? Once again, this recalls the experience of such as Joseph in the land of Egypt, and also Moses in Egypt at the beginning of the book of Exodus. Daniel and his friends receive new names in this book.

It's a way in which they have to navigate between two different identities and worlds. They're being taught the wisdom of the Babylonians, and they're being assimilated into Babylonian culture in various ways, and the challenge of standing out from this pagan society will be a very keen one for them. The first great test is a food test.

Will they eat the king's food? Eating such food would be a considerable honour for them. It would be a sign of status and belonging within the kingdom, but Daniel determines to refuse this. It's not made clear why he does this.

No mention is made of eating unclean animals, for instance. It seems most likely to me that the refusal to eat the food came from the fact that the food would have been sacrificed to idols. This, of course, becomes a big issue in the city of Corinth in the New Testament, but it's also mentioned in the book of Exodus, chapter 34, verses 12 and 15.

Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice. The chief of the eunuchs responsible for Daniel and his friends is prepared to listen to Daniel's request, because God has given Daniel favour in his eyes. Once again, this

might recall the story of Joseph.

The chief of the eunuchs himself would be taking a risk in obliging Daniel in this matter. If the plan went awry, he could really get in trouble with the king, whose opinion mattered a great deal more than Daniel's ever would. Indeed, the chief eunuch's response to Daniel makes clear that he could lose his head if Daniel was seen to be in worse condition and the king found out what had happened.

The chief of the eunuchs, despite his favour towards Daniel, does not oblige Daniel in the matter. Daniel then goes to the steward who's been set over him, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He suggests the test, one in which the stakes will be considerably lower, giving them seeds to eat and water to drink for ten days.

Their appearance could be tested at the end of that time. If the test was favourable, they could proceed accordingly. The test is successful.

At the end of the ten days, they are better in their appearance than those who were on the king's food. Daniel and his three companions prosper in their training. The Lord not only gives them favour in the sight of those over them, but also gives them skill and learning, equips them in their studies.

In addition, Daniel is given skill and understanding in the interpretation of visions and dreams, something that would be much valued in the court of the king and which is clearly important for the story that follows. At the end of the three years, when they are finally brought in before Nebuchadnezzar, they stand out from all of their peers. In their wisdom, their skill and their understanding, they exceed all of the experts of the kingdom.

A question to consider. How do you imagine the example of Daniel and his friends would have been used by Jews during this period? In Daniel chapter 1, Daniel and his companions Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were tested. Through their faithfulness and not eating of the king's delicacies, they were set apart from their fellows, distinguishing themselves from others in their wisdom and understanding.

In verse 17, Daniel in particular was noted for his ability in interpreting dreams and visions. This skill in interpreting dreams and visions, or animancy, seems to be something that Daniel had a recognized skill in, even before the events of chapter 2. Chapter 2 begins a section of the book that runs up to chapter 7. Partway through verse 4, the book shifts from Hebrew to Aramaic, and it continues in Aramaic through to the end of chapter 7. We might observe, as many commentators have, a chiastic symmetry in these chapters. Chapters 2 and 7 deal with four empires, the first the vision of the great statue, and the second the vision of the four beasts.

Chapters 3 and 6 present two tests of faithfulness, the three friends of Daniel and the

fiery furnace in chapter 3, and the lion's den in chapter 6. In chapter 4, the proud king Nebuchadnezzar is humbled, and in chapter 5, the proud king Belshazzar is brought down, as in chapter 1 of the book. In chapter 2, there is a test that distinguishes Daniel from others, the test being the interpretation of the king's dream. Daniel, once again, is like Joseph.

He is the faithful man who rises through the ranks, he interprets the king's dream, and through his ascent to high office, prepares the way for his people to find refuge in a foreign Gentile land. The events of this chapter occur in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Considering that the training of Daniel and his friends was supposed to last for three years, in chapter 1, verse 5, this dating does raise some questions.

However, when we recognize that the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar most likely refers to the second full year of his reign, it makes more sense. Daniel's training would have begun in the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar, and then well into the second full year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar has his dream. Troubled by the unsettling dream that he has, Nebuchadnezzar summons the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans.

However, Nebuchadnezzar will not disclose his dream to these persons. They are expected to inform him both of the content of his dream, and also of its interpretation. If they cannot do this, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be demolished.

But Nebuchadnezzar does offer a carrot to go with his stick. If they are able to tell him the dream and give him the interpretation of it, they will be showered with gifts and honor and rewards. Perhaps wondering whether Nebuchadnezzar is playing a cruel joke upon them, or whether he is indeed serious, the Chaldeans repeat their request that they be told the dream.

But the king is not going to budge. If they cannot tell him his dream, they have condemned themselves. Quite dismayed by this point, the Chaldeans speak to the king again.

He is asking something impossible of them. There is no one who can tell the king his dream. The expert astrologers, diviners, magicians, and sorcerers can at most interpret the dream.

They cannot disclose the contents of a dream that they themselves have not received. Only the gods can do that, and they don't dwell with men. The expert interpreters and diviners have to figure things out from the limited information that they have.

What the king demands of them is entirely beyond their abilities and scope of competence. This episode seems to reveal a deep distrust between Nebuchadnezzar and

the Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar perhaps thinks that the Chaldeans are charlatans.

They don't really have knowledge. They are just good at bluffing and making things up. If they really had the deep knowledge, wisdom, and skills that would justify their influence in the Babylonian court, they would be able to perform the sort of feat that he is demanding of them here.

By their confession that they can't perform what is being asked of them, they are condemning themselves. The king therefore commands that they all be killed. Nebuchadnezzar seems to be radically re-evaluating the composition of his court.

Despite his great power and his recent pivotal victories, this might portray a sort of insecurity at the heart of his regime. When the news of Nebuchadnezzar's decree reaches Daniel, who is included among the wise men, Daniel requests a stay of execution. He is, he claims, able to show the interpretation of the dream to the king.

As we've already noted, Daniel was already known for the interpretation of dreams and visions. This claim is not a complete bolt from the blue. In light of verse 24, Daniel's request of the king is probably not delivered to the king directly, but through Ariok.

Having made this request, Daniel returns to his house and he relates the matter to his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In the first chapter, he had spoken for all of them. In this chapter, he asks them to intercede for and with him.

In the next chapter, they will be tested by themselves. Having prayed for knowledge of the mystery, Daniel receives a vision that night in which the dream of Nebuchadnezzar is revealed to him. While we, as the hearers of this chapter, know that Daniel now knows the contents and the interpretation of the dream, neither of them have yet been revealed to us.

The tension of the chapter is built up by a sort of poetic interlude. Within it, Daniel praises God for his revelation of mysteries. This break in the forward movement of the narrative heightens the tension.

We're still waiting to hear what the dream means. It slows the pace of the chapter down, but most importantly, it reveals the message at the heart of the chapter about the Lord's uniqueness, the fact that the Lord is the true one who rules in the affairs of men. He alone is absolutely sovereign.

This will be manifested in the interpretation of the dream, but it's also seen in the way that the Lord reveals this. Seen against the backdrop of the Chaldeans' claim that disclosing such a dream was impossible, the Lord's revelation of the contents of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel is a manifestation of his power and sovereignty. Furthermore, it's a sign that, in contrast to the gods that the Chaldeans believed in, the Lord is active and involved in and speaks into the affairs of men.



Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, might remind us of the figure of Potiphar, who occupied a similar position in the regime of Joseph's pharaoh. Arioch speaks for Daniel to the king. Paul Tanner suggests that Arioch was a glory grabber, attempting to gain extra favour for himself with the king by bringing Daniel to him.

However, we should consider the risk that Arioch is taking at this time. If Daniel fails to disclose and interpret the king's dream, he too would be put dangerously out of favour with the king. He's likely putting his neck out for Daniel at this point.

Already in chapter 1 we saw that Daniel gained favour with key figures in the court. And here again it seems, as in the case of Joseph, that the Lord giving favour to Daniel in the sight of others enables him to come before the king to save his life and to save also the lives of the wise men. Daniel has two names.

His Hebrew name is Daniel, presumably the name that he received at his birth. However, the chief of the eunuchs in chapter 1 gave him the name Belteshazzar. Here we are told once again that Daniel's name was Belteshazzar.

James Jordan has suggested that these names are not used interchangeably. Rather, the name Daniel highlights the fact that Daniel is the servant of God, Belteshazzar that he is the servant of the king. To the king's question whether he is indeed able to disclose and interpret the dream, Daniel's initial response is rather unpromising.

He starts by accentuating the negative. No wise men, enchanters, magicians or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked. One can imagine the king becoming quite angry, wondering whether Daniel is merely wasting his time.

However, Daniel's statement of what is impossible with man is calculated to set things up for a confession of the power of God. The true God, the God of heaven, is revealing mysteries to the king, in particular what will happen in the latter days. The latter days here are a reference not to the final days of all history, but rather to the latter days of the old covenant administration.

Daniel begins to recount the dream, but not before making another confession of the Lord's part in revealing the truth to him. Daniel is a renowned ennairomancer, an interpreter of dreams and visions, but it is not on account of his superior skill that he is able to reveal the meaning of this dream to the king. Rather, his recounting and interpretation of the dream will be an authenticating witness for the king.

The fact that King Nebuchadnezzar has the dream, and Daniel also receives the knowledge of the dream, also provide two distinct witnesses to this revelation, to make it more sure in our minds too. The image is of a great, terrifying and lofty statue. We might again think of the Babel themes that are playing out in this book.

The reference to the land of Shinar back in chapter 1 alluded to Genesis chapter 11 and

the story of the Tower of Babel and its builders. They were attempting to build a great empire that gathered together all the peoples of the world in one, and also to join together heaven and earth with a great tower. As we shall see, this statue seems to be motivated by a similar ambition.

The image is described historically moving down from the head towards the feet. Perhaps we are supposed to see this as a sort of descent from heaven to earth. The movement is from precious metals down.

Gold is the most precious metal, silver next, bronze next, and then iron after that. That iron is then admixed with clay at the very bottom. As a movement from precious metals down, it might be compared to the temple, which moves from gold in the most holy places, to silver for some of the brackets of the tabernacle for instance, to bronze in the courtyard, and then to iron for the gates.

James Jordan suggests that this statue might be a sort of humaniform temple. In addition to that progression, there is a movement into greater hardness. From gold to silver to bronze to iron may seem like a decrease in glory, but it's an increase in might.

It's also a movement of metals into more useful and powerful metals. You can do far more with iron than you can with gold. Furthermore, it's an image of extension.

Gold and silver are rare, bronze and iron are not as rare, and clay is extremely common. This could be seen as an extension out into the world. The statue is trying to gather up all the materials of the world to become comprehensive in its composition.

It's a movement into alloyed, and then finally admixed materials. It starts off with the purity of gold and silver, then has the alloy of bronze, and then moves into this brittle mixture of clay and iron. It's a single composite statue.

The statue starts at the top and moves down, cumulatively working through the different kingdoms. Perhaps when Satan brought Christ up on a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of earth at a glance, he was showing him something like this, a great visual symbol of the unity of successive empires over time, each empire taking on characteristics and continuing something of the life of its predecessors. Peter Lighthouse suggests that we might also take note of the movement into greater diversity within the statue itself.

The great head has a unity, whereas the chest and arms have two sides. Likewise, the middle and the thighs have different parts to them. The legs of iron end in feet with ten toes.

Most commentators note the literary connections between chapter 2 and chapter 7, and the way that the vision of the four beasts in chapter 7 might help us to interpret this vision in chapter 2. Chapter 7, verses 3 to 7 read as follows. The final beast seems to

connect with the bottom of the statue. It has feet, it's connected with iron, and its ten horns seem to connect with the ten toes.

The vision then seems to speak of four successive empires as a unity. God has given Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom, and he is establishing in Nebuchadnezzar and these successive empires a great and powerful structure that he will later overthrow. This great human image is given a sort of Adamic, comprehensive dominion over the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens.

Different theories have been advanced for the identity of these different kingdoms or empires. Typically, liberal scholars have identified these empires as Babylon, Media, Persia, and then Greece. While there is some variation on the point, generally conservative scholars have identified these empires as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and then Rome, Medo-Persia being counted as a single empire rather than two successive ones.

Ernest Lucas, in his commentary, challenges this conservative interpretation. The Seleucids and Ptolemies were mixed in marriage, which led to the weakness of the kingdom, which he argues is connected with the fourth beast and with the feet of this great image. He argues that the small horn that arises in chapter 8 would have to be distinguished from the horn in chapter 7. For more liberal commentators, there is also the problem of predictive prophecy.

If you don't believe that divine prophecy concerning the future exists, then clearly the book of Daniel is going to present some problems in parts. James Jordan interprets the two-horned ram with the horn that becomes larger as Medo-Persia, and the goat is identified as Greece in chapter 8, verse 21. This would seem to resolve at least one of Lucas' concerns.

As Tanner points out, there is no distinct empire of media that followed Babylon. The empire was given to the Medes and the Persians in chapter 5, verse 28, and it is the laws of the Medes and the Persians that are described in chapter 6, verse 8. The description of the destruction of the image might remind us of the description of the destruction of the wicked in Psalm 1, verses 4-5. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. One of the great questions concerning the meaning of this dream is what ends at the time of the downfall of the statue, particularly if we see the feet referring to the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire continues to be a thing well into the 5th century AD.

This would seem to present problems for interpretations that see the stone growing into the mountain as a description of Christ and the growth of his kingdom. Over four

centuries after the death and resurrection and ascension of Christ, the Roman Empire is still there. Rather, it seems to me that we need to understand these things from their spiritual aspect.

These great successive empires play a role prior to the ascension of Christ that they do not do afterwards. The God of Heaven gives the kingdom, the power, the might and the glory, not to Nebuchadnezzar and his successors, but to Christ and his kingdom. The Roman Empire may continue to be on earth, but it has been stripped of the spiritual role that it once played within the world.

The mantle of the great cosmic kingdom has been laid on another's shoulders, and even before it has risen in its height, this shift has decisively occurred. Later in the book of Daniel, Daniel will receive a vision in which he sees a sort of metallic man, which I think we should identify with the great angel of the covenant, with Michael, with the second person of the Trinity. Daniel chapter 10 verses 4 to 6 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, that is the Tigris, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Euphrates around his waist.

His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. This figure is the true metal man who will take the place of this former statue. The gradual growth of the stone into the mountain might remind us of passages like Isaiah chapter 2 verses 2 to 3. It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established at the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it.

And many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Behind the image of the stone toppling the giant statue we might see David and Goliath.

Now another stone of David, the stone of the Messiah, is going to topple another giant, this giant statue that represents all the empires of the world. As an uncut stone, it would also be associated with the altar which was formed of uncut stones. Altars were associated with mountains, a place of communion with God, of raising up the earth to God's presence.

Cut from the mountain might also remind us of the tablets of stone of the law, that the Lord himself originally cut. Most importantly, the mountain that fills the earth is an image of comprehensiveness. It joins heaven to earth in its height, and it unites the whole world in its scope.

The four corners of the altar represent the four corners of the world, and the four winds of heaven. Here the great mountain is a similar image of comprehensiveness. Jesus refers similar imagery to himself in Matthew chapter 21 verses 42 to 44, relating the image of the stone with the foundation of a temple.

Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people producing its fruits.

And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. With the king's dream, and Daniel's disclosure of the dream and its interpretation, the dream is made certain, it will surely come to pass. Nebuchadnezzar falls on his face in response.

Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold falling on his face, represents in his individual person, the later toppling of the great statue itself. Through the Lord's demonstration of his sovereignty, through the revelation of the dream and its interpretation to Daniel, he made known his power to Nebuchadnezzar too. Nebuchadnezzar, rewarding Daniel as he had promised, lifts him up and makes him the ruler of all the province of Babylon, and chief among Babylon's wise men.

At Daniel's request, the king also raises up Daniel's three companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, here referred to as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, their Babylonian names. A question to consider, the great metallic statue, gold, silver, bronze, iron and mixed with clay, was finally brought down with an uncut stone, juxtaposed with the other materials. What significance might we find in the uncut stone? Daniel chapter 3 should be read as the continuation of what began in Daniel chapter 2. In Daniel chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a great and terrifying statue, made of four different metals, going down from gold to silver to bronze to iron, and then in the toes and feet mixed with clay.

Daniel revealed the dream and its interpretation, four successive kingdoms or empires that would eventually be brought down by a stone cut from a mountain without hands, which would grow into a mountain that filled the whole earth. Nebuchadnezzar himself and the Babylonian empire that he represented were the golden head. The empire of Medo-Persia that followed him was the silver arms and chest.

The bronze waist and thighs were Greece and the iron legs and feet were Rome. With the advent of Christ, this towering statue of cumulative empires would be brought down, it would be crushed and in its place would grow a mountain to fill the earth, a new altar that would gather together all the nations and peoples of the world and also in the great elevation of this cosmic mountain, it would connect heaven and earth. This dream was clearly threatening for King Nebuchadnezzar.

It represented a possible fate for his kingdom that he wanted to avert. The fact that Nebuchadnezzar, shortly after receiving this dream, sets up a towering image purely of gold is not at all accidental. He is responding to the threat of the dream, trying to present an image that represents his universal and continuous sovereignty.

Nebuchadnezzar wants to gather all humanity around his sovereignty with this golden image. As we saw in chapter 2, this has Babelic connotations. In chapter 1, they are brought to the land of Shinar, which is the land where the tower of Babel was built.

