

**DANIEL**  
**Part One – We Are Not Alone!**  
*Lesson 58*

By God’s grace, I had some marvelous Christian friends growing up. A number of them were like brothers and sisters at our local church. One of my friends had a mother who, for our purposes here, we will name Ardeane. Ardeane was quite the character. Perhaps I could best contrast her with my own mother. My mom was friendly to everyone she met, especially anyone we kids brought home. Not so with Ardeane. Mom never met a meal she could not cook. Ardeane was not to be bothered much in the kitchen. Mom was always warm and brought out conversation from everyone she encountered; that was not Ardeane’s gift.

To an observer, Ardeane seemed stern and aloof, perhaps fitting better into a French palace than a Lubbock, Texas home. Now do not get me wrong, Ardeane was a loving mother and fine Christian lady, there is no greater proof than the spectacular children she raised. To me, she just seemed to belong above the world most of us lived in!

A classic example: one time I was with my friend and my friend started laughing. I asked what was funny and my friend pointed to a weed and said,

“Well, last week we went shopping and walking up to the store, which was a *spectacular* store, my mom spied a small weed growing in a crevice in the pavement. My mom grimaced and said, ‘What is the world coming to?’ as she stooped to pull up the weed!” My friend paused then added, “Oh Ardeane!” (Yes, my friend often referred to her mother by first name. It seemed, to me at least, to add to the regal nature.)

The presence of that one small weed in the crevice of the parking lot nearly ruined a day of shopping for Ardeane and her daughter. I have often chuckled over that story, wondering where I similarly lose out on the fullness of an experience by getting lost in the weeds (or one weed, in Ardeane’s case).

Believe it or not, this story reminds me of studying the book of Daniel! In Daniel we have some marvelous stories and visions that communicate spectacular and moving messages of God’s sovereignty, and the caring way he exercises his authority. Yet so many who approach the book, place the message as an afterthought as they struggle with a weed or two that are found in the cracks and crevices! Now, our goal is not to ignore the weeds, for they need a good yanking (for Ardeane’s sake), but we will not let the weeds detract from the experience of the book! The weeds are mainly found in issues of historical accuracy and

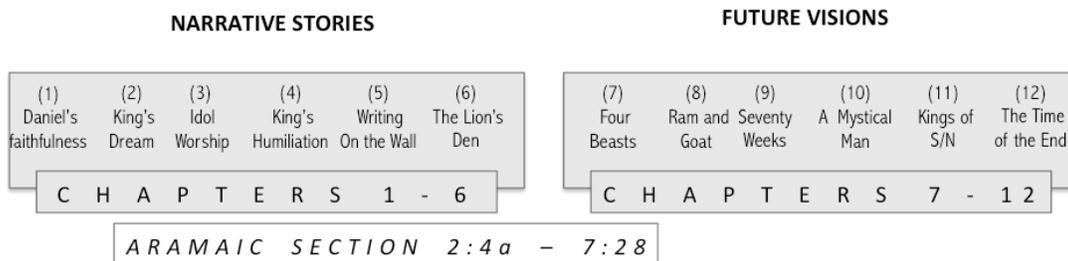
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prophetic meaning. They relate also to helping date the time the book was written in final form. As we study Daniel, where we come across the weeds, we will identify them, give them a good yank, and dispose of them as best we can, remembering the purpose of this class is to understand the book, not provide the definitive academic final word on disputed issues!

## BACKGROUND

As we begin to unpack the book of Daniel, it is not unlike unpacking a piece of luggage. You have a variety of items to unpack, and the author of Daniel has placed them in the luggage in interesting ways! Daniel is easily dividable into two parts – in two entirely separate ways! One can divide Daniel’s twelve chapters into a section of narrative stories (chapters 1-6) and a section of futuristic visions (chapters 7-12). Or one could unpack Daniel in a different manner and divide it into two languages! Daniel begins and ends in Hebrew, the language of almost all of the rest of the Old Testament; however, there is a large chunk of Daniel that is written in Aramaic.<sup>1</sup> Initially, one might think that the Aramaic portion was an incomplete translation, as if someone began translating the book into Aramaic and never concluded. Examining the odd placement of the Aramaic, however, immediately dispels such a notion. While Daniel is cleanly unpacked into two sections for both type of writing and the substance of the writing, the Aramaic reaches surprisingly into both sections in what can seem a most odd way:

### DANIEL – STRUCTURE



Theories for the Aramaic usage range from the bland to the really spectacular, and no one theory has commanded the consensus view of scholars! Surveying those views alone would consume more room in this paper than we have for the subject

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<sup>1</sup> There is also a noticeable portion of Ezra written in Aramaic as well as a few select Aramaic words and phrases sprinkled sporadically in the Old Testament.

matter of the narrative stories. Instead, we note several points and then leave it to the reader's own personal research.

