

Expansions on the Book of Daniel

Introduction

This document follows the same pattern as those dealing with Genesis, Exodus, First Samuel and Jonah, all posted on this home page. The Introductions of each lay out the same general plan which is applicable here, thereby making it unnecessary to go into detail. And so the idea laying behind the current document as well as the others is not to give a scholarly account of the Book of Daniel, let alone present one along devotional lines. If that is what one seeks, including historical data, plenty of information can be found elsewhere. The remarks set down here stick to the facts of the text yet knowingly take liberty to expand them, hence the title of this document. All this is done for the specific reason of guiding the reader in the practice of *lectio divina*. That, in turn, will allow one to move more into prayerful reflection on the text and hence God's presence. Other than having this specific purpose in mind, "Expansions" is of no value. Should the text be taken as a document to be read through, it would come across as awkward and in many occasions, repetitious due to frequent references and cross references. These, in turn, invariably bring in use of a common host of words and phrases ('next verse, 'cf. previous verse' and so forth). Thus we could say that "Expansions" is to be prayed through but prayed through with the text of Daniel obviously in the forefront.

The document at hand expands upon all the verses of the Book of Daniel, allowing us to have a broader picture of them while at the same time keeping within the bounds of the unique discipline of *lectio divina*. At the same time this freedom to elaborate upon the text avoids flights of fancy. Such an approach was less a temptation with the other biblical texts but is more so with the apocryphal nature of Daniel which contains vivid and sometimes alien imagery. In other words, the book at hand has a very different cast from the other works. Nevertheless, the spirit of *lectio* can take care of this handily. It is hoped that by sticking to the original text the occasional exotic images will be put into perspective and make more sense, especially in the light of *lectio divina*.

The Apocrypha (written in Greek or the Septuagint) contains the **Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men** which traditionally is inserted between vs. 23 and vs. 24 of Chapter Three of the Book of Daniel. That text will be included at the end of the document at hand as a kind of supplement.

Many of the words are in Chaldean, very similar to Hebrew, and have the same or proximate spelling. It should be noted that often the difference in spelling between the two languages with regard to verbs is that the first vowel in Chaldean is the letter "e" compared with "a" in Hebrew.

It's helpful to note the value of the Hebrew verbal root system, for frequent reference to it is used throughout this text. Hebrew verbs can assume various meanings, given their form, and are the basis of most nouns. Thus a given word can imply multiple, subtle meanings which escapes translation. When a particular word is discussed, usually the next occurrence of that word in the Book of Daniel is cited. If not, then another reference from the Bible is given. However, quite a few words are unique to Daniel.

The English text used throughout is **The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (RSV)**, New York, 1973.

Chapter One

Vs. 1: In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

The Second Book of Kings (24.10-15) give a more detailed account of this siege. Both the verse at hand and Second Kings use the verb *tsur* for “besieged” which connotes a pressing in upon, quite apt for describing the current state of affairs. The former has *tsur* in the active sense whereas the latter has the noun *matsur* derived from that verbal root prefaced with the preposition *b-* (in) which gives a more graphic picture of the situation. Thus the latter reads literally, “came to the city in siege.” This can also suggest that the Babylonians had a siege mentality, if you will, long before they arrived at Jerusalem. Here the “servants of Nebuchadnezzar” are doing the assault during which Nebuchadnezzar himself comes on the scene in the next verse. Perhaps word got back to him that his troops were faltering, some of which must have been non-Babylonians pressed into service and thus lacking motivation. His presence would strike fear into them, and hence they would press the assault. To suffer defeat at the hands of a second-rate power would send a message that it was open season on the kingdom of Babylon.

King Jehoiakim hadn't been on the throne long...three years...when he was faced with this threat and eventually carried off to Babylon. He “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” [23.37], this in a short span of time. We have no details about this evil, but it must have riled the Lord considerably. And so the only way to deal with this evil is to bring about an invasion by the most powerful nation of the time, Babylon. Jehoiakim's three year reign was compounded by the fact that this evil was “according to all that his fathers had done.” Mention of “fathers” is like a warning bell. When you hear it as in the present case, you know something much larger is at work. The ancients put a premium upon tradition and those responsible for its continuance, the chief way of maintaining social and religious order. So to question the behavior of these fathers is a serious matter, for the intent is hopefully to prevent a repetition of that wicked behavior.

As for Jehoiakim, he left a less than desirable track record in three years, one that could only be broken by an external disaster. The overall situation deteriorated even further when at a later time Zedekiah became king and followed the example of both his immediate predecessor and others before him. Such was the occasion for the second fall of Jerusalem eleven years later. Early on this succession of evil upon evil becomes a familiar pattern in the Bible, that is, commencing with the banishment from Eden, then on to Noah's flood to wipe clean the earth and not long afterward followed by the tower of Babel. In sum, a pattern difficult to break (‘according to all that his fathers had done’), was established. And that first real break came with the call of Abram followed centuries later with the definitive break ushered in with the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

What appears to be a minor detail in the account of Second Kings and can be inferred with regard to the exiles in the Book of Daniel, has greater significance. That is to say, everyone was deported “except the poorest people of the land” [vs. 14]. Such persons are called *dalath* which derives from the verbal root *dalal* meaning to hang down and implies being weak or feeble. They wouldn't be of value in Babylon but left behind to tend fields and thus enjoyed a relative freedom. It's a shrewd move on the part of Nebuchadnezzar to maintain conquered territory; people in that position

weren't a threat to anyone. After the Babylonians departed Jerusalem with captives in tow—and the *dalath* were standing there on the road watching with some admitted glee—they returned to Jerusalem in order to comb over the rubble. Being accustomed to living on the fly and using what most people had discarded, the *dalath* repaired some ruined homes for their own use, even if they were kind of make-shift, an improvement over living in rundown shacks out in the field. They may even have used the ruins as pens for their animals. Some time afterward the *dalath* had to put up with a new king, Zedekiah, who reigned for eleven years in the same, monotonous pattern mentioned just above. Even though he evicted these people from the semi-destroyed Jerusalem, he did them no harm because they performed the work most other people shied away from.

The second invasion by Nebuchadnezzar was more disastrous for the Israelites than the first. Certainly as ruler of a super-power he had to deal with other rebellions, so this one was not new, even a peripheral event in the grander scheme of things. As had been the case with King Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar allowed his captain of the guard to leave “some of the poorest (*dalath*) of the land to be vine dressers and plowmen” [25.12]. These were the most fortunate of the local inhabitants, having no participation in the siege, which means their lives hadn't changed at all. Most likely the *dalath* were better off after the two invasions because they made good use of the destruction left behind. In other words, they were little more than scavengers. This incident is detailed somewhat because it situates the Book of Daniel against a wider background even though the drama about to unfold shortly operates on a different level. Yet it is not divorced from the *dalath* who were in Jerusalem while Daniel was in the process of gaining prestige in far-off Babylon. Perhaps some communication took place between the two over the years, especially with the prospect much later on of the exiles returning home. However, the *dalath* weren't terribly concerned as to what happened there, let alone the possibility of another wicked king followed by an invasion. They knew they'd be left alone to fend for themselves and most likely scorned by the exiles. For them, what goes around, comes around. Nevertheless, these experiences taught them something precious about reliance upon God, in many ways just as well informed as Daniel concerning divine matters. The fact that this wisdom acquired by neglect is unrecorded lends a sense of greater mystery as to the text.

Vs. 2: And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

The familiar biblical words “into his hand” are ominous, leaving the details up to the reader, for we have no information as to the ultimate fate of King Jehoiakim. One thing is certain, however, that the Lord himself handed him over to Nebuchadnezzar. How this actually played out isn't described but left to the reader's imagination.

Note two uses of the phrase “house of God” or one with a capital “G” and the other with a lower case “g.” That is to say, a contrast between the God of Israel and the god Marduk.

Perhaps Jehoiakim wasn't aware of the Lord being at work at the moment Jerusalem had fallen nor when he was taken captive. However, there was a silver lining: his mother and wives, not to mention officials (cf. 2Kg 24.15), were led off to Babylon in his company which mitigated the tragedy somewhat and suggests that he was able to live out the rest of his life in relative peace.

Note, too, that some of the temple's vessels were taken which implies that King Nebuchadnezzar left the rest behind. Perhaps he wanted the Israelites to continue their services so that the survivors might not become completely alienated or more practically, his troops were unable to carry everything off to Babylon. This invasion was not as bad as the later one precipitated by King Zedekiah who was blinded after having seen his sons slain before him. Like Johoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar himself was unaware of the Lord's participation in all this as vs. 2 notes, for he and his military officials were more or less passive instruments.

As for the temple's "vessels," the noun is *kely* which applies more generally to utensils and can include clothing in the sense of ornaments. "He shall also carry off to Egypt their gods with their molten images and with their precious vessels of silver and of gold" [11.8]. The Babylonians were more interested in items of higher value which the text does not describe as inferred by the apparently lesser *kely*.

The word "house" (*beyth*) is used instead of temple...a common expression...thereby indicating that the Lord's presence among his people was there both in and among them, not above nor beyond their reach. Most likely Nebuchadnezzar himself had a hand in deciding which items to take, for they were destined to the *beyth* of his own god (i.e., Marduk) which was in Shinar. This city is first mentioned in Gn 10.10 where Nimrod, son of Cush (one of the sons of Noah after the flood) as the location of Babel, famous for the confusion of one language into many different ones. The prophet Isaiah mentions Shinar as well (Is 11.11), one of the places where the "Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people." So by mentioning Shinar, the author of Daniel has in mind right at the beginning of his book the return of Israel to its native land.

As for the *kely* taken to Shinar, they are not placed within the temple dedicated to Marduk but in its "treasury" or '*otsar*. "And Solomon brought...the silver, the gold and the vessels and stored them in the treasuries of the house of the Lord." '*Otsar* suggests a building adjacent to the temple itself, a kind of sacristy, where liturgical items were kept. Because the *kely* were of secondary importance, they did not have the same affect as the ark of the Lord among the Philistines: "the men who did not die were stricken with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven" [1Sam 5.12]. Note in the verse at hand that Marduk (though not explicitly mentioned) is called "his (Nebuchadnezzar's) god." That is to say, Nebuchadnezzar had sole possession of Marduk meaning that he was on the same plane, that is, a living god.

Vs. 3: Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility,

This is the only mention of Ashpenaz, Nebuchadnezzar's "eunuch" or *sarys* which can also apply to a (un-castrated) minister of a royal court. "And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names" [vs. 7]. In the verse at hand, Ashpenaz is not just any eunuch but a "chief" (*rav* meaning great) one who accompanied his master on this expedition to subdue Johoiakim's revolt. Most likely he came along to check out King Johoiakim's harem and other women suitable for bringing back to his master's court in Babylon. That seems to be behind the words "to bring some of the people of Israel."

In addition to this task, Ashpenaz is to make a selection of two groups: the royal “family” and “nobility.” The first term is *zarah* which literally means seed and the second, *partemym*, which is a word of Persian origin, the only use of this term in Daniel. Two other biblical references are Ester 1.3 and 6.9, the former being cited here: “In the third year of his (Ahsuerus) gave a banquet for all his princes and servants (etc.).” In the verse at hand, Ashpenaz and his associates, possibly eunuchs as well, first lined up the most beautiful women he could find followed by the men he deemed fit for service in Nebuchadnezzar’s court. The men must have been terrified, knowing that they too might be castrated once they reached Babylon. Any rejects were handed over to the sword and not allowed to join the *dalath* noted in vs. 1. If so, they would organize the survivors and formulate a revolt later on.

Vs. 4: youths without blemish, handsome and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to serve in the king's palace, and to teach them the letters and language of the Chaldeans.

This verse continues directly from the previous one and singles out a second group to be led away to Babylon with the chief eunuch Ashpenaz supervising those deemed suitable for his master’s court. It was a task familiar to him, having done this many times in other military expeditions, a way of culling the best and brightest from all over the known world, thereby enhancing Babylon's prestige. The noun “youth” is derived from the verb *yamad* (to be born) referring to those chosen by reason of six qualities which must have applied to others from previously conquered lands. The number isn’t given but presumably is small as can be inferred by the following:

- 1) “Without blemish” (literally, 'there is not in them all blemish') or *mu'um*, that is, having no stain, usually in the physical sense, this being the only term in the Bible.
- 2) “Handsome” is designated by the common adjective *tov* (good) and modifies *mar'eh* or appearance which is not in the English text and can be rendered “of good appearance.” “Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's rich food be observed by you, and according to what you see deal with your servants” [vs. 13].
- 3) “Skillful” is the participle *sakal* which basically means to look at in the sense of beholding. Also *sakal* applies to prudence and attention to a matter with care and understanding. “And those among the people who are wise shall make many understand though they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, for some days” [11.33]. In the verse at hand, *sakal* modifies “wisdom” or *chakmah* which connotes dexterity in a particular skill. “As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom” [1.17].
- 4) “Knowledge” or *dahath* means to know in an intimate, detailed manner. The adjective “endowed” is the verbal root for this noun, *yadah*. “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” [12.4].
- 5) “Understanding” is the verb *byn* which means to distinguish, to separate and is found often throughout Daniel which will come in very handy, given the rather exotic nature of the prophet’s visions. The preposition *bayin* (between) derives from this root which gives pretty good insight into the meaning of *byn* and how it can apply to thing difficult to grasp. “As I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth” [8.5]. In the verse at

hand, *byn* modifies “learning” or *madah* which derives from the verbal root *yadah* mentioned in #4. “As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom” [1.17].

6) “Competent” or *koach* is a noun meaning strength or might and can apply to the possession of riches. “And he ran at him in his mighty wrath” [8.6]. It is used with two qualities, the first being the ability to “serve” or *hamad*, a verb fundamentally meaning to stand or to take one’s place. It suggests permanence, that these youths of a small but indeterminate number will remain in the king of Babylon’s service not just during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign but his successors. While that may sound good in theory, often a change of absolute rulers means out with the old and in with the new. Chances are many of not all the advisers of the former ruler were put to death or expelled, something which the newly chosen captives knew could befall them. For another use of *hamad*, cf. 8.7: “and the ram had no power to stand before him.”

With regard to the verse at hand, the verb “teach” or *lamad* is to be considered in light of *koach* (‘competent’) in the last verse. Basically it means to chastize, to discipline, and is the only instance of this verb in Daniel. Often *lamad* is used in conjunction with the divine Law or Torah as in Dt 4.14: “And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess.” *Lamad* has as its object education of the Chaldeans, a word applicable to the inhabitants of Babylon. By way of side note, Kesed (the origin of this term) is a son of Nahor, Abraham’s brother (cf. Gn 22.22).

“Letters and language” belong to the Chaldeans, not the Hebrew youths, whom Ashpenaz has chosen. That means they would have to learn quickly under considerable pressure. Given the fact that Babylon was such a dominant power, chances are that educated Hebrews already were familiar with Chaldean culture and religious practices. What they lacked quickly could be supplemented and then perfected. However, to assume this total immersion meant that the Hebrews would be in grave danger of losing their own heritage and culture, especially if they intermarried. Obviously this was the intent of Ashpenaz which reflected that of King Nebuchadnezzar. This forgetfulness would be intensified when the Hebrews became exposed to others of their age who similarly had been taken captive. Then again, for many this was a special privilege, lifting them from the obscurity of a small country to the very center of power in the world. And so these chosen Hebrews stood at the opposite of the societal pyramid as the *dalath* of vs. 1, those left behind...the remnant...to raise their animals and crops amid Jerusalem’s ruins.

Vs. 5: The king assigned them a daily portion of the rich food which the king ate, and of the wine which he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.

The previous two verses which are to be taken as one speak of Ashpenaz selecting young men for service in the royal court at Babylon, presumably at Jerusalem just after its fall. Now vs. 5 begins in Babylon itself. That means between the fall and Jerusalem and the trek to Babylon the young men who had been chosen forcibly had plenty of time to ponder their fate. Because they were to be lodged in the royal palace, most likely their education, if you will, started during this journey. The Babylonians didn’t want to waste one minute. Both King Nebuchadnezzar and his chief eunuch were in the retinue after having taken Jerusalem and were eager to return home and introduce their captives to the court and others like them who had been taken from other lands.

At times during the journey he may have checked out these youths to see if already they showed promise. Because Nebuchadnezzar himself was in the retinue, they along more quickly. Besides, he was eager to hold a triumphal march and show off his captives.

Although we get the impression that the king himself took a direct hand in the education process of which vs. 5 speaks, chances this was not the case. These words can be a way of saying that the youths were ensconced within the royal palace, a kind of fortress from which they could not escape, albeit the loveliest on earth. However, the verb for “assigned” (*manah*: also as to prepare, to make ready) suggests that Nebuchadnezzar gave to his underlings some general rules to be followed and checked in on them on occasion. *Devar* is the noun for “portion” which derives from the verb *davar* meaning to speak. In some ways *devar* is like the Greek *logos*, an important word with multiple meanings, and difficult to pin down. With this in mind, the *devar* coming from the Babylonian king himself was not to be treated lightly. It was, if you will, an expression or utterance of what he wanted to be done with his captives.

Devar is specified here as being associated with “rich food” or *pat bag*, two words used together and sometimes combined as is the case in four verses in Daniel. *Pat* means a morsel or piece of food while *bag* is a Persian word for food. The only other use of these two words (separated) is 11.26: “Even those who eat his rich food shall be his undoing.” Since this *pat bag* was what Nebuchadnezzar ate, it was of the highest quality, something the youths couldn’t even imagine before arriving in Babylon. What prevented them from being dazzled by all this was knowledge that their master had been Ashpenaz, a eunuch; easily they could end up like him after three years, that is, castrated. After all, they were in the royal court and were surrounded by the most beautiful women King Nebuchadnezzar could assemble. While the youths were treated royally (literally), there was a danger this rich food and drink, let alone sex, could have a corrupting influence and weaken them for the work for which they were intended.

Gadal as “educated” fundamentally means to become great or to grow. “Out of one of them came forth a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east and toward the glorious land” [8.0]. although the *gadal* of vs. 5 is not spelled out, we can assume it was centered upon what was required of those in the court of the most powerful man in the world at that time. Astrology must have been involved which plays a role later. After all, it and the more scientific nature of astronomy had strong roots in Babylon. Other parts of the educational process involved court manners and foreign relations which the Hebrew youths picked up from their peers snatched from other lands. Thus in a short yet intense span of time, the young men would be ready for service. The time frame of three years suggests a program that already had been in place for others like them.

So in just three quick years graduation, as it were, took place during which the youths had crammed as much information as possibly about life at the Babylonian court, its customs and behavior. Nothing is said about those young men who may not have fit the qualifications despite the careful choices made by Ashpenaz back in Jerusalem. A lot was riding on him, too. So these three men were introduced to the royal court and were to “stand” (*hamad*: cf. vs. 4 as ‘serve’) before the king himself with Ashpenaz proudly in front. Since other family members were taken along as captives, chances are they too were present during this momentous occasion. Despite such an exalted honor, the Hebrews youths and their families knew they were stuck permanently in Babylon. Such was the beginning of their new life in a gilded cage.

