Knowledge, Wisdom, and Nebuchadnezzar through Narrated Time (Dan 1:1–4:34)

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Abstract

Concerning the questions of Nebuchadnezzar’s development in knowledge in Dan 1–4, and whether his final state of knowledge is wisdom, I employ a narrative-critical methodology influenced by Meir Sternberg’s concept of “gaps,” and by Paul Ricoeur’s concepts of mimesis of character, metaphor, and time in fictional literature. I draw mimetic and metaphorical links between Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel and his companions, and other biblical characters they echo (e.g. Bezalel, Hiram-abi, Solomon, and Joseph), to investigate the extent to which Nebuchadnezzar’s development in knowledge resembles a growth in wisdom. I find that Nebuchadnezzar is a character limited in both his past and future narrated time, while he is attempting to maintain control of time. I also uncover tensions between Daniel’s dream-interpretive wisdom, Nebuchadnezzar’s desire for the wisdom of skilful artisanship, and his need for the wisdom of judging justly. In the end, Nebuchadnezzar’s attainment of wisdom is possible but uncertain, leaving the reader to make the connections necessary to extract wisdom from his story.
Declarations

I declare that the word length of this thesis is 99,878 words. This does not exceed the maximum length specified in the regulations.

I declare that the referencing format is consistent, and conforms to the requirements of the latest Turabian Style; or that, alternatively, permission has been granted to employ another style.

I hereby certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution, and affirm that to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

Date: 1 September 2017
Acknowledgments

And here it ends, my five-year-long obsession with my particular reading of a fictional character based loosely on a historical Babylonian king. My interest in a narrative reading of Daniel began with Meir Sternberg’s *Poetics of Biblical Narrative* and Danna Nolan Fewell’s *Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories in Daniel 1–6*. It was deepened by Paul Ricoeur’s *Rule of Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative*, and challenged by David Valeta’s *Lions and Ovens and Visions*. I owe much gratitude to my principal supervisor, Marie Turner, for her encouragement, her confidence in my ability, her dedication to reading my writings, and her warnings that my argumentation had become convoluted. I also owe thanks to my associate supervisor Anthony Dean, for his companionship, good humour, advice, and easy-going nature. I am also grateful for my two associate deans, Rosemary Canavan in 2012–13, and Kevin Lenehan in 2014–17, for their persistence in keeping an “open door” for impromptu meetings and friendly encouragements. I also acknowledge the warm welcome granted me by the Australian Catholic Biblical Association since 2012, and for the opportunity to test my ideas. I acknowledge the contribution of the Commonwealth Government to this research through a Research Scholarship funded by the Research Training Program. I also acknowledge the memory of Rod Doyle (1932–2016), who taught me most of what I know about historical criticism in the New Testament, and who supervised my thesis on the Lukan narrative. Finally, I am thankful to my parents, Doreen and Tony Tucker, for their provision of a stable environment of food and shelter during this project.
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Chapter 1: Questions

The two central questions of my study involve change in Nebuchadnezzar in the text of Dan 1:1–4:34. These questions are: “How does Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation in Dan 1:1–4:34 change with respect to his knowledge?” And: “Does Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge change in Dan 1:1–4:34 so that he finally acquires the characteristic of wisdom (חכמה)?” These two questions about Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation in Daniel reveal my presupposition that there is an element of change in his character as the narrative progresses, which I hope will be vindicated by my examination of the narrative, but not necessarily shared by all its readers. The second question (about Nebuchadnezzar gaining wisdom), if it were answered in the positive, suggests a conclusion which, I think, would be shared by fewer readers of Daniel. Even I would not necessarily see it answered positively by the narrative text of Dan 1:1–4:34. However, I do see a movement of the plot presenting the viable possibility that Nebuchadnezzar acquires wisdom. Even so, I do not exclude a “tragic” reading, in which Nebuchadnezzar moves towards the state of wisdom, but because of certain, inextinguishable flaws, never reaches the endpoint of this movement—or perhaps he does, but only when wisdom is no longer of benefit.

These questions which I ask of the text of Daniel were initially the result of an intuitive reading. My initial, intuitive reading suspected that Nebuchadnezzar desired to learn something, at least in the sense of acquiring “knowledge” (יודע from the root ידוע). He claims that he desires “to know” (יודע) his dream (Dan 2:3); wants his courtiers to “make known” (הרורדע) his dream and its interpretation to him (v.5); he claims to know (יודע) about their buying time (v.8); he still wants to know (היודע) his dream, and be certain (יודע) of their interpretation (v.9). Before Daniel narrates and interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream, he claims God’s intention to make known to Nebuchadnezzar the things to come (ויהי יודע למלך נבוכדנצר מא ל), Dan 2:28), to which Daniel subordinates his own wisdom (בחקמה, v.30). When Nebuchadnezzar questions his three Judean governors why they will not worship his golden image, they respond by claiming a desire to “make known” (יודע) to Nebuchadnezzar their fidelity to their God (Dan 3:18). Nebuchadnezzar reports his second dream as intended
so that “the living may know” (אִדְעֹן חַַּ֠יַּיָא) about God’s sovereignty (Dan 4:14), and “the living” become identified with Nebuchadnezzar himself (עַד דִֽי־תִנְדַַּ֗ע, v.22, יִנְדְע֣וּן חַַּ֠יַּיָא, v.23, עַד דִֽי־תִנְדַַּ֗ע, v.29). Related to Nebuchadnezzar’s “education,” in “knowledge” (דַּעַּת) and “knowing” (ידע), is the possibility of a specific “knowing,” wisdom (חכמָה). Nowhere in the book of Daniel is Nebuchadnezzar explicitly said to gain wisdom (חכמָה). Instead, wisdom is ascribed to God (Dan 2:20), to Daniel and his three friends as a gift from God (1:17; 2:23, 30; 5:11, 14), which is also their natural quality (1:4, 20), and God gives “wisdom” to “the wise” (2:21), but not explicitly to anyone else. However, “knowledge” and “wisdom” are linked in the characteristics of God (Dan 2:20, 22) and God’s beneficiaries (vv.21, 23), such as Daniel and his companions (1:4, 17). This makes the questions I ask of Dan 1:1–4:34, concerning the development of Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge towards wisdom, difficult and interesting, but also viable.

Furthermore, the kind of knowledge which Nebuchadnezzar seeks, and which God seems willing to impart to him, concerns understanding his dreams (Dan 2; 4). Daniel is the one who interprets both of Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams, and a key aspect of Daniel’s wisdom is “understanding all visions and dreams” (ה בִּין בְכָל־חָזוֹן וַּחֲלֹמוֹת, Dan 1:17). Therefore, perhaps God, as a character in the book of Daniel, wishes to impart a special kind of knowledge to Nebuchadnezzar, given through the wisdom of Daniel, and perhaps the knowledge Nebuchadnezzar is meant to learn is wisdom.

However, in my own inquiries into wisdom and knowledge in the story of Nebuchadnezzar, I have come across hints of wisdom available to the king beyond this preliminary reading of wisdom as a kind of knowledge. Whereas wisdom as knowledge is a wisdom of the mind or heart, there are also indications that Nebuchadnezzar desires a wisdom of the hands, the kind of wisdom that will allow him to craft beautiful objects and buildings, like the wise characters Bezalel and Oholiab (Moses’ chief artisans), Solomon, and his chief artisan Hiram-abi.¹ Such a desire for wisdom of the hands is implicit in Nebuchadnezzar’s seizing the temple vessels crafted by Solomon and Hiram-abi (Dan 1:2), and immediately desiring wise youths for his

court (v. 4); in his dream of a statue made of gold, silver, bronze, and iron (2:31–35), materials whose crafting requires wisdom in Bezalel, Oholiab, and Hiram-abi; in his making an object of gold (3:1), an action also carried out by Bezalel and Solomon; in his boast of building himself a house (4:27), language mimicking Solomon’s act of building a house for God.

However, such a wisdom of the hands, although desired by Nebuchadnezzar, may not be the kind of wisdom God leads him towards through the actions of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. I read the story of Nebuchadnezzar as one where he is led towards a wisdom of the mouth, giving just and righteous judgments, based on a knowledge of Israel’s God. Though Nebuchadnezzar cannot be cognisant of Daniel’s and his friends’ disobedience in the matter of his imposed diet (Dan 1:8–16), Daniel does inform him that the dream-image representing his kingdom and three others will be shattered by a stone from a mountain (2:44–45), an image suggestive of the stone tablets of Moses, written with Torah, which he carried down from the mountain. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, renamed as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, inform Nebuchadnezzar that they will disobey his command to worship his golden image, no matter what judgment he may pass on them (and Nebuchadnezzar witnesses the powerlessness of his unjust judgment before their God). After Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream, Daniel pleads with him to do righteousness (Dan 4:24), and although the king falls as surely as the dream-tree, he does come to know God as the King who judges with justice and truth (v. 34).

Daniel’s wisdom is a wisdom of the eyes, in which he sees dream-images as portents of Nebuchadnezzar’s future in narrated time. Daniel, in his wisdom of knowing dreams and visions (Dan 1:17), communicates to Nebuchadnezzar knowledge about his own future, that he is limited in his time of future action before he becomes a memory of the past. Nebuchadnezzar has two options for leaving behind a memory: a wisdom of the hands, manifested in construction works to endure beyond his reign, or a wisdom of the mouth, manifested in

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2 Wisdom sought to practice justice and know God’s righteousness. Ibid., 11.
3 Wisdom could come from both “the experiential and the mysterious.” Ibid., 5.
righteous judgments based on a knowledge of Israel’s God, which may see him remembered by God for a future reign.
Chapter 2: Methodology

In the book of Daniel, the words for “wisdom” and “wise person” appear only in the interactions between Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, and God, and later between Nebuchadnezzar’s “son” Belshazzar, his widow, and Daniel (wisdom, Daniel 1:4, 17, 20; 2:20, 21, 23, 30; 5:11a, 14; wise person, Daniel 2:12, 13, 14, 18, 21, 24a, 27, 48; 4:3, 15; 5:7, 8, 15). Within the framework of narrative criticism, my specific interest concerns how wisdom, as a gift of God to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, might affect the life of Nebuchadnezzar, bringing him down a path he would not have otherwise taken, in order to educate him about the God of his captives. Because of my interest in the character of Nebuchadnezzar, the object of my study is focused on the Masoretic Text of Dan 1:1–4:34, with the consequences that a chapter without the words “wisdom” or “wise person” will be studied (Dan 3), but a chapter with these words (Dan 5) will not form part of the focus. These consequences follow from approaching the text as an ongoing narration focused on one character.

For the sources of my methodology, I have found the thinkers Paul Ricoeur and Meir Sternberg particularly helpful for my narrative-critical approach to reading Daniel, but I have not simply adopted their thinking, but also adapted it to my purposes. Thinking on biblical poetics, as represented by Meir Sternberg and others, formed my early approach to reading Daniel, but I reached a point where I believed that the deep thinking of Ricoeur on concepts such as narrated time, mimesis, and metaphor could make an important contribution to my reading. I see Ricoeur primarily as a philosopher, and I have found that his philosophical writings require what I will call “engineering” to be adapted to my reading of Daniel. This also means that for the two major works of Ricoeur behind my study, The Rule of Metaphor and Time and Narrative, I have found some ideas more useful than others for my own approach to biblical interpretation. For example, in his Time and Narrative, Ricoeur combines the philosophy of time, historical theory, and literary theory to form an extended and detailed dialectic. Because

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1 Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed. A New Concordance to the Old Testament (Jerusalem: Kibbutz Sefer, 1985), 367-69. However, the adjective “wise” (חכם) and the verb “to be wise” (חכם) do not appear in Daniel. Only the Aramaic “wise person” (חכם, not חכם) appears in Daniel, whereas “wisdom” in both Hebrew and Aramaic (חכמה) is present.
I am reading Daniel under the lens of narrative criticism, I have decided to limit myself to Ricoeur’s analyses of fictional narratives for the sources of my methodology. Ricoeur himself, writing at the end of *The Rule of Metaphor*, strives to bring together speculative thought and poetic thought, while recognising that an inextinguishable difference exists between the two. Just as Ricoeur believes that “poetic discourse and speculative discourse” can intersect and form a “dialectic,” while calling “naïve” the “thesis that the semantics of metaphorical utterance contains ready-made an immediate ontology,” I believe that there is a certain pertinence of Ricoeur’s philosophy of poetics and narrative for analysing a biblical literary text, while recognising that his philosophy is not quite a “ready-made” biblical methodology. My metaphor of “engineering” refers to my attempt at working his speculative thought into a methodology for the practice of interpreting a biblical text, but also refers to my “alloying” of Ricoeur’s thought to that of others, such as Sternberg’s poetics.

**The “World” of Daniel**

Following Ricoeur, I will initially define the “world” of Daniel as the world projected by the text itself, a fictional recreation and re-imagining of the “real world” into a new world desired by Daniel’s readers. I assume a world immanent to the text itself, abstracted from the situation of the original writer, but adaptable to the needs of multiple audiences beyond its initial historical setting. Seeing Daniel’s “world” as a text-immanent world is not the same as assuming it to be a closed, sealed-off world. I would also add that the text-world contains allusions to other texts in the author’s literary tradition, which create intersections with other text-immanent worlds, so that the text-world specific to Daniel is not complete in itself, but

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3 Ibid., 349.
5 Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 31; Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 78-83.
forms a whole with other biblical narratives. To develop this notion, I will reflect on Ricoeur’s contribution to the concept of “the world of the text.”

**Ricoeur’s “World of the Text” as Open to “the World of the Reader”**

In a landmark study on examining the philosophical aporias concerning “time” from the viewpoint of historical and fictional narratives (*Temps et récit, Time and Narrative*), Ricoeur asks “what, on the side of fiction, can be considered as the counterpoint to what, on the side of history, is given as the ‘real’ past.”8 He seeks to make a “break” with “the traditional terms of reference”: the idea that “only” historical narrative “can, absolutely speaking, be said to refer to something ‘real,’” while fictional narrative, its characters and their experiences are “‘unreal.’”9 Ricoeur wishes to add to his “critique of the naive concept of ‘reality’ applied to the pastness of the past ... a systematic critique of the no less naive concept of ‘unreality’ applied to the projections of fiction.”10 Ricoeur regards fiction’s “function” in relation to “everyday” reality as “revealing and transforming”: “Revealing, in the sense that it brings features to light that were concealed and yet already sketched out at the heart of our experience, our praxis. Transforming, in the sense that a life examined in this way is a changed life, another life.”11 For Ricoeur, the solution to the problem of making “a revision of the concept of unreality [of fiction]” lies in the phenomenon of reading: “Indeed, it is only through the mediation of reading that the literary work attains complete significance, which would be to fiction what standing-for is to history.”12 In his chapter, “The World of the Text and the World of the Reader,” Ricoeur builds upon his work in *The Rule of Metaphor*, where he presented “the thesis that the literary text transcends itself in the direction of a world ... [and] that the world of the text marked the opening of the text to its ‘outside,’ to its ‘other,’ in that the world of the text constitutes an absolutely original intentional object in relation to its ‘internal’ structure.”13

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8 Ibid., 3:157.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 3:158.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
Ricoeur’s solution to the problem of the “world” of the text is his concept of “the intersection between the world of the text and the world of the listener or the reader, the intersection, therefore, between the world configured by the poem and the world within which effective action is unfolded and itself unfolds its specific temporality.”¹⁴ For Ricoeur, “the poetic work ... [has] the power of transforming life by means of a kind of short-circuit operating between the ‘seeing-as,’ characteristic of the metaphorical utterance, and ‘being-as,’ as its ontological correlate,” by means of a “passage ... between two worlds, the fictive world of the text and the real world of the reader.”¹⁵ Ricoeur argues that consideration of the act of reading is necessary to literary theory: “Without the reader who accompanies it, there is no configuring act at work in the text; and without a reader to appropriate it, there is no world unfolded before the text.”¹⁶

First, however, Ricoeur considers the poetic work’s “strategy from the point of view of the author who carries it through.”¹⁷ By re-incorporating the notion of “author” into literary theory, Ricoeur aims to avoid “the ‘intentional fallacy’ ... [understood as] being no more than a psychology of the author” by understanding “author” not as “the real author” but as “the implied author,” the one who effects “the strategy of persuasions running through the operations [of the text’s poetics].”¹⁸ Ricoeur argues that “the category of implied author” is vital to any poetics, and that “[t]he reader has an intimation of the role it plays inasmuch as this reader intuitively apprehends the work as a unified totality.”¹⁹ Ricoeur relates his notion of the implied author to the narrator and to the reader as follows:

There is always an implied author. The story is told by someone. There is not always a distinct narrator. But when there is one, the narrator shares the privilege of the implied author, who, without always being omniscient, does always have the power to reach knowledge of others from the inside. This privilege is one of the rhetorical powers invested in the implied author by reason of the tacit pact between the author and the reader. The degree to which the narrator is reliable is one of the clauses of this reading pact. As for the reader’s responsibility, it is another clause of the same pact.²⁰

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¹⁴ Ibid., 3:159.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid., 3:164.
¹⁷ Ibid., 3:160.
¹⁸ Ibid.
¹⁹ Ibid., 3:162.
²⁰ Ibid., 3:163.
Il y a toujours un auteur impliqué : la fable est racontée par quelqu'un ; il n'y a pas toujours de narrateur distinct ; mais, quand c'est le cas, il partage le privilège de l'auteur impliqué qui, sans aller toujours jusqu'à l'omniscience, a toujours le pouvoir d'accéder à la connaissance d'autrui par le dedans ; ce privilège fait partie des pouvoirs rhétoriques dont l'auteur impliqué est investi, en vertu du pacte tacite entre l'auteur et le lecteur. Le degré auquel le narrateur est digne de confiance est une des clauses de ce pacte de lecture. Quant à la responsabilité du lecteur, elle est une autre clause du même pacte.  

In my own observations of reading the narrative of Daniel, I agree with Ricoeur that “[t]here is not always a distinct narrator.” The narration begins with the self-effacing narrator who always speaks anonymously in the third person, but Nebuchadnezzar, one of the characters, adopts the role of narrator in Dan 4, and Daniel in Dan 7–12. Both Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar speak of their own actions in the first person as well as speaking of other characters’ actions in the third person. The implied author relies on the reader’s response to the characters of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar when taking the narrating voice away from the self-effacing, anonymous narrator, and granting it to these two characters in turn. However, Ricoeur also understands the reader’s response to play an important role in creating a world out of the text.

Ricoeur believes that an understanding of the rhetorical nature of a literary text requires an understanding of “the reader’s response,” whether understood as “the individual reader” or “the response of the public.” Regarding the individual reader, Ricoeur admires Wolfgang Iser’s idea of “the ‘wandering viewpoint.’” For Iser:

... the whole text can never be perceived at any one time. In this respect it differs from given objects, which can generally be viewed or at least conceived as a whole. The ‘object’ of the text can only be imagined by way of different consecutive phases of reading. We always stand outside the given object, whereas we are situated inside the literary text. The relation between text and reader is therefore quite different from that between object and observer: instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a moving viewpoint which travels along inside that which it has to apprehend.

Ricoeur finds this insight consistent “with the Husserlian description of the interplay of protentions and retentions”; and sees another advantage in the way “this concept incorporates into the phenomenology of reading the synthetic process by which a text constitutes itself

23 Ibid., 3:168.  
sentence by sentence, through what might be called an interplay of sentential retentions and protentions.” Here Ricoeur is referring to the passage of time in the text as experienced by the reader. One readerly response which Ricoeur considers is to “the strategy of deception” in works where the expectation of “a configuration” places onerous demands upon the reader to make sense of its “coherence.” Ricoeur uses his term “discordant concordance” for such works, which contain many gaps (or “lacunae”) aiming at the reader’s “frustration.” Ricoeur also sees another dialectic of reading in the “excess of meaning,” in which “[e]very text ... is revealed to be inexhaustible in terms of reading,” and it is “the prerogative of reading to strive to provide a figure for this unwritten side of the text.” Ricoeur sees “[a] third dialectic” arising in which, on the one hand, readers may feel that they have mastered the text, and risk the “illusion” by which “they lose themselves in it.” If, on the other hand, the act of reading fails to make “the unfamiliar ... familiar” then “what is foreign remains foreign” and the reader is denied satisfactory access to the work. For Ricoeur, “[t]he ‘right’ reading ... admits a certain degree of illusion ... [but also] accepts the negation resulting from the work’s surplus of meaning.” Ricoeur’s “three dialectics”—indeterminacy, surplus, and illusion/confusion— “make reading a truly vital experience.” I will return to some of these notions again, when discussing Sternberg’s concept of “gaps”: those concerning the unfolding of the plot in time for reader, when he or she must look forward or back in the text to make sense of the present scene, and those concerning characterisation. My quest to understand Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation in Dan 1–4 is accompanied by my own experiences of reality. I hope to show at the end of this study how my reading of Nebuchadnezzar might shape a twenty-first century perception of the human experience of change, control, knowledge, wisdom, and time, even though the question remains whether Nebuchadnezzar’s story ends with him gaining wisdom, or if the final situation is more complex.

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 3:169.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
Time of Narrating, Narrated Time, and “the Fictive Experience of Time”

My reading of the narrative of Daniel assumes the importance of time as it is narrated in the text, because I am looking at the issue of change in the characterisation of Nebuchadnezzar. I have therefore found helpful Ricoeur’s analysis of “time” in relation to literary narrative, specifically his concepts of the “time of narrating,” “narrated time,” and the “fictive experience of time.”

Ricoeur takes the distinction between “time of narrating” (Erzählzeit) and “narrated time” (erzählte Zeit) from Günther Müller’s “morphological poetics.” In his essay, “Erzählzeit und erzählte Zeit,” G. Müller gives the following “two examples of the relationship between the time of narrating and narrated time” (“Zunächst sollen zwei Beispiele das Verhältnis von Erzählzeit und erzählter Zeit verdeutlichen.”)


[Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway]: Erzählt wird auf 270 Tauchnitzseiten das Leben einer zweihundundfünfzigjährigen Londonerin der höheren Gesellschaftskreise. Aber die erzählte Zeit ist ein Junitag des Jahres 1919, und zwar von Vormittag, wo Mrs. Dalloway in die Stadt geht, um für ihre party Blumen zu besorgen, bis zum Ende dieser party am späten Abend.

Ricoeur reads G. Müller as making the distinction between the time of “narrating” and “narrated” time in the act of the “presentifying” (vergegenwärtigen) of poetic works. For

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33 Ibid., 2:77.
34 Ibid.
35 Günther Müller, Morphologische Poetik (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 270.
36 Ibid. My translation: “‘Master Wilhelm’s Apprentice Years’ contains about 650 printed pages, and the printed page can also be a measure for the physical time to be taken, that the narrator needs for narrating his story. What in the ‘Apprentice Years’ allows for narrated time is not exactly fixed as month and day, though it’s there, since from the temporal extensions of the various phases observed, there is a duration of about eight years.”
37 Ibid., 271-72. My translation: “It narrates on Tauchnitz’s 270 pages the life of a fifty-two-year-old London woman of the prominent socialite circles. However, the narrated time is a June day of the year 1919, to be precise, from late morning, when Mrs. Dalloway goes into town, and worries about flowers for her party, until the end of this party late in the evening.”
38 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 2:78. Müller opens his essay, “Die Bedeutung der Zeit in der Erzählkunst,” with: “Erzählen is ein Vergegenwärtigen, und zwar ein Vergegenwärtigen von Ereignissen, die dem Hörenden nicht sinnlich wahrnehmbar sind.” (“Narrating is an imagining, to be precise, an imagining of events, that to the listeners are not meaningfully perceived.”) G. Müller, 247.
Ricoeur, “presentification” is an act in “which every narrating is narrating something (erzählen von), yet something which itself is not a narrative,” and so, “the time taken to narrate and narrated time” are distinguished.\(^{39}\) Like G. Müller, Ricoeur measures the time of narrating (Erzählzeit) in spatial terms—the number of pages and lines\(^{40}\)—from which he derives not “the time taken to compose the work” but “a conventional time of reading that is hard to distinguish from the variable time of actual reading.”\(^{41}\) Ricoeur notes that between these “two chronologies,” “[T]empo and rhythm thus enrich, in the course of the same work, the variations of the relative lengths of the time of narration and the time narrated.”\(^{42}\) Under his “narrative schema,” time maintains its linearity in terms of “sequence, ... the succession of events” but is modified by “narrative tempo,” which both slows down scenes and proceeds rapidly through scene transitions.\(^{43}\) For Ricoeur, there is also a “breaking up [of] chronology” in “anticipations and flashbacks,”\(^{44}\) which point to either future or past narrated time within the same moment of the time of narrating. Ricoeur alludes to his conception of narrative as a mimesis of temporal experience when he notes Goethe’s conception of art complementing life as the background of G. Müller’s analysis of “the relation of the time of narration to the time of life through narrated time.”\(^{45}\) Ricoeur therefore sees “three times” in G. Müller’s morphological poetics: “the time of the act of narrating, the time that is narrated, and finally the time of life.”\(^{46}\) Ricoeur takes up G. Müller’s idea of “the time of life” developed under the concept of “temporal experience’ (Zeiterlebnis)”\(^{47}\) and absorbs it into his concept of the fictive experience of time.\(^{48}\)

Ricoeur discusses the “fictive experience” alongside his concept of the text as a “world” which is both “open” and “closed”:

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\(^{39}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:78.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.; see G. Müller, 270.

\(^{41}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:79.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 2:80.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 2:81.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 2:80.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 2:87-88.
... the notion of the world of the text requires us to “open up” ... the literary work to an “outside” that it projects before itself and offers to critical appropriation by a reader. This notion of an opening does not contradict that of closure implied by the formal principle of configuration. A work can be at one and the same time closed upon itself with respect to its structure and open onto a world, like a “window” that cuts out a fleeting perspective of a landscape beyond.49

... la notion de monde du texte exige que nous ouvrions ... l’œuvre littéraire sur un « dehors » qu’elle projette devant elle et offre à l’appropriation critique du lecteur. Cette notion d’ouverture ne contredit pas celle de clôture impliquée par le principe formel de configuration. Une œuvre peut être à la fois close sur elle-même quant à sa structure et ouverte sur un monde, a façon d’une « fenêtre » qui découpe la perspective fuyante d’un paysage offert.50

This somewhat paradoxical idea of the text as a “world” that is both closed in upon itself and at the same time open to the world of the reader allows Ricoeur to develop the notions of “a transcendence immanent in the text” and “[t]he, at first sight, paradoxical expression ‘fictive experience’ [which] therefore has no function other than designating a projection of the work, capable of intersecting the ordinary experience of action ... .”51 Ricoeur charts the fictive temporal experiences projected by three narratives (Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*), in terms of not only “the narrative composition but also the lived experience of the characters in the narrative.”52 Ricoeur finds evidence in these works of “varieties of temporal experience that only fiction can explore and” he adds that “they are offered to reading in order to refigure ordinary temporality.”53 Notably, Ricoeur reads these works as a confrontation between characters’ personal time and grander modes of time or eternity, and their losing and regaining meaningfulness in their experience of time. For example, he reads Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* as a confrontation between the characters’ personal sense of time and “monumental time,” symbolised by the ringing of London’s Big Ben, where “[w]hat is important is not this reminder of the hour, striking at the same time for everyone, however, but the relation that the various protagonists establish with these marks of time.”54 He identifies a spectrum of characters, from

49 Ibid., 2:100.
50 Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, 189-90. Ricoeur's emphasis.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 2:105.
the “the highest authority-figures” most at home with “monumental time,” to those who seek to escape “monumental time,” to those who seek to escape “monumental time,” between which are those “temporal experiences” that are “the experience of the mortal discordance between personal time and monumental time ...” Ricoeur reads Mann’s Magic Mountain as “abolishing the sense of measurement of time [which] is the major feature of the way the guests at the Berghof, the Davos sanatorium, exist and live,” such as “[t]he confusion of the seasons” and “the blurring together of the common reference points of time” during Hans Castorp’s stay, which serves “[t]he erosion of the sense of time,” slipping into experiences of “eternity.” Ricoeur reads the denouement of Proust’s In Search of Lost Time, the narrator’s experience of an epiphany in the Guermantes library, as forming a symmetrical counterpoint to his experience of being half-asleep, half-awake in bed at the beginning of the novel. Between beginning and end, Ricoeur notes the many signs of “death” and “the precariousness of mortal beings,” which are countered by the narrator’s recall of experiences of past happy moments in Combray, buried deep in many pages already narrated to the reader. Ricoeur believes that “the enigma to be solved is that of the relation between the happy moments, offered by chance and involuntary memory, and the invisible history of a vocation.” He argues that the fleeting nature of the narrator’s final meditation on “extra-temporal being” (essences of beings, contemplated in works of art) is the first sense given to “time regained,” but that “[t]ime regained, in the second sense of the term, in the sense of lost time revived, comes out of the fixing of this fugitive, contemplative moment in a lasting work.” For Ricoeur, “the decision [of the protagonist] to write has the capacity to transpose the extratemporal character of the original vision into the temporality of the resurrection of time lost.” Here I will summarise why I believe Ricoeur’s analysis of the fictive

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55 Ibid., 2:106.
56 Ibid., 2:108.
57 Ibid., 2:112.
58 Ibid., 2:120.
59 Ibid., 2:121-25.
60 Ibid., 2:141.
61 Ibid., 2:142.
62 Ibid., 2:143.
63 Ibid. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
64 Ibid., 2:144.
65 Ibid., 2:145.
66 Ibid. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
experience of time resonates with the understanding of time offered by Nebuchadnezzar’s story.

First, following Ricoeur’s analysis of Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, Dan 1–4 narrates the passing of “official time” from a calendar designated by the Judean king Jehoiakim’s reign (Dan 1:1), to one designated by Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (2:1), before its final passing into the time of other kings (5:1; 6:1). However, while Nebuchadnezzar reigns, it is “his” time, and I see him attempting to maintain his ownership over his own “official” time: acquiring the vessels of the Jerusalem temple (Dan 1:2), which are suggestive of a “monumental history” marked by the wisdom of Solomon, but a “monumental time” that will eventually leave Nebuchadnezzar’s control; his attempt to maintain control over time in his court by refusing to allow his court sages to “buy time” (2:8); the precise moment of time when all his officials must bow down before his grand, golden monument is determined by his decree (3:5); as a narrator of part of Dan 4, he attempts to maintain control over the interpretation of the time represented by his dream of the tree, which is to be disseminated to “all peoples, nations, and tongues” (Dan 3:31). Second, following Ricoeur’s analysis of Mann’s *Magic Mountain*, Dan 2 represents the image of a mountain in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as a metaphor for “eternity.” If Nebuchadnezzar has forgotten his dream of the great statue, he has lost his sense of past narrated time, but this loss coincides with the sense of eternity he experienced in the dream, insofar as this is represented by the mountain and the stone which falls from it, which breaks the time of his kingdom. Third, following Ricoeur’s analysis of Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, Dan 4 suggests a question to the reader, whether the way in which Nebuchadnezzar ends his story may grant him any sense of dignity, worth, or meaningfulness, which may counterbalance his portrayal as tyrannical throughout the preceding narrative. Despite his characterisation as one prone to violence, arrogance, and a grasping of power exercised by the threat of death he hangs over his servants, is there any movement within the plot of Dan 1–4 which “redeems” Nebuchadnezzar in the end? Can his ongoing characterisation be re-seen as a movement in which he learns to make sense of his past time, in a way that may be regarded as a perspective entailing wisdom?
Gaps

As mentioned above, Ricoeur argues that when the world of the text intersects with the world of the reader, the response of the reader may be required to make sense of the narrative’s “coherence” and to deal with “the lacunae of the text.” I have found the biblical poetics of Meir Sternberg particularly helpful for thinking about such “gaps.” For Sternberg:

A gap is a lack of information about the world—an event, motive, causal link, character trait, plot structure, law of probability—contrived by a temporal displacement. Like the objects displaced, the forms of displacement vary. What happened (or existed) at a certain temporal point in the world may be communicated in the discourse at a point earlier or later, or for that matter not at all.69

Sternberg discusses “gap-filling” as a hypothesis constructed by the reader, which achieves highest plausibility when it “creates maximal relevance among the diverse features and levels ... and brings together more elements than the alternative hypothesis.”70 Sternberg recognises that gap-filling may be “illegitimate,” that it is “launched and sustained by the reader’s subjective concerns (or dictated by more general preconceptions) rather than by the text’s own norms and directives.”71 In Sternberg’s terms, for gap-filling to be cogent, “a hypothesis must be legitimated by the text.”72 In general terms, Sternberg identifies the way in which a passage opens a gap as the same way in which it is to be closed, which can be given by the narrator, by the characters, and by the allusions present in the words chosen.73 Sternberg also recognises that a single text can itself legitimate “dual or multiple systems of gap-filling, mutually incompatible and yet coexistent.”74

I regard such “multiple systems of gap-filling” to be instances of what Ricoeur sees as the potential of each text for “an excess of meaning,” which he sets against the text’s “lack of determinacy.”75 I also consider the finding of gaps and filling them to be the experience in

67 Ibid., 3:168.
68 Ibid., 3:169.
70 Ibid., 187.
71 Ibid., 188.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 259.
74 Ibid., 222. Sternberg’s emphasis.
75 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 3:169.
which the reader initially assumes that the text portrays a believable, consistent (but fictional) realm with plausibly-motivated inhabitants (and so, as Ricoeur says, they risk being lost in the “illusion”); but whose immersion is interrupted by the confrontation with a gap (what Ricoeur sees as the reader being alienated by the text); who then attempts to restore their immersion in the text by means of filling the gap. In my own exegesis of Dan 1:1–4:34, I employ the idea of gaps with multiple gap-fillings as a tool in which to interrogate the text, and to uncover its ambiguity which grants more than one option for the reader to make sense of it. At the same time, however, my own approach tends to attempt a synthesis of the different possibilities of gap-fillings, rather than leave them in internally consistent but irreconcilable rival systems, where possible.

**Gaps of Plot**

Given that some scholars see the court tales of Daniel (Dan 1–6) as a disparate collection of tales, originally circulating independently, this increases the probability that my efforts to read an ongoing story-plot concerning Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:1–4:34) will encounter gaps in what I am approaching as a coherent plot. Sternberg discusses two types of gaps encountered in the unfolding plots of biblical narrative, particularly suited to my purposes concerning the representation of time in the narrative. The first type involves the technique of “suspense,” evoked by gaps about future time, which are closed by gap-fillings of “prospection.” The second type involves the technique of “curiosity,” evoked by gaps about past time, which are closed by gap-fillings of “retrospection.” For Sternberg:

> In art as in life, suspense derives from incomplete knowledge about a conflict (or some other contingency) looming in the future. Located at some point in the present, we know enough to expect a struggle but not to predict its course, and above all its outcome, with certitude. Hence a discontinuity that extends from the moment of prospection on the unknown to the moment of enactment and release. Hence also the state of mind that characterizes the intermediate phase: expectant restlessness, awareness of gaps, gap-

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76 See the "third dialectic," in ibid.
77 For example, see John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 35-37. Within the sphere of narrative criticism, Fewell prefers to see Dan 1–6 as a series of different plot lines “paratactically constructed,” rather than constituting “a continuing, complex plot line”; however, she does see “continuity on other levels,” such as “development of character and situation as the narrative progresses.” Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories*, 13.
78 Discussed throughout Sternberg, 264-283.
79 Discussed throughout ibid., 283-308.
filling inference along alternative lines, with the attention thrown forward to the point in
time that will resolve it all and establish closure by supplying the desired information.80

Just as Sternberg defines “suspense” as something which concerns gaps in future time, he
defines “curiosity” as something which “has much in common with suspense,” but differs from
it insofar as it “bears on things past relative to the moment of their becoming of interest.”81
Sternberg goes on to say that “the closure takes the form of a retrospect,” before continuing
his comparison of “curiosity” and “suspense” in terms of “the temporal direction of interest—
past vs. future.”82 For Sternberg, “[t]o produce curiosity, ... the artist must perceptibly deform
the chronological order: suppress and entangle and delay information in order to open gaps
about what has already come to pass in terms of the natural time-line.”83 I would see an
underlying reason for the occurrence of gaps about future and past time to lie in the non-
simultaneity of the “time of narrating” and “narrated time.” The “time of narrating” involves
the reader’s temporal experience of reading a narrative from beginning to end, while “narrated
time” involves time as it is represented in the world of the text. While the narrator narrates the
story to the reader, that narrator may withhold vital pieces of information about past “narrated
time” in the story-world or its future “narrated time.” The non-disclosure of information about
future “narrated time,” during the “time of narrating,” would manifest as a gap of “suspense,”
while similar non-disclosure about past “narrated time” would manifest as a gap of “curiosity.”
For my own purposes, however, gaps of plot are important primarily to the extent that they
impinge upon an understanding of the characters, especially the development of
characterisation in Nebuchadnezzar.

Gaps of Character

The most important element of any plot is the cast of characters: without actors, there can be
no action; without multiple agendas, no conflict. Such conflict may also be found within the
characters themselves, their self-contradictions manifesting as gaps which complicate their

80 Ibid., 264.
81 Ibid., 283.
82 Ibid., 284.
83 Ibid.
characterisation in the eyes of the reader. Adele Berlin distinguishes three levels of complexity attributable to any character in a narrative: “the agent,” who contributes only a single action; “the type,” who portrays only one dominant character trait; “the full-fledged character,” who displays a complex range of characteristics. Fewell notes that the depth or complexity of a character can change during the narration, and complexity becomes unavoidable during the gap-filling occasioned by indirect characterisation. It is Robert Alter, however, who champions the complexity of characterisation, when he notes the apparent self-contradictions of biblical characters:

What it is like, the biblical writers seek to know through their art, to be a human being with a divided consciousness—intermittently loving your brother but hating him even more; resentful or perhaps contemptuous of your father but also capable of the highest filial regard; stumbling between disastrous ignorance and imperfect knowledge; fiercely asserting your own independence but caught in a tissue of events divinely contrived; outwardly a definite character but inwardly an unstable vortex of greed, ambition, jealousy, lust, piety, courage, compassion, and much more?

For Alter, this is the “ultimately representational purpose” of biblical characterisation, which finds resonance with my own observations of the complexities of Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation in Dan 1–4. Complexity, I suspect, is more likely in cases of indirect characterisation than direct: this is when a character is defined by their actions, by their speech within dialogue scenes, and by their responses to the movements of the plot, rather than by the epithets found in direct characterisation. Alter regards the indirect characterisation technique of dialogue as the mode emphasised by the biblical authors, and the main driving force behind biblical plots. The concept of indirect characterisation is particularly important for my reading of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 1–4, because he is nowhere designated as being “wise” or as possessing “wisdom,” and yet he interacts with “wise” characters who possess

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84 Adele Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, Bible and Literature (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 23; see also Yairah Amit, Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 72; Fewell, 21-22; but cf. Sternberg, 347. Sternberg dismisses the claim that biblical narrative characterises “types.”
85 Fewell, 22.
86 Ibid., 23.
88 Ibid. This phrase finds common ground with Ricoeur’s concept of the “mimesis of character,” discussed below.
89 See Sternberg’s evaluation of “indirect characterization,” which is “portrayal beyond the feature or facet specified by the epithet,” as “the most important but also the most tricky.” Sternberg, 342. Sternberg’s emphasis.
90 Alter, 72.
91 Ibid., 65.
“wisdom,” such as God, Daniel, and Daniel’s companions. Is it possible that in his interactions with “wise” characters, Nebuchadnezzar acquires “wisdom,” which may be discernible in his speech, in his actions, and in his reactions? The way in which I will answer this question involves my adaptation of Ricoeur’s concept of “mimesis.”

**Mimesis**

Using the concept of “gaps” as an interrogative tool for questioning the narrative of Daniel, I hope to uncover ambiguity and complexity in its plot and characters, but for my overall aim of reading the characterisation of Nebuchadnezzar, I have adapted Ricoeur’s concept of “mimesis.” My understanding of Ricoeur’s concept of “mimesis” is that it involves—to put it simply—an imitation, a likeness, a similarity of the world of the text and the temporal experience it configures, of the world of action which prefigures it, and of the world of the reader which refigures it. Ricoeur extends his concept of “mimesis” to characters and their characterisation. This concept of “mimesis” is of interest to me, because when I attempt to answer the question of whether Nebuchadnezzar acquires “wisdom” through his interactions with “wise” characters, my expectation is that he would do so through acquiring likenesses or similarities with these “wise” characters. Does Nebuchadnezzar learn “wisdom” by learning to imitate the “wise”?

At this stage, however, I should point out that my use of the concept of “mimesis” is not straightforwardly Ricoeur’s, but something I have adapted from Ricoeur’s conception and moulded for my own purposes. Where Ricoeur seems to conceive of “mimesis” as the kind of relationship a narrative has with the world of action before it and with the world of the reader which it transforms, I will take it as assumed that the narrative of Daniel bears a relationship with the historical context which formed it and that it may shape the context of its readers. However, I wish to adapt this conception of “mimesis” towards the relationship of similarity and likeness that a narrated world and its characters may bear with other narrated worlds and their characters—which themselves are crystallised likenesses of their own historical contexts, and which may form the framework for a reader’s understanding and appropriation of the narrated world and its characters, of which he or she is currently reading. In the hope of not
doing violence to Ricoeur’s concept of mimesis, I intend to follow the direction he lays out by making the act of reading the way in which a configured narrative is refigured.

**Mimesis of Action**

My main interest in Ricoeur’s conception of “mimesis” lies in his concept of the mimesis of character, but mimesis of character is something he develops from the mimesis of action, which informs the central thesis of his *Time and Narrative*. Ricoeur states this hypothesis in his chapter “Time and Narrative: Threefold Mimesis”: “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.” When Ricoeur states his thesis about the hominisation of time through narrative and the temporal conditioning of narrative, he has in mind the idea that narrative, both historical and fictional, is a “mimesis” of the human experience of time, in three senses—“mimesis,” as a “prefiguration,” “mimesis,” as a “configuration,” and “mimesis” as a “refiguration” of this experience:

I propose to disentangle them [i.e. “the temporal aspects of emplotment”] from the act of textual configuration and to show the mediating role of the time of emplotment between the temporal aspects prefigured in the practical field and the refiguration of our temporal experience by this constructed time. *We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time.*

When discussing “mimesis,” Ricoeur understands narrative plot to be “an imitation of action,” so that human action in the practical world is intelligible through a structure like that of characters’ actions in narrative: each action involves “what someone does,” and an agent who possesses a goal, motive, and responsibility by it. For Ricoeur, “mimesis,” opens

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93 Ibid., 1:52. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
94 Ibid., 1:54. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
96 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:54.
97 Ibid., 1:55.
Ricoeur defines mimesis$_2$ to involve the “plot” of a narrative, which constitutes the “intermediary” between “mimesis$_1$” and “mimesis$_3$,” performing “within its own textual field, an integrating and ... a mediating function, which allows it to bring about, beyond this field, a mediation of a larger amplitude between the preunderstanding and ... the postunderstanding of the order of action and its temporal features.”

Ricoeur states “that mimesis$_3$ marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds it specific temporality.”

For Ricoeur, the “act” of reading is “our connection to the plot’s capacity to model experience, ... because it takes up again and [fulfils] the configurational act.” In this sense, emplotment is “the joint work of the text and reader,” in that a configuration of temporal experience in narrative is only a potential which is yet to be actualised by a reader performing “an act of judgment.” This is Ricoeur’s conception of mimesis which I intend to adapt.

Ricoeur speaks of “narrative” in *Time and Narrative* to set up a dialogue between different methodologies of analysing historical narratives and fictional narratives, and between analyses of narrative and philosophical reflections on the nature and experience of time. My adaptation of Ricoeur’s reflections on “narrative” as a mimesis of temporal experience—while grateful for his extensive interdisciplinary work between philosophy, historical criticism, and literary criticism—must limit itself to his fictional-narrative-critical reflections for the sake of my own project’s limits. Therefore, when Ricoeur speaks of “mimesis” in terms of a mimesis of action, I must limit the vast scope implied by the word “action” to the specific action of reading. This move is inspired, in part, by Ricoeur’s understanding of the transition from the mimesis of configuration to the mimesis of refiguration as taking place in the act of reading.

When I limit the notion of “action” to reading, this reflects my understanding that the author of Daniel, in composing the narrative, was influenced by his or her reading of other narratives.

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98 Ibid., 1:64. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
99 Ibid., 1:65.
100 Ibid., 1:71.
101 Ibid., 1:76.
102 Ibid.
of the Hebrew Bible. By acknowledging that “action” may have a broader range than reading, however, I acknowledge that the author of Daniel drew inspiration from his or her historical context, even though such considerations fall outside the scope of my study. By focusing on “action” as the action of reading, I also understand myself as a reader who is influenced by other narratives in the Hebrew Bible, in my own attempts to make sense of the story of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 1–4. I would also hope that my reading of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 1–4 is of benefit to other readers in my own context. Since I am interested in the characterisation of Nebuchadnezzar, I will now outline the way in which Ricoeur moves from the concept of the mimesis of action to the mimesis of character, and present my strategy for adapting such a conception for my own purposes.

**Mimesis of Character**

Ricoeur sums up his move from the mimesis of action to the mimesis of character:

The narrated world is the world of the characters and it is narrated by the narrator. The notion of a character is solidly anchored in narrative to the extent that a narrative cannot be a mimesis of action without being at the same time a mimesis of acting beings. And acting beings are, in the broad sense that the semantics of action confers on the notion of an agent, beings who think and feel—better, beings capable of talking about their thoughts, their feelings, and their actions. It is thus possible to shift the notion of mimesis from the action toward the character, and from the character toward the character’s discourse.

... le monde raconté est le monde du personnage et il est raconté par le narrateur. Or, la notion de personnage est solidement ancrée dans la théorie narrative, dans la mesure où le récit ne saurait être une mimèsis d’action sans être aussi une mimèsis d’êtres agissants ; or, des êtres agissants sont, au sens large que la sémantique de l’action confère à la notion d’agent, des êtres pensants et sentants ; mieux : des êtres capables de parler leurs pensées, leurs sentiments et leurs actions. Il est dès lors possible de déplacer la notion de mimèsis de l’action vers le personnage et du personnage vers le discours du personnage.

As Ricoeur explains here, any mimesis of action in a narrative implies mimesis of an agent, or character, in the same narrative. Likenesses between the actions in the narrative and those in the world of praxis suggest similarities between characters of the narrated world and persons of the practical world. Such mimesis is exemplified by the characters’ representation as agents, capable of perspectives and motives, acting and suffering, reflecting on their activity and passivity, and representing or misrepresenting their perspective and motives to other
characters in the narrated world. In this context, Ricoeur incorporates the notions of point of view and narrative voice “into the problem of narrative composition ... by tying them to the categories of ‘narrator’ and ‘character.”’ He then reformulates the notions of utterance and statement in the personalised terms of the characters’ and narrator’s discourse: “The utterance becomes the discourse of the narrator, while the statement becomes the discourse of a character.” Ricoeur understands point of view to mark out “the essential plurivocality of the work of art,” and that, it “designates in a third- or first-person narrative the orientation of the narrator’s attitude toward the characters and the characters’ attitudes toward one another.”

It is a presupposition of my own narrative-critical approach that the narrator, Daniel and his friends, Nebuchadnezzar, and others in Dan 1–4 resemble real human beings by their expression of variation and difference in their voices. However, I will also ask if the reader might perceive resemblances between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel and his friends, developed over time spent in their influence, or resemblances to any other “wise” characters in biblical narrative, without direct influence, except perhaps the influence of the God of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. I will include resemblances of speech in my search. However, I will attempt to limit such relationships of similarity for when there is some warrant for connections. In developing a warrant for seeing likenesses between biblical narratives and characters, I will adopt and adapt principles in Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor.

**Metaphorical Connections**

In the narrative of Dan 1–4, Nebuchadnezzar has two dreams, the first one—as recounted by Daniel—of a great statue made up of multiple metals and pottery (2:31–35), and the other—as recounted by Nebuchadnezzar—of a tall tree reaching to the heights of heaven and visible to all the earth (4:7–14). In both cases, Daniel interprets the dream so to identify Nebuchadnezzar with one or more of the images in the dream: in the first, Nebuchadnezzar

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106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 2:93.
108 Ibid.
“is” the golden head on the top of the statue (Dan 2:38); in the second, Nebuchadnezzar “is” the tall tree (4:19). Daniel’s wisdom in interpreting dreams would seem to consist in making the appropriate metaphorical connection between part of the imagery of the king’s dreams and the identity of the king himself, and is played out in terms of what Daniel foretells of Nebuchadnezzar’s future in narrated time. In Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor, I found particularly helpful one of his central points in *The Rule of Metaphor*, for connecting biblical characters: the copula “is” in metaphorical statements is itself metaphorical, unfolding in the act of “seeing as.”

**The Metaphorical Copula**

Ricoeur’s central insight into the metaphorical nature of the copula “is” in metaphors begins with his argument that it is preferable to regard metaphors as sentences whose members are held in tension with each other, rather than simply the substitution of one noun for another. Ricoeur acknowledges that the tradition of “ancient and classic rhetoric” locates “the change of meaning” of metaphors “in the word.”

However, Ricoeur prefers to identify metaphor as “the metaphorical statement,” while still not wanting to completely abandon “the definition of metaphor as transposition of the name,” except to designate this definition as “nominal only and not real.” He still acknowledges that “[i]t is the word that is said to take a metaphorical meaning” and that “the word remains the ‘focus’ even while it requires the ‘frame’ of the sentence.” He thus argues for “a link between the semantics of the sentence and the semantics of the word, ... between the interaction theory and the substitution theory of metaphor,” so that “the real location of metaphor in the theory of discourse would begin to define itself between the sentence and the word, between predication and naming.”

In the course of developing his argument for the locus of metaphor “between the sentence and the word,” Ricoeur takes up the contribution of Marcus Hester in “join[ing] the properly

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109 Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 74. Ricoeur's emphasis.
110 Ibid. Ricoeur's emphasis.
111 Ibid., 75. Ricoeur's emphasis.
112 Ibid., 146-47. Ricoeur's emphasis.
sensual aspect of the image to a semantic theory of metaphor,” and despite earlier opposing “any reduction of metaphor to mental imagery,” he advances his argument to “proclaim[ing] the image to be the final moment of a semantic theory that objected to it as a starting point.”113 In arguing with Hester, Ricoeur endorses and adopts his principle of understanding metaphor in terms of “seeing as,” which he judges to be “Hester’s positive contribution to the iconic theory of metaphor.”114 Hester follows Wittgenstein in understanding “seeing as” in terms of “noticing an aspect” of an image, an aspect identified with that image in one’s imagination,115 but leaving open the possibility that the image is not the same as the aspect noticed and recognised.116 Ricoeur thus asks and answers a definitional question, “What is ‘seeing as’?”117

The “seeing as” is the positive link between vehicle and tenor. In poetic metaphor, the metaphorical vehicle is as the tenor—from one point of view, not from all points of view. To explicate a metaphor is to enumerate all the appropriate senses in which the vehicle is “seen as” the tenor. The “seeing as” is the intuitive relationship that makes the sense and image hold together.118

Le « voir comme » est le lien positif entre vehicle et tenor : dans la métaphore poétique, le vehicle métaphorique est comme le tenor ; d’un point de vue, mais non de tous les points de vue ; expliquer une métaphore, c’est énumérer les sens appropriés dans lesquels le vehicle est vu comme le tenor. Le « voir comme » est la relation intuitive qui fait tenir ensemble le sens et l’image.119

Ricoeur develops this notion of metaphor as “seeing as” taking place in the act of reading:

Now this “pictorial” capacity of language consists also in “seeing an aspect.” In the case of metaphor, to depict time in terms of the characteristics of a beggar is to see time as a beggar. This is what we do when we read the metaphor; to read is to establish a relationship such that X is like Y in some senses, but not in all.120

... or, ce pouvoir « pictural » du langage consiste aussi à « voir un aspect ». Dans le cas de la métaphore, dépeindre le temps sous les traits d’un mendiant, c’est voir le temps comme un mendiant : c’est ce que nous faisons quand nous lisons la métaphore ; lire, c’est établir une relation telle que X est comme Y en quelques sens, mais non en tous.121

113 Ibid., 245. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
114 Ibid., 251. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
116 Ibid., 173.
117 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 251.
118 Ibid. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
120 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 251-52.
121 Ricoeur, La métaphore vive, 269.
He formulates this understanding of metaphor, in which “a Gestalt” or a “point of view,” designated as B, is necessary for figure A to be seen as figure C, and characterises “seeing as” as “[h]alf thought, half experience.”122 Ricoeur ties “seeing as” to “[s]emantic theory” which “puts the accent on the tension between the terms of the statement,” so that “seeing as” creates “a tension grounded in contradiction at the literal level.”123 Ricoeur thus sees a necessary negative aspect in “seeing as”: “the literal is not accompanies the metaphorical is.”124 For Ricoeur, “Seeing X as Y encompasses ’X is not Y’; seeing time as a beggar is, precisely, to know also that time is not a beggar. The borders of meaning are transgressed but not abolished.”125 When discussing the ontology of metaphor, the question of the reality to which metaphor refers, Ricoeur argues that “taking the verb to be itself in its literal sense” would be “falling into a trap” when stating a metaphor.126 However, he then asks if there is “not a metaphorical sense of the verb to be itself,” which involves a “tension” between the two terms of the metaphor, between interpreting it literally and metaphorically, “and finally between identity and difference.”127 For Ricoeur, the copula “to be” in metaphor is constituted by both a negative element, “is not,” and by a positive element, “is like”:

In order to elucidate this tension deep within the logical force of the verb to be, we must expose an “is not,” itself implied in the impossibility of the literal interpretation, yet present as a filigree in the metaphorical “is.” Thus, the tension would prevail between an “is” and an “is not.” … “To be like/as” must [also] be treated as a metaphorical modality of the copula itself; the “like/as” is not just the comparative term among all the terms, but is to be included in the verb to be, whose force it alters.128

Pour porter au jour cette tension, intime à la force logique du verbe être, il faut faire apparaître un « n’est pas », lui-même impliqué dans l’interprétation littérale impossible, mais présent en filigrane dans le « est » métaphorique. La tension serait alors entre un « est » et un « n’est pas ». … « être-comme » devrait être tenu pour une modalité métaphorique de la copule elle-même ; le « comme » ne serait pas seulement le terme de

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122 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 252.
123 Ibid., 253.
124 Ibid. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., 293. Ricoeur’s emphasis. For Berggren, an influence upon Ricoeur, “the difference between the referents of any metaphor must be such that a literal or univocal interpretation of their conjunction would produce absurdity.” Douglas Berggren, “The Use and Abuse of Metaphor, I,” The Review of Metaphysics 16, no. 2 (1962): 239.
127 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 293. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
Ricoeur’s concept of the metaphorical copula is that to state a metaphor, “X is Y,” means to “see” X “as” Y, which requires the seeing of some likeness of X to Y, but even when saying “X is Y” is to see X to be like Y, it remains that X “is not” Y.

