

The Book of Daniel, as it now stands in the ordinary Hebrew Bibles, is generally divided into two main parts. The first includes a series of narratives which are told in the third person and the second, a series of visions which are described in the first person. From its content it readily appears that the Book of Daniel does not have as its objective a summary historical account of the period of the Babylonian Exile, or of the life of Daniel himself. The contents of the Prophecy of Daniel are of a peculiar kind which has no exact parallel in the Bible, except in the Apocalypse of St. John.

Commentary of the Book of Daniel is by Saint Jerome. St. Jerome, who was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, and is the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church. The Church regards him as the greatest of all the doctors in clarifying the Divine Word. While at Rome he made a revision of the current Latin New Testament, and of the Psalms. Then he undertook to translate most of the books of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. The only parts of the Latin Bible, now known as the Vulgate, which were not either translated or worked over by him are the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two Books of the Maccabees. In the sixteenth century the great Council of Trent pronounced Jerome's Vulgate the authentic and authoritative Latin text of the Catholic Church, without, however, thereby implying a preference for it above the original text or above versions in other languages. In 1907 Pope Pius X entrusted to the Benedictine Order the office of restoring as far as possible the correct text of St. Jerome's Vulgate, which during fifteen centuries of use had naturally become altered in many places. The Bible now ordinarily used by English-speaking Catholics is a translation of the Vulgate, made at Rheims and Douay towards the end of the sixteenth century, and revised by Bishop Challoner in the eighteenth century. The Confraternity Edition of the New Testament appearing in 1950 represents a complete revision.

Chapter 2

Verse 1. *"In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar saw a dream and his spirit was terrified, and his dream fled from him."* If the three lads had entered before him at the end of three years, as he himself had commanded, how is it that he is now said to have seen the dream in the second year of his reign? The Hebrews solve the difficulty in this way, that the second year refers here to his reign over all the barbarian nations, not only Judah and the Chaldeans, but also the Assyrians and Egyptians, and the Moabites and the rest of the nations which by the permission of God he had conquered. For this reason Josephus also writes in the tenth book of the *Antiquities*: After the second year from the devastation of Egypt Nebuchadnezzar beheld a marvelous dream, and "his spirit was terrified and his dream fled from him." The impious king beheld a dream concerning things to come, in order that he might give glory to God after the holy man had interpreted what he had seen, and that great consolation might be afforded the captive (Jews) and those who still served God in their captive state. We read this same thing in the case of Pharaoh, not because Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar deserved to behold visions, but

"Truly thy God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since thou hast been able to disclose this holy secret." And so it was not so much that he was worshipping Daniel as that he was through Daniel worshipping the God who had revealed the holy secrets. This is the same thing that we read Alexander the Great, King of the Macedonians, did in the high priesthood of Joaida [i.e., Jaddua]. Or, if this explanation seem unsatisfactory, we shall have to say that Nebuchadnezzar, overwhelmed by the amazing greatness of the miracles, did not realize what he was doing, but coming to know the true God and Lord of kings he both worshipped His servant and offered him incense.

Verse 48. "Then the king elevated Daniel to a high position, and gave him many great gifts and set him up as governor over all the provinces of Babylon. . . ." In this matter also the slanderous critic of the Church has ventured to castigate the prophet because he did not reject the gifts and because he willingly accepted the honor of the Babylonians. He fails to consider the fact that it was for this very purpose that the king had beheld the dream and that the secrets of its interpretation were revealed by a mere lad, that Daniel might increase in importance and that in the place of captivity he might become ruler over all the Chaldeans, to the end that the omnipotence of God might be made known. We read that this same thing happened in the case of Joseph at the court of Pharaoh and in Egypt (Gen. 41), and also in the case of Mordecai at the court of Ahasuerus (Esth. 8). The purpose was that the Jews, as captives and sojourners in each of these nations, might receive encouragement as they beheld men of their own nation constituted as governors over the Egyptians or the Chaldeans, as the case might be.

Verse 49. "Moreover Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the public works of the province of Babylon. But Daniel himself was in the king's gate." Daniel does not forget those men with whom he had made intercession to the Lord, and who had shared his peril with him. And so he makes them judges over the province, while he himself does not leave (a variant reading is: "did not leave") the king's side.