Babylon, of course, is related to Babel. And Nebuchadnezzar, in the chapters devoted to him, is always associated with these grand towering images, the great statue of chapter 2, the great image in chapter 3, and then in chapter 4, the great towering tree. Each of these images represent not only an ascent to or descent from heaven, but also a hubristic attempt to gather all things, all peoples, around these great images or towers.

Nebuchadnezzar's ambition is clearly the ambition of the tower builders in chapter 11 of Genesis. Chapter 3 continues the Aramaic section of the book of Daniel, which runs from chapter 2, verse 4, to the end of chapter 7. These chapters have a chiasmic, or book-ended, structure. Chapter 2 corresponds with chapter 7, chapter 4 with chapter 5, and our present chapter 3 corresponds with chapter 6. In chapter 3, the three friends of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are tested in their willingness to resist the king's idolatrous decree.

Daniel faces a similar test in chapter 6, where he gets thrown into the lion's den. Just as his friends are miraculously preserved in the fiery furnace in chapter 3, he will be preserved in the lion's den in chapter 6. In both cases, they exemplify faithfulness to the Lord in the midst of an idolatrous administration. As a response to the threatening dream of chapter 2, the building of this great image is a sign of the insecurity of Nebuchadnezzar.

It's an attempt to shore up his sovereignty. In chapter 2, we saw some of the tensions that probably existed between Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans within his administration. In this chapter, through the establishment of this grand public spectacle, Nebuchadnezzar seems to be attempting to bring some coherence to his fracturing administration.

In this respect, we can also see the shadow of Babel behind. They do not want to be scattered upon the face of the earth, and so they build this great tower. Nebuchadnezzar is building his great statue or image for a similar purpose.

The image itself is of a remarkable height, 90 foot or 27 meters tall. In the text itself, it's described as being 60 cubits tall and 6 cubits broad. As the Babylonians used a sexagesimal number system, the choice of these particular dimensions may not have been accidental.

While this would not be the largest image in the ancient world, it would be one of the tallest. The same language that is used of the image in chapter 2 is also used of this image. However, as James Jordan argues, the proportions seem wrong for a human figure.

We would expect, if it were a human figure, for its breadth to be at least double what it is relative to the height. We might perhaps speculate that it was set upon a grand pillar or pedestal, or perhaps it is something like a great gold-plated obelisk with the image of a person inscribed upon it. Collective worship, in this instance, seems to be serving a grander political project.

The construction of the image, as already noted, is in part Nebuchadnezzar's response to his sense of insecurity at the strength of the Babylonian administration. This great image, as a focal point for religious worship, is an attempt to gather together the whole of Babylon, both vertically, with the entire hierarchical structure of Babylonian government represented, and horizontally, with all peoples, nations and languages brought together and united in this common act. Several groups of government officials are mentioned.

Satrap, Prefect, Governor, Councillor, Treasurer, Justice, Magistrate, and all the officials of the provinces. Pultana identifies the different groups as follows. The Satraps would be the rulers over the major provinces.

The Prefects would be the high officials immediately subordinate to them. The Governors would be the administrators of smaller regions. The Councillors would be the advisors in the king's court.

The Treasurers, those who supervised the treasury. The Justices would be the legal officials. And the Magistrates would be like sheriffs in some instances.

Daniel chapter 3 makes a lot of use of repetition. It has these grand lists of these officials, also later of musical instruments. The clothes of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and even the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, are repeated on several different occasions, often redundantly.

This has a sort of comedic or satirical effect. Nebuchadnezzar is vying to express his great power and sovereignty, but it is all proven futile and impotent in the end. Nebuchadnezzar appoints a grand orchestra of exotic musical instruments that will lead the worship event.

They're perhaps related to the different nations. The musical instruments are an assemblage of instruments of diverse cultural origins, with their names also coming from different languages. Their precise identity is debated by biblical scholars.

In verses 3-7 we see some of the most extensive use of comedic repetition. Phrases like

the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up are repeated many times, and the narrator never avails himself of the many opportunities that he has to trim down the great weight of the text. The prose, weighted as it is by this abundance of repetitive elements, expresses something of the comedic pomposity of the king, and also of the mindlessness of what is taking place.

In terms of the background of Babel, the musical instruments seem to be serving as a language intended to unite all peoples, nations and languages. Such common worship of the great image is an attempt to provide a solvent for all these different nations that have been brought together in this great composite of peoples that is quite fragile within. Any who refuse to participate in the worship of the image are threatened with the burning fiery furnace, a fire that would have been maybe even as hot as 1000 degrees centigrade.

The presence of the fiery furnace nearby probably suggests that it had some role in the construction of the image in the first place, perhaps producing the metal with which it was plated, or perhaps it was used for preparing lime. It had an entrance at the top, through which the Jews would later be thrown, and it also has an entrance at the side from which the king would later see them. Foreign nations were often connected with images of fire and furnaces.

We might think, for instance, of the brick kilns of the original Babel, the invention of which encouraged the ambition to make this great tower in the first place. Egypt is described as an iron furnace in places like Deuteronomy 4.20, but the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day. The same image of Egypt and the captivity there is used in 1 Kings 8.51 and Jeremiah 11.4. In Ezekiel 22.17-22, the image of a furnace is also used of the house of Israel.

In the book of Ezekiel 22.17-22, the Lord there speaks of purging away the dross of a nation that has become thoroughly corrupt. And the word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me, all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace, they are dross of silver. Therefore thus says the Lord God, because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem, as one gathers silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire on it in order to melt it.

So I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the Lord, I have poured out my wrath upon you.

Later Jewish Midrash of Genesis chapter 11 and 12 would use this image of the fiery furnace taken from the book of Daniel and apply it to the story of Abraham, Abraham



being rescued from the fiery furnace of Nimrod, who was the great empire builder, and the one who led the project of the Tower of Babel. While this is clearly not a historical account as the biblical narrative itself is, it recognises appropriately a symmetry between these later events and those events back in the story of Babel and the call of Abraham. Abraham is called against the backdrop of Babel, he is rescued as it were from the judgment of Babel, and he will be used as a response to the threat of Babel.

The conflict between the Jews in this chapter and Nebuchadnezzar, who is a renewed Babel builder, must be read against that backdrop in Genesis. Nebuchadnezzar is the heir of Nimrod, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah are the heirs of Abraham. In the image of chapter 2 we saw the struggle to create a unified structure out of these diverse materials.

The image was of composite materials, of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. It was also of alloyed materials, like the bronze, and beyond the alloyed materials, of admixed materials, materials that did not come together in one single new material, in the case of the iron mixed with the clay. As images of a series of empires, this showed the inability of these great empire builders to form a united people.

No matter how much the great empire builders attempted to bring these peoples together, the material of their kingdoms remained divided by customs, ethnicity, language and religion. The Fari furnace is a means of preparing and purifying metals, a means by which this united metal kingdom could be built. Those parts that were not purified in the process, becoming part of the final structure, would be burned away or removed as dross.

Representing these great empires, whether the original Babel of Nimrod, or the nation of Egypt under Pharaoh, or Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, as if great furnaces, might be a way of illustrating their attempt to bring people together, through both purging unassimilable elements away, and purifying what remains as a single metal. Any people who resist the great imperial ambition of Nebuchadnezzar would find themselves burned away as dross within this Fari furnace. Only the pure gold of Babylon would remain.

In chapter 2, the tensions between King Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans in his court was quite apparent. Nebuchadnezzar did not trust them, was prepared to kill them all, and re-establish his court with a completely different composition. Daniel the Jew had saved all of their lives, but now these jealous officials seized their opportunity to use the king's words against the Jews that were rising among their ranks.

While it initially appeared that the king's decree had achieved its desired effect, here the Chaldeans inform him that it has failed in some cases. There is a fly in the ointment. Carol Newsome observes, not only by name, but also by ethnicity, certain Jews, and by the king's personal role in advancing them to office, whom you appointed, perhaps indirectly disclosing the sources of the Chaldeans' jealousy.

In the Chaldeans' speech, the actual misdeed the Jews are alleged to have done is the very last element mentioned. The information is preceded by two comments that interpret the significance of the act for the king. The Chaldeans represent the Jews' refusal to prostrate themselves as disdain for the king's own authority.

One can perhaps imagine Nebuchadnezzar's response to this as being in part frustration. His decree has been resisted by some that he himself appointed, and beyond this he can see that his decree is being used for petty court machinations by the Chaldeans, a faction that he already distrusts. He made his decree to establish his universal and comprehensive sovereignty, and now he already feels that it's being used against him.

He's being manoeuvred into a position, by the refusal of the Jews to cooperate, and by the machinations of the Chaldeans, to act in ways that he might prefer not to. The ideal and the expectation was that everyone would bow to the image without objection. Nebuchadnezzar is furious, perhaps in part because he feels the supposed ingratitude of the three Jews, who despite him raising them to positions of high office, have resisted his decree.

But perhaps also he feels that his hand has been forced. The empire can't merely be subdued by means of imperial decree and grand spectacle, but he has to resort to force. He had made a great power play, but some had resisted it, and the result was to make him look weaker.

It's very dangerous to overreach one's authority in the attempt to demonstrate it. Someone might always call your bluff. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't really want to kill the Jews.

The ideal is that they simply submit, and so he's quite prepared to give them another chance. However, the Jews are not prepared to bow under any circumstances. They serve the Lord over Nebuchadnezzar and his gods.

Nebuchadnezzar is filled with anger, and in his fiery anger, he orders the fire of the furnace to be heated seven times hotter. The three men abound, and are ordered to be thrown into the fiery furnace, even while wearing all of their official vestments. The furnace is so overheated that the men throwing Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into it are burned up themselves.

However, looking at the three friends after they have been thrown into the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar sees a remarkable sight. He rises up suddenly and asks his counsellors whether there were only three men that had been bound and thrown into the fire. Within the fire, he sees four men, unbound, walking around and unhurt, and the fourth man has the appearance of a son of the gods.

The text never makes exactly clear who this person is. Many Christians have seen it as a

Christophany, an appearance of Christ before his incarnation. A natural connection might be with the story of the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3, where the angel of the Lord speaks from the midst of the burning bush that is on fire but not consumed.

In Judges chapter 13, the angel of the Lord who appears to Manoah and his wife ascends in the flame of the altar. Just as the lion's den of chapter 6 seems to be an image of exile in Babylon, so the furnace, I think, should be read in a similar way. In Daniel chapter 6 verse 22, Daniel says that the Lord sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions and protect Daniel.

Just as the angel of the covenant was present with Israel and Egypt, so the angel of the covenant is present with the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Whether represented in the den of lions or the fiery furnace, he preserves his people from harm. They will neither be burned away as dross or assimilated into the great metal empire of Babylon, nor will they be consumed by the lions that surround them.

They will be preserved, and when the time comes, they will be brought out unharmed. It may even be possible that we are to see some connection between this and the Lord's burning throne in chapter 7, where once again there is a fire that does not consume the one within it. Nebuchadnezzar, in his pride, has set up a grand public spectacle to represent his own sovereignty, and unwittingly had established a stage for the demonstration of the Lord's power.

Nebuchadnezzar calls the three friends out from the fire, addressing them as servants of the Most High God. Recognizing in his address to them, they serve a higher authority than his. The Lord's power is also demonstrated to the satraps, prefects, governors, king's councillors, and the other figures who are present.

What had been intended as a unifying spectacle demonstrating Nebuchadnezzar's sovereignty becomes a means of showing the Lord's. The chapter ends with Nebuchadnezzar blessing the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, even speaking of the three friends in a way that honors them for resisting his decree. The chapter began with the decree of the king, and it ends with a different decree, with a very different force to it.

Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way. In the preceding chapter, the great image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was brought down. In some ways, we might see Nebuchadnezzar's decree here, almost as an affirmation of the judgment upon the original image in the preceding chapter.

Chapter two ended with the exaltation of Daniel and the friends within the court of the king, and this chapter again with a promotion for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. A

question to consider. Beyond its immediate historical reference, the book of Daniel speaks of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the imperial ambitions of proud human rulers.

What lessons could a Christian political theology draw from this chapter and apply to current day situations? Daniel chapter four continues the Aramaic section of the book that runs from chapter two to chapter seven. This section has a book-ended structure with chapter two paralleled with chapter seven, three with six, and then four with five. Chapter four and five both deal with the humbling and proud kings.

Twentieth century biblical scholars have noted the similarity between the story of chapter four and the prayer of Nabonidus, a text from the Dead Sea Scrolls. John Collins translates the relevant section as follows. I was with a bad disease was smitten for seven years, and since God set his face on me, he healed me, and as for my sin, he remitted it.

A diviner, he was a Jew from among the exiles, came to me and said, Proclaim and write to give honor and exaltation to the name of God most high. And I wrote as follows. I was smitten by a bad disease in Tima by the decree of the most high God.

For seven years I was praying to the gods of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood, stone, clay, since I thought that they were gods. The text is fragmentary and it picks up again later. I was made strong again.

The peace of my repose returned to me. Andrew Steinman makes the case that the prayer of Nabonidus text is dependent upon Daniel chapter four. It is not an actual historical account, but is designed to fill the gap between the known activities of Daniel during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and the later years of the empire of Babylon, during which time we also have records of Daniel's dealings.

Much of the chapter takes the form of Nebuchadnezzar's first person testimony. Nebuchadnezzar bears a remarkable witness to what has happened to him, and the story is filled out by the narrator. The affirmation of the Lord's everlasting kingdom should be read against the backdrop of chapters two and three, where Nebuchadnezzar's intention that his kingdom would endure forever is frustrated by the Lord.

Language such as that of verse three, how great are his signs, how mighty his wonders, evokes the story of the Exodus. In that story the stubborn heart of a king resisted the purpose of the Lord, and Pharaoh and the might of Egypt were humbled through the ten plagues and the defeat at the Red Sea. As in chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar has a troubling dream.

In order to interpret the dream he summons the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and astrologers. The tensions and the ill will that seem to exist between the king and the Chaldeans back in chapter two do not seem to be a factor here. We might speculate as

to why Daniel is not invited to interpret the dream, and why the king makes known the content of his dream to the Chaldeans, magicians, enchanters and astrologers.

Does he no longer doubt their powers of interpretation? The absence of Daniel, the truly gifted interpreter of dreams, and the presence of these Chaldeans, whose abilities are suspect, perhaps suggests that the king wants a flattering interpretation. The interpretation of such a dream is designed in part to explain how to avert the crisis that the dream foretells, and Daniel, for all of his ability to interpret the dream, did not provide much help on that front back in chapter two. Peter Lighthouse has suggested that Nebuchadnezzar's relationship to Daniel at this point might be similar to that between King Ahab and the prophet Micaiah back in 1 Kings chapter 22.

Micaiah, though known by the king to be a faithful prophet of the Lord, is shunned because he does not give the flattering prophecies that the king wants to hear. However, those who are first summoned are not able to interpret the dream, and so Daniel, otherwise known as Belteshazzar, is also summoned. He is addressed as the chief of the magicians.

He was set over them back in chapter two. In Genesis chapter 41 verse 38, Pharaoh said to his servants, Can we find a man like this, in whom is the spirit of God, speaking of Joseph? Here Daniel is described in a similar way to Joseph. We should notice the continuing theme in the book of Daniel of the struggle of interpretation.

It's in chapter two with the king's first dream. It's here in chapter four with the second dream. It's in chapter five with the writing on the wall.

Later on in the book, the theme of interpretation continues in relation to the visions that Daniel receives from the Lord. The struggle of kings to interpret, the changing of the language of the book itself from Hebrew to Aramaic, might be a further way in which the book evokes the themes of the story of Babel. Language is being confused.

People are struggling to interpret. Even in this chapter, there may be an element of wordplay in the changing of the king's heart. As James Joyce recognised in his book *Finnegan's Wake*, in the lines, And shall not Babel be with LeBarb? and He wore.

Babel is the Hebrew and Aramaic word for heart spelled backwards. The theme of Babel pervades the opening chapters of Daniel. It will continue into chapter five with the confusing writing on the wall and the overturning of this new kingdom of Babel, Babylon.

The Babelic heart of the king in this chapter has changed and a true heart will be placed within him. While this is rather speculative, there might be something along these lines taking place here. In contrast to chapter two, the king here relates his dream to Daniel.

It concerns a great tree in the midst of the earth. In chapter two, there was a towering image. In chapter three, there was a great image that was set up in the plain of Jura.

Here, there is another thing reaching up to heaven. This time, it's a great tree, a cosmic tree to go with the cosmic mountain at the end of chapter two, perhaps. As the tower of Babel had sought, the top of this tree reaches to heaven.

It's visible to the ends of the whole earth. It gathers together all the ends of the earth in its view and it also gathers together heaven and earth as its top reaches heaven. It provides food, shelter and shade to all around.

The beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens represent different peoples and nations that take refuge in the kingdom of Babylon. The image of kingdoms and empires as great trees is not exclusive to the Bible. It's also found in Babylonian texts.

Elsewhere in scripture, we can see it in places like Ezekiel chapter 31, verses 1 to 11. And of towering height, its top among the clouds. The waters nourished it, the deep made it grow tall, making its rivers flow around the place of its planting, sending forth its streams to all the trees of the field.

So it towered high above all the trees of the field. Its boughs grew large and its branches long from abundant water in its shoots. All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs.