Metaphors in Daniel, Metaphors between Daniel and Other Biblical Narratives

I will follow Ricoeur’s conception of metaphor, in which the “is” of “A is B” is understood as “seeing A as B,” which means both “A is not B” and “A is like B.” Hence, when Daniel describes the act of seeing the golden head in Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream, he sees Nebuchadnezzar as the golden head—he sees some likeness or similarity between Nebuchadnezzar and the golden head, even though Nebuchadnezzar is not a golden head. Likewise, when Nebuchadnezzar describes his act of seeing a tall tree in his second dream, nothing about his account indicates that he sees himself as the tree, and, literally, Nebuchadnezzar is not a tree. However, after Nebuchadnezzar describes his dream, Daniel makes the metaphorical connection of seeing Nebuchadnezzar as the tree: something about the two is similar in Daniel’s eyes. Since the narrator presents Daniel’s wisdom as interpreting dreams, it may also be asked whether Nebuchadnezzar needs to see himself in the metaphors Daniel applies to him to be wise like Daniel. However, I intend to extend metaphorical connections between Nebuchadnezzar and other characters or objects to include other biblical narratives, which means employing a notion of intertextuality. In his essay, “The Bible and the Imagination,” originally published in 1981 between the La métaphore vive (1975, The Rule of Metaphor) and Temps et récit (three volumes in 1983–85, Time and Narrative), Ricoeur analyses the creation process of metaphors in terms of the intertextual relationships of biblical narratives, and the formation

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129 Ricoeur, La métaphore vive, 312.
of biblical narratives out of metaphors. His paradigms are the parables of the synoptic gospels, from which I will extract his exegetical principles.

Ricoeur notes “that the narrative-parables are narratives within a narrative,” and form the speech of “the principal personage of an encompassing narrative.” For Ricoeur, it is because of this “embedding” that “the embedded narrative borrows from the encompassing narrative the structure of interpretation that allows the metaphorization of its meaning; in return, the interpretant ... is also reinterpreted due to the feedback ... from the metaphorized narrative.”

His next principle alludes to the notion of time and change in narrative: “To understand a narrative dynamically is to understand it as the operation of transforming an initial situation into a terminal situation.” Ricoeur understands this “dynamism” as that which allows the “rule-governed form of imagination” to be “authentically productive of meaning.” Ricoeur then observes the way in which elements of an embedded narrative and of its encompassing narrative are made to refer to each other, using prepositional clauses such as “instead of,” “like” and “in place of” to describe their relationship. In this way, Ricoeur regards “[t]he narrative form of imagination” as a preparation “for the metaphorical form” which involves a “transgressing of the expectation” created by the narrative. Ricoeur then argues that the “metaphorization” process can also be extended to the “actants,” or the characters, which takes place in their progressive characterisation within the embedded narrative, then in their being referred to characters “outside the [embedded] narrative” (but in the encompassing narrative), and even to “others” who are “outside the narrative” of the work as a whole. In going outside the work as a whole, Ricoeur argues that “[t]he explicit

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131 Ibid., 149.
132 Ibid., 150.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid., 151.
135 Ibid., 154. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid., 154-55.
139 Ibid., 155.
metaphorization is further guided by the device of quotations,” and it is “[t]he quotation [which] transforms” one image-object into another, which has the effect of producing a “crisscrossing between the narrative and the other texts.”

I will employ Ricoeur’s understanding of “metaphorization” between narratives, first, as a guide for understanding the way in which Daniel identifies Nebuchadnezzar with the image-content of his dreams. Second, I will utilise Ricoeur’s conception as a guide for understanding likenesses between the characters of the narrative of Daniel and of other biblical narratives, joined together not so much through direct quotation as through allusion, indicated by the co-occurrence of words found both in the text of Daniel and in the text of these other narratives. Despite my generally Ricoeurian approach, Kristeva’s definition of “intertextuality,” with its emphasis on interconnections through words, has also influenced me:

> Writer as well as “scholar,” Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure. What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of the “literary word” as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context.

Since, however, Daniel is a dual-language text of both Aramaic and Hebrew writing, I will also employ some Aramaic traditions of the Hebrew Bible, specifically Targum Onqelos of the Pentateuch, Targum Jonathon of the Prophets, Targum Isaiah, and some of the Targumim of the Writings (limited to those on Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, and Chronicles), as guides in establishing connections between the words of the Aramaic portions of Daniel and the words of the Hebrew Bible reinterpreted in this Aramaic tradition. In the main text for my study, Dan 2:4b–4:34 is in Aramaic, while most of the Masoretic Text is in Hebrew. My

140 Ibid., 156. Ricoeur’s emphasis.
142 I have used the electronic text of *BibleWorks 10*, but where possible (Targumim Onqelos, Jonathon, Isaiah, Qoheleth, and Chronicles), I have made minor corrections to reflect the printed text of Alexander Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic*, 4 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).
consultation of these Targumim is not about trying to establish a diachronic chain of influence from Hebrew biblical texts to Daniel. It is about my concern to justify the linking of Aramaic verses of Daniel to Hebrew biblical verses, when arguing for mimetic likenesses and metaphorical connections between Nebuchadnezzar and other biblical characters, on the basis that Aramaic readers of the Hebrew Bible have received and read these Hebrew verses, and re-expressed them in these Aramaic words and statements.

**Reading Strategy: A Summary of Principles**

These then are the principles of my reading strategy. Given that I am reading Dan 1–4 using narrative criticism, which implies approaching biblical texts as literary fiction, I will follow Ricoeur’s justification of the “reality” of fictional narratives from the intersection of their “world” with the world of the reader, rather than the world of the author or the author’s audience that might inform a historical-critical model. The “reader,” in this case, is abstracted from the different possibilities of making sense of the text, as carried out by myself or other real readers of Daniel. These different possibilities of making sense of the text arise from attempts to fill in its gaps, whether these are gaps arising from the temporal elements of the plot or from the apparent contradictions in characterisation. The act of reading follows the narrative during the “time of narrating,” constituted out of the line of each verse following the previous verse and leading into the next. In doing so, the act of reading attempts to reconstruct time as it is narrated in the text, its “narrated time,” and tap into the “fictional experience of time” of its characters. The characters’ “fictional experience of time” implies a mimesis of action taking place in the worlds of the author and of the reader, but for the kind of mimetic qualities which biblical characters may display, I will limit myself to the qualities which the biblical reader may observe in other biblical characters. In making connections between characters of different biblical narratives, I will employ Ricoeur’s notion of metaphor which

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“sees” them “as” each other, but such an identification (“is”) includes both negation (“is not”) and similarity (“is like”). Since this involves making intertextual connections between biblical narratives of different languages, I will look to some Aramaic traditions of the Targumim, which reread Hebrew verses in Aramaic, as guides to making connections between the Aramaic parts of Daniel and most of the Hebrew Bible. My overall goal is to test the hypothetical question of whether the character Nebuchadnezzar develops in his characterisation and in his knowledge to acquire a kind of “wisdom,” by changing to show likenesses with Daniel and other “wise” characters of biblical narratives.
Chapter 3: Literature Review: Daniel, Wisdom, and Readings of Nebuchadnezzar

Others have written on wisdom in the book of Daniel and of the character Daniel, and on the portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar. Some have written on the knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar, but there is little on the question of wisdom in Nebuchadnezzar. First, I review the scholarship on wisdom in Daniel, beginning with Gerhard von Rad’s thesis that apocalyptic (such as the book of Daniel) originated in wisdom circles, not prophetic literature, based on his view of the different views of time in wisdom literature and prophecy. Von Rad’s thesis has been critiqued by Paul Hanson, but Hans-Peter Müller offered an alternative view that apocalyptic originated in mantic wisdom rather than proverbial wisdom. Among the responses to von Rad’s and H.-P. Müller’s theses is Collins’s theory of the maššilîm as those behind Daniel. Second, I examine the scholarship on portrayals of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel. I begin with Humphreys’s claim that Dan 1–6 offers “a lifestyle for diaspora,” which, although more about the courtiers than the king, implies a benign view of foreign kings such as Nebuchadnezzar, insofar as he allows deserving courtiers to succeed. After looking at those who see the court tales in Dan 1–6 as courtier success stories, I examine a different approach, beginning in Daniel Smith-Christopher, which regards Daniel’s foreign kings such as Nebuchadnezzar as villains to be resisted and ridiculed by the protagonists. Finally, I look at studies analysing the role that the acquisition of knowledge plays in Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation. Among these, most notable is Danna Nolan Fewell’s landmark study, Circle of Sovereignty, which questions the kings’ knowledge of God’s sovereignty.

Wisdom and Daniel

Von Rad’s Thesis about Wisdom and Apocalyptic, and Hanson’s Critique

In 1957, Gerhard von Rad linked the book of Daniel to wisdom literature, by arguing that Jewish apocalyptic traditions developed from Israelite wisdom traditions, rather than prophetic traditions.¹ Von Rad’s starting point is his claim that apocalyptic and prophecy have

incompatible views of history. According to von Rad: prophecy assumes the divine election of Israel, apocalyptic takes the perspective that God deals only with world empires; apocalyptic conceives of history as a unified and predetermined whole, prophecy presupposes the possibility of God or God’s people changing their mind; in apocalyptic, evil is growing without restraint when human empires are established, but in prophecy, God directly causes disasters to happen; the prophets made their predictions within the confines of a specific historical event, apocalyptic intentionally conceals its historical context to portray a predetermined world history. From the claim that apocalyptic is concerned with a “knowledge based on a universal Jahwism, surprisingly divorced from the saving history,” von Rad identifies Israelite wisdom as its source. He sees the genetic relationship between apocalyptic and wisdom literatures in their shared quest for an “encyclopedic science” of the world and its history and principles. The specific links von Rad makes between wisdom and the book of Daniel, which exemplifies early apocalyptic, are: Daniel’s identity as a wise man, especially his wisdom in interpreting dreams; the “overtly didactic purpose” of Dan 1–6 to teach the Israelites in the Persian empire to remain faithful to God’s commandments (an obedience which von Rad identifies as “fear of the Lord”); the universalised view of all world history as four empires symbolised by four metals (Dan 2) or four beasts (Dan 7); the role of the wise at the end of the age to educate and lead many into righteousness (Dan 11:33; 12:3).

Gerhard von Rad developed his thesis of apocalyptic’s origin in wisdom in Weisheit in Israel (Wisdom in Israel). He continues to argue for the similarities between the conception of

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2 Ibid., 2:303.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 2:304.
5 Ibid., 2:305.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 2:306.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 2:310.
11 Ibid., 1:433, 438.
12 Ibid., 2:311-12.
13 Ibid., 2:315.
history in both wisdom and apocalyptic circles, but in terms of “determinism” (“Determinismus”). Von Rad places most weight on the conception of determinism found in Qoheleth—every event has its proper time, determined by God but unknown to people (Qoh 3:1–8, 14, 17; 6:10)—and in Sirach—every human action has its appropriate “Kairos” which is in principle knowable by (wise) human beings (Sir 4:20, 23; 6:8; 12:16; 18:26; 19:9; 22:6; 29:2–5; 31:28; 38:13). Taking this concept of the “appointed time”/“gesetzte Zeit” (נַע) found in Qoheleth and Sirach, von Rad considers this keyword a bridge to the concept of “divine determination” of time found in apocalyptic works (Dan 2:21; As. Mos. 12:4–5; 1 En. 39:11; 92:2; Jub. 32:21), concerning matters of “life and death, salvation and judgment.” For von Rad, “time” in late wisdom and early apocalyptic circles departs from the prophetic conception of divine intervention in response to the events of history. Instead, “time,” for von Rad’s apocalyptic sage, is predetermined by God from the primordial beginning, often using the literary device of pre-recording history on “heavenly tablets.” He sees this divine predetermination and foreknowledge of history as implying God’s non-intervention in history (hence abandoning earlier, prophetic “salvation history”). Instead, God waits until the end of history before creating a new world, a second age, for those already chosen from the beginning. Von Rad therefore sees a wisdom setting for “the kind of the interpretations of the future” found in Daniel 2, mirroring the “vaticinia post eventum” of “wise men” also found in the Joseph narrative and among Egyptian wisdom circles.

Paul Hanson, who in his *Dawn of Apocalyptic* acknowledges “the late Gerhard von Rad” as one of “four teachers” who taught him “useful methods” and through “personal example,”

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17 Ibid., 251.
20 Ibid., 269.
21 Ibid., 271.
22 Ibid., 272–73.
23 Ibid., 273–74.
24 Ibid., 281.
25 Ibid., 280.
nevertheless critiques von Rad’s theory of apocalyptic “as a new phenomenon without primary connections to prophetic Yahwism,” and his “theory of derivation from wisdom.” Hanson is critical of any approach finding “primarily dissimilarities” in a “contrast between prophecy and apocalyptic,” by direct comparison of seventh-century and second-century texts, while bypassing examination of “apocalyptic literature of the second century” as “the result of a long development reaching back to pre-exilic times and beyond.” Focussing on the element of “apocalyptic eschatology,” derived “from earlier prophetic roots,” Hanson identifies evidence for its development from prophecy, in “the self-identification of its protagonists with the classical prophetic tradition,” its appropriation of “archaic league and royal mythopoeic material” in line with Second Isaiah, and its “setting in a crisis-ridden post-exilic community struggling to adjust to the loss of nationhood,” and threatened by “a growing schism between two factions, one visionary, the other hierocratic.” Hanson thus seeks to trace the development from “[p]rophetic eschatology”—understood as “the prophetic announcement to the nation of the divine plans for Israel and the world,” spoken in “the terms of plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality”—to “[a]pocalyptic eschatology”—understood as “the disclosure ... to the elect of the cosmic vision of Yahweh’s sovereignty,” including God’s “acting to deliver his faithful,” but a “disclosure” which has “largely ceased to translate into the terms of plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality due to a pessimistic view of reality growing out of the bleak post-exilic conditions.” Although Hanson’s central argument is that prophecy is “one significant root—and in our mind the taproot—of the major apocalyptic works,” he still acknowledges “[t]hat works such as Daniel, 1 Enoch, and 4 Ezra contain other currents as well is undeniable, including ... the wisdom tradition.” However, it is his own “tentative judgment that wisdom was wedded to the tradition of apocalyptic eschatology ... in

27 Ibid., 5.
28 Ibid., 8.
29 Ibid., 5.
30 Ibid., 6.
31 Ibid., 9.
32 Ibid., 9-10.
33 Ibid., 10.
34 Ibid., 11.
35 Ibid., 8.
36 Ibid., 9.
the third and second centuries B.C. ... when prophetic figures were being regarded with a great deal of skepticism and even animosity by many religious leaders.”

Hanson updated his definition of “apocalyptic” in 1987, to include its functions of “renewal of faith” and ‘reordering of life’” during a crisis; its view of “the heavenly world ... as the source of transformation awaited by the faithful;” a “seer” who mediated the “vision” to his or her community; and its social context of “oppressed persons” whose experience of “this-worldly realities” was in “sharp contradiction” to their hopes in “the divine promises,” but who sought “[e]mpowerment to cope with such negative realities ... through denying them any ultimate validity.” Although Hanson continues to uphold “the unbroken development leading from prophetic eschatology to apocalyptic eschatology,” he still acknowledges that “[i]t is also clear that many of apocalyptic writings, ... were influenced by the wisdom tradition,” manifested in their “lists of cosmological and meteorological phenomena” and categorisation “of various natural realms.”

H.-P. Müller’s Revision of von Rad’s Thesis

In 1969, between von Rad’s publication of Old Testament Theology and Wisdom in Israel, Hans-Peter Müller put forward his thesis that the book of Daniel represents wisdom of “magical-mantic” (“Magisch-mantische”) kind. He traces a tradition history behind the root חכם, finding its meaning as a technique which “may recognise things or persons ... distant, hidden and above all future” (“die [Weisheit] den Dingen und Personen ... Fernes, Verborgenes und vor allem Zukünftiges zu erkennen vermag”). H.-P. Müller applies his background material to the book of Daniel, particularly Nebuchadnezzar’s court (Dan 2:27), which consists of the “wise men” (חכמים) who obtain knowledge of secrets through magical

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37 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 29.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 30.
42 Ibid., 33.
44 Ibid., 29.
H.-P. Müller includes Daniel and his friends in the category of עָשִׁפִּין and חֶרְטִמִּין (Dan 1:20), but designates Daniel as possessing “mantic” wisdom, because God gives him insight into dreams and visions. H.-P. Müller thus notes that the two previously separate “wisdom” categories, “magical” and “mantic,” find their union in the wisdom of Daniel, which means not only recognition but also influence of secret matters (“auch der Mantiker will ja nicht nur erkennen, sondern zugleich beeinflussen”). He traces the trajectory through which magic and manteia fused as wisdom in Daniel, beginning in the oneiromancy of Joseph (Gen 37:40–41), which Daniel also displays (Dan 2:4; 7:12); then in Daniel’s association with the martyrs’ role in the “doubling” (“Dopplegänger”) of the story of the three men (Dan 3:6); finally in Daniel’s characterisation as a mantic sage by the “pre-Maccabean collator” (“vormakkäbaischen Sammler”) (Dan 1:4). H.-P. Müller regards the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion as adopted from the Prayer of Nabonidus discovered at Qumran (4QOrNab), and identifies a prehistory of the character Daniel in the “Danel” of Ezek 14:14, 20, connecting Daniel to wisdom that uncovers “hidden things” (“das Verborgene,” סֵתֶום) (Ezek 28:3; Dan 2:22; 8:26; 12:4, 9). Finally, H.-P. Müller traces a prehistory behind Ezekiel’s Danel to the Ugaritic Dnil, whose wisdom consisted in righteous rule over a kingdom, and was connected to magic through the cultic connotations of his epithets, mt rpi (equated with אלהים) and ţzr (a class with ritual, military, and medical dimensions).

Three years later, H.-P. Müller developed his research into the magical-mantic background of Daniel’s wisdom in response to von Rad’s thesis. Noting the criticisms levelled against von Rad, H.-P. Müller formulates his own thesis which seeks to correct von Rad’s, who—in his

45 Ibid., 36.
46 Ibid., 36-37.
47 Ibid., 37.
48 Ibid., 38.
49 Ibid., 39.
50 Ibid., 40.
51 Ibid., 41.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 43-46.
55 Ibid., 269-71.
view—fails to clarify “the difference of educated wisdom from a slightly less rational near phenomenon” (“die Differenz der Bildungsweisheit gegenüber ihrem weniger rationale Nachbarphänomen”):

Weder die Weisheit in ihrer höfisch-pädagogischen Hochform, wie wir sie aus der israelitischen Königszeit kennen, noch deren demokratischere Sukzessoren in nachexilischer Zeit, sondern die archaische Gestalt einer mantischen Weisheit hat sich in der Apokalyptik fortgesetzt.56

H.-P. Müller adds two important notes when summarising his previous research:57 the figure of Solomon in the Wisdom of Solomon as a “magical-mantic sage” (“magisch-mantischer Weiser”), with insight into secrets (Wis 7:17–22; 8:8);58 Joseph, who combines “mantic wisdom and educated wisdom” (“mantischer Weisheit und Bildungsweisheit”), not only interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams, but also possessing “the art of speech and advice-giving” (“die Kunst des Redens und Ratgebens”), and who “has grown to learn the fear of God in the school of humility” (“in der Schule der Demut erlernten Gottesfurcht erwächst”).59 H.-P. Müller interprets the figure of Daniel (in Dan 1–6) as one who combines mantic and educated wisdom, when Dan 1 was joined to Dan 2; 4–5, since the prologue introduces Daniel’s insight into dreams and visions (1:17), and presents him as one who successfully exemplifies “the higher ideal of educated wisdom” (“dem Ideal höfischer Bildungsweisheit”) (1:4).60 However, H.-P. Müller parts ways with von Rad, by arguing that the parts of Daniel which show signs of an emerging apocalypticism (Dan 7–12; as foregrounded in Dan 2; 4) fail to manifest any signs of the ideal of educated wisdom. For H.-P. Müller, von Rad’s argument, based upon the “eschatologisation of wisdom” (“Eschatologisierung der Weisheit”), 61 “determinism” (“Determinismus”),62 “inspiration” (“Erleuchtung”),63 “codification ... through symbolic

56 Ibid., 271. My translation: “Neither the wisdom in its high pedagogical form, as we recognise it from the Israelite kingdom period, nor in the more democratic succession in the postexilic period: instead the archaic shape of a mantic wisdom has continued into apocalyptic.”
59 Ibid., 274.
60 Ibid., 279.
61 Ibid., 280.
62 Ibid., 281.
63 Ibid., 283.
images” (“Chiffrierung ... durch symbolische Bilder”),64 and “pseudonymity” (“Pseudonymität”),65 is better formulated in terms of “mantic wisdom,” and shows more in common with late prophecy than “educated wisdom.”66

**The “Maškilîm” and Daniel**

John J. Collins, presupposing the development of the apocalyptic material in Dan 7–12 from the court-tales in Dan 1–6, seeks to understand the early stages of the composition of Daniel.67 In doing so, he identifies three basic intentions of the tales, which allude to the protagonists as exemplars of wisdom.68 In Dan 2, Collins sees it emphasising the wisdom of Daniel and his God, because the king ignores the content of the dream’s interpretation and instead praises Daniel’s insight, nor is he hostile to the Jewish community.69 Collins puts weight on the inability of the Chaldean wise men to tell and interpret the king’s dream, comparing Dan 2 to Second Isaiah (Isa 40:23–24; 41:21–24; 44:9–20, 25–26; 47:13).70 In the stories of deliverance from danger (Dan 1; 3; 6), Collins considers the wisdom of Daniel and his companions to be de-emphasised (in contrast to comparable deliverance stories in Ahiqar, Esther, and Joseph), since the protagonists are saved not by their deeds or abilities, but “by the miraculous intervention of God.”71 In Dan 4–5, Collins considers the content of the wise courtier’s message to be the main emphasis, because both stories concentrate on the fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecies of the fall of their kingdoms, following God’s judgment upon their arrogance.72 For Collins, Daniel’s wisdom is important in these two stories as a consequence of God’s superior power over gentile idols and kings’ hubris.73

64 Ibid., 285-86.
65 Ibid., 289.
66 Ibid., 280-90. Müller’s argument is based on connecting these concepts to dreams, visions, and secret knowledge in Daniel and elsewhere.
68 Ibid., 219.
69 Ibid., 220.
70 Ibid., 223.
71 Ibid., 225.
72 Ibid., 227-28.
73 Ibid., 228.
Collins’s identification of the wisdom theme in the court tales leads to his thesis that the group behind the book of Daniel were the *maškilîm* (Dan 1:4; 11:33, 35; 12:3), who not only composed the tales but redacted them with the visions.  

Collins posits this group as diaspora Jews who aspired to be wise courtiers for gentile rulers, and who thus accepted oneiromancy as a way of discerning God’s will, and who composed Dan 1–6. According to Collins’s reconstruction, these diaspora Jews then came back to Palestine before the rise of Antiochus IV, practised mantic wisdom rather than proverbial wisdom, before one of them combined the tales (Dan 1–6) with the visions (Dan 7–12), redacting the final form of the book of Daniel. Collins distances himself from von Rad’s thesis, by distinguishing the self-identity of the authors of Daniel (“wise men”) from the content of their apocalyptic writings (sourced from prophecy), and by distinguishing the wisdom found in Daniel (“mantic”) from that found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (“proverbial”). Collins thus follows the alternative path laid out by H.-P. Müller.

**Other Responses to H.-P. Müller’s Revision of von Rad’s Thesis**

André Lacocque aligns Daniel’s dream-wisdom to the positive evaluation of revelatory dreams attributed to the patriarchs (Gen 20:3–7; 28:10–14; 31:11, 13, 24; 37:5–10; 40–41), to Joseph’s Pharaoh (Gen 41:1–7, 25), and to Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5–14; 9:2–9). For Lacocque, however, what makes Daniel’s wisdom “ten times superior” (Dan 1:20) is “the difference between wisdom of divine origin and wisdom of human origin.” In his addition of a seventh chapter, “The Figure of Daniel,” to his English edition of *Daniel et son temps*, he locates parallels between the protagonists of Dan 1–6 and visionary prophets who challenged kings, especially Ezekiel. Lacocque follows Collins and H.-P. Müller in designating Daniel’s wisdom as

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74 Ibid., 231.
75 Ibid., 229.
76 Ibid., 232.
77 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 33.
81 Lacocque, *Daniel in His Time*, 185-86.
“mantic,” but also sees Daniel distinguishing himself from his rivals by his Hasidic righteousness. Lacocque differentiates Daniel from prophetic literature, arguing that Daniel revives older forms of mythical knowledge, concerning the invisible world of angels. For Lacocque, the apocalyptic use of mantic wisdom—which predates the Israelite aphoristic “wisdom of ethics and theodicy”—separates Daniel from the prophets, on the understanding that prophets generally shunned dreams and angels as a means of knowledge. For Lacocque, the Daniel of the court tales, like the Daniel of the visions, is “less ... someone who practices wisdom than ... one who originates wisdom.” However, he sees the mantic sage’s purpose (in Dan 7–12) as educating the masses in righteous behaviour, as one of the maškilim. Lacocque reads Dan 1–6 as the court sage’s proclamation of truth to foreign kings in a way “truly irresistible,” consisting of divinely revealed secrets about God’s future rule which will overthrow human kings.

Klaus Koch follows Collins in identifying the character Daniel as representing a new type of wisdom in late Israel: along with Enoch, Daniel’s wisdom is insight into “divine secrets” (“göttlichen τη”), built upon “charismatic experiences and concentrated eschatology” (“auf charismatische Erfahrungen und Eschatologie konzentriert”). He regards Daniel’s wisdom as a result of a changed perspective—occasioned by the exile—from “proverbial wisdom” (“Bildungweisheit”), with its focus on the “fear of God” (“Gottesfurcht”) and “well-living” (“heilvollem Ergehen”), to be combined with “salvation-historical and cultic traditions” (“heilgeschichten und kultischen Traditionen”), to become “wisdom ‘theologised,’ and hypostasised as Lady Wisdom” (“die Weisheit ‘theologisiert,’ als Frau Weisheit

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82 Ibid., 185.
83 Ibid., 187.
84 Ibid., 188.
85 Ibid., 189.
86 Ibid., 186-87. However, Lacocque notes Zechariah as an important exception.
87 Ibid., 192. Lacocque’s emphasis.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 194.
90 Ibid., 195.
However, Koch still sees some elements of statecraft, in addition to mantic wisdom, in Daniel’s repertoire of knowledge (Dan 1:4), like that given to Solomon in his first dream, or that restored to Nebuchadnezzar after his madness/transformation (2 Chr 1:10–12; Dan 4:31, 33). Koch recognises the importance of H.-P. Müller’s research into “magical” and “mantic” wisdom for understanding wisdom in Daniel and in apocalyptic. He notes that mantic wisdom (distinct from magic’s attempt to manipulate the deity or reality) was an alternative of Israel’s neighbours to Israel’s prophetic traditions, for knowing the mind of the gods concerning an individual’s or a people’s fate. Koch contributes to H.-P. Müller’s work in constructing a history of Israelite wisdoms, “from experiential wisdom to Hebrew eschatological wisdom” (“von der Erfahrungsweisheit zur hebräischen eschatologisierenden Weisheit”). Koch traces this development as: the great work of God since the beginning, coming down from heaven to those in Israel who obey her; the essence of Torah; the motive force behind human history, especially as expressed by rulers; the recognition of the signs of the times, working from a view of history as predetermined; knowledge of a final future which will restore and complete the beginning of creation; knowledge of the secrets of how history will develop into the historical future. From this schema, Koch identifies the wisdom of Daniel as knowledge of the ages of Israelite and world history (Dan 2; 7; 8; 9)—secret knowledge revealed only by God (2:47)—culminating in the final age of creation, which not even Daniel will fully reveal (12:8–9).

**My Approach to Wisdom in Daniel**

In my own approach to wisdom in Daniel, I will take Hanson’s critique as granted, that the book was influenced by prophetic literature, as well as wisdom traditions. My work into intertextuality in Daniel has uncovered links to prophetic and Torah material just as often as

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92 Ibid., 173.
93 Ibid., 45.
95 Ibid., 58-59.
96 Ibid., 66.
97 Ibid., 66-69.
98 Ibid., 70.
the wisdom writings. I also acknowledge H.-P. Müller’s thesis that mantic wisdom is generally a better descriptor for Daniel’s insight into dreams and visions than proverbial wisdom. However, because I ask about wisdom in the development of Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge in the narrative of Dan 1–4, my questioning leads me away from limiting “wisdom” to interpreting dreams and visions, although this seems to be the main way Daniel attempts to “educate” Nebuchadnezzar. Because I ask about wisdom for a king, I also examine the ways in which constructing fine artistic objects and public structures might also be a manifestation of wisdom (following the pattern of Bezalel, Oholiab, Hiram-abi, and Solomon). I also ask about the relevance of wisdom to making just judgments over one’s subjects (following the model of Solomon). Finally, I do not exclude dream-oriented wisdom in my study, because I also ask about the relevance of Daniel forecasting Nebuchadnezzar’s future to his governing the kingdom more wisely (following the pattern of Joseph and Pharaoh). Asking about wisdom and Nebuchadnezzar also requires a review into scholarship on Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation in Daniel.

Literary Evaluations of Nebuchadnezzar’s Character in Daniel

Nebuchadnezzar as a King Who Allows Wise Courtiers to Succeed

W. Lee Humphreys, in a comparison with the book of Esther, defined the stories of Dan 1–6 under the form of “the tale of the courtier.” He saw the purpose of these “court tales” as guiding Jews to prosper in “the Persian and hellenistic diaspora.” Among these stories, he distinguished “tales of court contest and tales of court conflict.” For Humphreys, “court contests” involve the display of a Jew’s superior wisdom in a foreign court over his indigenous colleagues (Dan 2:1–49; 3:31–4:34; 5:1–31), while “court conflicts” narrate how the Jewish hero is endangered because of his religious identity, but is passively saved by his God (3:1–30; 6:1–28). Humphreys defines Dan 1:1–21 as neither contest nor conflict, but as an

100 Ibid., 223.
101 Ibid., 217.
102 Ibid., 219-21.
“introduction” of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, with their religious and educational backgrounds.\textsuperscript{103} When Humphreys speaks of Daniel’s “wisdom” in the tales, he speaks mainly of the protagonist’s ability to succeed in a royal court, aided by God because of his piety.\textsuperscript{104} Humphreys’s article represents a state of scholarship before the distinction between “mantic wisdom” and “proverbial wisdom,” and against later trends, seems to read Daniel’s wisdom as “proverbial.”\textsuperscript{105}

Seeking to improve on Collins’s article,\textsuperscript{106} Susan Niditch and Robert Doran aim to define more narrowly the genre of Dan 2, Gen 41 and Aḥiqar 5–7.\textsuperscript{107} They follow the folklore scholarship of Aarne and Thompson by defining these tales as “Type 922” or “Clever Acts and Words.”\textsuperscript{108} This genre has the structure of the calling of “a person of lower status” by “a person of higher status,” who poses an apparently insoluble “problem,” which, however, is solved by “the person of lower status,” who is then “rewarded” by “the person of higher status.”\textsuperscript{109} They identify the theme of this genre type as “the wise man wins in the end, no matter how lowly his origins; wisdom is the road to success,”\textsuperscript{110} making it a “dramatization of proverbial wisdom.”\textsuperscript{111} Niditch and Doran, however, find departures from Type 922 in Dan 2, nuances also present but less pronounced in the success story of Joseph (Gen 41).\textsuperscript{112} They see an added theological motif in Daniel’s successful request for help from God, when faced with the king’s insoluble problem,\textsuperscript{113} which they see as a departure from “the traditional wisdom type,” by incorporation of the “success through magic” type.\textsuperscript{114} Niditch and Doran thus follow Collins in

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 219.
\item Ibid., 223.
\item Humphreys still recognises the presence of dream interpretation in Dan 2:1–49; 3:31–4:34, but sees the emphasis falling on Daniel’s ability to succeed in his career in the foreign court. Ibid., 219-20.
\item Collins, "Court-Tales in Daniel," 218-34.
\item Ibid., 180.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., 181.
\item Ibid., 185.
\item Ibid., 187.
\item Ibid., 187-88.
\item Ibid., 190.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
naming this altered motif “mantic wisdom,”¹¹⁵ and identify Dan 2:16–24 as a later addition to the original story of Daniel’s success as a wise courtier in Nebuchadnezzar’s court.¹¹⁶

Lawrence Wills dialogues with the methodologies set out by Niditch and Doran,¹¹⁷ and H.-P. Müller,¹¹⁸ by defining the genre of Dan 1–6, Gen 37–50, and Esther as “wisdom court legend.”¹¹⁹ Wills’s genre-analysis leads him to define this term as a narrative set within a realistic, definite time-frame about a revered figure who is predictably successful (“legend”),¹²⁰ whose actors are a king and courtiers seeking advancement from him, often resulting in conflicts (“court”),¹²¹ and which has a “wisdom content.”¹²² Given the problems of seeking parallels between narrative wisdom and the wisdom canon, Wills proposes that protagonists such as Joseph are not paragons of the virtues found specifically in the wisdom canon, but “succeeds because he deserves to succeed.”¹²³ For Wills, these narratives are not concerned with what wisdom is, or that the hero exemplifies whatever wisdom is: their purpose is instead to emphasise that the wise person is successful.¹²⁴ Wills sees the origins of narrative wisdom in “popular, not professional,” ideas of the sage,¹²⁵ emphasising their character and actions, rather than their ideas or theology.¹²⁶

Insofar as Humphreys, Niditch and Doran, and Wills read Dan 1–6 as tales where courtiers such as Daniel find success under the foreign king, there is an implicitly benign view of Nebuchadnezzar as one who allows the wise courtier to succeed. If Nebuchadnezzar is one who rewards wisdom, then he would already have some familiarity with wisdom. In contrast are

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 191n32.
¹¹⁶ Ibid., 191. Niditch and Doran place Dan 2:16–24 in the same stratum as Dan 1.
¹¹⁷ Lawrence M. Wills, The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), 4-9; cf. Niditch and Doran, 179-93. Wills’s methodology interacts mostly with folklore studies.
¹¹⁹ Wills, 12. In contrast to Niditch and Doran’s “tale type 922” and Müller’s “didactic narrative.”
¹²⁰ Ibid., 15-17.
¹²¹ Ibid., 20-21.
¹²² Ibid., 23.
¹²³ Ibid., 29. Wills’s emphasis.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 31-33.
¹²⁵ Ibid., 34.
¹²⁶ Ibid., 35.
those who see Daniel and his companions as advocates of resistance or ridicule against foreign kings such as Nebuchadnezzar.

**Daniel as an Advocate of Resistance against Nebuchadnezzar**

Daniel Smith-Christopher’s commentary on Daniel in *The New Interpreter's Bible* has influenced others who read this text as resistance literature.127 Smith-Christopher is critical of Humphreys’s concept of Dan 1–6 as “a ‘life-style for Diaspora’” for posing “a somewhat benign view of the foreign emperor.”128 Smith-Christopher regards the portrayal of foreign rulers in Dan 1–6, and not just Dan 7–12, as “not nearly so benign as often thought,” but that the book “is openly hostile to their authority.”129 He holds this view while even allowing for the pre-existence of Danielic traditions in the Persian period, believing it is a mistake to assume “benevolence” towards and from Persian rulers.130 He also reads Daniel in the awareness that those in “a dominant [European] culture” owe recognition of past and present injustices done to “modern conquered or colonized peoples.”131

Some examples of Smith-Christopher’s interpretation of the text include reading Dan 1:1–2 as setting “the context of dominance” (implying Nebuchadnezzar’s, initially) for the whole work,132 the name-changing in Dan 1:7 as signifying the protagonists’ “dependent status,”133 and Daniel’s refusal of the king’s diet as “resistance” to “dependence on royal largess and wealth.”134 In Dan 2, he reads Nebuchadnezzar’s dialogue with his sages as not indicating “a certain fairness or even-handedness,” because of his “rage” after they fail at what he “(unreasonably) asks.”135 He also sees Daniel’s hymn as celebrating “God’s power ... over and

127 Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 7:17-152. For example, David Valeta, who offers the most pronounced resistance reading I have come across, acknowledges this same commentary as a significant influence on his finding coherence in Daniel as a whole. David M. Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: A Satirical Reading of Daniel 1-6*, Hebrew Bible Monographs (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), ix.
128 Smith-Christopher, 20.
129 Ibid., 21.
130 Ibid., 27-28.
131 Ibid., 34.
132 Ibid., 38.
133 Ibid., 39.
134 Ibid., 40.
135 Ibid., 51.
above the apparent power of the kings of this world,” and of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation as the “destruction of world terror and power in the name of God’s rule over humanity.” However, despite seeing Nebuchadnezzar as negatively portrayed for most of Dan 2, Smith-Christopher does recognise a “transformation” in his character, allowing for the “changed monarch” to be “affirmed” in the end, although he phrases his argument to emphasise the negative side of Nebuchadnezzar’s pre-change state. Smith-Christopher reads Dan 3:1–7 as Nebuchadnezzar imposing “a kind of universal demand on all peoples (poor and wealthy) to be obedient to the king,” frustrated by “Jewish resistance break[ing] out again.” He interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s words about the protagonists’ God (Dan 3:15) as revealing him to be “a man of great arrogance.” However, when Nebuchadnezzar changes his “supposedly unchangeable decree,” after the protagonists’ survival in the furnace (Dan 3:28–29), Smith-Christopher sees another change in the king’s perception, that “even Nebuchadnezzar is made to recognize his limitations before this God.” In Dan 4, Smith-Christopher sees Nebuchadnezzar as “realiz[ing] his dependence on Daniel and [he] openly attests to Daniel’s wisdom,” but “appears to lack understanding about where the source of Daniel’s great wisdom is to be found.” He observes another reversal in Dan 4:17 [4:14], when it is an angel’s turn to issue a decree, “not by the emperor,” since “God alone” holds “true authority.” Interestingly, and seemingly recalling the responsibilities he sees Daniel as imposing upon its European readers, Smith-Christopher reads the bestial transformation of the king as a scene where “Nebuchadnezzar must identify with the victims of his own rule.” In the end, Smith-Christopher sees Nebuchadnezzar as “a humbled and transformed emperor,” when he makes his confession (Dan 4:34–37 [4:31–34]), who had been a “proud and domineering emperor,” before “a transformation through being forced to endure what he

136 Ibid., 52.
137 Ibid., 55.
138 Ibid., 56. Smith-Christopher’s emphasis.
139 Ibid., 63.
140 Ibid., 64.
141 Ibid., 65.
142 Ibid., 73.
143 Ibid., 74.
144 Ibid., 34.
145 Ibid., 75.
inflicted upon others.”  However, in the same context, Smith-Christopher also argues that the changes in Nebuchadnezzar’s character are not grounds for reading “a positive attitude of the Jews toward the foreign king.” Interestingly, he also sees the final words of Nebuchadnezzar, concerning the humbling of the proud (Dan 4:37 [4:34]) as an allusion to both “wisdom literature” and “late prophetic passages.” Smith-Christopher’s argument concerning Nebuchadnezzar is intended to be a consistently “negative” reading of him, yet still allows for the possibility of change.

In a social-scientific study of Dan 1–6, Shane Kirkpatrick seeks to understand these tales from the perspective “of second-century BCE Judean readers,” whom he distinguishes from today’s readers by their participation in a Mediterranean “honor-shame society.” Critical of “readers of the Bible [who] tend to ‘fill in the gaps’ with cultural information from their own context,” his main finding for the tales of Dan 1–6 is that they were “a literature of resistance to the perceived threat of Hellenistic cultural hegemony.” Noting “[d]ebate … over the question of how early in the post-exilic Persian period, … or how late in the Hellenistic period” the tales were written, he carefully states that “[t]he scenario imagined in this study does not require an answer to the question of when these tales originated and in what form,” preferring to place his “concern … not for authors’ intentions but for [mid-second century BCE] readers’ perception.” Without completely committing himself to a Hellenistic origin of Dan 1–6, Kirkpatrick, with some warrant, privileges Hellenistic readers of these tales over someone who might read them today.

Under the concept of Mediterranean honour, Kirkpatrick reads Dan 1:1–2 as the compiler’s “rhetoric” that “God is not dishonored” (as one without power) by Nebuchadnezzar’s taking of

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146 Ibid., 77.  
147 Ibid.  
148 Ibid., 76.  
150 Ibid. Kirkpatrick seems to have readers of the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries particularly in mind as those who supply “cultural information from their own context” to understand the Bible.  
151 Ibid., 28.  
152 Without denying the justification for Kirkpatrick’s approach, I will note that it need not be the *only* approach.
Jerusalem (a city with God as its “patron”), because “God acted” to bring this about.\textsuperscript{153} He sees Daniel’s act of resistance in Dan 1:8–16 as a response to a threat against his “patron-client relationship to the Judean God,” and involves Daniel resisting not only Nebuchadnezzar’s diet, but also the Babylonians’ “voluminous omen literature.”\textsuperscript{154} Despite Daniel’s portrayal as an interpreter of dreams, Kirkpatrick reads his characterisation as one who “has rejected … the divinatory rites that go under the name of wisdom in the Babylonian tradition.”\textsuperscript{155} Kirkpatrick reads the dialogue between Nebuchadnezzar and his court sages (Dan 2:1–11) as a “contest” involving “an honor challenge,” with “challenge and riposte.”\textsuperscript{156} He characterises Daniel as displaying the Hellenistic virtues of “temperance,”\textsuperscript{157} “prudence, or wisdom,”\textsuperscript{158} and “justice or righteousness.”\textsuperscript{159} Kirkpatrick understands Daniel’s virtues, used in solving Nebuchadnezzar’s dilemma, as his way of winning honour against his competitors.\textsuperscript{160} He recognises that Nebuchadnezzar is portrayed quite negatively in Dan 3, which involves “the conflict and the comparison—between the Judean God and the Babylonian king who puts himself in the place that rightfully belongs only to God.”\textsuperscript{161} The “aspect of an honor culture” which he sees as driving the plot in Dan 3 is “envy,” the characteristic of being “aggressive in response to the success of others,”\textsuperscript{162} shown in the Chaldeans’ accusations against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,\textsuperscript{163} but “jealousy” motivates Nebuchadnezzar’s fury against their “affront” to his “honor.”\textsuperscript{164} He also sees their preservation in Nebuchadnezzar’s fire as the climax of a “contest between Nebuchadnezzar and the Judean God,” in which “God clearly wins and is granted the public glory due the victor.”\textsuperscript{165} However, Kirkpatrick identifies Nebuchadnezzar’s story in Dan 4 as “the positive example of an earthly king who suffers a great indignity and thereby comes

\textsuperscript{153} Kirkpatrick, 47.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 76.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 80-81.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 83-85.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 100-101.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 104.
to ‘know’ that God has sovereignty over human kingship, whereupon the king has his earthly
dominion restored to him,” in contrast to “the negative example” of Belshazzar in Dan 5.166
Kirkpatrick sees Nebuchadnezzar’s tragic fault as “‘impiety,’” in the sense of a “lack of loyalty
and refusal to acknowledge that God alone (and no human leader) provides.”167 He also finds
evidence that Nebuchadnezzar has gained knowledge in his act of praise: “That
Nebuchadnezzar knows is signified by his acknowledgment of God’s role as sovereign and
God’s power over the kings of the earth.”168 Somewhat interestingly, Kirkpatrick believes that
the restored Nebuchadnezzar is intended as a “model” of imitation for kings in the second
century BCE: “This acknowledgement is the proper response to the one who has granted the
earthly king his kingship. As such, it is the positive model that this tale submits for emulation
by the earthly kings of the second century, whether those kings are Seleucid (Antiochus) or
Judean (the high priests and Hasmoneans).”169 Kirkpatrick concludes that for both “Seleucid
kings” and “the Judean leadership,” “these tales [Dan 4; 5] provide a model for appropriate
rule.”170 I am intrigued by Kirkpatrick’s conclusions about Nebuchadnezzar, especially when
he identifies Dan 1–6 as resistance literature.

In Lions and Ovens and Visions, David Valeta argues that the tales of Dan 1–6 are best
understood as satire, particularly “Menippean satire,” as this concept has been developed by
Mikhail Bakhtin.171 He connects Dan 1–6 to the genre of Menippean satire by noting its
“fantastic type scenes,” “carnivalistic feel,” “heteroglossia, dialogism,” and “the novelistic
impulse.”172 As works of satire, Valeta understands these stories to be “an expression of
political and cultural resistance to the blandishments of empire.”173 Comparing Dan 1–6 to The
Wizard of Oz, Valeta asserts that “[t]he portrayals of the various kings and their advisors are
caricatures of the real thing, and their actions are more comical than royal. Even though these

166 Ibid., 117.
167 Ibid., 118.
168 Ibid., 126. Kirkpatrick's emphasis.
169 Ibid., 127.
170 Ibid., 140.
171 Valeta, 39-66.
172 Ibid., 65.
173 Ibid., 38.
men hold positions of power and authority, their behavior is often weak, vacillating, and erratic.”  

For example, Valeta sees “irony” (in Dan 1:1–2) in its depiction of “King Nebuchadnezzar as a sovereign who is in total control,” but “the authority of earthly kings is limited by divine power and will,” and his requirements for the Judean youths (in vv.3–7) as the “first example of hyperbole.” In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar’s attempt to train the youths, he comments on Dan 1:17 that “[t]he wisdom and erudition of the empire is of little consequence compared to the wisdom of God.” In Dan 2, Valeta sees “[m]any aspects” which “contribute to the sense that the narrative is funny and subverts the king’s authority.” He sees an attempt to ridicule the king in the dialogue with the court sages (Dan 2:1–12), and “mockery” in Daniel’s postponement of his execution by speaking directly with the king (vv.13–17). He regards Daniel’s hymn (Dan 2:20–23) about “God’s goodness, wisdom, and power” as a “contrast to the cruelty, foolishness, and false power of the king,” another “contrast between human and divine power” in the imagery and interpretation of the dream (vv.31–45), and that his prostration “before Daniel” (v.46) is “a ludicrous image that serves to belittle and make fun of the king.” Even so, Valeta employs verbs that imply acknowledgment of some change, although of a negative kind: “He has been turned from a vicious, violent victor to a sniveling, submissive supplicant. … The master not only becomes the supplicant of the slave, the slave also becomes the master of others.” Such an implied change in Nebuchadnezzar would seem to fit into the Menippean framework of the “rise and fall of the king,” which contrasts “[k]ingly imagery, such as banquets and other trappings of royalty” with “[i]ts opposite …

174 Ibid., 5.
175 Ibid., 68.
176 Ibid., 69.
177 Ibid., 71.
178 Ibid., 73.
179 Ibid., 73-74.
180 Ibid., 75.
181 Ibid., 76.
182 Ibid., 77.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid., 77. My emphasis.
marketplace and other public venues where the king is de-crowned.”185 However, such a reading of Nebuchadnezzar also raises the possibility of whether his change may be read in a more positive light, in terms of his education. Valeta sees a multiplicity of “humorous elements” in Dan 3—such as “irony, mockery, hyperbole, and the fantastic”—which emphasise “both the king’s grandiose view of himself and his true powerlessness.”186 Valeta regards the repetitive lists in Dan 3 as implying that “the king has ultimate control” in every “area” of “government,” but also “the mindless and absurd behavior of the king’s followers” in their “rote response” to his orders.187 At the same time, the disobedience of “Daniel’s three friends” sounds “[a] discordant note in the royal symphony,” and yet “[t]he king has legal authority to enforce his decrees, even if they are absurd.”188 When reading Nebuchadnezzar’s portrayal in Dan 3 against his acknowledgment of Daniel’s God in 2:47, Valeta believes that “[h]e apparently has no memory of the god who revealed his dream and its interpretation to Daniel,” and that “[t]he king’s faith is indeed short-lived and shortsighted.”189 Despite Nebuchadnezzar’s apparent change at the end of Dan 3, Valeta reads vv.28–30 so that “a less than complete conversion may have occurred,”190 concluding “that kings and leopards perhaps do not change their spots so easily.”191 However, I believe that Valeta sees a lack of change in Nebuchadnezzar (at least, change that is positive and enduring), precisely because he changes too much: “This chapter draws a preposterous and laughable portrait of a ruler who vacillates, is easily swayed, is overwrought, collapses, and gives away too much under pressure.”192 I agree that Dan 3 is the most negative moment of Nebuchadnezzar’s portrayal, and that if he were on a path towards wisdom, he strays furthest from his destination here. Even so, though he seems especially foolish in Dan 3, his overall story may still be a movement towards wisdom.

185 Ibid., 56.
186 Ibid., 79.
187 Ibid., 81.
188 Ibid., 83.
189 Ibid., 84.
190 Ibid., 86.
191 Ibid., 87.
192 Ibid.
Valeta argues that in Dan 4:1–3 [3:31–33], Nebuchadnezzar’s “confession is filled with irony as the infamous ruler of the Babylonian captivity is portrayed as piously dependent upon the God of his captives,” and that “[i]t is as if the king’s song of praise puts the final touches on the author’s portrait of the king as fool.”\textsuperscript{193} He recognises Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great tree as symbolising “the ongoing conflict between divine and human sovereignty and the ultimate failure of human pretensions of grandeur,”\textsuperscript{194} and that “the king suffers a judgment to teach all who live that the Most High is sovereign and is finally in control of all.”\textsuperscript{195} However, despite this slim glimpse that Nebuchadnezzar’s suffering may make him an educative example to others in Valeta’s reading, the king is apparently one who does not learn himself.\textsuperscript{196} Consistently, Valeta continues to read “the king as an imbecile with a very short attention span who requires the disciplining of the Most High God,”\textsuperscript{197} and his bestial transformation as having a “menippea-like satirical nature.”\textsuperscript{198} As for “the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar to human status,” “[t]he king says all the right words,” but “his focus again is on the power, status and glory that are restored to him as King of Babylon.”\textsuperscript{199} Rather sceptical of any real change in Nebuchadnezzar’s understanding, Valeta believes that “his song [ends] with the sour notes of conceit and smugness,” and that Dan 4 “ends with Nebuchadnezzar’s restoration but his failure to comprehend his full blasphemy and pride.”\textsuperscript{200} I believe that Valeta presents a strong case for reading Dan 1–6 as a series of satirical portraits of gentile kings, seen from his argument’s foundation. However, I still wish to argue that another reading of Nebuchadnezzar is possible, that underneath the mockery and criticism lies the hope that even a tyrant may change for the better. Even so, Valeta’s fine work represents a powerful counter-reading to the trajectory I will take, and one I hope to do justice to and incorporate.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
In her landmark work, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, Anatha Portier-Young offers an account of how early Jewish apocalyptic works, including the book of Daniel, “emerged as a literature of resistance to empire,” particularly the tyranny of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. She theorises “resistance” in terms of the “[d]omination” and “hegemony” which constitute its “conditions” and “objects,” as “[a]cts” formed out of “the intention to limit, oppose, reject, or transform” structures of hegemony and domination, and as “effective action” aimed at “limit[ing] power and influenc[ing] outcomes” originating from the oppressive agent(s). Portier-Young distinguishes hegemony, as the “more subtle forms of control conveyed through cultural institutions,” from dominion, understood in terms of “directly political and physically coercive forms of rule the empire acts on the bodies of its subjects.” Concentrating on “Daniel, the Apocalypse of Weeks, and the Book of Dreams” as examples of the “historical apocalypse,” she sees their “critique of ruling powers” in “revealing” the “transience” of Hellenistic imperial structures, and by “affirming God’s governance of time and the outworking of God’s plan in history [by which] they give their readers hope for justice, reversal, and a transformed future.”