End of Chapter 2

in order that Joseph and Daniel might appear as deserving of preference over all other men because of their gift of interpretation.

Verse 2. "Wherefore the king commanded that the soothsayers, the magi, the charmers, and the Chaldeans show the king his dream. And when they came, they stood in the presence of the king." Those whom we have translated as "soothsayers" (*harioli*) others have rendered as *epaoidoi*, that is, "enchanters." Well then, it seems to me that enchanters are people who perform a thing by means of words; magi are those who pursue individual lines of philosophic enquiry; charmers are those who employ blood and animal sacrifices and often have contact with corpses. Furthermore the term "*astrologers*" [or nativity-casters, *genethlialogoi*] among the Chaldeans signifies, I believe, what the common people call mathematicians. But common usage and ordinary conversation understands the term magi as wicked enchanters. Yet they were regarded differently among their own nation, inasmuch as they were the philosophers of the Chaldeans, and even the kings and princes of this same nation do all they can to acquire a knowledge of this science. Wherefore also it was they who first at the nativity of our Lord and Savior learned of his birth, and who came to holy Bethlehem and adored the child, under the guidance of the star which shone above them (Matt. 2).

Verse 3. "And the king said to them, 'I have seen a dream, and from the confusion of my mind I do not know what I have seen.' " There remained in the king's heart only a shadow, so to speak, or a mere echo or trace of the dream, with the result that if others should retell it to him, he would be able to recall what he had seen, and they would certainly not be deceiving him with lies.

Verse 4. "The Chaldeans replied to the king in Syriac." Up to this point what we have read has been recounted in Hebrew. From this point on until the vision of the third year of King Balthasar [Belshazzar] which Daniel saw in Susa, the account is written in Hebrew characters, to be sure, but in the Chaldee language, which he here calls Syriac.

Verse 5. "If you do not show me the vision and its interpretation, ye shall perish and your homes shall be confiscated. . . ." He threatened punishment and offered rewards, in order that if they should be able to tell him the dream, he might therefore believe also that which was uncertain, namely the meaning of the dream. But if they should be unable to tell the king what he in his mental confusion could not recall, they would also lose claim to trustworthiness in the interpretation they might give. At last there follows the statement:

Verses 9, 10. *"Therefore tell me the dream, that I may be certain that ye are giving me its true interpretation. The Chaldeans therefore made this reply in the king's presence: 'There is no man on earth who would be able to fulfill what thou hast spoken, O king!'"* The magi confess, along with the soothsayers----and all secular learning concurs----that foreknowledge of the future lies not in man's province but in God's. By this test it is proved that the prophets who proclaimed things to come spoke by the Spirit of God.

Verses 12, 13. *"And when he had heard this, the king in a furious rage gave orders that all the wise men of Babylon should be slain. And when the decree went forth, the wise men were being slaughtered. ..."* The Hebrews raise the question of why Daniel and the three lads did not enter before the king along with the other wise men, and why they were ordered to be slain with the rest when the decree was issued. They have explained the difficulty in this way, by saying that at that time, when the king was promising rewards and gifts and great honor, they did not care to go before him, lest they should appear to be shamelessly grasping after the wealth and honor of the Chaldeans. Or else it was undoubtedly true that the Chaldeans themselves, being envious of the Jews' reputation and learning, entered alone before the king, as if to obtain the rewards by themselves. Afterwards they were perfectly willing to have those whom they had denied any hope of glory to share in a common peril.

Verse 15. *"And he inquired of him who had received authority from the king as to why so cruel a decree had gone forth from the presence of the king."* Knowing that Daniel and the three youths possessed a knowledge and intelligence tenfold as great as that of all the soothsayers of Chaldea put together, the Chaldeans concealed from them the king's inquiry, lest they should receive preference over them in the matter of interpreting the dream. On this account Daniel inquired concerning the cruelty of the decree, being ignorant of the cause of his own peril.