Vs. 6: Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

Three youths describes in vs. 4 are singled out by reason of the role they will place later on and are from the tribe of Judah; none from the other eleven tribes of Israel are mentioned. The word for “tribes” here is *ben* or literally “son” compared with the more common designation of *mateh* and *shevet*. The former also means a rod or staff and the latter, a branch. The three young men are sons of Judah which implies that they had been noteworthy in that tribe before the fall of Jerusalem. We don’t have any information as to their status or influence they had exerted, but they must have stood out among the select youths whom Ashpenaz had chosen.

Vs. 7: And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Misha-el he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

Possibly the “chief” of the eunuchs is Ashpenaz noted in vs. 3 as *rav* meaning great although here the noun *sar* is used which often applies to a prince or commander of soldiers. One such reference to the former meaning is 10.13: “The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days.” Calling Ashpenaz a *sar* thus can suggest his presence during the siege and fall of Jerusalem when he picked out those young men to be trained in Nebuchadnezzar’s court. We don’t know if this chief eunuch gave names to the other captives...most likely not...but singled out the three by reason of their special character and intelligence. To assist him in this he must have asked other captives. The men had no choice but to submit to this imposition of names which was very important because it signaled a change not just in outward identification but in their very being. In other words, no longer were they considered of the tribe of Judah but Babylonians.

Chances are Daniel, Hananiah and Misha-el knew this change of names was in store for them because word gets around quickly in a royal palace, a place notorious for intrigue and rumors. In sum, the Babylonian names Belteshazzar means “Bel protect the king,” Shadrach as “command of the moon god” and Abednego: “servant of the god,” a solar god and overseer of netherworld. By attributing divine attributes the chief of the eunuchs believed he was performing an exorcism of sorts, of divesting the three of any association with the God of Israel. Once this had happened, (supposedly) the men themselves would obtain a share in King Nebuchadnezzar’s own divinity as well as those others in his immediate circle. But since Daniel and the other were devout Jews and found this change of names revolting, they could see the humor in this. In private they must have joked about the matter and addressed each other by their Babylonian names in a mocking fashion to make light of their situation.

As for the actual transfer of new names, it must have taken place in a temple, perhaps even with Nebuchadnezzar himself in attendance. By inviting the families (that is, if any had been taken captive along with them) of the three youths it was hoped they too might be inspired to change their names and thus become fully integrated into Babylonian society and more importantly, Babylonian religion. After all, it had happened many times with captives from other nations. However, Nebuchadnezzar was in for a rude awakening.

Vs. 8: But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank; therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

The verb “resolved” in Hebrew consists of two words, *sum* and *lev*. The former means to put, to place or to set in array while the latter is the common noun for heart. Thus the text reads “But Daniel placed in his heart.” Such an expression reveals Daniel’s resolution with regard to food and drink but says nothing about his attitude towards his new name, Belteshazzar. This was the worst insult of them all, so his denial of the king’s food was the best protest he could muster without endangering Hananiah, Misha-el and the others who had been taken captive. His protest can be summed up in the verb *ga’al* which has religious overtones and connotes pollution (*ga’al* also means to redeem, to buy back). After all, Daniel considered himself defiled by the name imposed upon him, Belteshazzar or “Bel protect the king.” Every time Daniel heard this name he cringed, for it identified him with the god Bel. Would that he could have it changed, but that was out of the question, a burden that weighed heavily upon Daniel. Yet as time passed, he would learn to use it to his advantage and those of his fellow exiles.

The words *sum* and *lev* just noted suggest that Daniel had taken this vow of sorts on his own accord without consultation. If he adopted a passive type of protest, perhaps the others might find courage to join in. Anyway, it was a risky gesture that could put all the Hebrew captives in jeopardy. For another use of *ga’al*, see Is 63.2: “Their life blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment.”

So once Daniel had decided upon this covert course of action, he approached the chief of the eunuchs to do the same. This may have been Ashpenaz noted in the last verse whom Daniel figured would be sympathetic. After all, Ashpenaz had been the one who chose Daniel at the fall of Jerusalem and may have been acquainted with some of the Jewish dietary customs. When making this request, Daniel he did with tongue in cheek, for, this chief of the eunuchs had just changed Daniel’s name and those of his closest friends. To push the matter further might just invite reprisals

The verb is “asked,” or *baqash* which means more to seek and in the case at hand, intimates a certain respect and reverence toward Ashpenaz. “When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it” [8.15].

Vs. 9: And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs;

This verse suggests that the chief of the eunuchs responded immediately to Daniel’s request not to suffer defilement. As soon as Daniel laid eyes upon him, he knew that God had disposed him favorably, that is, with “favor” and “compassion,” *chesed* and *rachamym*. The former is a well known term as applicable to divine mercy and generally considered as untranslatable. It involves piety and reverence, not unlike the Latin *pietas* which is applicable to all domains of life, religious, family and other social relationships. The other reference to *chesed* in Daniel is 9.4 where the English “steadfast” is often associated with it in translation: “O Lord, the great and terrible God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.” In some ways *rachamym* is more tender than *chesed* in that the verbal root *racham* means to cherish

with tender affection. “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness; because we have rebelled against him” [9.9].

Both *chesed* and *rachamym* are extraordinary qualities with strong divine overtones which the chief of the eunuchs displayed toward Daniel. Hopefully these two qualities would extend to Hananiah and Misha-el, including the other captives. If so, they would pick up this favorable disposition toward Daniel. Once Daniel was certain of this divine intervention in his mentor, he knew that this could work in favor of his fellow captives later on. The big question was whether or not they would respond favorably, and not just they but the eunuchs under control of their master. After all, never had the captives experienced such wealth and extravagance on so large a scale. although the verse at hand speaks of favor and compassion toward Daniel, we can be assured it was extended to any family member taken captive along with him as well as companions.

Vs. 10: and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear lest my lord the king, who appointed your food and your drink, should see that you were in poorer condition than the youths who are of your own age. So you would endanger my head with the king."

This verse is part of the previous one and reveals the specific nature of the chief of the eunuch's *chesed* and *rachamym*. Obviously he knew the mind and temperament of his king, Nebuchadnezzar, and came right out with a warning to Daniel. The command for Daniel and his two companions, not to mention any others, was for them to eat and to drink what the king consumed. That doesn't mean they sat at the royal table for every meal but could have eaten in a room adjacent to it not unlike Joseph with his brothers. “They served him by himself and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians” [Gn 43.32].

Manah is the verb for “appointed” as in vs. 5 for the same situation (‘assigned’). Obviously King Nebuchadnezzar didn't micro manage the dietary needs of his new captive-guests but gave the chief of the eunuchs and his associates general instructions. He made it a point to check in on occasion unannounced which put everyone on edge. So when the chief of the eunuchs asked Daniel about what the king might think, he had his personal welfare on the line behind this request. To his credit he came right out with the words: “You would endanger my head with the king.” *Chuv* means “endanger” or being made liable to a penalty; it is the only use of this verb in the Bible from which derives the noun “debt.” The peril of Daniel's action vis-a-vis the chief of the eunuchs is heightened by the preposition *l-* ('to') which reads literally “to the king” as though this man's head would roll directly to the feet of the king.

Eventually King Nebuchadnezzar would discover Daniel's practice of denying food from the royal table, for he would be “in poorer condition” compared with his fellows. The king might not ask Daniel directly nor the chief of the eunuchs about why this was so but his companions who lived and worked with him on a daily basis. That would be the best way of gleaning any information, for if they lied, their heads would roll. The verb *zahaph* coupled with *peny* (literally, ‘face’) is used to express “poor condition” or a sight that would grab one's attention by reason of an unhealthy demeanor. *Zahaph* means to be angry and sad as well. “When Joseph came to them in the morning and saw them, they were troubled” [Gn 40.6]. *Gyl* is a noun for “age” and can mean a circle,

generation or gladness; it has this specific use only here. "Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy" [Ps 43.4].

Vss. 11 & 12: Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah; "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.

Because vs. 11 is a kind of introduction to vs. 12, the two verses are combined.

Meltsar is the noun for "steward" which occurs one other time in the Bible: "So the steward took away their rich food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables" [vs. 16]. Possibly this word of Persian origin applies to an office with regard to the treasury or store of wine. The latter seems more appropriate in light of the verse at hand. This *meltsar* was "appointed" by the chief of the eunuchs, *manah* being the verb noted last in vs. 10. The chief of the eunuchs may have sympathized with Daniel's proposal but by reason of being more intimately associated with the king, decided to pass off responsibility to the steward. Both these men had to treat the matter with the utmost secrecy else they, including their families, would be put to death.

Daniel was so confident of the success of a strictly vegetarian diet compared with the rich food of the royal table that he bade the steward to "test" not just him but those with him whom he calls "servants" (*heved*; next reference is vs. 13). The verb here is *nasah* which also can apply to being tempted. It is found as "try" in vs. 14; another reference is Ps 26.2: "Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind." Obviously Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah went along with Daniel who quickly became their spokesman. If this experiment worked, the other Hebrew youths might join in. Then there were always the youths from other foreign lands. It would be surprising that part of Daniel's motivation was not so much exposure to the rich food at King Nebuchadnezzar's table but the grossly overweight people who indulged in it. The overweight nobles added to the grotesque scene that Daniel and his companions had to face on an almost daily basis. And so throughout this all, Daniel and his companions were determined to maintain their physical fitness in order to be in a good position of dealing with these overweight, lazy officials. Actually there was a method in this. King Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute despot interested in maintaining his own power. If he could keep his top officials happy with rich food and drink, thereby semi-debilitating them, it was easier for him to maintain control. Such was his approach to keeping tabs on the youths who partook of his table.

Vs. 13: Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's rich food be observed by you, and according to what you see deal with your servants."

Daniel continues with his proposal to the steward appointed by the chief of the eunuchs with regard to "our appearance" or *mar'eh* as in vs. 4 which is rendered literally as "of good appearance." It is derived from the common verb "to see" and here is as "observed" or *ra'ah*. In other words, Daniel wishes this steward to pay careful attention to him, his three intimate companions and other youths who had been taken captive. We don't know the exact number of these other young men. Since all were of one mind, readily they concurred with Daniel's proposal. After all, it was for only ten days (cf. vs. 12). Daniel must have conspired first with Hananiah,

Misha-el and Azariah first to see what they had to contribute after which they spread the word quietly among their confreres. This was more difficult than first imagined because they had to avoid letting others discover their experiment all the while not knowing whether the steward appointed as their guardian at the royal table might squeal on them.

The common verb *hasah* (to do, to make) translates as “deal with.” Note that the proper Hebrew names are used here, not the Babylonian ones bestowed in vs. 7. Daniel and his close companions must have used the former, the latter only for official or public events. And so we have two types of appearances, if you will: the one with regard to the Babylonian names (false appearance) and the other with regard to eating vegetables and drinking water (true appearance).

Vs. 14: So he hearkened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days.

Shamah is the verb for “hearkened” commonly as to hear, to listen and used with *davar* or “matter.” Refer back to vs. 5 which mentions *devar* or the noun for “portion” which derives from the verb *davar* meaning to speak. As noted there, in some ways *devar*, like *davar* in the verse at hand, resembles the Greek *logos*, an important word with multiple meanings difficult to pin down. Furthermore, the preposition *l-* (to) is prefaced to *davar* which reads literally “to this matter,” indicative of close, sustained attention to the request of Daniel and his companions. Obviously the steward knew he was taking his life into his own hands, so the ten days during which the experiment took place must have been the longest in his life. The same, of course, applied to his boss, the chief of the eunuchs. When the steward, Daniel and others met—perhaps not all the youths which would be too obvious and a give-away to any court spies—it had to be at a time and in a place they knew was secure. Perhaps following the daily round of rich food and wine was best, a time when everyone, including King Nebuchadnezzar, were stuffing themselves and getting drunk.

Nasah is the verb for “tested” noted last in vs. 12 in the same context as the one at hand. During this time the steward slipped the Hebrews the vegetables and plain water they requested. We don’t have any details as to how he pulled this off this at the royal table, but it succeeded. Then again, Nebuchadnezzar’s officials were too busy gulping down food and guzzling wine to take notice. If they were doing this on a daily basis which the text seems to suggest, Daniel and his companions would succeed in their experiment handsomely.

Vs. 15: At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's rich food.

From the point of view of modern dietary practice, physical fitness and the secret program adopted by Daniel worked perfectly. However, the pressures of the royal court to eat and drink what was put in front of you was not easy to avoid. An uninterrupted binge of eating rich food and drinking wine is bound to take its toll. If Daniel and his companions turn out to be better in appearance in after just ten days, we can imagine how grotesquely overweight and disgusting were those at the royal table after the same amount of time. The Hebrew captives may have joined in this uninterrupted orgy only to keep the officials from uncovering their secret plan. After all, these Babylonians were the enemy who had taken them captive.

Again we have the verb *ra'ah* and the noun *mar'eh* noted last in vs. 13 ('was seen' and 'appearance'). Not only that, Daniel and his companions were "fatter" or *bery'ey* than the other youths at the royal table. This intimates that the young men were not Hebrews but captives like them from other lands who weren't concerned about the effect of rich food and drink. After all, here they were on the verge of becoming officials in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar and enjoying all that the this life style would offer. The adjective *bery'ey* often pertains to healthy livestock. If we can compare the so-called fatness of the Hebrew youths with the Babylonian officials, the latter must have been a truly disgusting sight to behold. "And behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows sleek and fat, and they fed in the reed grass" [Gn 41.2].

Vs. 16: So the steward took away their rich food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.

In a sense, this verse concerning the steward who removed the rich food and wine should be before the previous verse. He may have convinced Daniel and his companions to start their new diet slowly, not all at once. In this way after ten days they could adapt to it gradually with a view towards not having King Nebuchadnezzar and his officials take notice of the change. Certainly plenty of vegetables were available at the royal table. By putting them closer to Daniel and the others this would make their choice look less obvious. In the meanwhile, they engaged in the normal conversation, being asked as to how their training in Babylonian science and custom was proceeding. By now Daniel could hold his own in this regard, a way of keeping up appearances. To be sure, it would be a long three year period after which they would be formally introduced into the royal court. Still, the specter of ritual castration was on their minds, ending up like the chief of the eunuchs.

Vs. 17: As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

The words "as for these four youths" can be taken as a way of setting them apart during their experimentation with eating vegetables and water compared with the overly rich food offered at the royal table. While there, they must have spread out a bit so they wouldn't be seen together and thus arouse suspicion. If not, it would result in certain death not just for them but for any family members who had been taken captive. Also they must have mingled with youths taken captive from other lands and recruited some of them to their way of life. This, however, would have to be done with extreme care and secrecy. In other words, Daniel and his companions used their unique position as an opportunity to infiltrate the inner workings of the Babylonian court. They were privy to sensitive material being discussed and if they were discreet, over time this information could be put to good use in Israel's favor.

"Learning" and "skill" or *madah* and *sakal*. The former is noted in vs. 4 which seems to apply to natural human aptitudes whereas here it comes directly from God himself. It seems to take effect once Daniel and his companions actually undertook their change in diet under great risk. So this divine intervention enhances their wisdom all the more. Emphasis is upon "letters and wisdom" again as noted in vs. 4. Daniel is singled out, however, as having "understanding" or *byn* not just as noted in vs. 4 but in a manner different from those with him. Here divine *byn* applies to "visions

and dreams,” *chazon* and *chalom*. The former derives from the verbal root *chazah* meaning to see in the sense of behold. The latter derives from *chalam* which interestingly means to be fat or to be robust, the idea being that the body’s fatness inclines one to sleep and therefore to dreams (in a sense, contradictory to the vegetarian diet at hand). “A vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first” [8.1].

“Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him” [2.1]. Chances are that Daniel did not ask for this twofold gift, but once he realized it, perhaps by interacting with his fellow Hebrew captives, came to see that it was for real. Quickly Daniel was patterning himself upon his predecessor Joseph in the land of Egypt.

Vs. 18: At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

As with vs. 15, the word for “end” is *qetsath* which has two other uses in the Bible regarding the ten days and first mentioned in 1.2, “some of the vessels of the house of God.” With the meaning of vs. 2 in mind, *qetsath* suggests a sum or whole number and thus “end” as completion. In this way it is not unlike the Greek *telos* or end as completion with regard to the fulfillment of time. Note, however, that nothing is said of the three years (cf. vs. 5), this being understood; the word used is “days” (*yom*). We can also assume that Daniel and his companions were able to maintain the diet of vegetables and water for this rather long duration. As time went on, they may not have frequented the king’s table as much as they had at first but managed to skip just enough meals so as not to arouse suspicion. This was easy to do because the Babylonian officials were in the habit of getting drunk each evening.

The verse at hand pertains to an event not unlike a graduation ceremony held at regular intervals for other captives by King Nebuchadnezzar. Obviously it was of major importance, a way to increase the staff of highly trained professionals in his service. But looming over the festivities is the dreaded prospect that they too might become castrated. After all, the chief of the eunuchs was responsible for introducing them to Nebuchadnezzar. By this time Daniel’s divine gift of having understanding with regard to visions and dreams reached the king, and he was interested to put him to the test not unlike Pharaoh did to Joseph.

Vs. 19: And the king spoke with them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Misha-el, and Azariah; therefore they stood before the king.

Of course, King Nebuchadnezzar had been informed throughout the past three years of how his captives had been progressing. He wouldn’t be speaking with them like this now if they hadn’t succeeded. “Among them” suggests that Daniel and his three companions were there with their fellow graduates, all very proud in one sense and in another, fearful of what may happen to them. Always was the threat that Nebuchadnezzar could be the target of an assassination, so any successor could be far worse.

“Therefore they stood before the king” comes after Nebuchadnezzar had spoken with them followed by lining up in a formal manner ready to receive their new assignments. With this new responsibility came greater freedom not just for them but for any relatives and friends who had

been taken captive with the fall of Jerusalem. Now attention of Daniel, his associates and other captives from foreign land who “graduated” turned their attention to the jobs for which they were trained. They didn’t have a choice but had to take what was handed out to them.

Vs. 20: And in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

This verse may be taken as an observation after-the-fact or after the four youths and others had been introduced to King Nebuchadnezzar. His inquiry (*baqash*, cf. vs. 8) was not in great detail, just covering basic facts, for he relied on his subordinates to provide more detailed information as to the education of these men. In other words, the *baqash* at hand was more a formal matter such as a question or two from science, history, religion and so forth. Hence the words “in every matter” isn’t to be taken in the comprehensive sense, the word *davar* being used which by reason of its generality and non-specific nature, reflects this.

Nebuchadnezzar’s inquiry or seeking was more specifically concerned with “wisdom and understanding” or *chakmah* (cf. vs. 4) and *beynah* (similar to *byn* last noted in vs. 17). Despite the general tone of this inquiry, always there was the danger that Nebuchadnezzar could throw a curve ball and ask about something obscure. However, this verse doesn’t seem to intimate that possibility. He had more pressing matters on his mind.

The process of *baqash* turned out more successful than Nebuchadnezzar, the Hebrew youths and court officials could have hoped for. The captives from Israel outdid all the “magicians and enchanters” in his kingdom, and kingdom can refer not just to Babylon proper but to those nations which had been subjected to its rule. The superiority of the youths is attributed in part to the sustained diet of vegetables and plain water, not the rich food and drink of the royal table. Those who had been present at the king’s table all along couldn’t help but take notice and be embarrassed. It turned out they had become too overweight and sluggish. So when they received an indirect rebuff as here, they could become jealous and vindictive at once. Such an attitude contributed to planting seeds of doubt towards Daniel and his companions that they fall out of favor with the king. The other problem Daniel would face is jealousy emanating from young men taken captive from other countries though it didn’t assume such intense vindictiveness.