Portier-Young identifies Daniel and his friends as “models or types for persecuted Judeans, and in particular for the *maškilîm*, or wise teachers, of the second century BCE.” She understands these models as expressing the “responsibility [of the *maškilîm*] to impart knowledge of God and to remain faithful in the face of domination and death,” who “embody” their writers’ “ideals,” and whose “actions constitute a pattern of behavior grounded in faith,” intended for “their audience to adopt.” She identifies “[k]nowledge” as “a key theme throughout the book of Daniel,” understood as “a precondition for right action” and “a key

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202 Ibid., xxi.
203 Ibid., 11.
204 Ibid., 12.
205 Ibid., 23.
206 Ibid., 23.
207 Ibid., 233-34.
208 Ibid., 234.
component of resistance.” According to Portier-Young, “knowledge,” when its object is God, is bound to strength and fidelity: “To ‘know God’ is to know what God will do, to know that God is sovereign, to know God’s commitment to God’s people, and to know what God requires of them in turn. Knowledge of God strengthens the people and empowers them to remain steadfast in their covenant faith.” She understands the “strength” of the character Daniel, which the maškilîm call their audience to adopt, as “wisdom, understanding, and knowledge,” in contrast to the military strength of those sovereignties to be resisted. Portier-Young also takes up the educative role of the maškilîm found in Dan 11:33; 12:3, of instructing “the many” in “understanding” and “righteousness.” She argues that this instruction in “righteousness” is an act of resistance, in that “righteousness” is “covenant obedience” in the face of persecution for “the practice of Torah,” coupled with the “knowledge” of scriptural interpretation and Daniel’s visions, intended to “impart the strength to hold fast to the covenant,” “even at the cost of death.” In summary, “knowledge” and “wisdom,” as Portier-Young sees these qualities in the book of Daniel, constitute the “strength” needed to resist oppressive, gentile rulers.

Portier-Young understands Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 1 as one whose imposition of his diet of foods and wine is to be resisted as a threat to a “distinctively Jewish identity.” For Portier-Young, Dan 1 presents Daniel and his friends as models of fidelity to their God, which they express through “fasting” and “abstention” while “under foreign domination,” “[r]ather than ingratiate themselves to their foreign ruler.” She sees their fidelity rewarded in God’s “gift of exceptional wisdom and understanding,” which “will later empower them to stand up to foreign kings.” Under this understanding, Nebuchadnezzar is a figure who is never to be cooperated with, but an opponent to be resisted, and “knowledge” is instrumental in opposing

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210 Ibid., 235.
211 Ibid.
212 Ibid., 238.
213 Ibid., 254-55.
214 Ibid., 256.
215 Ibid., 259.
216 Ibid.
217 Ibid.
him. In Dan 3, Portier-Young sees Nebuchadnezzar as one whose “words echo the arrogant taunt of the Rabshakeh of Sennacherib” (Isa 36:20),\(^{218}\) suggesting a likeness of Nebuchadnezzar to a “blasphemer,” and to “the foreign king,” who, “in his arrogance,” “has overstepped his ordained role.”\(^{219}\) Portier-Young sees this “echo” as containing the message that, just as in the distant past, “God established a ruler and retained the power to depose him,” so too “God delivers the three young men from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, and he will deliver the maškilîm of a later age.”\(^{220}\) Although Portier-Young sees Nebuchadnezzar as a figure to be opposed, she does recognise that, in Dan 3:28, “Nebuchadnezzar blesses God,” and that his speech “offers a portrait of faithful resistance.”\(^{221}\) If the figure of the king throughout Daniel is tied to the historical figure of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, it would seem doubtful to find any hope for his “redeemability.” However, is it possible to find traces of a hope that Daniel’s Nebuchadnezzar might change in knowledge, even if this change comes through other characters’ actions of resistance against him? Although my methodological starting point differs from Portier-Young’s, my own readings of “knowledge,” “wisdom,” and “time” in Dan 1–4 finds resonance in her arguments for the transience of the foreign kings’ reigns, for the concern for covenantal obedience to Torah, and for its hopes and dreams for a kingdom of justice.

**Nebuchadnezzar and the Acquisition of Knowledge**

*Nebuchadnezzar and Self-Knowledge*

Aaron Hebbard claims “[t]he book of Daniel is all about interpretation,”\(^{222}\) and seeks an “interdisciplinary” reading to uncover it “as an exercise in the theory and practice of interpretation,” and the character Daniel “as the paradigm of the good theological hermeneut.”\(^{223}\) Hebbard recognises that “[k]nowledge and wisdom are of extreme

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\(^{218}\) Ibid.
\(^{219}\) Ibid., 260.
\(^{220}\) Ibid.
\(^{221}\) Ibid.
\(^{223}\) Ibid., 4.
importance in the Danielic corpus,”224 and argues for a dialectic between “[t]rue knowledge of self” and “knowledge of God.”225 Hebbard sees that “[t]he wisdom motif is strong” in Daniel, and that in it is “the theme of the wise man, trained in an earthly school of wisdom and additionally endowed with supernatural wisdom from Yhwh, who is able to solve unsolvable riddles and mysteries.”226 Hebbard perceives that in the book of Daniel, “wisdom must be firmly established as the foundation of righteousness.”227 Hebbard argues, in his reading of Nebuchadnezzar’s eventual emergence as a narrator (Dan 4), that “[t]he self-narrated conversion of Nebuchadnezzar works to legitimate the optimism held by the Narrator as well as to establish a paradigm of conversion for others.”228 Hebbard identifies the purpose of Nebuchadnezzar’s narration as educative, “to relay the story of his own conversion to Yahwism in order that others may also come to acknowledge Yhwh as the universal God and king,”229 and that he “wants all peoples to come to know Yhwh as he himself has come to know Yhwh, yet hopefully without the trauma of his own personal experiences.”230 Hebbard’s positive and optimistic reading of Nebuchadnezzar, as a narrator in Dan 4, is preceded by other positive signs he sees in him as a character.

When interpreting Dan 1:1–2, Hebbard argues that “[n]ot only does the Narrator establish himself as a hermeneut through his theological interpretation of the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar over Jerusalem, but he also displays the potential latent also in Nebuchadnezzar to attain a status of interpreter.”231 However, Hebbard still recognises that “the Narrator” places “some sense of judgment against him,” in that “Nebuchadnezzar is completely ignorant” of Adonai as God.232 He also alludes to “the wisdom of Nebuchadnezzar” in creating a list of “the qualities required of the reader to become a ‘Daniel’ or a good

224 Ibid., 13.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid., 39.
229 Ibid., 40.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid., 59.
232 Ibid., 60.
interpreter” (Dan 1:4). He perceives Nebuchadnezzar’s “request” of his sages (Dan 2:1–11) as “irrational” and “seemingly ridiculous,” but it also “redefine[s] the terms necessary for interpretation,” by demanding “a new hermeneutical paradigm” to be fulfilled by Daniel. Concerning Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Hebbard sees him “as a receptor of God’s special revelation of the things that will come to pass in the future,” and that Daniel’s interpretation of the golden head “makes for some interesting implications regarding the identity of Nebuchadnezzar and his own self-awareness,” although he fails to “recognize himself” in his own dream, because of ignorance of “himself in relation to the dream-text giver [Adonai].” In Dan 3, Hebbard recognises the negative side in Nebuchadnezzar’s portrayal, that the Chaldean accusers’ salutation (v.9) plays “to Nebuchadnezzar’s misconceptions of the eternality of his kingdom,” and in his judgment of the accused Judeans (v.15), “Nebuchadnezzar seeks to put himself above any deity; the fear of Nebuchadnezzar should outweigh the trust they might have in any god.” However, he also interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s witness to the Judean youths’ survival as “our Narrator tak[ing] a sympathetic viewpoint with Nebuchadnezzar,” who presents “the report from Nebuchadnezzar” as “trustworthy,” and that although “Nebuchadnezzar thus far has struggled with understanding of his self-identity, ... he has made no uncertain progress toward a more ideal perception.” This is the groundwork Hebbard lays for the “change” in Nebuchadnezzar’s prior inability “to make any connection between his own identity and the person of Adonai,” in Dan 4. For Hebbard, Nebuchadnezzar finally reaches a satisfactory self-understanding by entering into “a hermeneutical circle” with “Adonai” (Dan 4:34–37 [4:31–34]) in which “praising God is an act of sanity and sane existence is demonstrated by

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234 Ibid., 79.
235 Ibid., 80.
236 Ibid., 88-89.
237 Ibid., 89.
238 Ibid.
239 Ibid., 95.
240 Ibid., 97.
241 Ibid., 100.
242 Ibid., 102.
243 Ibid., 108.
praising God.”244 He reads his story ending in the adequation of his self-knowledge to God’s wisdom, without explicitly calling Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge “wisdom”: “the hermeneutical circle is comprised of both the wisdom of God and the knowledge of man; they are inseparable.”245 Finally, in an intriguing phrase of Hebbard’s, “[k]nowledge and recognition of God as sovereign become paramount in this chapter where the haughty king must be humbled for the sake of the many as well as for the sake of the individual Nebuchadnezzar.”246 Because I also aim at reading Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation as a development in knowledge, and perhaps even in wisdom, my intentions align with Hebbard’s reading in many ways, and I also appreciate his concerted effort to present Nebuchadnezzar in a relatively positive and optimistic light. However, I hesitate: has the “ugly” side of Nebuchadnezzar’s character been adequately accounted for, and might the overall emphasis on self-knowledge and knowledge of God place too much weight on Nebuchadnezzar’s own individual conversion? Is it possible to read Nebuchadnezzar’s need for “knowledge” and “wisdom” as some readers’ concern that their ruler should rule justly, especially in the face of his violent leadership that seems neither wise nor just? Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar “needs” wisdom more for the sake of his subjects than himself.

Nebuchadnezzar and the Knowledge of God’s Sovereignty

In 1988, Danna Nolan Fewell published her innovative narrative-critical study of politics in Daniel, Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories in Daniel 1–6, and revised it as Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics in the Book of Daniel.247 She took the then unusual step of focusing on the royal characters in Dan 1–6, arguing “that the principal characters in the Daniel stories (with the exception of Daniel 1) are not the Judean sages, but the foreign sovereigns.”248 She seems to seek a corrective to the focus of previous readings, in which:

244 Ibid., 121.
245 Ibid., 122.
246 Ibid.
248 Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories, 10.
“Audiences have traditionally responded more sympathetically to the secondary figures, the Jewish courtiers, than to the primary characters, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius.”

It is her reading of Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation that interests me, which transfers the focus, but not necessarily the sympathy, from Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar.

Fewell begins by arguing that Nebuchadnezzar’s point of view diverges from the narrator’s as early as Dan 1:1–2. For Fewell, Nebuchadnezzar holds the perspective that “his conquest of Jerusalem is the result of his own action,” and that “[h]is god has defeated the god of Jerusalem.”

She regards the narrator’s perspective as different in that “the Babylonian king is but a passive recipient: Adonai gives Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand.” Fewell then reads Nebuchadnezzar’s first anxious experience of his dreams (Dan 2:1) as a scene that “shows another side of Nebuchadnezzar,” to his “self-perception” (in Dan 1) as a “self-confident military aggressor,” in that he may be “a less confident administrator.” Fewell sees Nebuchadnezzar expressing “political anxiety” in his treatment of his court sages over the matter of the dream (Dan 2:2–12), and suggests that he can be read as frustrated and angry, as suspicious and paranoid, or perhaps as “a dangerous, unpredictable, even sadistic character.” However, Fewell appears to offer some hope for Nebuchadnezzar, when she describes his dream of the statue as indicating “a [future] confrontation between human power and divine power,” but that “[t]he God of heaven wants Nebuchadnezzar to recognize the supremacy of divine power.” This may be a glimmer of hope for Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation in Fewell’s reading, because it does raise the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar will “recognize” God in a way that may prove redemptive for him, even if she believes that “Daniel has minimized [the dream’s] judgmental nature” and “Nebuchadnezzar’s culpability.”

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249 Ibid., 10-11.
250 Ibid., 35.
251 Ibid.
252 Ibid. Fewell’s emphasis.
253 Ibid., 49.
254 Ibid., 51.
255 Ibid., 58.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid., 61.
of heaven wants to impart to him this knowledge of the future.” The question remains as to why God might wish to impart “knowledge” to Nebuchadnezzar, and whether this might serve an educative or even redemptive purpose, beyond “mark[ing] his favored status.”

Fewell develops her reading of Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation, in seeing his construction of the golden image (Dan 3:1) as his response to his dream in Dan 2, but so revealing his character as “preoccupied with public perception,” and his attempts to “control” as indicative of “his anxiety.” She argues that his inquisition of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:14–15) reveals his concern not for their “belief ... in his gods,” but for their “conduct” in showing honour to his command and his “power to put them to death” as king. However, Fewell acknowledges change in his characterisation when he witnesses the survival of the three and their godlike rescuer (Dan 3:24–25), and that the scene’s “central purpose is to make an impact on the story world and on Nebuchadnezzar in particular.” Fewell sees the change in Nebuchadnezzar as his attainment of “his new knowledge of God,” which he “shares.” However, she also recognises a deficiency of change in Nebuchadnezzar, that his decree (Dan 3:29) reveals the “godlike fashion” in which “Nebuchadnezzar still considers himself to be in control of life and death.”

Fewell reads Dan 3:31–4:34 as a story about a “conversion” experience of Nebuchadnezzar, but occasioned by some event other than what happens in Dan 3:1–30. She astutely recognises that “the natural chronological order of the story’s events” has undergone a “distortion,” so that it begins “at the end.” She sees Nebuchadnezzar’s introduction of his second dream as prompting “[t]he reader” to suspect “that the dream has, at least, had

258 Ibid.
259 Ibid.
260 Ibid., 65.
261 Ibid., 67.
262 Ibid., 74.
263 Ibid., 80.
264 Ibid., 81.
265 Ibid., 83. My emphasis.
266 Ibid., 90.
267 Ibid.
something to do with [Nebuchadnezzar] the narrator’s conversion.”268 By looking at texts from the “Hebrew prophetic tradition” which “associate the tree with the king,”269 Fewell suggests that Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream, like his first, implies “God’s point of view,” and “that the relationship between God and the king is indeed an ambiguous one.”270 She identifies his ambiguity “as an agent, a protector and nourisher of all living things,” but also “as an enemy, a mortal who, like the tree, reaches to heaven.”271 Following her observation of the irony that Daniel’s advice to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:24) implies that God “will respond to a change in behavior,” but that the scene of Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment (vv.25–30) “implies that words trigger divine response,” she employs a distinction between words and actions to question the authenticity of Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion,272 asking if the story, “in a rather ironic light,” portrays “God’s preoccupation with human speech,” and whether “God is satisfied with verbal acknowledgment.”273 Fewell’s reading of Dan 4 is that “[t]he one who rules does not, according to Daniel, do righteousness nor does he favor the oppressed,” but that “his major offense is his arrogant pride.”274 She asks if his “pious language” is his attempt “to keep this powerful god at bay,” and to maintain “himself in position of sovereignty,” with the deceptively simple question, “Who’s ruling whom?”275 However, she also sees in Nebuchadnezzar’s words “echoes” of Qoh 8:1–11,276 suggesting “there is no rule in the day of death” (Qoh 8:8) is “an ironic comment indeed on the voice of the dead king in Daniel 4,” and “eventually, all oppressors are brought down, not just temporarily, but ultimately.”277 Whereas Hebbard presents an overall “positive” reading of Nebuchadnezzar’s character, Fewell’s portrait tends to emphasise his “negative” characteristics.

266 Ibid., 92.
267 Ibid., 94.
268 Ibid., 95.
269 Ibid., 95-96.
270 Ibid., 95.
271 Ibid., 95-96.
272 Ibid., 100. Fewell’s emphasis.
273 Ibid., 105.
274 Ibid., 107.
275 Ibid., 110.
276 Ibid., 105.
277 Ibid., 110.
Between “positive” and “negative” readings of the Babylonian king, Carol Newsom reads the tales of Dan 1–6 in terms of “‘hybridity,’” seeking to incorporate the accommodationist paradigm of Humphreys and the resistance paradigm of Smith-Christopher. For Newsom, “‘hybridity’” means that “[t]he discourses both of imperial power and of the subordinated peoples must be worked out in relation to one another,” and that “[t]he colonized” take the “intellectual and literary forms developed by the dominant culture,” “hybridize” them to make room “for their own agency,” while “the imperial powers” cannot completely “override and ignore the cultures of the subject peoples,” but use their “own symbols for purposes of authorization of the imperium.”

For Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation in Dan 1–4, Newsom chooses an intriguing subtitle, “The Education of King Nebuchadnezzar,” and calls the passage “a kind of Bildungsroman for Nebuchadnezzar.” In her summary of Nebuchadnezzar’s “education,” Newsom identifies Dan 1 as the initial point when the king is ignorant of the God behind his military success and Daniel’s wisdom; then Dan 2 as the point when his “sense of control” is disrupted by his dream, but after Daniel’s interpretation, showing partial understanding of his God as “a ‘revealer of mysteries’” and “‘Lord of kings’”; then Dan 3 as Nebuchadnezzar’s demonstration of ignorance of God’s sovereignty through the golden image, which receives correction through the defiance of the three youths, again, he understands in part; finally, Dan 4 as the point when he undergoes “humiliation, transformation, and restoration,” where after his “temporary displacement from his kingship, what changes at the end is not his status but his understanding of his status.”

Newsom refers to Dan 1–4 as “a cycle of stories concerning the slow and painful education of the king.” In following Newsom’s analysis, I will note her readings of the endings of Dan 2; 3; 4, as moments revealing Nebuchadnezzar’s change in each story.

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279 Ibid.
280 Ibid., 33.
281 Ibid., 34.
282 Ibid., 35.
283 Ibid., 39.
Newsom sees Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction to Daniel’s interpretation (Dan 2:46–47) as “neither puzzling nor incongruous,” but “precisely the right response” to “[t]he dream [that] is not a warning ... [but] a disclosure of a profound reality.”284 She rejects the label “conversion” for his response, preferring to see it as “a recognition by Nebuchadnezzar of the Jewish God as ultimate source of knowledge and sovereignty.”285 However, in light of the narrative in Dan 3–4, “he has not yet grasped the full implications of what he has affirmed.”286 Newsom understands Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction to his sight of the survival of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace (Dan 3:24–25) as his “cognitive dissonance.”287 In Newsom’s reading, “there is no revelatory message to Nebuchadnezzar” in what he sees, but “he has seen an event in which he is not a participant, taking a glimpse into a different reality and forms of power that nullify his own.”288 Again, Newsom sees a change in his perspective, following “the tension between Nebuchadnezzar and the three Jews ... in terms of which god they would worship,” now “Nebuchadnezzar’s characterization of them ... signals his recognition of the rightness of their choice.”289 Finally, Newsom sees the punishment of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4 to be consequent upon his “boast concerning his achievements as a builder,” whose buildings helped serve as “material propaganda for the imperial power of the king.”290 Newsom sums up “Nebuchadnezzar’s punishment ... as the loss of kingship.”291 However, Newsom seems to see the knowledge-conferring qualities of Nebuchadnezzar’s change into a beast-bird-figure as quite sudden, that his “suffering is not merely educative but also transformative,” in that “he does not gradually come to an understanding of divine sovereignty through his humiliation and suffering,” “but he receives a new understanding” at the moment of his restoration.292

284 Ibid., 84.
285 Ibid.
286 Ibid., 85.
287 Ibid., 112.
288 Ibid.
289 Ibid.
290 Ibid., 146.
291 Ibid., 147.
292 Ibid., 148.
My Approach to the Characterisation of Nebuchadnezzar

Of the three ways of reading the figure of the king in Daniel, whether as one who benignly allows deserving and wise courtiers to succeed, as a tyrant to be resisted, or as one undergoing an education, it is this last approach that most reflects my own. Although the “benign” reading of Nebuchadnezzar might, at first, seem closer to my interests than the resistance paradigm, I see value in the notion that Nebuchadnezzar is educated by those who resist him. I do not read Daniel as always hostile to Nebuchadnezzar (in contrast to the three in Dan 3), but neither do I necessarily read the king as a virtuous character. In contrast to seeing him as a “fool,” however, I tend to read his shadow side as a sometimes cunning, devious, and manipulative character. At the same time, I also read Nebuchadnezzar as mysteriously drawn to Judean wisdom (Dan 1), whose dreams have the potential to instruct him about the future limits to his reign (Dan 2), who attempts to imitate a kind of wisdom in fine artisanship, but fails in the wisdom of judging justly (Dan 3), and, finally, whose failure to heed the warnings of his dreams makes possible his appropriation of knowledge (and perhaps even wisdom) from those dreams, but for his own purposes (Dan 4).
Chapter 4: Temple Vessels and Wise Youths—Wisdom’s Appeal to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:1–21)

In this chapter, I will begin with two gaps of Dan 1, concerning the cause of exile and Daniel’s intention not to defile himself with the king’s diet, for raising the questions to initiate the discussion. My focus in examining Dan 1 concerns Nebuchadnezzar’s actions of taking the temple vessels (v.2) and the Judean youths (v.4) from their home in Jerusalem, to inquire about his motives for doing so. I will approach the question of Nebuchadnezzar’s motives by arguing that he desires the wisdom represented in these temple vessels (originating from Solomon and Hiram-ab) and these youths. I will argue for a metaphorical correlation between the vessels and the youths, based on the latter’s appearance, knowledge, and strength, because of which they are desirable as the vessels, are also formed in wisdom, and have the strength to stand throughout the reigns of many kings. Nebuchadnezzar’s custody of wisely-crafted vessels and wise youths is limited in narrated time, as is his time of opportunity to gain wisdom.

Gaps of Dan 1

When exegetes look at Dan 1, they usually focus on two characters: God and Daniel.¹ This is understandable, since Daniel is the protagonist persistent through most of the book (except for Dan 3), and God is the power that moves behind the thrones of the series of kings. However, the overall goal of my project is to understand the character of Nebuchadnezzar as he is portrayed in Dan 1–4, and I focus on his relationship to God’s gift of wisdom to Daniel and his friends. Therefore, my analysis of Dan 1 will take the uncommon move of looking at God and Daniel only as a step towards understanding the Babylonian king. For this reason, when I look at the two key moments in the plot of Dan 1—the cause of the exile (vv.1–2), the decision of

¹ Fewell argues that in Dan 1–6, “the principal characters … (with the exception of Daniel 1) are not the Judean sages, but the foreign sovereigns.” Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories, 10. Newsom also notes the traditional focus on Daniel and his friends, but points out that “a good case can be made that the true focus is on the figure of the Gentile king.” Newsom and Breed, 33.
Daniel not to defile himself (v.8)—my focus will be on how these key moments interact with the narrative context to illuminate the character of Nebuchadnezzar.

**Is the Exile an Act of Nebuchadnezzar or an Act of God?**

The first noticeable gap of Dan 1:1–21 occurs in the second verse: what motivates God to hand over (יָזַר) Jehoiakim and the vessels of the temple in Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar (v.2)? On the presupposition that the implied reader’s sympathies lie with the kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem as the city chosen by “Adonai” (Dan 1:2), he or she will ask why God has given God’s city, God’s vassal king, and the sacred vessels of God’s house into the hands of a foreign king who neither knows nor worships the Lord. However, the narrator’s implication that Israel’s God caused the exile is juxtaposed to a statement which implies the exile to be the action of an earthly king, Nebuchadnezzar: he “came” and “besieged” (וַיָּצַר) Jerusalem (Dan 1:1), and “brought” (וַיְבִא) back the city’s temple vessels (v.2). Paying attention to the gap about God’s motives (Dan 1:2) helps elicit a further gap when v.1 is also taken into account. Is the exile an act of Nebuchadnezzar or an act of God?

Since the narrative of Daniel begins at Dan 1:1–2, its gap challenges the reader, because it is a question about narrated time which is past relative to this point, and yet this is the beginning of the time of narrating in Daniel. The reader is faced with a gap which may not be filled until much later in the narrative, or only by the texts of other biblical narratives, if at all.² Fewell alludes to the duality of action in Dan 1:1–2, when she notes a “dramatic irony” in the divergence of Nebuchadnezzar’s and the narrator’s points of view: the Babylonian king attributes his victory over Jehoiakim and Jerusalem to his own military skill, and also acknowledges his god’s help (by transferring the temple vessels); but for the narrator, “Adonai gives Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand.”³ Daniel 1:1–2, according to Fewell, portrays

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² For example, Goldingay recognises an explanation for God’s motives in Dan 1:1–2 in terms of God’s people’s “apostasy, neglect, disorder, and complacency,” but notes that “Dan 1 makes no reference to the sins of preexilic generations.” John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 21. On the one hand, he regards the exile as (theologically) explicable only “in terms of the hand of God (v 2) … [as God’s] mysterious initiative” (ibid.), and yet his explanation ends up as a refusal to attempt an explanation: “Daniel offers no answer to the question ‘Why are we here in exile?’ It was simply God’s will.” Ibid., 28.

Adonai and Nebuchadnezzar as “allies,” but “potential conflict is born” because Nebuchadnezzar is ignorant of Adonai.\(^4\) Anderson, after comparing Dan 1:1–2 to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Lamentations, denies that the exile was “the casual outcome of political and military struggle but” he affirms it was “the decree of the nation’s God.”\(^5\) However, Anderson also seems to question whether the political and military aspects can be completely dismissed: “From another perspective, it can be readily seen that no small nation, obedient or disobedient, could have withstood the onslaught of Nebuchadnezzar’s armies. ... Would an obedient Judah really have thwarted the expansionist policies of Babylon?”\(^6\) Hebbard regards it as the narrator’s view “that Adonai is ultimately the responsible party for the destruction of Jerusalem and the capture of Jehoiakim, and that Nebuchadnezzar is only an instrument used by Adonai for this purpose.”\(^7\)

The first gap concerns whether the exile in Dan 1:1–2 is an act of Nebuchadnezzar or an act of God. However, I plan to move the discussion of this gap of the cause of exile to its consequences, particularly its consequences for how Nebuchadnezzar is characterised in the narrative of Daniel. When Nebuchadnezzar takes the city of Jerusalem, Jehoiakim, and the temple vessels (Dan 1:2), what would be the likely effect of the possession of the temple vessels on his character, given his immediately subsequent orders (v.3) also to take young, aristocratic men of certain qualities from Jerusalem to attend his court (v.4)? My approach will be to trace the past and future narrated times of the temple vessels—understood as products of Solomon’s wisdom—to establish a plot action of the implantation of a jealous desire for wisdom in Nebuchadnezzar’s heart, so highlighting a future trajectory of Nebuchadnezzar’s development as a character.

\(^4\) Fewell recognises the narrator’s allusions to an earlier story, in which Adonai governs world history, but has been provoked to anger by the people of Judah, “usually caused by their religious or political apostasy.” Ibid., 15.
\(^6\) Ibid., 2-3.
\(^7\) Hebbard, 56.
Why is Daniel Concerned to Change his Diet?

The second gap of Dan 1 is Daniel’s concern to change his diet: “And Daniel put into his heart not to defile himself (לֹא־יִתְגָאַל) with the fine foods (בְפַּתְבַּג) of the king and with the wine he drank and he sought from the chief eunuch that he would not defile himself (לֹא יִתְגָאָל)” (v.8).

Why is Daniel concerned about defilement regarding the food and wine of the king, which he exchanges for water and seeds? Exegetes offer several possibilities, giving reading options to the implied reader. First, Daniel was concerned to eat only kosher foods, keeping the food laws of Torah, especially concerning forbidden or improperly prepared meats (Lev 11). Seeds remain clean while they are dry (Lev 11:37–38). However, there is no prohibition against wine, except for Nazirites under a temporary vow (Num 6:2–4). Second, Daniel feared that the palace food and wine may have been offered to another god in a Babylonian temple. However, “seeds” or vegetables may also have been offered to an idol or a Babylonian god. Third, as Fewell argues, Daniel considers “complete political allegiance” to Nebuchadnezzar (symbolised by sharing his provisions) as “defiling,” no matter what food or drink comes from the king’s table. Gardner expands upon Fewell’s interpretation by arguing that the hyphenation in גָּפֹר (Dan 1:5) makes it a play on הָרֶשֶׁב, “a portion of prey”: the defilement Daniel averts from is ethical, “rejecting what has been taken by force; what does not rightly belong to the king.” In this view, “Daniel avoided defilement by aligning himself with God.”


10 Collins, Daniel, 142; Goldingay, 18; Redditt, 46.


12 Lacocque, Book of Daniel, 30; Collins, Daniel, 142; Goldingay, 18; Lucas, 54; Hammer, 20; Porteous, 29.


14 Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 19; see also Lucas, 54; cf. Goldingay, 19.

15 Gardner, 59.

16 Ibid., 62. Gardner suggests a link between Daniel’s choice of seeds and water to Ezekiel’s example of adopting a similar diet as atonement for national sin (Ezek 4:9–15). In support of this interpretation, Ezekiel lies on his left side for 390 days then his right side forty days to symbolise the exile as God’s punishment for wayward Israel then Judah (Ezek 4:4–8). Ibid., 61.
Fourth, Goldingay’s preferred solution is that “[p]agan food and drink may simply epitomize the pagan uncleanness associated with exile ... [Our food and drink express] our self-identity and commitments. ... [especially for] groups in exile or under persecution ... Daniel’s abstinence thus symbolizes his avoiding assimilation.”¹⁷ These readings of Daniel’s fear of defilement take it as either ritual (where eating the food itself defiles) or political (where aligning with the king or assimilating his culture defiles), just as the exile could be explained as an action of God, or in terms of a failure of Judean kings to oppose Nebuchadnezzar.

I intend to move beyond these gap-fillings to focus on Nebuchadnezzar’s motives for feeding the Judean youths this special diet (Dan 1:5), rather than on Daniel’s motives to avoid defilement (v.8). I see gap-fillings which present “defilement” in terms of cultic uncleanness or misplaced political allegiance as both possible options available to the implied reader. However, I lean towards the “political” explanation, because I see the attribution to Nebuchadnezzar of a desire for his courtiers’ loyalty as congenial to explaining his perspective.

I believe that Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective is especially complicated by the combination of his desire for control over his courtiers and the desire that his courtiers become strong enough to stand before his presence (Dan 1:4)—a kind of strength which Nebuchadnezzar may intend for them in the matter of his imposed diet (v.5).

The Lure of Wisdom for Nebuchadnezzar

The above gap-fillings give two dual readings for Dan 1:1–21. These are reading the exile as a divine act or a human act (Dan 1:1–2), and reading Daniel as concerned to avoid ritual contamination or ethical/political compromise (v.8). There is also the question of the interaction between Nebuchadnezzar’s intention to educate the Judean youths (Dan 1:4), implying a desire to increase their knowledge and wisdom, and God’s action of giving wisdom and knowledge to Daniel and his friends (v.17). The narrator informs the reader that God is the immediate giver of wisdom to Daniel and his friends, including aptitude for “all literature”

¹⁷ Goldingay, 19. Other solutions Goldingay considers but rejects are: the impropriety of eating “festival food” during a time of “mourning or penitence”; or asceticism as “preparation for a divine revelation.” Ibid. For the preservation of self-identity as Daniel’s motive, see also Seow, 26; W. Sibley Towner, Daniel, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1984), 28; Porteous, 31.
(Dan 1:17), which alludes to the education program Nebuchadnezzar orders (v.4). However, a perspective limited to Nebuchadnezzar’s possibilities of observation would see Daniel and his friends’ wisdom as a natural latency discovered by Ashpenaz (Dan 1:3–4), but brought to perfection by the king’s educational and dietary program (vv.4–5). The wisdom which Daniel and his friends had as a natural endowment may be due to their upbringing by their aristocratic parents (Dan 1:3), which may place these youths in the proverbial wisdom traditions of Israel.\(^{18}\) In this conflict of perspectives, God is the source of Daniel and his friends’ wisdom (Dan 1:17) for the narrator, but as far as Nebuchadnezzar knows, through his interactions with Ashpenaz (vv.3–5) and the four youths later (vv.18–20), his educational prescriptions bring their wisdom to maturity.\(^{19}\) I regard Nebuchadnezzar’s intention to implant wisdom in the Judean youths as an intention consequent upon his taking the city of Jerusalem and its temple vessels (which themselves may be read as symbols of Solomon’s wisdom), and his desire to possess, control, and augment the wisdom he finds in Jerusalem’s inhabitants. Such a desire for control is implicit in his imposition of the diet (Dan 1:5), and in Ashpenaz’s imposition of new names on Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (v.7). However, the temple vessels represent a narrated time preceding and outlasting the narrated time of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, so these creations of Solomon and Hiram-abi’s wisdom never fall under his control permanently.

**The Vessels of the House of God through Narrated Time**

The temple vessels, or the vessels of the house of God, are mentioned in the second verse of Daniel:

> And my Lord gave into his hand Jehoiakim, king of Judea, and some of the vessels of the house of God (כְּלֵי בֵית־הָאֱלֹהִים). And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of

\(^{18}\) Goldingay regards Dan 1:4 as an indication of Daniel’s “rational/experiential/court wisdom” but v.17 as a sign of Daniel’s “mantic wisdom.” Goldingay, 20. He also links Dan 1:4 to the kind of wisdom found in Proverbs. Ibid., 16.

\(^{19}\) Goldingay plainly sees that “that God (not Nebuchadnezzar or Babylon) is the source of wisdom, whenever it comes.” Ibid., 12. For Fewell, Daniel and his friends’ wisdom is “not due to their fine Babylonian education but to Elohim’s graciousness.” Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics*, 21. Fewell’s use of the adjective “fine” is ironic: she elsewhere refers to Daniel’s Babylonian education as “professional indoctrination.” Ibid., 16. For a similar perspective on Nebuchadnezzar’s educational program as coercive, see Pace, 20, 32, 37.
his god, and the vessels he brought to the house of his god. (Dan 1:2)

In arguing that “the vessels of the house of God,” in some way, signify wisdom, my first step will be to trace their perseverance through the narrated time of various biblical narratives and prophetic oracles. I will highlight the key moments of these artefacts in narrated time, starting with the present of Dan 1:2, then trace their time back through the narrated past to their origin in the wisdom of Solomon. This will suggest that Nebuchadnezzar has been given objects which symbolise Solomon’s wisdom. I will then trace the future of these vessels through narrated time to their restoration to a post-exilic temple. This will elicit a pattern in which the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s custody over the products of Solomon’s wisdom is limited in duration, and therefore prone to a certain precariousness. I will identify the key moments of the duration through narrated time of the temple vessels by means of my intertextual method, which looks at the co-incidence of the words “vessel,” “house,” and “God,” by the invariance of their lemmas throughout their syntagmatic variations, while seeking to elucidate their significance in a plot structure larger than that found in Dan 1–4.

The “Proximate” Present of the Temple Vessels: The Reigns of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah during the Reign of Nebuchadnezzar

Since my aim is to analyse the significance of Nebuchadnezzar’s seizure of “the vessels of the house of God” (Dan 1:2) for his consequent action of ordering the taking of wise youths from Jerusalem to be educated in his court (vv.3–5), I will begin with the intertextual links which tie the narrated present of v.2, and its near future time of vv.3–5, with other narratives set in the same proximate present of narrated time. The intertextual links found in the recurrence of

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20 In seeing these vessels as symbols of wisdom, I differ from Newsom, who asserts that “in Daniel the vessels serve as a physical symbol of divine power, much as they do in Jeremiah.” Newsom and Breed, 41. Alternatively, Seow sees the vessels as “veritable emblems of divine presence in Israel.” Seow, 22.

21 In tracing the narrative future of the temple vessels, I will be looking primarily at the text of Ezra, whose “concern,” as identified by Newsom, “sees the temple vessels as a marker of continuity between the first and second temples,” Newsom and Breed, 40. Also see Ackroyd’s excellent essay (“The Temple Vessels: A Continuity Theme”), which argues that the temple vessels are symbolic of the community’s relationship with its past, Peter R. Ackroyd, Studies in the Religious Tradition of the Old Testament (London: SCM Press, 1987), 46-60.
the combination of the words, “vessels” of the “house” of “God,” suggest a joining of Dan 1:2 to Jer 27:21; 2 Chr 36:18, 19. These latter verses seem to be set in the narrated time of the proximate present and near future of Dan 1:2.22 Jeremiah 27:21 speaks of “the vessels remaining in the house of Yhwh,” where Yhwh is immediately identified as the “God” of Israel.23 There is also mention of the vessels found in the king’s house.

For thus says Yhwh of the hosts, God (אֱלֹהֵי), of Israel, concerning the vessels (עַל־הַכֵּל) remaining in the house (בֵּית) of Yhwh and the house (וּבֵּית) of the king of Judea and Jerusalem. (Jer 27:21)

Jeremiah’s oracle concerning the temple and palace vessels portrays God as declaring that they are to remain in Babylon “until the day of my appointing” (עַַּּ֠ד י֣וֹם פָקְדִִ֤י), when they will return to the temple (Jer 27:22).24 Jeremiah’s oracle opposes the “lie” (שֶַּׁ֔קֶר) of his rival prophets who claim that “the vessels of the house of Yhwh (כְלֵי בֵית־יְהוָָ֛ה) will be returned from Babylon quickly now” (Jer 27:16).25 In the context of Jeremiah’s advice to the envoys from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, Tyre, and Sidon seeking an alliance with Zedekiah to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 27:3, 8–10), it seems that God wills for the temple vessels to remain in the custody of Nebuchadnezzar and his first two successors, “until the time of his land comes” (וַעֲבֹד ל אֵּ֣שׁ אַּרְצוֹ֙, v.7).26 As a scene set in the reign of Zedekiah, the oracle of Jer 27:21–22 does not, strictly speaking, share a present in narrated time with Dan 1:2. However, the narrated

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22 I have chosen the words “proximate present” to avoid the idea of a strict simultaneity. Jeremiah’s oracle is initially said to take place in “the first year of the reign of Jehoiakim” (Jer 27:1) which indicates a time earlier than “the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim” (Dan 1:1). Yet it seems strange that the oracle which follows Jer 27:1 is to be communicated to the envoys from the kings of Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, Tyre, and Sidon who are present in the court of “King Zedekiah of Judea” (v.3). Since I am taking narrated time on a reasonably large scale in this section, Jeremiah’s oracle is set roughly in a present proximate to the present in narrated time of Dan 1:1–2. By speaking of Jer 27:21 and Dan 1:2 as sharing proximity in narrated time, I intend no reference to the time of composition for these texts.

23 Montgomery believes that the “‘house of YHWH’” was an “earlier” phrase replaced by “‘[t]he house of God’” by the author of Chronicles. Montgomery, 117.


25 Hill argues that the difference between Jeremiah’s oracle and that of his prophetic opponents concerning the return of the vessels is a difference of time: before or after another deportation (which took place in 587 BCE), following the first deportation (597 BCE) when they were taken. Hill, 142.

26 Lundbom reads this phrase as “a limited but unspecified time,” Jack R. Lundbom, Jeremiah 21–36, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 316. Hill seems to allude to this phrase when he says that “the period of the Babylonian king’s dominance is limited, and he will in turn be subjugated by unnamed conquerors.” Hill, 129. A “time limit” for Babylon is also noted by Thompson, 534.
time of Jer 27:21–22 (when Zedekiah conspires against Babylon) is near enough in the future of the narrated time of Dan 1:1–2 (the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign), that the Masoretic Text of Jer 27:1 confusedly sets the scene of the oracle “in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim” (בראשית מלכות ייואים).27

Second Chronicles 36:18 identifies “all the vessels of the house of God” (differing only in quantity to the “portion of the vessels of the house of God” of Dan 1:2) as the objects seized and brought back to Babylon.

And all the vessels of the house of God (כלי בית ידך), the great and the small, and the treasuries of the house (יהוה) of Yhwh and the treasuries of the king and his princes—everything he brought to Babylon. (2 Chr 36:18)28

The immediately following verse, 2 Chr 36:19, refers to “the house of God” as that which the Babylonians burnt down, with presumably different “desirable vessels” found throughout the city which they ruined.29

And they burned the house of God (בית ידך), and they tore down the wall of Jerusalem, and all the citadels they burned with fire, and all its desirable vessels (כלי חמדה) they spoiled. (2 Chr 36:19)

In the narrative context of 2 Chr 36, however, vv.18–19 takes place in the near narrated future relative to the narrated time of Dan 1:2. In 2 Chr 36, the people of the land made Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, king in Jerusalem (v.1), but Pharaoh Neco imposed a tribute upon Judah (v.2) and replaced Jehoahaz with his brother Eliakim, whose name Neco changed to Jehoiakim (v.4).30 After the Chronicler summarises Jehoiakim’s reign as beginning in his twenty-fifth year of age and lasting eleven years, which saw him “doing evil in the eyes of Yhwh his God”

29 Japhet puzzles over the uniqueness of the phrase כליו חמדה, and suggests that it may be another reference to the temple vessels. Sara Japhet, I & II Chronicles: A Commentary (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1993), 1073-74.
30 That “Eliakim” and “Jehoiakim” are one identical person is noted by Collins, Daniel, 133.
the point in narrated time which shares the present with Dan 1:1–2 occurs in 2 Chr 36:6–7.

6Upon him went up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he bound him in bronze fetters to make him walk to Babylon. 7And from the vessels of the house of Yhwh Nebuchadnezzar brought to Babylon, and gave them into his palace in Babylon. (2 Chr 36:6–7)

Second Chronicles 36:18–19, on the other hand, takes its present in later narrated time as the reign of Zedekiah in Judah (v.11). Between the narrated time of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah’s reigns, the narrator of Chronicles sets the time of Jehoiachin’s reign:

9At the age of eight Jehoiachin was in his reign, and three months and ten days he reigned in Jerusalem. And he did evil in the eyes of Yhwh. 10And at the turning over of the year, King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him into Babylon, with the desirable vessels of the house of Yhwh, and he made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah. (2 Chr 36:9–10)

It is puzzling to a modern reader what evil an eight-year-old boy king could possibly achieve in three months and ten days (cf. “eighteen years old” in 2 Kgs 24:8). Yet this phrase, “he did evil in the eyes of Yhwh,” is stereotypical of the narrator, who does not explain it in the cases of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin. However, Zedekiah is also a king who also “did evil in the eyes of Yhwh his God” and “was not humbled before Jeremiah, the prophet from the mouth of Yhwh” (2 Chr 36:12), who went back on his oath to God by rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar (v.13). Zedekiah’s impiety and rebellion were also reflected in his people and in the priests who “defiled the house of Yhwh” (2 Chr 36:14), who made little of God’s “compassion over his people” (יְהוָֹה חָמִַּּ֥ל עַּל־עַּמ, v.15), by mocking the prophets God sends them (v.16). The result is “the
rage of Yhwh against his people” (וֹחֲמַּת־יְהוָה, 2 Chr 36:16), with God “bringing up against them the king of the Chaldeans,” who slaughters the inhabitants of Jerusalem: “everything [God] gave into his hand” (וֹהַלּוֹ, נָתִּּ֥ן בְיָדֽ, v.17). In the figure of Zedekiah, the Chronicler describes the kind of deeds which are “evil in the eyes of Yhwh,” resulting in the vessels’ ransacking from God’s house, including not only the defilement of “the house of Yhwh” (2 Chr 36:14), but also a refusal to listen to Jeremiah (v.12) and other prophets sent by God (v.16).37

The entanglement of discordant chronologies has already been heavily discussed by scholars when they examine the “time” of Dan 1:1–2.38 The present in narrated time of Dan 1:1–2 is said to take place in the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign, seemingly implying Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Jerusalem, if a harmonisation with the chronology of Chronicles is attempted. However, other chronologies do not align with this event as the “third” year of Jehoiakim: for 2 Kgs 24:12, Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Jerusalem happened in the eighth year of Jehoiachin’s reign. However, the wording of Dan 1:1–2, signifying “the vessels of the house of God,” also alludes to intertextual links to the near future in narrated time of Nebuchadnezzar’s more violent, second siege of Jerusalem, during the time of Zedekiah (up until the eleventh year of his reign, 2 Kgs 25:2; implied in 2 Chr 36:11, 17). My linkage operates on the congregation of the same lemmas “vessels,” “house,” and “God” in Jer 27:21; 2 Chr 36:18, 19, with the proviso that Jer 27:21 speaks of the “the vessels remaining in the house of Yhwh,” where Yhwh is identified as “the God of Israel.” The situation of the “present” of Dan 1:2, when compared to other chronologies, would seem to be well described as a “discordant concordance” according to the Augustinian strand of Ricoeur’s thought (beginning with his

37 Interestingly, Jarick argues that the failure of Zedekiah to heed “Yahweh’s programmatic words to Solomon and his successors” when the temple was dedicated (2 Chr 17:17–20) results in Zedekiah becoming “the last of the royal custodians of Solomon’s temple”; Jarick, 192.

examination of Augustine’s paradox of time appearing perfectly coherent and comprehensible as long as it remains unexamined, but dissolving into incoherence and perplexity once it comes under scrutiny).\textsuperscript{39} Once the discordant nature of temporality (despite its initial concordance) becomes apparent, it remains the task of analysing the overall plot to make sense of the series of actions taking place in narrated time (according to the Aristotelian strand of Ricoeur’s thought, “emplotment,” or “muthos,” is a “concordant discordance,” the making coherent of an otherwise incoherent sequence of actions).\textsuperscript{40}

This disharmony in the “time” of Dan 1:1–2 could also be termed a “gap”: does Nebuchadnezzar’s seizure of the temple vessels coincide with God’s displeasure with Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin (and the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege), or with Zedekiah (and the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s second siege)? More to the point, however, the temple vessels of the house of God are objects whose presence stretches out, back into past narrated time in their origin in Solomon’s wisdom, and forward into the future, when these symbols of Solomon’s wisdom will be reclaimed for the rebuilt Jerusalem temple.\textsuperscript{41} When Jehoiachin surrenders himself and his family to Nebuchadnezzar in his eighth regnal year (2 Kgs 24:12), the temple vessels seized by Nebuchadnezzar are explicitly indicated as made by Solomon:

\begin{quote}
And he brought out from there all the treasures of the house of Yhwh (אֶת־כ ל־אוֹצְּרוֹת בֵּית יְּהוֹ ִ֔ה) and the treasures of the house of the king, and he dissembled all the vessels of gold, which Solomon the king of Israel made (אֶת־כ ל־כְּלֵֵ֣י הַז ה ִ֗ב אֲשֶׂר עָשָׂ֥ה יְשוֹר עֵֽלֶּֽה), in the temple of Yhwh, as Yhwh had spoken. (2 Kgs 24:13)
\end{quote}

The exercise of tracing the past and future narrated times of the vessels will help me to examine the significance of Nebuchadnezzar’s capture of Judah’s king, temple vessels, and young nobles (such as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah), as a situation in which he also has

\textsuperscript{39} Ricoeur first mentions Augustine’s paradox (“What, then, is time?”) as “the aporia of the being and nonbeing of time.” Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, 1:7. Ricoeur argues that Augustine “sees discordance emerge again and again out of the very concordance of the intentions of expectation, attention, and memory.” Ibid., 1:21. Even so, Ricoeur warns against thinking of temporal experience as only “dissonance.” Ibid., 1:72.

\textsuperscript{40} “By including pitiable and fearful incidents, sudden reversals, recognitions, and violent effects within the complex plot, Aristotle equates plot with the configuring we have characterized as concordant discordance.” Ibid., 1:65-66. Ricoeur, however, warns against opposing “consonance” in “narrative” to “dissonance” in “temporal experience,” “in a nondialectical fashion.” Ibid., 1:72-73.

\textsuperscript{41} For Ackroyd, the “prominence” given to “this apparently minor theme” of the temple vessels by “the later community” shows their significance in that community’s eyes, “to re-establish itself after the exile, deeply conscious of its ancestry in faith, but also aware of the problem of continuity with that faith,” Ackroyd, 60.
an opportunity to capture Hebrew wisdom, but an opportunity which is limited in its own time frame.

**The Past of the Temple Vessels: The Reigns of Ahaz, Amaziah, Asa, and Solomon**

The lemmas “vessel,” “house,” and “God” congregate in 2 Chr 28:24, when Ahaz dishonours these temple vessels.

> And Ahaz gathered the vessels of the house of God (אֶת־כְּלֵי בֵית־הֵֽאֱלֹהָּ֔ים), and he cut up the vessels of the house of God (אֶת־כְּלֵי בֵית־הֵֽאֱלֹהָּ֔ים). And he shut the doors of the house of Yhwh and made for himself altars in every corner in Jerusalem. (2 Chr 28:24)

The spatially dispersed altars among which Ahaz distributes the dismantled vessels are profane to Yhwh to the extent that Ahaz makes them sacred to rival deities, since he also sacrifices to the gods of Damascus (2 Chr 28:23) and “other gods” (v.25). For the Chronicler, Ahaz’s motive for his infidelity is indicated in his own words, “The gods of the kings of Aram, they have helped them, I will sacrifice and they will help me,” but the narrator immediately marks Ahaz’s reasoning as mistaken, “but they became for him his cause for stumbling, and for all Israel” (2 Chr 28:23). Ahaz’s infidelity occurs during time of a specific quality: “And in the time of distress for him” (ויֹּבֵּ֨עַ תָּּד לֹ֖וֹ צֵר). This “time of distress” is one in which Ahaz, perhaps rather foolishly, had ransacked “the house of Yhwh” (אֶת־בֵּית יְהוַָּ֔ה), to give tribute to the Assyrian king, “but it did not help him” (2 Chr 28:21). Tilgath-pilneser harassed Ahaz with his forces at a time when Ahaz would have expected aid (2 Chr 28:20), the object of his earlier request to Assyria’s king (v.16). Ahaz’s other troubles include invasions and exiles induced by the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Chr 28:8, but repented of in vv.14–15), by the Edomites (v.17), and the raids and aggressive settlements of the Philistines (v.18). Ahaz’s troubles begin when “Yhwh his God gave him into the hand of the king of Aram ... and he was also given into the hand of the king of Israel” (וַּיִּתְנֵּ֨הוּ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהָיוֹ בְיַד מֶ֣לֶךְ אֲרָם ... וְַ֠גֵּם בְּיַד־מִֶ֤לֶךְ יִשְרָאֵל֙, 2 Chr 28:5), the same action God takes against Jehoiakim of Judah with respect to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (וַיֹּ֣תְנַֽהוּ אֱלֹהַ֑י בְּיַ֣ד נְבֻ֚כֶדנֵ֣זֶ֑אר, אֶת־יְהוֹיָָקִ֣ים מֶֽלֶךְ־יְהוּדַָ֗ה, Dan 1:2). God’s action with respect to Ahaz is explained by the narrator’s foregrounding of this handover: “but he did not do the right thing in the eyes of Yhwh, like David his father” (2 Chr 28:1).
upright is specified as making images of the Baals (2 Chr 28:2), making offerings in the valley of Hinnom’s son, making children pass through fire like the other nations (v.3), making offerings on the heights, on the hills, and “under every flourishing tree” (implying worship of an Asherah, v.4). Ahaz’s dissembling of the temple vessels is narrated as the result of a downward spiral of initial infidelity to Yhwh, leading to military losses against other kings, resulting in attempts to appease even more kings, which are attempts that fail and even prove counterproductive.

Going back through the past narrated in Chronicles, the next occurrence of the “vessels” of the “house” of “God” is set in the reign of Amaziah of Judah (2 Chr 25:1), immediately after Joash of Israel defeats him on the field of battle and breaks into Jerusalem (v.23). The action of Joash, king of the northern kingdom, is described as follows:

And all the gold and the silver and all the vessels (כ ל־הַַ֠כֵל ים) found in the house of God (בְּבֵית־ה אֱלֹה ָׂ֜ים) with Obed-Edom, and the treasuries of the house of the king, and the children of the hostages, and he returned to Samaria. (2 Chr 25:24)

The narrator blames Amaziah’s defeat in battle for his not listening to a prophet, who foretold that God would ruin him for such a failure of the ear (2 Chr 25:16), so God “gave him into the hand, because he sought the gods of Edom” (v.20). The prophet’s advice concerned his condemnation of Amaziah’s decision to worship another people’s gods, whom God had just given into his hand (2 Chr 25:15), the Edomite idols he had plundered (v.14). Joash of Israel’s grudge against Amaziah is ostensibly because of his boasting for defeating Edom (2 Chr 25:18–19), but more likely caused by Amaziah listening to a different “man of God” and dismissing the Ephraimite mercenaries (vv.7–9), hired for a hundred silver talents (v.6), causing much anger for the northern kingdom (v.10). There is therefore a gap, with two contrasting gap-fillings, for why Amaziah lost “the vessels of the house of God” (2 Chr 25:24) to the northern kingdom: he listened to “a man of God” (to dismiss the Ephraimite mercenaries, prompting Joash’s grudge), but did not listen to “a man of God” (who criticised him for worshipping the

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42 The Asherah was historically a cultic tree or wooden pole symbolising some aspect of deity, a goddess-consort of the male god, or was simply a shrine. Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Godesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 230-32.
Edomite idols after defeating them, prompting God’s handing him over to Joash). This Judean king who sometimes listens to a prophet, sometimes not, is assessed by the narrator that “he did what was right in the eyes of Yhwh, except not with a complete mind” (2 Chr 25:2).

Going back further through past narrated time in Chronicles, “vessels” connected to “the house of God” occur in the reign of Asa of Judah (2 Chr 14:1), set between his fifteenth (15:10) and thirty-fifth regnal years (15:19).