First, Aramaic was the “international language” of court and commerce at the time of Daniel. In both the Babylonian court and the Persian court, Aramaic was the tongue used across borders and boundaries for diplomacy as well as international trade. Aramaic classifies as a “Semitic language,” from the same family of languages as Hebrew. It has the same basic alphabet, although pronunciation differs in places, follows much of the same core grammatical structure, and has a related vocabulary.<sup>2</sup> When the Jews were exiled to Babylon, they were thrown into a culture that used Aramaic extensively, and it was likely during this time that many Jews began writing even their Hebrew with the Aramaic script. These were the block letters that we more familiarly use with Hebrew today as opposed to the older Hebrew letter shapes found in ancient artifacts.<sup>3</sup>



Rows one and three are examples of Old Hebrew letters. Rows two and four are the corresponding letters written in the block Aramaic script.

There are significant distinctions in Hebrew and Aramaic, making it hard for a Hebrew speaker to understand Aramaic. In this sense we recall 2 Kings 18:26,

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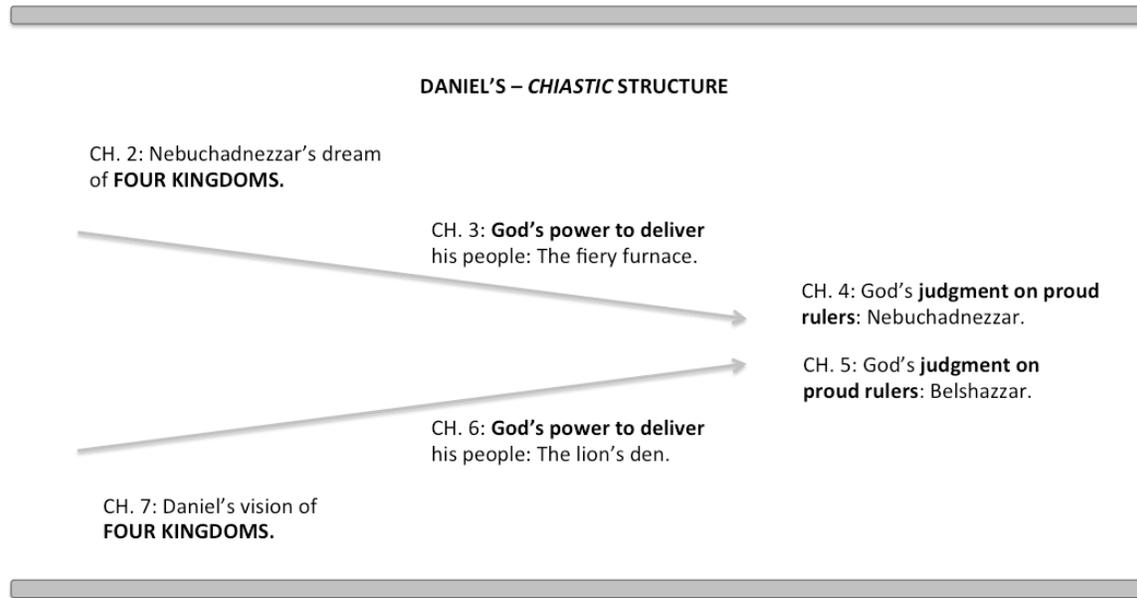
<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, there are many varying dialects even within Aramaic. The language spanned centuries of use and in some form is still in usage today.

<sup>3</sup> When we note that there is an Aramaic section of Daniel, we are not simply speaking of the way the letters are written. The reference is to the actual language being used. All of Daniel, and in fact, all of the Hebrew Old Testament, in most ancient manuscripts began using the Aramaic letters after the Babylonian exile. One of the main exceptions is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls where some of the scrolls were written in ancient Hebrew letters. Among the other scrolls, even some written in block Aramaic, scribes would resort to the ancient Hebrew lettering when writing the name of YHWH.

“Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it. Do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall!”

This plea from King Hezekiah’s ministers to the Assyrian invaders was meant to stop the Hebrew speeches that were demoralizing those within the walls of Jerusalem.

A second note on the Aramaic of Daniel does involve the structure of the book, but in a manner a bit different than the obvious structure set out in the earlier diagram. If one were to excise the section of Aramaic, an amazing thing unfolds within those chapters. They form a very clear “*chiasm*,” a structure we have seen used in Hebrew writing repeatedly in the Old Testament. As we have discussed before, a *chiasm*, like the Greek letter *chi* ( $\chi$ ) builds to a point in the center. We see it most clearly by looking at it diagrammed:



These Aramaic chapters form a clear message in themselves, one that points toward the importance of God’s control and dominion over a proud ruler/world leader. This message is the focus of the section that is written in the language of the international world rulers themselves (Aramaic!).

This leads to one last note as we unpack the book. Daniel, in the Hebrew grouping of Scripture, is not gathered into the groups that are the “prophet” writings. As we have discussed in earlier lessons, the Hebrews divided their Scriptures into three sections: Law, Prophets, and Other Writings. Daniel is included in the section of Other Writings. While some scholars believe this reflects a late date of composing Daniel, so late that it was after the Prophet section was “closed,” there is no real

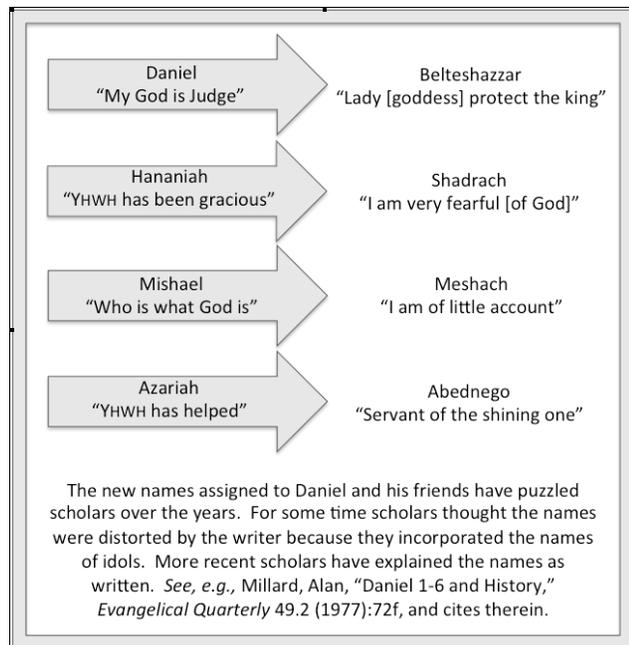
authority for this view. It is supposition. Scholars have no bright line indicator of when the Prophet section was closed, or whether the Prophet section is the only place of prophetic writings! The Law section, for example, is considered the writings of Moses, and Moses is still reckoned as Israel’s first and maybe greatest prophet. Another very viable explanation lies in the nature of Daniel as a prophetic writing. While the other prophets spoke forth in a “Thus saith the Lord” voice, setting out God’s warnings, instructions, and coming judgments to Israel and Judah, Daniel does something much different. Daniel’s focus is what one might expect from one active in foreign courts and in service of foreign kings. Daniel’s focus is on the world’s stage, not that of Jerusalem or Israel. Daniel’s ideas and insight are international in scope in a way unseen in the Prophet books. As we shall see in a later Daniel lesson, much of his writing on these issues is in an “apocalyptic form,” which merits a great deal of discussion later.

With this background in place, we proceed to unpack Daniel’s beginning section of narrative stories, stopping to pull an occasional weed!