Verses 16, 17. *"Therefore when Arioch had explained the matter to Daniel, Daniel entered in and asked the king to grant him some time for the disclosure of the solution to the king. And he entered his home and disclosed the affair to his comrades, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah...."* Daniel requested time, not that he might investigate secret things by the clever application of his intellect, but that he might beseech the Lord of Secrets. And for that reason he engaged Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to join with him in supplication, to avoid the appearance of presuming upon his own merit alone, and to the end that those involved in a common danger might engage in common prayer.

Verse 19. *"And Daniel blessed the God of heaven, and spoke, saying, . . ."* In contrast to those who occupy themselves with this world and delude the earthly minded with demonic arts and illusions, Daniel blessed the God of heaven. For the gods who did not create heaven and earth will pass away.

"And a third empire of bronze (the Vulgate LXX has "made of copper"), which shall rule over the entire earth." This signifies the Alexandrian empire, and that of the Macedonians, and of Alexander's successors. Now this is properly termed brazen, for among all the metals bronze possesses an outstanding resonance and a clear ring, and the blast of a brazen trumpet is heard far and wide, so that it signifies not only the fame and power of the empire but also the eloquence of the Greek language.

Verse 40. *"And there shall be a fourth empire like unto iron. Just as iron breaks to pieces and overcomes all else, so it shall break to pieces and shatter all these preceding empires . . ."* Now the fourth empire, which clearly refers to the Romans, is the iron empire which breaks in pieces and overcomes all others. But its feet and toes are partly of iron and partly of earthenware, a fact most clearly demonstrated at the present time. For just as there was at the first nothing stronger or hardier than the Roman realm, so also in these last days there is nothing more feeble, since we require the assistance of barbarian tribes both in our civil wars and against foreign nations. However, at the final period of all these empires of gold and silver and bronze and iron, a rock (namely, the Lord and Savior) was cut off without hands, that is, without copulation or human seed and by birth from a virgin's womb; and after all the empires had been crushed, He became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This last the Jews and the impious Porphyry apply to the people of Israel, who they insist will be the strongest power at the end of the ages, and will crush all realms and will rule forever.

Verse 45. *"The great God has shown to the king the events which shall hereafter come to pass, and the dream is true and its interpretation is reliable."* Daniel again asserts that the revelation of the dream is not a matter of personal merit, but has been granted for the purpose of making the interpretation manifest to the king and of teaching the king that God alone is to be worshipped.

Verse 47. *"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and worshipped Daniel, and ordered sacrifices and incense to be offered up to him. Therefore the king spoke and said to Daniel."* Porphyry falsely impugns this passage on the ground that a very proud king would never worship a mere captive, as if, forsooth, the Lycaonians had not been willing to offer blood sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas on account of the mighty miracles they had wrought. And so there is no need to impute to the Scripture the error of the Gentiles who deem everything above themselves [i.e., superhuman] to be gods, for the Scripture simply is narrating everything as it actually happened. However we can make this further assertion, that the king himself set forth the reasons for his worship and offering of blood-sacrifices when he said to Daniel:

"...and He who reveals secrets has shown thee what is to come to pass." The statement which we read in the Gospel, "Who maketh His sun to rise upon the wicked and the good" (Matt. 5:45), we realize to have been fulfilled in the case of Nebuchadnezzar also. For so great was God's mercy that He even revealed to Nebuchadnezzar secrets as to His own mode of government whereby he rules the world. Let us ask those who assert that men's characters belong to one extreme or the other, which character do they understand Nebuchadnezzar to have possessed, the good or the evil? If the good, why is he called an impious man? If the evil (which was certainly the case), why did God show forth His holy secrets to one who was evil and earthly, that is to say, *earthen*?

Verse 30. *"Moreover this holy secret has not been revealed to me in virtue of any wisdom which inheres in me more than in all living men, but rather that the interpretation might be manifested to the king, and that thou mayest know the thoughts of thine own mind."* The king had imagined that cleverness of the human intellect could embrace a knowledge of the future, and for that reason he had ordered the wise men of Babylon to be slain. Daniel therefore makes excuse for those who were unable to speak, and himself avoids the envy of others, lest any should imagine that he had said any of the things he was going to say by virtue of his personal wisdom. But the cause of the prophetic revelation was the earnest desire of the king, who wished to know the future. Consequently he does honor to the king, because he states that it was for the sake of the king's knowledge that the secrets have been revealed by God. And this fact should be pondered, that dreams in which any coming events are signified and in which truth is shown forth, as it were, through a cloud, are not manifest to the conjectures or dominion of the human mind but to the knowledge of God alone.