And he brought the holy things of his father and his holy things to the house of God (בֵֵ֣ית ה אֱלֹה ָ֑ים), silver and gold and vessels (וְּכֵל ָֽים)(. 2 Chr 15:18)

This movement of the vessels (along with silver, gold, and holy objects) into “the house of God” happens during the reforms of Asa. Second Chronicles 15 portrays Asa as one who “repaired the altar of Yhwh which was before the porch of Yhwh” (v.8), and who gathered together a national assembly at the Jerusalem temple, including sojourners from the northern kingdom (vv.9–10) for sacrifice to Yhwh (v.11), renewing their covenant “to seek” Yhwh, under pain of death (vv.12–13), and swearing an oath of allegiance to Yhwh (vv.14–15). This national dedication to Yhwh, led by Asa, follows on from the king’s “listening” to “these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet” (2 Chr 15:8, but earlier identified as “Azariah, son of Oded,” v.1). The prophetic oracle had counselled Asa to seek and not abandon Yhwh (2 Chr 15:2), giving him the precedent of Israel “for many days” being “without a faithful God, without an instructing priest and without a Torah” (v.3), yet finding Yhwh by turning back their enmity (v.4), in a time of distress caused by the peoples surrounding them (vv.5–6). Asa’s response to the prophet’s words also involves him “getting rid of the detested [cultic] objects from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which were captured from the mountain of Ephraim” (2 Chr 15:8), even removing his mother from her position as queen mother because of her image of Asherah, which Asa promptly cuts down (v.16). Asa’s decision to move “vessels”
into “the house of God” would seem to align with his act of “listening” to the words of a prophet upon whom was “the spirit of God” (2 Chr 15:1). 43

Proceeding back through narrated time in Chronicles, the next occurrence of the “vessels” of the “house” of “God” involves two verses (2 Chr 4:19; 5:1) which enclose the completion of Solomon’s work for the temple.

This passage speaks of two sets of vessels for the house of God: the first set which Solomon made for the temple (2 Chr 4:19), with emphasis on vessels of gold (vv. 20–22); the second set collected with the holy things, silver, and gold Solomon inherited from David, that he placed into the treasuries of the house of God (5:1). Vessels constructed specifically for the temple include bronze objects made by Hiram, king of Tyre (2 Chr 4:11), work delegated to the artisan Hiram-abi (v. 16). Hiram-abi’s work for Solomon’s temple is Hiram’s gift, as part of Solomon’s exchange of his wheat, barley, oil, and wine (2 Chr 2:10, 14) for Hiram’s Lebanese timber (vv. 7, 15). Solomon requested from Hiram “a wise man,” specifically one wise for “working in gold, silver, bronze, and iron” (as well as various types of cloth and dyes), who “knows” how to engrave as finely as “the wise ones” in Judah and Jerusalem:

“And now send me a man wise (רַב חֵכֶם) for working in gold (בַז בָּדֶן) and in silver (בַכָּסֶף) and in bronze (נַחֲשֶׁת) and in iron (בַבְּרִזל) and in red-purple, crimson and violet-dyed cloths, and who knows how to carve engravings like the wise ones (חֲכָמִים) which are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, which David my father established.” (2 Chr 2:6)

43 However, Asa is not consistent in his character trait of listening to advice, as the reader moves through 2 Chr 16—Asa makes a gift of the temple vessels to seal an alliance with Ben-hadad, king of Aram, against the kingdom of Israel (vv. 1–4), which earns him the epithet “foolish” (נִסְכַּלְתָ) from the seer Hanani (v. 9), who is imprisoned upon Asa’s reaction of rage (v. 10).
Hiram responds by praising Solomon as “a wise, knowing, skilful, and insightful son” of David (2 Chr 2:11), and sends Hiram-abí as the requested “wise, knowing, and insightful man” (v.12), who “knows” how to work in the required materials, including “the gold, silver, bronze, and iron” (v.13).

11 And Hiram said, “Blessed be Yhwh, God of Israel, who made the heavens and the earth, who gave to David the king a wise, knowing, skilful, and insightful son (בֵֵ֣ן ח כ ִ֗ם יוֹדֵעַ שֵֵ֣כֶל וּב ינ ִ֔ה), who will build a house to Yhwh (בַ י ת  לַיהו ִ֔ה בְּנֶה־י בְּנֶה), and a house for his kingdom. 12 And now I will send a wise, knowing, and insightful man (א יש־ח כ ָ֛ם יוֹדֵֵ֥עַ ב ינ ֵּ֖ה), Hiram-abí. 13 The son of a woman from the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, he is knowledgeable (יִוֹדֵָ֡עַ) for working in gold and in silver (בַז ָֽה ב־וַ֠בַכֶסֶף), in bronze (בַנְּח ֹ֙שֶת), in iron (בַבַרְּזֶָׂ֜ל), in stone and in wood, in red-purple and in violet-dyed cloth, and in byssus linen and in crimson dyes, and in carving every engraving and for designing every pattern which will be given to him, like your wise ones (ךָעם־חֲכ מִֶ֔י) and the wise ones (וְָּֽחַכְּמִֵ֔י) of my lord David your father.” (2 Chr 2:11–13)

Hiram-abí, the architect of Solomon’s temple, and Solomon who employs him, share characteristics with the youths whom Nebuchadnezzar orders to be brought from Jerusalem after he captures “the vessels of the house of God” (Dan 1:2): they also are to be “skilful in all wisdom and knowing knowledge and insightful in knowledge” (יִֽשְׁכִּילֵם בְכָל־חָכְמַָ֗ה וְיִֹ֣דְע י דַּ֙עַּת֙ וּמְבִינ ֣י מַּדַָּ֔ע), Dan 1:4). Furthermore, just as Hiram-abí’s wisdom is his skill at working gold, silver, bronze, and iron, Daniel demonstrates his wisdom by interpreting a dream about gold, silver, bronze, and iron (Dan 2:31–45). The origin of at least some the vessels of the house of God which God handed over to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:2) lies in the wisdom of Hiram-abí, and the wisdom of Solomon, who oversaw their construction. The associated traits of Solomon’s and Hiram-abí’s wisdom (2 Chr 2:6, 11–13) allude to the kind of wise youths whom Nebuchadnezzar desires to be brought from Jerusalem (Dan 1:4).

The “holy things” Solomon inherits from David, that accompany “the silver and gold and all the vessels he gave to the treasuries of the house of God” (2 Chr 5:1), are included in David’s instructions to “the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son” (1 Chr 22:17), designating them for “the house” to be built for Yhwh’s name (v.19).

“Now give your minds and souls to pursue Yhwh your God, and get up and build the sanctuary of Yhwh God, to bring the ark of the covenant of Yhwh and the holy vessels of God (כֵּלֵי קֶדֶש הַאֱלֹהִים) to the house to be built for the name of Yhwh (לַבֵַּ֖י ת הַנ בְּנֵֶ֥ה לְּשֵם־יְּהו ָֽה).” (1 Chr 22:19)
These instructions of David to the princes occur at the end of his reign, since he immediately abdicates for Solomon’s accession (1 Chr 23:1). David’s words follow his instructions to Solomon “to build a house for Yhwh, God of Israel” (ליבנות בית יִהוֵה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, 1 Chr 22:6), after David makes initial preparations (vv.1–5), amassing gold, silver, bronze, and iron (v.14), and finding artisans skilled in working with these metals (vv.15–16). David also recounts God’s promise to him of a son who will build a house dedicated to God’s name, whose throne will be established forever (1 Chr 22:10), but contingent upon the expectation that Solomon, as the promised son (and, implicitly, those who would follow him), should be “skilful and insightful” (שכֶל וּבִינַָּ֔ה), “keep the Torah of Yhwh your God” (ךָוְלִשְׁמ֕וֹר אֶת־תוֹרֵַּ֖ת יְהוִָּ֥ה אֱלֹהֶֽי [123x559]), and “the ordinances and the judgments which Yhwh commanded Moses concerning Israel” (v.13). The motif of the king’s listening obedience is a theme accompanying moments of the vessels of the house of God, passing through the narrated time of Chronicles.

This backwards journey through the narrated time of Chronicles reveals key moments when the movement of the “vessels” into “the house of God” coincide with moments of narrated time in which the Judean king demonstrates a listening obedience either to the word of a prophet or to the Torah of Moses, and moments when the seizure of the “vessels” out of the “house of God” coincide with the Judean king’s failure to demonstrate a listening obedience to a prophet or Torah. The implication for understanding the plot of Dan 1 and Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation is that he could seize the vessels of the house of God because of a lack of listening obedience on Jehoiakim’s part. These temple vessels, products of the wisdom of Solomon and of Hiram-abi, could be interpreted as metaphors standing for a Solomon-like wisdom. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s possession of these material reminders of Solomon’s wisdom is limited in time: they will soon return to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, after the exile and the returnees’ renewed obedience in the future narrated time of Ezra–Nehemiah.

The Future of the Temple Vessels: The Reigns of Belshazzar, Cyrus, Artaxerxes, and Darius

The first chapter of Daniel already alludes to the future narrated time when Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom will pass away: “And Daniel was there until the first year of Cyrus the king” (Dan
Within the limitations of narrated time in which Nebuchadnezzar and his successors possess these vessels, will he listen to those who represent God-given wisdom to him, such as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah? Or will his kingdom’s loss of these vessels result from wasting the opportunity to establish his kingdom on wisdom? The place to start with the future narrated time of the temple vessels is their reappearance in the Belshazzar’s reign (Dan 5), when Nebuchadnezzar is absent, except in memory, but his successor makes use of the vessels.

Belshazzar, under the influence of the wine, ordered to be brought out the vessels of gold and silver (כסא וכסא), which Nebuchadnezzar his father took out of the temple in Jerusalem (בירושלים ובירוננו). And they were drinking from them, the king, and his nobles, and his wives, and his concubines. Then they brought the vessels of gold (כסא וכסא) which were taken from the temple, which is the house of God, which is in Jerusalem (בירושלים ובירוננו), and they were drinking from them, the king and his nobles and his wives and his concubines. (Dan 5:2–3)

Because Dan 5:2–3 is in Aramaic, but Dan 1:2 is in Hebrew, different words are used. Whereas Dan 1:2 used the lemma קִבְלָה for “vessel,” Dan 5:2 uses קַסְפַּא. The substitutions for “house” (בית) and “God” (אלים) in Dan 1:2 differ semantically in 5:2, as “temple” (ריכהל) and “Jerusalem” (ירושלם), but these alternative terms are juxtaposed to “house” (בית) and “God” (אלים) in 5:3. The sacred objects are specified as “vessels of gold and silver” (כסא וכסא וכסא וכסא), and connected back to the narrated time of Dan 1:2 as that “which Nebuchadnezzar his father took” (הב, יכַּל, 5:2). Intertexts which yield combinations of the Hebrew words “vessel” (קִבְלָה), “house” (בית), and “God” (אלים), are found in Ezra 1:7; 8:25, 30, 33; Neh 10:40; 13:9, as points of narrated time future to Dan 1:2. Aramaic combinations of “vessel” (נקף), “temple” (מקדש), and “Jerusalem” (ירושלים) yield Ezra 5:14, 15; 6:5, which all happily speak of “the temple in Jerusalem” as “the house of God.” Ezra 7:19, which contains the lemmas “vessel” (נקף),...
“house” (בַּיִת), “God” (הּ אֱלָ), and “Jerusalem” (יְרוּשְׁלֶם), but lacks “temple” (יַכֲל), will also be considered. I am not interested merely in a lexical exercise involving “vessel,” “house,” and “God,” or “vessel,” “temple,” and “Jerusalem,” but also in the significance of these points in future narrated time for the narrated present of Dan 1:2.46

It is significant that Belshazzar’s decision (Dan 5:2) to move these objects out of the treasure house of Nebuchadnezzar’s god (1:2), to profane them by drinking wine out of them (5:3),47 while praising “the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone” (v.4), leads in a downward spiral towards his death (v.30) and the loss of his kingdom (6:1).48 Daniel interprets Belshazzar’s action as the supreme act of arrogance against “the Lord of heaven” (Dan 5:23), even before he interprets the writing on the wall (vv.26–28).

“And against the Lord of the heavens you have exalted yourself! And the vessels of [God’s] house (הַקְּדֹשֹׁבֶת אֱלֹהֵי בַּיֵּת), which were brought before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine in them! And the gods of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone (הַגֵּאָלֶים לֵּכָּחְבֵּי אֱלֹהֵי אִישָׁי אֵין אָוָן אֲבָנָה), who do not see and do not hear and do not know, you have praised! And the God in whose hand is your breath, and all his ways with you, you have not glorified!” (Dan 5:23)

Of the three kings in the narrated time of the temple vessels between Solomon and Nebuchadnezzar—Ahaz, Amaziah, and Asa—Belshazzar bears greatest likeness to Ahaz. The queen mother’s introduction of Daniel to Belshazzar (Dan 5:10–12) implies that he had never sought him out for listening beforehand, and, like Ahaz, he desecrates the vessels for the sake of idols and other gods (vv.3–4). The fate of Belshazzar represents the decline and loss of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, and the limits placed on Nebuchadnezzar’s future time to learn to rule his kingdom in a manner to preserve it, and to teach his successor to do likewise.

The limited future of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, implied by Daniel remaining “until the first year of Cyrus the king” (Dan 1:21), situates his reign between the narrated times just before

46 Hartman believes that the temple vessels are introduced in Dan 1:2 simply to be reintroduced in 5:2–3, without finding any other purpose for them in the plot of Dan 1. Hartman and Di Lella, 129, 132.
47 The vessels’ desecration by Belshazzar in relation to Nebuchadnezzar’s action of taking them is also noted by Seow, 22. Montgomery believes that “the sacred things of even a conquered religion being still holy” made Belshazzar’s action “a sacrilege even to Pagan eyes.” Montgomery, 117.
48 In the vein of intertextuality, Johnstone even connects Nebuchadnezzar’s seizing of these vessels in 2 Chr 36:7 to Dan 5 to argue that the Chronicler means Nebuchadnezzar’s action to signify the doom that will eventually befall his empire. Johnstone, 2:266–67.
the end of Chronicles and when Ezra begins.\footnote{Konkel observes that the end of the narrative of Chronicles (2 Chr 36:22–23) flows into the beginning of the narrative of Ezra. \cite{Konkel}} Ezra 1:7, in which “vessel,” “house,” and “God/god” co-occur, refers back to Nebuchadnezzar’s time, and to Cyrus ending Babylonian custody over these sacred objects.

And King Cyrus brought out the vessels of the house of Yhwh (אֶת־כְּלֵי בֵית־יְּהוָ֖ה), which Nebuchadnezzar had brought out from Jerusalem and had given into the house of his gods (אֶת־כְּלֵי בֵית אֱלֹהִ֑ים). \footnote{The words which tie Ezra 1:7 to Dan 1:2 are “vessel” (כְלִי), “house” (בֵית), and “gods” (אֱלֹהִים), but the phrase כְּלֵי בֵית־הָאֱלֹהִַּים (Dan 1:2) is substituted for כְּלֵי בֵית־יְּהוָ֖ה, and אֱלֹהִים occurs as a reference to the house of Nebuchadnezzar’s gods (Ezra 1:7). Therefore, although there is intertextual linkage here, a subtle limitation is placed upon the meaning of אֱלֹהִים. In Dan 1:2, this word may signify “Adonai” or Nebuchadnezzar’s gods, but in Ezra 1:7, this word is limited to Nebuchadnezzar’s gods, and the narrator’s deity is named as יְהוָ֖ה.} (Ezra 1:7)

The point of narrated time is “in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia,” whom the narrator presents as sending a herald to announce a decree, because “to fulfil the word of Yhwh from the mouth of Jeremiah, Yhwh awoke the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia” (Ezra 1:1). In this decree, Cyrus acknowledges that “all the kingdoms of the earth have been given to me by Yhwh, the God of heaven” (כֹֹּל מַּמְלְכ֣וֹת הָאַָּ֔רֶץ נָ֣תַּן לִַּ֔י יְהוֵָ֖ה אֱלֹה ֣י הַּשָמָָ֑יִם, Ezra 1:2), words reminiscent of Daniel’s attribution to Nebuchadnezzar: “You, O king, are the king of kings, because the God of heaven has given the kingdom (דִֹּ֚י אֱלָ֣הּ שְׁמַּיַָּ֔א מַּלְכוּתִָ֥א), the power, and the might, and the honour to you” (ךְיָּֽבִּל, Dan 2:37). However, where Nebuchadnezzar will respond to Daniel’s acclamation by building a tall golden image (Dan 3:1), Cyrus considers himself obliged “to build for [God] a house in Jerusalem (לִבְנֽוֹת־ל֣וֹ בַַּּ֔יִת בִירוּשָׁלֵַּ֖ם), which is in Judah” (Ezra 1:2). A key part of this rebuilding effort is Cyrus’s decision to return the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had originally taken (Ezra 1:7). The returned vessels are made of silver and gold (further linking to Dan 5:2): thirty gold (זָהֵָ֜ב) basins, one thousand silver basins (אָגַּרְטְל י־כֶ֙סֶף֙, Ezra 1:9), thirty gold (זָהָ֖ב) bowls, four hundred and ten silver (כֶ֙סֶף) bowls, and “one thousand other vessels” (נְף לִּים אֲחֵֽרִים אָֹ֖לֶף, v.10), for a total of five thousand and four hundred items of “all the vessels of gold and silver” (כָל־כִּלְים לַּזָהָ֣ב וְלַּכֶַּ֔סֶף, v.11). The entire operation is overseen by the Persian-appointed leader of Judah, Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8, 11).

The co-occurrences of “vessel,” “house,” and “God,” or “vessel,” “temple,” and “Jerusalem,” which are next in the time of narrating (Ezra 5:14, 15; 6:5), are set in the reign of Darius, since
they are the next intertexts encountered by the reader moving sequentially through Ezra. However, it is ambiguous whether these verses are also next in narrated time, because Ezra 7:19; 8:25, 30, 33; Neh 10:40; 13:9 occur in the narrated time of Artaxerxes’s reign, but it is not immediately clear whether this “Artaxerxes” is the same as the one in Ezra 4:7–24, who appears to precede the narrated time of Darius, or an Artaxerxes who succeeds the narrated time of Darius’s reign.\(^51\) However, despite these difficulties, because the narrator follows the story of Darius with the words, “And after these matters, in the reign of Artaxerxes” (אַַחַּר֙ הַּדְבָרִ֣ים הָא ַּלֶה בְמַּלְכֵ֖וּת אַּרְתַּחְשַּׁ֣סְתְא, Ezra 7:1),\(^52\) I will tentatively take the narrated time of Ezra 7:19; 8:25, 30, 33; Neh 10:40; 13:9 to occur after the narrated time of Ezra 5:14, 15; 6:5, following the time of narrating.

Ezra 5:14–15 occurs in a letter sent by Jewish elders, which ends up in the hands of Darius the king (vv.5–6), that responds to the challenge of Tattenai, governor of the Beyond the River province, who questioned their authorisation “to rebuild this house” (מַּן־שָ֙ם לְכֵֹ֜ם טְע ַ֗ם בַּיְתִָ֤א דְנָה֙ לִבְנ ַ֔א, v.3). The elders’ response to Tattenai recalls events in their narrated past which justifies their rebuilding efforts, and they present God’s house as constructed “from of old, many years before, by a great king of Israel” (Ezra 5:11); “except that since our fathers enraged the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon” (יְהַּ֣ב הִמַּ֔וֹ בְיַָּ֛ד נְבוּכַּדְנֶצִַּּ֥ר מֶֽלֶךְ־בָבֵ֖ל, v.12; recalling Dan 1:2); “but in the first year of Cyrus, king of Babylon, Cyrus the king set a decree to rebuild this house of God” (שָ֣ם טְע ַּ֔ם ב ית־אֱלָהִָּ֥א דְנֵָ֖ה לִבְנ ֽא, Ezra 5:13).\(^53\) Naming Cyrus as “king of Babylon” indicates a time when Nebuchadnezzar and his dynasty lose their kingdom to another, when the house of God will be ordered to be rebuilt (Cyrus’s “first year” in Ezra 5:13 alludes to Dan 1:21). The Jewish elders’ narration sets Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom

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\(^{52}\) Goswell argues that Ezra 7:1 signifies “a considerable span of time” and a “temporal ellipsis,” and that “the king has changed.” Goswell, 189. Brown sees Ezra 7:1 as a correlation to the time of 4:7 in the reign of the same Artaxerxes. Brown, 44.

(when God’s house and its vessels were lost, Ezra 5:12) between the kingdom of Solomon
(when God’s house and its vessels were gathered and made, v.11) and the kingdom of Cyrus
(when God’s house was ordered to be rebuilt, and its vessels recovered, v.13). They name
Sheshbazzar as the governor overseeing the recovery of the vessels looted by Nebuchadnezzar:

And so, the vessels of the house of God (אָמַּנְיָא דִּי בֵּית־אֱל הָּא יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם), of gold and silver (which Nebuchadnezzar brought from the temple which was in Jerusalem [מָרָוָה לֵא דִי יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם], and they were brought to the temple in Babylon), they were taken by Cyrus the king from the temple in Babylon, and he gave them to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had set up as a governor. And he said to him, “These are the vessels (אָמַּנְיָא), you are to deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem and the house of God (אָמַּנְיָא דִּי בֵּית־אֱל הָּא יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם) which is to be built in its confines.” (Ezra 5:14–15)

These vessels therefore endure narrated time through the rise and falls of multiple kings and kingdoms: Solomon, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and Darius. Darius investigates the Jewish elders’ claims against the Babylonian archives (Ezra 6:1), on the advice of Tattenai (5:17), but finds the relevant evidence written on a scroll found in Ecbatana in Media (6:2). Ezra 6:5 is part of the record of the first year of Cyrus’s reign, his “decree to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem” (אָמַּנְיָא דִּי בֵּית־אֱל הָּא יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם), with wood and stone, out of the expenditure of “the house of the king” (אָמַּנְיָא). The reported decree ends with instructions concerning the vessels:

“And so, the vessels of the house of God (אָמַּנְיָא בֵּית־אֱל הָּא יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם), of gold and silver, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which was in Jerusalem (מָרָוָה לֵא דִי יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם) and brought to Babylon, they are to be returned and moved to the temple which is in Jerusalem (מָרָוָה לֵא דִי יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם), in its confines, and to be deposited in the house of God (אָמַּנְיָא בֵּית־אֱל הָּא יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם).” (Ezra 6:5)

Therefore, Darius orders Tattenai to allow them to rebuild their temple (Ezra 6:6–7), to pay the costs out of the tribute from his own provincial treasury (v.8), and to supply their needs for liturgical sacrifices (v.9). Darius ends his decree with a threat that anyone who attempts to change it will have their house made a dung heap (גהְ תְּתָלֵל שְׁלֵדֵד אֵל הָּא יְרוּשָּׁלֵּם, Ezra 6:11, recalling Nebuchadnezzar’s threat against his sages, וְּבָת יכֵ֖וָל נְוָלִִּי יִתְשָמְל, Dan 2:5), and his wish that God would “overthrow any king or people” (יְמַּגַַּּ֞ר כָל־מִֶ֤לֶךְ וְעַּם) who attempt to alter it or “destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem” (לָ֣א תִתְחַּבַַּּ֔ל ה ב ית־אֱלָהִָּ֥א ד ֵ֖ךְ דִ֣י בִירוּשְׁלֶָ֑ם, Ezra 6:12, recalling Daniel’s description of God’s eternal kingdom, לא תִתְחַּבַַּּ֔ל, Dan 2:44).
The next intertext in the time of narrating (Ezra 7:19), is set in the narrated time of Artaxerxes’s seventh regnal year (v.7).

“And the vessels (שֵׁמֶר) which were given to you for worship in the house of your God (בָּית אֱלֹהָּ֑ךְ), it shall be completed before the God of Jerusalem (יְרוּשָׁלַֽם).” (Ezra 7:19)

These words are part of a letter of Artaxerxes to Ezra (Ezra 7:11), which Ezra took back with him on his return to Jerusalem from Babylon (v.9). The letter is Artaxerxes’s decree allowing the free movement of priests and Levites in his kingdom to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:13), which also instructs Ezra to inquire about Jerusalem and Judah concerning the law of his God (v.14), and provides him with silver and gold to buy the animals, grains, and liquids needed for temple sacrifices (v.17). In Ezra 7:19, “the vessels” of “the house of your God” are to be returned for the re-establishment of worship in the temple. Artaxerxes even recognises the wisdom of God within Ezra, specifically the wisdom needed for administering justice in the land: “And you, Ezra, like the wisdom of your God (כְּחָכְמַּת אֱלָהָּ), which is in your hands to appoint judges and magistrates, who will come to judge the whole people of the province beyond the river, all who know the law of your God, and everyone who does not know, they will make it known to them (וְדִֵ֧י לָא יָדֵַּ֖ע תְהוֹדְעֽוּן)” (Ezra 7:25). Here, justice-oriented wisdom, and making such wisdom known, coincides with being entrusted with the vessels of the house of God. Will Nebuchadnezzar live up to Ezra’s standard?

The next intertexts (Ezra 8:25, 30, 33), are set in the narrated time of Ezra’s return with the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem, in Artaxerxes’s reign (v.1), in his seventh year, the fifth month (vv.7–8). The returning group carry the “vessels,” along with “silver and gold,” for God’s house:

And I weighed for them the silver and the gold and the vessels (וְאֶת־הַכֵּל), as an offering for the house of our God (וּבֵית־אֱלֹהִֵ֗ינ): the king and his advisors and his princes and all Israel found among them. (Ezra 8:25)

Included are “one hundred silver vessels” (וְאֶת־הַכֵּל), Ezra 8:26 and “vessels of well-polished bronze, two precious objects like gold” (וְאֶת־הַכֵּל, v.27).

54 Anderson sees Ezra 7:14 as evidence that the characters Daniel and Ezra are alike as courtiers in foreign courts. Anderson, 5.
Ezra commands the people to keep and guard these vessels in “the house of Yhwh” (בית יוהו, Ezra 8:29), on the basis that just as the people are holy, so too the vessels are holy: “And I said to them, ‘You are holy to Yhwh, and the vessels (הכליים) are holy; and the silver and the gold are an offering to Yhwh, the God of your fathers’” (v.28). The priests and the Levites carry “the vessels” back “to Jerusalem, to the house of our God”:

And the priests and the Levites received the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels (הכליים), to be brought to Jerusalem to the house of our God (לירושלים לביתי אלוהינו). (Ezra 8:30)

Despite how attractive all this treasure would have been to roaming brigands, Ezra attributes the party’s escapes from all predations to “the hand of our God” (ייד אלוהינו, Ezra 8:31). They finally arrive back in Jerusalem, rest for three days (Ezra 8:32), then store “the vessels,” along with the silver and gold, “in the house of our God”:

And on the fourth day it was weighed, the silver and the gold and the vessels, in the house of our God (beth elohim) by the hand of Meremoth, son of Uriah the priest. And with him was Eliezer son of Phinehas, and with them were Jozabad, son of Jeshua, and Noadiah, son of Binnui, the Levites. (Ezra 8:33)

Within the narrative of Ezra–Nehemiah, included among the returnees from exile is Nehemiah, cupbearer to the Persian king (Neh 1:11), but Nehemiah’s return is set somewhat later in narrated time than Ezra’s return. Nehemiah’s narrative begins in the narrated time of Artaxerxes’s twentieth year (Neh 1:1; 2:1), when Nehemiah obtains his permission to leave his court to help the rebuilding effort in Jerusalem (2:8). This intertext reveals this moment in the vessels’ future narrated time:

For they brought it to the chamber, the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi, the offering of grain, the new wine and the oil, and there were the vessels (כלי) of the sanctuary, and the ministering priests and the gatekeepers and the singers. And we did not neglect the house of our God (beth elohim). (Neh 10:40)

This moment is set at the end of a document which has been inserted into the narrative (Neh 10:1), which records the names of Nehemiah, now governor of Judah, and the returned exiles who accompanied him (vv.2–28), characterising them as “everyone knowledgeable, understanding” (כל ידע מבין), because they are “all those separated from the peoples of the

55 Anderson sees a similarity between Daniel and Nehemiah in their “serving foreign monarchs.” Ibid.
lands for the Torah of God (אֶל־תּוֹרַ֣ת הַאֱלֹהִַּ֔ים) (v.29). As characters knowing and understanding, they share characteristics with the youths whom Nebuchadnezzar desires for his court (Dan 1:4). This dedication not to neglect the house of God (in which the vessels are kept, Neh 10:40), however, will prove to be precarious once again. Nehemiah’s narrative ends in a scene where he has obtained leave to return to Jerusalem in Artaxerxes’s thirty-third year (Neh 13:6), but finds all manner of neglect of Torah to which the people had dedicated themselves: abandoning the temple’s liturgy and tributes (13:10–11; cf. 10:33–39), conducting business on the Sabbath (13:15–16; cf. 10:32), and mixed marriages (13:23–24; cf. 10:31). The intertext reads:

And I ordered, and they purified the chambers. And I returned to there the vessels of the house of God (כְּלֵי בֵֵ֣ית ה אֱלֹה ִ֔ים), with the offering of frankincense. (Neh 13:9)

Here Nehemiah takes the temple vessels back to their rightful place after he discovers that Eliashib had prepared a room for Tobiah in “the living areas of the house of God” (Neh 13:7), because of which Nehemiah angrily throws out Tobiah’s furniture (v.8).57

Building a Metaphorical Link Between the Temple Vessels and the Judean Youths

Having argued for the pre-existence and post-existence of the temple vessels with respect to the narrated time of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, I intend to argue for their “metaphoricity” in relation to the cohort of Judean youths (Dan 1:3–5), particularly Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (v.6). In Ricoeurian language, to say metaphorically that, “Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are the temple vessels,” is to say, “Daniel and his companions are not but are like the temple vessels, or are seen as the temple vessels.”58 Nebuchadnezzar implicitly “sees” the Judean youths “as” or “like” the temple vessels when performing four actions in succession, expressed by the rootבוא, he came (בָּא, Dan 1:1), he brought Jehoiakim and the

56 Their obedience to Torah is understood as avoiding mixed marriages (Neh 10:31), observing the Sabbath (v.32), and offering tribute and tithes for the temple’s sacrifices (vv.33–39).
57 Eliashib is the priest in charge of the residences, and Tobias is his relative who is normally not allowed to reside in the temple districts (Neh 13:4–5).
58 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 251, 293.
temple vessels (הָבִּים), and again brought the vessels (הֶבֶּלְתָּם, v.2), then he ordered noble youths from Judah to be brought (לְהָבִַּ֞יא, v.3).

1In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came (בָּא) to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2And my Lord gave into his hand Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and some of the vessels of the house of God, and he brought them (וַּיְבִיאֵם) to the land of Shinar, the house of his god, and the vessels he brought (הֵבִּיא) to the treasure house of his god. 3And the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his attendants, to bring (לְהָבִַּ֞יא) from the children of Israel and from the seed of the kingdom and from the nobles. (Dan 1:1–3)

In the three instances of Dan 1:1–2, Nebuchadnezzar is the subject of the verb שָׁבָּה. In Dan 1:3, Ashpenaz is the implied subject of שָׁבָּה, but Nebuchadnezzar is the subject of the speech act which has as its direct object that order of bringing. There is more variation in the objects of שָׁבָּה: in Dan 1:1, the object is Jerusalem (implicitly this is an indirect object, despite the absence of a preposition such as לְ). In Dan 1:2, the direct objects of שָׁבָּה are, first, Jehoiakim and some of the temple vessels (with an indirect object of destination, the land of Shinar and the Babylonian temple), and second, the vessels without Jehoiakim (with an indirect object of the Babylonian temple treasury). In Dan 1:3, the direct objects of שָׁבָּה are some of “the sons of Israel,” “the seed of the kingdom,” and “the nobles,” but the action indicated by the root שָׁבָּה is itself the object of Nebuchadnezzar’s speech act. The verb’s paradigmatic variations are the qal perfect in Dan 1:1 (שָׁבָּה, indicating a simple, past action), two hiphil forms in v.2 (וַּיְבִיאֵם and הֵבִּיא, indicating past actions with the sense of causing someone or something to come), and a hiphil infinitive construct (שָׁבַּהַל, which allows it to be the direct object of another verb). The effect of these variations of שָׁבָּה is that Nebuchadnezzar ascends a hierarchy of causation as a performer of actions:59 Nebuchadnezzar came (Dan 1:1), Nebuchadnezzar causes someone (Jehoiakim) and some things (the vessels) to come (v.2), Nebuchadnezzar causes someone (Ashpenaz) to cause some others (the Judean youths) to come (v.3).60 Across Dan 1:1–3,

59 Commenting on Nebuchadnezzar’s actions involving the root שָׁבָּה, Fewell succinctly and ably sums up his perspective: “His conquest of Jerusalem is, he believes, the result of his own action. He comes (בָּא), he besieges, he takes (בָּא), he places (בָּא).” Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 14. Fewell’s emphasis. That the repetition of the verbal root שָׁבָּה gives the (misleading) impression of Nebuchadnezzar’s “irresistible power” is also recognised by Valeta, 68.

60 However, Newsom argues that God’s actions, using the verbal root נתן, contrast to Nebuchadnezzar’s actions, using the root שָׁבָּה, and that it is known to the reader, but not yet Nebuchadnezzar, that “the God of Israel is the effective agent in history, not Nebuchadnezzar.” Newsom and Breed, 41. I am not denying the superior agency of God over against Nebuchadnezzar, but here I am arguing that, at least at this point in narrated time,
Nebuchadnezzar retains his sovereign position as agent, while Jehoiakim and the vessels become the objects of his actions, and the Judean youths become the object of the action of someone who is himself is the recipient of Nebuchadnezzar’s command.\(^{61}\) Such an ascendency of agency is only apparent, as the narrator’s confession of God’s role (Dan 1:2) makes clear.\(^ {62} \) Even so, the temple vessels and Judean youths are alike in Nebuchadnezzar’s eyes: they all fall under his power. However, Daniel and his friends are not the temple vessels with respect to Nebuchadnezzar’s action of \( בָּא\): they are not merely (sometimes, not even) recipients of Nebuchadnezzar’s desires, actions, and orders. Capable of their own responses and actions, they differ from the temple vessels, which silently receive all manner of honours and abuses from various kings. Neither are they merely passive recipients of wisdom: they are also agents of wisdom, implied by their initial conversations with Nebuchadnezzar as his courtiers (Dan 1:20).

**The Courtiers Nebuchadnezzar Desires**

Daniel 1:4 expresses the specific qualities that Nebuchadnezzar desires in the courtiers whom he orders to be brought “from the sons of Israel and from the seed of the kingdom and from the nobles” (Dan 1:3).\(^ {63} \)

Youths in whom there was not any blemish (אֲשֵֶ֣ר אֵָֽין־ב הֵֶ֣ם כ ל־מְּאוּם), and good in appearance (אֱֽשֶׂנֶ֥שׂ אֲשֶׂרֶ֖ת), and skilful in all wisdom (משֵׂשֶׂל לֵלִי), and knowing knowledge (יֶדְּעֵי וֹדֵי), and discerning in knowledge (מְבִינֵי מְבִינֵי), and in whom there was strength to stand (כ הִ לַעֲמִ֖ד) in the palace of the king. And they would learn the books and the tongue of the Chaldeans. (Dan 1:4)

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\(^{61}\) Redditt, commenting on Nebuchadnezzar’s actions in Dan 1:1–2, likewise recognises that “[f]rom Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective, he was the primary mover in human affairs,” and that “Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective” differs “[f]rom the redactor’s point of view, [that] Nebuchadnezzar simply functioned with the permission of God ... no doubt as punishment for sin”—presumably the “sin” of Jehoiakim and his people. Redditt, 43.


\(^{63}\) As Newsom insightfully points out when commenting on Dan 1:3–5, this “first characterization of Daniel and his three friends … also serve to characterize Nebuchadnezzar himself.” Newsom and Breed, 41. In what follows, I hope to elucidate a characterisation not only of Daniel and his friends, but also of Nebuchadnezzar as the agent who desires certain characteristics in his courtiers.
For the purposes of this discussion, I will divide this set of qualities into three categories. The first category is appearance, which concerns both bodily integrity and “good looks”: “Youths in whom there was not any blemish, and good in appearance.” Notably, Daniel’s status as being one “without blemish” (Dan 1:4) may also lay behind his desire not to defile himself (v.8), and so may reflect a characteristic of cultic purity that goes beyond mere “good looks.” However, I will primarily consider Daniel’s absence of blemish in terms of Nebuchadnezzar’s desire that the youths should also be “good in appearance” (Dan 1:4), so I will include “without blemish” under “appearance,” with the proviso that this reflects Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective. The second category is knowledge, which includes the characteristics of aptitude, wisdom, and understanding: being “skilful in all wisdom, and knowing knowledge, and understanding of knowledge” (Dan 1:4). The third category is strength, which Nebuchadnezzar believes is a trait necessary for them to be able to serve him in his court: “in whom there was strength to stand in the palace of the king” (Dan 1:4).

At the end of Dan 1:4 is Nebuchadnezzar’s instruction for improving these youths in terms of their knowledge (this is an “improvement” at least from Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective): “And they would learn the books and the tongue of the Chaldeans.” Nebuchadnezzar’s further instructions concerning their diet (Dan 1:5) is for the sake of ensuring their loyalty, as is Ashpenaz’s imposition of new names (and therefore new identities) upon them (v.7). However, the king’s diet may also have the purpose of improving their strength: after sharing in the king’s “fine foods” (מִפַּת־בִּג הַּמֶּלֶךְ) and wine, “they would grow great for three years, and upon completion they would stand before the king” (ךְיַעַמְדֵוּ לִפְנֵי הַּמֶּלֶךְ, Dan 1:5)—and standing before the king requires strength (v.4). The reader then learns that “from the children of Judah,” there are four youths who particularly stand out, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and

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64 Redditt ties together the phrase “without physical defect” (Dan 1:4) to the Judeans’ requirement to “keep themselves ritually fit” (vv.8–16) when serving as courtiers in exile in this way. Redditt, 45.

65 However, also see Fewell’s observation that Nebuchadnezzar, in requiring his servants to be “without blemish,” is acting as a kind of rival to Yhwh, “as they vie for the allegiance of their subjects.” Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 15.

66 Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 17.
Azariah (Dan 1:6), whose names are replaced with “Belteshazzar,” “Shadrach,” “Meshach,” and “Abednego” (v.7). The reader will find out that these four surpass their fellow students in terms of appearance, when they succeed at Daniel’s self-imposed test involving the diet of seeds and water: “And upon completion of ten days, their appearance seemed better (נִרְאִָ֤ה מַּרְא יהֶם֙ טַּ֔וֹב) and they were fatter of flesh than all the youths eating the fine foods of the king (ךְפַּתְבִִַּּֽ֥ג הַּמֶֽלֶ)” (Dan 1:15). This implies that Nebuchadnezzar’s pat-bag was intended not only to make the youths strong enough to stand before him, but also sufficiently “good-looking.” As courtiers who appear not only “good in appearance” but also “fat of flesh” (Dan 1:15), Daniel and his friends would give Nebuchadnezzar the impression of being the most successful in “growing great” from eating and drinking his food and wine (v.5), despite the reality that they ate and drank only seeds and water (vv.12, 16).67 When the chief eunuch brings them “before Nebuchadnezzar” (לִפְנ ֵ֖י נְבֻכַּדְנֶצַּֽר, Dan 1:18), they show themselves to surpass the other youths in conversational abilities (וַּיְדַּב ֣ר אִתָם֘ הַּמֶלֶ֒), implying the characteristic of knowledge, but perhaps also strength, since their fitness for standing before the king (ךְוַֽיַּעַֽמְדֵ֖וּ לִפְנ ִּ֥י הַּמֶָ֑לֶ), v.19) requires that characteristic (ךְוַֽכ ֹ֣חַ בָהֶַם לַּעֲמֵֹ֖ד בְה יכַּ֣ל הַּמֶָ֑לֶ, v.4). However, they excel most in characteristics related to knowledge, since in terms of “wisdom” and “understanding,” they surpass not only the other courtiers in their training class, but even all other advisors in Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, which he discovers by testing them (Dan 1:20).68

These characteristics of appearance, knowledge, and strength in Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are similarities they share with other characters in the Hebrew Bible. By sharing likenesses—particularly likenesses of action—with other biblical characters, Daniel and his friends mimic them for readers who juxtapose their similarities. In applying this idea of mimesis to literary characters, I hope to demonstrate the basis on which Daniel and his friends also show certain likenesses to the temple vessels: good in appearance, they are desirable to

67 Redditt correctly notes the oddness for a modern Western perspective that fatness is synonymous with beauty and health in Dan 1:15, and that for the historical perspective of the text, “a round, plump body was possible only for kings, nobles and those who had succeeded, and was deemed desirable,” Redditt, 47. Pace sees the divine gift of “further strength” to be consequent upon Daniel passing his own dietary test. Pace, 35.
68 Montgomery also believes that “[t]he stress lies … on the intellectual training” when commenting on Dan 1:4. Montgomery, 120. Pace sees evidence in Dan 1:20 that “Nebuchadnezzar himself judges Daniel and his companions with respect.” Pace, 37.
kings; formed in their own traditions of wisdom, they are like these vessels crafted by wise characters; strong enough to stand before Nebuchadnezzar and other monarchs, they are like the vessels that endure many kings’ reigns.

**Appearance**

Numbers 19:2, which combines the lemmas זֵאָן and מוּם (cf. Dan 1:4), implies the bodily integrity appropriate for ritual purity.

This is a statute of Torah which Yhwh commanded, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel, and take from among yourselves a red heifer, free of defect and in which there is no blemish (אֲשֵֶּ֤ר אֵָֽין־ב הּ  מִ֔וּם), which has not had a yoke taken up over it.” (Num 19:2)

The slaughter of this red heifer is intended for sprinkling its blood sprinkled over the “tent of meeting,” to cleanse it (Num 19:4), for burning (v.5), to mix its ashes with water to signify the “waters of impurity,” and to be “a sin offering” (v.9). If Daniel’s companions are like the red heifer, being “without blemish,” then the burnt offering (Num 19:5) foreshadows the (unsuccessful) burning of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace (Dan 3:23). Such a connotation for the observant reader lies outside Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective in the narrated present of Dan 1:4, yet such an awareness may become implicit in Nebuchadnezzar’s acknowledgment that “they gave their bodies” (וּוִיהַ֣ב גֶשְׁמ יהוֹן) for God’s service (Dan 3:28). The other connotation of being “without blemish” is the possession of bodily beauty:

All of you is beautiful, my companion, and there is no blemish in you (ךְָֽוּמֵּ֖וּם אֵֵ֥ין ב $.) (Song 4:7)

Since Song 4:7 is addressed to the feminine character, it seems to be the speech of the masculine lover. Just as Num 19:2 suggested a likeness between Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and the red heifer, Song 4:7 suggests likenesses of Daniel and his companions which are shared with a character who is herself likened to all manner of animals: she has eyes like doves, hair like goats (v.1), teeth like freshly shorn sheep (v.2), breasts like two young stags (v.5), and she is likened to living in mountain caves among lions and leopards (v.8). All this aligns with

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69 Seow also notes a similarity between Daniel and his friends and “animals offered up to God as sacrifice,” but when comparing Dan 1:4 and Lev 22:19–21. Seow, 23. See also Hartman and Di Lella, 129.
the character trait of having “good appearance,” desired by Nebuchadnezzar for his courtiers (Dan 1:4).

The combination of the words טוב and מראה in a single phrase describes all manner of female characters who find themselves desired by male characters. The first such character is Rebekah, granddaughter of Abraham’s brother Nahor (Gen 24:15), who is observed by Abraham’s servant coming down out of the city to fill up her jar with water:

And the girl was very good in appearance (טוב מראה מידה), a virgin and a man had not known her. And she went down to the spring and filled her jar and went up. (Gen 24:16)

When Isaac and Rebekah first encounter each other, Isaac experiences the desire to marry and love Rebekah (Gen 24:67), but it is Rebekah who first sees Isaac, and who first experiences desire consequent upon seeing her future spouse (vv.65–66). However, Isaac’s awareness of Rebekah’s “good appearance” (Gen 26:7) will fill him with fear, in that she would become the object of desire for men in Gerar (v.6), and their desire—so Isaac tells himself—would lead to his death:

And the men of the place asked about his wife, but he said, “She is my sister.” For he was afraid to tell them, “My wife,” “Lest the men of the place kill me because of Rebekah, since she is good in appearance (כי טוב מראה היא).” (Gen 26:7)

When Abimelech discovers Isaac’s deception (Gen 26:8), he retorts against Isaac’s excuse (v.9) that “it would have taken little for one of the people to lie with your wife” (v.10), whom he presumes would have done so believing that Rebekah was merely Isaac’s sister (and therefore “available,” to use a modern idiom). In saying this, Abimelech betrays his belief that Rebekah is inherently desirable for male characters.

The next character who has a “good appearance” is Bathsheba, whom King David first sees bathing on her roof, from the much higher vantage point of his own palace roof:

And it happened at the time of evening, and David rose from his bed and was walking about upon the roof of the house of the king. And he saw a woman washing herself from above on the roof, and the woman was very good in appearance (וַתָּבֹא אֵלָיו). (2 Sam 11:2)

Concerning their agency in what they do next, David initiates the action by sending messengers to Bathsheba who would “take her” (וַיִּשָּׁלַּח דָוִ֙ד מַּלְאָכִֵ֖ים וַּיִּקָּחֶֽהָ), but Bathsheba takes the action in which “she came to him” (וַתָּבָא אֲלֵיהָ), but then David is he who “lies with her”
David is in a higher position of power than Bathsheba: from the higher vantage of his palace roof, he can easily see Bathsheba undressed (2 Sam 11:2), and sends messengers who would “take her” (v.4). Bathsheba is assigned agency by “coming to him” (2 Sam 11:4), but from what motive? Out of a reciprocal desire for the king, or under the pressure of coercion? The narrator provides the reader with a clue in a parenthetical comment that, from the outset, Bathsheba was not bathing with any premeditated view to attracting the king’s attention, since “she was sanctifying herself from her uncleanness” (2 Sam 11:4). Bathsheba thus combines the characteristics of a “very good appearance” (2 Sam 11:2), of acting to purify herself (vv.2, 4), and of being desired by a king (vv.2–4). In these three aspects, she shares a likeness with Daniel’s “good appearance” (Dan 1:4, 15), his desire not to defile himself (v.8), and his inclusion within a cohort desired by Nebuchadnezzar for his court, albeit to become wise advisors who serve in his court (vv.3–5), distinct from David’s desire of Bathsheba for his harem. Bathsheba, although one of many wives of David, provides Israel with a wise king to succeed him, by giving birth to and raising Solomon, and by her shrewd manipulations of court politics at the end of David’s reign (1 Kgs 1:15–21).

The next character “good in appearance” is Queen Vashti, whose beauty and attractiveness is given as Ahasuerus’s reason for commanding his seven eunuchs, on his feast’s seventh day (Esth 1:10), to bring her from her feast for the women (v.9), to be displayed before the eyes of other feasters:

To bring Vashti the queen into the presence of the king with a royal crown, to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was good in appearance (כָּיְּטוֹב מַרְּאֵּה הָֽיא). (Esth 1:11)

Ahasuerus’s desire to display Vashti’s beauty follows his ostentatious display of wealth, luxury, and magnanimity before his lords and ministers (Esth 1:3–4), then in his palatial gardens for Susa’s citizens (v.5), when he shows off his fine furniture, including “couches of gold and silver” (מִטֹת זָהָב וָכֶַ֗סֶף, v.6), and serves them the king’s wine “in gold vessels and vessels from a variety of vessels” (בִּכְלֵי זָהָּב וְכָלִּים מִכָלִּים שׁוֹנִים, v.7). Ahasuerus’s attempt to show off the beauty of Vashti (Esth 1:11) occurs at the climax of his second feast, “as the heart of the king was good in wine” (כְּטִּ֥וֹב לַבַּיִּ֖ן, v.10), but the climax never arrives, because Vashti refuses to come
when the king calls, enraging him (v.12). She thus acts in a manner which inert gold, silver, vessels, and wine could never do. Ahasuerus’s behaviour in this scene is suggestive of Belshazzar’s acts of giving a great feast for a thousand of his lords (Dan 5:1; cf. Esth 1:3), making decisions under the influence of wine (אכון חמר, Dan 5:2; cf. Esth 1:10), and giving his guests gold and silver vessels for drinking wine (Dan 5:3–4; cf. Esth 1:7). Despite being like him, Ahasuerus is not Belshazzar, in that Belshazzar desecrates the vessels “from the temple, the house of God, in Jerusalem” (Dan 5:3), while praising of “the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone” (v.4).

The last character described as “good in appearance” is Esther. The king’s courtiers advise him following the debacle involving Vashti:

And they said—the youths of the king who served him—Let them seek out for the king young virgin women, good in appearance (טוֹבַת מַרְאֶָֽה). And let the king appoint overseers over every province of his kingdom, and gather every young virgin woman, good in appearance (טוֹבַת מַרְאֶָׂ֜ה), to Susa, the palace, to the house of women, to the hand of Hegai, the eunuch of the king who keeps watch over the women, and let them be given massages and perfumes. (Esth 2:2–3)

The youths’ final word of advice is, “And the young woman who is pleasant in the eyes of the king, she will reign instead of Vashti,” to which the king readily agrees (Esth 2:4). The narrator then introduces Mordecai, grandson of Kish the Benjamite (Esth 2:5), who shares with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah the characteristic of being “led into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,” along with a “king of Judah” (v.6). When Hadassah, or Esther, is introduced in the next verse, she shares the characteristic of being “good in appearance” with Daniel and his friends:

And he was a guardian over Hadassah, she was Esther, daughter of his uncle, since there was no father or mother for her. And the girl was beautiful in shape and good in appearance (טוֹבַת מַרְאֶָֽה). And at the death of her father and her mother, Mordecai took her for a daughter. (Esth 2:7)

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70 Pace notes attempts by the scholars of Talmud to draw connections between Daniel and Esther, in terms of both behaviour (resolve to keep a kosher diet) and benevolent relationships, as well as attempts to create a genealogical connection between Nebuchadnezzar and Vashti, suggesting a similarity of their characterisation of these two monarchs. Pace, 29.

71 Shepherd briefly notes Daniel’s likeness to Esther while comparing Dan 1:4 to Esth 2:7, but unfortunately does not spell out the implications of such a comparison. Shepherd, 71.
Other characteristics shared between Esther and Daniel and his companions are being taken into the king’s court and placed under a chief servant, presumably a eunuch (Hegai, Esth 2:8; Ashpenaz, Dan 1:3, 7), and winning favour with this palace steward (חֶ֣סֶד, Esth 2:9, לְחֵֶ֖סֶד, Dan 1:9). Where Esther differs from Daniel and his friends, however, is in her initial acceptance of the king’s luxuries, such as cosmetics, her portion of food (Esth 2:9), massages, anointing with myrrh, and perfumes (v.12), but Daniel is concerned from the beginning not to defile himself with the king’s fine foods and wine (Dan 1:8). However, Esther’s actions come to align with Daniel’s repeated action of fasting (Dan 1:16; 9:3; 10:3), in her decision to fast and petition the king (Esth 4:16), when she learns from Mordecai about the danger to her people (vv.8–9), and potentially to herself (vv.13–14).