As for the “magicians and enchanters,” the former is *chartumym* which occurs eight other times in the Bible and most likely derives from the verbal root *charat* meaning to engrave. The idea is that these magicians were not unlike sacred scribes who could both read and interpret texts. “And he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and for all its wise men...but there was none who could interpret it to Pharaoh” [Gn 41.8]. The term for the latter is *‘ashaphym* which has one other biblical reference, that being 2.2: “Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams.” Mention of these two types of advisers to the king of Babylon give us an idea where the Book of Daniel is headed, that is, it will be bound up with dreams and their interpretations.

Vs. 21: And Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

The verb “continued” is not in the Hebrew text. This short verse runs something like “And Daniel was until the first year of King Cyrus.” As a footnote to the **RSV** says, that was “the year 538 BC, almost seventy years after Daniel’s coming to Babylon.” In other words, Daniel began favorably and continued throughout the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar despite the travails that would follow. We can take this note as one of consolation, for Daniel will be put to the text shortly. Obviously not an easy path for Daniel to follow, being confronted with those who are jealous of him and therefore seeking any pretext to have him fall out of favor.

Daniel had a major hidden asset in his favor, namely, the example of Joseph and how he comported himself deftly as second in charge after Pharaoh. Both were cut of the same prophetic cloth and shared the same predicament: Hebrews in a foreign land who end up governing it. Then we could throw in the example of Moses. He wasn’t a dreamer like Joseph but lived in Egypt and had to contend with a Pharaoh quite unfavorable towards the Hebrews as well as his magicians and enchanters.

Chapter Two

Vs. 1: In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him.

Mention of the second year of Nebuchadnezzar being on the throne intimates that he took quick action against King Johoiakim, an expedition considered minor compared with others but for the text at hand is very important. Neighboring lands took notice and obviously were concerned. Here was a new king of the most powerful nation on earth who suddenly burst upon the scene and in their eyes, was trying to make a name for himself. Members of his court were still jockeying for position which must have made it both difficult and confusing for Daniel and his companions. They had to sort through all this while attending to their rigorous three year training, the end of which was uncertain. Top on the list of their concerns was the following question: would Nebuchadnezzar still be in power or would his nobles attempt a coup d’etat and put someone new on the throne? To borrow the words from Exodus, would a new king arise “who did not know Joseph” [1.8]?

As for this momentous second year, King Nebuchadnezzar “had dreams,” the verb being *chalam* which fundamentally means to be fat, this condition supposedly conducive to having dreams. Note the plural which in this context suggest demons coming in the middle of night to haunt the king. Furthermore, dreams were important for ancients since it was a way the gods communicated with people, the Babylonians placing an especially high value on them and tying them in with their renowned practice of astronomy, tinged as it was with astrology. Although the noun occurs frequently throughout the Book of Daniel, the verb occurs one other time, vs. 3: “And the king said to them, ‘I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.’”

These dreams troubled the “spirit” of Nebuchadnezzar, *ruach*, being the common word for the human spirit as well as wind, breath and the (Holy) Spirit and is cited next in vs. 3. *Paham* is the verb for “troubled” meaning to strike, to beat. Thus Nebuchadnezzar’s *ruach* was beaten...struck...a vivid way to convey the impact of this dream. Although vs. 3 cites *paham*, another reference (there

are three others apart from these two) is Judg 13.25: “And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him (Manoah) in Mahanehdan between Zorah and Eshta-ol.”

As for the expression “his sleep left him,” “sleep” here seems almost like an animate being with a life of its own not unlike the plurality of dreams. The text puts it literally and vividly as “and his sleep was upon (*hal-*) him.” It seemed to have come out of him and stand upon or above him, almost mockingly. Such is a common experience of nightmares.

The parallels between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel on one hand and Pharaoh and the patriarch Joseph on the other were noted several times, this being another interesting one with regard to Daniel’s ability to interpret dreams. Actually the two accounts should be read side by side, for Daniel was a devout Jew who had known the scriptures. So when this occasion arose to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams, he had an historical precedent on which to draw and make the right interpretation.

Vs. 2: Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned, to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king.

With the parallel between Pharaoh and Joseph in mind, consider the words “and he (Pharaoh) sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men” [Ex 41.8]. Those whom Nebuchadnezzar summons are listed here as four groups of men. Chances are they weren’t the ones who partook of the king’s table with its rich food and wine, for that would have dulled their capacity for divination and the like. They were of a more ascetic cast preferring the same or similar diet of vegetables and water as the new Hebrew captives. Surely Daniel and his companions watched with some awe at this rather unusual assembly taking place at the royal palace. He had heard of their reputation back in Jerusalem, but now the highest religious figures of Babylon were gathering before his very eyes.

“Magicians and enchanters” or *chartumym* and *ashaphym* are both noted last in 1.20 but not the “sorcerers,” a participle of the verbal root *kashaph* being used with five other biblical references. Basically it means to utter prayers but is restricted to prayers offered to idols. “And he (Manasseh) burned his sons as an offering in the valley of the son of Hinnom and practiced soothsaying and augury and sorcery and dealt with mediums and with wizards” [2Chron 33.6]. The fourth and final group is the most general in nature, “the Chaldeans,” a word applicable to Babylonians. That narrows down the field to natives of that country compared with other lands that have been conquered. All are to “tell” King Nebuchadnezzar his dreams, the verb being *nagad* which connotes a proclaiming with emphasis upon showing, and that in turn implies the faculty of sight. This is appropriate here, for we’re dealing with dreams or visual representations impressed upon the memory. “At the beginning of your supplications a word went forth, and I have come to tell it to you” [9.23].

As for the dreams themselves, we have no information until much later in Chapter Two when Daniel, like his predecessor Joseph, comes on the scene and tells King Nebuchadnezzar about the “great image” [vs. 31]. What’s more remarkable about this incident is that Daniel has intimate knowledge of the dreams even before he related them to the king. So to Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel must have seemed like a mind reader. That’s flattering, but getting too involved with a despotic ruler almost always spells disaster, yet in the case of Joseph, Pharaoh was absolute ruler in Egypt

who had appointed this Hebrew second in command which contrasts more favorably compared to the instability of Nebuchadnezzar. Thus Daniel knew the story well, including Moses' dealing with another Pharaoh who had oppressed the Israelites. Combining insights from these two provided formidable resources to help Daniel in any future dealings with King Nebuchadnezzar.

Now these, the most celebrated and intelligent religious men in Babylon, stood before King Nebuchadnezzar. Most knew each other and took the occasion to reacquaint themselves and share any information that would prove useful in this tense situation. They knew that someone in his position easily could end to their lives and those of their families. The king was on his throne for about two years and already by his attitude towards the diviners had established a track record on how he dealt with those who crossed him, thereby putting the magicians and enchanters in a particularly tight spot.

Nebuchadnezzar found Daniel and his associates "ten times better" [1.20]. If that were true, the diviners would have to be ten times sharper, an impossible task. Besides, they must have been intensely jealous of these newly captive Hebrews and their insertion into the royal court. Surely these men, despite any differences among them, were united in opposition to the newcomers and their easy access to the royal throne. And so they took every opportunity to connive against them, resolving to do away with Daniel who clearly emerged as their leader.

Vs. 3: And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream."

"And the king said to them." These words intimate considerable tension on the part of those who had been summoned even though they knew the reason. The time between being lined up before the king as in vs. 2 and now must have been short, given Nebuchadnezzar's anxiety about his dream. He wanted to get at the heart of the matter without delay. However, to the men anxious to hear directly from the king himself, the waiting seemed like an eternity. Note that "dream" is singular compared to the plural of vs. 1.

Nebuchadnezzar says outright that he had a dream compared with the indefinite number of dreams intimated in vs. 2. Regardless, these dreams...nightmares..."troubled" (*paham*) his "spirit" or *ruach*, both words mentioned in the same context as vs. 1. Here he beseeches the wise men of Babylon to "know" the content and significance of the dream, *yadah* being the verb noted in 1.4 as the root for *dahath* (knowledge). However, this knowledge won't be forthcoming until Nebuchadnezzar meets Daniel. In the meantime he engages in a heated give-and-take with those men he had summoned which reveals their inability to help him, thereby setting the stage for Daniel and the jealousy shown toward him.

Vs. 4: Then the Chaldeans said to the king, "O king, live for ever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation."

The Chaldeans were mentioned in vs. 2 along with the magicians, enchanters and sorcerers...more or less a general or unspecified group of experts...who in the verse at hand speak up to King Nebuchadnezzar. While the three groups with them were pretty much specialized with respect to their role in the Babylonian religious tradition, the Chaldeans seem to be government officials. When entering the presence of Nebuchadnezzar they came off with the standard greeting, "O king,

live forever!" The Hebrew text adds *'aramyth* which means "in Syriac." Obviously no one at this stage knew the content of the dream though they had an inkling of it by reason of their profession.

So when the Chaldeans bid King Nebuchadnezzar to give an account of his dream, they take the conventional subservient tone and employ the standard "servants" (*havad*). All knew their lives were on the line. If they failed to give the right interpretation, they wouldn't leave the palace alive. Even if they came up with the correct interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar might not accept it. Such was the risk they were about to embark upon.

Peshar is the word for "interpretation" derived from a verbal root meaning to explain and occurs numerous times throughout the Book of Daniel, this being the first and vs. 5 being the next. The three groups were confident that they could respond accurately, the verb *chavah* meaning "will show" and also is found throughout Daniel, the next reference being vs. 6. On the other hand, the apparent display of confidence before King Nebuchadnezzar could have been one of bravado. In fact they were terrified of finding themselves in such a situation from which they couldn't extricate themselves.

Vs. 5: The king answered the Chaldeans, "The word from me is sure: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.

Now come the dreaded words from the mouth of the king, something the men summoned had expected the moment they were rushed off to the royal palace. How could anyone give a proper response?

Milah is the noun for "word" found throughout the Book of Daniel, the next reference being vs. 8. Like *davar* (to speak; same spelling as the noun 'word'), it can mean "thing" or "speech." When a king utters a *milah*, it has more weight than anyone else, as though it came directly from the gods, and the case at hand is not unlike this. This word is modified by *'azad* (verb) with one other biblical reference, vs. 8: "the word from me is sure." Fundamentally it means to go away, to depart. So once a *milah* goes forth from a king like Nebuchadnezzar, never can it return empty or void. Everyone present before him was fully conscious of this fact.

Yadah is the verb for "make known" noted last in vs. 3 with regard to both the dream and its "interpretation" or *peshar* (cf. vs. 4). Nebuchadnezzar wanted an answer pretty much on the spot with his whole court looking on and sharing the tension experienced by the magicians, sorcerers, enchanters and Chaldeans. Failure to do so will result in being "torn" from limb to limb or *havad* which means to do or to make. And so the text at hand reads literally "you shall be made," the words "limb to limb" not being in the text. "Any people, nation or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb" [3.29].

Nehlau is a noun for "ruins" but is more colorful than that, i.e., a dunghill. Only one other biblical reference is found, 3.29 quoted in part just above: "and their houses laid in ruins." The verb used with *nehlau* is *sum* meaning to set or to make. "Therefore I make a decree" [3.29]. And so this part of the verse at hand reads literally as "shall be placed your houses a dunghill."

It wouldn't be surprising that some of the guards standing by would gladly oblige their king by dispatching these men. They have had seen them before Nebuchadnezzar came on the scene and knew how they could manipulate someone in a vulnerable position.

Vs. 6: But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation."

In the last verse King Nebuchadnezzar had offered the stick and now dangles the carrot. Those he was addressing certainly paid attention but after the horrendous threat of vs. 5, had blotted out these blandishments. Really, how could anyone under these circumstances make a divination? Those responsible had performed their arts many a time before, often for high officials but this is the first time for the king himself, and they heard all sorts of frightful reports about his unstable mind. If this is how Nebuchadnezzar is behaving after two short years of his reign, what does the future hold? A frightful prospect indeed.

The same word *chavah* as in vs. 4 is used for "show." The rest of this first sentence in vs. 6 is passive in a way. That is, Nebuchadnezzar speaks indirectly of himself as source of "gifts, rewards and great honor." It intimates that he, a despotic king, considered himself removed for the affairs of mortal man and was a kind of god or at least semi-god who could dictate from above to below. Even if the diviners received these gifts in abundance, still they would live in fear of their lives. If not that, the prospect remained that at any whim or pretense King Nebuchadnezzar would take them away, leaving them destitute. Not just that but disgraced which, given the king's despotic nature, would be the lightest of all penalties to pay.

Qeval means "shall receive" and has two other references, both in Daniel, 5.31 (6.1) and 7.18, the former being cited here: "And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old." The Hebrew *qaval* is, of course, similar, and means to take, to receive; it connotes being before or opposite which is the position for giving or receiving from another person.

Matna' is the first of three potential rewards ('gifts') with two other biblical references, all in Daniel, 2.48 and 5.17, the former being cited here: "Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts." This verb derives from the common Hebrew *natan* (to give).

Nevizbah is the noun for "rewards" with one other biblical reference: "Let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another" [5.17].

Sagy' is an adjective for "great" with references in the Book of Daniel, the only exception being Ezr 5.11 ('that was built many years ago'). The next verse with *sagy'* is 48: "Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts." This adjective modifies *yeqar* which is like the Hebrew meaning to be precious or dear. "You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the might and the glory" [vs. 37].

Vs. 7: They answered a second time, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation."

Here the Chaldeans respond a second time, the first being in vs. 4. As noted earlier, the attitude in both verses is not one of confidence but of bravado...a false front of sorts...in a life or death

situation. Either the diviners get it right or they don't. There's no middle ground. although the diviners were divided into magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldeans and may have been rivals among each other, now they had to pull together and come up with a life-saving response.

King Nebuchadnezzar was watching the Chaldeans very closely, their every gesture and facial expression. If he detected the slightest hesitation or tenseness, off with their heads. The text has the third person plural with regard to these spokesmen. Their number is not given, perhaps chosen among themselves either by lot or random. At least it wasn't one person which may have been the original plan. Most likely one person would screw up asking the question.

Vs. 8: The king answered, "I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time because you see that the word from me is sure

This verse follows through with vs. 9, the two forming one sentence.

The response from King Nebuchadnezzar comes as no surprise, for he sees through the bravado of the Chaldeans which must have put them further on edge. That's why he knows (*yadah*, cf. vs. 5) "with certainty" or *yatsyv*, an adjective with four other biblical references, all in Daniel, the next being in vs. 45: "The dream is certain and its interpretation sure." *Yatsyv* derives from a verbal root meaning to set, to put and therefore connotes firmness. In the verse at hand the preposition "from" (*min*) is used with "word" or *milah*, a further indication of Nebuchadnezzar's ability to see through the Chaldeans.

Hidan is the noun for "time" found only in the Book of Daniel, the next reference being in vs. 9 and sometimes intimates the period of a year...and would that the Chaldeans could get that length of time from the king. It is used with the verb *zevan*, the only biblical use of this term.

Clearly King Nebuchadnezzar sees through this ruse of delay, the only one the Chaldeans could come up with, since they had been put on the spot although not entirely unexpected. Since these men were essentially diviners and were esteemed for their ability to interpret dreams and see into the future, we could view the words of Nebuchadnezzar as challenging their talent. So when he says "you see," the verb here is *chazah* which suggests a beholding. Therefore *chazah* intimates a divining on the spot, if you will, of the king's intention or more specifically his "word" or *milah*. Refer to vs. 5 where this *milah* from Nebuchadnezzar is "sure" which certainly it is.

Vs. 9: that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation."

The Chaldeans were totally focused...terrified is more like it...by the *milah* coming from King Nebuchadnezzar as intimated by the small but significant "that" or *yid* which connects vs. 8 with this one. Or more to the point, it's the way he spoke it that grabbed everyone's attention and put them on edge. *Yid* is made more ominous by the equally small word *hen* or "if" which sets the stage for what comes immediately afterward. Everyone therefore was transfixed as they stood before the most powerful man on earth.

Dath is the noun for “sentence” which occurs several times in Daniel as well as Ezra. “So the decree went forth that the wise men were to be slain, and they sought Daniel and his companions to slay them” [vs. 13]. It applies to something set such as a mandate which is the case at hand. Thus King Nebuchadnezzar threatens the diviners with both a sentence and a word, both being irrevocable.

The second of three sentences within this one verse contains Nebuchadnezzar’s harsh response to the request by the Chaldeans for him to reveal his dream. As mentioned above, Nebuchadnezzar could see through them, their bravado disguising a desperate desire to save their own skins. In reality they didn’t agree to “speak lying and corrupt words.” The verb “have agreed” is *zeman*, the only reference in the Bible.

The noun *milah* or “word” is used as in the previous verse which here is both “lying” and “corrupt.” The first is *kadav*, the only use of this adjective in the Bible and the second is *shechath*. It has one other biblical references, 6.4: “Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel...but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault.” A Hebrew version of this verb (same spelling) is found in 11.17: “He shall give him the daughter of women to destroy the kingdom, but it shall not stand or be to his advantage.”

Nebuchadnezzar’s mention of “times” or *hidan* is noted in the previous verse and most likely refers to that. In other words, he is accusing the Chaldeans of deceiving him and waiting for a chance to catch them in the act when they can again pull off their supposed deception. The verb for “change” is *shena’* and applies to repetition as well; it occurs frequently in the Book of Daniel, the other references being in Ezra. “Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change” [5.10].

The third and final sentence of vs. 9 simply is a reiteration of Nebuchadnezzar’s demand in vs. 6. How could the Chaldeans respond adequately to this without showing outward signs of fear and doubt?

Vs. 10: The Chaldeans answered the king, "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand; for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean.

This verse is a continuation of the back-and-forth between the Chaldeans and King Nebuchadnezzar which keeps escalating with no backing down which is typical of these situations. To their credit, they stand their ground and respond to the king with boldness as reflected by use of the preposition *qodem*, “before the king.” Yet he had not revealed the nature of the dream, just that it he had it, and that “his spirit was troubled” [vs. 1]. Despite the diviners’ reputation for having interpreted dreams and the like, it appears they never encountered such a demand from this, the absolute ruler of the most powerful empire on earth. Their response echoes that of Pharaoh’s magicians noted in 1.20, “but there was none who could interpret it to Pharaoh” [Ex 41.8].

Yabesheth is the noun for “earth,” similar to the Hebrew, and the only use of this term in the Bible. Fundamentally it means dry ground as in Gen 1.9: “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.”

Milah or “word” (cf. vs. 9) is used here for “demand.” Because the *milah* of a king is absolute, it cannot be retracted, let alone altered. And so no one on the “dry ground,” if you will, can stand up to its force. The limits of responding to a divine *milah* is demonstrated by the verb *chavah* or “meet” which in vs. 6 is rendered as “show.” *She’el* or “asked” (again, similar to the Hebrew *sha’al*) is similar in force to the absolute *milah* of King Nebuchadnezzar. This is reflected in the two adjectives meant to flatter him, “great and powerful” or *rav* and *shalyt*, the latter suggestive of the exercise of political power. “Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard” [2.15].

The demand is made of three categories of diviners:

1) “Magician” or *ashaph* found next in vs. 27 whose verbal root suggests soothing as applied to serpents in order to subdue them.