Under its branches, all the beasts of the field gave birth to their young and under its shadow lived all great nations. It was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches, for its roots went down to abundant waters. The cedars in the garden of God could not rival it, nor the fir trees equal its boughs.

Neither were the plain trees like its branches. No tree in the garden of God was as equal in beauty. I made it beautiful in the mass of its branches and all the trees of Eden envied it that were in the garden of God.

Therefore thus says the Lord God, because it towered high and set its top among the clouds and its heart was proud of its height, I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out.

Having witnessed this great tree, the cosmic tree, Nebuchadnezzar then sees a watcher coming down from heaven. He declares a sentence against the tree. It must be cut down, its branches lopped off, its leaves stripped off and its fruit scattered.

Its stump should be left, but it would be bound with a band of iron and bronze. At this point the imagery seems to shift from a tree, or a stump of a tree, to a person. He is cast out and put among the beasts, wet with the dew of heaven.

His mind is changed for that of a beast and seven periods of time pass over him. The watchers here mentioned are most likely angels, angelic figures who watched over nations. At various parts of the Old Testament we read of these figures.

We might think of the visitors that went to Sodom to inspect it, or perhaps more relevant in this instance, those who went down to judge Babel and its builders. While Israel was the Lord's special inheritance and he ruled over Israel more directly, the other nations were given to angelic rule. Perhaps we are supposed to see in these figures of the watchers that angelic rule in practice.

They participate in the council of the Lord and they declare this sentence that is passed upon Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. The purpose of the sentence is so that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of man and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men. The importance of the humility of great rulers is seen at various points in the Old Testament.

We might think of the law of the king in Deuteronomy 17, verses 19-20. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it, all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel. In Numbers chapter 12, when his leadership is challenged by Aaron and Miriam, Moses is declared to be the meekest of the men of the earth.

It is precisely his meekness that qualifies him to be a good leader. If he were not so meek, the great revelation that he had received would have lifted up his heart in pride. Understood like this, being lowly in heart is one of the things that qualifies rulers for their office.

As the Lord will humble Nebuchadnezzar in this chapter, he is preparing him to exercise a more effective and righteous rule. Hearing the dream and perceiving its interpretation, Daniel is dismayed. As Belteshazzar, he is a loyal servant of King Nebuchadnezzar.

He does not want to see Nebuchadnezzar brought down. Nebuchadnezzar is even a source of safety and security for the Jews within the land of Babylon. He has been good to Daniel and his three friends, lifting them up to high office.

He has even confessed the sovereignty of the Lord and made decrees that would provide some religious freedom for the Jews within the land. Daniel makes the key identification. The tree is Nebuchadnezzar himself.

The sentence of the Watchers, here also described as a decree of the Most High, is a humbling of King Nebuchadnezzar. As we see in places like Psalm 8, the raising up of human beings to sovereignty over nations is a remarkable thing. It is a sign of the great dominion the Lord has given to humanity.

Man is made a little lower than the angels and placed over all of the beasts. In the book

of Daniel, the angels will come into greater focus. Angelic figures like the Prince of Persia exercise authority over kingdoms and human rulers like Nebuchadnezzar are under these greater powers.

James Bajon has suggested a similarity between Nebuchadnezzar and Cain. Cain is driven away from other men and is connected with the number seven. The Lord will avenge Cain sevenfold on anyone who attacks him.

The judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar and his pride might also recall the judgment that is made upon the serpent in Genesis chapter 3. Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field. On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. The serpent is exiled and humbled on account of his pride.

He is brought down, and he has to eat the dust as food. Here Nebuchadnezzar is brought to eat food from the ground also, eating grass like an ox. However, in being wet with the dew of heaven, there may be some sign of hope.

I think we might be justified in seeing some baptismal imagery here. The Lord's intent is not to cut off Nebuchadnezzar entirely. His kingdom will be preserved for him, and it will be restored to him.

Daniel concludes by giving some urgent counsel to Nebuchadnezzar. There is the possibility of averting this terrible judgment. If he cuts off his sins and shows mercy to the oppressed, the Lord may have mercy on him and not judge him as he is warned.

We might well ask why God has given Nebuchadnezzar this dream if there is no hope of a positive response from him. However, Nebuchadnezzar is not able to avert it. Twelve months later, he is walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon.

This might remind us of the story of David and Bathsheba, where David's sin concerning Uriah and Bathsheba began with him looking out from the roof of the royal palace. Looking out over Great Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's heart is lifted up in pride. At that very moment, God's judgment takes effect.

A voice comes from heaven and declares that the kingdom has departed from him. He is expelled from among men and has to live among the animals. The seven periods of time might be seven years or perhaps only seven months.

James Jordan suggests that as it references twelve months in verse 29, it might be more likely that it is seven months for the period of the judgment. Peter Lightheart suggested that the description of what befalls Nebuchadnezzar might make us think of the cherubim. The cherubim or the living creatures in Ezekiel chapter 1 have four faces, an ox, a lion, an eagle and a man.



Here Nebuchadnezzar is made to eat grass like an ox. His hair, in a very strange description, is described as growing as long as eagle's feathers and his nails like bird's claws. In Ezekiel chapter 17, two eagles represent Babylon and Egypt.

In verse 3 of that chapter, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar. In chapter 7 verse 4, similar cherubic imagery is used concerning the Babylonian beast. Through the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon is being raised up as a glorified cherubic guardian empire.

In the cutting off of the nails and the cutting off of the hair, James Jordan has suggested that we might find some background in the law of the Nazarite. Perhaps there is also some in the law concerning those infected with leprosy in Leviticus chapter 14 verses 1 to 9. In that law, the person is purified, being removed from the areas of human habitation for a period of time. They are cleansed over a period of seven days with seven sprinklings.

At the end of that period of days, the person being cleansed must remove all of the hair from their body. The hair of their head, their beard, their eyebrows, all other hair. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar is being cleansed from being struck by the Lord in a similar way.

His restoration comes as he lifts up his eyes to heaven. At that point, his reason returns to him and his first response is to praise and honour the Lord. Throughout the book of Daniel, the question of who has the dominion, who it is who really orders the affairs of men, is the dominant and driving question.

And at the end of this chapter, in another great confession of the Lord's sovereignty, Nebuchadnezzar goes farther than he ever has before. He recognises the Lord's sovereignty, not just in being able to disclose dreams and visions, not just in being able to deliver his servants from the fire, but also in his sovereignty over the heart of the king. All of the signs point towards Nebuchadnezzar having a sort of conversion at this point.

This proud king's confession of the Lord's sovereignty is truly remarkable. Now he is lifted up again and the heart of a man is given to him as the beast of chapter 7 verse 4. He enjoys far greater sovereignty and rule than he ever did beforehand. A question to consider.

Some New Testament scholars have argued for an echo of the story of Nebuchadnezzar in the story of Jesus' baptism, particularly as recorded by Mark's Gospel. Do you believe that such an echo exists? If you do, what theological purpose might it be serving in its context? Daniel chapter 5 continues the Aramaic section of the book. It corresponds with chapter 2 in the bookended structure of this section from chapter 2 to chapter 7. Both chapters concern the humbling of kings, although the outcome for Belshazzar is very

different than that for Nebuchadnezzar.

Once again, the story of Babel and its themes lies close in the background. Babel, of course, was the original Babylon, a hubristic attempt of man to make a kingdom that would last forever, to gather together time, to gather together heaven and earth, and to gather together all of humankind in this one world society. At the beginning of chapter 1 of the book of Babylon, the temple vessels were mentioned as having been taken from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

These are, as it were, a Chekhov's gun in the book. And now finally, in chapter 5, it's going to get fired. A lot of history has transpired between the time of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

Nebuchadnezzar reigned from 605 BC to 562 BC. After him, there were four very short reigns of kings before Nabonidus came to the throne in 556 BC. For many years, the absence of any reference to Belshazzar within the archaeological and other material led people to believe that he was just a figure invented within the biblical text, with no historical basis.

Figures like Belshazzar gave support to the claim that the book of Daniel was merely a work of historical fiction. However, later discoveries made clear that Belshazzar was in fact a historical figure and vindicated the biblical text and its references to him. Belshazzar was the son and the crown prince of Nabonidus.

He was not the sole ruler at this time, but was in a co-regency with his father. However, as his father was away from Babylon for a long period of time, in a sort of self-imposed exile, Belshazzar exercised more royal prerogatives than we might initially expect. Many scholars also believe that Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar's maternal grandfather, Belshazzar's mother, the queen in this story, being Nebuchadnezzar's daughter.

The story of chapter 5 begins with Belshazzar throwing a great feast for his nobles. In the course of the celebration of the feast, he brings in the vessels of gold and silver that had been taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. These vessels dedicated to the service of the Lord, Belshazzar and his lords used for their drunken revelries and their idolatrous worship.

We should recall that priests were specifically prohibited from drinking while in the temple. In the context of the Book of Leviticus, the deaths of Nadab and Abihu as they offered strange fire to the Lord is implied to have resulted from their drinking of wine. We should also think back to Jeremiah chapter 25, where the Lord declares through the prophet Jeremiah that he will test the various nations that had been involved in the downfall of Jerusalem.

This judgment will occur as they drink his cup of wrath and reel in the resulting

drunkenness. In verses 15-29 of that chapter, So I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse, as at this day. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, all his people, and all the mixed tribes among them, all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, Edom, Moab, and the sons of Ammon, all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland across the sea, Dedan, Tima, Buz, and all who cut the corners of their hair, all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed tribes who dwell in the desert, all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media, all the kings of the north far and near, one after another, and all the kingdoms of the world that were on the face of the earth, and after them the king of Babylon shall drink.

Then you shall say to them, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Drink, be drunk, and vomit, fall and rise no more, because of the sore that I am sending among you. And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, You must drink. For behold, I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name.

And shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished. For I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the Lord of hosts. It seems that not only the drinking vessels of the temple have been brought to this feast, but also the lampstand.

The fact that it is spoken of as the lampstand suggests that this is the lampstand of the temple in Jerusalem itself, an object that had been consecrated to the Lord's service. The lampstand was associated in some ways with the high priest within the temple. It was connected with the almond or watcher tree, whose blossoms were represented upon it.

Some commentators also observe its similarity to a scale's, with counterbalancing stems on either side. It has a tree-like character. In other respects, it could be associated with the hand.

There are five lampstands on either side of the temple, like the five digits on each of a person's hands. In the context, it seems clear that it symbolizes the Lord's light-giving presence in the situation, watching, inspecting, and bringing matters into judgment. Opposite this lampstand, and presumably in association with the lampstand, the king sees the fingers of a human hand writing in the plaster of the wall, or the dust of the wall.

Writing with the finger of God is rare in scripture. The one clear association is the writing of the tablets of the law in the book of Exodus. Another associated instance might be Jesus' writing on the ground in John chapter 8, as the woman caught in adultery was brought to him.

The king's response to this sign is sheer terror. His colour changes, the colour of his face. His thoughts, the thoughts of his heart, alarm him.

His loins were loosed, some translations give this as his limbs giving way, and his knees knocked together. The reference to his loins being loosed suggests that he involuntarily defecates himself. This would have been a fulfilment of Isaiah chapter 45, verse 1. Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him, and to loose the belts or loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed.

We might also recognise that we are here moving down through the king's body, in a way that corresponds with the great image of chapter 2. The changed countenance is the head of gold, the silver chest is the thoughts of the heart, the loosed loins is the waist and thighs, and the iron legs are the knees knocking together. King Belshazzar, the personal representative of the great tower of Babylon, is being shaken and toppled. We might also recognise behind this account some allusions back to the ritual of the law of jealousy in Numbers chapter 5, when a woman was suspected of adultery by her husband, and yet there was insufficient evidence to convict her.

The woman could be brought to the Lord, where the Lord would render judgement directly upon her himself, giving her a test of jealousy. The test of jealousy involved taking some dust from the tabernacle floor, mixing it in with water, which also contained scraped off handwriting of a curse. If a guilty woman drunk this, the Lord would bring a miraculous punishment upon her.

Numbers chapter 5 verses 21-22 describe what would happen. In Daniel chapter 5 we have another inspection of jealousy, with elements that recall this earlier rite. There is handwriting, where in the original rite there was dust from the tabernacle floor, here there is the plaster, or what could be rendered, the dust of the wall.

In Numbers chapter 5 the woman drinks from a cup prescribed by the Lord. In Daniel chapter 5 Belshazzar and his Lord sacrilegiously drink from the cups of the Lord. The words, Amen, Amen, that the woman pronounces are an anagram of the words Mene, Mene, and the wound swelling and the thigh falling away could be seen to correspond with the loosening of Belshazzar's loins.

Belshazzar summons the enchanters, the Chaldeans and the astrologers, promising them a huge reward if they are able to read the writing and make the interpretation known to him. The promise that they would be the third ruler in the kingdom fits with what we know of Belshazzar, whereas other kings might have offered that the person would be the second ruler in the kingdom. As Belshazzar is co-regent with his father Nabonidus, he can only offer the third spot.

After the enchanters, Chaldeans and astrologers have failed, the Queen, who is likely the

Queen Mother, the wife of Nabonidus and the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and hence a person of great importance in the court, especially in the absence of her husband Nabonidus, gives her counsel to her son. The Queen is the only woman who speaks in the Book of Daniel. By this point Daniel is likely in his eighties and has been out of the service of the king for some time.

The Queen, however, remembers Daniel and the way that the Lord used Daniel in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar, by contrast, is like the Pharaoh that forgot Joseph. Belshazzar doesn't seem to be entirely ignorant of Daniel, however.

When Daniel is brought in before him, he exhibits some knowledge of Daniel beyond what his mother told him. Possibly by this point he would have hidden the temple vessels, not wanting Daniel to realise what had been going on. Daniel, who interestingly has called Daniel through most of this account, refuses the gifts of the king but says that he would read the writing and make known the interpretation.

He begins, however, not directly by giving the reading of the text and its interpretation, but by speaking about the contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Within the bookended structure of these chapters, chapters four and five give accounts of two humbled kings that are contrasted with each other. Daniel emphasises the glory and the might of Nebuchadnezzar and the way that the Lord humbled him in the events of chapter four, the Lord thereby demonstrating his rule in the affairs of men.

Belshazzar failed to learn the lessons from his maternal grandfather's experience. His sins were more egregious than those of his grandfather. He had lifted himself up against the Lord himself, defiled the vessels of his temple and employed them in acts of idolatry.

James Jordan notes that the shifting of the order of the metals in verse 23, from the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone, to silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood and stone, is an indication that the silver and the gold, the silver of Medo-Persia and the gold of Babylon have switched positions. Belshazzar and Babylon with him have lost their power and in their place is rising the kingdom of Medo-Persia. This introductory statement is an important part of helping us to understand what comes later, the interpretation of the riddle.

To most readers of Daniel chapter five, the writing on the wall may receive little attention. There are four words on the wall and for some reason Belshazzar and his wise men are unable to read them. The English Bible reader might speculate that these were words written in a language that Belshazzar and his wise men couldn't understand.

The connection between the words and their interpretation might also seem somewhat opaque. Perhaps the four words are simply headings for a prophetically revealed message that cannot be deduced from them. Daniel's interpretation is considerably longer than the words themselves, so we might presume he must be adding a lot of

information to what is given in the writing itself.

Then if we do look closer, other puzzles emerge. For instance, why is the word mene repeated? Or why does the plural parson become peres singular in the solution? The first thing that we need to recognise is that the words written on the wall would have likely been a consonantal text without vowels and likely without spaces either. If you imagine receiving a text in English without vowels and without spaces, you can imagine that it would be very difficult to interpret and exceedingly difficult if you didn't have any sort of clear context.

There were many different ways that you could divide the words of the writing on the wall to derive some sort of message from it, and no clear way to narrow down its possible meanings. A solution to the riddle of its meaning would need to stand out so clearly from other candidates that its truth would become apparent. Daniel's solving of the riddle begins by reading the text itself, broken into its component words, mene, mene, tecele and parson.

The first word mene, tecele and parson, three nouns, all refer to a particular type of thing, weights. The second mene, however, might not be a repetition of the weight, but the passive participle, it has been weighed. The first, mene, is a minor, or 60 shekels.

The second, tecele, is a shekel. The third, peres, written in the plural form of parson, is half of a weight, either half of a minor or half of a shekel. As I will argue, it seems to be taken in both of these senses in different ways in Daniel chapter 5. At one point it is the half weight of a minor, at another point the half weight of a shekel.

The riddle is a multi-stage puzzle, and in breaking it down into these words and recognising that they refer to a process of weighing or assessing, Daniel has unlocked the first stage. The interpretation that Daniel arrives at is much more elaborate than this, however, and contains a lot more information, so we need to consider what other steps might have taken him there. Daniel does seem to exercise some prophetic insight in this passage.

He mentions the hand sent from God that wrote upon the wall, even though the text doesn't record Daniel being informed about how the writing came to be there. Nevertheless, there is no statement here that the Lord informed Daniel of the meaning of the handwriting on the wall. Daniel is renowned for his skill in interpreting visions, dreams and solving riddles.

He has a divine gift, but this gift need not mean that he is privy to revealed information that others lack in this instance. Nowhere here does Daniel say that he has a crucial part of the puzzle that others lack, as if the handwriting were merely a fragment of a larger revelation. No, he presents his message as an interpretation of what is written.