## NARRATIVE STORIES

### *Daniel’s Faithfulness (1:1-21)*

Daniel begins “in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.” Nebuchadnezzar successfully besieged Jerusalem. Among the booty Nebuchadnezzar took to “the land of Shinar” were Judeans who were of the royal family and the nobility. Once back in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had his chief Eunuch Ashpenaz carefully select the best and brightest of the youths for training in the language and ways of Babylonian court and culture. As a part of their assimilation into Babylonian culture, the young men were given rations of food and drink from the king’s table. The eunuch also gave each of the four lads appropriate Babylonian names. Daniel and his friends each decided to forego the king’s food and wine, considering it defiling. Rather than simply refuse it, though, Daniel actually sought



permission from the eunuch. The eunuch was hesitant, recognizing that if the young men suffered, the king would hold the eunuch to account. The eunuch relented for a test period to see whether Daniel and his friends would suffer from some lack of nourishment. The reason the eunuch allowed Daniel this freedom was because,

God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs (Dan. 1:9).

For a ten-day trial period, Daniel and his friends were allowed to eat a vegetarian diet, drinking water rather than wine. After the trial period, the eunuch saw that the boys looked healthier than the others fed the richer food. The eunuch then allowed the four to continue their special diet. God honored the four with great learning and skill in their studies.

After three years passed, Daniel and his friends were brought before the king for inspection and testing. The king found that in matters of “wisdom and understanding,” the young men were “ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom” (Dan. 1:20). Daniel had job security!

Daniel does not tell us why the lads considered the king’s food and wine defiling. Scholars toss around ideas that the food would have included pork, which was certainly defiling. Wine, however, would not fit into the “defiling” category. Absent an explicit explanation, we cannot hope to know what was in the minds of the boys. We can know, however, that they were clearly seeking to live in ways that honored and respected YHWH, their God, even as they were in a foreign land being made to assimilate into a foreign culture. They took their faith into each day, and YHWH faithfully guarded their hearts, minds, and bodies.

Before leaving this story, there are two weeds we might stop and pick one academic and one practical. The academic weed involves the timing of the story. Chapter one begins with the identifier, “in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim.” Jehoiakim took the throne after Pharaoh Necho removed Jehoahaz in 609 BC. We do not have a Babylonian record that gives any invasion by Nebuchadnezzar into Judah during 606 BC or any siege of Jerusalem then. The Babylonian Chronicle does place Nebuchadnezzar and his army in the region from June 604 to January 603. The difficulty in trying to wedge this into an inconsistency is the inability to determine whether Daniel is using “Babylonian accession years” and whether the writer of Kings (and Jeremiah) is using Egyptian accession years or something else. Depending upon the accession formula used, and when the king came to the throne, one would not regard the first year as a reigning year. Without knowing which dating system is referred to, it is not fair to claim an error in the Biblical accounting. Similarly, the failure of the Babylonian

chronicle to specify action against the city of Jerusalem in that campaign does not mean that Nebuchadnezzar overlooked Jerusalem! The Babylonian Chronicles did not remotely detail every city conquered.

The practical weed centers on how we read and understand not just this but several other stories to come. These are not stories to teach the specific actions of the characters. This first story is not teaching, “be a tee-totaling vegetarian and God will bless you.” The story is teaching one should commit their life and actions to God and live faithfully to that commitment!

### **Point for Home:**

*God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs (Dan. 1:9).*

Daniel learned that he could live faithfully to the Lord, even in a pagan land, as his mind was set on serving the Lord wholeheartedly. This is no less true today, and is certainly no less true in a land where faithfulness is readily found. My prayer for my family and loved ones? Lord, may they live in devotion to you, seeking your will in their lives without regard to the cost, confident in your care.

### *The King’s Dream (2:1-49)*

Daniel chapter two sets up in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, which according to Babylonian accession years would have likely coincided with the end of Daniel’s three-year training period from chapter one. Nebuchadnezzar had an extremely disturbing dream, causing him to bring in his “Chaldeans,”<sup>4</sup> his wise men, to interpret the dream. As the Chaldeans began to speak in the latter half of verse four in chapter two, Daniel makes the switch from Hebrew into the Aramaic tongue.