2) “Enchanter” or *chartom* also found next in vs. 27 and applies to scribes or those skilled in sacred writing. The Hebrew verbal root *charat* means to engrave.

3) Chaldeans being a general term of anyone associated with divination or the like.

Vs. 11: The thing that the king asks is difficult, and none can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

Here is another use of *milah*, as “thing” compared with the two meanings noted in the previous verse (‘word’ and ‘demand’). The *milah* is “difficult” or *yaqyr* which has one other biblical reference, Ezr 4.10 as “noble:” “and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province beyond the river.” *Yaqyr* derives from a verbal root meaning to be heavy, or precious. The showing (*chavah* as ‘meet’ in vs. 10) literally “before” or *qodem* the king (cf. vs. 10).

So if the Chaldeans are right in claiming that only the gods can assist King Nebuchadnezzar, he must seek their advice. After all, he was a god incarnate and pretty much on the same divine level. Their response can be taken as a subtle insult: being a god means that Nebuchadnezzar can get an answer automatically from his fellow gods which doesn’t seem to be the case, hence his reliance upon the diviners. Yet even before the Chaldeans asked about the dream they knew this association with the gods was beyond their capacities. The gods do not dwell on earth whereas King Nebuchadnezzar does, the noun here being *medar*, the only use in the Bible, the root of which is *dor*, to remain or to inhabit. The gods are spirits, of course, in contrast to humans who here are called “flesh” or *besar*, an almost identical word (*basar*) being found in vs. 1.15 but not mentioned there: “At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king’s rich food.”

Vs. 12: Because of this the king was angry and very furious and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.

The dialogue between King Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans now comes to an abrupt end. The tension had been building with no resolution, the Chaldeans clearly not having gained the advantage. Perhaps they regretted their claim that Nebuchadnezzar’s request had been too

difficult, for when that response was given (cf. vs. 11), the silence in the royal court was palpable. Everyone was holding his breath. We don't know if Daniel and his companions were present. Most likely there were, an opportunity to get a first hand look at how the very best diviners in Babylon worked, and their disaster turned out to be a boon for him. However, one has to pity Ashpenaz, the chief eunuch, who originally had taken Daniel and the other Hebrew youths under his wing.

This verse reflects Nebuchadnezzar's ferocious anger in vs. 5 ('torn limb from limb') which to everyone present in his court was unreasonable because he hadn't disclosed his dream to those who were supposed to help him interpret it. But as they realized, it is best to keep silence even in these situations or else their heads would roll. *Benas* is the verb for "was angry," the only use in the Bible, and *qetsaph* is the verb for "furious" (the only biblical reference) similar to the Hebrew *qatsaph* which fundamentally means to break. It is modified by the adjective *sagy'* noted last in vs. 6.

The result of this fury is typical of what we know about King Nebuchadnezzar who immediately ordered the death of those who couldn't fulfill his unreasonable request. The common verb '*amar* (to say, to speak) is used, the same form as in Hebrew. Nebuchadnezzar didn't have to make a fuss about his draconian measure. Being semi-divine, all he had to do was utter a word, and it was accomplished. '*Avad* is the verb for "destroyed" and connotes being lost, thereby having a fuller sense of passing out of existence. "Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon" [vs. 24].

Nebuchadnezzar's wrath was directed, of course, at the men he had summoned havelily who are lumped together as "wise men" or *chakym*, an adjective found a number of times in the Book of Daniel and occurs next in vs. 13. Those present before King Nebuchadnezzar were representative of the *chakym*, so he was sorely tempted to have them executed on the spot. We don't hear of anything like this possibly because the king didn't wish to draw undue attention to the royal court. Better to have his spies and agents fan out throughout his kingdom and arrest these wise men and deal with them quietly. Obviously Nebuchadnezzar didn't think through the consequences of his actions. To wipe out an entire class of religious people like this was dangerous to contemplate and would have long term consequences on the well being of his empire.

Vs. 13: So the decree went forth that the wise men were to be slain, and they sought Daniel and his companions to slay them.

This "decree" or *dath* as noted in vs. 9 was composed most likely from a bank of scribes present during the meeting between King Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean diviners. Just about everything done in public was recorded for future reference. These men knew their fate was sealed...literally...as the scribes put the royal seal on the decrees before being dispatched throughout the kingdom by messengers. All the diviners could do was to watch on helplessly. *Nephaq* is the verb for "went forth" which applies to the promulgation of an official document and occurs only in Daniel and Ezra. It is found in the next verse with respect to Arioch "who had gone out to slay the wise men of Babylon."

The "wise men" or *chakym* (cf. vs. 12) are to be "slain" or *qatal* where the primary sense of the verb is to cut and is found in the next verse. So once the scribes wrote the royal decree, had it sealed and sent copies throughout Babylon, the Chaldeans were allowed to leave the royal court

alive. King Nebuchadnezzar figured that already they were dead men, and better to be found dead outside his palace than within it.

It is unclear to whom “they” refers, most likely persons at court familiar with Daniel. Word had gotten around of Daniel’s strict personal discipline and ability to learn more quickly than any others in the royal court, his associates included. That put them on the top of the hit list. In addition to his companions, youths from other lands taken captive were present. Perhaps they squealed on Daniel and knew his whereabouts. *Behah* is the verb for “sought,” similar to the Hebrew, and found next in vs. 16; all references are found in the Book of Daniel. *Bahah* also means to request or to inquire. That implies that any agents sent out into the field disguised themselves in order to infiltrate various groups such as those who had been taken captive after the fall of Jerusalem. Chances are that Daniel would take refuge among them. In addition to this, some officials in the royal court pressed the foreign youths in training to get as much information out of them as possible. All this for a dream which King Nebuchadnezzar had yet did not disclose.

Vs. 14: Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to slay the wise men of Babylon;

Tuv is the verb for “replied” which also means to turn back, to restore and is found only in the Book of Daniel and Ezra. The previous verse speaks of a decree that went out from King Nebuchadnezzar, that is, from his palace, not far from the residence of Daniel and his associates (cf. 1.4). That means the decree didn’t have to reach far for Daniel to hear; in fact, he may have been present while Nebuchadnezzar was speaking with the diviners. Regardless, he saw the futility of it all and feared his head would be next on the chopping block. So when Daniel gives his reply, it’s recorded by the scribe who had written King Nebuchadnezzar’s decree and passed it onto the messengers.

“Prudence and discretion” or *hetah* and *tehem*: the former is the only reference in the Bible and similar to the Hebrew *hetsah*. The latter is found only in the Book of Daniel and Ezra and like the Hebrew, derives from a verbal root meaning to taste. “You, O king, have made a decree” [3.10]. This is the first real glimpse into Daniel’s character, of how he deals with other people such as Arioch, and what had made him so popular at court before this unfortunate incident. Even the meaning of this man’s function in Hebrew is ominous, *tabach* (only use of it in the Bible), which means executioner and is derived from a verbal root meaning to kill or to slay. Despite Arioch’s important position, Daniel seems to be on good terms with him. And why not cultivate a working relationship with someone so powerful? It could come in handy as in this instance.

Vs. 15: he said to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so severe?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel.

This verse follows as part of the previous one. A bystander listening in on Daniel automatically could discern his renowned prudence and discretion in his very voice as he addressed Arioch. After all, this man could dispatch not only Daniel but even the king himself, either usurping his place or installing a puppet who would do his bidding. In vs. 14 Arioch is called *tabach* or “captain”

whereas here it's *shalyt*, an adjective which pertains to having power, being hard or vehement. It is found last in vs. 10 as "powerful."

Posing this question implies that while Daniel may have been in the court during the contentious argument between King Nebuchadnezzar and the diviners, he was not informed as to its exact content. Perhaps it's because as a foreigner, albeit a privileged one in the royal court, he was kept sufficiently distant from the action. Regardless, the tension throughout the royal palace was so intense everyone that everyone could feel it. That's why Daniel inquired as to the decree being so "severe" or *chatsaph*. It has one other biblical reference, 3:22: "Because the king's order was strict and the furnace very hot, the flame of the fire slew those men." So when Arioch "made known" (*yadah*, cf. vs. 8), this "matter" (*milah*, cf. vs. 11) to Daniel, surely he didn't say it outright but whispered discreetly into his ear or on an occasion when there may have been some commotion to disguise it. This exchange took place after Arioch had returned to his position, for in his role as the king's captain...executioner, really...he was close to King Nebuchadnezzar in case his services were required. He must have been extremely relieved not to have been called upon and left the court as quickly as possible.

Vs. 16: And Daniel went in and besought the king to appoint him a time, that he might show to the king the interpretation.

We don't have any response from Arioch to Daniel's question in the previous verse. Despite the grave concern, it must have been encouraging, for he "besought" King Nebuchadnezzar for an audience, the verb being *bahah* which also means to cause to swell. The idea is that a person reflects on a matter and swells up inside with thoughts and emotions before making them known. "And has now made known to me what we asked of you" [vs. 23]. although the text says that Daniel approached Nebuchadnezzar directly, most likely he did not. Given the tense situation, that would be importune; better to make an appointment through a secretary or the like. The verb here is *zeman* which also can apply to a season as in vs. 21: "He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings (etc)."

The person who set up the appointment could have been one of the scribes who just recently had taken down the king's decree to slay the wise men of Babylon. Although Daniel technically didn't fall into that category, he was the wisest of them all which events would prove true. Whoever took the appointment must have recognized Daniel, but we have no information if there was any hard feelings or suspicions between the two men. If there was, the scribe kept it to himself. No one can simply walk up to a secretary in the court of the world's most powerful ruler and make an appointment unless he had some pull. Regardless, the scribe rushed off with the request and handed it to his master. We have no response until vs. 25 when Daniel approached King Nebuchadnezzar in the company of Arioch, and wisely so. To do this alone would have been to invite instant death. Because Arioch was captain of the king's guard (and executioner as well), he had considerable influence. Even Nebuchadnezzar could have felt intimidated by this man who easily could prompt a coup or some kind of rebellion.

The secretary himself must have been surprised at Daniel's forthrightness. No ordinary person can claim that he will resolve the issue at hand. And that issue, of course, is to "show" the meaning of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the verb being *chavah* noted last in vs. 11. *Peshar* is the noun for

“interpretation” found last in vs. 5. So when Nebuchadnezzar got the message, he gave an immediate order to set up an appointment. But in light of this recent information, would he revoke the decree to slay the wise men of Babylon? We have no official word but hopefully took this action. If King Nebuchadnezzar followed through, the wise men would hail Daniel as a true hero.

Vs. 17: Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah, his companions,

We are left hanging after the previous verse, that is, we have no idea of what transpired between Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar except that Daniel sought an appropriate “time” (*zeman*) for a meeting, both a wise and bold move. Wise in that Daniel didn’t want to further upset Nebuchadnezzar after his decree and bold in that he didn’t fear to approach him. So after this incident Daniel returned home, *bayth* being both the Chaldean and Hebrew word for “house.” Apparently by this time he had his own private dwelling which means either he shared it with his three companions or invited them to that place.

Yadah is the verb for “made known” (cf. vs. 15) which means that only Daniel had been present during the tense audience with King Nebuchadnezzar. *Milah* is the noun for “matter” (cf. vs. 15), and in this instance means that Daniel recounted in full all that had transpired. Since he, Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah were singled out as the best of the Hebrew captives for service in the Babylonian court, they listened intently to his words. We don’t have an account of what must have been a heated discussion, but from this point on the fate of these three men were bound up with that of Daniel. Their meeting had to be kept quiet, for the king’s decree to slay Babylon’s wise men was in effect, and they didn’t want to be caught up in the terror that had begun to rage around them.

Vs. 18: and told them to seek mercy of the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

The verb “told” isn’t in the original text, but use of *yadah* in the previous verse can apply here, for vs. 18 is joined with vs. 17 by the conjunctive *w-*, “and.”

Behah is the verb for “seek” mentioned last in vs. 13 with respect to “the God of heaven.” Daniel specifically uses *shemayn* or “heaven,” a reminder that they are in the midst of a society with multiple gods and shouldn’t let this affect any decision they would have to make. Obviously Daniel, Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah were in an environment alien to the one in which they had been raised, and to maintain their faith in the Lord was no small matter. Also King Nebuchadnezzar himself was considered a god or demi-god which made the situation more difficult. *Shemayn* occurs frequently in the Book of Daniel, the next instance being in vs. 19.

When Daniel bids his three companions to seek divine mercy, he isn’t telling them anything new, just reminding them to continue in their faith. *Rachamyn* is the noun for “mercy,” the only occasion in the Bible, yet close to the Hebrew which is noted in 1.9. Here the implied tender concern of a mother for her child is directed to “this mystery” or *raz* (only found in Daniel) which means something concealed or out of sight. It is found next in vs. 19. Indeed, the *raz* at hand is

concealed in a twofold manner: first by King Nebuchadnezzar himself in his disinclination to reveal it to the Babylonian diviners and second, the mystery in and by itself which turns out to be a conundrum for everyone in the court. The *rachamyn* which Daniel beseeches is directed in part to the king, that he overcome his reluctance and make know his dream...not so much to satisfy him but to prevent the slaughter of innocent people. It should be noted that Daniel shows no ill will towards King Nebuchadnezzar which might not have been the case with the Babylonian diviners, their families and supporters.

Of course, Daniel was concerned about his own life, those of Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah as well as any other foreign captives both Israelite and non-Israelite they had gotten to know during their three year period of training. He calls these three men “companions” or *chavar* which has two other biblical references, vs. 13 and 18, and is derived from a verbal root meaning to join together. While they may not have been on the immediate death list sent out by King Nebuchadnezzar, it wouldn’t take long for his agents to track them down. After all, they were foreigners living as guests in a gilded cage. This could move them to the top of the list on trumped up charges as spies or secret agents. Just the fact that they refrained from eating rich food but preferred vegetables and water was suspicious enough.

Vs. 19: Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

After a heated discussion with Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah, Daniel won out by appealing to the only possible resolution, seeking divine mercy...not just for themselves but for the Babylonian diviners, their families and friends. Resolution of this tension is marked by the small word ‘*edayin*’ or “then.”

Note the passive “was revealed” or *gelah*, that the “mystery” or *raz* (cf. vs. 18) did not originate from Daniel but from a divine source. *Gelah* is similar to the Hebrew and means to make naked or uncovered. It suggests a reality already present though with some kind of cover acting either as a disguise or protection, depending upon the circumstance. The verb being in the passive suggests that Daniel had gone asleep as usual. During the course of the night this *raz* which had been present to him all along but not revealed (for example, in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar) came upon him. On one hand it was unexpected but on the other, Daniel had an intimation that if divine mercy (cf. vs. 18) were to be manifest, it would have to be through this *raz*. “But as for me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living has this mystery been revealed to me” [vs. 30].

Chezeh means “vision” and occurs only in the Book of Daniel, being suggestive of a beholding or a taking in all at once instead of piecemeal. In other words, *chezeh* represents the big picture or akin to what the Lord is seeing at the present moment. No small wonder that the Hebrew noun for “seer” derives from this root, one who is able to behold. Beholding is one half of the picture. The other half is being able to interpret it. With this in mind King Nebuchadnezzar was a kind of seer...having one half...yet was frustrated at not having the other half. Even his diviners couldn’t appreciate this distinction which is why Daniel stands out so much throughout the narrative at hand.

Although Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar share this mystery, the former stands out by way of being grateful and at peace whereas the latter is ruffled beyond measure and takes it out on other people. And so the rest of the Book of Daniel plays out these two radically different tendencies. As for Daniel, he “blessed” the Lord of heaven or *berak*, a verb which means to kneel down and give obeisance. “And I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever” [4.34]. The phrase “God of heaven” is found last in vs. 18, *shemayn* being the noun which as noted there, serves to distinguish the Lord from the multiple gods of Babylon. As for the *berak* at hand, Daniel must have done it throughout the entire night and in a sense was disappointed with the coming of dawn when he it came to an end. In the case of King Nebuchadnezzar, he didn’t bother blessing his gods but stewed in his juices all night long...not just one night but night after night until finally he consults Daniel.

Vs. 20: Daniel said: "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever to whom belongs wisdom and might.

In the previous verse Daniel blessed God which can be taken two ways: either in the context of the dream when he received the vision or upon waking. The verse at hand begins a hymn of praise to God ending in vs. 23 which can apply to the just mentioned two options. Regardless, blessing God in a spirit of thankfulness was utmost on Daniel’s mind. However, the description of this “mystery” or *raz* doesn’t begin until vs. 31 when Arioch, the captain of the guard, introduces Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar. Given the tenor of these verses, it seems Daniel exclaimed his hymn upon awakening from sleep and perhaps even in the company of his three companions, Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah. This prayer primes them all, if you will, for the famous prayer in the fiery furnace, the Septuagint text traditionally inserted between 3.23 and 3.24.

The verb *hanah* for “said” usually means to answer or to respond which fits in nicely with Daniel’s response of gratitude for having received the mystery. We have no account of the details, that is, of how Daniel perceived it, only later from vs. 31 onward when he recounted it to King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel also must have been extremely grateful for this gift. It couldn’t have come at a better time given the draconian measure the king proclaimed about slaying his diviners and by extension, their families and associates. That would wipe out the entire religious cast, Babylon’s cream of the crop.

Mention of the “name” or *shum* (similar to the Hebrew *shem*) is a traditional way to address the Lord who essentially has no name except the enigmatic one delivered to Moses in Ex 3.14, “I am who I am.” So the *raz* or mystery at hand elicits a burst of intense gratitude on Daniel’s part who pretty much utters “the name of God” spontaneously and without reflection. The words “forever and ever” also are traditional, an extension on the worshiper’s part to have his gratitude last as long as God...i.e., having no end. *Halam* is the word at hand used twice and as one would expect, occurs frequently in the Book of Daniel.

A further extension of Daniel’s gratitude and relief is through the divine “wisdom and “might” or *chakmah* (five other references in Daniel, the next being in vs. 21) and *gevurah*. The next reference to the former is in vs. 21; the is in vs. 23, “for you have given me wisdom and strength.” *Chakmah* originally applied to skill and dexterity as in practicing a craft, that is, something first taught then

immediately tested out in the field. *Gevurah* is suggestive of fortitude and can have military application.

Vs. 21: He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;

The verb for “changes is *shena’* which applies to alteration in general, the last reference being 2.9. Daniel starts off using this common observation with regard to “times and seasons” or *hidan* (last noted in vs. 9) and *zeman* (last noted in vs. 16). In those references both terms refer to human events whereas here they apply to natural ones. Because the Babylonians were renowned for astronomical research, Daniel’s remarks take on a greater meaning in a society where positions and movements of stars and planets have direct impact upon human affairs.

Because of this cosmic association, no small wonder that Daniel singles out the removal and establishment of kings as having wider implications. although he was speaking in general terms about kings, Daniel has in mind King Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful ruler in the world at that time. So for God to remove and to set up such rulers was not so much a threat to their power but more fundamentally to their religious beliefs.

The verb for “removes” is *hadah* (only found in the Book of Daniel) which means to pass over, the next reference being 3.27: “the fire had not any power over (i.e., passed over) the bodies of those men.” The verb for “sets up” is *qum* (same as in Hebrew) which means to rise up or to stand and occurs frequently in this book. “The image, mighty and of exceedingly brightness, stood before you” [vs. 31]. Daniel had to contain himself at having been privileged to know the mystery of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. If any of his words uttered in this excitement ever leaked out, someone could use them against him and his three companions as well as any other Hebrews living in the Babylonian empire.