The implication of “desirability,” which I have located in “appearance” (מראה), suggests receiving another’s action of “seeing” (ראה). In his self-imposed test of dieting on vegetables and water, Daniel asks his guard “to see” his appearance (ראה), in the awareness of the danger that Nebuchadnezzar might also “see” his “appearance” (ראה):

“And may they be seen (וּגוֹרֵּא), before your presence, our appearance (וּמַרְּאִֵ֔ינ) and the appearance (וּמַרְּאֵה) of the youths eating the fine foods of the king, and as you see (תִּרְּאִ֖ה), do with your servants.” (Dan 1:13)

Daniel became aware that Nebuchadnezzar might “see” his appearance in a way displeasing to him, when hearing Ashpenaz’s warning:

But the chief eunuch said to Daniel, “I fear (יָרֵא) my lord the king, who appointed your food and drink, which is why when he sees (יראה) that your faces more miserable (יָרָה אֲנֶת פְּנֵיכֶָׂ֜ם זָעֲ֣ם) than all the youths of your exilic group, and you would make me forfeit my head with the king.” (Dan 1:10)

There may be a pun here, involving the words “fearful” (ךָרַךְ) and “he will see” (ךָרַךְ). In this context, Daniel’s request to the guardian (Dan 1:13) carries an implied subtext: “do not be afraid (to disobey the king’s order).” This is all suggestive of the dominative power in Nebuchadnezzar’s act of “seeing” among his court, at least as perceived by his chief steward.
Ashpenaz: if one’s “appearance” is not what Nebuchadnezzar desires to “see,” death could ensue—if not for the one of aberrant appearance, then at least for the minister responsible.72

Concerning the action of “seeing” (ראה), there are two occasions where a Judean king acts to “show” (ראה in the hiphil) “vessels,” “gold,” and “silver” to a Babylonian king’s messengers:

And Hezekiah listened to them, and he showed them (וַיַּרְאֵם) all the treasure house, the silver and the gold (אֶת־הַכֶסֶף וְּאֶת־הַזֹּלֶל) and the spices and the good oil and the house of his vessels (וְּאֵת  הַכֶּלֶּים), and all that was found in his treasuries. There was not a thing which Hezekiah did not show them (לֹא־הֶרְאִיתִם) in his house and in all his dominion. (2 Kgs 20:13)

And Hezekiah rejoiced over them, and he showed them (וַיַּרְאֵם) his treasure house, the silver and the gold (אֶת־הַכֶסֶף וְּאֶת־הַזֹּלֶל) and the spices and the good oil and all the house of his vessels (וְּאֵת  הַכֶּלֶּים), and everything which was found in his treasuries. There was not a thing which Hezekiah did not show them (לֹא־הֶרְאִיתִם) in his house and in all his dominion. (Isa 39:2)

Hezekiah’s action of “showing” occurs in narrated time which is past relative to Nebuchadnezzar’s seizure of “the vessels of the house of God” (Dan 1:2), which are also “gold and silver” (5:2). Hezekiah’s action is specified as occurring “at that time” (בָּעַת הַהִיא, 2 Kgs 20:12; Isa 39:1), when the king of Babylon demonstrates friendship for Hezekiah, before (2 Kgs 20:12) or after (Isa 39:1) hearing of his illness. Hezekiah’s action of “showing” his wealth to the Babylonian envoys (2 Kgs 20:13; Isa 39:2) raises the reader’s expectation that the Babylonian king might desire to see and even possess those same vessels, when he hears of them. Such a desire is revealed by Isaiah, represented as a character in the third person, when he demands to know the envoys’ origin and message, about which Hezekiah unconcernedly answers: “from a distant land” (2 Kgs 20:14; Isa 39:3). Isaiah’s anxiety rises, and asks what they “saw” (ראה) in his house, but Hezekiah, still unconcerned, answers that they have “seen” (ראה) everything, and that there was nothing he did not “show” them (לֹא־הֶרְאִיתם, 2 Kgs 20:15; Isa 39:4). Now Isaiah makes his oracle, in the narrated time of Hezekiah’s reign, but looking forward to the future narrated time of Dan 1:1–3.73


73 Lester presents a vigorous argument that Dan 1:3 is a deliberate allusion to Isa 39:7, and that the author of Daniel quite consciously intends Daniel and his friends to be portrayed as eunuchs, against a general trend of
And Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of Yhwh! Behold, the days are coming, and everything in your house will be lifted, and what your fathers stored up until this day, into Babylon! A thing will not remain, says Yhwh. And from your sons who went out from you, who will be begotten, will be taken, and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” (2 Kgs 20:16–18)

And Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of Yhwh of the hosts! Behold, the days are coming, and everything in your house will be lifted, and what your father stored up until this day, Babylon! A thing will not remain, says Yhwh. And from your sons who went out from you, who will be begotten, will be taken, and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” (Isa 39:5–7)

Hezekiah, who was previously perturbed at his own span of time suddenly ending through sickness and death (2 Kgs 20:1–3; Isa 38:1–3), now seems immune to anxiety, since his own time will now remain peaceful and prosperous (2 Kgs 20:19; Isa 39:8). However, in his anxiety over what a Babylonian king may “see,” Ashpenaz is not unlike Isaiah.

Knowledge

Nebuchadnezzar, after bringing the temple vessels back to Babylon (Dan 1:2), orders Ashpenaz to bring from Jerusalem (v.3) youths who are not only without blemish and good-looking (reflecting the beauty of the vessels), but also “skilful in all wisdom, and knowing knowledge, and discerning in knowledge” (משכלים כלים חכמה, וידע ידוע מיומין פה, v.4). The knowledge-related metaphorical link between the temple vessels and Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, concerns the vessels’ need of wise crafters for their construction, and the youths’ previous formation in wisdom, which alludes to a wisdom beyond that necessary for crafting skills.

I will build links on their character traits of being “skilful in all wisdom” (employing the verbal root שלל and the noun חכמה), “knowing knowledge” (using the verbal root ידע and the noun דעת), and “discerning in knowledge” (using the verbal root בין and the noun דעת). The only other occurrence of שלל חכמה is in the Psalms: “A beginning of wisdom is the fear of Yhwh, good success is for all those doing them (ODEV חכמה; דוע ידוע ידוע מיומין), his praise stands always” (Ps 111:10). Here wisdom (beginning in the fear of Yhwh) relates to “good

biblical scholarship which refrains from seeing Daniel as someone castrated. Lester, 123-25. Newsom notes a later Jewish tradition (b. Sanh. 93b) which links the future sons of Hezekiah in Isaiah’s oracle (Isa 39:7) to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, serving Nebuchadnezzar “as eunuchs.” Newsom and Breed, 42. See also Hartman and Di Lella, 130; Anderson, 4.
success” for those who perform the deeds commended in the psalm, and the fearer of Yhwh will be honoured with praise. Commended in this psalm is “acting with trust and uprightness” (Ps 111:8), actions which have “all of [God’s] precepts” as its object (v.7). Being among those who fear Yhwh means that one is among those whom Yhwh feeds as though among a pack of carnivorous predatory animals (טֶ֭רֶף), for whom God provides as an expression of the eternal remembrance of God’s covenant (Ps 111:5). God’s “name” is also characterised as “holy and fearful” (וֹקָדֵ֖שׁ וְנוֹרָ֥א שְׁמֽוֹ, Ps 111:9).

Nebuchadnezzar expects his courtiers already to be “skilful” or “successful in wisdom” (וּמַּשְכִילִ֣ים בְכָל־חָכְמַָ֗ה, Dan 1:4), which he hopes to enhance through a Babylonian education, combined with a share in the king’s diet (vv.4–5). Psalm 111 presents another perspective on those who have “good success” and are just “beginning” in “wisdom” (v.10): their education in wisdom (v.10) and share in food likened to “prey” (טֶ֭רֶף, v.5) begins in their action of fearing Yhwh (vv.5, 10).

More occurrences of “knowing knowledge” appear in the wisdom literature, particularly in relation to the act of speech. In Job’s words: “As for your knowledge, I also know (כְֽדַּעְתְכֶם), and I do not fall beneath you” (Job 13:2). His claim to knowledge is based on the actions of seeing (ראַה) and understanding (בין): “Lo! Everything my eyes have seen (רָאֲתָ֣ה), my ears also understood it (וַּתִָּ֥בֶן)” (Job 13:1). The other co-occurrence of יָדַּ֣עְתִי and גַּם־אָָ֑נִי in Job indicates Job’s disavowal of knowledge and understanding, despite his previous presumption to speak and advise, when his dispute with God concludes itself: “Who is this who conceals advice without knowledge (בְֽלִִ֫י דִָּ֥עַּת)? Therefore, I have declared but I did not understand (וְלֹ֣א אָבִָ֑ין), impossibilities for me and I did not know (וְלֹ֣א א דָֽעַּת)” (Job 42:3). In Proverbs, “knowing knowledge,” understanding (תְבוּנָה), and an absence of foolishness (כְסִי) are proven in one who refrains from speaking, rather than one who speaks: “Walk away from a foolish (כְסִי) person: you did not know lips of knowledge (וּבַּל־יֵָ֜דַַּ֥֗עְתָ שִפְת י־דָֽעַּת)” (Prov 14:7); “One restrained in his

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74 Hebbard, when commenting on Dan 1:4, recognises that these characteristics placed at this point in the narrating of the text means “that Daniel and his three companions come to the scene as ones with prior educational training.” Hebbard, 63.
76 For Bergant, what Job does not know or understand is God’s sovereignty over the cosmos and chaos. Dianne Bergant, Job; Ecclesiastes, Old Testament Message (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982), 205.
speech is a knower of knowledge (חוכש אכפיי ידע פנים), and one cool in spirit is a person of understanding (חוכש אמירות ידע פנים), (17:27). One who has strained for wisdom, like Agur, son of Jakeh (Prov 30:1), is expected to disavow wisdom and knowledge when speaking of themselves: “But I have not learnt wisdom, and the knowledge of holy ones I do not know” (ולא ידעתי חכמה ודעת קדשים אדעת, v.3). Agur’s disavowal is especially appropriate in that he strained for knowledge of the heavens, their winds and waters, and the earth’s far reaches (Prov 30:4): human beings should only claim such divine knowledge when it is mediated by divine speech (vv.5–6). Even Daniel, when summoned to narrate Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream and its interpretation, takes care to disavow any more wisdom than what has been revealed to him (Dan 2:30), since it involves the future determined by God (v.29). In direct contrast is Balaam, son of Beor, who claims the right to speak at great length because he “knows knowledge of Elyon” (ודע דעת עליון), claims visions of Shaddai (מגלה שדי), but shows enough respect, at least, to fall to the ground (Num 24:16). In receiving visions of God, Balaam is like Daniel, but Daniel, in his visions, knows his need to seek out the proper interpretation (Dan 7:16), aware of his own difficulty in understanding (ומברכם באור, 8:15), and even lack of understanding after hearing the interpretation (ואין בין, v.27). The last co-occurrence ofידע and בינה is in Second Isaiah, which asserts the absence of privilege in human beings’ “knowledge” and “knowing” with respect to God, especially concerning the divine administration of justice in the world: “By whom was he advised, and made him understand (בינה), and taught him in a path of justice (ולמד יהושע דעה, 8:15), and taught him knowledge (וַיְלַמְדֻּהוּ מַדַָּע), and made known to him a way of discernment (וַדָּרֶךְ תְבוּנֵוָּה)?” (Isa 40:14). This lesson may have been learnt, at last, by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:32, 34).

With respect to being “discerning” or “understanding of knowledge” (מקרא מדבר, Dan 1:4), the only other co-occurrence of בינה and מדבר is:

And these four youths, God gave them knowledge (מדע) and made them skilful in all literature and wisdom, and made Daniel to understand (הבין) during every vision and dreams. (Dan 1:17)

Daniel 1:17 indicates God’s actions by which God allows the four protagonists, especially Daniel, to fulfil Nebuchadnezzar’s expectations (vv.4–5), and even to surpass them upon being
introduced to him (vv.18–20). Daniel 1:4 lists the qualities Nebuchadnezzar desired to be already present in the youths of his court, including the knowledge-related qualities of being “skilful in all wisdom, and knowing knowledge, and discerning in knowledge” (וּמַּשְכִילִים בְכָל־חָכְמַָ֗ה וְיִֹ֤דְע י דַּ֙עַּת֙ וּמְבִינ ֣י מַּדַָּ֔ע). The end of this verse indicates the additional knowledge-related attributes Nebuchadnezzar wished to be imparted upon these courtiers-in-training: “And they would learn the literature and the tongue of the Chaldeans” (וּלֲלַּמְדִָּם ס ֵ֖פֶר וּלְשִׁ֥וֹן כַּשְדִֽים, Dan 1:4). Daniel 1:17 first gives the sense that God, by God’s act of “giving,” causes Daniel and his friends to match Nebuchadnezzar’s expectation of their “knowledge” (מַדָע, vv.4, 17). Second, there is the sense that they would be “skilful in all wisdom” (וּמַּשְכִילִים בְכָל־חָכְמַָ֗ה) and “learn the literature and the tongue of the Chaldeans” (וְהַּשְכ ֵ֖ל בְכָל־ס ֣פֶר וְחָכְמָָ֑ה, Dan 1:4), by God’s act of making them “skilful in all literature and wisdom” (וּֽלֲלַּמְדִָּ֥ם ס ֵ֖פֶר וּלְשִׁ֥וֹן כַּשְדִֽים, v.17). Third, there is also the sense that they would be “understanding of knowledge” (וּמְבִינ ֣י מַּדַָּ֔ע, Dan 1:4), by God making Daniel specifically “understanding in every vision and dreams” (וְהַּבִּֽין בְכָל־חָזֵ֖וֹן וַּחֲלֹמֽוֹת, v.17).

Daniel and his friends share similarities with Solomon in being given knowledge and wisdom by God. For the phrase, “God gave them knowledge” (נָתַּ֙ן לָהֵֶ֧ם הָֽאֱלֹהִָ֛ים מַּדָע, Dan 1:17), the only other co-occurrences of נתן and מַּדָע are in 2 Chr 1:10, 12, in which God is the giver of both knowledge and “wisdom” (חָכְמָה). Quite appositely, Solomon receives knowledge and wisdom from God appearing to him at night, implying a dream (2 Chr 1:7). In the nocturnal apparition, God tells Solomon, “Ask what I shall give to you” (שְָאֵַ֖ל מִָּ֥ה אֶתֶ נִלָֽךְ, 2 Chr 1:7), to which Solomon first acknowledges God’s fidelity (חֶ֣סֶד) to his father David (v.8), shown especially in making him king as David’s son over a great people (כִֽי־מִ֣י יִשְׁפַֹּ֔ט אֶת־עַּמְךִָּ֥ הַּזֵֶ֖ה הַּגָדֽוֹל, v.9). Then Solomon makes his request:

“Now wisdom and knowledge give to me (וְהַּבִּֽין בְכָל־חָזֵ֖וֹן וַּחֲלֹמֽוֹת), and let me go out before this people and let me come back, since who will judge your people, this great one (כִֽי־מִ֣י יִשְׁפַֹּ֔ט אֶת־עַּמְךִָּ֥ הַּזֵֶ֖ה הַּגָדֽוֹל)?” (2 Chr 1:10)

77 As noted by Seow, 29. Also see the linking of “success” and the “literature” of Torah in Josh 1:8; Neh 8:8, 13, and the linking of “success” and “wisdom” in Ps 111:10
Daniel did not ask God for wisdom or knowledge, and was given these qualities nevertheless (Dan 1:17), but Solomon asks God to give him wisdom and knowledge for the stated purpose of administering judgment over God’s people (2 Chr 1:10). Solomon’s request pleases God, who praises him for not asking for “wealth, riches, and glory, nor the life of those who hate you, and not even many days have you requested,” then, because he asked for “wisdom and knowledge with which to judge my people (חָכְמָ֣ה וּמַּדַָּ֔ע אֲשִֶׁ֤ר תִשְׁלָּ֥ו אֶת־עַמִַּ֔י),” over whom God made him king (2 Chr 1:11). God then promises Solomon not only “wisdom and knowledge,” but also “wealth, riches, and glory”:

“The wisdom and the knowledge is given to you (ךְָ֑הַחַמָּה וְּהַמַדָּ֖ע נַעְּלָה לִָ֑י), and wealth and riches and glory I will give to you, which there was no likeness for kings before you, and after you there will be no likeness.” (2 Chr 1:12)

A few points need to be made with respect to God, Solomon, Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel. First, Daniel never asks God for wisdom, but God still gives him wisdom (Dan 1:17): even when Daniel praises God for giving him wisdom and strength (חָכְמָ֣ה וּגְבוּרְתֵָ֖א יְהַּ֣בְתְ לִָ֑י, 2:23), he was originally seeking mercies from God (v.18). Only after his “vision of the night” (בְחֶזְוִָּ֥א דִֽי־ל יֵלְיֵָ֖א, Dan 2:19), will Daniel retrospectively recognise his prayer for mercy as one for strength and wisdom (v.23). However, like Daniel (Dan 2:19), Solomon receives knowledge and wisdom at night, when God appears to him (בַּלַּ֣יְלָה הַּֽוּא נִרְאִָּ֥ה אֱלֹהִֵ֖ים לִשְׁלֹמָֹ֑ה, 2 Chr 1:7). Second, in the example of Solomon, God is pleased to grant a king wisdom and knowledge for the explicit purpose of judging God’s people. At the beginning of the narrative of Daniel, the human sovereignty over God’s people passes from Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:1–2), just as custody over Solomon’s wisely-crafted vessels passes from the Jerusalem temple to Nebuchadnezzar, who entrusts them to the temple treasury of his god (v.2). Such custody over the vessels of God’s house and over God’s people is limited in future time: the Babylonian exile will come to an end (Dan 1:21). However, in the limited time that Nebuchadnezzar is responsible for administering judgment over God's people, justice-oriented wisdom and knowledge will bring him closest to the virtues of a Solomon-like reign, which may protect him from a future loss of sovereignty longer into the future. Third, and perhaps signalling potential tragedy for Nebuchadnezzar, God’s promise to Solomon of wisdom, knowledge, wealth, and
glory means that no other king will be comparable to him in these aspects: “... which it was not like for the kings which were before you, and after you there will not be one like this” (2 Chr 1:12). However, as the narrative of Daniel progresses, the reader may pick up notions that God has given Nebuchadnezzar much glory over the peoples (Dan 2:37–38; 4:19), and enough wealth to construct a tall, golden image (3:1). However, even if God has given Nebuchadnezzar Solomon-like wealth and glory, it is not clear whether Nebuchadnezzar ever attains Solomon-like wisdom and knowledge, even if he desires it (Dan 1:2, 4). Fourth, Solomon’s reception of wisdom and knowledge occurs in the high place of Gibeon (2 Chr 1:3), before “the bronze altar which Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, had made” (v.5). Bezalel is one of Moses’s chief artisans, “filled with a spirit of God” (וּנַַּחַת אֲלֹהִים, Exod 31:3; like Nebuchadnezzar’s later recognition of Daniel, Dan 4:5–6), and “with wisdom (בְחָכְמַה) and with understanding (וּבִתְבוּנָה) and with knowledge (וּבְדֵעָת) and in every craft” (Exod 31:3), for designing objects “with the gold (בַּזָהִ), silver (וּבַּכֵָ֖סֶף), and bronze (וּבַּנְּחֹֽשֶׁת)” (v.4). God speaks of giving Bezalel wisdom (נָתַּ֣תִי חָכְמֳָה, Exod 31:6), as does Moses (נָתַ֨ן יְהוֵָ֜ה חָכְמִָ֤ה וּתְבוּנָה, 36:1) and the narrator (וֹ ָ֑נָתֵַּ֧ן יְהוָָ֛ה חָכְמֵָ֖ה בְלִב, v.2). Nebuchadnezzar possesses the vessels made in Solomon and Hiram-abi’s wisdom, but there is no indication that he ever prays in their presence, as Solomon prays for wisdom and knowledge before the bronze altar made in Bezalel’s wisdom. If Nebuchadnezzar had shown more honour to these temple vessels, rather than forgetting about them, leaving them for Belshazzar to inherit, could he, like Solomon, have had more success in gaining wisdom in a dream or night vision, which will soon happen (Dan 2:1)?

**Strength**

The last characteristic Nebuchadnezzar desires of the youths he orders to be brought from Judah (Dan 1:3) is “strength,” specifically the “strength within them to stand in the palace of the king” (וְאָשֶׁ֣ר כֹּחַּ בָהֶַּם לַעֲמֵֹד בְּה יכַּל הַַּמֶָלֶךְ, v.4). As Nebuchadnezzar instructs Ashpenaz further, he expects, from sharing his diet of food and wine, that “they would grow great (וּלְגַּדְלֵָם) for three years, and at the end of that, they would stand in the presence of the king (יַּעַֽמְדֵוּ לִפְנ ִּ֥י הַּמֶֽלֶךְ)” (Dan 1:5). I will examine the relationships between “strength to stand,” and the transfer
of sovereignty, eating and drinking, and fear, to identify why Nebuchadnezzar may want “strong” courtiers, and what relationship with the temple vessels this implies.

The phrase “strength to stand” occurs predominately in Daniel (Dan 8:6, 7, 22; 10:16, 17; 11:6, 15, 25), but sometimes elsewhere (Jer 48:45; Ezra 10:13; and perhaps Exod 9:16; Job 23:6). In my reading of the occurrences in Daniel, the loss of “strength of stand” in a king usually signals the transfer of sovereignty from him to a stronger king. In Daniel’s vision by the river Ulai at Susa (Dan 8:2), he sees a ram “standing” (עָמַּד, v.3), against whom a male goat “comes” from the west (v.5), and charges the ram, who represents the Persian and Median kings (v.20):

6And he came against the ram, the master of the pair of horns, which I saw standing (עָמַד) before the river, and he charged him with the fury of his strength (וָכָח). And I saw him reaching the side of the ram, and he became embittered against him and struck the ram, and he shattered both of his horns. And there was not strength (כָח) in the ram to stand (לַעְמַּד) before him, and he cast him to the ground and trampled him. And there was no rescue for the ram from his hand. (Dan 8:7)

Then it is the male goat’s time to “make great” (הִגְדִּיל, Dan 8:8), just as it had previously been the ram’s time to “make great” (וְהִגְדִּיל, v.4). The four horns which sprout up after the male goat’s “great horn” (הַקֶּרֶן הַגְדוֹלָה, Dan 8:8) represent the four successor kingdoms rising as Alexander’s newly conquered empire is divided up:

And about the shattered thing: and there were standing four in its stead, four kingdoms made out of the nation, and they will stand but without his strength (וָיַעֲמַּד הַּלֵּא בְּכֹח). (Dan 8:22)

Standing, but without the strength of the first horn, implies that they will not be able to conquer like Alexander, but also perhaps these successor kingdoms are limited in their future time, because of their deficiency in “strength.” In Dan 11, the “strength” to “stand” also occurs during the narrated struggle for sovereignty between two of the successor kingdoms, the Seleucids (ruled by “the king of the north”) and the Ptolemies (ruled by “the king of the south”). The southern king’s daughter is given to the northern king to ratify an alliance agreement, but she does not hold onto “strength of the arm” (מִיִּבְשָׁה הַזְּרַע), and so he (presumably her child, הַיֹּלְדָה) will not “stand” (וְלִֹא יַּעֲמֹד), but will be given away with his mother (Dan 11:6). When the king of the north “comes,” the soldiers (the “arms”) of the south “will not stand” (ולֹא יַּעֲמַד), nor will there be any “strength to stand” (וְאִּין כֵֹ֖חַ לַּעֲמֹד), leading to the loss of a military stronghold
The northern king again summons his own “strength” (וֹכֹח֙), and so the southern king is unable to “stand” (וְלֹ֣א יַעֲמַֹּ֔ד), despite his great army, since the northern king’s “strength” lies in his aptitude for intrigue and hatching plots against the southern king (Dan 11:25). Interestingly, those who connive with the northern king’s plots are those eating from the southern king’s table, from his pat-bag (וּוְאֹכְלֵָ֖ה יִשְׁבְרֵ֖וּה, Dan 11:26). My suspicion is that Nebuchadnezzar’s desire for “strong” courtiers implies that he sees their origin to be from a weaker kingdom and king (Jehoiakim) who could not stand against him, but nevertheless expects his new courtiers to be made “strong” enough “to stand” before his presence. That the southern king fell because of those eating from his pat-bag (Dan 11:26) shows that Nebuchadnezzar cannot necessarily enforce loyalty with his pat-bag (1:5), although he may still expect his food and drink to supply such loyalty. However, I will suggest that Nebuchadnezzar’s imposition of the pat-bag also implies his desire to strengthen the Judean youths (Dan 1:5).

Ashpenaz is anxious that Daniel consume the food and drink which Nebuchadnezzar assigned to him (אֶת־מַּאֲכֵַ֖לכֵֶ֖ם וְאֶת־מִשְׁת יכֶָ֑ם, Dan 1:10), but Daniel has other ideas about what he and his companions will eat and drink (וְנֹאכְלֵָ֖ה, וְנִשְׁתֶֽה). “Strength” (כֹח) can be produced by “eating” (אֶאֶכְל) or “drinking” (שֶׂתָה), in intertexts containing these words (1 Sam 28:20, 22; 1 Kgs 19:8; Isa 44:12), just as one can even “eat” the “strength” of another person or land (Job 31:39; Hos 7:9). After Saul’s encounter with the angry ghost of Samuel (1 Sam 28:15–19), summoned by “the mistress of the bottle” (בַּֽעֲלַת־אֵ֖וֹב), or necromancer, at Endor (v.7):

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78 Concerning the transition from Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:1–2), Fewell aptly observes: “A native, though weak, king is harshly succeeded by a strong, but foreign, one.” Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 13.

79 However, Fewell, commenting on the link between Dan 1:5 and 11:26, believes that such a “rebellion against the king of the south in Dan 11:26 is unexpected and extreme because the rebels eat the king’s pat-bag.” Ibid., 16.

80 My argument here is not necessarily incompatible with Fewell’s well-put argument that the king is trying to make them dependent to ensure their “political allegiance” (Ibid., 17). If “dependence” is not assumed to be synonymous with “weakness,” then Nebuchadnezzar could desire the youths to be weaker relative to himself, but perhaps also “stronger” by disassociating them from a “weaker” king and realigning them to himself as the “stronger” king. This characterisation aligns with his trait of arrogance.

81 See Gardner’s interesting identification of the bear’s “mouth and teeth” (Dan 7:5) as weapons, and her comparison to Nebuchadnezzar’s or Babylon’s “devouring” (אֶאֶכְל) Israel (Jer 30:16; 51:34). Anne E. Gardner, “Decoding Daniel: The Case of Dan 7,5,” Biblica 88, no. 2 (2007): 231.
And Saul hurried and fell his full height to the earth, and he feared greatly (וַיְבָשָׁ֖ס אֵֽל) because of the words of Samuel, just as strength was not in him (וִֹ֔גַם־כֹ֙חַ לָא־הָיִ֣י הָבֵ֔), since he had not eaten (וַיְאָכְּל֗) bread all that day and all that night. (1 Sam 28:20)

Saul’s falling is occasioned partly by his not eating, but also partly by Samuel’s words which forecast the fall of Saul’s kingdom and the transfer of sovereignty to David (1 Sam 28:17). Saul has even less desire to eat, after Samuel’s oracle from the grave (1 Sam 28:23), but receives eminently sensible and compassionate care from a lady who raises the dead (vv.23–25), whose plea is:

“And now, please hear, even you, to the voice of your maidservant, and may I set before your face a fragment of bread. And eat (וְאֱכָ֑וֹל), and there will be strength in you (וַיֹ֣אכַל וַי ַּ֔שְׁתְּ), since you will walk on your way.” (1 Sam 28:22)

Next, after Ahab tells his wife about Elijah’s slaughter of the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 19:1), some of whom “ate at the table of Jezebel” (אֹכְלִ֖ים גּ֜שִּׁים אִ֙זְבָּל, 18:19), she sends him a message, threatening his life (19:2). Elijah’s response is to “rise and walk for the sake of his life” to Beer-Sheba (1 Kgs 19:3), but he prays for his own death under the shade of a broom tree, after one day walking in the wilderness (v.4). God responds through an angel waking Elijah and telling him to “rise and eat” (קִּוּם אֱכֽוֹל), and he “eats and drinks” (וַיֹ֣אכַל וַי שְּתֶָ֑ה) a stone-baked bread-cake and water from a jar (יֶרַע לְרֶפֶת וְצַפַּ֣חַת מָָ֑יִם), which has appeared before him (v.6). The angel repeats the command to “rise and eat” (קִּוּם אֱכֽוֹל), after which Elijah gains the “strength” necessary for a long journey:

And he rose and he ate and he drank (וַיֹ֣אכַל וַי ַּ֔שְׁתְּ) and he walked in the strength of that eating (בְּכ ֵ֣חַ׀ ה אֲכ ַ֣י ְה הַה ִ֗יא), forty days and forty nights, up to the mountain of God, Horeb. (1 Kgs 19:8)

Second Isaiah gives the example of a person who begins with “strength in the arm,” but loses it due to a lack of “drinking” water:

A crafter of iron by a tool, and he works with coal and with hammers, he shapes it and he works upon it with his strong arm (וֹּ ֵבַּזְּר עִ֣בְּרָהוֹת), even he is hungry and there is no strength, he does not drink (וְּאֵֵ֣ין כ ִ֔חַ ל א־ש ֵ֥ת ה) water and he becomes weary. (Isa 44:12)

This ironsmith is one of the engravers condemned in the oracle (Isa 44:11) for crafting idols for worship (וְאָלָ֖א־רָכָֽב), against whom the oracle tells the audience “do not fear” (אַל־תִירָא, v.2), “do not be terrified and do not fear” (אַל־תִּפְחֲדוּ וְאַל־תִּרְה, v.8). It is the ironsmith weakened from not drinking water who is ordered: “let them stand, let them be terrified” (וּ ֵיַֽעֲמַֹּ֔דוּ יִפְחֲדוּ, Isa
44:11). Considering these examples where “eating” and “drinking” confer “strength,” perhaps Nebuchadnezzar expects his captives from a “weaker” kingdom to be made sufficiently “strong” by consuming his own food and drink, despite Daniel and his friends finding their strength from eating seeds and drinking water (Dan 1:12).

Among some of these intertexts and others, the absence of strength, or being in the presence of a stronger one, can provoke fear (1 Sam 28:20; 2 Kgs 17:36), just as the possession of strength accompanies the absence of fear (Isa 40:9). Possibly Ashpenaz’s awareness of Nebuchadnezzar as a “strong” king lies behind his “fear” of “my lord the king” (Dan 1:10). As I see Nebuchadnezzar here, he is aware of himself as a fearsome king—as expressed in his attempt to rule his servants in Dan 2; 3—and he is concerned that captives from a “weaker” kingdom will not be strong enough to stand before his presence, so the share in the royal diet is meant to implant the needed strength for them to be useful to him.

Similarities between the Judean youths and the temple vessels, in terms of “strength,” are less explicit, but I will suggest that as a king’s “strength to stand” impacts upon his time as sovereign, youths and vessels from a “weaker” kingdom would appear unable to endure as long as the “stronger” king. Despite this appearance, however, they have the strength to outlast many kings, while each king loses his own “strength” to be replaced by the next king.

Like Saul who did not retain strength out of both fear and not eating (1 Sam 28:20), Daniel will later become fearful after refraining from eating. In the narrated time of Cyrus’s third year (Dan 10:1), Daniel will be mourning for three weeks (v.2), during which, “desirable bread I had not eaten (לֹ֣א אָכַַּ֗לְתִי) and flesh and wine had not come to my mouth” (v.3). While fasting from rich foods and wine, Daniel loses his “strength” when he receives his vision: “and there did not

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82 Newsom insightfully identifies Nebuchadnezzar’s diet as symbolizing “‘strong’ foods” as opposed to “‘weak’ foods,” since meat requires the “slaughter” of an animal, and wine requires “fermentation,” and has an “inebriating effect,” so both symbolise “power.” “By feeding the young men from his own rations, Nebuchadnezzar directs to them some of the abundant strength that flows from a powerful king.” Newsom and Breed, 50.

83 Hebbard presents an alternative understanding of “strength to stand,” first of all by translating and interpreting as “competent to serve,” i.e. “to serve in the palace of the king,” which he understands as “including the ability to take and carry out orders, having the proper poise, being graceful in movement, showing appropriate manners, being sensitive to social ranks, and understanding all duties in order for royal house operations to run smoothly.” Hebbard, 64. In my questioning of the text, however, I have been more curious about how Nebuchadnezzar sees his own and his servants’ power, and what Ashpenaz’s experience of “fear” (Dan 1:10) might say about how Nebuchadnezzar runs his court.
remain in me strength (לִאֲנָיִשָּׁר בִּנְפֹרְשָׁי), and my complexion was overturned upon me to desolation, and I did not retain strength (וְלִאֲנָיִשָּׁר בִּנְפֹרְשָׁי)” (Dan 10:8). He falls to the ground (Dan 10:9), but is commanded to “stand up” (וְהָעָמָ֗ד עַֽל־עָמְדֵּךָ), v.11 and “not to fear” (אַל־תוּרָא), v.12. In a narrated future distant from his entry into Babylon, Daniel will cry out:

16And behold one in the likeness of the children of humanity touched upon my lips. And I opened my mouth so that I would speak, and I said to the one standing (וְהָעָמָד עַֽל־עָמְדֵּךָ) in front of me, “My lord, during the vision my convulsions turned over me, and I did not retain strength (כָּחַ).” 17And how is the servant of my lord capable? This to discuss with my lord, this! And as for me since just now, there does not stand within me strength (לִאֲנָיִשָּׁר בִּנְפֹרְשָׁי), and breath does not remain in me.” (Dan 10:16-17)

From the narrated present of Dan 1:8–16, Ashpenaz bears more resemblance to the future self of Daniel than does Daniel in his present self.

But the chief eunuch said to Daniel, “I fear (יָרֵא אֲנִי) my lord the king, who appointed your food and drink (אֶת־מַאֲכַלְכֵּם וְּאֶת־מְשָׂתיכֶם), which is why when he sees that your faces more miserable than all the youths of your exilic group, and you would make me forfeit my head with the king.” (Dan 1:10)

Daniel, in his present self, does not manifest the same fear as Ashpenaz of “my lord the king,” in that the chief servant is concerned for his own life should he be “seen” to neglect his king’s orders (Dan 1:10). Daniel, on the other hand, is less concerned about the potential consequences of disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar, but he is at least prudent enough to learn to hide his concern “not to defile himself” with the king’s food and wine (Dan 1:8). The difference between Daniel’s present (Dan 1:8–16) and future self (10:1–21) is explicable in terms of the difference he perceives between Nebuchadnezzar’s servant, Ashpenaz, and God’s angelic servant (10:5–6), and the different levels of sovereignty they mediate. However, from Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective, perhaps out of the awareness of the effect he has on his servants, he is concerned that his new batch of courtiers-in-training from a conquered kingdom would already have enough “strength within them to stand in the palace of the king”

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84 However, Anderson differs somewhat, in claiming—quite legitimately—that “the personal danger [Daniel] endured was both real and frightening,” on the basis that “the author uses the figure of Daniel to speak to his community.” Anderson, 6.
85 I concur with Redditt that the palace master’s fear “for his position and perhaps even his life” is the best explanation for his refusal of Daniel’s request, despite his “favor and sympathy to Daniel.” Redditt, 46.
86 The contrast between opposed allegiances to two lords, Ashpenaz’s (Dan 1:10) and the narrator’s (v.2), is aptly observed by Seow, 27; Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 20.
(Dan 1:4), and by eating and drinking the diet of a “strong” king (v.5), they will be able to serve him, without fear excessive enough to make them useless to him.

In his own eyes, Nebuchadnezzar has already demonstrated his “strength” by his capture of Jerusalem, its king, and its temple vessels (Dan 1:2): for him, he and his own kingdom have the “strength to stand,” but Jehoiakim and his kingdom did not. However, the narrator inserts a confession of faith here: “And my Lord gave into his hand Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and a portion of the vessels of the house of God” (Dan 1:2). In their past and future narrated times, the temple vessels have already pre-existed, and they will outlast, the narrated time of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom.87 Daniel, too, will “outlast” Nebuchadnezzar’s rule, at least until the “first year of Cyrus the king” (Dan 1:21),88 and perhaps until “the end of days” while he remains in a state of “rest” (12:13).89 If “strength” in the narrative of Daniel is measured by the duration of narrated time one is able to “stand,” when threatened by foreign aggression, then it is perhaps an irony that Nebuchadnezzar’s wish for courtiers with “strength to stand” means that some of them will outlast him and his reign, like the vessels he takes from the temple in Jerusalem.

**Groundwork for the Future Development of Nebuchadnezzar’s Character**

In this chapter, I have argued Nebuchadnezzar’s seizing of “the vessels of the house of God” (Dan 1:2) implants a desire for wisdom in him, as these vessels have lasted through their past narrated time as products of Solomon’s and Hiram-abi’s wisdom. God’s handing over of these vessels to Nebuchadnezzar fits a pattern where they have moved into or out of their rightful place, coinciding with an Israelite king listening, or not, to the advice of a prophet or to Torah, concerning idolatry. However, these vessels also outlast Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and will return to a restored temple, implying that he is limited in his future time to gain wisdom.

87 As implied by Seow, 30.
88 As noted in ibid., 20. Seow also uses the verb “outlast” of Daniel with respect to Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, ibid., 30. Pace also recognises the significance of Daniel enduring beyond “the status quo” imposed by Nebuchadnezzar. Pace, 38.
89 Redditt believes that Dan 1:21 was added to Dan 1 for the sake of “the lastest-dated vision in the book (10.1–12.4a),” which it “foreshadows.” Redditt, 48.
Nebuchadnezzar offers a fictive experience to the reader in which one may be inspired towards wisdom by relics of the past, but while constrained by the uncertainty of future time. When Nebuchadnezzar comes into possession of these products of wisdom, he also expresses a desire to possess and control youths of wisdom (Dan 1:4), expressed in his actions of “coming” to Jerusalem, “bringing” the vessels from there, and ordering the youths “to be brought” (vv.1–3). Daniel and his friends are like the vessels, in their appearance desirable to kings, in their formation in knowledge and wisdom, and in their strength to stand throughout many kings’ reigns. They are not vessels, in their possession of agency and the capability of directing Nebuchadnezzar’s desire for wisdom on a path different from his expectations.
Chapter 5: Knowing the Dream, Knowing the Time—Wisdom Hidden and Uncovered for Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:1–49)

Daniel 2:1–49 is the first full-length encounter between Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, where Daniel’s wisdom in interpreting dreams is put to the test by Nebuchadnezzar’s challenge to his court sages, and Daniel receives his first opportunity for instructing Nebuchadnezzar by interpreting his dream. Here I will discuss two gaps concerning Nebuchadnezzar’s and Daniel’s knowledge about Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, whether Nebuchadnezzar still “knows” his dream by remembering its imagery, or “knows” what it might mean, and how Daniel came to “know” Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. This will lead to a discussion of the connection between wisdom and the revelation of secrets, as how Daniel came to know the king’s dream. Next, I will draw character likenesses between Daniel and Joseph, and their knowledge of future narrated time, and between Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh, and their recognition of wisdom in their dream-interpreters. I will then analyse the metaphors and images of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, as interpreted by Daniel, in their connections to past narrated time, and what this might mean for future hopes. Finally, I will summarise Nebuchadnezzar’s relations with narrated time in Dan 2:1–49.

Gaps of Dan 2

Does Nebuchadnezzar Know His Own Dream?

The narrator tells how Nebuchadnezzar summons his sages to make known the dream he dreamt the night before (Dan 2:2), and Nebuchadnezzar (in his own voice) tells the sages about his anxiety to know his dream (v.3). There is an ambiguity in the “knowledge” sought by Nebuchadnezzar: does he want a verbalisation of the image-content he experienced while sleeping, or does he want to know the meaning of that dream imagery?¹ Such an ambiguity is also present for the court sages, who assume the king wants to know the meaning of his dream, and that he will communicate its content so that they may interpret it for him (Dan 2:4).²

However, Nebuchadnezzar disappoints their expectation by informing his court scholars he wants to hear both an account of the dream and its meaning, while adding a “carrot-and-stick” motivation in a verbal decree: rewards for fulfilling his task, punishment for failure (Dan 2:5–6). The court sages, however, either ignore or misunderstand the king’s decree, repeating their request for the king’s account of his dream (Dan 2:7). The relations between the king and his court quickly disintegrate from that point onwards, resulting in a near execution of all the scholars of Babylon (Dan 2:12). This surface reading of the first scene in Dan 2 raises the question of what Nebuchadnezzar knows. When the king demands an account of his own dream from the court sages, does he remember his own dream or not? A closely linked question is the king’s motives for making such an apparently unprecedented demand (Dan 2:10). There are four possibilities for closing the gap of the king’s memory/amnesia: (i) he remembers his dream, but does not know the interpretation; (ii) he remembers his dream, and knows the interpretation; (iii) he has forgotten his dream, and so cannot know the interpretation; (iv) he somehow knows the interpretation but has forgotten the dream (which is a counterintuitive possibility). These possibilities suggest the following four gap-fillings.

**Scenario 1: The King Remembers the Dream but Does Not Know the Interpretation**

If the king remembers the dream, but is confused about its meaning, then possibly he has a genuine desire to understand his dream as meaningful in its own right, but wants the sages to give the correct interpretation by testing them. This gap-filling is supported by Collins, who reads the context as implying that Nebuchadnezzar “simply wanted to understand the dream” (opposing the scenario of his forgetting), who tests his sages only as “a way of checking the reliability of the interpretation” (quoting Dan 2:9 as evidence). Similarly, Hartman and Di Lella also interpret the king as one who remembers the dream but who wants “assurance” of

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5 Collins, Daniel, 156.
“a reliable interpretation” (again quoting Dan 2:9 as evidence). Fewell identifies one of “[t]wo mutually exclusive explanations” (for why the conflict in Dan 2:2–12 happens) in the following terms: “he has not forgotten the dream, but for some reason feels the need to test the ability of his sages.” Under Fewell’s scenario, she imagines the king as being motivated by “political anxiety” and “paranoia,” when he wants to see if “he can trust their interpretation,” by checking to see “[i]f they can tell the dream.” In this scenario, where Nebuchadnezzar remembers the dream but does not know the interpretation, then his motives for demanding an interpretation from his sages could be due to anxiety or curiosity.

In favour of reading Nebuchadnezzar as anxious, his explosion into rage (Dan 2:12) may be explained as stemming from feelings of anxiety and insecurity, still present in his mind from the point in narrated time when he was dreaming (v.1). Anxiety could also explain his accusation that his sages are conspiring to lead him astray with a “lying word” (גֵּדֶר כְּבִיהֶי וּשְׁחִיתָהּ, Dan 2:9). However, his raging fit (Dan 2:12) could also be a response to the sages’ last words (vv.10–11) interpreted as an insult (whether deliberate or merely perceived), offending his personal sense of honour. The sages have just identified the king’s demand as unprecedented (Dan 2:10) and impossible (v.11), implying that he is cruel and irrational. Nebuchadnezzar’s command of mass execution (Dan 2:12) may only be intended as a way of saving face (while still intending to avert the execution as a public display of mercy, if possible), to keep the proper level of respect among his courtiers. Fear may be a common attitude of Nebuchadnezzar’s servants towards him, as it is for Ashpenaz (Dan 1:10). Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar wants to maintain his image as a man not to be trifled with, as a king to be feared. Even so, a high esteem of personal honour is compatible with anxiety. Nebuchadnezzar may still have anxiety about his underlings’ perception and respect of him. I would expect

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6 Hartman and Di Lella, 144. Fox acknowledges the ambiguity without resolving it, but finds the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar is deliberately “withholding” information more meaningful, since then “he is probing the inspiration of the interpreters, as if he too recognises that interpretations come from God.” Fox, 39.

7 Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 25.

8 Ibid.

9 Nelson, 82.

10 Kirkpatrick, 78.

11 Seow takes the sages’ perspective (as expressed in Dan 2:10–11) at face value, that the king is completely “unreasonable.” Seow, 38, 39.
Nebuchadnezzar to hide such anxiety, because its revelation would uncover a weakness that conflicts with a desired aura of fear. If so, his admission of “a troubled spirit” (וַּתִפָעֶם רוּחִי) is a careless slip on his part, even if he expresses it so as to make the knowledge of his dream its object (וַּתִפָעֶם רוּחִי לָדֵעַּת אֶֽת־הַּחֲלֽוֹם, Dan 2:3). After his sleepless night (Dan 2:1), he may still be fatigued when he summons his sages (v.2). In a state of fatigue, Nebuchadnezzar’s anxious suspicion of his courtiers might be expressed in his reaction to their request for the dream account (Dan 2:7), which he condemns as their attempt to “buy time” from him (וְאִנְדַּע דִי פִשְׁר הּ תְהַּחֲוֻנַּנִי, v.8). If he were to narrate his dream to his sages, and give them time to construct an interpretation of the dream, he would lose his monopoly of control over the interpretation that they could provide, no longer the sole judge of the interpretation’s fitness for the narrated dream. Nebuchadnezzar’s increasing hostility towards his sages (Dan 2:3, 5–6, 8–9, 12) may coincide with his sense of losing control over them, reflecting a mind seethed in anxiety.

However, Nebuchadnezzar’s interactions with his sages may also be explained as curiosity, a desire for more knowledge. Here he already has some knowledge (he remembers his dream), wants to gain more (the sages’ interpretation), but also verify it (the sages report the dream). Nebuchadnezzar presents his motive for his unusual request, for both dream and interpretation, as his desire for certainty concerning the interpretation (אֲנַָּ֔ה דִִ֥י עִדָנֵָ֖א אַּנְת֣וּן זָבְנִָ֑ין, Dan 2:9). This reading takes his words at face value, presuming it is not a “bluff.” The sages’ own perspective is that Nebuchadnezzar demands an impossible task from them (Dan 2:10–11), but is this Nebuchadnezzar’s own perspective? Is he unreasonable for expecting them to

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12 Interestingly, Wesselius sees the word for “time” (עִדָן) as the connector between the two parts of Dan 2:8–9 (before and after כָּל־כָּל כָּל עִדָנ), in which the phrase introduced by כָּל כָּל כָּל presents Nebuchadnezzar’s decree (vv.5–6) as the sages’ reason for wanting more “time”: they could then “avoid” the “penalty” of death by “giving a preliminary, incorrect interpretation, which can be modified as circumstances change ….” He also suggests the alternative of Nebuchadnezzar’s belief “that they will tamper with the interpretation if they are told the dream first,” prompting his decree. Jan-Wim Wesselius, “Language and Style in Biblical Aramaic: Observations on the Unity of Daniel II–VI,” Vetus Testamentum 38, no. 2 (1988): 198.
13 Collins, Daniel, 156; Hartman and Di Lella, 144; Lucas, 70.
14 Goldingay, 46; cf. Lucas, 70.
know the thoughts of his mind without prior communication? His anger and rage (Dan 2:12) in response to their rebuff (vv.10–11) might suggest to the reader that Nebuchadnezzar is quite unreasonable, as the narrator presents him, but not in his own eyes (thus heightening the degree of his irrationality). If so, this reading would join curiosity for more knowledge with an irrational means of verification, which implies an incongruity in Nebuchadnezzar’s character. However, despite what the sages claim (Dan 2:10–11), Nebuchadnezzar may not be so unfair as to give them only one chance to narrate and interpret his dream. Many sages are present, is he expecting them all to speak in unison like a chorus line? The other possibility is that he expected each individual sage to give an account of a dream together with an interpretation, and the successful one could be identified as truly wise, and his interpretation trustworthy, and be rewarded alone; but if none were successful, Nebuchadnezzar could apply the punishment to all of them together (Dan 2:5–6). Admittedly, this does involve counter-reading his intentions against the wording of his decree, which both threatens punishment (Dan 2:5) and promises reward (v.6) in the plural. However, the sages’ distinct professions, “magicians, conjurers/necromancers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans” are more diverse than the designation “Chaldeans” by itself implies (vv.4, 5, 10), implying diverse methodologies for extracting divinations from an omen, and thus diverse answers. Nebuchadnezzar also refuses to allow the sages to work on the problem in agreement with each other (Dan 2:9), and the eventual outcome in which only the successful dream-teller and interpreter Daniel is singled out for reward, while the rest are apparently spared, may reflect Nebuchadnezzar’s original intentions. Furthermore, after Arioch informs Daniel of the matter (Dan 2:15),

15 As Wesselius explains the phrase in Dan 2:10–11, Nebuchadnezzar is unlike any other king on earth in making such a request: “exactly because this demand is so difficult that no one is able to fulfil it, no king has ever thought it worth while to ask this thing.” Wesselius, 199.
16 In this instance, Valeta characterises him as “a capricious sovereign.” Valeta, 74.
17 “Chaldean” here is a general designation for a Babylonian mantic sage. Collins, Daniel, 137; Hammer, 26.
19 I am relying on Holladay’s interpretation of זָכַר as “agree” in the hitpael (Qere in the MT), or “come to a decision” in the hafel (Ketib in the MT), both of which implies some kind of collusion. William L. Holladay, ed. A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 404.
20 Daniel’s companions are only included in the reward at Daniel’s explicit request (Dan 2:49).
Daniel’s cry not to carry out the communal punishment, because he can supply the interpretation (v.24), reflects a shared understanding between Daniel and Arioch, and possibly between Arioch and Nebuchadnezzar, that just one successful sage is enough to save the whole group. I have argued for Nebuchadnezzar’s initial intention that each sage attempt to narrate and interpret his dream in defence of reading him as curious, but such an intention, if fulfilled, could also satisfy an anxious Nebuchadnezzar with knowledge of each sage’s attitude towards him. Nebuchadnezzar’s curiosity may be more than a disinterested desire to know his dream, but also an anxious curiosity to know the thoughts of his court sages, so that he might judge each one’s depth of loyalty.

Scenario 2: The King Knows the Dream and the Interpretation

If the king remembers his dream, and is confident of its interpretation, then perhaps he sees no need to gain knowledge here, but wants to test his sages’ wisdom against his own, engaging in a “court contest” with them. If he were confidently testing his sages about what he already knows, while threatening death, such a reading aligns with Fewell’s suggestion that his “decision … is arbitrary,” and that he is “a dangerous, unpredictable, even sadistic character.”

If Nebuchadnezzar expected each sage to give a dream account and interpretation, he could confidently judge each answer and reward the successful sage, the one whose imagination and understanding align closest to his own. If a sage guessed the dream, but his interpretation did not match Nebuchadnezzar’s, he could demonstrate the superior wisdom of his own interpretation before his court. If all the sages failed to narrate the correct dream, Nebuchadnezzar could punish them all for lacking the wisdom of the gods (cf. Dan 2:11), thus clearing their places before a new generation of scholars is ready (1:3–5). The reader might then understand his furious reaction (Dan 2:12) to their assertion of the impossibility of his

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21 Fewell notes a discrepancy between Dan 2:18 and v.24, concerning Daniel’s private intentions to save himself and his friends, and his public intentions to save the wise ones of Babylon. Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 28-30. However, the public intentions he communicates to Arioch are more likely to reflect the executioner’s, and therefore the king’s, understanding of the dilemma.

22 I am extending Humphreys’s concept of the “court contest” as a contest adjudicated by the king to one in which the king might participate. For his view of Dan 2, see Humphreys, 219.

demands as his anger at their failure to play along with his game, or his contempt for their admission of incompetence.\textsuperscript{24}

Against this scenario, Nebuchadnezzar’s supposed confidence while awake does not match his anxiety while asleep (יָדוֹ וּשְׁנָתוֹ נִהְיְתָה עָלָיו, Dan 2:1). If he remembers the dream so well that the interpretation is self-evident, then his waking and sleeping states of mind are still closely connected through memory. He would seem too contradictory a character if the dream and its meaning could make him both terrified and overweeningly confident in quick succession. Perhaps his dream was not really a portent of judgment against him, despite Daniel’s interpretation (Dan 2:38, 44–45), or he does not understand how his dream applies to himself, which would imply that he does not know the interpretation so well after all. This scenario would not seem to be the most viable reading.

\textit{Scenario 3: The King Has Forgotten the Dream and is Ignorant of the Interpretation}

If the king has forgotten the dream and so is ignorant of the interpretation,\textsuperscript{25} then perhaps he is running a gambit.\textsuperscript{26} He wants to test his sages for their wisdom, but does not want to reveal his lack of knowledge (i.e. poor memory). Although he has no way of knowing if the sages will lie to him or not, he is relying on the probability that the sages do not know that he does not know.\textsuperscript{27} Goldingay hovers towards the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten his dream but creates “suspense” for his sages (and for the readers, one may add), “over how much he remembers and how far he is thus capable of telling whether their account of the dream is correct, or how far v 9 is bluff.”\textsuperscript{28} Following Goldingay’s line of thought, Nebuchadnezzar’s words indicates that “the king may be able check” the sages’ dream account (on which they base the interpretation) against his own memory,\textsuperscript{29} and the sages cannot be certain how much Nebuchadnezzar remembers. This scenario imagines Nebuchadnezzar as a practitioner of

\textsuperscript{24} Lenzi reads the sages’ words in Dan 2:10–11 as being spoken out of “the bitterness of their failure” (346) and as “a humiliating defeat” for them (347). Lenzi, 346–47.

\textsuperscript{25} The favoured interpretation of Montgomery, 141-42. See also Nelson, 80-81.

\textsuperscript{26} Lucas argues against this possibility (the king has forgotten the dream), on the grounds that “that would then make v. 9 a bluff.” Lucas, 70. Yes, it may well be a bluff.

\textsuperscript{27} Cf. Gowan, 54.

\textsuperscript{28} Goldingay, 46.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. My emphasis.
intrigue. Reading his words, “unless you recount the dream to me and I can be sure of the interpretation you tell me” (Dan 2:9), as a “bluff,” he wants to give the impression that he knows the dream when in fact he does not. This scenario fills the gap of Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge (Dan 2:1–12) by picturing him as being troubled by a dream he does not know because of forgetfulness (v.1), but he wants to know it (v.3). He does not tell the sages his dream (Dan 2:5) because he cannot rather than he will not, and since he is concerned about them inventing something to fool him (v.8), he hides his poor memory with a bluff (v.9). Nebuchadnezzar’s slip into rage (Dan 2:12) may then result from insecurity and anxiety peaking when they call his bluff (vv.10–11), and from his realisation of digging himself into a pit out of folly, so he attempts to regain control through public execution (v.12).

This reading also raises the question of why Nebuchadnezzar summoned his sages in the first place (Dan 2:2), to inquire about a dream he could not remember (v.3), leaving him a lack of control over the proceedings. How did he expect his sages to respond, if not to inquire immediately into the content of the dream (Dan 2:4)? If he expected the sages each to give their own dream account with an interpretation, how would Nebuchadnezzar have adjudicated between all the different accounts without knowing the dream? Would he have chosen the most favourable account for which he was hoping, or the least favourable which he feared? If divinations of the gods’ will occurred frequently in Nebuchadnezzar’s court, then could he have proposed an alternative method (such as looking at animal livers, patterns of smoke or of oil upon water), or called off the meeting altogether for more pressing state business? This would at least allow him to save face. Therefore, this scenario, despite imagining Nebuchadnezzar starting out as cleverly deceptive, ends up having him revealed to be rather foolish. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar gambled his public face with his sages, because he judged the risk justified when weighed against the dream’s importance to himself or his kingdom. However, this would presuppose that he has some awareness of the dream as significant, even without remembering it, which leads into the next scenario.