The king’s servants asked Nebuchadnezzar to relate the dream so they could interpret it. The king refused. He believed that that they would lie about knowing the meaning. If he was to believe that they were really interpreting it, rather than

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<sup>4</sup> Here is another weed for some scholars. A number of commentators, like Porteous, N., *Daniel, A Commentary* (London 1965), at 28, consider using “Chaldeans” for a group of wise men to be an anachronistic usage of an ethnic term. In truth, there are a number of references in the royal inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar and others to the Chaldeans as a tribal people. By the time of Herodotus (c.484-c.425 BC), the Chaldeans are referenced as priests of Bel, indicating not only their tribal nature but also their role as men with supposed insight from the gods.

free-lancing some meaning, then they were going to need to first tell the king the dream rather than vice versa. This stunned the wise men, and they declared the king's demand impossible. The king furiously proclaimed that all wise men were useless, fakes and charlatans, and all would be put to death if no one were forthcoming and able to both tell the king the dream and interpret it.

Daniel and his three friends heard of the king's decision, and knowing their own lives were on the line knew exactly what to do! They prayed!

Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon (Dan. 2:18).

That very night, God revealed to Daniel both the dream and the interpretation. Before Daniel goes to the king, he first paused to thank God for hearing his prayers. With thanks and praise, Daniel blessed God who knew and revealed the deep hidden things, giving wisdom when asked and providing the very aid needed in the moment.

Daniel declared to the king's power structure his readiness and ability to do the very "impossible" thing the king was requesting. As Daniel was brought before the king, the king challenged him, "Are you able?" Daniel's reply was both humble in his own ability and confident in the Lord's:

No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries... (Dan. 2:27-28).

With that, Daniel proceeded to tell the king both his dream and its meaning. Upon hearing Daniel complete the task, the king, probably for the first time in his life, "fell on his face and paid homage" to Daniel. The king then worshipped Daniel's God and heaped honors upon Daniel.

The meaning of the dream is tied very closely to the vision Daniel has in the *chiastic* responsive chapter seven. We will wait and cover the meaning of both at the same time in a subsequent lesson. At this point, however, it is important to the story to realize that the vision's meaning takes the lesson of the chapter a step forward. The chapter showed God's knowledge of all things, even the dreams of the king. The interpretation showed that God's knowledge also extended deep into the future. No wonder Nebuchadnezzar fell before the Lord in worship!

## **Point for Home:**

*No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can... but there is a God in heaven... (Dan. 2:27-28).*

I am convinced many of us are limited in our lives because we are limited in our faith. There is a God who both *can* and *will!* God can do what needs to be done in our lives. Moreover, he will do what needs to be done. We always struggle with the difference between what we need and what we want. My first goal in life's struggles is God's aid in identifying what is needed for his kingdom and will on earth. It is then my prayer that he will meet that need, and that he will use me in meeting that need for others.

### *Idol Worship and God's Power to Deliver from the Fiery Furnace (3:1-30)*

In the third chapter of Daniel, we read of God's power to deliver his followers, even from the wrath of a king. Nebuchadnezzar makes a massive idol on the plains of Dura and ordered most everyone who was in government service to come before the statue and bow in worship. Failure to show obeisance would result in death by fire. Jealous government ministers saw this as a chance to eliminate Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They told the king that the three refused to worship the idol. The king called the three in and gave them one more chance to obey and show obeisance. The three told the king not to even waste time setting up the opportunity, they would sooner face his fire than deny their God.

Enraged, the king ordered the fire revved hotter than normal and the three were tied up and thrown into the furnace. Looking into the furnace, the king discovered that not only were the three without even a single mark, but their bonds were gone and there was a fourth presence in the furnace who was in appearance "like a son of the gods" (Dan. 3:25). This was not a light statement by the king. Archaeologists have uncovered other examples of this phraseology in a closely related time period. In Southern Turkey (Karatepe), an inscription dated a bit earlier reads of a king Azitawadda who cursed any who removed his legacy proclaiming that they should be "wiped out" by Ba'al, El, and "the whole group of the sons [children] of the gods."<sup>5</sup> The king knew that this was not a simple case of asbestos clothes on the three Jews; something divine had taken a special interest in the three. One cannot help but wonder if the king did not look upon his created statue as a bit silly at this point!

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<sup>5</sup> Pritchard, James D., *Ancient Near-Eastern Texts*, (Princeton 1969), at 654.

The three were brought out of the furnace with not so much as an odor of burn, and Nebuchadnezzar, who started the chapter ordering all to worship his created idol now ordered all to worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! What happened to the jealous government ministers seeking the firing (pun intended) of the three? They had to suffer the three getting promoted!