Verse 31. *"Thou sawest, O king, and behold there was, as it were, a large statue."* Instead of "statue," that is a *sculptured effigy*, the only rendering used by Symmachus, others have translated it as "image," intending by this term to indicate a resemblance to future events. Let us go through the prophetic interpretation, and as we translate Daniel's words, let us explain at some length the matters which he briefly states.

"Now thou art the head of gold." "The head of gold," he says "is thou, O king." By this statement it is clear that the first empire, the Babylonian, is compared to the most precious metal, gold.

Verse 39. *"And after thee there shall arise another empire inferior to thee, made of silver."* (The Vulgate LXX does not include "made of silver.") That is to say, the empire of the Medes and Persians, which bears a resemblance to silver, being inferior to the preceding empire, and superior to that which is to follow.

Verse 21. *"And it is He who changes times and seasons, who transfers kingdoms and establishes kingdoms."* Let us not marvel, therefore, whenever we see kings and empires succeed one another, for it is by the will of God that they are governed, altered, and terminated. And the cases of individuals are well known to Him who founded all things. He often permits wicked kings to arise in order that they may in their wickedness punish the wicked. At the same time by indirect suggestion and general discussion he prepares the reader for the fact that the dream Nebuchadnezzar saw was concerned with the change and succession of empires. *"He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who acquire learning."* This accords with the scripture: "The wise man will hear and increase his wisdom" (Prov. 1:5). "For he who has, to him it shall be given" (Matt. 25:29). A soul which cherishes an ardent love of wisdom is freely filled by the Spirit of God. But wisdom will never penetrate a perverse soul (Wisdom 3).

Verse 22. *"It is He who reveals deep and hidden things, and He knows what is placed in the darkness, and with Him is the light."* A man to whom God makes profound revelations and who can say, "O the depth of the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of God!" (Rom. 11:33), he it is who by the indwelling Spirit probes even into the deep things of God, and digs the deepest of wells in the depths of his soul. He is a man who has stirred up the whole earth, which is wont to conceal the deep waters, and he observes the command of God, saying: "Drink water from thy vessels and from the spring of thy wells" (Prov. 5:15). As for the words which follow, "He knows what is placed in the darkness, and with Him is the light," the darkness signifies ignorance, and the light signifies knowledge and learning. Therefore as wrong cannot hide God away, so right encompasses and surrounds Him. Or else we should interpret the words to mean all the dark mysteries and deep things (concerning God), according to what we read in Proverbs: "He understands also the parable and the dark saying." This in turn is equivalent to what we read in the Psalms: "Dark waters in the clouds of the sky" (Ps. 17:12). For one who ascends to the heights and forsakes the things of earth, and like the birds themselves seeks after the most rarified atmosphere and everything ethereal, he becomes like a cloud to which the truth of God penetrates and which habitually showers rain upon the saints. Replete with a plenitude of knowledge, he contains in his breast many dark waters enveloped with deep darkness, a darkness which only Moses can penetrate (Ex. 23) and speak with God face to face, of Whom the Scripture says: "He hath made darkness His hiding-place" (Ps. 17:12).

Verse 23. *"I confess Thee, O god of my fathers, and I praise Thee because Thou hast granted me wisdom and strength."* Lest it should seem to be an achievement of his own deserving, Daniel assigns it to the righteousness of his forefathers and to the faithfulness of God, Who takes pity upon their posterity even in exile.

"And now Thou hast shown me that for which we petitioned Thee. ..." That which the four of them had asked for is disclosed to the one, for the twofold purpose that he might escape any temptation to pride, on the ground of having obtained the request by himself, and also that he might render thanksgiving because he alone heard the secret of the dream.