We should be able to trace the stages by which Daniel arrived at his interpretation, and the stages by which others could have followed his interpretation, recognising it to be the correct one. James Bergeon, drawing together work from Al Walter's, James Jordan and others, has written an extensive and profoundly illuminating exploration of Daniel's solution to this riddle, which provides the basis for much of my treatment. The ground story of the solution is the identification of the three nouns.

How did Daniel get to the next story? By taking the root consonants of the three nouns that he had identified, he identifies three verbs corresponding to the three nouns. He then, working on this next story of interpretation, expounds those verbs. Mene corresponds with a verb for to weigh or value, from which he determines the meaning, God has valued your kingdom.

Tekel corresponds with a verb for to weigh, whose meaning he expounds as, you've been weighed in the balances. Perez corresponds with a verb for to divide or distribute, yielding, your kingdom has been divided. This still leaves us with the question of how Daniel moved from the verbs he identified to his interpretations.

The staircase by which Daniel ascended to the higher story of his interpretation was a final transformation of the root letters. Having identified the three nouns and the initial three verbs, he recognised a third form of the roots, which made it possible for him to solve the entire riddle. These third forms themselves aren't given to us in the text, but they can be deduced from Daniel's interpretations, in which the key terms cast the shadow of synonymous words and expressions.

The first part, corresponding to Mene, is, he has entrusted it to you. The synonymous verb is usually translated finished or brought to an end, but is elsewhere used in the sense of paying over, in the sense of completing or performing a transaction. The second part, corresponding to Tekel, is, you're too light.

The third and final part, corresponding to Perez, is twofold, a verb to give the meaning, it has been allocated, and the noun, Persia. As Carol Newsome notes, the text could easily have given us the key terms related to the original consonants that would have revealed how Daniel arrived at his interpretation. However, by giving us synonyms instead, it gives us enough to discover them, while veiling them to all but the most attentive readers of the text, who are thereby rewarded with the satisfaction of insight.

The handwriting on the wall sets up what Newsome calls the governing trope of someone using scales. On the one side of the scales is a minor weight, the weight of the kingdom of Babylon that God has entrusted to Belshazzar, which he had inherited from Nebuchadnezzar, with whom Daniel has just unfavourably contrasted Belshazzar at length. This is then the meaning of the first line, the interpretation of Mene, the weighty kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar has been weighed out and entrusted to Belshazzar.

The second line, the interpretation of Tekel, places Belshazzar himself on the scales, weighing him against the weight of the kingdom committed to him. Belshazzar, however, is an extreme lightweight, only one shekel, a sixtieth of what Nebuchadnezzar was. As Berjan observes, such comparisons of persons with relative weights are found elsewhere in the literature of the period.

The insufficiency of this shekel-weight man for this minor-weight kingdom presents a problem that is solved in the third line, the interpretation of Perez. Perez relates to the plural parsin, to the verbs for division and allocation, and to the proper noun of Persia. If Belshazzar is too light, then two half-miners, the Medes and the Persians, will do the job, as the kingdom is divided and allocated to them.

We can see then that in terms of this interpretation, there are three stages to the story. In the past, there is the weighing out of the kingdom of Babylon, and entrusting it to Belshazzar. In the present, there is the judging and weighing of Belshazzar himself, and finding him wanting.

This is in the context of the test of jealousy, as he drinks from the vessels of the temple, before the lampstand of the Lord. The final stage concerns the future. The kingdom that he has will be divided to people who are sufficient for it, the Medes and the Persians, these two half-miners.

We can appreciate then that the weights are integral to the meaning of the riddle. Fittingly, these events occurred just as Libra was rising over Babylon, as Al Walters notes. Libra was known in Aramaic literature as the scales, and that word is at the heart of Daniel's interpretation.

As we know that astrologers were at the scene, it seems unlikely that this connection would have passed them by. If we get into the gematria of the three-by-three block of consonants that compose the riddle, the gematria being the sum of the numerical values associated with the letters, Bijan suggests that we can see the identities of Cyrus, Darius, the Watchers, the King, and Belshazzar himself all alluded to, with the same sum of the letters in the first row and the first column, 91. That number corresponds with only two proper nouns in the book, God and the King.

It also equals the sum of the weights in shekels, a minor, 60, a shekel, 1, and a half-miner, or peres, 30, totaling 91. It is also the same number as the number of letters in Daniel's statement and the interpretation of the riddle together. Elements of our interpretation of a biblical passage could be compared to branches on a tree.

Some aspects of our interpretations are like the trunk, which is robust, central, and certain. Others are like larger branches, which can support a lot of weight. However, as you venture out further, branches can become a lot thinner and less suitable for resting much weight upon.



This is a chapter with a riddle at the heart of it that invites a lot of careful and deep reading. Yet certain of these speculations about levels of meaning in the riddle of the handwriting on the wall can bear much more weight than others. Nevertheless, even though we should hold certain speculative interpretations very tentatively, recognising ways in which they could be weak, it is always valuable to get an appreciative sense of how full the tree of the text's meaning might actually be.

By interpreting the riddle, Belshazzar perhaps thinks that Daniel has diffused it in some way, giving him the means to avoid it. He exalts Daniel to a position of high office, just as Joseph was exalted by Pharaoh back in Genesis. This is yet another example of the parallels between Joseph and Daniel in this book.

However, Belshazzar's fate is not so easily avoided. That very night, he is killed, and his place is taken by Darius the Mede. This Median king receives the kingdom, just as the sentence of the handwriting on the wall announced.

Darius the Mede is 62 years of age when he receives the kingdom. It is very rare for us to be given the age of a pagan king. Indeed, no other instances of this happening in scripture come to mind.

It is worth reflecting upon why this number is given to us. Later on in the book, we find the number 62 used in the context of the 70 weeks of years in chapter 9. This might suggest that the events of the first year of Darius' reign that follow are a means of assisting the attentive reader in interpreting the events of the final week of the 70 weeks of years. A further thing to note is that if we take the Pera's half-weight to be a half-weight of a shekel rather than a half-weight of a minor, the total of the weights in the handwriting on the wall comes to 62.

60 is a minor, a shekel is 1, and then the two half-shekels come to one shekel, bringing us to 62 shekels in total. This 62-year-old Darius the Mede, then, is marked out as suitable for the kingdom. The equivalence of his age to the sum of the weights suggests that he is the one who is going to bring balance.

A question to consider. In the opening narrative chapters of the Book of Daniel, the shadow of the Tower of Babel hangs over much of the proceedings. What are some of the ways that we can see the story of Genesis 11 and the Tower of Babel in the background of this chapter? Daniel chapter 6 is the penultimate chapter of the Aramaic section of the book.

As we've already noted, the Aramaic chapters, chapters 2 to 7, have a chiastic or book-ended pattern, which can help us to get a firmer grip upon their more particular and their overarching themes. Chapter 2, The First Dream of Nebuchadnezzar, parallels with chapter 7, the four beasts mapping onto the four parts of the image. Chapters 4 and 5 both concern the humbling experienced by two contrasted kings.

And chapters 3 and 6, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the Fari furnace, and Daniel in the lion's den, both involve idolatrous decrees, resisted by faithful Jews, who were then miraculously delivered from a death sentence. Chapter 6 begins and ends with a decree. The first decree is an idolatrous decree, and the second decree, a decree honouring the Lord and his sovereignty.

Although themes of Babel are not now prominent in the ways that they were during the period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in chapters 1 to 5, the theme of the competing sovereignty of the Lord and human rulers continues to drive the narrative in this, the final narrative chapter of the book. It's important to appreciate that the book of Daniel isn't merely dealing with the specific events that befell Daniel and his friends, but raises more generalizable issues of the relationship between the rule and sovereignty of the Lord and those of great human empires, something that will be represented in visionary form in the chapter that follows. The pretensions of empire, whether expressed in the hubris of egotistical kings like Nebuchadnezzar, or in the divinized legal systems of the Medes and the Persians, are no match for the rule of the creator god.

At the end of chapter 5, Darius was said to receive the kingdom at the age of 62. That we have the age of a pagan king given in such a manner is itself very strange, especially as it is seemingly entirely incidental to the narrative. It doesn't serve as a chronological reference point, for instance.

This raises the possibility that the number was recorded for us less for the narrow purposes of historical record than for the purpose of highlighting matters of symbolic significance. As we previously saw, Darius' age suggests that he represents a new balance, as his age corresponds to a particular rendering of the weight in shekels of the weights of the handwriting on the wall. One minor worth 60 shekels, one shekel and two half-weights, in this case taken as two half-shekels, 62 shekels in total.

We can go further, though. In chapter 9, verses 24 to 27, Daniel receives a revelation in the context of his reflections concerning the completion of the 70 years foretold for the desolations of Jerusalem by the prophet Jeremiah. 70 weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

Know therefore, and understand that from the going out of the word, to restore and build Jerusalem, to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for 62 weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the 62 weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing.

And the people of the prince who is to come, shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed, and he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half the week he

shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.

And on the wing of abomination shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. The fact that the very specific number 62, a number that only appears once in scripture outside of the book of Daniel, in 1st Chronicles chapter 26 verse 8, with no apparent significance in that context, appears twice in a few chapters, seems to be quite noteworthy. It raises the possibility that we ought to read the events of chapter 6 as a preview of the 70th week of the prophecy of chapter 9, and perhaps also as a microcosmic representation of the 70th year of the desolations of Jerusalem under Babylon that it magnifies.

I believe that attempting to read chapter 6 in light of this proves fruitful and illuminating. Before we enter into a consideration of the substance of the passage, it's important to consider the figure of Darius, whose identity is a cause of considerable debate among commentators. Indeed, the figure of Darius is one of the reasons why perhaps a majority of academic commentators consider the book of Daniel to be a much later work of historical fiction, rather than as a historical account faithful to the actual events.

While we won't settle the questions surrounding his identity here, it's worth taking the time to reflect upon the various pieces of evidence, and other considerations that must factor into our determination of Darius' identity, along with some of the chief identifications that have been advanced. To begin with, there are a number of pieces of biblical evidence that need to be considered. Darius is identified as being a Mede by descent in chapter 9 verse 1, as the son of Ahasuerus, representing the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians.

Second, Darius is 62 years old when he receives the kingdom. Third, we have chapter 6 verse 28, so this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. This verse could be read either as referring to Darius and Cyrus as two successive kings, in whose reigns Daniel served, or as an identification of the two figures, during the reign of Darius the Mede, who was the same figure as Cyrus the Persian.

Alternatively, perhaps Darius could be understood as a vicegerent or co-regent of Cyrus, or vice versa. Fourth, Darius clearly enjoyed considerable authority. He claims the prerogative to address all peoples, and he establishes a regime overseen by 120 satraps.

Fifth, we need to square the character of Darius as seen in this chapter, with whatever character with which we choose to identify him. We might also need to account for Darius' seemingly deep attachment to Daniel revealed in this chapter, which might be a little surprising if they have only recently become acquainted, and just for a short period of time. Sixth, there is the evidence in biblical prophecy that suggests that the Median kingdom initially enjoyed a greater prominence in the Medo-Persian empire, before the Persians became dominant, and furthermore, that it was the Medes in particular that

overthrew Babylon.

Jeremiah chapter 51 verse 11 reads, Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields. The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance for his temple. Verse 58 of the same chapter, Prepare the nations for war against her, the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion.

Similarly, in Isaiah chapter 13 verses 17 to 19, Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver, and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter the young men, they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb, their eyes will not pity children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

In the book of Daniel, as James Bajan remarks, there is a notable shift from a Median prominence in the Medo-Persian empire to a Persian hegemony. In Daniel to this point, the Medes have been listed first, the rise of the Persians to dominance in the empire is seen in the raising up of the bear-like beast on one of its two sides, in chapter 7 verse 5. In chapter 8 verse 3, the Medo-Persian empire is represented in a ram with two horns, with one later gaining primacy over the other, representing the Persians. Later on in the prophecy of Daniel, Persia is spoken of by itself, without reference to the Medes, perhaps suggesting that a Persian hegemony within the empire would be established quite soon.

Finally, there is the apparent great significance that the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede had for Daniel, connected with the fulfilment of prophecy concerning the end of Israel's captivity, an event which was, in 2 Chronicles chapter 36 verses 20 to 23, connected with the time of the establishment of the Kingdom of Persia. These elements of the biblical account, however, conflict with the picture that most historians have drawn from the various evidence that we have from other sources. For many of the relevant sources, there is no record of such a Median king taking over Babylon.

There is a later King Darius, a successor to Cyrus the Great, mentioned in the context of the rebuilding of the temple, but he is described as a Persian and comes some time afterward. Andrew Steinman, in his treatment of the question, notes that some sceptical scholars have speculated that the story of chapter 6 was a fictional one, originally set in the reign of Darius the Great of Persia, later incorporated into the Book of Daniel, with the king being reimagined as an invented king that was designed in part to fulfil the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the Medes' overthrow of Babylon. Before venturing further into the details of the question, it is important to bear in mind the danger of overconfident pronouncements on such historical questions.

Belshazzar was long declared to be a figment of later historical imagination, rather than an actual historical figure, before evidence surfaced vindicating the biblical account in its assertion of his historicity. There are many ways in which the discovery of new evidence

could change the picture that we have of this period. Many of the reconstructions are fairly tentative on certain points.

We also need to bear in mind the fact that dominant interpretations of the existing evidence can themselves be very contestable. Some of it, for instance in this case, derives from propagandist accounts given by kings of the scope of their own power and should be taken with a generous helping of salt. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the biblical texts themselves are key historical evidence, not merely dubious accounts that must be granted no weight beyond what can be corroborated by other sources.

The fact that the reliability of the text on certain points has been vindicated against previous consensuses among scholars, for instance, should encourage us to insist that more weight be placed upon the evidence that the text provides for things that cannot yet be corroborated when we deal with non-Christian or liberal scholars. Other scholars have attempted to identify Darius the Mede with other known characters of history. Gubaru, the general of the Persian army that conquered Babylon in 539 BC, who then became its governor, or perhaps vassal king, has been one popular historical contender.

However, Gubaru's period of office was under a month, far too short for all of the events associated with it in the Book of Daniel. Gubaru would need to have had time to appoint 120 satraps for Daniel to stand out to him from the other high officials and to establish the law concerning the 30 days of exclusive intermediation. This is not to mention all of the other things that Daniel and others did during this period.

As Steinman argues, it strains credulity that all of this occurred in a single month. Besides this, as a mere governor or vassal king, Gubaru would not seem to have enjoyed the sort of authority that Darius claimed to exercise in this chapter. Another possible and ancient identification is of Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian.

The identification would read, chapter 6, verse 28, as speaking of them as the same figure, rather than as two successive kings. The theory, based in part on the histories of Herodotus, is that Darius was the name given to Cyrus at his birth by his mother, Mandane of Media, the daughter of the last Median king, Asterges, and the queen consort of Cumbyses I, the king of Persia. Cyrus then joined together the kingdoms of Media and Persia in his own person.

Steinman suggests that Asterges is the same figure as Ahasuerus, of whom Darius is said to be the son, in chapter 9, verse 1. Alternatively, it may be a Persian royal title enjoyed by one of Cyrus' ancestors. It's important to note that royal names and titles were often held by several different figures over the history of these kingdoms, and that one person might have gone by a number of different names. We see something similar in modern royalty.

King George VI, for instance, had Albert as his primary name at his christening, but bore the name George on the throne. He was one of six monarchs to be called George. Prince Albert of York is the same person as George VI.

But George VI should not be confused with any of the previous Georges. Things become more complicated when the rule of two kingdoms are joined together. James VI of Scotland, for instance, was James I of England.

An identification of Darius the Mede and Cyrus has the benefit of making sense of the prophetic importance of the first year of his reign, and also of his significance as a figure more generally. It still, however, leaves us with questions about the seeming discrepancies in the description of the relative prominence of the Medes and Persians at the time of the overthrow of Babylon. Other positions exist.

Some scholars identify Darius with a different Gubaru, a man appointed by Cyrus to rule over Babylon. A few others identify him with the son of Cyrus the Great. Carl Friedrich Kiel, Paul Tanner and Bajon all make the case for the identification of Darius as Syaxares II, the son of Astages, the brother of Mandanae, the uncle of Cyrus the Great and a Median king.

Josephus, Saint Jerome and John Calvin are among many who advocated for this position historically. The existence of Syaxares II is disputed, however. He is not mentioned in Herodotus' histories, but is prominently mentioned in Xenophon's work.

Our understanding of the movement of the Medo-Persian Empire to a Persian-dominated empire will be greatly shaped by our determination of the existence or nonexistence of this figure. If he existed, he was the senior ruler in the Medo-Persian confederacy, with his nephew Cyrus, who led the campaign against Babylon, taking his place at the time of his death. According to Xenophon, Syaxares gave Cyrus his daughter and the kingdom of Media with her.

Kiel suggests that he would have been called Darius as a Persian title that he bore as the king of the united kingdom of the Medes and Persians. This would fit very neatly with the biblical account. There are other historical texts and artifacts that lend support to the idea that the Medes and Persians were equal partners, or even that the Medes were the senior partners in the confederacy, some time after Cyrus and Persia were supposed to be dominant within the prevailing academic historical account.