As for “wisdom” and “knowledge,” the former (*chakmah*) is mentioned in the previous verse and the latter (*mandah*) which has three other references, the next being 4.34. It is derived from the verbal root *yadah* (to know). Apparently the Lord imparts both to persons with “understanding” which is rendered literally as “to those knowing of understanding” or *bynah*, this being the only form in the Bible and related closely to *beynah* as in 1.20. “Those” may be Daniel’s way of including the diviners who had been threatened with extermination by King Nebuchadnezzar. Hopefully they may apply wisdom and knowledge to extricating themselves from the ban which had condemned them.

Vs. 22: he reveals deep and mysterious things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.

Daniel could be speaking of himself, the Babylonian diviners as well as King Nebuchadnezzar as well as those Hebrew sages and prophets who had preceded him. *Gelah* is the verb for “reveals” noted last in vs. 19 as pertaining to the mystery Daniel is now experiencing. Here *gelah* pertains to things which are both “deep and mysterious” or *hamyq* and *setar*, two participles. The former is the only use in the Bible and connotes that which is unsearchable, similar to the Hebrew verb in Ps 92.5: “How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep!” The latter has one

other biblical use, Ezra 5.12: “or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem.” The verb “destroy” is another use of *setar*, for when you destroy something, you hide it or put it out of your sight.

The Lord also “knows” (*yadah*, cf. vs. 17) two realities which are presented as being opposite to each other, “darkness and light” (*chashach* and *nehyr*), two words used only on these occasions and similar to those in Hebrew. The former often applies to darkness vis-a-vis the sun but can refer to ignorance or misery in general. “And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds” [Is 5.30]. The latter associates light with the flow of a river, an alternate meaning in the Hebrew: “and all nations shall flow to it” [Is 2.2].

While the Lord has knowledge of what lies in the darkness—it isn’t spelled out but inferred as being less than desirable—light “dwells” with him, a permanent part of his divine nature. The verb *shere’* occurs four other times in the Book of Daniel and fundamentally means to loosen in the sense of dissolve. The idea seems to be that when you come to an inn for the night, you loosen the burdens upon your beast. “His limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together” [5.6].

Vs. 23: To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and strength, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter."

The hymn which Daniel spontaneously utters and most likely shares with his three companions comes to an end, having begun in vs. 20. This sharing is intimated by the words “for you have made known to us,” that is, Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah. although the dream was intended for Daniel, these three companions were the first ones to grasp it before Daniel approached King Nebuchadnezzar. *Milah* is the noun for “matter” noted last in vs. 17.

Daniel addresses the Lord as “God of my fathers,” a fairly common expression which has greater significance because Daniel is in exile...in Babylon...and had to contend with among a whole multitude of strange gods, including those from other lands, some of which may have been hostile to Israel. It was not uncommon for the Babylonians during their invasions of countries to adopt their deities, thereby taking them home and setting them up beside their own. Such was the case with the Philistines when they had capture the ark of the Lord: “then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon” [1Sam 5.2].

“Give thanks and praise” or *yeda’* and *shevach*, the former having one other biblical reference which is 6.10: “and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously.” *Shevach* connotes soothing or stroking as well as to be still with four other references, all in Daniel, one of which is 4.37: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven.”

This twofold attribution of joy and glory stems from the fact that the Lord bestowed upon Daniel “wisdom and strength” or *chakmah* and *gevurah*, both occurring last in vs. 21. In a sense, Daniel hadn’t yet manifested *chakmah* (that will come shortly) but certainly did with regard to *gevurah*. That is to say, he had to maintain his composure in King Nebuchadnezzar’s court while the diviners were being berated and then dismissed with a price on their heads. Surely the same could be in store of Daniel.

Yadah means “made known” (cf. vs. 22), the context being one of passivity by Daniel to the revelation occurring in the night hours. It occurs twice here with use of the first person plural (‘what we asked of you’ and ‘what we asked of you’), again referring to Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah. Looking back, Daniel must have felt relieved he didn’t approach King Nebuchadnezzar in vs. 16. That was a kind of flush of excitement that he could lift the decree against the diviners. Now he has had time to reflect back on the situation, share it with his three companions, which placed him in far better position to meet the king.

Vs. 24: Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and said thus to him, "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation."

This verse begins with Chaldean words *kal-qovel* which reads something like “all for which cause” and serves to link the verses of Daniel’s hymn and the fortitude he received from God which gives him courage to speak boldly to Arioch. Also it links what appears to be little or no time gap between that “vision in the night” [vs. 19] and the meeting with Arioch. This man, of course, is captain of the king’s guard first encountered in vs. 14, perhaps the most feared individual in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar and as noted earlier, someone whom Nebuchadnezzar himself feared. Apparently Daniel and Arioch got along well. Normally things like this don’t happen; behind the scenes Arioch might wish to cultivate friendship with Daniel in order that his interpretation of the dream might contribute to Nebuchadnezzar’s fall.

As for Daniel, he could have used his friendship with Arioch to gain access to the king and thereby spare the diviners. His ultimate goal, of course, is to deflect any wrath from the Hebrews living in Babylon. Regardless, Daniel is engaged in a risky proposition. The courage with which Daniel approached Arioch can be seen by the form of the verb “went in” (*halal*) and the preposition “to” which runs as *hal hal-*(‘*Aryok*). The preposition *hal* fundamentally means on or upon, so the first impression is something like “on-on” with regard to Arioch, to put it a bit awkwardly. More accurately, the words read, (Daniel) “entered upon Arioch.” As for the verb *halal*, it more specifically applies to the matter as at hand, to have an audience with a king, and is found only in Daniel. It is in vs. 16 though not mentioned there.

Manah is the verb for “appointed” and has four other references in the Book of Daniel, the next being vs. 49: “Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon.” tied in with the notion of constituting is that of numbering or of counting. While vs. 14 speaks of King Nebuchadnezzar having delegated the destruction of the diviners to Arioch, mention of it again drives this home and carries over the urgency Daniel felt to prevent it. ‘*Avad* means “destroy” noted last in vs. 12 and applies directly to Arioch, the man responsible for carrying out the king’s sentence.

The words “he went” or ‘*azal* occurs three other times in Daniel, the last found in vs. 17 but not mentioned there. The connotation of spinning or rolling which this verb contains suggests some urgency with which Daniel approached Arioch. He couldn’t wait a moment after his divine revelation and conversation with his three friends, all of whom must have consented to this rather precarious meeting with the most powerful man in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar.

Halah is the verb for “bring (me) in” used here a second time, the first being “went in.” That is, Daniel wants...demands...an audience with King Nebuchadnezzar. Arioch must have been taken aback by this man’s boldness which bordered upon imprudence yet had knew him well enough to know he was serious. Daniel was determined to show the “interpretation” of the dream Nebuchadnezzar had and which already caused such a commotion throughout his empire. *Peshar* is the noun (‘interpretation’) as in vs. 4 which the Chaldean diviners were confident to handle but failed abysmally. Daniel had this in mind, of course, yet it didn’t shake his determination.

Vs. 25: Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who can make known to the king the interpretation."

The haste refers to Daniel approaching Arioch who appreciated the urgency at hand and thus averting implementation of the sentence against the Babylonian diviners who attempted to help King Nebuchadnezzar. *Behal* (only in the Book of Daniel) is the verb for “in haste” which basically means to tremble, to be confounded, and echos the dread both men are about to feel when confronting the king. “Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste” [3.24]. The time must have been rather early, for Daniel had the vision during the night, consulted his three friends, and ran off to Arioch who, in turn, hastened with Daniel to the royal court. Because Arioch was the captain of the guard, he had access to the court day or night. Those whom he met sensed something urgent was at hand, so without delay they let the two men inside.

Once Arioch had gained audience with the king, he took it upon himself to speak first. Daniel, after all, was numbered among those under the royal decree of execution. Arioch calls Daniel an “exile” or *galuth*, from a verbal root similar to the Hebrew which also means to make or to become naked. “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah” [5.13]. In the situation at hand, Arioch was careful to use the word *galuth* instead of speaking about Daniel himself. Judah was known among the Babylonians for worship of the Lord, a coy tactic of gaining King Nebuchadnezzar’s attention. If Daniel had been among the other non-Judean captives, he would stand no chance of being heard. So by avoiding use of the name Daniel, Arioch hoped (and rightly so) that he would have an audience. Otherwise he wouldn’t listen and have Daniel’s head without further question.

Vs. 26: The king said to Daniel, whose name was Beltshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?"

Apparently King Nebuchadnezzar didn’t hesitate to receive Daniel at the request of Arioch, most likely alone minus his three companions as well as Arioch. As noted above, he was wary of the captain of the guard who had troops stationed near the royal palace and could topple him at once and install on the throne anyone he wished. At the same time, Nebuchadnezzar hadn’t slept much the past few nights, having been troubled by his dreams. He was left alone with no one to advise him and may have had regrets at the order to execute his diviners. With this in mind, he received Daniel without hesitation even if it meant canceling other important duties. That’s why we see the two men speaking immediately. Note the tone of the king’s voice, that is, he simply asks Daniel about his ability to interpret dreams. No show of force or authority, just the request of a desperate man.

Being king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar addresses Daniel as Belteshazzar which, as noted in 1.7, means “Bel protect the king.” Mention of this name must have brought some comfort to Nebuchadnezzar, that here was a representative of Bel to protect him. Chances are the king had no recollection of Daniel from his campaign against Jehoiakim and the subsequent siege of Jerusalem, to him a relatively minor victory. Since Arioch and others in the royal court treated their lord with respect, even if it were feigned, they decided upon using Daniel’s Babylonian name. If they had used his Hebrew name, things might turn out unfavorably to say the least. Daniel himself both appreciated this yet at the same time loathed being identified as Belteshazzar though certainly he didn’t divulge this in front of the king.

Nebuchadnezzar begins his question with the verb *hanah* for “said” which is noted last in vs. 20 but fundamentally means to answer or to respond. Now here was the question, the very essence of what Daniel and his companions had prepared themselves. Note the words “are (you) able” or *kehal* (two other references, Book of Daniel) or “can you, Belteshazzar, help me?” It’s a life-or-death situation. To answer yes meant life. If the interpretation wasn’t to the king’s liking, off with his head. To answer no is out of the question, really.

The question puts Daniel in the same situation as the diviners, that is, without knowing the content of the dream, which means he must function as a kind of mind reader. Obviously Daniel knew about this incident and was prepared, hence the value of his own dream the previous night with regard to Nebuchadnezzar’s. He had precise information about it as that “mystery” noted in vs. 19. Now Daniel was about to impress the king beyond all measure, including Arioch and other court officials. Still, he realized a spectacular success could turn sour at any moment, given royal politics and intrigue. Thus Daniel could first “make known” the dream followed by its “interpretation.” That is to say, he could do what the Babylonian diviners never could do. They had the ability to interpret dreams, not reveal them.

Vs. 27: Daniel answered the king, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians or astrologers can show to the king the mystery which the king has asked,

Here begins Daniel’s address to King Nebuchadnezzar which continues without interruption through vs. 45, quite lengthy. Certainly it grabbed the king’s full attention since he didn’t interrupt. All those around him, too, must have listened in wrapped attention.

Right away Daniel (the proper name is used here compared to Belteshazzar which is for official use only, if you will) takes the initiative by mentioning the four categories of Babylonian diviners, a way to avoid associating himself with them. More specifically, Daniel is intimating what was said in the previous verse, that the diviners could interpret a dream but as a matter of course require information about this dream before doing so. As in vs. 26, the verb *hanah* is used in its more customary way as “answered,” and in the verse at hand, it has the preposition *qodam* or “answered before the king.” The picture here is a subject making his case before his sovereign after having done obeisance, the conventional way of comporting oneself in these circumstances.

Daniel addresses King Nebuchadnezzar with a confidence that must have astonished everyone at court mentioning four types of diviners who could “show” him or give a proper response. *Chavah* is the verb here noted last in vs. 16 in a similar circumstance. At first Nebuchadnezzar thought this might justify his decree of putting the diviners to death, certainly not Daniel’s intent. The

groups are as follows who couldn't deal with the "mystery" (*raz*) simply because Nebuchadnezzar didn't disclose it either out of rage or as a means of testing them:

- "Wise men" or *chakym* noted last in vs. 24.

- "Enchanters" or '*ashaph* which occurs only five times in Daniel and noted last in vs. 11.

- "Magicians" or *chartumym* (cf. vs. 2).

- "Astrologers" or *gezar* (participle) which occurs only five times in Daniel and found next in vs. 34: "As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand." The idea seems to be that astrologers would determine...cut or divide...the future by observing the stars and planets.

Actually the king was doing an unintended favor for Daniel by not telling his advisers about the dream even though it put them in jeopardy. His withholding of the most important part of the puzzle serves to introduce both Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonians in general the revelation of Israel's one God.

Vs. 28: but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:

Beram or "but" (alternately as 'truly') is the most important word Daniel could utter before the most powerful man on earth, for it serves to introduce what he wanted to communicate more than anything else, namely, the truth about "God in heaven." The common word "heaven" separates the revelation given to Israel from those gods whose natural dwelling place is either on earth or under it. Actually it's a bold statement that Nebuchadnezzar failed to grasp nor was capable of grasping. Furthermore, what distinguishes "God in heaven" is his ability to reveal "mysteries," the verb being *gelah* first noted in vs. 19 or in the context of Daniel's dream. As there, *raz* is used but as applicable to Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Here it has a general application though the king's dream certainly is included.

Use of the plural "days" can mean an extended period of time in the indefinite future. At first this must have confused King Nebuchadnezzar further though he refrained from interrupting Daniel. At the same time he was ready to pounce on him if the dream's interpretation wasn't to his liking. He must have been surprised, too, that a relatively obscure deity from a minor country communicated with him instead of a familiar Babylonian god.

Daniel makes a distinction: "dream and "visions," *chelem* (singular) and *chazah* (plural). The former occurs first in vs. 4 and the latter in vs. 8. This dream seems to contain an indefinite number of visions, the troubling nature of which is implied by the two phrases "of your head" and "as you lay in your bed" or what had been rolling around unceasingly during the night preventing the king from getting sleep. It should be noted that most likely King Nebuchadnezzar didn't sleep alone at night but had a concubine...even more than one...in bed with him. If so, they must have been just as much troubled as he.

The words "as these" sets the stage for getting down to business, what King Nebuchadnezzar had been after since these dreams began.

Vs. 29: To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be hereafter, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be.

The words “as you lay in bed” are found in the previous verse and intimate a restlessness or lack of sleep whereas here Daniel puts the same phrase in a more positive light in order to prepare King Nebuchadnezzar for the dream’s interpretation. Also he puts these troubling incidents in terms “thoughts” or *rayhon* of which there are five other references in Daniel, the next one being in vs. 30. They center upon the “hereafter” or ‘*acharey* which is similar to *be’acharyth* of vs. 28, “in the latter days.” If the Babylonian diviners had even this clue, they may have solved their king’s dilemma, but they lacked it and were condemned to death.

So here we have King Nebuchadnezzar desirous to get at the root of these dreams as he is listening to a foreigner giving an interpretation of which seems to be of his liking. He could tell Daniel was for real just by watching him talk on. It was obvious that he didn’t attempt to deceive nor impose the performance of impossible tasks. The dreams are “mysteries” or *raz* (cf. vs. 28) which have a twofold process of manifestation. First comes revelation or *gelah* (cf. vs. 28) followed by a making known or *yadah* (cf. vs. 23). In other words, an uncovering followed by a recognition of what has been uncovered. To a certain degree, this uncovering or making bare (the original meaning of *gelah*) lays in the future, “what is to be,” the “latter days” of vs. 28. Hearing these words provides some comfort to King Nebuchadnezzar. At first he was disturbed by his dreams, but as he listens to Daniel, he felt a growing sense of worth at having been singled out to have them, even if they were from a god alien to the Babylonian pantheon. Perhaps going through his mind right now is that yes, I will set up a statue in all the temples to this god beside the others he had taken in earlier military campaigns..

Vs. 30: But as for me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living has this mystery been revealed to me, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

Before launching into a detailed explanation of the king’s dreams, Daniel wisely downplays his role so Nebuchadnezzar won’t make him into some kind of idol to be worshiped, a god living among men. Thus he claims the “wisdom” or *chakmah* he has as not special or one proper to all the “living” even though in vs. 23 he attributes such *chakmah* to God’s favor. In getting down to business, Daniel again brings up the importance of revelation, that *gelah* he stresses so often with a volatile monarch like Nebuchadnezzar. All the while he is doing this under the guise of his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar.

Daniel gains confidence as he moves along, throwing responsibility upon King Nebuchadnezzar for knowing his dreams. In that way he can take possession of them and act in accord with the “thoughts of his mind,” those *rayhon* of vs. 29. He does the king a big favor by attributing their source as laying in his “mind” or *levav* which is the common word for heart. It has five other references in the Book of Daniel. “Let his mind be changed from a man’s; and let a beast’s mind be given him” [4.16].

Vs. 31: "You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening.

Chazah is the verb for "saw," the root for "visions" as in vs. 28 (here, 'of his head'). With this in mind, Daniel begins a kind of initiation process for King Nebuchadnezzar, namely, that his seeing is at one with his vision...his *chazah* is in line with his *chezeh*. This leads to an expression of astonishment signified by "behold" or '*alu*. Such beholding is a sudden realization of the dream's form and serves to introduce it at once. There are four other references to '*alu* in Daniel, the next one being 4.10: "I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth."

The immediate object of '*alu* is *tselem* which occurs only in Daniel though the spelling is identical with the Hebrew. This noun also applies to a shadow suggesting an image as well as something essentially empty. It occurs in the next verse while the negative sense is conveyed in 3.1: "King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth and its breadth six cubits." Actually the verse at hand presents this *tselem* as "one" or *chad* which isn't in the English text, but Daniel mentions it, knowing that the king might confuse it with the manifestation of one of the Babylonian gods.

Despite the shadow-like nature of *tselem*, it had a reality for the king and if so, ramifications for his kingdom once word about it leaks out. Actually he may not want that not to cause panic. Still, this dialogue between him and Daniel couldn't be contained to the confines of the royal court for long; surely courtiers were listening in and loved to gossip.

The *tselem* is characterized by two features, "mighty" and having "exceedingly brightness." *Sagy*' derives from a verbal root meaning to multiply or to become great. It is found in vs. 2 though not mentioned there. One other reference exists outside the Book of Daniel, Ezra 5.11: "We are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago which a great king of Israel built and finished." The second characteristic is *zev* or the noun brightness which has five other references in Daniel, the next being 4.36: "and still more greatness was added to me." Apparently *zev* applies to the human face as determined by its use in other verses. This face in its brightness, if you will, "stood" before King Nebuchadnezzar, the verb being *qum* (cf. vs. 21), which fundamentally means to arise. With this in mind, the images "rises up" before him which is not an inappropriate way to express such a thing.