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31 Dreams were not the only means of divination available to ancient Mesopotamian seers. Lawson, 68.
**Scenario 4: The King Has Forgotten the Dream but Intuitively Senses the Interpretation**

In this reading, Nebuchadnezzar has forgotten the dream but somehow retains an intuition of its meaning, one of ominous danger, and suppressed his memory out of fear. Fewell identifies another of “[t]wo mutually exclusive explanations,” where Nebuchadnezzar “has forgotten the dream, suppressing some unpleasantry.” For Fewell, this reading implies that his outburst in “unmitigated anger” is due to “[a] sense of foreboding,” because of “his frustrating inability to remember.”

Goldingay considers this reading to be possible, because Daniel’s introduction to his dream narration (Dan 2:29–30) indicates his knowledge that Nebuchadnezzar’s mind “had turned to the future,” “but the dream had ‘hidden itself’ (because of its unwelcome content) as dreams do.”

Likewise, Lacocque sees him as suppressing a nightmare: “Nebuchadnezzar does not ‘remember’ (sic) his dream; in any case he refuses to present its contents because there is a psychological barrier against a revealed truth whose fatal implication he senses.” In this reading, Nebuchadnezzar was aware of the dream’s meaning while asleep (Dan 2:1), but woke to suppress his memory of the dream-images, while retaining awareness of their inimical implications. In favour of this reading, Nebuchadnezzar’s sleep was troubled by his dreams, and he wakes to speak of his spirit being troubled, even if he expresses his anxiety as a concern to know his dream (v.3). This reading does not require Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge of the interpretation to make correspondences between dream-images and interpretive statements, as Daniel does (Dan 2:37–45), but an affective knowledge expressed in fear (Daniel describes the image in the dream as “fearful,” v.31). Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar seeks to evade the danger represented by the dream, by understanding its nature and finding a way to outwit or appease the deity behind the dream.

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33 Ibid.
34 Goldingay, 48.
37 See ibid.
awareness of any of its negative consequences for himself, but perhaps its curse has been dispelled in his mind. Perhaps he heard Daniel’s interpretation as focusing the judgment upon the fourth kingdom represented by iron and pottery (Dan 2:41–43), and lifting the onus of guilt or political weakness upon himself as the golden head (vv.37–38).

Nebuchadnezzar’s Knowledge of His Dream

The gap about Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge in Dan 2:1–12 can be filled in terms of his remembering or forgetting his dream, and in terms of his knowing its meaning or not. His potential characteristics implied by these gap-fillings include anxiety, curiosity, over-confidence, foolish risk-taking, and inarticulate fear. Nebuchadnezzar’s state of knowledge and dominant character traits are still quite ambiguous at the point in narrated time of Dan 2:1–12. This necessary ambiguity creates the second gap about knowledge in Dan 2: how does Daniel come to “know” Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation?

How Does Daniel Know Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream?

Daniel narrates and interprets a dream for Nebuchadnezzar in his court (Dan 2:31–45), interlaced with his affirmations, “you saw” (vv.31, 34, 41, 43, 45), and Nebuchadnezzar does not deny Daniel’s claim that the dream described is what he saw. Instead, Nebuchadnezzar claims that Daniel has revealed a “secret” or a “mystery” (לָלָת לֹכְדֶלֵא רָזִין), and that Daniel’s God is “a Reveal of secrets” (וְגָל ֣ה רָזִָּ֥י, Dan 2:47), a divine epithet learned from Daniel (וְגָל ֵ֧א רָזָ, v.29). The nature of the secrets revealed concern future events, and Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that God has already made the narrated future known to him before he narrates the dream (אַלָּכָה מָה־דִִ֥י לֶהוּ, Dan 2:29), but Daniel also claims the secret’s revelation for himself to make the interpretation known to Nebuchadnezzar (וְגָל ֵ֧א רָזִָּ֥א דְנָֽה גֱלִ֣י לִי לָה ַ֗ן עַּל־דִבְרַּת דִִ֤י פִשְׁרָא֙ לְמַּלְכָ֣א יְהוֹדְעַּ֔וּן, v.30). Daniel refers to his own wisdom in his ability to make the interpretation known to Nebuchadnezzar, but in a modestly negative manner of denying himself exceptional wisdom in that he happened to be the revelation’s recipient, and solely for

38 Implied by Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 36; Valeta, 72.
40 See Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 33, 35.
the king’s benefit (Dan 2:30). The narrator informs the reader of the secret’s revelation to Daniel in a vision of the night (Dan 2:19), after he meets the king (v.16).

When Nebuchadnezzar praises Daniel’s ability to reveal a “secret” (Dan 2:47), does he mean only the interpretation (vv.36–45), or the dream together with the interpretation (vv.31–45)? If Nebuchadnezzar refers to only the interpretation as the secret revealed by Daniel and his God (Dan 2:47), does he know something hidden from the reader, and even counterintuitive, about how Daniel came to know his dream? In Daniel’s impromptu, hasty, and secretive meeting with the king, in which he is “given time” (Dan 2:16), denied to the sages (v.8, v.9), the narrator specifies his task only as telling the interpretation (v.16), without any mention of the dream. When Arioch formally introduces Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, where for all official intents and purposes, they never met before, Arioch mistakenly reduces the dilemma to making known the interpretation alone (Dan 2:25), an error he uncritically adopted from Daniel (v.24), despite informing Daniel about the matter (v.15), that the sages were to die for not knowing both dream and interpretation (vv.4–13). However, in case any sages are present in the court (Dan 2:25–48), Nebuchadnezzar very prudently corrects Arioch, and unwittingly Daniel and the narrator, when he asks Daniel: “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I saw and its interpretation?” (v.26). There is a viable but counterintuitive possibility that Nebuchadnezzar is hiding himself as the source of Daniel’s knowledge of his dream imagery (since the point in narrated time of Dan 2:16).

41 Goldingay notes that “the narrator tells the story briskly here,” and because of the absence of קָדָם מַלְכָא in Dan 2:16 (present in vv.24–25), he questions whether Daniel “actually saw the king?” Goldingay, 34. Collins notes Josephus’s scruple about Daniel’s apparent “impropriety” in Dan 2:16 but “correct protocol” in v.24. Collins, Daniel, 158. (Collins’s reference to Josephus making Arioch Nebuchadnezzar’s and Daniel’s mediator is missing, but his claim is vindicated by Josephus, Ant. 10.198, 202.) So, if Daniel met the king in Dan 2:16, it was anything but “official.”

42 See Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 27.

Scenario 1: Nebuchadnezzar Reveals the Dream, and God the Interpretation, to Daniel

This scenario presupposes that Nebuchadnezzar still remembers his dream. If he was curious to know what it meant, such a desire for knowledge might override his earlier commitment not to tell his dream to any sage (Dan 2:5–6, 9), once he has travelled past the point in narrated time when his task proves impossible for them (vv.10–11), and Daniel’s unexpected visit (v.16) provides him with a new opportunity for knowledge. Alternatively, Nebuchadnezzar may be anxious or contemptuous about his sages, and now that he has come into conflict with them (Dan 2:10–13), he has no option to consult them again and still retain his public face, so Daniel’s surreptitious entry (v.16) may provide him an opportunity to regain control over his sages or to shame them. He wants to demonstrate to them that this neophyte can do what they cannot, but Nebuchadnezzar has secretly helped Daniel, so to avenge his own personal sense of honour. This reading presupposes that the sages are present when Daniel narrates and interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, but it is supported by Nebuchadnezzar’s public orders of burning incense for Daniel (Dan 2:46), and appointing him “chief prefect over all the wise ones of Babylon” (v.48), at the end of the scene. This reading also imagines Nebuchadnezzar as a rather deceptive character who reveals his dream to Daniel when the sages are not present (Dan 2:16).

Scenario 2: God Reveals Dream and Interpretation to Daniel

The more intuitive scenario is that the secret God reveals to Daniel in a vision of night (Dan 2:19) is both Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation, without any prior input from Nebuchadnezzar concerning the dream’s imagery. This reading is compatible with both prior gap-fillings that Nebuchadnezzar remembers his dream (and so could, but does not, inform Daniel), and that he has forgotten his dream (and so cannot inform Daniel). When Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to him, he repeats the phrase “you saw” (Dan 2:31, 34, 41, 43, 45), but the perspective from which he describes the imagery is not that of the golden head, but that of an observer (vv.31–35). Since Daniel identifies Nebuchadnezzar with the golden head (Dan 2:38), he is more likely describing the dream from his own perspective as one who

44 See Kirkpatrick’s comment on Dan 3:12–23. Kirkpatrick, 103.
has observed it (in a vision of the night, v.19), rather than the perspective of a participant in
the dream, such as Nebuchadnezzar. When the narrator, Daniel, and Arioch only mention the
interpretation as necessary to tell Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:16, 24, 25), this could reflect their
perspectives that it is only the interpretation he desires or needs to know, if he still remembers
his dream. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s corrective reminder (Dan 2:26) reflects his interest
that Daniel is not wrongly suspected to have been granted the unfair advantage of being told
the dream beforehand. If, however, Nebuchadnezzar does not remember his dream, and has
foolishly attempted to bluff, or is fearful of what the hidden dream might mean for him, then
his granting more time to Daniel (Dan 2:16) coincides with a loss of personal power over his
court, because he is desperate enough to rely on this newcomer, without retaining the dream
in his own mind (the lack of knowledge leads to a lack of control). Daniel presents him with
an opportunity of avoiding the execution of his sages without losing face, or of identifying the
potential threat to himself or his kingdom, implied by his own inchoate sense that his dream
means disaster.

The question of Nebuchadnezzar’s memory of his dream in Dan 2 has implications for the
extent of his power over his past and present narrated time: does he remember enough of his
own immediate past to be able to govern his present? For now, however, I will examine some
of the connections of the plot of Dan 2 to wisdom, concerning Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and/or
its interpretation as a “secret” (רָז), and Nebuchadnezzar’s and Daniel’s likenesses to other
dreamers and dream-interpreters.

**Secrets, Dreams, and Wisdom**

As argued above, there is potential ambiguity for the reader concerning the “secret” (רָז)
revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night (Dan 2:19), whether Nebuchadnezzar previously
informed him about his dream (v.16). There remains the question of the relevance of “wisdom”
to the idea of the revealed “secret,” for which the material consists of texts in Daniel (2:18, 19,
27, 28, 29, 30, 47; 4:6),45 and intertexts in which the Aramaic tradition of Targumim Jonathon,

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45 Even-Shoshan, 1069. Also noted by Lenzi, 331, 339. Lenzi also notes the occurrence of רָז in Sir 8:17–18;
12:11–12. Ibid., 332-33.

My examination of רַּז in Daniel suggests the persistence of the ambiguity of whether it refers to both Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation, or simply the interpretation. The first two uses of רַּז in Daniel are spoken by the narrator:

18 And mercies they were seeking from the presence of the God of heaven concerning this secret (עַל־רַּזְּ הַדְּנָה), so that they would not be destroyed, Daniel and his companions, with the rest of the wise ones of Babylon. Then to Daniel, in the vision of the night, the secret was revealed (רַּז גָּלֶּי). Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. (Dan 2:18–19)

Since this “secret” is that which would save Daniel and his friends from being destroyed along with the remaining sages, Dan 2:18 would seem to imply that רַּז refers to both Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation, for the sages are under threat precisely because they failed to tell the king both dream and interpretation (vv.2–12). It is still possible for a reader to suspect Nebuchadnezzar’s informing Daniel of his dream in Dan 2:16, but the sense of v.18 reads easier under the scenario in which Daniel requires a revelation from the God of heaven to reveal both (in v.19). It is upon reception of the “secret” (in Dan 2:19) that Daniel blesses the God of heaven, which he concludes by thanking God for “the wisdom and strength you have given me” (חָכְמָה וּגְבוּרְתָּא יְהַּבְתְ לִי, v.23). Although the narrator informed the reader of God’s gift of wisdom back in Dan 1:17, Daniel shows awareness of it as a divine gift only now, which, for him, means that “now you have made known to me (הֽוֹדַּעְתַּנִי) what we requested of you, that the matter of the king you have made known to us (הוֹדַּעְתֶֽנָא) (Dan 2:23). The narrator conjoins Daniel’s “wisdom” (חָכְמָה) to his “understanding in every vision and dreams” (וְדָנִיָּאל הַבִּין בְכָל־חָזֵוֹן וַחֲלֹמּוֹת, Dan 1:17), seemingly referring to his ability to interpret dreams rather than the revelation of secret dreams to him. Daniel’s hymn implies an understanding of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, although worded differently from what he tells.

46 That רַּז in Dan 2:19 means “the unknown dream” is assumed by Lenzi, 341.
the king.⁴⁷ In his hymn, Daniel alludes to God’s transcendence over time (God’s name is blessed “from age to age” [מִן־עָלְמֵָ֖א וְעַּ֣ד־עָלְמָָ֑א]), wisdom (חָכְמָּ֖א), and strength (וּגְבוּרְתֵָ֖א, Dan 2:20); God’s power over time (determining “periods and seasons,” the rise and fall of kings, וְהוּא מְהַּשְׁנ ִ֤א עִדָנַּיָא֙ וְזִמְנַּּ֔א מְהַּעְד ִּ֥ה מַּלְכִֵ֖ין וּמְהָָק ֣ים מַּלְכִָ֑ין), concerning which God gives “wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the knowers of insight” (יָה ִ֤ב חָכְמְתָא֙ לְחַּכִיםֵָ֔ין וּמַּנְדְעֵָ֖א לְיָדְע ִּ֥י בִינָֽה, v.21),⁴⁸ and God’s revelation not of “secrets” but “deep and hidden things” (הָ֛וּא גָל ִּ֥א עַּמִיקָתֵָ֖א וּמְסַּתְרָתָָ֑א, v.22).

The image of God knowing “what is in the darkness” (יָדַּע֙ מָ֣ה בַּחֲשׁוֹכַָּ֔א, Dan 2:22) is suggestive both of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream at night and the distant future, which is “dark” for human beings.

The next four uses of רַּז occur in Daniel’s public address to Nebuchadnezzar, immediately before Daniel gives the dream account of the four-metalled statue:

Daniel responded in the presence of the king and said, “The secret (רַּז) which the king asks, there are no wise ones (חַכִים), conjurers, magicians, astrologers able to tell it to the king. Nevertheless, there is the God of the heavens, Revealer of secrets (גֵּל רַּזִּין), who has made known (וְהוֹדִַ֗ע) to the king, Nebuchadnezzar, what will be in the future of the days. Your dream and the visions of your head upon your bed, this is it. You, O king, your thoughts upon your bed ascended, what will be after this, and the Revealer of secrets (גֵּל יָא רַּזִּין) has made known to you (יָדַּעְתָּ) what will be. And as for me, there is not wisdom (חָכַמַּה) in me more than all the living: this secret was revealed to me (רַּז ֵ֥א דְּנֵּ֖ה גֱל ֵ֣י לָ֑י), but only in order that the interpretation may be made known (יְּהוֹדְּעִ֔וּן) to the king, and you may know (תְּנַדַּ‏ָָע) the thoughts of your heart.” (Dan 2:27–30)

The first use of the word רַּז in Daniel’s speech (in Dan 2:27) implies a reference to both dream and interpretation, since Nebuchadnezzar’s court sages are incapable of revealing it.⁴⁹ However, leading up to this point, Daniel and Arioch have only mentioned the need to tell Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation (Dan 2:24, 25). Daniel’s words in Dan 2:27 may be specifically aimed at shaming the courtiers who failed to tell the king both his dream and its

⁴⁷ I agree with Goswell that Daniel’s prayer (Dan 2:20–23, especially God deposing and setting up kings in v.21) is already an implicit interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream: “It is perhaps only on a second reading of the chapter that the reader perceives the prayer to contain a hint of the content of the yet-to-be narrated dream that depicts the course of history as a succession of human kingdoms.” Gregory Goswell, “The Visions of Daniel and Their Historical Specificity,” Restoration Quarterly 58, no. 3 (2016): 130.

⁴⁸ Daniel’s understanding of God as possessor and giver of wisdom, knowledge, and strength is also observed by Lenzi, 342.

⁴⁹ Also noted in ibid., 343. However, Lenzi recognises that Daniel’s characterisation of the Babylonian sages in Dan 2:27 is at odds with Mesopotamian documentary evidence that this social class “were specialists in secrets.” Ibid., 346, see also 337-39. Lawson has also found documentary evidence, particularly the Mari correspondence, that when one person asked a Babylonian priest to interpret his or her dream, the priest would seek revelation from a god for knowledge of the interpretation. Lawson, 69.
interpretation, after Nebuchadnezzar reminds Daniel that this is the task required of him (v.26). When Daniel calls God a “Revealer of secrets” (in Dan 2:28, 29), Daniel specifically refers to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the visions of his head (in v.28), implying that the “secret” God reveals includes dreams about which a king does not inform his courtiers. Again, Daniel’s reference to a God who dwells in the heavens (in Dan 2:28) may be an implicit retort to the sages who said that the king’s request was only possible for “the gods, of whom those dwelling with the flesh, there is not one” (v.11), if Daniel learnt what they said from Arioch (v.15) or Nebuchadnezzar (v.16). However, Daniel’s reference to the God of the heavens as the “Revealer of secrets” (Dan 2:28–29) shifts the focus away from what happened in the narrated past (no wise one could tell the secret to the king, v.27) to what will happen in the narrated future: “what will be in the future of the days” (גָּלְתָּ הַי, v.28), “what will be” (אֶלְה ה, v.29). Specifically, Daniel’s reference to future narrated time involves the revelation of the secret in terms of knowledge of this future: God has “made it known” (וְהוֹדַע, Dan 2:28, 29) to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel’s final reference to the “secret” before Nebuchadnezzar limits itself to “the interpretation” (פִּשְׁרָא) and “the thoughts of your heart” (ךְֵ֖וְרַּעְיוֹנ ִּ֥י לִבְבָ). If Nebuchadnezzar’s “thoughts” means his dream, does his need to “know” them mean his need to remember his dream or to understand his dream, by way of Daniel’s interpretation? Daniel’s reference to the revealed “secret” in terms of his own wisdom, which he expresses in the rhetoric of humility before the king and his court (“And as for me, there is not wisdom [חכמה] in me more than all the living,” Dan 2:30), seems to imply not merely knowledge of another’s dream, but the wisdom to understand the king’s dream in terms of his kingdom’s future in narrated time.

The last reference to “secrets” in Dan 2 occurs on the lips of Nebuchadnezzar, after hearing Daniel’s speech:

   The king responded to Daniel and said, “It is from truth that your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and the Revealer of secrets (וְגָלְת ה ר ז), because you have been able to reveal this secret (לְּמ גְּלֵֵּ֖א ר ז דְּנ).” (Dan 2:47)

Up until now, the ability to reveal secrets has been presented as a divine prerogative (Dan 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30). Nebuchadnezzar’s attribution of the ability to reveal secrets to Daniel may,
at first, seem to bring this ability down to the human sphere in the king’s own mind. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s act of prostration before Daniel and his order for incense to be offered to him (Dan 2:46) shows him treating Daniel as a divine, or quasi-divine, being.

Nebuchadnezzar may be sincere in his act of deifying Daniel, especially if he possessed so little memory of his dream that he was completely in Daniel’s control for the narration of the dream and its interpretation. In this case, the narrator may be making a satirical mockery of Nebuchadnezzar. However, it is also possible that in treating Daniel as a divine being, and in also making any gathered courtiers in the background treat Daniel as a divine being by ordering them to sacrifice incense to him (Dan 2:46), Nebuchadnezzar is mocking his own sages. Just as they had insulted his sense of honour by questioning his rationality when he asked them to perform an impossible task, as the gods do not dwell with mortal flesh (Dan 2:10–11), Nebuchadnezzar now presents them with the “god” able to do what they could not.

Nebuchadnezzar’s deification of Daniel may be neither absolute nor completely sincere: it serves his purpose of making Daniel chief prefect over all his sages and provincial administrators in Babylon (Dan 2:48), but Daniel must still submit his request to Nebuchadnezzar to transfer the administration to his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (v.49). Despite Nebuchadnezzar’s “recognition” of Daniel’s “divinity” (Dan 2:46), Daniel is still answerable to the king. Nebuchadnezzar’s words in Dan 2:47 imply partial

50 Lenzi reads Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective as expressed in Dan 2:47 in terms of giving “the primary credit … to Yhwh” and recognising Daniel as simply “the human agent … through which the divine agent acts.” Lenzi, 344.

51 Also see Mastin’s argument concerning the vocabulary used in Dan 2:46 and elsewhere in Biblical Aramaic (and equivalent roots in Biblical Hebrew), that נפל על ענפיה יִּניּ is often a “reaction” to a divine being but not always (81), כָּלֹ דְּגָ֣ל עַל־אַנְּפִ֔וֹה יִּניּ is “cultic” in Dan 2:46 (81), הבְּרֹדֶנֱ is always “a sacrificial term” (82), ולַעֲבוֹר יָהַנְה לֲעַבֹּר is “the sense which is nearest” to Dan 2:46 is that of “to pour out a libation” (82). B. A. Mastin, "Daniel 2:46 and the Hellenistic World," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 85 (1973): 81-82.

52 In the scenario that Nebuchadnezzar is completely dependent upon Daniel, Mastin’s interpretation that Nebuchadnezzar shows Daniel the honour due to “a benefactor,” albeit “in an extravagant way,” seems apt, except that Mastin also wants to avoid the imputation of “impiety” to Daniel in accepting “divine honours.” Ibid., 85. Whatever Daniel’s reaction (which I imagine to be one of great bemusement), his piety does not preclude Nebuchadnezzar believing Daniel to be a godlike being. Mastin himself goes on to imagine that if this were “real life,” then “Daniel would have found it embarrassing to be put in charge of all the wise men of Babylon … .” Ibid., 90.

53 Valeta, 77.

54 Kirkpatrick analyses Dan 2:1–12 as Nebuchadnezzar’s exchange of “challenge,” “counter-challenge,” and “insult” with his courtiers. Kirkpatrick, 77.
understanding of God as sovereign over kings and secrets comparable to Daniel’s, but his sincerity in worshipping Daniel is questionable, making the sincerity of his confession of Daniel’s God also questionable. However, in the future narrated time of Dan 4:6, Nebuchadnezzar appears sincere about his belief that “a spirit of the holy gods” inhabits Daniel, and his reference to Daniel’s mastery over the רז (Dan 4:6) can only refer to his ability to interpret, since Nebuchadnezzar informs his sages (v.4) and Daniel (vv.7–14) about his second dream of the tree.

On the basis of its use in Daniel, Lenzi defines רז as “secret information that only the deity knows but which God voluntarily distributes to chosen individuals.” He notes that רז is often the object of גלה, “to reveal,” in Daniel, and so suggests an allusion to prophetic revelation, by the use of גלה and רז in Amos 3:7. He also argues that רז and סוד have the “virtually synonymous” meaning of “secret” according to the occurrences of סוד in its wisdom context.

In favour of Lenzi’s equating of רז with סוד in Amos 3:7, Targum Jonathon supports this interpretation:


Targum Jonathon also interprets the counsel of God in Jer 23:18, 22 in terms of a revealed secret:

For who stands in the counsel of Yhwh (בְּסֵוֹד יְּהוֹ וֹה; קְדָם יִוְּדָא תגְּלֵי לְּהוֹן רַז מְּדֵ֖ו, Tg. Neb. Jer 23:18), and sees and hears [God’s] words? Who pays attention to my words and listens? ...  And if they stand in my counsel (וְּאָֽם־עֲדָא בְּסוֹד ָ֑י; קְדָם יִוְּדָא תגְּלֵי לְּהוֹן רַז יְּלֻו ק מְּדֵ֖ו, Tg. Neb. Jer 23:22), and they make my people hear my words, and they return from their ways of evil, and from the evil of their deeds. (Jer 23:18, 22)

Here the idea presented in Jeremiah is that of a prophet standing before the divine presence to hear and listen to God’s words, as well as “seeing” (Jer 23:18), to turn God’s people away their “evil” deeds (v.22). Targum Jonathon interprets this idea of a prophet listening to God’s

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55 Newsom and Breed, 84-85.
56 Fewell believes that he is suffering from “theological confusion.” Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics*, 37.
57 Lenzi, 332.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
words in terms of God revealing a “secret” to that prophet (Tg. Neb. Jer 23:18, 22). Targum Isaiah presents the idea of a “secret” thing which is “revealed” in an interpretive expansion of the Masoretic Text:

From the end of the earth we heard songs, glory to the Righteous One, but I said, “Wasted is me, wasted is me, woe is me! [The prophet said, “A secret reward (רָזִי) for the righteous ones, make me see a secret punishment for the wicked, it is revealed to me (רָזִי לְִּ֥י רָֽזִי לְֵ֖֥י), Tg. Isa. 24:16] The faithless ones have acted faithlessly, and the infidelity of the faithless ones has acted faithlessly!” (Isa 24:16)

The prophet’s complaint about the “faithless ones” still acting without fidelity (Isa 24:16) has been expanded by the Targum writer into the idea of “secret” rewards and punishments for the righteous and wicked respectively, which are “revealed” to the “prophet” who speaks (and indicative of a future reality for which the speaker hopes? Tg. Isa. 24:16). This targumic expansion involving “secret” rewards and punishments may ground its own interpretive legitimacy on the occurrence of רָזִי לְִּ֥֥י רָֽזִי לְֵ֖֥י in Isa 24:16, a phrase which I have tentatively translated as “wasted is me, wasted is me.” However, Niehaus has argued for an alternative reading of this phrase, rather than “to be lean” (רָזָה).60 Seeing a parallel between Isa 24:16–18 and Dan 5:25–28 (where each word is expanded into a פְשַר of judgment), Niehaus reads רָֽזִי לְִּ֥֥י רָֽזִי לְֵ֖֥י as “my secret, my secret,” even in Isa 24:16.61

Targum Psalms identifies those who fear God as the recipients of God’s revealed secrets and knowledge of God’s covenant, which the Hebrew represents as God’s counsel:

The counsel of Yhwh (סֵ֣וֹד יְְ֭הו ה; רזא דיהוה גליא, Tg. Ket. Ps 25:14) for those who fear [God], and [God’s] covenant to make known to them. (Ps 25:14)

This is a psalm of trust (see אלהי בו in v.2), which does not explicitly mention “wisdom,” but the related concepts of “knowledge” (ידע, vv.4, 14), “teaching” (לְמַד in the piel, vv.5, 9), and “instruction” (למד, vv.8, 12) are presented as ideals, especially for those who fear Yhwh (יְר ֣א יְהוָָ֑ה, v.12, רָֽזִי לִיר אָ֊יו, v.14). Daniel is not explicitly identified as a “fearer” of God or Yhwh, but he does call God “the great and fearful God” (הָא ִ֤ל הַּגָדוֹל וְהַּנּוֹרַָּ֔א, Dan 9:4), and an angelic figure must tell Daniel twice, “do not fear,” when he appears to Daniel in a vision (אַּל־תִירָ֣א, Dan

61 Ibid., 376-77.
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Targum Psalms interprets the fear of Yhwh (יָרֵא, Ps 25:12, 14) with the root דחָל (יָרֵא, Tg. Ket. Ps 25:12, v.14). The character Daniel only experiences the dream-images which are antagonistic to God’s reign in terms of דחָל (יָרֵא, Dan 2:31; the fourth beast is דחָל, 7:7, 19). Nebuchadnezzar describes himself as one who “fears” his own (second) dream (הָלָךְ תַּדַּחֲלָה, Dan 4:2), but Daniel characterises Nebuchadnezzar as one who was “feared” by all peoples (לָךְ דָחֲלִֵ֖ין מִן־קֳדָמָ֑וֹהִי, 5:19).

Targum Jonathon on Kings and Targum Proverbs shift the idea of a “revealed secret” away from God informing prophets and fearers about God’s judgments, to refer to an untrustworthy person who reveals the secret of another. Targum Jonathon interprets the king of Aram’s war with the king of Israel (2 Kgs 6:8)—when Israel’s king is warned by “a man of God” (i.e. a prophet) where the Arameans’ camp will be (v.9)—in terms of the Aramean king’s anger at the suspected spy who is “revealing secrets” to the king of Israel (Tg. Neb. 2 Kgs 6:11).

And it was enraged, the mind of the king of Aram, concerning this matter, and he called his servants and he said to them, “Have you not told me, who, from among us, [“reveals secrets,” אֹל רָאֵל, Tg. Neb. 2 Kgs 6:11] is for the king of Israel?” (2 Kgs 6:11)

Three texts in Proverbs refer to the idea of slander in the revelation of another person’s counsel, which Targum Proverbs interprets as “revealing secrets.”

The slanderer walking about revealing counsel (אֶלְקָל וְרָאֵל תַּדַּחֲלִשׁוּ, Tg. Ket. Prov 11:13), but the one trustworthy of breath covers a matter. (Prov 11:13)

The revealer of counsel is a slanderer walking about (גָּל יְרֵא, Tg. Ket. Prov 20:19), and for a naïve one, do not mingle yourself with his lips. (Prov 20:19)

Your dispute is a dispute with your neighbour, and the counsel of another do not reveal (וְסֵ֖וֹד אַחֵֵ֣ר אַל־תְּגַל, Tg. Ket. Prov 25:9). (Prov 25:9)

Just as revealing another person’s secret enrages the king of Aram (in Tg. Neb. 2 Kgs 6:11), so too the speakers of Prov 11:13; 20:19; 25:9 condemn the revelation of another person’s counsel, or “secrets” (Tg. Ket. Prov 11:13; 20:19; 25:9). If Nebuchadnezzar revealed his “secret” to Daniel (Dan 2:16)—the imagery of his dream which he did not tell his sages—then Daniel and

62 In Daniel, it is only the king Darius who uses the term דחָל with respect to God, in making a decree that all peoples in his kingdom are to “tremble and fear before the God of Daniel” (ז אֲע יַן וְּדָחֲלִֵ֖ין מִן־קֳדָמָ֑וֹה, Dan 6:27).
63 Whom the Aramean king’s servants suspect is the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 6:12).
64 On the basis of the use of “reveal” (גלה) with דחָל in Prov 11:13; 20:19, Lenzi finds a warrant to extend the equivalence of דחָל and סוֹד under the idea of “secrecy” from “the human realm … to the divine realm.” Lenzi, 333.
Nebuchadnezzar together share a “secret” (collusion and Daniel’s unfair advantage) which they would be wise to hide from the courtiers (in the perspective of Prov 11:13; 20:19; 25:9). Even if Nebuchadnezzar did not reveal his dream to Daniel, it would still be in Nebuchadnezzar’s interests not to arouse suspicion that he may have informed Daniel of his dream before the courtiers, as he corrects Arioch’s triumphal announcement of finding a Judean exile who can tell the interpretation (without mentioning the dream, Dan 2:25–26). Just as the speakers of Targum Proverbs warn against “the revealer of secrets” who “eats pieces” (דאכל קורצי, Tg. Ket. Prov 11:13, אכל קורצה 20:19) of those whose secrets they know, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar is already aware of his courtiers’ “eating pieces” of each other, even before the narrator informs the reader of their practice of “eating pieces” of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (וַּאֲכִַּּ֥לוּ קַּרְצ יהֵ֖וֹן דִִּ֥י יְהוּדָי ֽא, Dan 3:8). In summary, the intertexts mainly from the prophetic tradition (Isa 24:16; Tg. Isa. 24:16; Jer 23:18, 22; Tg. Neb. Jer 23:18, 22; Amos 3:7; Tg. Neb. Amos 3:7; but cf. Ps 25:14; Tg. Ket. Ps 25:14) speak of the revelation of secrets as God’s prerogative to announce God’s judgments, while texts from the wisdom tradition (Prov 11:13; 20:19; 25:9; Tg. Ket. Prov 11:13; 20:19; 25:9; but cf. 2 Kgs 6:11; Tg. Neb. 2 Kgs 6:11) speak of revealing secrets mainly as one person’s intention to harm another’s reputation. When Daniel speaks of God’s revelation of secrets in terms of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as a future judgment, he combines notions of the prophetic tradition as reread by the Targumim with the idea of God as wise and strong, and the giver of wisdom, knowledge, and strength (Dan 2:20–23). When Nebuchadnezzar acts so to avoid implanting any suspicion in his courtiers’ minds that he may have revealed the secret imagery of his dream to Daniel (Dan 2:26), he is implicitly acting under the advice of the wisdom texts as reread by Targum Proverbs.

65 The acidity of scholarly “competition” in Mesopotamian courts evident through their letters, according to Karel van der Toorn, “Scholars at the Oriental Court: The Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” in The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 40. Van der Toorn also notes the king’s tendency towards “suspicion” in a “climate of intrigue,” ibid., 41; also see Lenzi, 336.
Character Likenesses of Daniel and Joseph, Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh

Scholars have often noted the similarities between Daniel (in Dan 2) and Joseph (in Gen 40–41) as wise interpreters of dreams, including: the identification of their ethnic origin (Gen 41:12; Dan 2:25); their introduction to the king (Gen 41:14; Dan 2:25); their being questioned about their ability to interpret the king’s dream (Gen 41:15; Dan 2:26); their deemphasis on their abilities so to give credit to God (Gen 41:16; Dan 2:30); their stress on the inevitability of the events predicted in the interpretation (Gen 41:32; Dan 2:45); their inhabitation by a divine spirit (Gen 41:38; Dan 4:6).

Similarities between Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh which have been observed include: they are both kings whose dreams disturb their spirits (Gen 41:1; Dan 2:1); they call for “magicians” (חַרְטֻמִים) from among their courtiers (Gen 41:8; Dan 2:2); they are satisfied with the interpreter (Gen 41:37; Dan 2:46); they praise the interpreter and/or his God (Gen 41:37; Dan 2:47); they promote and reward the successful interpreter (Gen 41:41–45; Dan 2:48). Observed likenesses between the minor characters of the two tales include: the failure of the sages to interpret the dream (Gen 41:8; Dan 2:10–11); the one who introduces the dream-interpreter to the king (the chief cupbearer, Gen 41:9–13; Arioch, Dan 2:12–16 or v.25). Noted similarities concerning time include: the reference to two years (Gen 41:1; Dan 2:1); the dream is understood as a reference to the future (Gen 41:28–32; Dan 2:39–45).

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68 Rindge, 89.
69 Gnuse, 37; Segal, 142; Rindge, 89; Fox, 32, 39.
70 Rindge, 89.
71 Fox, 39.
73 Segal, 142; Gnuse, 37; Rindge, 88.
74 Rindge, 89.
76 Rindge, 89; Segal, 142; Gnuse, 38; Labonté, 277; Wahl, 62.
77 Segal, 142; Gnuse, 37; Rindge, 89; Labonté, 277.
78 Segal, 142; Rindge, 89.
79 Rindge, 88.
80 Ibid., 89; Labonté, 277.
scholarly conversation: there is a similarity between Pharaoh’s and Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams in that—according to their interpretations by Joseph and Daniel—they both pertain to the future of their kingdoms; there is also a similarity between Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh in their recognition of the wisdom of their dream-interpreters, implied by their act of promoting the interpreter.

**Dreams and Future Narrated Time**

Before Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dream (Gen 41:25–32), the reader is prepared for Joseph’s ability to successfully interpret dream images in terms of a quantified time reference, when he is imprisoned with the chief cupbearer and the chief baker (40:1–23). The Aramaic readings of Targum Onqelos on Gen 40–41 bear linkage with the text of Dan 2, linking the dreams of not only Pharaoh but also his two disgraced servants, in the repetition of the keywords “dream” (Hebrew חלום, Aramaic חלמ) or “to dream” (Hebrew חלם, Aramaic חלמ), and the root of the verb “to interpret” (Hebrew פתר, Aramaic פשר), which reappears as the noun “interpretation” (פושר) in Aramaic Daniel.81 The Aramaic roots חלמ and פשר co-occur in Tg. Onq. Gen 40:8, 16; 41:8, 12, 15 and Dan 2:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 26, 36, 45; 4:3, 4, 6, 15, 16; 5:12. The first intertext immediately precedes the recitation and interpretation of the cupbearer’s dream:

And they said to him, “We have dreamed a dream but there is no interpreter for it (חֲלוֹם חלֶמוֹנִים, פֵּשַׁר חֲלַמֵּים, Tg. Onq. Gen 40:8).” But Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations (פְּשַרַים חֲלַמְיֵים, Tg. Onq. Gen 40:8) belong to God? Please recount it to me.” (Gen 40:8)

The cupbearer then tells Joseph a dream about a vine with three branches (וּבַּגֵֶ֖פֶן שְׁלֹשָׁ֣ה שָרִיגִָ֑ם, Gen 40:10; ובגֻפֶּנֶת שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׁבֶשִׁין, Tg. Onq. Gen 40:10), which Joseph interprets as three days (שלְשִׁתָּ֣ה יָמִֵ֖ים הָֽם, הלָּהֶת תֵֵּ֖ים אִינֻון, Tg. Onq. Gen 40:12). Joseph evaluates the three dream-branches providing the dreaming cupbearer with grape-wine to fill Pharaoh’s cup (Gen 40:10–11) as three days into narrated future time of a restoration for the awake cupbearer.

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81 This linkage is present only as the reoccurrence of the same root in the verb “to interpret” (in the Joseph narrative) and the noun “interpretation” (in Aramaic Daniel), not as a noun-to-noun relationship between the two narratives. In the Joseph narrative, the Hebrew noun for “interpretation” is פתר (Gen 40:5, 8, 12, 18; 41:11). Targum Onqelos rewrites this noun as פושר (Tg. Onq. Gen 40:5, 8, 12, 18; 41:11). Aramaic Daniel, however, uses a different form of the noun for “interpretation”: פשר (Dan 2:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 16, 24, 25, 26, 30, 36, 45; 4:3, 4, 6, 15, 16, 21; 5:7, 8, 12, 15, 16, 17, 26; 7:16). This, however, is the consonantal form in which Targum Onqelos rewrites פְּשַר (Tg. Onq. Gen 40:8, 16, 22; 41:8, 12, 13, 15).
The next intertext coupling “(to) dream” and “to interpret” introduces the imprisoned baker’s dream:

And the chief baker saw that he interpreted (פָּשַר, Tg. Onq. Gen 40:16) it as good, and he said to Joseph, “And I too was in my dream (בָּחֲלֹמ י, Tg. Onq. Gen 40:16), and look, there were three baskets of flour-cakes upon my head.” (Gen 40:16)

Joseph interprets the baker’s three dream-baskets as three days in the immediate narrated future (שְׁלִֹּ֥שֶׁת יָמִֵ֖ים ה ֽם, Gen 40:18; תְלָתָה יוֹمִין אִינֻון, Tg. Onq. Gen 40:18), and the dream imagery of birds eating his bread as a sign that his future in waking life is doomed (Gen 40:19). The next intertext is set two years later in narrated time (Gen 41:1), in the morning after Pharaoh’s disturbing dream:

And it happened in the morning and his spirit was distressed, and he sent for and he called all the magicians of Egypt and all his wise ones. And Pharaoh recounted to them his dream (וִֹ֔ת אֶת־חֲלֹמ; י ת ח למֵיה, Tg. Onq. Gen 41:8) but there was no interpreter (וְּאֵין־פוֹתֵֵ֥ר; וְּלֵית דְּפ שַר, Tg. Onq. Gen 41:8) among them for Pharaoh. (Gen 41:8)

With likenesses between Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar (and their respective sages) already noted, Pharaoh’s sages have an advantage over Nebuchadnezzar’s courtiers in hearing the dream from the king himself, and—unlike Pharaoh’s baker—are not in any apparent danger of death for failure.82 The next intertext in the scene of Pharaoh’s court occurs in the cupbearer’s speech:

“And there was with us a Hebrew boy, a servant of the executioner, and we recounted it to him, and he interpreted for us our dreams (וּוַי פְּתַר־ל נוּ אֶת־חֲלֹמ תֵינ, Gen 41:12), as each one’s dream an interpretation (א יש כַחֲלֹמוֹ פ ת ר; גְּבַר כְּח למֵיה פַשַר, Tg. Onq. Gen 41:12).” (Gen 41:12)

Here the cupbearer remembers his past in narrated time, when he and the baker offended Pharaoh and were imprisoned (Gen 41:10; recalling 40:2–3), but each had a dream (41:11; recalling 40:5). The reason the cupbearer gives Pharaoh for Joseph’s success in interpreting their dreams (Gen 41:12) is that: “and it happened just as he interpreted for us, thus it was” (וַּיְהִָ֛י כַּאֲשִֶּׁ֥ר פָֽתַּר־לֵָ֖נוּ כ ֣ן הָיָָ֑ה, v.13). In other words, Joseph could decipher a symbolic dream in terms of the narrated future as a true forecast, since what was then still in the narrated future at the time of Joseph’s prediction (that the cupbearer would be restored and that the baker

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82 As noted by Rindge, 91-92.
would be executed, Gen 40:13, 19) came to happen in the narrated time of three days, as Joseph predicted (vv.20–22). The cupbearer is now able to verify that Joseph could make a true forecast of the narrated future, because what was then still a point in the narrated future has now become a point in the narrated past. Whereas Joseph required a unique skill for interpreting the cupbearer’s and baker’s dreams in terms of the narrated future, the cupbearer only requires the mundane skill of memory and the retrospective vantage point of narrated future time to verify Joseph’s skill, demonstrated in the narrated past. The cupbearer’s past-oriented skill of memory is not always successful, either: two years later, he can say, “My sins I remember today” (Gen 41:9), but until the point in narrated time of Pharaoh’s dream, “he did not remember, the chief cupbearer, Joseph, but he forgot him” (40:23).

Nebuchadnezzar also needs the act of memory to be able to verify whether his sages are successfully able to decipher his dream. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s memory works differently from the cupbearer’s memory for the purposes of verifying dream interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar requires both the memory of his dream and its non-communication to his sages, to verify whether they can interpret his dream, proven by recounting it without being told beforehand. As the reader will discover, Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream pertains to the narrated future, but this ability requires a divinely-bestowed skill of a specific kind of wisdom (Dan 1:17). Unlike Pharaoh’s cupbearer, no characters in the narrative of Dan 2 are yet in the position of future narrated time to verify Daniel’s interpretive abilities through memory. Even so, before the sages who declared the revelation of an unspoken dream to be possible only for the gods (Dan 2:10–11), Daniel’s act of narrating Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (vv.31–35) offers a proof to those sages that he has been informed of what only a deity could reveal. However, Daniel is careful to speak of the dream as the future in narrated time revealed to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:28–29), but of himself as the recipient of a revelation which makes it possible to offer the king an interpretation of the dream (v.30) in terms of the narrated future (vv.39–45), beginning from the narrated present (vv.37–38).

The next intertext occurs in the speech of Pharaoh—after hearing the cupbearer’s recommendation—who inquires into Joseph’s interpretive abilities:
And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have dreamed a dream and there is no interpreter for it (וֹחֲלָם חֲלַמְּתִּי וּפִטְר לָהּ; Tg. Onq. Gen 41:15), but I have heard it said about you that you listen to a dream for interpreting it (וֹחֲלָם חֲלַמְּתִּי וּפִטְר לָהּ; Tg. Onq. Gen 41:15).” (Gen 41:15)

Pharaoh's narration of his two dreams (to his sages, Gen 41:8, to Joseph, vv.17–24) offers a contrast to Nebuchadnezzar who publicly questions Daniel: “Is there, in you, ability to make known to me the dream which I saw and its interpretation (וֹחֲלָם חֲלַמְּתִּי וּפִדְר לָהּ;?” (Dan 2:26). Nebuchadnezzar asks if Daniel surpasses his other court sages, who claimed that they could interpret the dream provided they were told what it involved (Dan 2:4, 7). For the reader who does not counterintuitively suspect Nebuchadnezzar of telling Daniel his dreams beforehand, his question also concerns whether Daniel surpasses Joseph.

Like his interpretation of the cupbearer’s and baker’s three dream-images as three days (Gen 40:12, 18), Joseph also interprets the two groups of seven cows (41:18–19) and ears of grain (vv.22–23) in Pharaoh’s dreams as two periods of seven years in the narrated future (vv.26–27). Just as Joseph interpreted the cupbearer’s dream as a future restoration (Gen 40:10–11), and the baker’s dream as a future execution (v.19), so too Pharaoh’s two groups of seven cows and ears of grain (41:18–19, 22–23) represent seven future years of flourishing followed by seven years of famine (vv.26–27, 29–30). When Daniel (possibly accompanied by his companions, cf. “we” in Dan 2:36) interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, it is in terms of the narrated present and future. Daniel interprets the head of gold in terms of a present narrated time of flourishing, when God has given Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom over every human, beast, and bird (Dan 2:37–38), but the other elements of his dream as other kingdoms when Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom would no longer hold dominion (vv.39–40). In Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s narrated future time, the iron element is a kingdom malignant towards other kingdoms (Dan 2:40), and its mixture with pottery is a fatal flaw to that malignant kingdom (vv.40–43), but followed by God’s establishment of a different,
everlasting kingdom (vv.44–45). Just as Joseph warned Pharaoh that suffering will follow plenty, so too Daniel warns Nebuchadnezzar that his time of glory will come to an end.

**Dream Interpretation and the Recognition of Wisdom**

Just as there are shared likenesses between Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and those interpreted by Joseph of future narrated time, so too there is a likeness of Nebuchadnezzar to Pharaoh in recognising wisdom in the interpreter. After Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dream as forecasting seven years of plenty then seven years of famine, he advises him to appoint someone “understanding and wise” (כְּבָד חָכָם) to govern the land of Egypt:

> “And now, may Pharaoh see a man discerning and wise (כְּבָד חָכָם, Tg. Onq. Gen 41:33), and let him set him over the land of Egypt.” (Gen 41:33)

Joseph explains to Pharaoh that he needs such an understanding and wise governor to keep and preserve one-fifth of all of Egypt’s agricultural produce during the seven years of plenty, to act as a reserve supply for the seven years of famine which will follow (Gen 41:34–36). Pharaoh is satisfied not only with Joseph’s interpretation, but also his advice to ward off the future danger predicted by his interpretation (Gen 41:37), and expresses his admiration of Joseph as one endowed with “a spirit of the gods”:

> And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find one like this man in whom is a spirit of the gods (רָוִחַ אֱלֹהִים בּ), “that a spirit of prophecy from the presence of Yhwh is in him,” (כְּבָד חָכָם, Tg. Onq. Gen 41:38)?” (Gen 41:38)

Insofar as Pharaoh recognises the presence of this spirit in Joseph, he shares a likeness with Nebuchadnezzar who, somewhat later in narrated time, will recognise “a spirit of the holy gods” in Daniel (וְיִרְשָׁד אֱלֹהִים קַדִישִׁים, Dan 4:5). Nebuchadnezzar attains this perception of Daniel after he interprets his first dream, which he sees as Daniel’s ability to reveal secrets (וְגָלַה רָזִין דִּי יְכַלְתָּלָה רָזִין דְּנָה, Dan 2:47; cf. וְכָל־רֵצָא אָנָס לְאָנָס, 4:6), and his prostration and order of incense for Daniel (2:46) may be some initial recognition of a deity dwelling in him, if this act does not come from Nebuchadnezzar’s cynicism towards his gathered sages. Interestingly, Targum Onqelos interprets the “spirit of the gods” (Gen 41:38) as “a spirit of prophecy from the presence of Yhwh” (Tg. Onq. Gen 41:38), seemingly understanding Joseph as both prophet and sage, not unlike the co-existence of aspects of both prophet and sage in Daniel. Pharaoh’s
recognition of Joseph’s understanding and wisdom picks up on his counsel to find someone “understanding and wise” (Gen 41:33), and is expressed as follows:

And Pharaoh said to Joseph afterwards, “God has made known (יהוה אֵלֵ֣ב יְדֵ֑יעַ, Tg. Onq. Gen 41:39) to you all of this, there is none discerning and wise (לֵית דְּסֻוכלְּת וְּחָכֵָ֖ם, Tg. Onq. Gen 41:39) like you.” (Gen 41:39)

Nebuchadnezzar will also come to recognise “understanding” and “wisdom” in Daniel and his three companions, but not immediately after the point in narrated time in which Daniel interprets his first dream (Dan 2:37–45). The narrator has already informed the reader a biblical chapter earlier in the time of narrating that Nebuchadnezzar noticed Daniel and his friends’ surpassing of their exilic cohort: “And the king spoke with them, and there was not found among all of them any like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and they stood before the king” (Dan 1:19). Nebuchadnezzar’s inability to “find” any “like” the protagonists (אֵין־נ בֵ֥וֹן וְּח כ ֵּ֖ם, Dan 1:19) is expressed in language like Pharaoh’s question to his servants about whether they could “find” any “like” Joseph (ךָוֹא יִנְמָצָא כָזֶַּ֔ה, Gen 41:38). The narrator then informs the reader that Nebuchadnezzar “found” Daniel’s and his companions’ uniqueness when he questioned them about “every matter of wisdom of discernment” (וְכַֹ֗כל דְבַּר חָכְמַּ֣ת בִינַָּ֔ה, Dan 1:20), calling to mind Pharaoh’s discovery of Joseph to be “discerning and wise” (ךָא יִנְמָצָא כָמֽ, Gen 41:39). The attributes associated with Daniel and his friends, expressed through the nouns חָכְמָה and בִינָה, are semantic cognates of the adjective חָכָם and the niphil verbal participle of בִּֽינָה, which express Joseph’s characteristics. The narrator informs the reader that Nebuchadnezzar makes this discovery about Daniel’s understanding and wisdom “at the end of the days” (וּלְמִקְצָת הַַּיָמִַּ֔ים, Dan 1:18) which he ordered to be for the exiled youths’ training: “three years” (שׁוָֹ֑שָׁנִ֣ים שָׁל, v.5). These “three years” situates Nebuchadnezzar’s discovery at a point later in narrated time than Daniel’s interpretation of the king’s first dream (“in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar,” Dan 2:1). Nebuchadnezzar’s perception of Daniel’s and his companions’ understanding and wisdom therefore matures in their conversations (Dan 1:20) afterwards in narrated time (2:1). However, since the narrator informs the reader of Nebuchadnezzar’s discovery (in Dan 1:20) thirty-nine verses before Daniel begins to dissect Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (in 2:37)—earlier
in the time of narrating—the reader’s curiosity is aroused about the context in which Nebuchadnezzar might make his discovery (1:20). The narrator has already informed the reader of God’s gift to Daniel and his friends of “wisdom” (חכמה), and to Daniel of “understanding in every vision and dreams” (понимание, Dan 1:17), but the reader comes to perceive the context of Nebuchadnezzar’s perception of their wisdom after advancing through the time of narrating of Dan 2.

Pharaoh’s recognition of Joseph’s wisdom and understanding (Gen 41:39) is also a recognition of Joseph’s fitness to govern his kingdom: “You will be over my house and upon your mouth will command all my people, except for the throne I will be greater than you” (Gen 41:40). Pharaoh’s recognition of Joseph’s intellectual and governmental capabilities within the same speech act (Gen 41:39–40) has been prompted by Joseph’s shrewd advice that Pharaoh’s need to find “a man understanding and wise” is so that such a person could be set “over the land of Egypt” (v.33), to ward off the predicted disaster (vv.34–36). Joseph leaves it to Pharaoh to make the link between the kind of wisdom which can successfully interpret a dream in terms of the narrated future and the kind of wisdom which can successfully govern a land to avoid dangers predicted in dream interpretation (Gen 41:39–40). As the narrator informs the reader, Joseph’s interpretive wisdom is vindicated in that seven years of plenty then seven years of famine follow (Gen 41:53–54). His governmental wisdom is also vindicated by his decision to store grain (Gen 41:48–49), which allows Egypt to flourish during the famine, makes all Egyptians dependent upon Joseph for bread, and all nations upon Egypt for grain (vv.54–57).

Nebuchadnezzar shows likeness to Pharaoh in promoting Daniel to “govern over the province of Babylon,” and making him “prefect over all the wise ones of Babylon” (Dan 2:48). Here Nebuchadnezzar regards Daniel as fit both to govern the capital province and to direct all his other sages, implying that he sees a connection between successful dream interpretation and governmental ability. However, although Nebuchadnezzar is like Pharaoh in this manner, Daniel is unlike Joseph. Where Joseph had argued before Pharaoh about the possibility of staving off starvation through the selection of a wise and understanding governor who will
collect grain during the time of plenty (Gen 41:33–36), it is not so clear that Daniel believes that Nebuchadnezzar will be able to prevent the future disaster symbolised by the rock falling from the mountain which crushes all parts of the statue (Dan 2:44–45). The language used by Daniel suggests a note of inevitability and finality about this future danger for kings such as Nebuchadnezzar: “it will crush and end all these kingdoms, and it will stand forever” (Dan 2:44); “a great God has made known to the king what will be after this, and the dream is certain and the interpretation trustworthy (v.45). Nebuchadnezzar does not seem to perceive such danger as relevant to his own present in narrated time, as he not only decides to set Daniel over his province of Babylon (Dan 2:48), rather than execute the doomsayer, but will also celebrate “the head of gold,” which Daniel identified with him (v.38), by the construction of a tall image of gold (3:1). In the end, however, Daniel declines to govern the province of Babylon (Dan 2:49), and perhaps under the belief that his successful dream interpretation does not necessarily make him a better administrator (unlike Joseph, Gen 41:33–36), Daniel successfully requests that his companions Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego govern the capital province instead (Dan 2:49). Daniel seems to perceive the situation in such a way that his friends’ wisdom, which he holds in common with them (except dream interpretation, Dan 1:17), will prove beneficial in their administration of provincial matters (to be played in 3:1–30). Daniel also seems to perceive himself as better placed to remain as a dream-interpreter in Nebuchadnezzar’s court (Dan 2:49), a function which will again play a part in the plot (3:31–4:34).