Verse 24. *"Destroy not the wise men of Babylon. Take me in before the king and I will set forth the explanation to the king. ..."* He follows the example of the clemency of God, who intercedes in behalf of his persecutors, and is unwilling that those men should perish on whose account he himself had been threatened with death.

Verse 25. *"I have found a man who belongs to the children of the captivity of Judah and who will set forth the explanation to the king."* He credits his own diligence with what God's grace has bestowed, and he claims that he himself has done the finding, when actually Daniel had applied to him of his own volition that he might be presented to the king. This instance manifests the habitual reaction of messengers, for when they have good news to report, they wish it to appear their own doing. But the man who undertakes the explanation of the dream is certainly going to relate the dream beforehand. And note that Daniel is said to be of the children of Judah, rather than being a priest as the latter part of the story of Bel relates.

Verse 26. *"Dost thou truly believe that thou canst show me the dream I have seen...."* In framing his inquiry he adheres to logical sequence, so that he first asks for the dream, of which the magi had replied they were ignorant, and afterwards he asks for the interpretation of the dream. The implication is that after he has heard the dream, then he would believe also in the correctness of what was susceptible of varying interpretations.

Verse 27. *"As for the secret for which the king is asking, neither the wise men nor the magi nor the soothsayers nor the diviners are able to declare it to the king."* In place of diviners (*haruspices*), as we have rendered it, the Hebrew [sic!] text has *Gazareni* [actually the Aramaic word is *gaz^erin*], which only Symmachus has rendered as sacrificers [*thutai*], a class of people whom the Greeks usually call liver-diviners (*epatoskopoi*), and who inspect the inwards in order to make predictions from them concerning the future. By terming a mystery the category of a revealed dream, Daniel shows that whatever is hidden and unknown by men can still be called a "mystery." Moreover he obviates any evil suspicion on the king's part, lest he should imagine that human cleverness can discover something which is reserved to the knowledge of God alone.

Verse 28. *"But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries."* Therefore it is only in vain that thou inquirest (other MSS have: "that he inquire") of men as to something which is known only to God in heaven. Also, by indirectly drawing Nebuchadnezzar away from the worship of many gods, Daniel directs him to the knowledge of the one (true) God.

"Who hath shown thee, King Nebuchadnezzar, what is going to take place (the Vulg. reads: "the things which are going to take place") in the last times." Avoiding the blemish of adulation but cleaving to the truth, he courteously suggests that it is to the king [God has shown these things], for it was to him that God had revealed secrets concerning what was to occur in the last times. Now either these "last days" are to be reckoned from the time when the dream was revealed to Daniel until the end of the world, or else at least this inference is to be drawn, that the over-all interpretation of the dream applies to that final end when the image and statue beheld [in the dream] is to be ground to powder.

"Thy dream and the visions of thy head upon thy bed were as follows." He does not say, "The visions of thine eyes," lest we should think it was something physical, but rather: "of thy head." "For the eyes of a wise man are in his head" (Eccl. 2:14), that is to say in the princely organ of the heart, just as we read in the Gospel: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they are ones who shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Again: "What are ye meditating in your hearts?" (Matt. 9:4). To be sure, other authorities in treating of this chapter [i.e., Matt. 9], conjecture that the authoritative part of the soul (*to hegemonikon*) lies not in the heart but, as Plato says, in the brain.

Verse 29. *"Thou, O king, didst begin to meditate upon thy bed as to what should come to pass hereafter."* Instead of the true reading the Septuagint alone inserts the translation "in the last days" after the "hereafter." But if it be read thus, we must inquire quite carefully as to where "last days" have been written; and we would refute those who think the world will never be destroyed. For never would any days be called "the last days" if the world were everlasting. And as for the statement, "Thou, O king, didst begin to meditate," this would indicate the [psychological] motives behind the dream; for it was for this reason that God revealed to him the secrets of the future, because the king himself wished to know what was going to happen. Also, in order that Nebuchadnezzar might marvel at the gracious gift of divine inspiration, he sets forth not only what the king had beheld in the dream, but also what he had thought to himself (beforehand).