This account of the history, however, conflicts with that of Herodotus, which historians generally prefer. The chapter begins with Darius setting up a new regime, 120 satraps, 3 high officials, and Darius himself makes 124, 62 times 2. 62 was once some of the weights mentioned in the writing on the wall, and also the age of Darius when he received the kingdom. Daniel swiftly distinguished himself from the other high officials and satraps on account of his gifting by the spirit of God.

So gifted was Daniel that the king wanted to make him the administrator of the whole kingdom. This, unsurprisingly, led to great envy among the other high officials and satraps, and they sought to find some way to bring Daniel down. The officials and satraps sought to find some dirt on Daniel.

However, Daniel proved to be without corruption when they surveilled him. The only hope that they had to bring Daniel down was through his piety as a faithful worshipper of the Lord. Recognising this, the high officials and satraps conspired together and went to the king, proposing a policy that he be the universal mediator of the kingdom for a month.

For that period of time, he should be the only intermediary between the people and the gods. It is likely that the high officials and satraps presented this as a matter of political prudence. A religious vacuum had been created, as Nabonidus had gathered all the idols and images from the various cities into Babylon, as the Medo-Persians had advanced against him.

Presenting Darius as the cultic focal point for 30 days before things were restored to normal could help to unite the kingdom under his rule. Just as the people of Israel were to be bound together by the unified and single cult focused upon Jerusalem, so the people of the Medo-Persian empire were supposed to be bound together with this cult that was focused upon Darius as the universal intermediary for this period of time. The high officials and satraps likely represented this as a consensus decision that they had arrived at altogether, although it's hard to believe that Daniel was present.

They present this in terms of the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked. The law here is a sort of divinised entity. Kings may come and go, even great priest-kings, but the law will endure unchanged.

Ironically, if the law of the Medes and Persians is like the genome, there seems to be a sort of epigenome that arises in order to determine when the law will be enacted and enforced or not. The law, which is seen as a great symbol of the power of the people who make it, ends up being a power that exercises rule over them. Darius will find himself trapped by the law of his own creation.

When Daniel discovers that the law has been ratified, he goes back to his house and continues his religious practice. Daniel's habitual practice involves three occasions of prayer every single day. Many have regarded these times of prayer as corresponding with daily rituals in the temple.

Even after the temple is destroyed and people are exiled far from Jerusalem, there are people who continue patterns of piety that look back to the life of Israel within the land. The fact that Daniel's worship is oriented towards Jerusalem is important evidence of this. Daniel does not make a scene of public disobedience here, but he does not divert

from his usual practice.

He has an existing pattern of piety and he continues in it. Had he not such an existing pattern of piety, it would have been much easier for him to compromise at this point. The fact that the conspirators knew that Daniel would continue in his religious devotion, irrespective of the threat of being thrown to the lions, testifies to Daniel's fearless character and his unswerving commitment to the Lord.

The conspirators, having caught Daniel in the act as they had hoped, inform the king and remind him that the law cannot be revoked. Daniel must be thrown to the lions. There is no way of stopping it.

The king presumably recognises at this point that he has been trapped, that his advisors and those ruling under him have manipulated him for the sake of their own envy. The law, which should have been the means of his power, ends up being a power against him. He is powerless to prevent the sentence from being enacted, even though he might try.

The conspirators eventually insist that the sentence be carried through and the king has to comply. He commands that Daniel be placed in the den of lions, but he declares his fervent desire that Daniel be saved from their mouths by the Lord whom he trusts. Perhaps he had heard the story of Daniel's three friends being saved from the fiery furnace earlier.

Daniel is placed in the den. A stone is placed over the entrance of the den and the stone is sealed with the king's signet so that it might not be removed. The king, who has a deep sympathetic concern for Daniel, does not want to see him destroyed and so fasts and cannot sleep that whole night.

The next morning he goes to the den and calls out to Daniel, hoping against hope that he is still alive. Answering the king, Daniel declares that the Lord shut the mouths of the lions, sending his angel to protect Daniel from them. Just like his three friends in chapter 3, when he is taken out, no harm is found to have come to him.

The evil of the conspirators, however, comes back upon their own head. They are thrown into the den of lions with all of their families. The lions immediately devour them.

We earlier noted the way that the number 62, the age of Darius as he came to the throne, connects this chapter, concerning the first year of his reign, with the prophecy of chapter 9. That prophecy relates to the end of the 70 years of the exile. It also relates to the 70th week of years that is foretold. Concerning the first, we should recognize that the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire is the sign that the exile in Babylon has come to an end.

As a beast, the Babylonian Empire is represented as a lion and the deliverance of faithful



Daniel from the den of lions is a microcosm of the deliverance of his people from exile. While they were in exile, the mouths of many had sought to devour them and yet the Lord preserved his people from the mouths of all of the lions. They will be brought out of the Babylonian den of exile and returned to the land.

Beyond this reference to the end of the 70 years, we should also recognize its relationship with the end of the 70 weeks of years. In this respect, it foreshadows the resurrection of Christ. Christ will be placed in the den of the great lion, the realm of the grave in which Satan himself prowls.

A stone will be placed over the entrance to his tomb and it will be sealed. However, when a new morning dawned, he would emerge unharmed, having overcome death itself. A question to consider.

How might this chapter help us to read the vision of the beast in the chapter that follows? Daniel chapter 7 is a transitional chapter in the book. Chapter 6 was the last of the narrative chapters of the book and chapter 7 begins the section of the book containing Daniel's visions and prophecies. This connects the chapter with the chapters that conclude the book.

Daniel chapter 7 is the last of the Aramaic chapters of the book, which began in chapter 2. The Aramaic chapters have a book-ended or chiasmic structure. Chapter 2 corresponds with chapter 7, 3 with 6 and 4 with 5. In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar had his dream of the image, with a golden head, silver chest and arms, bronze waist and thighs, iron legs and feet and toes with iron and clay admixed. These four kingdoms in succession correspond with the four beasts in chapter 7, which describe the sequence in different but complementary symbolic imagery.

The correspondences between these two visions aren't merely at the level of four kingdoms in succession, but also relate to more particular details of those kingdoms that we are given. There is, for instance, a correspondence between ten toes on the statue and ten horns of the fourth beast in chapter 7. This chapter also breaks with the chronological sequence of the narrative chapters that preceded it, even though the literary structure of the book that we have just seen shows that its place in the wider text is not arbitrary, but is carefully considered. Daniel receives this vision at the beginning of the reign of Belshazzar, some time before the events described in the preceding two chapters.

At the time of Belshazzar's feast in chapter 5, for instance, Daniel already had this vision. When considering such a vision, we should appreciate that it is not merely about random world historical events in the ancient Near East. It relates to the broader covenantal purpose of the Lord playing out in history.

The beasts of the nations are part of the picture, but they are not at the centre. If we

treat them as if they were at the centre of the picture, we will likely struggle to appreciate the momentous character of what is taking place. The events of this vision are seen from a heavenly vantage point.

This is where the key event of the vision takes place, and that is also the place from which the significance of the earthly events can be perceived. It is the realm from which they are orchestrated. Were one merely viewing the events from an earthly perspective, one wouldn't perceive the significance of what was occurring.

When considering this vision, we should bear in mind the relationship between earthly empires and powers and the heavens. The Lord entrusted the government of the nations to heavenly agencies. We have already encountered heavenly watchers in chapter 4. Further heavenly rulers appear in the chapters that follow.

Persia, for instance, has an angelic prince. The empire is not merely an earthly and human entity, but also plays its part in a heavenly drama. The crucial changes occur in the heavens, but have far-reaching ramifications upon the earth.

As in the case of the four kingdoms of chapter 2, scholars differ over the identification of the kingdoms in this chapter. Many scholars, overwhelmingly but not exclusively liberal scholars, support a second century BC dating for the book. They identify the kingdoms with Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece.

The little horn in this reading is identified as Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Understood this way, the chapter presents itself on the surface as 6th century BC prophetic literature, but it is really 2nd century BC pseudepigraphical literature, not really written by Daniel and not being predictive prophecy at all. To represent this position fairly, we should recognize that it need not require that we present the text as perpetuating an intentional falsehood.

They were pseudepigraphical works, and such works can be understood in terms of genre conventions. Problems would arise, of course, in contexts where such genre conventions were not recognized, and the works were presumed to be actual historical accounts, rather than fictional stories. This said, however, we should be clear that for many such scholars, a motivation for holding their position is their denial of the possibility of predictive prophecy.

Evangelical and conservative scholars, by contrast, have generally identified, rightly I believe, the beasts as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, at least in some form. Ernest Lucas argues that the four beasts exhibit the influence of Hosea 13, verses 7-8, where the three animals to which the first three beasts are compared are mentioned, along with a fourth wild beast that might correspond with the monstrous creature that follows them. So I am to them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way, I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will tear open their breast, and there I will

devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open.

In this list of the animals, the leopard and the bear are in a different order from Daniel chapter 7. Lucas suggests that the order that they appear in in Daniel might have something to do with their hierarchical ordering, relating to the gold, silver, bronze and iron of chapter 2, a bear is second to a lion. The vision is received in the first year of Belshazzar, likely around 553 BC, by which time the realities perceived in the vision had already been in motion for some time. The imagery of the vision is cosmic and creational.

While some commentators dispute the presence of such imagery, many hearers have recognised imagery from Genesis chapter 1 in this vision. As at the beginning of the creation story, the winds of heaven are moving over the face of the waters. Just as the land was brought up out of the water, so great beasts will be raised up out of the sea.

The beasts are connected with various animals, and the vision concludes with the Son of Man receiving the dominion over them. Four strange and remarkable beasts with peculiar properties arise from the sea in succession. Each are described by Daniel, along with the transformations that some of them undergo.

The first beast is compared to a lion with eagle's wings. A lion with eagle's wings should remind us of the living creatures, or the cherubim, of Ezekiel's throne chariot vision in chapters 1 and 10 of his book. Given the presence of the Lord's throne chariot in this chapter, we should be alert to connections between this vision of Daniel's and the vision of Ezekiel.

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, in the corresponding chapter, he was identified with the head of gold. Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, but the head of gold is also the kingdom that arises from him. The same thing is the case with this first beast, within which we can see both Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire.

The lion, more generally, is an image of the grandeur of Babylon, related to the head of gold in chapter 2. In chapter 6, the lion's den represented the period of Babylonian exile. In scripture, Babylon is compared both to a lion and an eagle. For instance, in Jeremiah 4, verse 7, And in Ezekiel 17, verses 2-3, Babylon, however, was humbled in the person of its king Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4. Chapter 7 speaks of the eagle's wings being removed.

We should think back to chapter 4, verse 33. Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. After his humbling, however, Nebuchadnezzar was raised up once more, restored to power.

The restored Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon had undergone a transformation. The guardian beast now was humanized, standing on its two feet and having the mind of a

man. In the reduction of Nebuchadnezzar to his bestial form, he and his kingdom were being unmasked in their true character.

In the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar, he was being elevated into something greater, his receiving the heart of a man, corresponding with his recognition of the sovereignty of the Lord, and becoming a knowing servant of him. The second beast, the bear-like monster, is the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. Its twofold character is seen in its two sides, one raised up above the other.

In chapter 8, the empire of Medo-Persia will be represented as a ram with two horns, a single beast with two conspicuous parts. The raising up of one of the sides of the Medo-Persian beast occurs as Cyrus becomes its king. Paul Tanner suggests that the connection between the Medo-Persian kingdom and the bear might have to do with its appetite, seen both in the three ribs between its teeth and in the instruction given to it to devour much flesh.

The Medo-Persian and later Achaemenid Empire was the largest empire to that point in history, commanding a massive military force. Tanner speculates that the three ribs in its mouth represent key conquests that it made earlier on, suggesting that these could represent Lydia, Babylon and Egypt. James Bajon, taking a similar line of interpretation, identifies the ribs as the Phrygians, Cappadocians and Arabians, who were conquered by Medo-Persia and assimilated into their force prior to attacking Babylon.

The Persian Empire was succeeded by the Empire of Greece under Alexander the Great. Alexander came to the throne of Macedon at the age of twenty and by thirty-three he was dead. However, within little over ten years he conquered the entirety of the Persian Empire, which had long troubled the Greeks.

He spread the power of Greece across the known world, even extending into India. The pace of the leopard, assisted by its four wings, represents the speed of Greece's rise to dominance. Alexander's Greek Empire split immediately after his death into four separate and often rival kingdoms under four of his generals.

One ruled over much of Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey, another over Macedonia and Greece, a third over Egypt, Palestine and other surrounding areas, and a fourth over Syria, Babylonia and other eastern lands. James Jordan and Peter Lighthouse dispute this identification of the four heads, arguing instead that they refer to four successive phases of the Greek Empire. In Revelation 17 verses 9-14, the description of the seven heads of the beast as kings or kingdoms, five of which have fallen, one that currently is, and one that is yet to come and will remain only a short time, might give weight to the idea of the heads as standing for successive phases.

According to Jordan and Lighthouse's reading, the Roman Empire in its earlier stage is a mutation and continuation of Hellenistic rule, which will later transmogrify into a

terrifying new entity of its own. The fourth beast that arises is different from those preceding it, being arrestingly monstrous and not being compared to any specific animal. It has features reminiscent of those of the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

It has iron teeth corresponding with the iron legs, and ten horns corresponding with the ten toes. It is also distinguished by its strength, much like iron is. It has powerful feet that can trample down other forces.

In Revelation chapter 13 verses 1-8, the sea beast that is described clearly corresponds to this fourth beast. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marvelled as they followed the beast. And they worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it? And the beast was given a mouth, uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it.

Everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. The sea beast in Revelation is a composite of the beasts of Daniel 7. It has the ten horns of the fourth beast. It has seven heads, corresponding to the total heads of the four beasts.

It also has distinguishing characteristics of each of the four beasts. It is most essentially like the speedy leopard. It is an empire founded upon a Hellenistic basis.

It has feet like the Medo-Persian bear and a mouth like that of the Babylonian lion. The sea beast of Revelation is the final form of the beasts, a composite of them all. And in this respect it is also a reflection of the satanic red dragon of Revelation chapter 12, which has seven heads and ten horns.

When it reaches maturity, it mutates into the form of the terrifying satanic power behind it. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of chapter 2 showed the unity and continuity of the four successive kingdoms in a single statue. They are not merely detached entities.

The vision of the beasts in chapter 7 does not highlight the same unity. However, viewed in terms of the beast of Revelation, we can see that the final beast is a hybrid of those

that preceded it. Each empire that arises maintains and develops features of its predecessors, not merely being a completely new entity.

On a very small level, within the book of Daniel, we can see the way that Daniel serves as a high official both in the Babylonian and the Medo-Persian administrations. Such continuity also functions culturally. For instance, the Roman Empire preserved and continued much of the culture of the Greeks.

The fourth beast is generally identified with Rome by conservative scholars. At least, that is generally seen as its most immediate identification. Many regard the fulfillment of the prophecies of chapters 7 and 2, however, as still lying in the future.

This is in part because they find it difficult to believe that the prophecies of the destruction of the image and the elevation of the saints to the possession of the kingdom have already been fulfilled. The fourth kingdom seemingly has at least three stages. There is the initial stage, with the arising of the kingdom itself.

In its second stage, ten horns arise, as we see in verse 24. And in its final stage, the little horn arises, taking the place of three other horns. Interpreting the ten horns is difficult.

John Calvin argues that the ten merely signifies many, and that the horns are the rulers over provinces, who enjoyed considerable power in the Roman Empire. The mutation that the beast underwent was the shift from republican to imperial Rome under the Caesars, who, for Calvin, are to be connected with the little horn. Jordan and Lightheart argue that the ten horns are successive emperors, from Julius Caesar on.

These emperors exercise a cumulative power over time. Especially when interpreting the great image of chapter 2, we should recognise that sequential realities can be represented in a single visual snapshot, even though the realities so represented later undergo changes. This is less obvious in the vision of chapter 7, but still the case.

Ten horns need not represent an enduring state during a given period of time, but might be a succession of related entities. In other words, we might be dealing with ten successive yet related rulers, rather than ten concurrent rulers. Jordan and Lightheart stress that the prophecy focuses not upon general shifts in imperial dominance in the ancient world, but upon those shifts as they pertain to the people of God.

It may seem as though the great centre of weighty events on earth is Rome, but the earthly centre is really the people of God, generally represented in Jerusalem, and, above them, heaven itself. Consequently, features of imperial powers that might seem relatively minor and insignificant from an earthly perspective take on great significance. Jordan argues that the little horn is the power of the herods.

The herods exert the power of the great fourth beast within the land. In the book of Revelation, the dragon gives authority to the sea beast, who in turn is served by a land

beast. The herods exercise the power of three emperors, Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius, over the Jews.

They don't destroy the other three horns. Rather, as Jordan writes, a stump is not something uprooted, but something from which an offshoot appears. In Ezekiel chapter 1, Ezekiel saw a vision of the divine throne chariot.

Daniel sees something similar here, with the arrival of the ancient days. Daniel is seeing these beasts from the perspective of heaven, and the judgments of the heavenly court. There is about to be a radical transformation in the heavens, which will change matters on earth.

The old covenant order was placed under the rule of angels. Satan enjoyed authority in the heavenly realm, and the people of God had not yet been raised up to sit in heavenly places. They were bound in the realm of the grave at their deaths.