The Orientation to Past Narrated Time in the Dream’s Metaphors

When the character Daniel introduces his dream account to Nebuchadnezzar and his court, he affirms that “the Revealer of secrets” has made known to the king what will be in the future (Dan 2:29). Daniel relates this knowledge to wisdom (חכומת), even if it is through self-denial in a display of humility (Dan 2:30, he affirms his own wisdom in v.23), which he diplomatically asserts is for the king’s benefit (v.30). Daniel’s words imply that wisdom is required to interpret the dream (description and interpretation follow in Dan 2:31–45), and that the knowledge he communicates may be a kind of wisdom, opening the possibility of
Nebuchadnezzar learning wisdom from Daniel’s speech. Here I intend to draw out the metaphors in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation to analyse their aspect of judgment, in relation to wisdom, interpreted through intertexts of the same word-images recurring elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, as read through the lens of the Aramaic tradition in the Targumim. These metaphors and intertexts suggest a relationship between Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and past narrated time, which sets the context for the implicit judgment and the kind of wisdom needed.

**Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron**

When Daniel interprets the four metals of gold, silver, bronze, and iron in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as four kingdoms, he sees some likeness between these four metals collated and foreign kingdoms. I will examine potential likenesses through the readings of Targumim Onqelos, Jonathon, and Chronicles, which present co-occurrences of דְַהַּב, כְַסַף, נְַחָשָׁ, and פַּרְַזֶל, in a pattern of past narrated time which is transformed into a pattern for the future through Daniel’s interpretation.

First, these four metals—gold, silver, bronze, and iron—are part of the booty which the Israelites of Moses’ generation seized after conquering the Midianites:

“But only the gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron (אֶת־הַז הֵ֖ב וְּאֶת־הַכָּֽסֶף אֶת־הַנְַחָשָׁ אֶת־הַבַּרְַזֶל; Tg. Onq. Num 31:22), the smelted dross and the lead.” (Num 31:22)

The narrator of Numbers presents Yhwh as commanding Moses (Num 31:1) to take vengeance upon the Midianites (v.2), which Moses faithfully relays to the people when ordering them to war (v.3). Targum Onqelos reinterprets this “vengeance of Yhwh” (נִקְּמַּת־יְהוֵָ֖ה, Num 31:3) as the “retributions of justice (or judgment, פְּרוּשׁוֹת דִּין) of the people of Yhwh upon Midian” (Tg. Onq. Num 31:3). Phinehas, who impaled Cozbi, daughter of Zur (Num 25:15), with his spear, during a conjugal act with her Israelite partner (vv.6–8), is singled out to lead the troops into battle, while carrying “the vessels of the holy place” (שׁוּכְלֵי הַקַּדְּשָׁא, Tg. Onq. Num 31:6).  

However, as a twenty-first century reader of this text, I wince at any implications of “justice” in this context (especially in conjunction with Num 31:14–18), whether or not it reflects the Targum writer’s perspective.
Num 31:6). They slay Balaam, son of Beor, and the five kings of Midian, one of whom is Cozbi’s father Zur (Num 31:8), and seize the gold, silver, bronze, and iron from Midian (v.22), by order of Eleazar, Phinehas’s father, as “the statute of the Torah which Yhwh commanded Moses” (v.21). These metals from the Midianites’ camp will be purified by fire (תַּעֲבָרָה בָא שְׁוֶ֖יַּ וְטָהְֽר), or if they would be tarnished by fire, then purified by water (Num 31:23).86 Moses justifies the command to conquer Midian on the supposition that they led the Israelites astray to worship the Baal of Peor (Num 31:16). Daniel’s metaphor of these four metals as four kingdoms (Dan 2:37–40), when set against Moses’s order to take revenge on Midian (Num 31:3, cf. v.16), implies a warning to any ruler who would seek to lead Israel astray through idolatry (cf. Nebuchadnezzar’s attempt in Dan 3:14–15). However, Eleazar’s order for these metals to be taken and cleansed (Num 31:22–23) implants hope for Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel’s metaphor, that elements from any of these four kingdoms might be preserved, despite Daniel’s anticipation that they will be completely wiped away (וּנְשִָ֤א הִמוֹן רוּחַָ֔א וְכָל־אֲתֵַּ֖ר לָא־הִשְׁתֲּ֣חַ לְהָוֹן, Dan 2:35).

The second intertext (of gold, silver, bronze, and iron) also places these metals as part of the spoils of war, seized by the Israelites of Joshua’s generation after conquering Jericho:

> And the city they burnt with fire, and everything in it, except the silver and the gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron (כֶ֣סֶף וְזָהַָ֗ב וּכְלֵֵּ֤י נְחֹ֙שֶׁת֙ וְבַרְזֶַּ֔ל; Tg. Neb. Josh 6:24), they gave to the treasury of the house of Yhwh. (Josh 6:24)

The gold, silver, bronze, and iron (כֶ֣סֶף וְּדַּהְּבָא וּמָנֵּ֤י נְחֹשָׁאָ֖ו וְכַּבַּרְזֶל אֹ‬, Tg. Ket. Josh 6:19) seized from Jericho are called “holy” to Yhwh (קִֹּ֥דֶשׁ הֵ֖וּא לַּֽיהוֵָ֖ה), and are kept for God’s treasury (אוֹצִַּּ֥ר יְֽהוֵָ֖ה יָבֽוֹא, Josh 6:19), while the other spoils fall under the ban (v.18). Yhwh says to Joshua, “See, I have given into your hands (נְתִּֽתִי בְיָָּדְ) Jericho and its king and the strong ones of the army” (Josh 6:2), words reminiscent of the narrator of Daniel, that “my Lord gave into [Nebuchadnezzar’s] hand (נְתֵֵּ֥ת יַֽהוָֽה בְּיָָּד) Jehoiakim, king of Judah” (Dan 1:2). Just as Joshua commands the soldiers to take the gold, silver, bronze, and iron for

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86 Targum Onqelos Numbers 31:23 reads the purification of the metals by fire (שָׁבָּר) with the Aramaic noun רָב, the same word for “fire” used in Nebuchadnezzar’s decreed punishment for anyone refusing worship to his statue (נֶר, Dan 3:6, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27).
God’s treasury (אוצר יהוה, Josh 6:19, v.24), so too Nebuchadnezzar takes the temple vessels into “the treasure house of his god” (אוצר יהוה, Dan 1:2). When the gold, silver, bronze, and iron composing Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-statue (Dan 2:32–33) are set against Joshua seizing the same from Jericho (Josh 6:24), the advice implied by Daniel’s metaphor is that although Nebuchadnezzar may have seized such spoils from the Jerusalem temple, this is due to God handing them over (Dan 1:2), and they could just as readily be taken by another people and kingdom established by God never to pass away (2:44–45).

In the next four intertexts which follow (1 Chr 22:14, 16; 29:2, 7; Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 22:14, 16; 29:2, 7), gold, silver, bronze, and iron are part of David’s spoils of war which Solomon inherits for the building and furnishing of the Jerusalem temple. The first two occur in David’s speech to his son:

14“And behold, in my affliction I have prepared for the house of Yhwh, gold—one hundred thousand talents, and silver—one thousand of thousands of talents, and for bronze and for iron (לז הֵב וְלכֶסֶף וְלַנְּחַשֶּׁת וְלַבַּרְּזֵל), there is no weighing because of its multitude, and wood and stone I have prepared, and upon them you will add. ... For gold, for silver, and for bronze, and for iron (לז הֵב וְלכֶסֶף וְלַנְּחַשֶּׁת וְלַבַּרְּזֵל), there is no counting. Get up and work, and Yhwh will be with you.” (1 Chr 22:14, 16)

David’s advice to Solomon begins with recounting his initial plan to build a house for the name of God (לבת לוֹם יִשְׂרָאֵל, 1 Chr 22:7), but he was forbidden by the word of God to make such use out of the great quantities of spoils (לָרֵב, v.14) he had gathered, because of the great amount (לָרֹב) of blood he shed in pursuing his wars (v.8). Instead, his son Solomon, who will be “a man of rest, and I [God] will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies” (1 Chr 22:9), “will build a house for my name” ( محمودה יְהוָה), “and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever” (וַהֲכִינוֹתִֵ֜י כִס ֵ֧א מַּלְכוּתָ֛וֹ עַל־יִשְרָא ֵ֖ל עַד־עוֹלָֽם, v.10). The divine character employs the principle that the one who gathers gold, silver, bronze, and iron through war may not use them to build the house for God’s name: this task instead falls to a wise successor who is a builder, not a fighter (which would preclude Nebuchadnezzar, Dan 1:1–2). The next intertexts involve David calling together the whole assembly (1 Chr 29:1), to ask for further
donations of precious materials (v.5), while noting his own gathering of gold, silver, bronze, and iron, for building God’s house:

“And by all my strength I have secured for the house of my God: the gold for the gold, and the silver for the silver, and the bronze for the bronze, the iron for the iron (הַז הַב וְלַכֶָֽסֶף וְּהַנְּח ֵ֣שֶת לַנְּח ִ֗שֶת הַבַרְּזֶל לַבַרְּזִֶ֔ל), and the wood for the wood, onyx stones and fillings, stones of antimony and mosaic, and every precious stone and stones of alabaster for abundance.” (1 Chr 29:2)

The tribal leaders then fulfil David’s call for freewill offerings (1 Chr 29:6), including gold, silver, bronze, and iron:

And they gave for the labour of the house of God, gold (כַּסֶף, Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 29:7)—five thousand talents, and ten thousand drachmas, and silver (כַּסֶף, Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 29:7)—ten thousand talents, and bronze (נְח ֹ֔שֶת, Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 29:7)—eighteen thousand talents, and iron (לַבַרְּזִֶ֔ל, Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 29:7)—one hundred thousand talents. (1 Chr 29:7)

The narrator then emphasises that David and the people of Israel give these precious metals with freedom and joy (1 Chr 29:9). Daniel’s metaphor of gold, silver, bronze, and iron as four kingdoms, when set against these intertexts (1 Chr 22:14, 16; 29:2, 7; Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 22:14, 16; 29:2, 7), implies they will be spoils of war for the everlasting kingdom to be established by God, but also offers hope that their remnants might be incorporated into the new house of God in the eternal kingdom. When gold, silver, bronze, and iron are considered as metaphors for foreign kingdoms and the literal building materials for furnishing God’s house, the last two intertexts (2 Chr 2:6, 13) are suggestive that these kingdoms’ incorporation into a future house or kingdom of God can only be achieved through the work of wisdom. These four metals are the objects to be worked by Hiram-abi’s wisdom, in that he knows how to craft them for the construction of Solomon’s temple and its related vessels (2 Chr 2:6, 13). Hiram, king of Tyre, sent Hiram-abi at Solomon’s request for a “wise man for working with gold, and with silver, and with bronze, and with iron” (אִישׁ־חָכָָ֛ם לַעֲשוֹת בַּזָהָ֙ב וּבַּכֵֶ֜סֶף וּבַּנְּח ֹ֖שֶׁת וּבַּבַּרְּזֶַ֗ל, 2 Chr 2:6; גֶבֶר חָכָֽם לַמעֶּבֶד עֲבוֹדַת א בְָֽדֲֹהֵא ובָּכֶס פֵּאֶה לְבַרְּזֶlèveלַכֶָֽסֶף וְּנְח ַּשֶׁת לְבַרְּזֶל, Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 2:6), along with dyed-cloth materials and engravings. Hiram blesses the God of Israel for giving David “a wise son, who knows intelligence and insight” (ב ֣ן חָכַָ֗ם יוֹד ֙עַּ֙ ש ֣כֶל וּבִינַָ֔ה, 2 Chr 2:11; בר חכים ידע סוכלתנו וביונתא, Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 2:11), and Hiram-abi is the requested “wise man who knows insight” (אִישׁ־חָכָָ֛ם יוֹד ִּ֥עַ בִינֵָ֖ה, 2 Chr 2:12; אִישׁ־חָכָָ֛ם יוֹד ִּ֥עַ בִינֵָ֖ה, Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 2:12), who “knows how to work with gold and with
silver, with bronze, with iron” (2 Chr 2:13), and the other requisite materials. If gold, silver, bronze, and iron are four kingdoms, in Daniel’s metaphor (Dan 2:37–40), which will be completely wiped away by wind rising in the wake of the stone falling from the mountain (vv.34–35), then in this sense they are not part of God’s eternal kingdom forecast by Daniel for future narrated time (vv.44–45). However, if these four kingdoms are like the plunder gathered from Midian (Num 31:22), Jericho (Josh 6:24), and David’s enemies (1 Chr 22:14, 16; 29:2, 7), they could conceivably be incorporated as raw materials into the furnishings of God’s house in the future eternal kingdom, if worked upon by the wisdom, understanding, and intelligence of an artisan like Hiram-abi, who is of mixed descent, “a son of a woman from the daughters of Dan, and his father is a man of Tyre” (2 Chr 2:13).

**Broken Clay, Stones, and Mountains**

Daniel’s interpretation of the dream’s imagery implies two reasons for the four kingdoms’ end: the weakness of the fourth kingdom, which is composed of clay mixed with otherwise strong iron (Dan 2:41–43); the stone which strikes the statue on the feet composed of clay and iron (v.34), a metaphor for God’s ever-enduring kingdom (vv.44–45). Here I aim to read the metaphors of clay, stones, and mountains as the reason for the limitations on the narrated future of kingdoms such as Nebuchadnezzar’s: because of their weakness but also the strength of another.

**Potter’s Clay as Weakness**

Daniel hints that the weakness of the fourth kingdom, expressed in the metaphor of iron mixed with clay, refers to “the seed of human beings” (בִזְרַע אֲנָשִׁים, Dan 2:43). The weight of scholarship reads this phrase as referring to one or both disastrous marriage alliances between the two kingdoms of Seleucids and Ptolemies, after the sundering of Alexander’s empire, rather than mixed ethnic marriages among the general populace (see Dan 11:6, 17). However,
the language of fragile potter’s clay is allusive of texts in the Aramaic tradition of Targumim Onqelos (Tg. Onq. Lev 6:21; 11:33; 15:12), Jonathon (Tg. Neb. 2 Sam 5:20; Jer 19:11), Isaiah (Tg. Isa. 30:14), Psalms (Tg. Ket. Pss 2:9; 31:13), and Chronicles (Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 14:11), through the linkwords “(potted) clay” (חֲסַף, Dan 2:33, 34, 41, 43, 45), “(wet) clay” (טִין, vv.41, 43), and “potter” (פֶחָר, v.41), combined with the verbal roots “to crush” (דקק, vv.34, 45), “to mix” (ערב, vv.41, 43), and “to break” (חבָר, v.42).

First, God gives Moses instructions for Aaron and his priest-sons (Lev 6:17–18) to break (ישב, Lev 6:21; יחרב, Tg. Onq. Lev 6:21) clay vessels (קדשכי חזר, Lev 6:21; קדשי חזר, Tg. Onq. Lev 6:21) used to cook the sin offering (משהכ חזר, Lev 6:18), which is “holy of holies” (קדש קוшив, Lev 6:18). Leviticus 11:33 has God convey instructions to Moses and Aaron for the people of Israel (Lev 11:1–2), to break (וכל חזר; חזר彼ら, Tg. Onq. Lev 11:33) any clay vessels (וכל חזר; חזרלע, Tg. Onq. Lev 11:33) made unclean by contact with dead (יומם, Lev 11:31, 32), swarming creatures (הכלים חזרו, Lev 11:31). “Seed” (זרע) is mentioned in relation to swarming creatures’ corpses: dry seed intended for sowing is not made unclean by contact with them (Lev 11:37), but seed which contacts both them and water is unclean (Lev 11:38). The earthen vessels touched by a man with an unclean discharge (זרע, Lev 15:12; interpreted as gonorrhoea, דוֹבָנָא, Tg. Onq. Lev 15:12), are juxtaposed to clothes made unclean by a man discharging “seed” (זרע, Lev 15:16, 17). These clay vessels (קדשכי חזר, Lev 15:12; קדשי חזר, Tg. Onq. Lev 15:12) are also to be broken (ישב, Lev 15:12; יחרב, Tg. Onq. Lev 15:12). When read in conjunction with these texts from Leviticus, the dream-statue’s feet of clay (Dan 2:33) gain the nuance that their breaking is intended to preserve the holiness of the offering contained within (Lev 6:21), or to avoid contamination of people or other objects (Lev 11:33; 15:12). At the end of the book of Daniel, the aftermath of the northern king’s sudden end (Dan 11:40–45) is expressed as a separation of those who rise from the dust of the earth, “these to life everlasting, but those to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence,” (אלה לחי עולם ואלה לקסמים, Dan 12:2).

The next two intertexts parallel each other in the story of David (2 Sam 5:20; 1 Chr 14:11), set in the beginning of his reign as king (2 Sam 5:1–4), when he comes to know (יידע, 2 Sam 5:20; 2 Sam 5:20; 1 Chr 14:11).
that Yhwh has established him as king. The Philistines hear of his anointing as king and come out against him (2 Sam 5:17; 1 Chr 14:8), stopping in the valley of Rephaim (2 Sam 5:18; 1 Chr 14:9). David inquires into the battle’s outcome, and learns that God has “given” the Philistines into his “hand” (ךָעֲלִיַּֽה כִֽי־נָתִֹּ֥ן אֶת ָ֛ן אֶת־הַּפְלִשְׁתִֵ֖ים בְּיָדֶֽךָ), just as Adonai will later “give” David’s city Jerusalem and his successor Jehoiakim into the “hand” of Nebuchadnezzar (וֵֹ֜י אֲדֹנָ֙י בְיָד וּנְתַּ֖תִים בְּיָדֶֽךָ). Emerging victorious over the Philistines, he praises God for bursting forth against his enemies like water surging through the breach of a retaining wall or riverbank (2 Sam 5:20; 1 Chr 14:11), which Targum Jonathon rereads as the breaking (כתיבור) of a clay vessel (מאן דתחף) full of water (Tg. Neb. 2 Sam 5:20), and Targum Chronicles as the breaking (כתיבור) of a potter’s vessel (מאן דתחף) full of water (Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 14:11).

In the next intertext, however, it is not a foreign enemy like the Philistines who are “broken like breaking potters’ pitchers, crushed (כְּשׁוֹרָה כְשׁוֹרָה מָן תַּחְתֵּשׁ מַחְמֵשׁ), not spared, and not found among the fragments of earthenware” (כְּשׁוֹרָה כְּשׁוֹרָה מָן תַּחְתֵּשׁ מַחְמֵשׁ), but “a rebellious people” who “will not hear the Torah of Yhwh” (Isa 30:9), nor their seers’ or prophets’ oracles about the Holy One of Israel (vv.10–11). Likewise, in the next intertext, Jeremiah utters an oracle against the Judean kings and Jerusalem (Jer 19:11; Tg. Neb. Jer 19:11), that God “will break” (אַתְבַּר) “this people and this city, just as a vessel of a potter” (כַּאֲשִֶׁ֤ר יִשְׁבֹר֙ אֶת־כְלִ֣י הַּיוֹצָ֑ר), because its people abandoned God for other deities, shed innocent blood (v.4), and offered their children to Baals by burning them in fire (לְﬠָרַ֖שׁ אֶת־בָּנִים בָאֶ֛ם לְאיוֹכֵ֖ד יָת בְּנַעֲדָא יַעֹ֥וֵב, Tg. Neb. Jer 19:5; לְﬠָרַשׁ אֶת־בָּנִים בָאֶ֛ם לְאיוֹכֵ֖ד יָת בְּנַעֲדָא יַעֹ֥וֵב, Tg. Neb. Jer 19:5; allusive of the trial of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Dan 3:15, 20, 21, 23). Not only are David’s enemies susceptible to breaking like clay, but also David’s kingdom if its people do not listen to Torah or to prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. However, Daniel’s metaphor of fragile clay for the weakness of a kingdom implies a warning to Nebuchadnezzar, that just as he broke Jehoiakim’s kingdom (Dan 1:1–2), even his may be broken. So too the psalmist may look forward to God “breaking” enemies
of the Davidic king “like a potter’s vessel” (כִכְלִי לְצַוָּר הַמֶּקִיסְת, Ps 2:9; תְנַפְצָם, Tg. Ket. Ps 2:9) using a sceptre of “iron” (בַּרְזֶל, Ps 2:9; פְדוּרָא, Tg. Ket. Ps 2:9), but may also identify with someone dead and forgotten, “like a vessel destroyed/like a vessel of a potter broken” (כִכְלִי אֹב, Ps 31:3; כִכְלִי אֹב, Tg. Ket. Ps 31:13). In summary, the weakness of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-image, its feet of breakable clay, is a metaphor which calls to mind clay vessels to be broken to preserve cleaness or holiness, or the fragility of either the Davidic kingdom or its enemies, when they stand in opposition to Israel’s God.

Stones and Mountains as Torah from Sinai

The object which breaks Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-image (Dan 2:34), a stone which becomes a mountain (משָׁרָא, v.35) or a stone cut from a mountain (אֶבֶן דִי־לָא בִידַַּיִית לְטִוּר רֵב, v.45), is Daniel’s metaphor for an eternal kingdom to be established by God in distant future narrated time, which will not pass on to another people but bring all other kingdoms to an end (v.44). By his act of “seeing” this final kingdom “as” the image of the stone cut from the mountain (Dan 2:45, which also becomes a mountain, v.35), Daniel makes it “like” Moses’s “stone” tablets of the covenant “cut” on the “mountain” of Sinai, even if the dream-stone of the dream-mountain “are not” these stone tablets of Mount Sinai.88 Taking the linkwords “stone” (אֶבֶן) and “mountain” (טוּר) from Dan 2:35, 45, and “stone” (אֶבֶן), and “to cut” (גזר) from vv.34, 45, Targumim Onqelos and Jonathon allow for intertextual linkage, first with Exod 24:12; 31:18; 34:4; Deut 5:22; 8:9; 9:9–10; 10:1, 3; 27:4; 2 Sam 16:13; Tg. Onq. Exod 24:12; 31:18; 34:4; Deut 5:22; 8:9; 9:9–10; 10:1, 3; 27:4; Tg. Neb. 2 Sam 16:13, second with Deut 9:9; 1 Kgs 8:9, 21; Tg. Onq. Deut 9:9; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 8:9, 21. I will focus on those intertexts which connect the stone cut from the mountain in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to Moses’s stone tablets from the mountain (Exod 24:12; 31:18; 34:4; Deut 5:22; 9:9–10; 10:1, 3; 1 Kgs 8:9, 21; Tg. Onq. Exod 24:12; 31:18; 34:4; Deut 5:22; 9:9–10; 10:1, 3; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 8:9, 21), thus effecting a bridge between the distant future narrated time forecast by Daniel’s interpretation and the distant past narrated time of Moses (and God) inscribing Torah on stone.

88 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 293.
The first intertext occurs in the past narrated time when the Israelites promise obedience to Yhwh (Exod 24:3, 7), in a covenantal bond which Moses seals by splashing blood against an altar (vv.6, 8). God commands Moses to approach up the mountain, to write Torah and the commandment on stone tablets for teaching the Israelites:

And Yhwh said to Moses, “Go up to me, towards the mountain (יהוה אל הר, Tg. Onq. Exod 24:12), and be there, and let me give to you tablets of stone (את לוחות אבן, Tg. Onq. Exod 24:12) and the Torah and the commandment which I have written for teaching them.” (Exod 24:12)

After God instructs Moses on the building of the wilderness sanctuary and its vessels (Exod 25–31), commissioning Bezalel for his “wisdom, understanding, and knowledge” (bbieחכמה ובחכמה ובוחכמה, 31:3), then Oholiab, to lead the artistic work (31:1–6), God gives Moses two stone tablets of testimony on the mountain of Sinai:


Whereas the stone from the mountain in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream broke the kingdoms of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay (Dan 2:45), Moses breaks his stone tablets at the foot of the mountain in anger (Exod 32:19) when the Israelites break the covenantal command by worshipping the golden calf (vv.1–8). At God’s command (Exod 34:1), Moses hews out two new stone tablets for God to rewrite Israel’s covenantal duties on the mountain of Sinai: 89

And Moses engraved two tablets of stone (שני לוחות אבן, Tg. Onq. Exod 34:4) like the first ones, and Moses rose early in the morning and went up to the mountain of Sinai (בְהֵר סִינַי, Tg. Onq. Exod 34:4), as Yhwh commanded him, and he received with his hand two tablets of stone (שני לוחות אבן, Tg. Onq. Exod 34:4). (Exod 34:4)

In Moses’s great exhortation to the Israelites in the wilderness before they enter the promised land (Dan 1:1–11:32), Moses recalls narrated time now past when he received the stone tablets of God’s covenantal words on the mountain, which Moses now calls Horeb (5:2):

“These words Yhwh spoke to all your assembly on the mountain (בְּהֵר; אֲבָא עַל הבַּר, Tg. Onq. Deut 5:22), from the midst of the fire, the cloud and the darkness, a great voice, and did not do

89 Exodus 34:5–7 alludes to God’s side of the covenant in the divine declaration of God’s mercy, fidelity, and favour.
so again. But [God] wrote upon two tablets of stone (לֻחֵ֣י אֲב נ ים, Tg. Onq. Deut 5:22) and gave them to me.” (Deut 5:22)

Two divine prohibitions in this context concern the making, serving, and bowing before idols (Deut 5:8–9), and murder (v.17), which Nebuchadnezzar will transgress by making a golden image, commanding others to prostrate before it, or face a cruel and unjust death by fire (Dan 3:1–6). In ironic contrast, Moses recalls that when he received these stone tablets for the Israelites’ instruction (Deut 5:22), they feared death by God’s fire on the mountain (vv.23–27). However, if the Israelites are obedient to God’s commandments, they will demonstrate their “wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the peoples” (חָכְמַּתְכֶם֙ וּבִ֣ינַּתְכֶַּם לְע ינ ֵ֖י הָעַּמִָ֑ים), who will commend them as “a wise and understanding people” (טְסֵרְקָם, Deut 4:6). The Israelites have not always been obedient, for Moses recalls their lack of righteousness, “stiff necks,” and provocation of God (Deut 9:4–8), exemplified in the act of idolatry (v.12), when he next remembers the stone tablets cut not by hands, but by God, and God’s “finger,” on the mountain:

“When I ascended the mountain (הר ה, Tg. Onq. Deut 9:9) to receive the tablets of stone (לֻח ֵ֣ת אֲב נ ִ֔ים, Tg. Onq. Deut 9:9), the tablets of the covenant which Yhwh cut (אֲשֶר־כ רֵַ֥ת יְּהו ֵ֖ה; ד גזַר יוי, Tg. Onq. Deut 9:9) with you, and I sat down on the mountain forty days and forty nights, bread I did not eat and water I did not drink. And Yhwh gave to me two tablets of stone (לֻוחֵי אַבנַי א, Tg. Onq. Deut 9:10), written by the finger of God, and upon them as all the words which Yhwh spoke with you, on the mountain (ב ה ָ֛ר; בְּטֻור א, Tg. Onq. Deut 9:10) from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly.” (Deut 9:9–10)

Moses then recalls his intercession for the Israelites (Deut 9:26–29), after which God graciously allows the rewriting of the covenant on another two stone tablets, when Moses re-asdescends the mountain, and which he will place in the ark of the covenant (10:2):

“‘At that time Yhwh said to me, ‘Engrave for yourself two tablets of stone (שְּנֵָֽי־לֻוח ֵּ֤ת אֲב נ ים; תְּרֵין לֻוחֵי אַבנַי א, Tg. Onq. Deut 10:1) like the first ones, and go up to me, towards the mountain (הר ה; לְטֻור א, Tg. Onq. Deut 10:1), and you will make for yourself an ark of wood.’ ... And I made an ark of acacia wood, and I engraved two tablets of stone (לֻוחֵי אַבנַי א, Tg. Onq. Deut 10:3) like the first ones, and I went up to the mountain (ב ה ָ֛ר; בְּטֻור א, Tg. Onq. Deut 10:3), and the two tablets were in my hand.” (Deut 10:1, 3)

In a narrated time that is future to Moses but past to Nebuchadnezzar, Solomon discovers the ark of the covenant, empty except for the two stone tablets God had cut for Moses:

Nothing was in the ark except two tablets of stone (לֻוחֵ֣וֹת ה אֲב נ ִ֔ים, Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 8:9), which Moses had rested there, at Horeb, which Yhwh had cut (אֲשֶר כִּרְתָּא, Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 8:9) with the children of Israel during their coming out from the land of Egypt. (1 Kgs 8:9)
In the context of Solomon’s assembly of the Israelite chieftains (1 Kgs 8:1), the priests carry it into the holy place of the temple he has just finished building (vv.6, 8). Solomon speaks of the house he built for Yhwh’s name (1 Kgs 8:20), as a place for the ark and the two stone tablets cut by God:

“And I set there a place for the ark which was there, the covenant of Yhwh which [God] cut (בְּרֵית יְּהוָה אֲשֶׁר כִּרְתָ), “the two tablets of stone [לֻוחי אַבנֵי] which upon them are written the covenant of Yhwh which was cut [פִּגְזַר],” Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 8:21) with our ancestors when bringing them out from the land of Egypt.” (1 Kgs 8:21)

Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple (1 Kgs 8:22–53) begins with a plea for renewal of the covenant (vv.23–26), recalling God’s promise to his father David of always providing successors for the throne, conditional upon their listening obedience to walk in God’s ways (v.25). Somewhat proleptically, Solomon anticipates the narrated time of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, when, because of Israel’s sins, God will give them to an enemy who will carry them away to a distant land (1 Kgs 8:46), but Solomon hopes for their repentance in exile (vv.47–48), and for God’s forgiveness and compassion (v.50).90

Daniel’s metaphor of the stone from the mountain (Dan 2:34) sees this image as God’s eternal kingdom, which will never pass away but end all others (vv.44–45). In assigning this image to this hoped-for reality, Daniel makes this kingdom “like” Moses’s stone tablets from the mountain, written with a Torah to form the covenantal basis of life for God’s people, but the future eternal kingdom “is not” of the breakable qualities of these stones when the covenant is broken. Daniel’s metaphorical image implies the hoped-for reality of a future kingdom constituted upon perpetual obedience to Torah, which serves as a counterpoint to Nebuchadnezzar’s reign of gold which will end at some point in future narrated time, along with the kingdoms of silver, bronze, iron, and clay.

**Nebuchadnezzar and the Head of Gold**

Daniel identifies Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold (אֲנַחְתָּה אִשָּׁא רַעַת אֱלֹהִים, Dan 2:38), which, in Daniel’s understanding, acknowledges that God has given him “power, might, and

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splendour" (v.37), and universal rule over all human beings, beasts of the field, and birds of the air (v.38). In using this language about Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel anticipates his future estimation of the king in his interpretation of the dream of the great tree (Dan 4:17–19), which will end in judgment and acquired knowledge for Nebuchadnezzar (vv.20, 22–23). In the dream of the statue, the aspect of judgment is present in the stone's crushing of the gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay structure, with whose head Daniel identifies Nebuchadnezzar. However, in describing Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to him, Daniel presents the imagery in a way that might allow Nebuchadnezzar not to identify with the head of gold. In narrating and interpreting the dream, Daniel consistently affirms to Nebuchadnezzar that “you saw” (Dan 2:31, 34, 41, 43, 45) each element of the imagery. The curious thing about this is that he describes the image of the statue from the viewpoint of someone else looking at it in its entirety (Dan 2:31–35), not from the viewpoint of the statue’s eyes looking down upon its own structure. Daniel identifies Nebuchadnezzar as an element of the grand statue, the golden head (Dan 2:38), whom the reader would expect not to be able to see itself, but only to look down upon the silver arms, bronze belly and thighs, iron legs and feet, and iron-clay compound toes, connected to itself. When Daniel describes the dream imagery to Nebuchadnezzar as what “you saw,” he takes the viewpoint of an observer rather than a participant integrated into the structure. If this is how Nebuchadnezzar saw his own dream, then he did not see himself as the golden head, even though Daniel will identify him with the golden head. If Nebuchadnezzar described his dream to Daniel in Dan 2:16, and if Daniel accurately repeats the perspective in which Nebuchadnezzar saw its imagery, then his interpretation of the golden head (v.38) has diverged from the viewpoint of the dreamer. If Daniel first learnt of the imagery in a vision of the night (Dan 2:19), then his account carries across his own observer’s viewpoint which he then imposes upon Nebuchadnezzar, before declaring him to be an element of the statue (v.38). Significantly, Daniel calls the dream-image’s appearance “frightening” (וְרָוֹ הַדְּחִֽיל, Dan 2:31), but frightening for whom? For Daniel, who implies that he is afraid of the succession of kingdoms in whose custody he now finds himself, or for Nebuchadnezzar, whom Daniel implies is afraid of the political structure of which he himself is now head?
Nebuchadnezzar in Narrated Time

Nebuchadnezzar presents the reader with a fictive experience in which his control of the present in Dan 2:2–12 depends upon his control of his past. Can he grasp the narrated past of his dreaming state (Dan 2:1) through memory, which will allow him to adjudicate his sages’ interpretation of his dream? This scene also relates Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge to his future: does he have some inchoate idea that his dream pertains to his own survival in future narrated time? There are multiple ways to read Nebuchadnezzar’s character in how he handles this situation, reading him as possessing such traits as anxiety, curiosity, over-confidence, foolish risk-taking, and inarticulate fear. Daniel’s knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar’s past dream, however he came by this “secret,” grants him influence over the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s future. However, when Arioch introduces Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar as though for the first time (Dan 2:25), the king still retains enough memory over his sages’ failure to narrate and interpret his dream the day before (v.26), that he corrects Arioch’s mistaken assumption that Daniel need only provide the interpretation (v.25), in case any envious sages might be present to witness Daniel’s appointment over them (v.48, and Nebuchadnezzar unwittingly corrects Daniel, v.24, and even the narrator, v.16). Like Joseph, Daniel recognises the king’s dream as a forecast to future narrated time, when the kingdom will face danger, and like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar sees administrative wisdom implied by the successful sage’s interpretive wisdom (but Daniel will transfer the honour following this evaluation to his three companions, Dan 2:48–49).91 Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-images point to moments of past narrated time, when Israel seized gold, silver, bronze, and iron from its conquered foes, and brought these metals to God’s sanctuary for crafting into temple vessels by a wise artisan. This offers Nebuchadnezzar the fictive experience of the future in hope that some element of his kingdom might be preserved, melted down, reformed, and incorporated into the everlasting kingdom of the “other people” chosen by God (v.44). The clay-like weakness of uncleanness or disobedience to God’s Torah limits such a hope, since the future

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91 Daniel’s gift of honour to his friends robs the other sages of honour, setting the stage for their envious attack in Dan 3:8–12. See Kirkpatrick, 97.
everlasting kingdom is imaged in terms of a stone cut from the mountain, calling to mind the distant narrated past when the covenant and Torah Moses received on the mountain was cut by God’s finger onto stone tablets.
Chapter 6: Making with Gold, Acting without Justice—The Eclipse of Wisdom for Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3:1–30)

Daniel 3:1–30 contains no reference to “wisdom” or “the wise” (חָכְמָה, חַכִּים). The absence of wisdom in this chapter permits the reader to suspect that wisdom undergoes an eclipse for Nebuchadnezzar here, going into hiding before it can re-emerge. Daniel 3:1–30 does, however, contain three elements I will consider: Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image (Dan 3:1), his judgment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (vv.13–20), and the question of his change of character through narrated time (vv.24–30). First, Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image represents a gap, concerning what it may represent as a metaphor, whether Nebuchadnezzar’s deity, his kingdom, or himself. His act of constructing it is also ambiguous, since making objects from gold (Dan 3:1) is an action that mimics both wise characters (such as Bezalel and Solomon) and those disobedient to Torah. Second, Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment is open to the reader’s judgment. Nebuchadnezzar’s attempted coercion of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship his gods (Dan 3:14–15) is a judgment hostile to judgments found in Torah, but the punishment by fire is ambiguous: God commands that other gods represented as idols be destroyed by fire (thus Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image), but God also appoints Nebuchadnezzar to punish Jerusalem by fire. Third, Nebuchadnezzar shows signs of change after witnessing the survival of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire, but such apparent change is open to the reader’s suspicions, and should be placed in the context of Nebuchadnezzar’s development in the characteristic of fear. There is a kind of “fear” by which Nebuchadnezzar might begin to be wise.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Golden Image

The Golden Image as a Gap

This gap involves the perspective of Nebuchadnezzar (concerning both knowledge and motives) involved in his building the golden image (Dan 3:1) and summoning his entire

1 Even-Shoshan, 367-69.
imperial administration to prostrate themselves before it (vv.2–6). Linking Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective at Dan 3:1 with his perspective at 2:47 (where Nebuchadnezzar honours Daniel’s God as “God of gods”), does the golden image represent a deity, possibly the one whom Nebuchadnezzar understands to have revealed the dream to Daniel? If so, is Nebuchadnezzar’s ceremony a pious attempt to incorporate this deity into the Chaldean pantheon? Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar wishes to honour “the God of heaven” who gave him his kingdom (Dan 2:37). Or does the golden image represent Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, implying his concern for his administrators’ loyalty, coupled with an anxious fear of losing his kingdom? Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar is concerned about the crushing of the golden head (Dan 2:45) which represents himself (v.38). Or does this golden image (Dan 3:1) represent Nebuchadnezzar himself as king, implying his dominant characteristic is arrogance, that he even orders every minister to worship a symbol of himself? Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar has focused on the glorious image of the golden head as himself (Dan 2:37–38), and ignored the other elements of Daniel’s interpretation.

Scenario 1: The Golden Statute as Nebuchadnezzar’s God

The first gap-filling for Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image and aligned character trait is that it is his pious attempt to honour a deity. This view fits, in part, the perspective of the “Chaldeans” who “ate pieces of the Judeans” (Dan 3:8), though they also appeal to Nebuchadnezzar’s interest in maintaining his own authority:

“There are men, Judeans whom you appointed over the service of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they are not concerned about the king, they do not serve your gods (ךְִָּלֵאל הַי) and they do not prostrate before the image of gold which you set up.” (Dan 3:12)

The representation of deities in the golden image also aligns with Nebuchadnezzar’s publicly-stated perspective when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are dragged before him:

Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that none of you serve my gods (ךְִָּלֵאל הַי), and you do not prostrate before the image of gold which I set up?” (Dan 3:14)

2 Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 38; Valeta, 80; Hebbard, 93-94; cf. Collins, Daniel, 35. Collins cites Dan 3 as the “most obvious” case which exemplifies the original independence of each tale of Dan 1–6.
The Judeans’ response acknowledges Nebuchadnezzar’s publicly-stated intention for divine representation in his golden image:

“And if not, let it be known to you, king, that there is none of us who will serve your gods (ךְֵֽלֵּאל ה יִ), and we will not prostrate before the image of gold which you set up.” (Dan 3:18)

These three cases of characters’ direct speech associate serving Nebuchadnezzar’s gods with prostrating before his golden image. However, the decree communicated by the king’s herald only commands the acts of falling and prostration (תִפְלוּן וְתִסְגְּדוּן) before the image when the orchestra begins playing, without mention of “serving gods” (Dan 3:5). These characters have interpreted the decree (Dan 3:4–6) as a liturgical “serving” of Nebuchadnezzar’s gods (or god), and the physical act of prostration as the spiritual act of worshipping a deity. Collins assertively argues that the image represents a deity and not the king himself, since the three Jews are accused of not serving Nebuchadnezzar’s god (preferring to translate לֵאל ה יִ and לֵאלָהָי in the singular, Dan 3:12, 14, 18). Goldingay acknowledges a political dimension in the accusation of “treason” (to the extent that Dan 3 is “a tale of court conflict”), but adds that it is also “a confessor legend” concerning “a religious and not merely political offense,” which the three protagonists commit in order to safeguard “their religious commitment.” Similarly, when reading Dan 3:12, 14, Lucas favours the possibility that the statue represents a member of Nebuchadnezzar’s pantheon: “The author does not explicitly identify this image as being an idol of a god, but the words of the Chaldeans (12c) and of the king (14) seem to imply that it represents one of Nebuchadnezzar’s gods.” If the golden image represents a god, which one?

Possibly Nebuchadnezzar is attempting to enforce an empire-wide cult for a deity who has always been a member of the Babylonian pantheon, elevating a lesser deity such as the moon god Sin to supplant Marduk, as the historical Nabonidus did. Other possibilities include Bel, or if “Babylonian” is understood as a cypher for “Greek” or “Seleucid,” perhaps a deity from

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3 Collins, Daniel, 182. The main force of Collins’s argument compares historical, non-biblical texts, which fall beyond the scope of this study for evaluation: ibid., 180-81. However, he acknowledges that “[o]beisance to the idol at the king’s command would, no doubt, imply an affirmation of loyalty to the king.” Ibid., 183.
4 Goldingay, 67.
5 Lucas, 88.
6 Collins, Daniel, 180-81.
7 Goldingay, 70.
If Nebuchadnezzar has constructed the golden image for the worship of a god, this deity is generally understood to be one other than Daniel’s, suggesting a glaring inconsistency between the king’s recognition of Daniel’s God (Dan 2:47) and his golden image (3:1) for readers. Perhaps the author satirizes Nebuchadnezzar as blatantly inconsistent and a wildly unpredictable character, opening him to ridicule. However, in a counterintuitive reading possible for the reader, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar intends the worship of Daniel’s God, but through the mistaken means of representation in a golden image.

An initial observation is that Nebuchadnezzar’s construction of the golden image (Dan 3:1) occurs immediately after his response to Daniel’s dream interpretation (2:46–49) in the time of narrating, without any indication of significant lapses in the narrated time of these two events, at least in the Masoretic Text. Nebuchadnezzar summons his administration to the statue’s “dedication” (לְחֲנֻכַּת צַלְמָא, Dan 3:2) upon its completion, suggesting something quite new. If it represents a deity, it may be one without an established cult in Babylon, not customarily worshipped by Babylonian administrators. The death sentence, which enforces the decree to worship it (Dan 3:6), itself implies a concerted effort of imperial power to “persuade” the administration to join in this devotion. When Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged Daniel’s God as “God of gods and Lord of kings” (Dan 2:47), he had “fallen (נְפַל) upon his face and prostrated (סְגִד) to Daniel” (v.46), two actions he now commands his ministers through his herald: “you will fall and prostate (תִפְלוּן וְתִסְגְדוּ) to the image of gold which Nebuchadnezzar the king set up” (3:5). Is Nebuchadnezzar consciously converting his imperial administration to worship the deity of a people he conquered? Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar is attempting to convert the God of Daniel into the head of the pantheon already worshipped by his “satraps, prefects, governors, counsellors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all provincial high

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8 Collins, Daniel, 180.
9 Goldingay, 69; cf. Hebbard, 93-94.
10 Valeta, 86-87.
11 But cf. “the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign” (Dan 2:1 LXX) and “the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign” (Dan 3:1 LXX), which means that these two adjacent points (Dan 2:46–49; 3:1) in the time of narrating hide a lapse of sixteen years in narrated time, in the Septuagint readings.
12 Collins also reads the evidence along these lines, but in terms of finding an allusion to Nabonidus’s new cult to the moon god Sin. Collins, Daniel, 185.
13 Cf. Valeta, 86.
officials” (Dan 3:2, 3), out of all “nations, peoples, and languages” (v.4). Daniel did not name his God to Nebuchadnezzar, except by the title, “the God of heaven” (Dan 2:44). Nowhere in the book of Daniel does Nebuchadnezzar express knowledge of the name of Israel’s God. Syncretisation is possible. Arioch did introduce Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar as one “from the children of the exile, of Judea” (Dan 2:25), but Daniel speaks of his God of heaven placing Nebuchadnezzar on his throne (vv.37–38). Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar has interpreted this God to be friendly to his own interests. If Nebuchadnezzar made these assumptions about Daniel’s God and attempted to represent this deity in a golden image, an opportunity for correction arises in his encounter with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whom he knows to be Judeans (Dan 3:12), like Daniel (2:25), but who boldly assert that they will not worship Nebuchadnezzar’s “god(s)” nor prostrate before his golden statue (3:18). This correction has potential to confer new knowledge upon Nebuchadnezzar, since they express their refusal to worship any god that may be represented in the golden image with the phrase, “let it be known to you, O king” (יְדִיעַּ לֶהֱו א־לֵָךְ מַּלְכָָ֑א, Dan 3:18).

Scenario 2: The Golden Statue as Nebuchadnezzar’s Kingdom

The second gap-filling is that the golden image represents Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, and his concern to enforce its veneration across his imperial administration reflects his desire for social and political cohesion, to ensure his legacy and remembrance through a strong and longstanding kingdom. Accompanying Nebuchadnezzar’s concern for his legacy is his anxiety that his empire does not suffer the same fate as the divided fourth kingdom of iron and clay (Dan 2:35). Nebuchadnezzar, as the head of gold, has already heard himself implicated in the collapse of the fourth kingdom, as part of the whole dream-statue complex which forms the object of דֵּקָק (Dan 2:35, 45). Nebuchadnezzar may desire catharsis for the “evil consequences” of the dream he seeks to avert at all costs.¹⁴

¹⁴ Oppenheim, 219; see also Lawson, 69.
As Fewell observes, the “(almost) verbatim repetition” of Dan 3:2 in v.3 pictures the narrated world as one where obedience to the dominant (and dominating) king is the unquestionable norm.15

As Fewell also observes, the constant qualification of the golden statue as “that [which] Nebuchadnezzar the king has erected” implies that its true “significance” is as Nebuchadnezzar’s “accomplishment,” rather than any god represented through its iconography (Dan 3:2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 14, 15, 18).16 In my own observations, these references use the same verb for Nebuchadnezzar’s construction of the statue ( بصورة), except Dan 3:15, which uses служит (“to make,” see also v.1). Bilingual readers who observe Nebuchadnezzar’s variation might recall the Hebrew meaning of служит as “to serve.” Is Nebuchadnezzar the master who “made” the golden image, or the slave who “serves” it? Fewell also makes an insightful observation of the contrast between the narrator’s introduction of the crowd in their political classes and functions (Dan 3:2–3), and the herald’s address to them in their nationalities (v.4).17 The narrator then refers to the crowd in terms of ethnicity as well (Dan 3:7),18 allowing the herald to correct him or her, perhaps with tongue in cheek. For Fewell, Nebuchadnezzar’s imperial administration is representative of all the peoples whom he has “conquered and subjugated,” and perhaps out of “political insecurity,” he intends “to rally political solidarity” and “[promote] political unity.”19

Following Fewell’s line of thought, Nebuchadnezzar’s anxious concern for his kingdom may be subordinated to his concern for his personal glory to be remembered (adding the

15 Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 39.
16 Ibid., 40.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
characteristic of arrogance). However, it is still possible that Nebuchadnezzar's concern for his kingdom is more concern for his own people, than for himself as king, and that he possesses more pride in being Babylonian than in being Nebuchadnezzar. Immediately after he subjugated Jerusalem (Dan 1:1–2), he formulated a plan to capture and educate the nation’s nobles for his royal court (vv.3, 5), a key part of which was to teach them the language of his own people (נְפִלֵם וְלַמְדָם סְפֶר וְלֹשׁוֹן כַּשְדִים), which, in his perspective, seems to be an essential part of developing the natural attributes of knowing knowledge and being skilful in all wisdom (v.4). If the entire crowd of subjugated peoples recruited for the administration were also required to use the imperial language for record-keeping and official communications, then their gathering before the golden statue (while indicated in their native languages, Dan 3:4, 7) may signify a submission broader than to Nebuchadnezzar personally: their prostration before the golden statue may reflect a submission of all peoples to Nebuchadnezzar's people, all nations to Nebuchadnezzar's nation, all languages to Nebuchadnezzar's language. Similarly, the names “Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (Dan 1:6) do not occur in Dan 3, who instead are presented as “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” (vv.12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 26, 28, 29, 30), suggesting that the submission Nebuchadnezzar expects from them is an extension of their incorporation into the Babylonian people (1:7). (The irony, of course, is that their actions in Dan 3 prove that their new nomenclature is misleading.)

Scenario 3: The Golden Statue as Nebuchadnezzar Himself

The alternative to reading the golden image as Nebuchadnezzar’s god or his kingdom is that it represents himself, implying arrogance and hubris as his dominant traits. Fewell develops her argument of Nebuchadnezzar's concern for political unity in the direction of his demand for submission to his power as king. For Fewell, Nebuchadnezzar is not only a king needy for

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20 Ibid., 41. I wish to distinguish these two readings.
21 Fewell explains their “rite of passage” as a “liminal stage,” “a change of identity” and “reintegration into society.” Ibid., 17. Fewell's emphasis.
22 Ibid., 39-41.
assurance of his subjects' loyalty to relieve his “political insecurity” and “anxiety,” but also one who craves a sense of possessing godlike power:

He [Nebuchadnezzar] seems to see the need to make himself the head of gold, to show himself superior to all other rulers; he does not see himself as part of the history of political hubris that stands condemned. His self-serving understanding legitimates the judgmental message of the dream. By erecting the image that represents his sovereignty, and by requiring that his officials worship the image, he has raised himself to the divine status for which the dream, on a broader reading, has condemned him.

Valeta likewise advances the claim that the statue represents Nebuchadnezzar himself, implying that he is filled with hubris and a lust for power. Picking up on Meadowcroft’s observation that צֶלֶם refers not only to the king’s statue, but also his face (Dan 3:19), Valeta sees the statue as a “[reflection of] the king’s pomposity,” alluding to the צֶלֶם of Dan 2 which “is ultimately destroyed,” and so “this word picture playfully satirizes the king.”

I see the implication of Nebuchadnezzar’s facial imagery changing (Dan 3:19), immediately after Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego publicly refuse to worship his golden image (v.18), to be that his face does what a lifeless idol cannot do: display the emotion of rage at the disrespect of these three rebels. Perhaps the sevenfold-heated oven meant to incinerate Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is also an extension of his rage (Dan 3:19). Valeta also helpfully demonstrates how Nebuchadnezzar’s concern for his kingdom may be subordinated to his concern for his personal glory:

The erection of such a large statue out of gold symbolizes the permanence and economic might of royal power. It is ironic that it both signifies the opposite and is suggestive of the undoubtedly heavy burden of taxation and servitude forced upon the king’s subjects and the wasteful extravagance of imperial domination centered upon this royal image of the king.

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23 Ibid., 40.
24 Ibid., 41.
25 Valeta, 79-83. Valeta builds his argument on the repetitions that Nebuchadnezzar set up the image (79), his “ultimate control” of his courtiers in Dan 3:2-3 (81), his demand for “absolute obedience” through the imposition of a “penalty for disobedience [which] is horrific” (83).
26 Ibid., 85. Meadowcroft argues that this wordplay is the narrator’s way of suggesting “that the king himself is the one before whom they [the administrators] are really being asked to fall and worship,” Timothy J. Meadowcroft, Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison, JSOT supplement series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 148; also observed by Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 51.
27 Valeta, 85. Fewell also argues that Dan 3:19 implies that Nebuchadnezzar built the statue “in his own (very human) image, [as] an object to be worshipped”; Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 51.
28 As a metaphor for Nebuchadnezzar’s face, this is a way in which the golden image is not him, while still closely adhering to being like him.
29 Valeta, 79-80.
Valeta’s comment demonstrates the possibility of how Nebuchadnezzar may rule his kingdom so that the interests of his realm and its peoples come second to his egocentrism, that his overriding interest may be for his entire administration to waste time, labour, and resources to honour his personal image, if that is indeed what the golden image represents.

*Nebuchadnezzar and His Golden Image*

There are at least three different ways of understanding Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image, each with its own implication for Nebuchadnezzar’s characterisation: it is an idol representing a deity, possibly even Daniel’s God, constructed out of a sense of misplaced piety; it is a monument celebrating his kingdom, which he hopes will prove everlasting, constructed out of a sense of political anxiety; it is his personal image, to be worshipped by his ministers, constructed out of a sense of arrogant hubris. These three systems of gap-filling may be what Sternberg calls “mutually incompatible and yet coexistent.”

It may be that the object represented by the image is inherently ambiguous, and so too Nebuchadnezzar’s motives for building it, making him a deeply conflictual, multilayered (and perhaps even inherently flawed) character of the story world, or as Alter would put it, “outwardly a definite character but inwardly an unstable vortex.” In my reading, Nebuchadnezzar presents the reader with a human portrait of being possessed of a riven mind, wanting to show honour to the Judean exiles’ deity who has given him his kingdom, even taking this highest “God of heaven” into the Babylonian pantheon to be worshipped by all his subjects. At the same time, Nebuchadnezzar exemplifies a lingering nervousness that this same deity may dispossess him of his kingdom, and so coerces his ministers from all the peoples to devote themselves to the perpetual memory of Babylonian glory. Going even further, Nebuchadnezzar also knows himself as the head of this glorious Babylonian empire, and head of all other kingdoms, and will not be content until his name is established in the heavens above as on the earth beneath. Finally, his desire for the self-exaltation of his name may, in his own perspective, simply serve the demonstration of

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30 Sternberg, 222.
31 Alter, 176.
himself as a humble and pious servant attending the gods. The ambiguity of the golden image allows the reading of Nebuchadnezzar as a deeply complex character.