The noun "appearance" or *reh* is not unlike *tselem* in that both are ghost-like objects. There is one other biblical reference to the former, 3.25: "and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." This word derives from the verbal root *ra'ah* meaning to see. Instead of being bestowed with some type of luminosity as is the case of *zev*, this appearance is "frightening," *dechal* (five other references in Daniel). The corresponding Syriac implies reference; whether that is true here is not certain. Regardless, the image terrified King Nebuchadnezzar.

Vs. 32: The head of this image was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze,

Now that Daniel has navigated through his introductory remarks and has the king's attention, from here through vs. 45 he goes into considerable detail about the dream. He speaks of this

“image” (*tselem*) beginning from the top down where the body is divided into three parts up to the waist. The three are described into the next verse with the order as follows:

1) The head consists of “gold” (*dahav*) which is “fine,” the common adjective for “good.” “Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold all together were broken in pieces” [vs. 35].

2) The “breast” or *chadyn* and “arms” (*derah*), two words being the only biblical references. Both are “silver” (*kesaph*), the next reference being vs. 35. In other words the central part of the image’s body, its breast, is silver extending to both arms.

3) The “belly” or *meheh* (only biblical reference) which is similar to the Hebrew in Ps 22.14: “my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast.” Also “thighs” (*yarkah*, only biblical reference) is similar to the Hebrew which means sides, and thighs can be said as being on the side of the belly to support it.

Vs. 33: its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

Finally Daniel comes to the bottom part of the *tselem*, that is, from the waist down. The “legs” (*shaq*, the only biblical reference) as well as feet (*regal*; six other references, all in Daniel) which consist partly of “iron” (*parzel*). This material appears later on in Daniel, quite frequently, in fact. Despite iron’s strength, many verses speak of it as being broken. *Chasaph* means “clay” which in Daniel is often associated with iron, the two being mixed together which is a sign of internal weakness and inability to support something, the image at hand, for example.

No small wonder that King Nebuchadnezzar couldn’t get any sleep. Only Daniel could articulate the dream, a fact which quickly became apparent to everyone. We have no insight into what Daniel himself thought of this mystery which he is unfolding to the king. Actually that isn’t his job which is to recount the dream in a direct, matter-of-fact manner minus the insertion of personal observations or the like. However, he must be aware of the jealousy he has aroused in the court and among the diviners, even though he had been responsible for saving their lives.

Vs. 34: As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it smote the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces;

The words “as you looked” (*chazah*) is a way Daniel kept King Nebuchadnezzar focused upon the interpretation of his dream, the same tactic he employs in vs. 31: “You saw (*chazah*), O king, and behold, a great image.” In this way the king won’t be distracted nor tempted to disrupt Daniel’s account. It is very important that everything be laid out in accord with what the Lord desires. Obviously, this interpretative process is delicate, a fact which Nebuchadnezzar seems to appreciate.

The stone from which the image is hewn is ordinary but the action performed upon certainly is not. *Gezar* means “cut out” found last in vs. 27 as the participle “astrologers.” There it was mentioned that such persons would observe or “cut out” an interpretation from the movement and position of stars and planets. So indirectly we could take this *gezar* not as coming from the heavens but as from the Lord himself, hence the words “by no human hand.”

The shape or form of this stone (apparently it had pre-existed and was not created) not hewn by human means differs from the just described image whose origin isn't given and is as mysterious as the way it took shape. As soon as it saw the image it attacked, "smote" or *mecha'* being the verb which connotes hindering or restraining. It is found in the next verse as well as 4.35, the only three uses in the Bible: "and none can stay his hand." The point of attack is the image's (*tselem*, cf. vs. 32) feet, its most vulnerable spot, being composed of the unlikely mixture of iron and clay. Thus the feet are unstable to begin with and could barely support the image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver and belly and thighs of bronze, all very heavy metals. Even if this image were to walk around, it risked falling to pieces.

Daqaq is the verb for "broke (them) in pieces" and like the similar Hebrew, suggests crushing or grinding into powder until it's almost invisible. With this grinding motion in mind, the stone not cut by a human hand is not unlike a huge mill which crushes everything in its path. *Daqaq* is found in the next verse.

Vs. 35: then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold, all together were broken in pieces and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel continues with a description of the stone assaulting the image with the verb *deqaq* and its connotation of grinding into fine power. For emphasis he adds "all together," *kachadah*, which reads literally "as one." The closest analogy Daniel comes up with is chaff...not just any chaff but the kind found on "summer threshing floors" meaning the kind which is very dry and combustible. The noun for this is '*idrey* modified by *qayt*, the only two uses of both terms in the Bible. It is during this season, perhaps towards the end of it, that wheat is ground and chaff being separated from it. The image is not unlike John the Baptist's prophecy of Jesus Christ: "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" [Mt 3.12].

Once the wheat has been separated from the chaff, the "wind" or *ruach* (apparently identical to the Hebrew but listed separately; cf. 2.3) carries it away to the four corners of the earth where it is forgotten. In fact, no "place" can be found for it, '*atar* occurring three other instances in Daniel, the next being vs. 39 which conveys the original sense of "after:" "after you shall arise another kingdom of bronze which shall rule over all the earth."

So once this stone, apparently small by reason of its sudden cutting off, has smashed the image and turned it the metals into something which resembles chaff, it "filled" the entire earth, *mela'* being the verb similar to the Hebrew *mala'*. The only other biblical reference is 3.19: "Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury."

As for the noun "mountain" (*tur*), the only other biblical reference is vs. 45: "just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand." *Tur* is similar to the Hebrew for wall, the idea presumably in reference to the imposing height of a mountain looming overhead. So this stone of small size grows to fill the entire earth which pretty much absorbs it, thereby changing its identity.

Vs. 36: "This was the dream; now we will tell the king its interpretation.

Daniel has concluded the first part of his interview with King Nebuchadnezzar and now moves immediately to the dream's "interpretation" or *peshar* (cf. vs. 24). Note that Daniel uses the first person plural, "we." Perhaps he is thinking of his three companions, Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah, with whom he had consulted. The king doesn't respond which intimates he didn't care, as long as the dream and its interpretation were accurate. Then again, what is the right interpretation in this tense circumstance? Do Daniel and his companions have to make something up or doctor the facts in order to flatter their patron? Truly they were on uncertain ground because King Nebuchadnezzar had not revealed his dream to neither his diviners nor to Daniel. Because Daniel was correct as far as the dream goes, most likely he'll do the same with its interpretation.

Vs. 37: You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power and the might and the glory,

Wisely Daniel uses the flattering title "king of kings" as he continues to address Nebuchadnezzar yet at the same time tries to make him aware that he does not have this authority by his own might. It derives from the "God of heaven," *shemayn* being the word used and found last in vs. 19. Daniel isn't attempting to convert Nebuchadnezzar even though he'd like that very much; more practically and immediately he would like him to recognize the God of Israel. If that happened, everything in the civilized world would change drastically. In one sense this is a bold move because Nebuchadnezzar is the most powerful man in the world who twice had invaded Israel, a peripheral land compared with Egypt and the like. All these countries had multiple gods and goddesses with the exception of Israel, a curiosity of sorts, and not to be taken seriously. So while Daniel continues with his interpretation, most likely the king recalled his invasion and subsequent dealings with Israel, no pressing issues as far as he was concerned. However, Daniel has gotten his attention, so much that he doesn't respond until later in vs. 46.

Daniel speaks about the divine source of King Nebuchadnezzar's authority, that is, in the context of four general spheres:

1) "Kingdom" or *malkuth* first noted in 1.1, "in the third year of the reign of Johoiakim, king of Judah." Every known land at the time was ruled by a king, so familiar among people that it went unquestioned.

2) "Power" or *chesen* which has one other biblical reference, 4.30: "Is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power?" The idea is to bind up or to lay up as in a store as the Hebrew word of Prov 15.6 connotes: "In the house of the righteous there is much treasure."

3) "Might" or *teqoph* which has one other biblical reference, 4.30 cited just above as "mighty." The verbal root occurs in Daniel five times, the first being 4.11 as "became strong:" "The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven."

4) "Glory" or *yeqar* noted last in vs. 6 as "honor."

Vs. 38: and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the sons of men, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold.

Daniel continues from the previous verse in one breath, as it were, about the divine source of King Nebuchadnezzar's power, gaining in confidence as he addresses the mightiest ruler on earth. He begins with the second use of the verb "has given" (cf. previous verse) which is *yehav*. There it is used with respect to the four spheres of influences entrusted to rulers like King Nebuchadnezzar whereas here *yehav* pertains to three categories of living beings. Note that Daniel prefaces this by the words "wherever they dwell," *dur* being the verb. It has five other references, the next one being 4:1: "King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth." By referring to mankind in general, the influence of Nebuchadnezzar will extend over every person on earth in the not too distant future.

This potential lordship over the entire world brings to mind the rule which the Lord God had endowed man at the dawn of creation: "and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" [Gn 1.26]. If Nebuchadnezzar could subscribe to this view of creation as subject to the one Lord God, his rule would be the most benign known to mankind. He would be re-creating what Gn 1.26 says before it speaks of dominion: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

The verb for "rule" is *shelet* which has six other references in Daniel, the next one being vs. 39. Like its Hebrew counterpart, *shelet* implies not just having authority but mastery which is more important. The image Daniel uses to describe this *shelet* is a "head of gold" or *dahav* noted last in vs. 32 with respect to the "great image" [vs. 31] which Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream though had no clue about what it represented. Just now Daniel had described in some detail the significance of this image which a stone "cut out by no human hand" [vs. 34] had smashed into pieces. There the head is composed of "fine gold" whereas in the verse at hand this adjective (the common one for 'good') is missing. If King Nebuchadnezzar weren't so in awe of Daniel, he could take these words as a direct threat. In other words, the "great image" suffered total destruction at the hands of the stone not cut by human hand. Further reflection would lead Nebuchadnezzar to believe he would suffer destruction at the hands of the God of Israel. Actually, given his volatility, it isn't surprising he put Daniel to death there on the spot.

Vs. 39: After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze which shall rule over all the earth.

We can assume Daniel was aware that King Nebuchadnezzar could take the dream's interpretation the wrong way and put him to death at once. However, he avoids this by saying that the stone smashing the other metals pertained to kingdoms other than Babylon. In other words, it doesn't involve a king who might supplant Nebuchadnezzar. A huge relief, to be sure, for both men and perhaps a disappointment to the king's captain, Arioch who, as the second most powerful man in Babylon, might be contemplating a coup.

"Inferior" is the noun '*arha*' which occurs rather frequently in Daniel and fundamentally means the earth. The idea seems to be that the earth lies under the heavens, keeping in mind that the night sky was vitally important to the Babylonians with their astronomical observations and

interpretations including astrological readings. In other words, 'arha' is a kind of sublunary realm where humans intermingled with gods. In this verse it occurs as "earth" as well.

Daniel speaks briefly, almost hesitatingly, about "another kingdom" as well as a third one, continuing in vs. 40 with yet a fourth kingdom. This must have sounded confusing to Nebuchadnezzar, reducing the inflated image he had of himself, yet he remained enthralled at Daniel's interpretation of his dream. After all, Daniel isn't responsible; he's just putting out the facts as they are, and King Nebuchadnezzar can do with them what he wishes. Nevertheless, this is a huge gamble for Daniel, his three compatriots as well as other Hebrews living in Babylon, not including the diviners whom the king had issued a death sentence.

Vs. 40: And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things; and like iron which crushes, it shall break and crush all these.

While King Nebuchadnezzar continues in rapt attention, Daniel speaks of a fourth kingdom. Hopefully this will be the last one which turns out to be true. It will be "strong" as iron, the adjective being *taqyph* and found three other times in Daniel, the next reference being vs. 42. The verbal root suggests arrogance by reason of the power one has gained. Certainly iron fits that description because of its superior strength and durability. Iron, too, will be smashed (cf. vs. 45).

In the meanwhile, iron rules and does so with the strength one associates with its composition. It "breaks into pieces and shatters" everything. The first verb is *deqaq* noted last in vs. 35 and connotes reducing to power. The second verb is *chashal*, the only one in the Bible, and suggests making thin by beating. In other words, *chashal* is like hammering out a thin piece of metal.

The strength of this fourth kingdom which resembles iron yet is not named can crush everything as well, the verb being *rehah*. It occurs twice here, the only occurrences in the Bible. *Rehah* parallels the Hebrew *raha* which means to do evil, so this is in line with iron's nature and the two verbs "breaks to pieces and shatters."

At this point one can begin to sympathize with King Nebuchadnezzar. Obviously all this breaking, shattering and crushing rolling around in his head kept him from getting a good night's sleep.

Vs. 41: And as you saw the feet and toes partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom; but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the miry clay.

The words "as you saw" are inserted as a means of keeping King Nebuchadnezzar attentive to Daniel's narrative and thus avoid any misunderstandings. Here the "clay" or *chasaph* (first found in vs. 33) is specified as belonging to a potter and hence a molding or fashioning. Never would a true potter fashion an object of clay and iron like the feet and toes of this image. Their commingling suggests something not done in accord with nature and against common sense. That's why the clay and iron make for a kingdom which is "divided" or *peleg*, the only use of this verb in the Bible which is similar to the Hebrew. The noun *peleg* derives from it and means stream or river...i.e., something divided from a larger source of water.

Nitsbah is the noun for “firmness” (the only biblical reference) which parallels the Hebrew verb *natsav*, to stand upright and hence to be strong or firm. However, this *nitsbah* is reduced to small pieces amid the larger matrix of clay, hardness and softness being combined against their natures.

In this verse “clay” or *chasaph* is described first as belonging to a potter (and hence being malleable) as well as “miry” or *tyn*, a noun which occurs one other time, vs. 43. The difference seems to be that *tyn* applies to earthenware compared to the more generic *chasaph* associated in this verse with a potter.

Vs. 42: And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle.

Instead of “as” and “so” the text has the conjunctive *w-* or “and” which makes the iron and clay comprising the image's toes and feet correspond to the unidentified kingdom. So while King Nebuchadnezzar was delighted with Daniel's ability to interpret his dream, he found this talk about four kingdoms disconcerting, any one of which could be a rival to Babylon either now or in the future. With this in mind, Nebuchadnezzar must have thought of the kingdoms around him, all potential threats.

The iron, of course, is “partly strong,” *taqyph* being the adjective as in vs. 40. However, it is present within the clay composite like chunks which certainly are *taqyph* but are prevented by the clay from coming together. And so the toes and feet of the image are “brittle” or *tevar*, a participle, the only use of this word in the Bible. If the image came to life—and Daniel seems to intent that it will move—it would come crashing down to the ground after a few steps forward. Applied to a kingdom as yet unidentified, this combination of opposites, strong and brittle, represents both good and bad features which ultimately will do it in.

Vs. 43: As you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together just as iron does not mix with clay.

Daniel continues with this theme of iron mixed with clay (‘miry’ as in vs. 41) so important for King Nebuchadnezzar to grasp because the future of Babylon depends upon it, to say nothing of Daniel himself, his companions and of course, the exiles from Israel. Note the two mixings: one is present...an actuality...whereas the second is yet to happen. This second mixing is in the context of “marriage,” *zerah* being the only biblical term though related closely to the Hebrew which fundamentally means seed.

Devaq is the participle for “hold together” and related to three uses of a Hebrew adjective which apply to joining or cleaving. One verse is Dt 4.4: “but you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive this day.” And so *zerah* and *devaq* convey the same notion. Perhaps Daniel has in mind an actual marriage between the king of one country and the queen of another. It can be a typical marriage of convenience where the mutual dislike of spouses trickles down quickly to the two royal courts and further to the bureaucracies, bottoming out among the people themselves.

Vs. 44: And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever;

Obviously King Nebuchadnezzar is familiar with the affairs of other kingdoms and peoples, keeping a sharp eye on them with a view to warding off any potential military threat. Nevertheless, something unexpected could arise without him nor his advisers knowing about it. Thus it is prudent to maintain a vigorous foreign policy to defend Babylon against possible attacks or the like.

“In the days of those kings” suggest an indefinite period of time laying in the equally indefinite future though not so terribly far off. Mention of a number of kings...neither their names nor their number is given...sounds troubling to Nebuchadnezzar, for they are direct threats not so much to him personally but to his successor(s). Still, in this context the “God of heaven” (and that means the God of Israel) will establish a kingdom, the verb for “set up” being *qum* noted last in vs. 31 which is suggestive of a rising as well as an establishing. Although Daniel speaks of his God like this, he really means the God of Israel, that puny but troublesome land Nebuchadnezzar had invaded twice. If that country’s god becomes involved with Babylon, does this mean the conquest of Babylon by Israel?

The future possibility of God establishing a kingdom is bad enough but made worse by the fact that never will it be “destroyed,” *chaval*. This verb also suggests being spoiled or corrupted and is found next in 4.23: “Hew down the tree and destroy it.” Also this kingdom will have a “sovereignty” or *maliku* will belong to another people, a word being akin to “kings” and “kingdom.” Note the passive “be left” or *shavaq* which connotes being left alone. Three other references are found in Daniel, the next being 4.15: “But leave the stump of its roots in the earth.” *Shavaq* intensifies the adjective “another” which to King Nebuchadnezzar meant a non-Babylonian rival such as Egypt and (God forbid) Israel.

Despite the king’s misgivings, this action by the “God of heaven” seems inevitable. The kingdom he sets up will “break in pieces” the kingdoms Daniel had mentioned, that is, their number, not their names. The verb is *daqaq* noted last in vs. 34 which suggests being reduced to fine power or dust, so much so that easily the wind will blow it away and be forgotten. The words “bring to an end” are rendered by the verb *yasaph* which means to add, to increase or to continue with something indefinitely. Since God is involved, no person has an idea how this will come about, simply that it will, and everyone will know it. Once done, this kingdom will be the only one remaining and “will stand forever,” another use of the verb *qum* with its connotation of rising. In other words, this kingdom won’t be static but will continue to rise...to grow.

Vs. 45: just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be hereafter. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Daniel brings King Nebuchadnezzar’s attention back to what he had seen in vs. 38. We don’t know what shape this stone assumed since God had hewn it much as he had done with the two tables of the testimony which were “written with the finger of God” [Ex 31.18]. Chances are this very special stone was round in shape which “broke in pieces” the five elements comprising the image seen by

the king in his dream (cf. vs. 35). The verb here is *daqaq* found in the previous verse. In other words, this stone has so much power that a single roll will reduce to dust anything that stands in its way.

Yadah (cf. vs. 23) means “made known” and implies being privy to intimate details and information which here comes to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. True, the Lord did make known his intent to the king of Babylon about the future four kingdoms but stopped there. The reason was to bring in Daniel that he may interpret the dream. Nebuchadnezzar could abide by this interpretation or not.

Note the two adjectives “certain” and “sure” or *yatsyv* and ‘*aman*. The former occurs four other times in Daniel and derives from a verbal root meaning to set, therefore connoting firmness. The latter has two references, 6.4 and 6.23, the former being cited here: “they could find no ground for complaint nor any fault because he was faithful.” *Yatash* applies to the dream and ‘*aman* to the interpretation, bold words for Daniel which he claims not on his own but from the “vision of the night” in vs. 19.

Thus ends the interpretation of Daniel concerning King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In a sense, he wished he could continue in order to put off the inevitable reaction which, of course, could turn out to be anything. However, he could tell from the king’s face that he was deeply interested and used that expression as favorable.

Vs. 46: Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and did homage to Daniel and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.