**Point for Home:**

*If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up (Dan. 3:17-18).*

Nebuchadnezzar gave the men a second chance. One quick bow and they were safe. All they needed was to show outwardly a devotion to the idol, even if inwardly they were praising God. Did they contemplate that doing so would give them a long life they could use in God's service? Did they consider that God knows their hearts and surely knew they did not really worship the idol? Yet that was not their decision. When given that second chance, they declared plain and simple, "God *can* save us, and if he doesn't, we don't care. We still will not deny our God!"

There is an expression of "setting your face to the wind." It is choosing a course and following it, regardless of how tough the going may get. It is choosing the right way, regardless of what may seem easier or more convenient. This runs deeper than a character trait. This is a decision that changes the course of one's life, and of the world's history. Is there any wonder that a glimpse into the furnace found God intimately saving these faithful three?

Lord, may I learn to set my face to the wind, determined to walk right before you, when it is easy, hard, or even impossible in human strength, trusting that you will walk with me, even if the road leads to death.

*God's Judgment on Proud Rulers / Nebuchadnezzar's Humiliation (4:1-37)*

In the chiasm of the Aramaic structure in Daniel, both chapters four and five become the focus point. These chapters both demonstrate God's sovereign judgment over proud rulers. Written in the language every court official understood perfectly (Aramaic), these chapters explained very personal events in the lives of two kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. In chapter four, the text begins with Nebuchadnezzar praising God, not as YHWH, but as "the Most High God":

How great are his signs,  
how mighty his wonders!  
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
and his dominion endures from generation to generation (Dan. 4:3).

From there, in Nebuchadnezzar's voice, the story is told. The king was "at ease" and "prospering." In the midst of his luxury, he had a dream that shook him up and scared him. The summoned wise men had no explanation for the dream, but Daniel did. The dream was of a great tree with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit. The tree provided shelter and food for many animals and birds. After a time, a holy one from heaven came down and chopped the tree down, stripped its leaves, and scattered its fruit. The stump was left in the grass amidst the grazing beasts. The voice added that the tree's mind was to be that of a beast's, and this was to last for "seven periods of time."

This dream dismayed Daniel, and after urging from the king, Daniel gave the interpretation. The king was powerful, as a tree reaching to the heavens. The king was a source of food and protection for his people. But the king's unrighteousness and oppression of the people were to be his undoing. God had declared that the king was going to lose his active reign and spend "seven periods of time" wondering the fields as a beast, mad and out of his mind. This would last until the king knew and acknowledged the rule of God Most High. Daniel urged the king to know that immediately, to break off his sins and reign in righteousness.

Twelve months passed and the king was strolling on his roof surveying his spectacular accomplishments as king. It was upon this expressed arrogance that God's judgment descended. The king in madness left the presence of his people and began living as a beast, unkempt and disheveled.<sup>6</sup> This lasted until Nebuchadnezzar lifted his eyes to heaven and acknowledged God Most High. From there, the king broke into praise as he was restored to his right mind proclaiming the glories of the Most High.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The late Old Testament scholar R. K. Harrison related seeing a man with a mental illness like that of Nebuchadnezzar institutionalized in England in 1946. The man suffered from "boanthropy," a mental disorder where one believes himself to be an ox or cow ("bo" from "bovine" plus "anthropy" from the Greek *anthropos* meaning "man"). Harrison, R. K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans 1969), at 1116-7.

<sup>7</sup> Some cynical scholars see in this story a confused history of centuries later, where the writer messed up the kings Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus. Because Nabonidus is recorded in Babylonian inscriptions as departing from the capital and living on an oasis for ten years, this is accorded as the basis for the Daniel story. This is quite a stretch, however, for many reasons, not the least of which is there is no indication that Nabonidus suffered from any illness of any kind. Actually later research has indicated that Nabonidus fled Babylon with an army leaving his son to

Nebuchadnezzar returned to his rule, a more humble man and a better king.

**Point for Home:**

*You shall be made to eat grass...till you know that the Most High rules (Dan. 4:25).*

This is a theme we see page after page in Scripture, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Maybe the refrain is repeated so often that we do not need to hear it again. Maybe we have this down! Maybe we have achieved humility!!! Maybe we are so much better than those people in the Bible who are proud!