Once again, this vision relates to events that we see in the book of Revelation, that specifically concerns the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, Pentecost, and the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. As we see later on in figures such as the Prince of Persia, an angelic figure that stands for the Persian Empire, these earthly beast empires represent heavenly powers. While empires may continue to rise and fall on earth, with the ascension of Christ and his sitting at God's right hand, the great powers of the heavens will be shaken, old powers will be removed, Satan, the great dragon of old, will be cast down to earth, and his angels with him.

We should recognize, for instance, the importance of these empires as religious bodies. They were not just human polities, but they were the kingdoms of spiritual entities, commanding the fear, worship and service of millions of people. In verse 13 and 14, a new figure comes to receive the kingdom, to receive the realms that formerly belonged to the beasts.

Continuing the theme that pervades the book of Daniel, the enduring character of God's kingdom, this figure, the one like the Son of Man, receives a dominion that will not be destroyed. This passage is one of the most important for understanding New Testament eschatology. Already prior to the time of the New Testament, the figure of the Son of Man in Daniel chapter 7 was being read messianically.

Christ presents himself as the Son of Man, the one who receives the kingdom. In Matthew chapter 26, verse 64, at his trial before the high priest, Jesus declares, But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven. In the Olivet Discourse, the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the events surrounding it is seen as proof that Christ is seated at God's right hand.

The ascension of Christ and the demonstration that he is now seated at God's right hand is proof that the events of Daniel chapter 7 have occurred. Likewise, Daniel chapter 7 lies behind much of the prophecy of revelation. Daniel is deeply troubled by the vision and seeks understanding of its proper interpretation.

In summary, the meaning of the vision is given in verses 17 and 18. Daniel is especially troubled by the fourth beast and the figure of the little horn that arises within it. The little horn is distinguished by its pride and its blasphemy.

It is also marked out by its focused and indeed successful persecution of the saints. The little horn in the interpretation that is given to Daniel, perhaps by Gabriel, may perhaps relate to the figure of the land beast in Revelation chapter 13, a Jewish agency of persecution operating with power granted by and in the name of the sea beast of Rome. The reign of the beast will finally be brought to an end as the Son of Man inherits the kingdom.

The figure like the Son of Man is not just an individual figure. We see this in verse 22. The judgment is given not just for this individual figure, but also for the saints.

They are the ones that will possess the kingdom. The old beastly powers are dethroned and Christ and his people take their place. After the ascension of Christ, the beast and their order is not immediately destroyed.

Rather, as we see in the book of Revelation, it continues for a time. And the little horn and the monstrous form of the final beast come to their full expression. However, the monstrous guise of the final beast is finally put down.

The beast more generally have their dominion taken away, but continue for a brief period more, as the beastly order of empires is the means by which the final monstrous form of Rome and the boastful horn are both destroyed. Earthly kingdoms and empires continue to exist after this time, but they are no longer the expression of the same heavenly authorities. In the place of the old heavenly powers sits the unrivaled Son of Man in an enduring and everlasting kingdom.

This is a kingdom in which all of the saints of God participate. A question to consider, where can you see allusions to Daniel chapter 7 in the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation? The narrative chapters of Daniel ended in chapter 6. Chapter 7 opened up a series of visions which occupy the rest of the book. Chapter 8 continues on from chapter 7, drawing upon many of its themes.

However, chapter 7 was a transitional chapter between the Aramaic section of the book, from chapters 2 to 7, and the later visionary chapters. Chapter 8, along with the rest of these chapters, is written in Hebrew. In chapter 8 we find a new vision of beasts, but this time it's not the bear and the leopard, but a ram and a goat, two sacrificial animals.



Perhaps this is an indication of the greater scope of covenant concerns in this period. This vision, as we've noted, connects with what happens in chapter 7. The vision of the preceding chapter occurred in the first year of King Belshazzar, and this occurs in the third. In his vision, Daniel is in the citadel of Susa, elsewhere referred to as Shushan.

This site would later be the capital of the Persian Empire, so it seems appropriate that it is here that he sees the rise of the ram. The ram is described as having two horns. The Medo-Persian Empire is a single entity.

At its beginning, the kingdom of Media is the most prominent. However, through Cyrus, Persia comes to greater prominence. Persia, in this vision, is the higher horn that comes up last.

The two-horned ram corresponds with the bear of the preceding chapter, and the raising up of the bear on one side relates to the dominance of Persia within the confederacy. This is, within this vision, represented by the higher horn that comes up second. The ram in this vision, later explicitly identified as Medo-Persia, challenges those who identify Media and Persia as two separate empires in chapters 2 and 7. The ram arises in the east, but it charges westward, northward, and southward.

We might associate its northward conquest with Lydia, its westward conquest with Babylon, and its southward conquest with Egypt. While Daniel is considering the ram, he sees another creature rising up, a male goat coming from the west. The west here is the region of Greece.

To this point in biblical history, the dominant powers had chiefly come from the north, the south, and sometimes the east. After this point, however, powers of the west would become increasingly important. The male goat from the west is enraged at the ram.

Greece suffered a very great deal at the hands of the Persians, and were only too keen to get their revenge. The male goat moves without touching the ground. This corresponds, of course, with the winged leopard of chapter 7. The conspicuous horn of the male goat is readily identified as Alexander the Great.

In the period of about ten years, Alexander the Great forges an empire of almost unprecedented size. He utterly breaks the two-horned ram, sweeping over the kingdom of Persia. The ram is cast down to the ground and trampled upon.

This might refer to the decisive victory at Gaugamela in 331 BC. At the height of the male goat's power and pride, his great horn, Alexander the Great, is broken. Alexander dies at 33, and his kingdom is divided into four chief parts.

This connects with the four heads of the leopard in chapter 7. James Jordan argues that these are four successive phases of the Greek empire, the final one being Hellenistic Rome. More commonly, and I think correctly, people associate this with the splitting of

the kingdom after the death of Alexander into regions roughly corresponding with Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, Syria, Babylonia and the East, and then Egypt, Judah and Arabia Petraea. Many people identify the small horn here as the little horn of chapter 7. However, while that horn related to the power of the Roman beast, this horn relates to the Greek beast.

It also arises out of one of the horns, in a way that suggests that the horns exist simultaneously, not in succession as Jordan suggests. The figure in view here seems to be Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a ruler of the Seleucid dynasty, who was a cruel persecutor of the Jews. He arose from the dynasty that had taken control of Syria and Babylonia after the death of Alexander, the Seleucids.

He was successful in war against the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt, groups in the East, and most importantly, Judah. It is important to remind ourselves that the story that is being told in these prophecies is not focused upon what makes the biggest bang on the stage of earthly history, but is rather focused on the history of the people of God, and the way that the covenant and God's purposes within it are working out in history. In terms of this, while they may seem to represent a backwater from the perspective of many of the great empires of the time, Jerusalem and its temple are the very centre of the world.

The significance of Antiochus IV Epiphanes is seen in his direct assault upon the worship of the people of God, actions that would later spark the Maccabean Revolt. He sought to replace the worship of God with the worship of Jupiter Olympius. He abolished the daily sacrifice.

Antiochus supported Hellenizing Jewish factions. Menelaus, the extreme Hellenizing high priest set up by Antiochus, had Gnaeus III, the legitimate high priest, killed. A pagan altar, the Abomination of Desolation, was established upon the true altar, and a pig was slaughtered in sacrifice.

The period of the giving over of the sanctuary is declared to be 2,300 evenings and mornings. Scholars differ on whether this is a reference to 1,150 days measured in evening and morning sacrifices, or 2,300 days. Jordan sees some symbolic resonances of this number.

Referencing the reign of Jehoshaphat in 2 Kings chapter 12, he observes the 23 years period of time in which money was collected and no repairs were made. At this point Jehoshaphat and the high priest repaired the temple. Behind this, Jordan sees the story of Athaliah.

Athaliah was killed in her seventh year, after reigning for a period of time that would have been in the region of 2,300 days. He argues that we can presume that the true worship of the Lord was cut off during that period, later to be restored during the reign of Jehoshaphat. Taken as a literal period of 1,150 days, it might refer to the period of time between 167 to 164 BC, the period prior to the rededication of the temple.

The man, or the angel Gabriel, is charged to teach Daniel concerning the meaning of the vision. Daniel is told that the vision refers to the appointed time of the end. It is likely that we should see events surrounding Antiochus IV Epiphanes as prefiguring and anticipating events that happen at the end of the period of the beasts.

Antiochus rose to power through deceit, subversion and intrigue. However, his reign came towards the end of the period of Seleucid power in Judea. A few decades after his death, Judea enjoyed semi-autonomy, and then from around 110 BC, under the Hasmonean dynasty, enjoyed independence as an expanding kingdom.

The cunning Antiochus set himself against human authorities, and also divine authority. His rising up against the Prince of Princes is presumably a reference to his assaults upon the Jews, the Prince of Princes perhaps being Michael the Archangel. However, this proud king would be overcome, not ultimately by human might, but by divine.

While other powers in this chapter had no one to come to their aid when they were assaulted, the people of God have the Lord on their side, and although they may be seriously persecuted and even martyred, they will not finally be overthrown. A question to consider, how can this chapter be related to broader themes within the book, for instance, the relationship between divine and human sovereignty? Daniel chapter 9 opens with Daniel's recognition that the 70 years spoken of in the prophecy of Jeremiah chapter 25, verses 8-12, in which Jeremiah foretells the number of years that must pass before Jerusalem's desolations would end, were shortly to be completed. This occurs in the first year of the reign of Darius, here further described as the son of Ahasuerus.

Jeremiah's prophecy reads, Jeremiah also prophesies on the matter in chapter 29, verse 10, When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise, and bring you back to this place. The 70 years of exile are also mentioned in 2 Chronicles chapter 36, verses 20-21. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths.

All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfil 70 years. The land being rendered desolate and enjoying its Sabbaths, the years of Sabbath rest it was denied, is mentioned in the covenant blessings and curses in Leviticus chapter 26, verse 43. But the land shall be abandoned by them, and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my rules, and their soul abhorred my statutes.

The calendar of Israel had the principle of Sabbath weaving through it on all levels. The seventh day was the weekly Sabbath. There were two great seven-day feasts, unleavened bread and tabernacles.

There was the feast of weeks, connected with seven times seven weeks. There was the cluster of feasts in the seventh month. Then there was the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee, once again based on the principle of seven times seven.

The fiftieth year was the new year following the passing of seven years times seven. The great events in Israel's history were often also connected with the Sabbath principle. For instance, the completion of Solomon's temple complex occurred in the 500th year after the Exodus, a Jubilee cycle raised to the next order of magnitude.

The book of Ezekiel makes great use of Sabbath and Jubilee themes, with the numbers 49, 50 and 25, a half-Jubilee, appearing throughout the great visionary temple at the end of the book. With the overthrow of Jerusalem and Judah by the Babylonians, the land enjoyed a sort of Sabbath rest. An oppressive rich class was removed from the land, and the poor took possession of it.

The situation under the governorship of Gedaliah was short-lived, however, a false dawn. But the purging of the land of a sinful people allowed the land itself to enjoy a period of rest. Understanding the seventy years of Jeremiah is challenging, even if not as challenging as understanding the seventy weeks of years that are mentioned at the end of this chapter.

Differing positions exist. Some regard the seventy years as symbolic, rather than a literal reference to a period of time. As a symbolic designation for a time period, it would evoke Sabbath and other connections for the hearers.

For other commentators, it is regarded as an exact period of time, and for yet others, an approximate one. The Sabbath and Jubilee patterns gave a structure for hope. If the seventy years are an exact or an approximate period of time, we need to work out their boundaries.

Do they begin with the events of 605 BC, when the prophecy of Jeremiah was first given, when Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish, became the king of Babylon, established Babylonian dominance in the region, besieged Jerusalem, took some of the royal family hostage, and placed the kingdom of Judah under his yoke? Perhaps earlier, with the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC, and the devastation of the Neo-Assyrian Empire at that time? In his lengthy treatment of the subject, Ross Winkle argues for 609 BC as the key date, with the final defeat of Assyria. Or do the years begin with the final overthrow of Jerusalem in 586 BC? What is the end point? Is it the time of the rebuilding of the Temple in 516 BC, the time of Babylon's overthrow in 539 BC, the return under Cyrus shortly after that in 538 BC, or to some other date? The period of time seems to relate quite particularly to the time of Babylon's dominance over the countries of the region, not merely to Judah's exile. There are several candidates for a good starting point in the late 7th century BC, which is where I believe we ought to focus.

The most natural end point would be 539 BC or 538 BC, with the overthrow of Babylon and the decree of Cyrus. This, I believe, is why Daniel is reflecting upon this prophecy of Jeremiah in the first year of the reign of Darius. If we take the subdivisions of the later 70 weeks of years in this chapter as something that might help us to understand how the 70 years of Jeremiah function in the understanding of Daniel, we might find a clue in the fact that Darius comes to the throne at 62 years of age, mapping the 70 years onto the schema of the 70 weeks of years.

The final year is the year after Babylon's overthrow. Having recognised that the time spoken of by Jeremiah's prophecy had been completed, Daniel recognises also that the people should be returning home, but they're not doing so yet. So Daniel turns to the Lord in prayer.

He fasts and dresses in sackcloth and ashes, confessing the rebellion, the sins and the unfaithfulness of the people that had led them into exile in the first place. Daniel is approaching the Lord on the basis of and in terms of covenant promises, such as those found in Leviticus chapter 26, verses 40-42 and 44-45, sandwiching the judgement of that chapter concerning the land being granted at Sabbaths. But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, so that I walk contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies, if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac, and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

And then continuing in verse 44, Daniel prays as a prophetic intercessor for his people. It may also be helpful to see Daniel's prayer in the light of the sacrificial system. Covering is needed for Israel's sins, a purification, and Daniel's prayer seeks this.

Daniel's prayer is a long prayer of confession, in which Daniel confesses the sins of the nation to the Lord. Daniel's prayer is driven by a profound sense of the Lord's holiness and justice, but also by his unswerving faithfulness to his covenant, and by the confidence that, since Judah and Jerusalem are named by the Lord's name, he will not cast them off completely. The prayer alternates between the two parties of the covenant, speaking of the riches of the Lord's justice, faithfulness, righteousness, and truth, while juxtaposing each of these with the injustice, unfaithfulness, unrighteousness, and falsehood of Israel.

The Lord's unchanging character and commitment to his covenant is the bedrock of Daniel's appeal. Each trait of the Lord exposes something new about the sin of his people. The Lord's faithfulness to the covenant exposes just how unfaithful his people have been.

His righteousness exposes the wickedness and the shame of his people. His mercy,

forgiveness, and long-suffering expose the depth of the people's rebellion. His deliverance exposes the extent of the people's ingratitude.

His hallowing of his name through his redemption of his people in the midst of the nations exposes the perversity of the way that redeemed people, graciously called by his name, made themselves a byword among the nations on account of their wickedness and the destruction that resulted from it. Yet here lies the one hope for Israel. Daniel has exposed their complete and utter bankruptcy.

But he can still appeal to the Lord, because the Lord has placed his name upon them as his own people. The angel Gabriel comes to Daniel at the time of the evening sacrifice. The evening tribute or offering came at the beginning of a new day and was a memorial, calling upon God to see his people and to act on their behalf.

This is essentially what Daniel's prayer had been. Even though there was no earthly tribute being given at that time, Daniel still presents the response to his prayer in terms of that offering. This might offer a powerful insight into the way that prayer can be considered in terms of ritual.

Such a principle is illustrated in Psalm 141 verses 1-2. O Lord, I call upon you, hasten to me, give ear to my voice when I call to you, let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Prayer and song can be thought of as akin to sacrifices, but the connection can work in the other way too and help us better to understand the nature of the sacrificial system.

Sacrifices are like dramatised or ritualised prayers. As the prophets often stress, the sacrifices don't operate as a sort of mindless ritual, irrespective of the posture of heart of those performing them. The temple was not primarily a house of sacrifice, but a house of prayer.

Gabriel assures Daniel that his pleas for mercy have been heard, and tells him that he has a word and vision in answer to Daniel's prayer, as Daniel is greatly loved. Like Moses in Exodus chapter 32-34, the prophet loved by the Lord intercedes for a wicked people. The vision that he is given concerns 70 weeks.

While Jeremiah's prophecy was about 70 years, Daniel is told of 70 weeks or sevens, not literal weeks but periods of time generally identified as years. We should recognise the Jubilee themes here. In Leviticus chapter 25 verses 8-13, the law of the Jubilee is given.

It starts on the tenth day of the seventh month, in connection with the day of atonement. Liberty is proclaimed to the land and all of its inhabitants, who can return to their ancestral properties. Leviticus speaks of seven weeks of years, in reference to the Jubilee, the time of replanting in the land, extending themes of Pentecost, which is seven weeks of days.

The event declared to Daniel is a greater awaited Jubilee, a Jubilee multiplied by ten, a Jubilee raised by an order of magnitude. This awaited event would put an end to Israel's transgressions, confirm the sin or purification offerings, cover Israel's liability to punishment, establish the reign of righteousness, confirm and fulfil that which was foretold by visions and faithful prophets, an anointed and most holy place, establishing a place of God's dwelling. From the very earliest period of the Church, Christians have seen in this prophecy a foretelling of the advent and the ministry of Christ.