A very dramatic moment, to be sure, not only for Daniel (hitherto he didn’t know the king’s response) but for Arioch and other members of the court who may have been in attendance, including Daniel’s three close friends. All along Nebuchadnezzar’s conviction as to the genuineness of Daniel’s interpretation had been growing though he could not make it public. After all, the fate of the entire kingdom was at stake. This obeisance to Daniel by the most powerful man on earth must have been tremendous news for the diviners recently put under a ban. So despite the success of Daniel’s intervention, what he had interpreted needs to be worked out. At last King Nebuchadnezzar could get a full night’s sleep instead of being tormented by his dreams and lack of help interpreting them. That sentiment too must have been part of his homage to Daniel.

Falling upon one’s face and doing homage are more or the less the same gesture of reverence, the first as a physical gesture of submission followed by words of the submission itself. The verb for “did homage” is *segad* which occurs frequently in the Book of Daniel and connotes prostration coupled with words of obeisance. “All the peoples, nations and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up” [3.7]. We don’t know how long this act of submission lasted, but for Daniel it must have seemed extremely long. Now he was put on the spot with the most powerful man in the world laying prostrate before him.

In typical fashion in a society where a multitude of gods and goddesses were worshiped, King Nebuchadnezzar orders both an “offering” and “incense” be given to Daniel as though he were part divine. The first is *minchah* which as one other biblical reference, Ezra 7.17, and is very close to the Hebrew spelling: “with their cereal offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer

them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem.” The second is *nesak*, the only use of this term in the Bible and again, closely related to the Hebrew. It seems to apply more to a drink offering compared with one involving grain or an animal, the verbal root meaning to pour out.

Vs. 47 The king said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

While King Nebuchadnezzar was giving reverence to Daniel...the actual nature of the dream and its interpretation have yet to be manifest in reality...Daniel was relieved that he was not the object of worship but his God whom the king acknowledged as the “God of gods,” that is, the Lord over the Babylonian gods as well as any other divinities that may have been imported into Babylonian worship.

The verb for “said” is *hanah* noted last in vs. 27 as “answered” and used here with *qoshet* or “truly” which is a noun found in one other place, 4.37: “for all his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase.”

Mare’ is the noun for “Lord” which occurs three other times in the Book of Daniel, the next being 4.19: “My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!” It derives from a verbal root meaning to be full of food, to be well nourished.

“Revealer” and “reveal” are derived from the same verbal root *gelah* found last in vs. 30 which means to uncover or to make bare.

Vs. 48: Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

This acknowledgment of Daniel by King Nebuchadnezzar parallels that of Pharaoh who raised Joseph to second in command over Egypt after the correct interpretation of his own troubling dreams. “Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt” [Gen 41.41]. Surely Daniel must have had Joseph in mind during this moment of exultation knowing full well that his new position would cause intense jealousy and rivalry among the Babylonian court. And like the pharaoh Joseph had served so well, a new one might arise “who did not know Joseph” [Ex 1.8].

King Nebuchadnezzar immediately bestowed upon Daniel “high honors and many great gifts,” *revah* and *matna’*. The former (adjective) occurs four other times in Daniel, the next being 4.11: “The tree grew and became strong” where “grew” is a participle. The latter is *matna’* which is noted last in vs. 6 in the same general context. *Matna’* is described as both “many and great” or *ravrav* and *sagy’* (cf. vs. 31). *Ravrav* is an exaggeration or *revah*, something like “great great,” and has seven references in Daniel, the next being 4.3: “How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders!” While the nature of these favors is not spelled out, surely it must have been not unlike those given to Joseph by Pharaoh.

Babylon is described as a “province” or *medynah* which has five other references in Daniel, the next being in vs. 49. It seems to be a juridical area, making Daniel something like a judge for the capitol area compared with other provinces under that country’s rule. So to hold a judicial

position over Babylon means that he has a lot to say about the central governing area of the empire. In addition to this, King Nebuchadnezzar appoints Daniel as “chief prefect” *signyn*, a kind of governor. Four other references occur in the Book of Daniel, the next being 3.2: “Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors...to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.” In the verse at hand, *segan* applies to Babylon’s “wise men” or *chakym* found last in vs. 27. They must have been delighted, for he would act as their protector against the whims of the king. Besides, these religious figures would seek the opportunity to learn from Daniel to prophesy correctly.

Vs. 49: Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel remained at the king's court.

Chapter Two ends on a positive note, namely, that Daniel bade the king to appoint his three closest friends in charge of the province of Babylon. So this part of the Book of Daniel ends with four foreigners put in charge over the center of power of the empire, a gesture bound to rouse suspicion and get them into trouble. Daniel uses the Babylonian names for these friends who in Hebrew are called Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah. It was a shrewd move on his part, adopting these names so as not to cause discord among the population. From now on, they would be in the public eye and thus under close scrutiny.

Manah is the verb for “appointed” (cf. vs. 24) with respect to the “affairs” proper to the most important part of the Babylonian empire. More specifically, the three friends were to administer the “affairs” of this seat of power, *havydah* meaning more literally “work.” It occurs one other time in Daniel, 3.12: “There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon.” Because Daniel himself petitioned King Nebuchadnezzar for this responsibility, the three complied. At least they would have each other to lean upon in any crisis. Obviously, the Hebrews who had resided within the Babylon empire greeted this decision with great joy. Still, they would have to be on the look-out from their neighbors who might become jealous.

The court of King Nebuchadnezzar was the very center of power within the province of Babylon. That meant Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were close by, perhaps in an adjacent building, so all four could collaborate with each other. Then there was the problem of Arioch, commander of the king’s guard. If he turned against them, there would be hell to pay. Chances are that Nebuchadnezzar ordered Daniel to remain at court, close by, in case of any future dreams which would require his expertise. Also, the diviners who originally attempted to interpret the king’s dream would drift back to the court and be re-instated.

Chapter Three

Vs. 1: King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

In a certain sense this *tselem* or “image” (cf. 2.34) came into existence through Daniel helping out King Nebuchadnezzar which must have horrified him and his three companions. After all, he was

the one who properly interpreted the dream and now saw it in the form of a hideous idol. That meant he had to confront the prospect of worshiping it as a god. Chances are that the king ordered Daniel to work with sculptors to make the image, otherwise they wouldn't know how to proceed. On the other hand, he may have been able to wiggle out of this since Nebuchadnezzar had scribes present when Daniel was interpreting the dream. They took down meticulous notes which could be used for the image's construction. Nevertheless, Daniel was in an awkward position because he was in charge of the province of Babylon, a new responsibility which meant he had to attend official ceremonies, dedication of the image being a prime example.

As for the image itself, we have no actual description, possibly in the likeness of King Nebuchadnezzar, totally of "gold" or *dahav* (cf. 2.32), not gold which is "fine" as noted there. While the head may be of gold, the rest of this image, along with the god, was "broken into pieces" [2.35]. Everyone knew that but didn't dare to mention it to the king. The grotesque size of this thing must have disgusted Daniel and others, but it did them well to keep their opinions to themselves.

The location of Dura is not found elsewhere in the Bible, but the image being situated on a plain was chosen deliberately, that is, in the province of Babylon. Thus everyone who made their way both in and out of the city had to confront it glistening in the desert sun and possibly illumined by torches at night. King Nebuchadnezzar may have thought he was honoring Daniel who was in charge of this most important of all provinces. All Daniel had to do was look out the window of his office, if you will, each day as the image took on shape until finally it was ready for dedication. He knew then he'd be put on the spot, having to attend as that province's leading official. To him King Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the true meaning of his dream. As this chapter advances, it bears out Daniel's premonition as we will find out shortly.

Vs. 2: Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to assemble the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

This sending (*shelach*) by the king was done by written decree which was to be delivered to these eight groups of people responsible for governing the Babylonian empire. Though not mentioned, top of the list must have been Daniel who was in charge of the province of Babylon. They were to gather in Babylon first and then make their way in sacred procession to the statue in the plain of Dura. These people heard of their king's dream, Daniel and so forth; they had no choice but to attend. The verb for "assemble" is *kenash* which has two other references in Daniel, the next one being in vs. 3 followed by vs. 27. The eight types of officials are as follows:

1) "Satraps" or '*achashdarpnya*', a mouthful of a word of Persian origin as with several others in this list, which applies to regional administrators or those in charge of provinces, Daniel being first among them. It occurs eight other times in the Book of Daniel, occurring next in vs. 3.

2) "Prefects" or *signyn* noted last in 2.48.

3) "Governors" or *pechah* which is found three other times in Daniel as well as Ezra, the next instance being vs. 3. One reference to this noun of the same Hebrew spelling is 1Kg 10.15: "from all the kings of Arabia and from the governors of the land."

4) “Counselors” or *‘adargazra’*, from the Persian which occurs in the next verse, the only biblical use and applies to judges.

5) “Treasurers” or *gedavyryn* which is found only here.

6) “Justices” or *detavar* which is found only here. Apparently they are similar to the counselors.

7) “Magistrates” or *tiphtaye’* which is found only here.

8) “Officials” or *shilton* which is found only here though similar to *shalton* or 4.3 as “dominion.” They are in charge of “provinces” or *medynah* noted last in 2.48, the position held by Daniel.

Chanukah means “dedication” which occurs in the next verse and has two references in Ezra, the first being 6.16: “And the people of Israel...celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.” The idea seems to be one of initiation though that of sacrifice doesn’t seem to be present in this particular instance.

Vs. 3: Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates and all the officials of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

This verse is more or less a repetition of the previous one mentioning the eight types of officials summoned by King Nebuchadnezzar, possibly right after the image had been cast and set up on the plain of Dura. Travelers had to make their way from far-flung corners of the Babylonian empire which means a waiting period of some duration as everyone hastened to gather whether they wished to come or not. Actually, their very lives depended upon them being present.

The verb for this standing before the image is *qum*, the same as “had set up.” Note that everyone was “before” the image (*qivel* also means ‘because’ as in 2.8), neither beside nor behind it. There is no indication that King Nebuchadnezzar himself was in attendance; perhaps not since this image was considered a replication of his royal-divine presence. This lack of royal presence served to enhance his mystique, his semi-divine status. Also nothing is said about Daniel being in attendance. He would have sought every means possible to avoid what he’d consider an abomination, a huge idol for which in a sense he had been responsible. In addition to the officials a sizable crowd must have gathered either out of reverence or curiosity, for how could anyone not miss this gigantic statue on the plain?

Vs. 4: And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations and languages,

This verse continues through the next one and ends in vs. 6.

Karuz is the noun for “herald,” the only one in the Bible, and related to the verbal root *qera’* (to call) out from which it is derived. Such a person must have a strong voice, one which can call out “aloud” or *chayl* (noun). It has four references in the Book of Daniel, the next being vs. 20: “And he ordered certain mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.” This herald

was considered the very voice of the king, so when he spoke, everyone had to listen attentively. The English text has “commanded” which in Chaldean is ‘*amar*’ used in the same sense as in vs. 12. However, the herald didn’t have to use such a forceful tone because the very word from his mouth was taken as coming directly from King Nebuchadnezzar. All the king had to do (or his representative) was to speak, and that was sufficient.

The herald addresses the eight groups of people as “peoples, nations and languages,” that is to say, these men from every corner of the Babylonian empire were representatives of their subjects. What they communicated had the same force as their king. Thus they were trained to absorb any royal communication exactly as it came down and to do the same to their subjects. In this way the communication transpiring from the herald derives directly from the king and passes without dilution to the officials who, in turn, pass it to their subjects whole and intact.

Vs. 5: that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up;

First we have the human voice of a herald addressing the Babylonian officials about the newly erected statue on the plain of Dura. Now he mentions the “sound” (*qal*) of six musical instruments plus one related to music in general which are listed as follows:

1) “Horn” or *qeren* which actually applies to the horn of an animal such as a goat. One such example is 7.7: “and it had ten horns.”

2) “Pipe” or *mashroqyta’* which has three other references in Daniel, the next being vs. 7. The verbal root is *sharaq* which means to hiss, to whistle.

3) “Lyre” or *qytaros*, the only use of this noun in the Bible.

4) “Trigon” or *sabka’*, the only use of this noun in the Bible.

5) “Harp” or *pesanteryn*, the only use of this noun in the Bible.

6) “Bagpipe” or *sumponyah* which has three other references in Daniel.

7) “Music” or *zemar*, the only use of this noun in the Bible but closely related to the Hebrew verb *zamar*, to sing praises.

In sum, these musical instruments are chosen because of their loudness or ability to project their sounds across long distances. For example, all six instruments could be used first in major cities after which agents of the king would fan out to remoter areas. Before you knew it, every corner of the Babylonian empire would receive the communication. Perhaps some if not all these instruments are kept for use of similar notifications, one of the most powerful means of communication available at the time.

Even though the golden image has a specific place just outside the city of Babylon, people would “worship” it not so much at the exact same time as we conceive it nowadays but close, for example, to the noon hour. The verb here is *segad* which occurs frequently in the Book of Daniel and noted last in 2.46. People were accustomed to such a practice, considering their king semi-divine.. Even if some did not subscribe to this publicly, they went through an external act of worship in order to keep their heads and those of their families.

Vs. 6: and whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

People were well acquainted with the consequences of not following a royal decree as promulgated like the one at hand. All were supposed to acknowledge the dream by King Nebuchadnezzar even if they hadn't a clue as to what it means. The simultaneity of this worship (*segad* again) is conveyed by "immediately" which reads literally "in the hour" or *shahah* and occurs next in vs. 15: "you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." "Hour" refers to a pre-set time of day as noon, suggested in the previous verse. Perhaps messengers went out in haste throughout the empire before the six musical instruments were sounded. In that way they informed the local populations that these instruments would be played at a designated hour. And so everyone would contribute to a unified act of worship as they faced towards the golden image.

Presumably King Nebuchadnezzar dispatched officials who would report on anyone not complying with this draconian order and arrest them on the spot. A "furnace" would be set up in local areas to burn any offenders, the noun being *atun* which occurs a number of times in the Book of Daniel. It derives from a verbal root meaning to smoke and could apply to local furnaces used for baking bricks as for construction. Thus there quite a few were around, the reason why this method of execution was chosen. Besides, it would help dispose of the bodies quickly. The words *nur* and *yeqad* are used not so much for effect though that is certainly true. Furnaces for baking bricks were heated to a high temperature and gave off plenty of smoke, making them visible both day and night, a frightful sight. The former noun occurs seven times in Daniel and the latter more frequently.

Vs. 7: Therefore as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

The picture we get is that everyone throughout the Babylonian empire heard in unison the "sound" or *qal* (cf. vs. 5) of the seven types of musical instruments. We have no information as to the identity of the musicians, but they must have been numerous and could have been pre-positioned throughout King Nebuchadnezzar's domain. Other could be performers at the royal court. Also, some of these players performed the crucial role of summoning of the local population to the battlements in case of war. Either the professional or semi-professional musicians were sent; if not available in remote areas, then anyone with a modicum of skill. That's why so many different types of instruments were involved; it increased the chances of at least one person playing them in every city and hamlet. The exact nature of this *qal* isn't given but is something like several blasts to alert people about something very important.

Zeman is translated as "soon as" and means a time or even season noted last in 2.21. It serves to specify the time when the musical instruments would be played though that is not given.

The universality of King Nebuchadnezzar's decree is emphasized not just by "all the peoples" (plural) but by "all the peoples, nations and languages." It would apply not just to native Babylonians but to foreign peoples under his dominion. Like so many ancient peoples, those

involved ranged from true believers to those making a public acknowledgment without further ado, after which they would get on with their lives. For royal officials that would suffice but would be compelled to prosecute any dissenters. Generally such decrees were well received, for subjects to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed a relatively benign, civilized society compared with their neighbors.

Vs. 8: Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

“Certain” or *gevar* is found last in 2.25 but not noted there and means more specifically “man.” It’s use here has an ominous ring, indicative of anonymous spies or informers who all along had been keeping a close eye on the Jewish population. Although small in number among other foreigners under Babylonian rule, they were led by highly competent people such as Daniel and his three companions. Thus they could be perceived as posing a threat to the kingdom’s internal stability.

The Chaldeans at hand must have been jealous of Daniel, a foreigner, who had gain such intimacy with their king and therefore be suspicious of plotting to overthrow him. This perception was compounded by reason of Daniel’s familiarity with Arioch, captain of the guard. If they could get at Daniel, they could do the same with Arioch.

“At that time” or *zeman* (cf. last verse) was ideal for discovering the true loyalty of the Jews or when everyone was commanded to give the idol obeisance.

Qerev is the verb for “came forward” and occurs five other times in the Book of Daniel, the next being vs. 26: “Then King Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace.” Given the circumstances, one gets the impression that these informers emerged from the shadows, their native environment. Apparently they were some kind of officials in the royal court because in the next verse they were at court addressing King Nebuchadnezzar. After having emerged from the shadows and before returning there, these men “accused” the Jews, the noun being *qerats* which literally means pieces of food. And so the text reads literally “and ate the pieces.” *Qerats* has one other biblical reference, 6.24: “and those men who had accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions.” That noun brings out the real meaning of *qerats*, for that is exactly what these lions did to the accusers. The adverb “maliciously” is lacking in the original text.

Vs. 9: They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live for ever!"

As mentioned in the previous verse, those men who emerged from the shadows of the royal court (one could argue that the court itself was a kind of shadow) were sycophants familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of their king. At this point Nebuchadnezzar revealed both. He was strong in that finally he resolved the troubling dream with Daniel’s help and weak...especially in the eyes of his court...that he was dependent upon a foreigner for this resolution. So here was an ideal opportunity for any one like these “certain Chaldeans” to come forward and hit as hard as possible.

The standard address or salute mentioned in this verse is pretty much what you’d expect from a subject to his master, especially one so powerful as Nebuchadnezzar. The “certain Chaldeans”

weren't the type of subjects who mean it, using every device possible to worm their way into the king's confidence. After all, Nebuchadnezzar had just ordered his entire kingdom to worship the image of gold which presumably is of himself. At this point he hadn't an idea about this request, basking in his new-found glory. Most likely it was a hollow glory because most of his subjects did obeisance to the idol out of fear, not with true reverence or devotion, the case with all absolute rulers.

While all this was transpiring Daniel continued his duties as "ruler over the whole province of Babylon" as well as being "chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" [2.48]. He too was compelled to bow down and worship the idol but probably came up with an excuse to be elsewhere. We have no information if he was at Dura itself, for vs. 2 says that King Nebuchadnezzar had summoned all his officials there. However, we can assume that he was present which is where the "certain Chaldeans" had been. So the exact nature of the accusation is murky. If Daniel had been at Dura and remained standing instead of falling down in worship to the idol, this would have been mentioned.

Vs. 10: You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image;

Tehem is the noun for decree found last in 2.14 as "discretion." It can have a fuller sense, more as an appeal compared to the common understanding of a decree as a summons to be effected on the spot as happens to be the case at hand.

Vs. 8 has the noun *qerats* along with the common verb to eat rendering the words "maliciously accused" (the Jews) as "ate the pieces." The verse at hand shows this attitude at work with regard to King Nebuchadnezzar by reminding him of the decree just issued. Of course, he didn't have to be reminded, but it is a way of intimidating him while the conspirators refrained from putting themselves on the line, of showing their innate vulnerability.