Of course, we know better.

Lord, we praise you as the Great One. All that we have, all that we are, anything within us that is good, Lord, comes from you. We confess sins of pride and self-centeredness, and humbly seek your forgiveness. Give us wisdom and strength to serve you humbly each day.

*God's Judgment on Proud Rulers / Writing on the Wall (5:1-31)*

In the chiasmic structure, chapter five repeats the theme of chapter four: God judges the rulers of the world. No one is beyond his sight or his reach.

Chapter five sets the events in Babylon, where King Belshazzar had a feast for a thousand of his lords, with consumption of a great deal of wine. Not satisfied with the party, Belshazzar ordered that the holy vessels from Solomon's temple were brought out so that the concubines and others would use them for their drinking party. They toasted their idols with the holy vessels, downing drink after drink.

While this sacrilege was taking place, a hand appeared and wrote on the wall, scaring the king quite a bit. The king began summoning his wise men trying to understand the appearance of the mysterious hand and the words written. It was the queen who knew of Daniel, by now an old man, and urged the king to summon him forth:

There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the

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reign in order to avoid possible insurgence over his religious policies. (See the citations to this in the earlier lesson on the fall of Babylon downloadable at [www.Biblical-Literacy.com](http://www.Biblical-Literacy.com)).

wisdom of the gods were found in him, and King Nebuchadnezzar, your father—your father the king— made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar (Dan. 5:11-12).

With this, Belshazzar called Daniel offering him great rewards for any help. Daniel refused the rewards and prefaced his help with a short sermon. Daniel explained how Nebuchadnezzar had stumbled out of his arrogance and pride, until he turned and acknowledged God Most High. Then Daniel began to read the writing that had gone on the wall:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN (Dan. 5:25).

The words themselves were not unknown to the king; it was the interpretation that was missing. Each word was an Aramaic weight, in descending order, the *mina*, the *shekel*, and the *half-shekel*. Daniel then interpreted the words:

This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” (Dan. 5:26-28).

As interpreted, Daniel used words that sounded very similar to the weights. *Menah* meant “to number” and this was the indication that God had numbered the days. *Teqal* meant “to weigh” and this word was the indication that Belshazzar was “weighed” and did not measure up. *Peras* was a word meaning “to break in two,” and this was Daniel’s explanation that the kingdom was divided and given up.

Belshazzar, in a move some might reckon alcohol induced, celebrates the interpretation by giving Daniel royal clothes and a gold chain, proclaiming Daniel “the third ruler in the kingdom.” This is one of several places in the story that subtly refer to Belshazzar as acting king/co-regent rather than the singular king of Babylon. Historical records outside Scripture explain that Belshazzar’s birth father Nabonidus had abdicated effective reign on the throne to Belshazzar for at least ten years. Hence Belshazzar could be king in substance, even though not the singular king in title. The best Belshazzar could give Daniel was place number three (See also 5:7, 16). Of course these gifts meant nothing, as Daniel’s interpretation was borne out almost immediately:

That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old (Dan. 5:30-31).

As set out in the lesson on the fall of Babylon, the story in Daniel 5 is very consistent with that given in other historical documents. In the fifth century BC, Herodotus wrote of Babylon's fall in the night amidst revelry and intoxication. So also the Cyrus cylinder recounted the taking of the city with hardly a fight put up by Babylon.

Before we leave this chapter, we should note several “weeds” that occupy pages of scholarly comment. First, some scholars protest the reference in Daniel five to Nebuchadnezzar as “father” to Belshazzar as historical error. This protest is not fair because the idea of “father” in a regal sense is not always biological. On the throne, even if Nabonidus and Belshazzar had no familial relation, the father of the kingship of Babylon was easily identifiable as Nebuchadnezzar. We see a similar situation on the Mesha stele at the Louvre. Israel's king Jehu is called the son of Omri, even though he was a usurper responsible for killing the regal offspring of Omri's lineage (2 Kings 9). We must not read Daniel as something it is not. It is not a Babylonian court record making official notations of “king” with accession years, or of lineage trees. It is a private retelling of events.