The seventy weeks of years are subdivided into seven weeks of years, sixty-two weeks of years and a single final week. Once again, determining dating is difficult. What and when is the decree referred to in verse 25? Is it the decree of Cyrus around 538 BC, following shortly after the fulfilment of the seventy years of the prophecy of Jeremiah? Or is it some later event? Here we encounter significant differences on chronology, particularly around the dating of the return and the rebuilding of the city and temple.

Are Ezra and Nehemiah to be dated immediately after the decree of Cyrus or do they relate to a time over a century later? James Jordan, for instance, argues for a short chronology, with Ezra and Nehemiah dating from the time of Cyrus' decree in 538 BC onwards. Much depends on the identification of the Artaxerxes of Ezra and Nehemiah and his connection with Darius the Mede of Daniel, who is also identified by Jordan as Cyrus the Persian. Jordan has also previously raised the possibility that wholesale and radical revisionist work on the entire BC dating system might be required.

Such a revision, of which he is not the only advocate, would remove about 80 years in the process, cutting the length of the Persian Empire from 205 to 120 years. Modern Christian commentators, by contrast, have tended to date the events of Ezra and Nehemiah later, with Artaxerxes commissioned to Ezra, which is commonly identified with the decree, coming in 458 BC. Calculating from this date, taking the weeks as a reference to 490 literal solar years, the start of the 70th week comes in 26 AD, the beginning of Christ's ministry according to this reckoning, with his cutting off occurring halfway through the final week.

James Bajan, for instance, interprets the decree as a mandate from Artaxerxes to re-establish Judah's religious governance in 458 BC. In 409 BC, in Bajan's account, Nehemiah the anointed prince is in Jerusalem and completes the reforms initiated by Ezra. Paul Tanner argues for a different date, 444 BC, the word of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah authorising him to return to Jerusalem to rebuild a city and its walls.

He argues that the years, rather than being taken as regular solar years, should be interpreted as prophetic years of 360 days. This would yield a time of 475 regular years instead of 490. This yields the beginning of the 70th week in 33 AD, the more generally recognised date for Christ's death and resurrection.

We should observe the way that the 70 weeks of years begins with a period of 7 weeks

of years, an initial regular jubilee cycle, as part of the great jubilee cycle, the jubilee cycle times 10. Numerous other positions exist. Some relate this to events surrounding Atticus IV's epiphanies.

Symbolic readings of these time periods can dispense with many of the attempts to match these clearly to specific dates. Some argue that some of the years are symbolic while others are literal, others that there is a gap or delay or that a period of time intervenes between some of these weeks. Some clues to the meaning of periods of time within it might also be found elsewhere in the book of Daniel and in books like Revelation.

In Daniel 7, verse 25, the little horn is described as follows. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law, and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. A time, times, and half a time makes three and a half, which is half a week.

Elsewhere in the book of Revelation, this is connected with 1260 days and 42 months. 42 months is three and a half years and months, and 1260 days is three and a half years and days. This measuring of three and a half years and days would seem to give some support to Tanner's proposal that the years are prophetic years of 360 days rather than standard solar years.

The Anointed One, or literally the Messiah that is cut off, seems to be a reference to Christ. We had a foreshadowing of the coming of this figure in Daniel in the lion's den. The lion's den symbolised the period of exile.

It also anticipated the events of the resurrection. The Messianic Prince acts in the 70th week. He is expelled from his people in that week, dispossessed and condemned to death, but then the city will be destroyed, overwhelmed in a flood of judgement.

This refers, I believe, to the judgement of Jerusalem in AD 70. While this does not occur within the 70 weeks of years, its sentence is established at that time. Through Christ's death and resurrection, he brings the covenant into full force.

He ends the tribute and peace offering, and the city is going to be rendered desolate. He puts an end to the sacrificial system and establishes a new covenant in its place. The year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement, and the greater Jubilee that is foretold to Daniel also involves a great act of atonement or covering as its climax, as Christ is the last great sin offering for his people.

Sacrifice is put to an end because all previous sacrifices could only anticipate his sacrifice, and they depended upon it for their efficacy. A question to consider, where else in scripture do we encounter 70 times 7? How could we read these references in the light of Daniel's 70 weeks of years? Daniel chapter 10 begins the fourth and final vision of the



book of Daniel, which runs for three chapters until the end of the book. The first vision was the vision of the four beasts in chapter 7, the second the vision of the ram and the goat in chapter 8, the third the vision of the 70 weeks of years in chapter 9. This is the longest and the most challenging vision of the book, especially with the long sequence of prophesied events of vaguely defined characters in the following chapter.

Due in part to the exceptional detail of the prophecies of chapter 11, many commentators have regarded this vision as being prophecy delivered after the fact. However, those who adopt a late date for the book of Daniel have to apply all of the prophecies to events before the end of the second century BC. Either some of the events spoken of at the end of chapter 11 had not yet taken place but were seen on the horizon, or sections like verses 40-45 must be related to the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

In either case, we have prophecies that don't fit what actually happened, leading to problems for those who believe that this was included as canonical literature earlier on. If on the one hand, this is prophecy after the fact, describing events in recent history, it seems strange that it would describe events in its own time so inaccurately. If it is mostly prophecy after the fact, but there is prophecy within it that looks to the near future, then it would clearly be proven not to be prophecy shortly afterwards.

Either way, we have a problem. It is far more reasonable, I believe, to take this as Christians have historically taken it, as prophecy that looks into the future long distant from its own time, and also far beyond the time of the Maccabees. The prophecy comes in the third year of Cyrus, likely 536 BC.

Things will be much clearer now to Daniel. Babylon has fallen, Cyrus has given his decree, many have returned to Judah, and had even started rebuilding the temple. However, as Paul Tanner notes, by this point news had probably reached Daniel of rebuilding efforts having stalled, having faced concerted opposition the people had left off the work.

The rest of this chapter describes the context of the delivery of the visionary word, which is related in chapters 11 and 12. These chapters describe the conflicts that frame the period that will follow. Daniel's mourning, described in verses 2 and 3, might have been provoked by a dispiriting news from Jerusalem.

The re-establishment of the city and its sanctuary had been the subject of the vision of the preceding chapter. The fact that Daniel was mourning during a feast time, during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, indicates the seriousness of the situation. Daniel receives the vision by the banks of the river Tigris.

He hasn't returned to Jerusalem, he is aged and still in the service of the king. The figure described in verses 5 to 9 should be distinguished from the figure in verse 10 and following. As Tanner observes, the vision here resembles that in Revelation chapter 1

verses 12 to 17.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead. The close similarity between the figure in Daniel chapter 10 and Christ in Revelation chapter 1 should, I believe, lead us to identify the two.

Daniel does not have the same response to Gabriel as he had to this figure, strongly weighing against the identification that some have made between Gabriel and the man dressed in linen. Tanner also recognises similarities between Daniel's response to the vision and Saul of Tarsus' response to his vision on the road to Damascus in Acts, where Saul sees the vision and falls to the ground, whereas those with him do not, although they do see a great light. Daniel's companions here have a response of terror and flee, but they do not see the vision.

They experience dread in response to they know not what. The figure that Daniel sees is clothed like a high priest, but is glorious like no human high priest is. He has a metallic and radiant appearance, recalling the terrifying image of chapter 2 and Nebuchadnezzar's first dream.

This is the reality of which the earthly high priest was merely a pale reflection. His linen garments, as James Jordan argues, should be associated with the garments worn by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. We should here recall the vision of the 70 weeks.

This is the great high priestly figure who will fulfil what the prophecy declared would come to pass in chapter 9 verse 24. 70 weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Daniel won't see the prophecy fulfilled, but he does get to see the glorious one who will fulfil it.

The description of the figure here would also recall the throne chariot vision of Ezekiel chapter 1. This is the awaited figure, none other than Michael himself, the great prince of the covenant. He is also the angel of the covenant, or the angel of the Lord, who appeared in the burning bush, who led Israel through the wilderness and into the promised land, and who is also mentioned in such places as Zechariah chapter 3. Daniel is so overcome by the vision that he enters into a sort of death-like state, or deep sleep, much as Adam was placed into a deep sleep when Eve was taken from his side and

Abraham was placed into a deep sleep when he saw the vision of Genesis chapter 15. Daniel is raised up with a touch and a word.

The figure who does this is not the glorious man he has just seen, but an interpreting angel, namely Gabriel, whom he has seen in the earlier visions. In chapter 8 verse 16, Gabriel had been charged to instruct Daniel concerning the vision. In chapter 9 verse 21, Gabriel was sent with a message to Daniel.

There we are told that it was the one that he had seen in the vision at the first, which might be a reference to chapter 7 verse 16, when Daniel approaches one of the standing figures who interprets the vision for him. Gabriel, it would seem, has been the interpreting angel for Daniel throughout. He will appear again in the Annunciation narratives in the story of Jesus' nativity.

Gabriel declares that Daniel is greatly loved, much as in chapter 9 verse 23, and Daniel is made to stand up, trembling. Much as in the preceding chapter, Daniel received this vision in response to his diligent seeking of the Lord. The Lord heard him and responded.

Gabriel was resisted by the prince of the kingdom of Persia for 21 days. The world was under angelic governance, and the prince of the kingdom of Persia here should be understood to be an angelic figure. Israel also has its prince, not a human figure, but a glorious heavenly figure, Michael.

Nations were ruled by angelic powers, which were connected with the gods of those nations. Gabriel, as Jordan notes, seems to be responsible not just for a particular kingdom, but also for the region of the empires, struggling with both Persia and later with Greece. He must subdue the evil angelic rulers of those kingdoms, placing them under the Lord's dominion for a time.

This struggle was keener during the time of Cyrus' absence, as Cambyses, who was ruling during that period, was not favourable to the Jews in the way that Cyrus was. The 21 days of the kingdom of Persia's withstanding naturally recalls the three weeks of Daniel's fast at the beginning of the chapter. Daniel will be given a vision that will concern days yet to come.

It will speak to his mourning concerning the seeming failure of the Jews to re-establish themselves in Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Daniel has already been spoken to and touched in order to raise him up. Now his lips are touched in verse 16, but he is still weak and overcome.

We should likely see in Daniel's experience here, the touching and raising up of him, some reference to the experience of Israel itself. Daniel stands for the nation that will also need assistance at critical moments in the years that follow. In the visions of these chapters there are a number of references to empires that are brought low without

receiving any aid.

Daniel receives a touch and the nation of Israel will be touched at various points in its history and assisted in order that it might not be finally overcome. Daniel is a man greatly loved and he is strengthened accordingly. His people will also be strengthened and raised up in the years that follow.

Gabriel, the angel charged with subduing these empires to the service of the Lord, now has to wrestle with Persia once again. And once he has finished with Persia, he will have to wrestle with Greece. His only great support in this struggle is Michael, the Prince of Israel, the angel of the Lord, whom I believe we should see as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

A question to consider, where else in scripture do we have references to Michael? Daniel chapter 11 contains the main part of the fourth and last of Daniel's visions. This vision runs from chapter 10 to chapter 12. The prophecy covers a period of well over 550 years and with the frequent ping-ponging between the King of the North and the King of the South, it can be quite difficult to follow.

It does however provide us with a schema for thinking about much of the intertestamental period. Beginning with the period from Cyrus to Alexander the Great, it takes us through the six Syrian wars from 274 BC to 168 BC, followed by the Maccabean Revolt and taking us down to the time of the Herods. The chapter begins with a verse that really belongs with the preceding chapter.

The verse refers to Gabriel's assistance of Michael from the first year of Darius the Mede. This confirming and strengthening of Michael probably relates to the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire and the subsequent release of Israel, Michael's people. From verse 2, the chapter relates the history of the region that is to be expected.

Following Cyrus, three more kings will arise in Persia. Cambyses, Gaumata, Darius. After them comes the fourth king, who is far richer than all of them, Xerxes.

His stirring up against the Kingdom of Greece is the Second Persian War. The mighty king that arises after them comes from Greece, it's Alexander the Great. He reigns from 336 to 323 BC.

However, he does not get to pass on his kingdom to his son. Rather, it is divided among four of his generals. Cassander gets Macedon and Greece, Antigonus, Anatolia and Asia Minor, Seleucus, Mesopotamia, Ptolemy, Egypt and the South.

In Israel's history, it was generally caught between a northern and a southern power. The northern powers were generally Babylon and the Assyrians. The great southern power was Egypt in its various guises.

For much of the chapter that follows, the king of the north is the man who rules under Seleucid Empire. And the king of the south is the Ptolemaic king. The first Ptolemy, from 322 to 285 BC, established his kingdom in Egypt.

He buried the body of Alexander in Alexandria. He was the first of a very long line of Ptolemies. Seleucus, who had been one of the officers under Ptolemy, was attacked by Antigonus to his west, but was assisted in defeating him by Ptolemy.

Ptolemy I was succeeded by Ptolemy II, who gained the authority of Egypt and married his sister. The Seleucid king Antiochus I fought the first of six Syrian wars with Ptolemy II. After the end of the Second Syrian War in 248 BC, the war was concluded with a marriage treaty.

Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II, was given to Antiochus II. Unsurprisingly, Laodice, the replaced wife of Antiochus II, was not happy with this situation. She poisoned her husband, his new wife Berenice, and their son in 246 BC.

After this coup, a branch of her, being Berenice's roots, Ptolemy III, her brother, sought to avenge her death and launched the third of the Syrian wars. He prevailed over Seleucus II, Antiochus II's successor, and got a lot of plunder. Seleucus II's attempts at retaliation failed, and he returned to his own land.

Verse 10 refers to the heirs of Seleucus II. In 219 BC, the Fourth Syrian War started, Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV fighting. Ptolemy IV brought up a force against Antiochus III, who was defeated at Raphia in 217 BC.

The war ended in 211 BC. The Jews, being in the region between and variously controlled by these powers, was naturally caught up in these conflicts. Ptolemy IV was exalted in pride and started to persecute the Jews, who were at that time under the rule of his kingdom.

Verse 13 refers to Antiochus III's regathering of his forces and forming a greater army. He was preparing for a fifth Syrian war. From verse 14, it seems that this period was one of failed Messianic Jewish resistance to the Ptolemies.

Ptolemy V became king in 205 BC. Antiochus III launched the Fifth Syrian War. He took the well-fortified city of Caesarea and the territory of Judah, what is referred to as the Glorious Land in verse 16, came under his control around 197 BC, as he, Antiochus III, otherwise known as Antiochus the Great, took it from the Ptolemies.

The Seleucid king Antiochus gave his daughter Cleopatra, not the later, much more famous Cleopatra, to the young Ptolemy V in marriage. Their wedding is actually recorded on the Rosetta Stone. He hoped, by this means, to subvert the rule of Ptolemy through the influence of his daughter.

However, his plan failed and indeed ended up backfiring. She steered her husband towards alliance with Rome instead of Antiochus. Antiochus then turned to attack the coastal towns, Ptolemaic and Greek cities.

When the Greek cities appealed to the Roman Republic, they fought against Antiochus III. He invaded Greece, but Antiochus was decisively defeated by the Romans at Thermopylae and Magnesia, who took Asia Minor from him and drove him back into his land. In the Treaty of Appamea in 188 BC, Antiochus III was forced completely to abandon Europe and had no choice but to submit to other humiliating terms.

He was murdered in 187 BC while trying to plunder a temple in Susa to pay off his war debts, being removed, as it were, from the playing field, the events of verse 19. After this, in verse 20, we have the rise of Seleucus IV. He was the heir of Antiochus III, who needed to pay off his father's war debts to the Romans.

He sent Heliodorus to the temple in Jerusalem to loot its treasuries, but he was expelled from the temple. He claimed that supernatural powers had prevented him from entering. Later, Heliodorus assassinated his master Seleucus IV, hoping to seize the throne for himself.

After the assassination of his brother Seleucus IV by the usurper Heliodorus, Antiochus IV, otherwise known as Epiphanes, another son of Antiochus III the Great, recovered the kingdom in 175 BC with the aid of the king of Pergamum. He claimed to rule as co-regent with an infant son of Seleucus IV on behalf of the rightful heir Demetrius I, his nephew, who was imprisoned in Rome. Antiochus IV later murdered his infant co-regent.

During this period in Jerusalem there were tensions between two factions, the Tobiads and the Oniads. The former were Hellenizers, who celebrated the cultural sophistication of the Greeks, represented by Syria, and the latter were more conservative Jews, who supported Jewish nationalism or Egyptian governance. These two groups struggled for dominance over the high priesthood in Jerusalem in the years leading up to the Maccabean Revolt.

The high priesthood was the focal Jewish power in Jerusalem at the time. The Oniads were represented by Annus III, the high priest and descendant of Zadok. They resented the Hellenizing influence of Seleucid rule.

The conflict between these two factions would play an important role in what followed. Joshua, who had taken the Greek name Jason, representing the Tobiads, although he was the brother of Annus III, was sent to Antiochus IV and he proposed that he replace his brother as high priest in exchange for increased tax revenue and proactive Hellenization of Jerusalem. Jason was made high priest in 174 BC.

Although he was the high priest, Jason encouraged his compatriots to adopt Greek

culture and values. He built a large gymnasium next to the temple and Jews participating in the games would use false foreskins to hide their circumcision as they competed naked. In 171 BC a Tobiad named Menelaus was sent to Antiochus with the tribute.

He offered greatly to increase Jerusalem's tax revenue if Antiochus would only install him as the high priest instead of Jason. Sure enough, Menelaus, though having no connection with the line of Zadok or Aaron, was established as high priest by Antiochus. Menelaus raided the temple treasuries to pay tribute to Antiochus.