Although King Nebuchadnezzar was thrilled with Daniel's interpretation of the dream that had troubled him and resulted in promoting him to an exalted position, he was fairly ignorant of him and his three friends. This ignorance could extend to the Jews in general although twice he invaded their land which was relatively insignificant compared with Egypt and the like. And so the conspirators sowed their seeds of doubt and suspicion based on rumors that Daniel and his three companions failed to comply. That means they'd have to produce evidence right away which they were ready to bring forward.

Vs. 11: and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.

These words reflect those of vs. 6 and cap off perfectly what the conspirators hoped to achieve. All the while they were taking a chance, for despite the strong possibility of success, they were unsure as to King Nebuchadnezzar's loyalty towards Daniel. Their plan might backfire. Still, they went ahead which is why they decided to approach the king before slinking back into the shadows.

Vs. 12: There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no heed to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."

Vs. 8 speaks of "certain Chaldeans" (*gevar*) which has a certain ominous ring to it and used here as applicable to the Jews though with a menacing tone. The Jews are identified as Hananiah, Misha-el and Azariah but under their Babylonian names. Should King Nebuchadnezzar choose to go after these men, he would in essence be going after the entire population in exile at Babylon. Interestingly, the "certain Chaldeans" went after these "certain Jews," omitting Daniel. Actually, he doesn't appear until much later. Perhaps he was too powerful to attack directly, hence the focus upon his three compatriots. Such a plan would be in line with their long term strategy.

This direct report to King Nebuchadnezzar showed both the daring and cowardice of the "certain Chaldeans," working in the shades, if you will. By saying to his face that he had appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon, they are making the case that he as king would be directly responsible for any subversive action by these Jews. *Havydah* is the word for "affairs" mentioned last in 2.29, that is, all three were administering the central province or seat of power whereas Daniel remained at the royal court...sufficiently close by to implicate him. *Menah* is the verb for "appointed" also in 2.29, use of which here can be used to implicate the king himself should he take no action.

As for not paying heed to the king, the text reads literally "these did not place on you." Furthermore, the three companions failed to "serve" the king's gods as well as to "worship" the image set up in Dura. *Pelach* is the verb for the former and is found next vs. 14, fundamentally meaning to cleave or to furrow a field. *Segad* is the verb for the latter and found last in vs. 6. The former can refer to anything between their appointment up to the erection of the golden image. Being royal officials meant the three had to pay public homage to the local gods, something they couldn't avoid for very long.

Vs. 13: Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be brought. Then they brought these men before the king.

The king was won over immediately by the accusations these "certain Chaldeans" brought forth without questioning their motives. We could take Nebuchadnezzar's intense expression of anger as an assault on his pride and arrogance, but then again, he may have had in mind the cohesion of the Babylonian empire. If certain elements decided not to follow royal decrees, he would be confronted with the threat of rebellion.

"Furious rage" is rendered such by two nouns, *regaz* and *chema'*. The first is the only reference in the Bible and closely related to the Hebrew verbal root meaning to tremble, to be moved. The second also means warmth, an apt term to describe another meaning, anger, the next reference being vs. 19: "Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury."

The Chaldean informers got their way and acted more quickly than imagined. Some planning must have been involved, to be sure, for to approach the king with such a matter meant certain death if they miscalculated him. Nebuchadnezzar didn't have to go far to get Shadrach, Meshach

and Abednego...next door, if you will, for as administrators of the province of Babylon meant they were close to the royal palace.

Vs. 14: Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image which I have set up?"

The verb *hanah* (cf. 2.27) is used for "said" in conjunction with the common *'amar* (to speak, to say). It highlights both the surprise and disappointment King Nebuchadnezzar had when confronting three of his most trusted officials. One can detect a note of betrayal as well, especially when he says "Is it true?" or *tseda'*, the only use of this noun in the Bible which can be rendered something as "of a purpose." The suddenness with which Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were brought before the king surprised them. When they caught glimpse of the "certain Chaldeans" they knew for certain that they had been accused unjustly and had to face the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar. Quite a few royal officials were present which must have caught them off guard as well. Without a doubt, someone must have rushed off to inform Daniel who decided against coming, for he knew his turn was next. It was only a question of when this would happen.

Vs. 15: Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image which I have made, well and good; but if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace; and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?"

Despite the unexpected awkward situation in which King Nebuchadnezzar found himself with so many eyes upon him waiting for a decision, he threatens the three men while at the same time hoping they would fall down and worship the image at Dura. He had hoped they heard the various musical instruments giving the command and obeyed but apparently such was not the case. *Hatyd* is the adjective for "ready," the only use in the Bible, and related to the Hebrew verbal root meaning to be prepared or to be prompt. After all, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were administrators of the most important province in the Babylonian empire. They were expected to take the lead in such important matters. However, there seems to be no first hand eyewitnesses to whether or not they obeyed the royal decree.

Shezav is the verb for "will deliver" which connotes a setting free and is found next in vs. 17. In 2.47 King Nebuchadnezzar exclaims after Daniel had interpreted his dream, "Truly your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries." How quickly he had forgotten this! The king knew that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were close friends with Daniel, but that wouldn't save them now. At this point the "certain Chaldeans" must have gloated to themselves, trying their best from not showing their glee.

Vs. 16: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter."

The three companions respond to the king without hesitation and fear, most likely in the presence of those "certain Chaldeans" who eagerly were waiting what they had to say. These sycophants

must have been taken aback at their boldness which in itself was a refutation of their false accusation. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego respond with the proper name “Nebuchadnezzar” minus any formal title which serves to accentuate both their innocence and determination. *Chashach* is the participle for (no) “need” which has one other biblical reference, Ezra 6.9: “And whatever is needed—young bulls, rams or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven.” *Chashach* is used with *pitgam* or “matter” which also applies to an edict or letter. It has one other reference in Daniel: “The sentence is by the decree of the watchers” [4.17].

King Nebuchadnezzar and the “certain Chaldeans” must have been puzzled at this answer which hinted at a righteousness indignation out there for all to behold. They know they’re in a situation where any rational response is fruitless. They also know the accusation brought against them is partially true insofar as they did not give obeisance to the image. Why bother with arguing against a decree of death they knew was to follow?

Vs. 17: If it 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.

Not only do Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego continue with calm resignation, they come off with an astounding claim of divine protection against this, the most powerful ruler in the world. They state their dedication to God whom they “serve” or *pelach* (cf. vs. 12) which naturally forbade them to worship the gold image. Other Jews living in Babylon must have followed suite though we have no record of them whereas others went through with the outward gesture and then got on with their lives.

Shezav or “deliver” (cf. vs. 15) is used twice here: with respect to the furnace and the king’s hand. That pretty much puts Nebuchadnezzar in a position where he had no other choice but to execute Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Would he do the same to Daniel? That question remains to be seen.

Vs. 18: But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image which you have set up.”

The words “be it known to you” must have galled Nebuchadnezzar as well as having taken him by surprise, the three companions not showing the slightest intimidation or fear. Refusal to bow down to the golden image is one thing, but not serving “your gods” is a wholly different matter. The response is one of contempt as well, for “your gods” is a way of saying they do not exist nor ever have existed. Since the Babylonians were renowned for their astronomical observations, such contempt intimated that work as well, for it was interwoven with the practice of astrology.

The king must have been thinking of his earlier exclamation to Daniel in 2.47, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings.” How was he to reconcile the two? To condemn Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would be to condemn the very man (Daniel) who came to his rescue in a time of great need. Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar was on the spot. If he were to cave in, he would be doing so in a public manner that would be scandalous to those at court as well as to the Babylonian nation. And Arioch, captain of the guard, was always ready to step in and assist in any coup.

Vs. 19: Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

After such a bold, even brazen, few verses, King Nebuchadnezzar vented his “fury” or *chema’*, the only other biblical reference being found in vs. 13 above. It is the same rage but here as directed to the immediate execution of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Until then he was willing to hear them out with the possibility of saving them or making some kind of excuse due to their exalted position in the government. The “certain Chaldeans” who accused the three must have been thrilled, doing their best to conceal their delight at this royal decision which was irrevocable.

Tselem is the noun for “expression” noted last in vs. 1 with regard to the golden image King Nebuchadnezzar had erected on the plain of Dura. This word is used with the verb *shena’* in 2.21, there with regard to change of seasons. It’s almost impossible to describe what his face looked like, just as hideous to the three companions as the golden image. From there it was one step to heat the oven almost to the melting point. Earlier it was noted that quite a few such furnaces must have been scattered around the countryside for making bricks. The one at hand must have been considerably larger and more ominous looking because it was centrally located and therefore used for large scale building projects.

Vs. 20: And he ordered certain mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

“Mighty” and “men” both derive from a common Hebrew verbal root, *gavar* meaning to prevail, to be strong. The noun is *gevar* noted last in vs. 2 as “certain” (Jews) which is modified by another noun (the only use of this term in the Bible), *gibar*. One gets the sense that King Nebuchadnezzar picked out not just the strongest men but those who distinguished themselves in his various campaigns, possibly against Israel. If this were true, these soldiers would take particular delight in the work they were about to accomplish. Perhaps Arioch, the captain of the guard was responsible for delegating the executioners, having no other choice to but obey even though he was on friendly terms with Daniel.

Kephat is the verb for “bind” found in the next verse and has three other references, all in Daniel.

The sense of power conveyed by *gevar/gibar* corresponds not only to Nebuchadnezzar’s altered look but to the furnace having been heated seven times its normal capacity.

Vs. 21: Then these men were bound in their mantles, their tunics, their hats and their other garments, and they were cast into the burning fiery furnace.

By reason of their combustibility, the various types of garments stress the intense heat and flames of the furnace adjacent to the royal palace. They could even be part of official garb for the high positions the three companions held. The flowing nature of these clothes are sufficient for binding them, no ropes or other external means are required. The four types of clothing are as follows: “mantles” or *sarbalyn* which refers to under garments, “tunics” or *petash*, “hats” or *karbela’* and

the most general term of them all, “garments” or *levush*. The first three are the only found here whereas the fourth has one other reference, 7:9: “his raiment was white as snow.”

Although these are rarely used terms, they are idea for conveying the intent of King Nebuchadnezzar to make the most dramatic spectacle possible. One can just imagine Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego so tightly bound up and as combustible as they could be, standing there a few moments before the order was given to case them into the furnace.

Vs. 22: Because the king's order was strict and the furnace very hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Milah is the noun for “order” noted last in 2.23 as “matter” which here is “strict.” It applies to the strong words from vs. 19 to now as “seven times more,” “mighty men,” “bound” (in combustible clothes), “strict,” “very hot” and “slew.” All are intended to heighten the powerless three companions confronted with certain death. At least their combustible clothing insured they would die instantly.

Chatsaph is found one other time (2.15) where it is rendered as “severe.” Actually, the “certain Chaldeans” who had brought accusations against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego couldn’t be more delighted, being front row and center as they observed each and every move as closely as possible. The men consumed by the furnace are those “certain mighty men” of vs. 20 who must have been an unexpected treat of what was soon to happen.

Vs. 23: And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

Since the furnace had consumed the mighty men chosen to cast Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the intense heat was sufficient to suck in the companions without further ado. Some kind of special fuel is being used to get the oven heated seven times above its normal capacity. Those in charge knew it might crack but went ahead anyway in order to make the execution of the three companions as spectacular as possible. However, they emerge unscathed and already must have had a premonition of this since they hadn’t been burned at the very moment the fire consumed those chosen to cast them into the furnace.

NB: The Septuagint or Greek version inserts here *The Prayer of Azariah* and *The Song of the Three Young Men*, that is, between vs. 23 and vs. 24. However, those two texts are included in a supplement posted at the end of this document.

Vs. 24: Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He said to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered the king, "True, O king."

The King himself took special interest in the execution of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, possibly having mixed feelings by reason of their remarkable ability. He knew, albeit sadly, that they were intimates of Daniel which means the “certain Chaldeans” might go after him next.

Tevah is the verb for “astonished,” the only use of this word in the Bible and used concurrently with *behal* or “in haste,” a verb noted last in 2.25 which connotes being afraid as well as taking flight. This rising up suggests that King Nebuchadnezzar was seated close to the opening of the furnace yet far back enough so as not be burned. Thus he was the first person to witness the astonishing sight at hand. Right beside the king were his counselors, the first time these men are mentioned. Chances are they had no association with the “certain Chaldeans” and may even have had numerous run-ins with them over the years. As royal counselors it was difficult to deal with such shady characters who always tried to interfere in matters of state. The noun for “counselors” is *hadavar* which occurs three other times in the Book of Daniel, the next being vs. 27. The verbal root is *davar* which means to speak and thus is indicative of this consultative role. King Nebuchadnezzar was too taken aback at what was happening to say or do anything. In fact, he may have thought the sight before his eyes was some kind of optical illusion.

Vs. 25: He answered, "But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

While both Nebuchadnezzar and his counselors agreed that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been cast into the furnace (they didn't seem concerned about those who were burnt doing it), the king saw four men. They were “loose” or *shere'*, that is, untied from “their mantles, their tunics, their hats and their other garments” noted in vs. 21. Obviously the flames had dissolved their bonds while not harming the wearers. *Shere'* is found last in 2.22 with another meaning, “dwells.”

Furthermore, the three companions are not “hurt,” *chaval* (the only use of this word in the Bible), as they walk about within the furnace which, as noted earlier, must have been one the largest around due to its central location in Babylon and used for making bricks in the city's unending construction projects.

As for the fourth man who remain unidentified, his “appearance” or *demah* is singled out, the noun being close to the Hebrew verbal root *damah*, to be like. It occurs one other time, 7.5: “And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear.” To both King Nebuchadnezzar and his counselors this fourth man resembled a “son of the gods.” They must have had an idea of what such a being looked like from their tradition even though it could be an illusion due to the leaping of flames. Refer to vs. 28 where Nebuchadnezzar calls this being an angel.

Vs. 26: Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come forth and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.

Due to the intensity of the fire, everyone stood back at a safe distance else they be consumed as had been the case of those who tossed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So when King Nebuchadnezzar approached the door, the fire must have died down a bit...not fast enough for him after what he had just witnessed...and bade the three men to come out. He didn't order the fourth man, the son of the gods, to exit, fearful of who he might be and take revenge for having issued a decree of execution.

Nebuchadnezzar calls the three “servants” of the Most High God or *havad* noted last in 2.4. He had a not entirely dissimilar experience with Daniel, that is, when he acknowledged “your God is God of gods and Lord of kings” [2.47]. This occurred immediately after the successful interpretation of the dream, the memory of which now must have hit Nebuchadnezzar with considerable force, even with some recrimination.

So as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego made their way out of the furnace, the fourth man “like a son of the gods” remained although we have no account of anyone seeing him. Chances are that as soon as the three exited, much effort was made to extinguish the furnace...no small task...to discover the identity of this mysterious person. However, nothing nor no one was to be found.

Vs. 27: And the satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their mantles were not harmed and no smell of fire had come upon them.

Here we have three governing bodies mentioned last in vs. 3 as being assembled for the dedication of King Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image set up on the plain of Dura. These people were responsible for the empire’s governance and did not come together except during special occasions. Obviously the dedication of the statue was important (for the king, at least). The same applies to the miraculous event that just transpired, the rescue and preservation of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego after their recent ordeal. King Nebuchadnezzar deemed this so important an event that he summoned his officials. The first summons was for a dedication whereas this time it was to behold and verify a miracle. They got the details by courier, of course, and wondered if it were actually true. At least curiosity urged them on, so as soon as the officials had arrived home, they turned around and hastened to Babylon. Hence there was some gap of time between their arrival and when the three companions emerged from the furnace meaning that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were treated as curiosities, even gods, by reason of their experience.

Shelet is the noun for “power” found last in 2.38 as “rule.” The observation that their hair wasn’t singed, their clothing harmed nor did they have the smell of fire is compounded by the fact of having been cast into the furnace with bound with their mantles, tunics, hats and other garments. This means that King Nebuchadnezzar had to preserve the three companions in their original condition, as it were, as he awaited the arrival of his officials. He had the support of numerous eye witnesses who could testify to what had happened.

Vs. 28: Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him and set at nought the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

Berak is a participle for “blessed” first noted in 2.20 which in this instance is both an exclamation and recognition by King Nebuchadnezzar that the God of Israel was responsible for delivering Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. As has been pointed out several times earlier, the king did pretty much the same in recognition of Daniel’s interpretation of the dream. So now the most

powerful man on earth gives homage to four men, more accurately, the God whom they worship, taken from an obscure nation he had subdued. Actually, Nebuchadnezzar is extravagant in his praise which could fade away just as quickly as it came on, something the Jews were used to. Nevertheless, word of this must have spread rapidly throughout Babylon to all the Jewish exiles, a cause of great delight and pride in their leaders.

The “angel” or *mali’ak* of whom King Nebuchadnezzar speaks most likely is that fourth man in the furnace “like a son of the gods” [vs. 25]. It has one other reference (6.22) in not a dissimilar situation: “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths.” Like its Hebrew counterpart, *mali’ak* pertains to a messenger. If that fourth man was actually present, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego don’t speak of him to the king nor to anyone else. Later they must have mentioned it in some detail to Daniel which is why he refers to this *mali’ak* in the lions’ den, the same one who had been in the furnace. It is to Nebuchadnezzar’s credit, however, that he didn’t press the three companions for further information.

Three words in rapid succession, all related to each other: *shezav* is the verb for “delivered” noted last in vs. 17, 2), *rechats* is the verb for “trusted,” the only biblical reference and seems related to the Hebrew verb to wash and *shena’* for “set at nought” noted last in vs. 19, its fundamental meaning to change.

Vs. 29: Therefore I make a decree: 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 deliver in this way."

Now King Nebuchadnezzar decides to formalize his enthusiasm, going way overboard but keeping with his tendency to swing from one mood to another. Although the new promulgation will protect the Jews, it could cause trouble for non-Jews, presumably the bulk under the king’s rule and therefore the Babylonians themselves. He stops short of making them worship Israel’s God but instead promulgates against speaking against him.

Netsal is the verb for “deliver” and has two other references, 6.14 being the next: “and set his mind to deliver Daniel.” Like its Hebrew counterpart, *netsal* means to draw out or to pull away, thereby conveying a more hands-on approach to rescuing someone.

One can only imagine the response of those in the royal court listening to these words. After all, the full spread of Babylonian power was represented there (cf. vs. 27) along with those “certain Chaldeans” who had been responsible for the charge against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Vs. 30: Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Prior to their sudden, dramatic fall from grace, the three companions were exalted once again, the first being after Daniel’s correct interpretation of the dream (cf. 2.49). Apparently they were restored to their former position “in the province of Babylon” which also occurs in 2.49. The only difference here, however, is one of promotion, the verb *tselach* being used which means to prosper and occurs one other time in Daniel, 6.28: “So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and

the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” Despite this, it couldn’t subdue any hostility native Babylonians had for foreigner masters within their own borders.

Thus Chapter Three ends on a promising note, the fortunes of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego having been restored. Although those around them must have badgered them about their experience, especially as to the identity of the fourth man in the furnace, they did best to keep quiet. Given King Nebuchadnezzar’s mood swings, they could fall out of favor yet again.

Earlier mention was made that Daniel does not appear in this drama, as though he were absent. It was best for him to remain in the background though he couldn’t hide. If the three had been executed, he might stand a chance to stay alive long enough to protect his fellow Jews in exile. However, Daniel’s travail is to make its appearance shortly.