A second “weed” is the reference to “Darius the Mede” receiving the kingdom from Belshazzar that night. This has kept many scholars up late at night trying to determine if Porphyry of Tyre (234-c.305AD) and other skeptics are right in saying that Daniel must have been written very late by a sloppy or ignorant historian. We can state with a measure of certainty, that there were historical Darius figures, but they were kings of Persia a much later date. Darius I was 522-486 BC, Darius II was 423-404 BC, and Darius III was 336/5-331 BC. Of course none of these could be Darius the Mede. Furthermore, historical records show that Cyrus was the Mede/Persian conquerer of Babylon, not a man named Darius. (Although as a practical matter it was not Darius himself who conquered the city, but an army and general on his behalf). As a name, Darius in Old Persian meant “he possesses.” It is not fair to assume it was a name only of kings, never found in any other context, and could easily be a name of a one given possession or taking possession of a city. This point is fully aside from the points other scholars make about possible identities of this “Darius the Mede” that are consistent with the historical context of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>8</sup>

### **Point for Home:**

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Wiseman, D. J., *et al.*, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, (London 1965), at 9ff.

*You have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored (Dan. 5:23).*

There is something amazingly foolish about putting faith in anyone or anything other than God. What is worth such honor, other than God? The stories of God are not stories of some powerful deity far removed from the daily doings of humanity. The story of God is one of relationships in the nitty-gritty of life. God is tuned into our every move, and yet we still find it easy to ignore him and fail to give him the praise and honor properly his.

Lord, forgive us these shortcomings, and may we praise and honor you as a God involved in our world and our lives. May we see your hand as it writes not only on the walls of the world, but also on the pages of our lives. May we sense your touch in each beat of our hearts, and walk in relationship with you as the loving and caring Father you are. Thank you that we see in Jesus, your final Word, which further attests to your commitment to loving us in the every day nature of our life. May we grow in our understanding and ability to praise you before a watching world.

#### *Daniel and the Lion's Den (6:1-28)*

Daniel chapter six sets up the sixth and final narrative story of God's great care for his people and over the world. In this story, we have Darius the king (who Wiseman argues is the same as Cyrus based on his reading of Daniel 8:28, *see* citation at footnote 8) setting up a kingdom here and Daniel has a key position. This incites jealousy among other officials who plan a trap to take Daniel down. At the instigation of the jealous men, the king unwittingly passes a law that will conflict Daniel's ability to be an obedient member of the state. The king's law states that no one was allowed to pray to a god for a thirty-day period without going through the king. Failure to abide by this law would result in being pitched into the den of lions.

Even though Daniel knew the law was in place, he kept to his prayerful habit and three times daily prayed in his house on his knees facing Jerusalem. The jealous men caught Daniel in his practice and ratted Daniel out to the king. The king was obligated to follow his legal decree and begrudgingly sent Daniel into the den, hoping, that God might miraculously rescue Daniel:

May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you! (Dan. 6:17).

The king spent a sleepless night in fasting, while Daniel spent the night in the home of lions, but also in the hands of God. At daybreak, the king raced to check on Daniel and found him alive and well. Daniel explained that God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions, and Daniel was removed from the pit. The men that had set Daniel up were then tossed into the pit and the lions had their fill! Darius was moved to decree that “the God of Daniel” was worthy of worship as “the living God” who “delivers and rescues” and “who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions” (Dan. 6:27-27).

**Point for Home:**

*May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you! (Dan. 6:17).*

The lessons of Daniel repeat constant themes. No matter the appearance of things, no matter the people in charge, no matter the circumstances of fate, there is a God who is in control. He is a God who gets into the details of the lives of people on earth. He cares for his people and seeks those who humbly seek him. Impersonal forces of nature do not dictate life; it is the give and take of human choices in the midst of a caring and attentive God.

My final prayer in these points for home is one for each who studies these lessons with us: May we each serve God continually and may we see his deliverance! Then may we share it with others, and see his glory unfold in our day and lives.

**CONCLUSION**

These are rich Bible stories that proclaim the grandeur of a God who tends to the affairs of mankind, among the captives and the kings. He lifts the humble and opposes the proud. He moves among nation groups to effect his will. All history is open to him and accountable to him. This message should both warn and assure the reader as it moves the reader to praise. Who is like the God Most High? No one! And no amount of “weeds” should ever distract from that truth!