When Annius III, who had been deposed for Jason, Menelaus' predecessor, publicly protested against this, Menelaus had him murdered. The murder of Annius III is likely the reference to the Prince of the Covenant in verse 22, which summarizes events of Antiochus IV Epiphany's reign. Verse 23 likely describes Antiochus' deceitful rise to power, initially presenting himself as ruling for the sake of the imprisoned Demetrius, but then seizing power for himself.

Antiochus had greater wealth to employ than his predecessors, who had costly war debts to roam. Antiochus IV used his larger funds to buy loyalty. His desire for funding is an important element of what precipitated the crisis of the period in Jerusalem.

The Aeneids appealed to Ptolemy to help. A young Ptolemy VI sent a force into the south of Syria, hoping to take back Jerusalem in 170 BC. This kicked off the Sixth Syrian War.

They had lost Jerusalem to the Seleucids under Antiochus III in 197 BC. However, this force was decisively defeated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, as Ptolemy was betrayed by people close to him. Antiochus ended up taking the whole of Egypt, save for Alexandria.

He took Ptolemy VI captive and reduced Ptolemy his nephew to the status of a puppet king. In response to this, the city of Alexandria set up Ptolemy VI's younger brother as king there, Ptolemy VIII, called Phiscon. Ptolemy VI and Antiochus ended up uniting against this common enemy, while still very much scheming against each other, speaking lies at the same table as verse 27 says.

Antiochus, however, did not defeat Alexandria. Antiochus was likely concerned about how Rome would respond. After this, he returned to Syria to regroup.

Passing by Jerusalem on his way back, with the help of his high priest Menelaus, Antiochus levied a tax on the people and took tribute from the temple treasury. In his absence, Ptolemy VI, Antiochus' puppet king, was driven out by Ptolemy VIII, Phiscon, the man that Alexandria had set up. The deposed Ptolemy VI went to Rome to seek for aid.

In 168 BC, Antiochus IV returned to Egypt. However, now there were Roman forces on the side of Ptolemy VI, who weren't happy with this destabilizing of the region. Egypt was Rome's breadbasket, so they were naturally concerned about Antiochus' actions in the region.

The Romans sent a senator, Popilius Linnaeus, who set Antiochus an ultimatum. He drew a circle around Antiochus in the sand, requiring a response from him before he left it. Either he would withdraw from Egypt, or he would continue his expedition and face the wrath of Rome, who would declare war against him.

The Romans are the ships from Kittim, referred to in verse 30. Antiochus, tailed between his legs, had to leave Egypt. In Jerusalem, news was received that Antiochus had been killed.

Jason, the high priest who had been deposed for Menelaus, sought to regain control of the priesthood and of Jerusalem. Menelaus and other leading Tobiahds fled to the Syrians in Egypt. Antiochus, who was still very much alive, was infuriated.

Crushing rebellious factions in Jerusalem would be just the way to get beyond the humiliation of his Egyptian escapades. Turning back from Egypt, he would take action against the Holy Covenant. Antiochus IV sought to humiliate the Jews, defiling and dishonouring their worship.

He sought aggressively to Hellenise and paganise the city of Jerusalem, building a large fortress within it. He required the Jews to refer to the Lord as Jupiter or Zeus Olympius. He set up pagan altars throughout the city and required that the Jews offer pigs to the Lord.

He prohibited faithful Jewish worship and practices such as Sabbath, circumcision and feast days. He set up a pagan altar within the temple itself, the abomination that makes desolate, offering a pig to Zeus. He plundered the temple treasury and left a force to control Jerusalem in his absence.

We should recall that Antiochus' actions here and the three year cessation of Jewish religious worship was earlier referred to in chapter 8 verses 8-14. And some of the hosts and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the prince of the host.

And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it, together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. Then I heard a Holy One speaking, and another Holy One said to the one who spoke, For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot? And he said to me, For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.

The conflict with Antiochus IV was not merely an external one to the nation of Judah. It was also one bound up with internal divisions between Hellenizers and conservative



Jews. While faithful Jews resisted Antiochus and his forced paganization of the land, they suffered horrific persecution, and many were martyred.

Many commentators speculate that the little help received by the wise among the people, referred to in verse 34, relates to the Maccabean revolt. As Judean rebels under Judas Maccabees, a nickname meaning hammer, whose father Mattathias, the Hasmonean, sparked the revolt, defeated the Syrian army and re-established the worship of the temple, he rededicated the temple in December of 165 BC. This would later be commemorated as the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah.

The Maccabeans were eventually successful in driving out the Syrian Greeks in 140 BC, establishing the Hasmonean dynasty and enjoying semi-autonomy in the empire. From around 110 BC, they enjoyed independence, and they expanded into surrounding regions of Transjordan, Samaria and Idumea. They forced conversion to Judaism upon the Idumeans, descendants of the Edomites.

Later they also added Galilee to the territory. This period of time, much of which is recorded in the books of the Maccabees, was a testing and refining time for the nation, a time of expectation of the Lord's visitation, as the fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel and others was still awaited. The Hasmonean dynasty, arising from the Maccabees, was corrupted however.

John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean ruler under which Judea had gained independence, claimed both high priestly and royal office and prerogatives. It was he who had forced the Idumeans to convert. Verse 36 and following are seen by many as a portrait of Antiochus IV, relative to his gods.

However, the picture does not fit Antiochus well. Antiochus, for instance, is the king of the north, but the king mentioned here is attacked by the king of the north. This king also seems to be unfaithful to a covenant that he is under in some way.

James Jordan, I believe correctly, argues that this figure is Herod the Great and likely the dynasty that followed him. Even though they had been forcibly converted, the Idumeans had come under the covenant. The Herods arose from an Idumean ruling family.

After the Roman Pompeii occupied Jerusalem in 63 BC, the Hasmoneans retained some nominal power. In 47 BC, the Romans had appointed Herod the Great's father as procurator of Judea. He had appointed Herod his son as governor of Galilee.

Only a few years later, however, Herod's father was killed and Herod took over his position as procurator. To strengthen their ties with Rome, the Hasmonean dynasty gave one of their daughters to Herod in marriage. Herod later appointed his 17 year old brother-in-law as high priest.

Caught in civil war conflicts between Mark Antony and Octavian, Herod initially sided

with Antony as Antony had helped him earlier. However, when he saw the tide of the conflict turning, he switched his allegiance to Octavian. These events seem to be referred to in verses 40-43.

The king of the south is Mark Antony, the king of the north is Octavian. Herod initially fights with the king of the south, but the king of the north comes against him with a superior force and sweeps through the lands. Rome, this king of the north, ends up taking over Egypt, Libya and then Ethiopia.

However, in verse 41, reference is made to his abortive expedition against Edom, Moab and Ammon. Herod is, as verses 37-39 highlight, a man of fortresses, a man who is a wily political operator. He is unfaithful to the covenant and engages in a lot of paganising practices.

In addition to not paying attention to the gods of his fathers, it says that he does not pay attention to the one beloved by women. We might speculate as to what is being referred to here. Perhaps it's a reference to children.

We might think about the massacre of the innocents. Others see some reference to homosexuality in the figure being referred to here. It might also refer to the messiah as the desire of women.

The concluding verses of the chapter return from Octavian and the Romans to the character of Herod. The alarming news from the north probably refers to messages from Antipater, his son, that two of his older sons had spoken against him to Caesar. Herod ended up killing both of them and after them Antipater when Antipater tried to kill him.

The alarming news from the east seems to be something different. In Matthew 2 verses 1-3 we read, When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. This is the troubling news from the east.

Once again it leads an angry Herod to strike out with violence. In this case with the massacre of the innocents. The final verse of the chapter likely refers to Herod's two palaces within Jerusalem.

One in the temple complex and the other in the upper city. However Herod, this violent king would meet a sorry end. No one would come to help him.

A question to consider. What are the lessons that could have been learned from people reading this prophecy when it was first given? Daniel chapter 12 is the conclusion of the fourth vision, received in the third year of Cyrus and the final chapter of the book. Daniel receives this final vision in response to his distress and lengthy mourning at that time, presumably provoked by discouraging news from the returned exiles in Jerusalem and the stalling of the rebuilding efforts.

In the vision he sees Michael, the angelic guardian and glorious high priest of Israel. A figure who should be likely identified as the pre-incarnate Christ. Daniel is given an outline of the history that will follow.

In chapter 11 he was given a preview of the events from the middle of the 6th century through the rise of the empire of the Greeks, the six Syrian wars, the persecutions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Maccabean revolt and the Hasmonean dynasty and through to the rise of the Herodian dynasty. The concern that drives Daniel is not some general uncertainty or anxiety about what sort of things are going to happen in the future. The vision is aimed at addressing something more specific.

We arrive at the climax of all of this, in this chapter. The arrival of Michael, the angelic guardian, the glorious high priest and the messianic prince. The nations were ruled over by angels at this time.

Israel however was the Lord's special possession. Michael or the angel of the Lord or the angel of the covenant is the divine guardian of Israel. Daniel saw him back in chapter 10, falling down as dead as a result of the glory of the vision.

In the last days, the time when the whole order of the empires will come to its end, the time anticipated in Daniel chapter 2 with the stone crushing the statue or in chapter 7 with the granting of authority to the people of God, Michael himself will come on the scene. The advent Michael however will be accompanied with unprecedented tribulation. Those whose names are found in the book will be delivered.

We should think here of the various references to names written in the Lamb's book of life in the book of Revelation, which is framed as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel. Verse 2 is one that many have seen as a rare Old Testament testimony to the resurrection. The resurrection here however seems to be more complicated.

First, it is of many, not necessarily all. Second, if this is the final resurrection, it is happening far, far too early. Third, it is a resurrection that includes many of the wicked, which makes it difficult to identify as a spiritual resurrection.

Elsewhere in scripture we see a number of different ways in which resurrection is referred to. For instance, there is a sort of resurrection in the advent of new spiritual life in a person or a nation. In Revelation chapter 20 verses 5 to 6, we read of the first resurrection.

In the first century following the resurrection of Jesus, all covenant saints who had rested in Sheol were raised up by Christ to sit with him in the glory of heaven. Whereas they had been formerly in the exile of the grave, now they enjoyed God's very presence and participation in the divine council itself. What death means for the people of God radically changed at that point.

This being raised up from the grave to God's presence is the first stage of the resurrection. The later, greater stage still awaited is the raising of our bodies and the fullness of the new heavens and the new earth. In Ezekiel chapter 37 and the vision of the valley of dry bones within it, we have not individual bodily resurrection, but the spiritual resurrection of Israel as a nation, its re-establishment as a people.

In John chapter 5 verses 25 to 29, Jesus talks both of a form of resurrection that is already occurring through his ministry and of a resurrection yet awaited. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man.

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Jordan argues that the resurrection in view in verse 2 of Daniel chapter 12 is principally the raising of the nation through the ministry of Christ and his apostles. Some here respond and are raised up to new life, and others, hearing and rejecting, are marked out for destruction.

Jesus is the one who brings about the fall and the rising again of many in Israel. This time of national resurrection to judgment and new life comes in the period from Christ's ministry to the end of the age in A.D. 70 with the removal of the old covenant order, with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. It would be accompanied by extreme tribulation, as Christ declares in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew chapter 24 verses 21 to 22.

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short.

It would be a time when the judgment of the entire old creation would occur. All of the blood from Abel to Zechariah would come upon that first century generation, as Jesus said in Matthew chapter 23. The arising of Michael at that point in history was the advent of Jesus, his atoning work, and his rising again in the resurrection.

He is exalted as the representative and great high priest of his people to the Father's right hand. He raises up the Old Testament saints with him from the grave and vindicates them against the unfaithful of their people in the events of A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem. Michael would wage successful war in heaven, and the old covenant demonic authorities would be subdued, as we see in Revelation chapter 12 verses 7 to 11.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the

dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.

He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come. For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they love not their lives, even unto death. Coming through the tribulation of that time, the faithful martyrs would be raised up to God's presence. They would be vindicated, and their enemies would be judged in the downfall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Those who are wise and righteous would shine like stars, reigning with Christ and sharing in his victory, testifying to him in the darkness of the world. In Philippians 2, verse 15, Paul describes Christians as shining as lights in the world. Daniel must seal the book until the time of the end.

His prophecies concern a time long distant. While the book of Revelation is constantly stressing that the fulfilment is near at hand and is about unsealing a sealed book, Daniel's prophecy awaits a far-off future. In Revelation we see the fulfilment of the events foretold by the book of Daniel, the advent of Michael, the coming of the Son of Man and the saints into possession of the kingdom, the destruction of the beast, empires, and victory over the angelic powers, the elevation of the saints, the great work of atonement, and the consummation of the destiny of the people.

Because the events foretold by the book of Revelation will occur within a matter of a few years after its writing, in Revelation chapter 22, verse 10, John is instructed not to seal the book because the time is near. During the period of awaiting the fulfilment of the vision, there would be a great deal of drama, wars and rumours of wars. All of the events of chapter 12, for instance, are important, yet they are just milestones on the road to the awaited future.

The conflicts and persecutions foretold during that period are not the final end. Nevertheless, as the time drew nearer, clarity of understanding the prophetic horizon of that future would greatly increase. The faithful people of God would meditate upon the meaning of the prophecies of Daniel over the centuries that followed, wondering what exactly their fulfilment would entail.

The man clothed in linen, Michael, is asked by an angel about the time of the fulfilment of the vision and the end of the times foretold. The answer is given that it will be for a time, times, and half a time. This length of time has already been mentioned earlier in other connections in the book.

It seems to be a symbolic means of referring to both longer and to shorter periods. The time, times and half a time was mentioned in connection with the little horn in chapter 7, verse 25. In Revelation chapter 12, verses 6 and 14 and chapter 13, verse 5, it's related to the period of the woman's time in the wilderness in 1260 days and the period of the blasphemous authority of the sea beast as 42 months.

We should also recall the half week in the final of the 70 weeks of years in Daniel chapter 9. The referent of the time, times and half a time is made a little clearer in verses 11 to 12 with the 1290 and 1335 days. The first number, as Jordan points out, is 3 times 430. The significance of that number is seen in Exodus chapter 12, verses 40 to 41.

The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. The prophetic symbolism of that number is also seen in Ezekiel's prophetic sign act of Ezekiel chapter 4, verses 4 to 6. Then lie on your left side and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it.

For the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their punishment. For I assigned to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel.

And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Forty days I assigned to you, a day for each year. Of course, 390 days and 40 days added up make 430 days, multiplied by 3 and we get 1290.

Jordan suggests that the time, times and half a time refers to three periods of persecution, following which there will be a period of great tribulation. That will be cut short, the half a time. In his reading, the 1290 days takes you up to the time of the great tribulation.

Those who pass through those three Egypt-like times and pass through the tribulation as well, reach the 1335 days, receiving their reward. These three periods begin with the cutting off of the regular burnt offering and the establishment of the abomination that makes desolate, all in the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus also speaks of an abomination of desolation, corresponding to the time of the great tribulation, prior to AD 70.

The three periods correspond to the period of tearing in Egypt and are, according to Jordan, the period of Antiochus Epiphanes, the period of the Hasmonean dynasty and the period of the Herods. The half a time is the great tribulation that precedes the final destruction of Jerusalem, which is the aftermath of the fulfilling of the 70 weeks prophecy in Daniel 9, verse 26. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be

war.

Desolations are decreed. Jordan suggests that the 45 years corresponds to the time following the departure from Egypt, the period of wandering in the wilderness and the conquest of the Promised Land. Karen Newsome helpfully writes, Hartman and Dallella shrug their shoulders and say that the symbolism, undoubtedly obvious to the biblical writers and their original audiences, alludes to today's readers completely.

They are on the right track in noting that 1290 days equals 43 months of 30 days and 1335 days equals 44 and a half such months. What they fail to see is the pattern of what is left over from the original prediction of a time, two times and half a time, which amounts to 42 months. What remains is one extra month in the first part and two and a half months in the second part.

The length of the delay would have the same numerical pattern as the original prediction, a time, two times and half a time. This pattern would also account for why the two parts of the final period are not presented as of equal duration. The total number of days also lends itself to other symbolic numerical play, which, whether intentional or not, would lend authority to the calculation.

The total of the two numbers is 2625. If one calculates by weeks rather than months, seven years of 52 weeks of seven days equals 2548 days. Subtracting that from 2625 leaves 77 days, a number of symbolic significance.

The prophecy all refers to events far off, but the distant hope would give the people of God the power to persevere in the interim. Those who were faithful to the vision would purify themselves and gain insight into the promised future as they meditated upon the vision. However, wickedness would continue and grow in others.

Daniel himself is addressed in the final words of the book. He must soon die, however at the conclusion of the period of time he will participate in the first resurrection. He will be raised up to God's presence, to his allotted place of rule, inheriting the kingdom with Michael, the son of man of chapter 7 and the prince of the people of Israel.

His kingdom, established in heaven at that time, would end the reign of the beasts and begin the reign of man. Like the stone of chapter 2, it would grow to fill the whole earth. The great struggle for sovereignty in the kingdom, which is the subject of the whole book of Daniel, would finally be resolved as he would reign forever and ever, his kingdom having no end.

A question to consider, if the fulfillment of this prophecy occurred in the first century AD, how might it relate to Christians in the 21st century?