**Working with Gold as a Mimetic Action**

Insofar as Nebuchadnezzar makes ( Heb, Dan 3:1, 15) an object out of gold ( חלב, v.1), his action is like the actions of other goldsmiths, some of whom are commended for their wisdom in working with gold, while others are condemned for making idols out of gold. In the narrator’s words:

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold ( חלב וְלָֽעְבַּד), its height sixty cubits, its breadth six cubits, he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. (Dan 3:1)

Concentrating on the linkwords “to make” ( עֲבַד), and “gold” ( חלב), found in Targumim Onqelos, Jonathon, Isaiah, Qoheleth, and Chronicles, wise characters such as Bezalel, Oholiab, and Solomon made liturgical objects out of gold (for the wilderness sanctuary and the temple), but others, usually not specifically named, made a different class of liturgical objects, evaluated as ethically distinct in the Hebrew Bible.

**Working with Gold as an Act of Wisdom**

God tells Moses of God’s gifts of “wisdom, understanding, and knowledge” to Bezalel (Exod 31:3), and of “wisdom” in the “heart” or “mind” to Oholiab and others like him (v.6), for the expressed purpose of making all the elements of the wilderness sanctuary which God has commanded Moses to make. In Yhwh’s words to Moses:

> “See, I called by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, in the tribe of Judah. And I filled him with a spirit of God, with wisdom, and with understanding, and with knowledge ( חָכְמָה וּבִתְבוּנִָּה וּבְדֵַּ֖עַּ; בְּחָכְמָָ֛ה וּבִתְבוּנִּ֥ת תְבוּנִּ֥ת וּבְדֵַּעַּ֖ת), and in every work; for thinking out designs, for working with gold ( חָכְמָה וּבִתְבוּנִָּה לַעֲשָ֛וֹת בַּזָהִָ֥ב; לְמַּעְבַּד בְדַּ海棠), and with silver, and with bronze; and in carving stone for filling, and for carving wood for making in every work. And I, behold, have given him with Oholiab, son of Ahisamach, in the tribe of Dan, and in every heart, all the wise of heart, I have given wisdom, and they will make ( חָכְמָה וּבִתְבוּנִָּה לַעֲשָ֛וֹת בַּזָהִָ֥ב; לְמַּעְבַּד בְדַּ海棠), and in every work, all the wise of heart, I have given wisdom, and they will make ( חָכְמָה וּבִתְבוּנִָּה לַעֲשָ֛וֹת בַּזָהִָ֥ב).” (Exod 31:2–6)

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32 Limited to verbs of making. Excluded verses: Exod 12:35; Tg. Onq. Exod 12:35; Num 22:18; Tg. Onq. Num 22:18; Num 24:13; Tg. Onq. Num 24:13; 2 Sam 8:10; Tg. Neb. 2 Sam 8:10; 2 Sam 21:4; Tg. Neb. 2 Sam 21:4; Isa 10:32; Tg. Isa. 10:32; Isa 13:12; Tg. Isa. 13:12; Jer 4:30; Tg. Neb. Jer 4:30; Zeph 1:18; Tg. Neb. Zeph 1:18; 1 Chr 18:7; Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 18:7; 1 Chr 18:10; Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 18:10; 2 Chr 8:18; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 8:18; 2 Chr 9:10; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 9:10; 2 Chr 9:21; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 9:21. Also not examined here: 1 Kgs 7:45; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 7:45; 2 Kgs 12:14; Tg. Neb. 2 Kgs 12:14; Ezek 28:13; Tg. Neb. Ezek 28:13.
Below I have tabulated all the objects of “gold” which God commands Moses “to make,” which Moses delegates to artisans working under the supervision of Bezalel and Oholiab. These items include wooden objects overlaid with gold, and other objects made of gold, for God’s dwelling place while sojourning with Israel in the wilderness.

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<tr>
<th>Phrases with linkwords (Masoretic Text)</th>
<th>Phrases with linkwords (Targum)</th>
<th>Object of “to make”</th>
<th>References</th>
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<td>וְעָשִַּ֥יתָזָהָֽבּ, זִּיר זָהָ֖ב</td>
<td>תַּעְבִּידָהּ, דַּהַּבְּא</td>
<td>Circlet of gold (the ark of the covenant is also overlaid with pure gold)</td>
<td>Exod 25:11; Tg. Onq. Exod 25:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וְעָשִַּ֥יתָזָהָֽבּ, זִּיר זָהָ֖ב</td>
<td>תַּעְבִּידָהּ, דַּהַּבְּא</td>
<td>Poles of acacia wood, overlaid with gold</td>
<td>Exod 25:13; Tg. Onq. Exod 25:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וְעָשִַּ֥יתָכַפֵֹ֖רֶת זָהָֽבּ</td>
<td>תַּעְבִּידָהּ, דַּהַּבְּא</td>
<td>Covering of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 25:17; Tg. Onq. Exod 25:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וְעָשִַּ֥יתָשְׁנִַּּּ֥֑יִם כְרֻבִֵ֖ים זָהָָ֑ב</td>
<td>תַּעְבִּידָהּ, דַּהַּבְּא</td>
<td>Two cherubim of gold</td>
<td>Exod 25:18; Tg. Onq. Exod 25:18</td>
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| וְעָשִ֙יתָאָרְבֵַּ֖ע עִזְּקָן דִּדָּ֜֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞֞ֆ
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<th>Text</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>וְעָשִֹית, תַּעֲשִֶּ֥ה, Dishes, jugs, and sacrificial bowls of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 25:29; Tg. Onq. Exod 25:29</td>
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<td>מְנֹרֵַּ֖ת זָהָ֣וב טָהֵ֖וֹר, Lampstand of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 25:31; Tg. Onq. Exod 25:31</td>
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<td>כָֽל־הֵַ֖ים הָא ֽלֶה, “All these vessels” (כֶלַּהָפֶרֵים הָאָלֶיהַ) (קִמֵּי הַאֲלֵיל) from a talent of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 25:39; Tg. Onq. Exod 25:39</td>
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<tr>
<td>מָנַּיָא הָאִל ין, Fifty hooks of gold for the curtains</td>
<td>Exod 26:6; Tg. Onq. Exod 26:6</td>
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<tr>
<td>מְרַּמְצָן בִּדַּהב, Signet-rings of gold (planks and bars are also overlaid with gold)</td>
<td>Exod 26:29; Tg. Onq. Exod 26:29</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>מְרַּמְצָן דִּדַּ heb, Settings of gold</td>
<td>Exod 26:37; Tg. Onq. Exod 26:37</td>
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<td>מִשְׁבְצִּוֹת זָהֵ֖ב, Settings of gold</td>
<td>Exod 28:11; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:11</td>
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<tr>
<td>מִשְׁבְצֵֹ֖ת זָהָֽב, Settings of gold</td>
<td>Exod 28:13; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Bible Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>תַּעֲשִֶּ֥ה וּשְׁת ִ֤י שַּּרְשְׁרֹת֙ זָהָ֣ב טָהַּ֔וֹר</td>
<td>Two chains of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 28:14; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:14</td>
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<tr>
<td>עָשִֹ֣יתָ, מַעְּשָּׁה חֹשַׁ֖ב, תַּרְבָּ֣עִים וְקַנְּנֵ֑י בְּרִית</td>
<td>Breastplate of judgment, made of gold and dyed-cloth materials, “work of a designer/artisan like the work of the ephod”</td>
<td>Exod 28:15; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>עָשֳִ֔יתָ, מַעְּשָּׁה עֲבָֹ֖ת זָהֵָ֖ב וְתַּעְב יֵד</td>
<td>Twisted chains of pure gold, “a work of cords”</td>
<td>Exod 28:22; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תַּעֲשֶָנּוּ זַָ֠הָב וְתַּעְב יֵד, עֹבָ֑ד אֻומָן</td>
<td>Two signet-rings of gold</td>
<td>Exod 28:23; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תַּעֲשֶָנּוּ זַָ֠הָב וְתַּעְב יֵד</td>
<td>Two rings of gold</td>
<td>Exod 28:26; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תַּעֲשֶָנּוּ זַָ֠הָב וְתַּעְב יֵד</td>
<td>Two rings of gold</td>
<td>Exod 28:27; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תַּעֲשֶָנּוּ זַָ֠הָב וְתַּעְב יֵד, עֹבָ֑ד גְדִילֻו</td>
<td>Bells of gold, along with pomegranates of dyed-cloth materials</td>
<td>Exod 28:33; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תַּעֲשֶָנּוּ צִיצֵ֣֚י זָהָ֣ב טָהָ֑וֹר</td>
<td>A blossom of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 28:36; Tg. Onq. Exod 28:36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יְשֵׁשִּׁ֖ת יְשֵׁשִּׁ֖ת</td>
<td>A ring of gold (the acacia altar for incense is also overlaid with pure gold)</td>
<td>Exod 30:3; Tg. Onq. Exod 30:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תַּעֲשֶה תַּעֲשֶה</td>
<td>Two rings of gold</td>
<td>Exod 30:4; Tg. Onq. Exod 30:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נשְׁנֹֽן</td>
<td>Poles of acacia wood, overlaid with gold</td>
<td>Exod 30:5; Tg. Onq. Exod 30:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>חֲתָנָה חֲתָנָה</td>
<td>Fifty hooks of gold for the curtains</td>
<td>Exod 36:13; Tg. Onq. Exod 36:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>חֲתָנָה חֲתָנָה</td>
<td>Signet-rings of gold (planks and bars are also overlaid with gold)</td>
<td>Exod 36:34; Tg. Onq. Exod 36:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מַעַשֶּ֑ה</td>
<td>Four acacia columns, overlaid with gold, and nails/hooks of gold</td>
<td>Exod 36:36; Tg. Onq. Exod 36:36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מַעַשֶּ֑ה</td>
<td>Circllet of gold (the ark of the covenant is also overlaid with pure gold)</td>
<td>Exod 37:2; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מַעַשֶּ֑ה</td>
<td>Poles of acacia wood, overlaid with gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:4; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מַעַשֶּ֑ה</td>
<td>Covering of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:6; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יָעַשׁ שֶנִּי כְּרֻבִים זָהָב</td>
<td>Two cherubim of gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:7; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יָעַשׁ וְעָבַד תְרִיָּן כְּרֻבִים דִּיתָב</td>
<td>Circllet of gold (the acacia table for the bread of the presence is also overlaid with pure gold)</td>
<td>Exod 37:11; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יָעַשׁ וְעָבַד רוֹדֵה בּוֹ, רְבֵּה דִיתָב</td>
<td>A border and a circlet of gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:12; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יָעַשׁ וְעָבַד וַּיַּעַשְׁו</td>
<td>Poles of acacia wood, overlaid with gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:15; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יָעַשׁ וְעָבַד וַּיַּעַשׁ</td>
<td>“The vessels” (אֶת־הַכֹּל, יָת מָנָהָא) on the table: dishes, jugs, and sacrificial bowls of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:16; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יָעַשׁ וְעָבַד אוֹרֵה, אוֹרֵה</td>
<td>The lampstand of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:17; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יָעַשׁ וְעָבַד כַּכְכָר</td>
<td>Seven lamps, snuffers/tongs, and coal-pan of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:23; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יָעַשׁ וְעָבַד כַּכְכָר</td>
<td>“All its vessels” (כָּלָה, כל מָנָהא, כָּלָה) out of a talent of pure gold</td>
<td>Exod 37:24; Tg. Onq. Exod 37:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַיִַּּ֥עַּש</td>
<td>וֹ</td>
<td>וּשְׁת י֩ טַּבְעֹ֙ת זָהֵָ֜ב</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַּעְבַּד</td>
<td>ם</td>
<td>טָהַ֗וֹר</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַּיֵַּ֖֑֑אָֽשְׁיֹת</td>
<td>וּשְׁתָּ֣ר זָהֵָ֖ב</td>
<td>Poles of acacia wood, overlaid with gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַּיֵַּ֖֑֑אָֽשְׁיֹת</td>
<td>וּשְׁתָּ֣ר זָהֵָ֖ב</td>
<td>All the gold used for the crafting work of the holy place, twenty-nine talents and 730 shekels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַּיֵַּ֖֑֑אָֽשְׁיֹת</td>
<td>וּשְׁתָּ֣ר זָהֵָ֖ב</td>
<td>The ephod, made of gold and dyed-cloth materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַּיֵַּ֖֑֑אָֽשְׁיֹת</td>
<td>וּשְׁתָּ֣ר זָהֵָ֖ב</td>
<td>Hammered plates of gold among dyed-cloth materials, “work of a designer/artisan”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַּיֵַּ֖֑֑אָֽשְׁיֹת</td>
<td>וּשְׁתָּ֣ר זָהֵָ֖ב</td>
<td>Onyx/beryl stones, surrounded by gold settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>�ֵַ֧</td>
<td>וַּּ֨יַּעֲשָּׁ֨</td>
<td>Breastplate of judgment, made of gold and dyed-cloth materials, “work of a designer/artisan like the work of the ephod”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>�ֵַ֧</td>
<td>וַּּ֨יַּעֲשָּׁ֨</td>
<td>Twisted chains of pure gold, “a work of cords”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>�ֵַ֧</td>
<td>וַּּ֨יַּעֲשָּׁ֨</td>
<td>Two settings of gold, two rings of gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>�ֵַ֧</td>
<td>וַּּ֨יַּעֲשָּׁ֨</td>
<td>Two rings of gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>�ֵַ֧</td>
<td>וַּּ֨יַּעֲשָּׁ֨</td>
<td>Two rings of gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>�ֵַ֧</td>
<td>וַּּ֨יַּעֲשָּׁ֨</td>
<td>Bells of pure gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>�ֵַ֧</td>
<td>וַּּ֨יַּעֲשָּׁ֨</td>
<td>A blossom of pure gold, crowning the holy place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Insofar as Nebuchadnezzar constructs an object of gold (Dan 3:1), he mimics the actions of the wise, knowing, understanding characters Bezalel and Oholiab. However, although Nebuchadnezzar performs the action of a wise character, there are reasons I will outline below why this does not in itself make Nebuchadnezzar wise. In imitating the actions of Bezalel and Oholiab in making his image of gold (Dan 3:1), Nebuchadnezzar implicitly demonstrates an
attempt to act from wisdom, but without having achieved wisdom, because he makes an
*idolatrous* image of gold.

Solomon is another wise character to whom the narrator attributes making objects of gold.

The works attributed to Solomon are for the adorning of God’s house in Jerusalem:

> And it was completed, every task which King Solomon worked for the house of Yhwh (אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה לְבֵית יְהוָה), and he brought the holy things of David his father, the silver and the gold, and the vessels which he gave into the house of Yhwh (יִתֵּן לְבֵית מַקְדָּשָׁה), Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 7:51).

> And it was completed, all the work which Solomon did for the house of Yhwh (אשֶר עָשָׂה שְׁלֹמֹה לְבֵית יְהוָה), and Solomon brought the holy things of David his father, and the silver and gold and all the vessels he gave to the treasuries of the house of God (וַיִּתֵּן לְבֵית אֱלֹהִים), Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 5:1). (1 Kgs 7:51)

Notably, 1 Kgs 7:51; 2 Chr 5:1 do not speak of Solomon making anything specifically out of gold, but all the works for the temple in Jerusalem. All the objects made of gold attributed to Solomon are tabulated below, most of which are for the temple, but some are intended for royal use.33 However, 1 Kgs 7:51; 2 Chr 5:1 speak of Solomon inheriting gold, silver, and vessels from his father David, which he deposits into the treasuries of God’s house. In this action, Nebuchadnezzar stands opposed to Solomon as one who took the vessels from God’s house and deposited them into the treasury of his god’s house (Dan 1:2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrases with linkwords (Masoretic Text)</th>
<th>Phrases with linkwords (Targum)</th>
<th>Object of “to make”</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>נִיטָשׁ שִׁלְׁחָה</td>
<td>תְּנַבְּדָה שִׁלְׁחָה</td>
<td>“All the vessels (כָּל בְּשֵׁם, הָכַל) in the house of Yhwh,” the altar of gold, the golden table for the bread of the presence</td>
<td>1 Kgs 7:48; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 7:48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תְּנַבְּדָה שִׁלְׁחָה</td>
<td>דָּבָא, מִדָּבָא דָּבָא</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33 J. A. Davies argues that much of what Solomon made was meant to “represent the fruits of the restored Eden.” J. A. Davies, 48-49.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verse</th>
<th>narrative</th>
<th>comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Kgs 10:16</td>
<td>Two hundred shields of gold, alloyed with six hundred pieces of gold</td>
<td>1 Kgs 10:16; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 10:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kgs 10:18</td>
<td>A great ivory throne, overlaid with purified gold</td>
<td>1 Kgs 10:18; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 10:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kgs 14:26</td>
<td>“All the shields of gold which Solomon made”</td>
<td>1 Kgs 14:26; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 14:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 24:13</td>
<td>“All the vessels of gold which Solomon made”</td>
<td>2 Kgs 24:13; Tg. Neb. 2 Kgs 24:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chr 22:16</td>
<td>(David tells Solomon to start making with the gold, silver, bronze, and iron he collected)</td>
<td>1 Chr 22:16; Tg. Ket. 1 Chr 22:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chr 3:8</td>
<td>The house of the holy of holies, overlaid with pure gold</td>
<td>2 Chr 3:8; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 3:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chr 3:10</td>
<td>Two cherubim, “a work of metal-casting,” overlaid with gold</td>
<td>2 Chr 3:10; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 3:10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34 As objects seized by Shishak, king of Egypt—a reference to the narrated past of Solomon’s reign from the narrated present of King Rehoboam’s fifth year (1 Kgs 14:25).

35 As objects seized by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—another reference to the narrated past of Solomon’s reign in the narrated present of King Jehoiachin’s eighth year (2 Kgs 24:12).
The Queen of Sheba, when she visits Solomon to test his famed wisdom by questioning him (1 Kgs 10:1–5; 2 Chr 9:1–4), sees “all the wisdom of Solomon and the house which he built” (כָּל חָכְמַּת שְׁלֹמֹ֑ה וְהַּבֵַ֖יִת אֲשִֶּׁ֥ר בָנָֽה), implying that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ten lampstands of gold</td>
<td>2 Chr 4:7; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 4:7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hundred basins/bowls of gold, and ten tables of unspecified material</td>
<td>2 Chr 4:8; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 4:8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All the vessels” for the house of God, the altar of gold, and tables for the bread of the presence</td>
<td>2 Chr 4:19; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 4:19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two hundred shields of gold, alloyed with six hundred pieces of gold</td>
<td>2 Chr 9:15; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 9:15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great ivory throne, overlaid with pure gold</td>
<td>2 Chr 9:17; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 9:17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The shields of gold which Solomon made”</td>
<td>2 Chr 12:9; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 12:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36 As in the parallel 1 Kgs 14:25–26, these are objects seized by Shishak, king of Egypt, during the narrated present of King Rehoboam’s fifth year (2 Chr 12:2).
what Solomon has made is just as much a testament to his wisdom as what he says. The Queen of Sheba praises Solomon’s wisdom (וְעַל־חָכְמָתֶֽה, 1 Kgs 10:6, v.7, 2 Chr 9:5, v.6, חָכְמָה, v.7), and rather interestingly, praises Yhwh for making him king “for doing justice and righteousness” (וַּיְשִֽימְךָ֣ לְמֶַּ֔לֶךְ לַּעֲשִ֥וֹת מִשְׁפֵָ֖ט וּצְדָָֽקָֽה, 1 Kgs 10:9; וַּיִתֶנְחָ֥ם הַּעֲלֵיהָ֖ לְמֶַּ֔ולֶךְ לַּעֲשֵ֖וֹת מִשְׁפִָּ֥ט וּצְדָָֽקָֽה, 2 Chr 9:8). As one who has also made an object of gold (Dan 3:1), Nebuchadnezzar mimics the actions of the wise king Solomon. However, although Nebuchadnezzar performs the action of another wise character, this again does not in itself make Nebuchadnezzar wise, especially with respect to judging with justice and righteousness, which I will detail below, in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Hiram-abi is another wise character skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, iron, and dyed-cloth materials (2 Chr 2:6, 13; Tg. Ket. 2:6, 13), but the objects attributed to him he makes out of bronze (1 Kgs 7:14–16, 27, 30, 38; 2 Chr 4:6; cf. “Hiram” in 1 Kgs 7:45).

Working with Gold as an Act of Disobedience to Torah

Making objects of gold is not exclusively an action of wise characters, but when those golden objects are idols or “gods,” it is an action of those disobedient to Torah. It is the action of a sinful Israel wandering in the wilderness, and later in narrated time, of a fallen Jerusalem, of human beings in general, and of unidentified metalworkers. There is one individual, however, who is singled out for making two calves of gold: Jeroboam, king of the northern kingdom of Israel shortly after the schism. These golden calves become “a sin” for his people (וַיְהִָ֛י הַּדָבִָּ֥ר הַּזֵֶ֖ה לְחַָ֛טָאת, 1 Kgs 12:30).

37 However, J. A. Davies argues that Solomon’s “wisdom … is contingent on his obedience to God,” where Solomon fails, and that the Queen of Sheba’s words in 1 Kgs 10:9 is an unintended “prophetic rebuke.” J. A. Davies, 53, 54.

38 Other characters who make objects of gold who are not condemned for doing so are Aaron with respect to the golden lampstand (Num 8:4; Tg. Onq. Num 8:4; but cf. the golden calf, Exod 32:1–4; Tg. Onq. Exod 32:1–4), Zechariah (the silver and gold crown for the high priest, Zech 6:11; Tg. Neb. Zech 6:11), Jehoiada (gold and silver vessels for the temple, 2 Chr 24:14; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 24:14), and Hezekiah makes storehouses for his gold (2 Chr 32:27; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 32:27). In a targumic expansion of the Masoretic Text, Qoheleth makes honest weights and scales of pure gold (Tg. Ket. Qoh 2:8; cf. Qoh 2:8).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linkwords (Masoretic Text)</th>
<th>Linkwords (Targum)</th>
<th>Subject of “to make”</th>
<th>Object of “to make”</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>לא תשש, לא תעש</td>
<td>לא תעשבד</td>
<td>Moses’ audience are prohibited to do this</td>
<td>Gods/feared ones of gold and silver</td>
<td>Exod 20:23; Tg. Onq. Exod 20:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לאליך זكب</td>
<td>לאליך זקב</td>
<td>“This people” (Israel) who “have sinned a great sin”</td>
<td>Gods/feared ones of gold</td>
<td>Exod 32:31; Tg. Onq. Exod 32:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>טעבה</td>
<td>טעבה</td>
<td>ועלו ועלו בני ישראל</td>
<td>A calf of gold</td>
<td>Tg. Onq. Deut 1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ישלע</td>
<td>חוּרִים וּלְתַמְאָם</td>
<td>Jeroboam, king of Israel</td>
<td>Two calves of gold, about which Jeroboam says, “Behold your God/feared ones (אֱלֹהֶיךָ, דִּחלָתָך), Israel”</td>
<td>1 Kgs 12:28; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 12:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אנשי שפירות</td>
<td>דָּרְבִּיהוּ לִיהו</td>
<td>“Humanity”</td>
<td>Idols of silver and idols of gold</td>
<td>Isa 2:20; Tg. Isa. 2:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אשרי נפש</td>
<td>דָּשַד</td>
<td>Children of Israel</td>
<td>Idols of silver and idols of gold</td>
<td>Isa 31:7; Tg. Isa. 31:7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39 Tg. Onq. Deut 1:1 expands upon Deut 1:1 by interpreting each of the place names on the Israelites’ itinerary as one of their sins. The sin of making the “calf of gold” (עֵיגַל דִּדהָב) is an expansive interpretation of the place name Dizahab (דְּזוֹחָב).
|ןכד | עביד | A craftsperson | The idol/image (עֲלֵמָה, חֲפֶש), overlaid with gold | Isa 40:19; Tg. Isa. 40:19 |
|ןכד | דַּבֶּר | A refiner/smith | A god/feared one (זָא, דְּחָלָא), of silver and gold | Isa 46:6; Tg. Isa. 46:6 |
|הַשֶּׁשֶּׁשָּׁב | עַבָּדָה | Jerusalem, imagined as a woman | Images of a male (צלְּמִי זָכָּר, צִלְּמ י דְכֻורָא), of gold and silver given by God | Ezek 16:17; Tg. Neb. Ezek 16:17 |
|עֶשֶּׁר | לָבָּט | Israel, imagined as God’s unfaithful wife | A Baal/idol, of gold given by God | Hos 2:10; Tg. Neb. Hos 2:10 |
|עֶשֶּׁר | עַבּוֹד | Idols of silver and gold⁴⁰ | Hos 8:4; Tg. Neb. Hos 8:4 |
|עֹז | עַבּוֹד | Jeroboam | “Calves of gold that Jeroboam made” | Qoh 3:11; Tg. Ket. Qoh 3:11 |

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⁴⁰ Interestingly, the prophet then announces the rejection of Samaria’s calf (עֶגְל שֹׁמְרַּוֹן, Hos 8:5).

⁴¹ The reference to Jeroboam’s golden calves is part of a large expansion of Qoh 3:11 in Tg. Ket. Qoh 3:11, in which the wise king Solomon is said to have the spirit of prophecy to see all periods of time.
By mimicking the actions of wise characters, such as Bezalel, Oholiab, and Solomon, in making an object of gold (Dan 3:1), Nebuchadnezzar attempts the action of a wise artisan, but is not necessarily to be judged as wise for doing so. Making objects of gold, when they are idols or “feared ones” to be worshipped, is also the action of a sinner, of one disobedient to Torah. Because Nebuchadnezzar commands his imperial administrators to fall and prostrate themselves before his golden image (Dan 3:4–6), what begins as the action of wise ones like Bezalel and Oholiab then falls short of their wisdom. Furthermore, although Nebuchadnezzar’s action of making out of gold may allow his comparison with Solomon, he also falls short of Solomon’s wisdom with respect to judging with justice and righteousness.

Judging Nebuchadnezzar’s Judgment

Nebuchadnezzar hears the following accusation from Chaldeans who were “eating pieces of the Judeans” (אֲכִַּּ֥לוּ קַּרְצ יהֵ֖וֹן דִִּ֥י יְהוּדָי ֽא, Dan 3:8), who salute him with a wish that he might “live forever” (v.9), summarise his decree (vv.10–11), then say:

“There are men, Judeans whom you appointed over the service of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, these men are not concerned about you, the king, or any decree, they do not serve your gods (לֵאל ה יְבֵלַע) and they do not prostrate (ל א ס גְּד ין) before the image of gold which you set up.” (Dan 3:12)

In my discussion in the last chapter, I mentioned the counterintuitive possibility that Nebuchadnezzar may have revealed his dream to Daniel (in Dan 2:16) before Daniel’s “vision of the night” (v.19), and that Nebuchadnezzar was careful to emphasise in his court that he had asked for both dream and interpretation (v.26), not the interpretation alone (cf. vv.16, 24, 25), in case any sages were present. The professional “envy” which the Chaldeans show in Dan 3:12 may be motivated by more than “resentment” merely at Shadrach, Meshach, and
Abednego’s promotion over them (2:49), but also a sense of grievance that they were promoted *unfairly* because of Daniel’s victory over them in the court, because he drew attention to their inability (2:27). Given the Chaldeans’ rebuff of Nebuchadnezzar’s request as an impossible task fit only for the gods (Dan 2:10–11), they may have been especially grieved by the suspicion that Daniel’s God, to whom he attributes his revelation (vv.28, 30), was in fact a cover for Nebuchadnezzar himself performing that function. Nevertheless, the Chaldeans express their grievance against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, accusing them of disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar and refusing to worship his gods or prostrate before his golden image (Dan 3:12). After his fit of rage (Dan 3:13), Nebuchadnezzar presents his own accusation against the three, not in terms of disobedience to himself, but against their impious refusal to serve his gods or prostrate before his golden image:

Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that for my gods there is none of you serving (לא אלים לא עבד מחכמים), and the before the image of gold that I set up, you do not prostrate (אך אכלים)?

Now, if there is among you any ready at the time that you hear the voice of the horn, the pipe, a lyre, the trigon, harp, and a wind instrument, and every kind of music, you will fall down and you will prostrate (בשך) before the image that I made, but if you do not prostrate (ילא תסודו) at that moment, you will be thrown into the midst of the furnace of burning fire (אש), and who is the god (האל) able to save you from my hands?” (Dan 3:14–15)

Nebuchadnezzar expresses his judgment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as their failure to perform the actions of פלח and סגד with respect to his gods (האלים) and golden image. Linking these words פלח, סגד, and האלים, through Targumim Onqelos, Jonathon, and Chronicles, uncovers intertexts by which a Torah-oriented reader perceives Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment as unjust, because he attempts to coerce the Judeans to perform actions their God has forbidden them. This divine prohibition with respect to other gods occurs in the Decalogue:

You will not bow down to them, and you will not serve them, because I am Yhwh your God (לא תעבד באלים ולא תitionally את אלעך), Tg. Onq. Exod 42

See Kirkpatrick, 101.


44 Portier-Young argues that their “resistance” to Nebuchadnezzar here makes them a “model … for the maššilîm.” Portier-Young, 261.
You will not bow down to them, and you will not serve them, because I am Yhwh your God, a jealous God, visiting the guilt of parents upon children, and upon the third ones, and upon the fourth ones of my enemies. (Exod 20:5)

Moses’s exhortation on the plain allows that other peoples may worship entities other than Israel’s God, but forbids Israel to follow suit:

And lest you lift your eyes to the heavens, and you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, all the host of the heavens, and you are led astray and you bow down to them, and you serve them which Yhwh your God portioned to all the peoples under the heaven. (Deut 4:19)

Again, Moses warns the Israelites that if they serve and prostrate before other gods, they are in danger of perishing, which, ironically, is precisely what Nebuchadnezzar warns against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego if they fail to obey his command (Dan 3:15):

And if it happens that forgetting you forget Yhwh your God, and you walk after other gods, and you serve them and you bow down to them (יְּהו ֵ֣ה אֱלֹהִֶ֗ים אֲשֵֶ֣ר צ וּ ֵ֣ה אֶתְּכֶם֒ וַהֲלַכְּתִֶ֗ם וַעֲבַדְּתֶם  אֱלֹה ֵ֣ים אֲחֵר ִ֔ים וְּה שְּתַחֲו יתֵֶּ֖ם ל הֶָ֑ם; Tg. Neb. Josh 23:16), and it will kindle the nostrils of Yhwh against you, and you will perish quickly from the good land which [God] gave to you.” (Josh 23:16)

Joshua also warns the Israelites that they will perish from their land if they serve and bow before other gods, after their conquest of Canaan:

“When you pass over the covenant of Yhwh your God which [God] commanded you, and you walk and you serve other gods, and you bow down to them (יְּהו ֵ֣ה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  אֲשֵֶ֣ר צ וּ ֵ֣ה אֶתְּכֶם֒ וַהֲלַכְּתִֶ֗ם וַעֲבַדְּתֶם  אֱלֹה ֵ֣ים אֲחֵר ִ֔ים וְּה שְּתַחֲו יתֵֶּ֖ם ל הֶָ֑ם; Tg. Neb. Josh 23:16), and it will kindle the nostrils of Yhwh against you, and you will perish quickly from the good land which [God] gave to you.” (Josh 23:16)

When God appears to Solomon a second time (1 Kgs 9:2; 2 Chr 7:12), God warns Solomon how his people will incur disgrace before all other nations (1 Kgs 9:7–8; 2 Chr 7:20–21), who will know that their downfall happened because of their infidelity, by serving and bowing before other gods:

And they will say, “On the account that they abandoned Yhwh their God (אֶת־יְּהו ֵ֣ה אֱלֹהֵיהִֶ֗ם; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 9:9) who brought their parents from the land of Egypt, and they seized upon other gods, and they bowed down to them (אֶת־אֵלֹהִּים אֲשֶׁר אֲבָאָם עֹבְדֻהָם; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 9:9), on this account, Yhwh brought upon them all this distress. (1 Kgs 9:9)

And they will say, “On the account that they abandoned Yhwh, the God of their ancestors (אֶת־יְּהו ֵ֣ה אֱלֹהָם אַבֶּיתָם; Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 7:22), who brought them out from the land of Egypt, and they seized upon other gods, and they bowed before them, and
they served them (ֶָנְּיָם אֶלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַיָּשְּתַחֲוֵּֽו לֵיהם וַיִּעַבְּדוּם, Tg. Ket. 2 Chr 7:22), so [God] brought upon them all this distress. (2 Chr 7:22)

Nevertheless, Ahaziah, king of Israel (1 Kgs 22:51), and later, the children of Israel (2 Kgs 17:9), perform these forbidden actions:

And he served the Baal, and he bowed down to it (וַיִּשְּתַחֲוָּם אֶת־הַבָּאָל וַיִּעַבְּדוּוֹ, Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 22:54), and he vexed Yhwh, the God of Israel (אֶת־יְהוַה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 22:54), like everything his father did. (1 Kgs 22:54)

And they abandoned all the commandments of Yhwh their God (וַיַּעֲבַדְוּוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם, Tg. Neb. 2 Kgs 17:16), and they made for themselves a molten form, two calves, and they made an Asherah, and they bowed down before all the host of the heavens, and they served the Baal (וַיָּשְּתַחֲוּ לְכָל־אֶלֶּיהָם וּפָלַכּוּ לֵיהֶם, Tg. Neb. 2 Kgs 17:16).

Like God’s warning to Solomon that Israel will become a “proverb” (1 קָנָה לְמָשִּׁל, 1 Kgs 9:7; 2 Chr 7:20) for the nations, Jeremiah warns the king of Judah (Jer 22:1) in similar language that Jerusalem will become a saying for the nations (vv.8–9):

And they will say, “On the account that they abandoned the covenant of the Yhwh their God, and they bowed before other gods, and they served them (וַיַּעֲבַדוּוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וַיָּשְּתַחֲוָּם לֵאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים), like everything his father did. (1 Kgs 22:54)

It would seem to the reader of these intertexts that Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:14–15) is not only an unjust judgment in the perspective of Torah (Exod 20:5; Deut 4:19; 5:9), and not only a judgment which does not know that Israel’s wellbeing and security is threatened by their infidelity to their God (Deut 8:19; Josh 23:16). It is also a judgment which fails at knowing the “proverb” (1 Kgs 9:7; 2 Chr 7:20) which all the nations are expected to learn from Jerusalem’s downfall (1 Kgs 9:8–9; 2 Chr 7:21–22; Jer 22:8–9). However, the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to serve Nebuchadnezzar’s gods or prostrate before his golden image, even if they should burn in Nebuchadnezzar’s fire, offers him the possibility of new knowledge (וַיִּדְוַיִּד, Dan 3:18).

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego responded and said to the king, ‘Nebuchadnezzar, there is no need for us to give you an account of ourselves about this. If there is our God whom we are serving (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֲנָחָנִי פָּלַכּוּנִי), [God] is able to save us from the furnace of burning fire (ךְּבָאת נְאִירָה), and from your hand, O king, let [God] save! But if not, let it be known to you (רֹאַי), O king, that your gods, there is none of us serving (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֲנָחָנִי פָּלַכּוּנִי)".

45 For the final portion of the quote, Sperber’s text reads פָּלַכּוּנִי. This is the only instance where I have preferred the BibleWorks 10 text to Sperber’s. Cf. Sperber, 4A:39.
Nebuchadnezzar’s witness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s survival in midst of the fire (סְגָּדוּן לֵא נָסָּ֔גָּד, Dan 3:16–18), and the mysterious fourth figure appearing like “a son of the gods” (לְבַר־אֱלָהִֽין, Dan 3:25), changes his perspective in seeing them as servants of God Most High (דִֽי־אֱלָהִָּ֥א עִלָיָא) coming out of the fire (נֻרָֽא, v.26), and he sees their refusal to serve or prostrate to any god but their own in a new light:

And Nebuchadnezzar said in response, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent [God’s] messenger and saved [God’s] servants who trusted in [God], and the word of the king they changed, and they gave their bodies which would not serve and would not prostrate to any god except their God (ל א־י פְּלְּלחֵון וְּל א־י סְּגָֻֽד לֵא־י הּ ל הֵן לֵאל הֲהוֹן).” (Dan 3:28)

The question of the authenticity of Nebuchadnezzar’s apparent conversion in Dan 3:28 will be evaluated below, in terms of how this verse is situated in the narrated time of Dan 3:1–30. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of one like הּ אֱלָ in the 눈 alludes to other texts through Targum Onqelos, where Nebuchadnezzar’s past act of judging by fire is again seen to be unjust, because this fate commanded for the idols of other nations’ gods, especially those coated in gold (Deut 7:25), is never to be applied to one’s youths or children (12:31), but may be applied to a city conquered by the Israelites (13:17).

The idols of their gods you will burn with fire (פְּס ילֵֵ֥י אֱלֹהֵיהֵֶ֖ם ת שְּרְ֣וּן ב אֵָ֑ש, Tg. Onq. Deut 7:25), and you will not desire the silver and the gold upon them and take for yourself, lest you become ensnared by it, since it is a detestable thing to Yhwh your God (ךָ יְּהו ֵ֥ה אֱלֹהֶָ֑י, Tg. Onq. Deut 7:25). (Deut 7:25)

You will not do this for Yhwh your God (ךָ לַיהו ֵּ֖ה אֱלֶּא הָי, Tg. Onq. Deut 12:31), for it is a detestable thing to Yhwh which [God] hates, they do for their gods, for even their sons and their daughters they would burn with fire to their gods (י שְּרְ֥וּ ב אֵֵ֖ש לֵָֽאלֹהֵיהֶָֽם, Tg. Onq. Deut 12:31). (Deut 12:31)

And all its plunder you will gather into the midst of its open square, and you will burn with fire (וְּש רַפְּת   ב אֵָׂ֜ש, Tg. Onq. Deut 13:17) the city and all its plunder, a whole offering to Yhwh your God (ךָ לַיהו ֵּ֖ה אֱלֶּא הָי, Tg. Onq. Deut 13:17), and it will be a ruin-mound forever, it will not be built again. (Deut 13:17)

However, the same linkwords applied to Targum Jonathon uncovers Jeremiah’s oracles, announced to Zedekiah, that Nebuchadnezzar’s act of burning Jerusalem with fire happened with God’s permission, but that Zedekiah could have escaped this judgment by Nebuchadnezzar’s fire by surrendering himself to the king of Babylon.
Thus says Yhwh, the God of Israel (יְּהו ה֩ אֱלֹהֵֵ֣י י שְּר אִֵ֔ל; Tg. Neb. Jer 34:2), “Walking you will speak to Zedekiah, king of Judah, and you will say to him, ‘Thus says Yhwh, Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire (שָׁפָּר, אֵֽוֶּרֶץ, יְּהו ה֩ אֱלֹהֵֵ֣י י שְּר אִֵ֔ל; Tg. Neb. Jer 34:2).’” (Jer 34:2)

And Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says Yhwh, God of hosts, the God of Israel (יְּהו ה֩ אֱלֹהֵ י צְּב אָׂ֜וֹת אֱלֹּהֵֵ֣י י שְּר אִֵ֗ל; Tg. Neb. Jer 38:17), ‘If going out you will go out to the princes of the king of Babylon, and your own self will live, and this city will not be burned with fire (לְאֵ֥ת ת ש רֵֵּ֖ף ב אֵָ֑ש; ל א ת תוֹקַד בְּנֻור אֵֽה, Tg. Neb. Jer 38:17), and you and your house will live.’” (Jer 38:17)

When God hands over Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:2), then in Jeremiah’s view, he does not contravene God’s will by using fire (Jer 34:2). However, by applying a judgment of fire to Judeans who express fidelity to their God, Nebuchadnezzar steps beyond the limits of divine justice.

**Nebuchadnezzar in Narrated Time: Can a King Change His Spots?**

I have alluded to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s defiance and survival bringing about change in Nebuchadnezzar’s character, which I will now examine in more detail. Indeed, it is uncertain whether Nebuchadnezzar’s apparent “conversion” is genuine. There are two options for the reader in judging change in Nebuchadnezzar’s character: taking the *prima facie* case that he does change for the better, or the suspicious stance that any positive change is apparent only. Judging these two stances possible for the reader involves reviewing Nebuchadnezzar’s actions (hearing, Dan 3:9–12, 16–18, seeing, vv.21–25, speaking, vv.14–15, 19–20, 28–29, promoting, v.30) and emotive states (v.13, 19, 24), to discern what may be happening in his mind, hidden to the reader.

**Nebuchadnezzar’s Prior State in Narrated Time**

Before any change may occur in Nebuchadnezzar because of what he sees (Dan 3:24–25), his efforts in ordering the construction, dedication, and veneration of the golden image (vv.1–7) implies that whatever it represents (his god, his kingdom, or himself) is of great value to him. Certain Chaldean sages approach him privately to accuse, somewhat slanderously (Dan 3:8), Judean ministers high up in the imperial hierarchy who do not honour his decree, gods, or

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46 Here, I allude to Valeta’s terse judgment on Nebuchadnezzar’s character at the end of Dan 3: “It seems that kings and leopards perhaps do not change their spots so easily.” Valeta, 87.

47 For example, see ibid., 86; Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics*, 56-58.
statue (v.12). They are only too happy to remind Nebuchadnezzar of his decree (Dan 3:10–11), that everyone summoned to the dedication must fall and prostrate before the statue at the sound of the orchestra, with a fiery death as punishment for disobedience (vv.5–6). Upon hearing this accusation, Nebuchadnezzar’s reactions are an emotive state of anger (נְגֹז וַחֲמָה), and his speech-action of ordering the culprits to be summoned into his presence (נְיָוָס מִלְכָּא, suggesting a more public scene, Dan 3:13).48 Ostensibly, Nebuchadnezzar’s emotive state is occasioned by his offence against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, for not honouring his gods (reflecting his piety), for disobeying an order meant to promote imperial unity (reflecting his anxiety), or for holding the king himself in disdain (reflecting his hubris). Even so, his next speech-act shows that he does not lose all rationality in his anger, since he can still question the accused about their disobedience, and offer them a second chance to prove the accusation wrong (Dan 3:14–15). Nebuchadnezzar’s specific challenge to them, “And who is the god who will save you from my hands?” (Dan 3:15), could reflect his piety (if he understands their refusal to worship as impious), as well as his arrogance (by elevating himself above any god they might worship), while his anxiety is more likely to be suppressed before the gathered ministers (vv.24, 27).

However, against every expectation of Nebuchadnezzar and his gathered court, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego make a riposte, and possibly even address him by his personal name “Nebuchadnezzar” (without “king” or “live forever,” Dan 3:16).49 Their riposte shows alarming disrespect to the great king, in that they do away with the need to make a formal defence (Dan 3:16),50 and even suggest that the king needs to learn something about them and their God

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48 The narrator later informs the reader of the presence of all Nebuchadnezzar’s ministers when he judges the three Judeans (Dan 3:24, 27).
49 Depending on how the punctuation in Dan 3:16 is understood. Alternative punctuation in Dan 3:16 would alter this interpretation, by reading: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego responded and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, ‘There is no need for us to give you an account of ourselves about this.’” However, this still lacks the court protocol enunciated by the Chaldean accusers in a less official setting (“O king, live forever!” Dan 3:9). For this more “courteous” reading of the punctuation, so that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego speak without addressing the king simply as “Nebuchadnezzar,” see Goldingay, 64, 66; Koch, Daniel 1–4, 251; Collins, Daniel, 177. For the “discourteous” reading (which I am following), where they boldly address the king by his personal name, without title or “live forever!” (which intensifies Nebuchadnezzar’s enrage, Dan 3:19), see Lacocque, Le livre de Daniel, 58.
50 As noted by Seow, 55-56.
They even have the audacity to issue a counter-challenge to Nebuchadnezzar, calling upon their own God’s reality, power, and fidelity (Dan 3:17). Wesselius perceptively recognises their imitation of Nebuchadnezzar’s speech (compare Dan 3:16–18 to vv.14–15) in an “echo dialogue” as symbolic of “their defiance and their dropping of courteous and humble address” before Nebuchadnezzar: “by using the same expressions they put themselves on an equal footing with him.” Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction to their riposte is the emotive state of extreme rage (וּנּהֵיתִ֣י חָמָ֥א וּצְלִ֗ם אַנְפֹּ֣וֹהִי֙ אֶשְׁתּ, and his speech-order to heat the furnace sevenfold for their execution (Dan 3:19). Why this heightened state of offence, which has the “counterproductive” effect of killing his men who throw the three into the furnace (Dan 3:22)? Against Nebuchadnezzar’s implicit claim of his own piety in worshipping his gods (Dan 3:14), their retort offends against his public religiosity, because of their assertion that they are not godless, but serve a God to whom they appeal to save them (v.17), rejecting the service of Nebuchadnezzar’s gods, even on pain of a fiery death (v.18). Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar’s sense of his self-importance has also been offended, since they demonstrate complete disregard for honouring him with a desperate plea for mercy, or even with a proper explanation for their disobedience (Dan 3:16). Perhaps he is also stressed by his heightened

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51 An alternative way of reading the syntax of Dan 3:18 is to read וְּהֵן לַא יְדֵיעַ as a complete phrase (as opposed to the more standard reading of וְּהֵן לַא by itself), which would translate as: “And if it was not known, let it be so to you, O king…” However, this alternative syntactical reading does not seem to have as much scholarly support, so I will adopt the more common interpretation (where a passive participle combined with יִתְיַּ in the infinitive can indicate the imperfect). See Peter W. Coxon, "The Syntax of the Aramaic of Daniel: A Dialectal Study," Hebrew Union College Annual 48, (1977): 109; Collins, Daniel, 177; James A. Wharton, "Daniel 3:16-18," Interpretation 39, no. 2 (1985): 173; Koch, Daniel I-4, 252, 284; Goldingay, 64, 66; Ernest C. Lucas, "A Statue, a Fiery Furnace and a Dismal Swamp: A Reflection on Some Issues in Biblical Hermeneutics," Evangelical Quarterly 77, no. 4 (2005): 292; Lacocque, Le livre de Daniel, 58; Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 49; Valeta, 171; Hebbard, 98.

52 "If there is our God …" or “If our God is able …" (Dan 3:17)? The translation depends on whether יִתְיַ is read as a verb of existence or as an emphatic copula. Franz Rosenthal, A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic, 7th ed., Porta Linguarum Orientalium (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz Verlag, 2006), 45. For the reading of יִתְיַ as an emphatic copula (resulting in their questioning of God’s power, but not God’s existence), see Peter W. Coxon, "Daniel III 17: A Linguistic and Theological Problem," Vetus Testamentum 26, no. 4 (1976): 407-8; Collins, Daniel, 177, 187; Lucas, "A Statue, a Fiery Furnace and a Dismal Swamp," 292; Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 49; Lacocque, Le livre de Daniel, 58; Valeta, 171. For the reading of יִתְיַ as a verb of existence (resulting in their questioning of God’s existence as a kind of negative rhetorical question), see Goldingay, 64, 66; Hebbard, 98.

53 Wesselius, 208.

54 See Goldingay, 74.

55 Fewell provides an insightful commentary on the difference between Nebuchadnezzar’s piety and that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as the contrast of the piety of power, which promotes those who imitate it, to the piety of the vulnerable, marked by courageous resistance to power. Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 50.

56 See also ibid., 49.
sense of anxiety, before the gathered officials of the empire (Dan 3:24, 27) who witness this scene of impudence. Up until now, Nebuchadnezzar maintained sufficient control over his expression, demeanour, and gravitas in public, but his change of face (Dan 3:19), and his command that results in his guards burning to death (v.22), indicates that he has now lost control. Even before seeing the godlike figure in the furnace (Dan 3:25), Nebuchadnezzar has already been overwhelmed by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s defiance.

**The Apparent Change in Nebuchadnezzar’s Character**

Does Nebuchadnezzar’s apparent change happen merely at the surface level, his “face,” leaving his character largely untouched and unscathed, or is his change in behaviour the sign of a deeper, substantial change in his “heart” or “mind”? Upon a first reading, what Nebuchadnezzar sees in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:24–25) occasions a complete reversal in his character, when the reader compares his characterisation before and after this event. Nebuchadnezzar rises in sudden alarm (יִתְבְּהָלָה יָקוּם), while presumably gazing into the furnace to see his three insolent administrators disintegrate into ash (Dan 3:24). He sees something in the furnace which shocks him (Dan 3:25), that remains unseen by his high officials (either they are not granted Nebuchadnezzar’s vision, or they are somewhat less interested in peering at others’ death scenes). Their rather simple, matter-of-fact answer to Nebuchadnezzar’s painfully obvious question (“Were not three men thrown into the fire, bound?”) is “Certainly, O king” (Dan 3:24). Their answer suggests an additional measure of restraint, decency, and willingness to respect someone who has just ordered three men to their certain doom. Perhaps they experience significant emotional tension, not wanting to offend the king. Nebuchadnezzar’s question to his high officials (Dan 3:24) repeats the event narrated in the story world, observable to all characters present (“And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, fell into the midst of the furnace of burning fire bound up,” v.23). Nebuchadnezzar’s response (“Look! I see four men freed, walking in the furnace of fire, and there is no injury among them, and the appearance of the fourth resembles a son of the gods!” Dan 3:25), negates the observable event previously narrated (v.23). Nebuchadnezzar’s observation, that they are unharmed and walking in the flames (Dan 3:25), also negates all
reasonable expectation of the effects of fire strong enough to incinerate strong military men from a distance (v.22). Nebuchadnezzar’s final observation of the fourth man “resembling a son of the gods” (Dan 3:25) is a further unexpected twist.

Nebuchadnezzar’s unusual observations are enough to arouse the curiosity of the court officials to gather round Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to see for themselves (Dan 3:27), once Nebuchadnezzar has called them out of the fiery furnace (v.26). Only now do the imperial administrators see the evidence of the king’s words with their own eyes, apart from the fourth, godlike figure, whom Nebuchadnezzar reinterprets as a messenger of the God who saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:28). The reader can then observe the effects of Nebuchadnezzar’s *apparent* change in his blessing, his decree, and his decision to reinstate Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as provincial governors of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar’s change seems occasioned by his reaction to what he sees, in an emotive state of sudden fear (תְוַּהּ וְקָם בְהִתְבְּהָלָה, Dan 3:24). Elsewhere in Aramaic Daniel, בהל often refers to kind of fear produced by one’s thoughts or visions, suggesting something like fretful anxiety (Dan 4:16; 5:6, 9, 10; 7:15, 28). Arioch also expresses בהל when he brings Daniel before the king to interpret his dream (בְהִתְבְּהָלָה, Dan 2:25; compare Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction, 3:24). This emotive state of fear, anxiety, and urgency (Dan 3:24) contrasts sharply to his previous state of rage and anger (vv.13, 19). On this reading, what Nebuchadnezzar sees in the furnace alters significantly his actions, words, and emotions.

**The Suspicious Stance towards Nebuchadnezzar’s “Conversion”**

This approach involves “counter-reading” the text to some extent, where the reader does not acquiesce to the appearance of Nebuchadnezzar as a completely changed character. For example, Valeta, commenting on “the pious prayer of a supposedly pious king” (Dan 3:28),
and his decree (v.29), takes what he sees as a divergent path in reading Nebuchadnezzar’s words.57

The great majority of commentators read this and other kingly prayers literally. They view this and similar scenes of repentant kings in Daniel as true conversions. This possibility is too good to be true, just like the royal declaration of Dan. 2.47. It will not last. The king is portrayed here as reacting wildly to the circumstances at hand, just as he was portrayed in Dan. 2.46–49. There, the king’s prostrating before Daniel is absurd. Now, it is the full embrace of the Hebrew deity and the enforcement of his laws. What ideal ancient Near Eastern king would embrace the god of his conquered subjects as against his own? In addition, v. 29 may give the reader a hint that a less than complete conversion may have occurred since the king is quite willing to hack anyone to death who defames the God of the three. It seems that kings and leopards perhaps do not change their spots so easily.58

Valeta makes what I believe is the strongest argument against the credibility of Nebuchadnezzar’s words in Dan 3:28–29. Regarding his query as to “[w]hat ideal ancient Near Eastern king would embrace the god of his conquered subjects as against his own,” I have already put forward my own divergent reading of Nebuchadnezzar’s piety as syncretistic, where he may have understood Daniel’s “God of heaven” from his perspective as a worshipper of the Babylonian pantheon, and divorced this God from Daniel’s original Judean context. Noteworthy points of Valeta’s argument quoted above, however, include: reading Dan 3:28 with 2:46–49 (especially v.47), that Nebuchadnezzar is again behaving erratically and irrationally, without any permanent, stable change in his behaviour; a closer reading of 3:29, that Nebuchadnezzar is still in the habit of cruelly executing his subjects on ostensibly religious grounds. Fewell also notes that Nebuchadnezzar retains much of his arrogance in Dan 3:29–30, and still attempts to control the power of “life and death” in the name of his newly professed deity, threatening dismemberment against detractors (v.29), and allowing the lives of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to flourish (v.30).59 For Fewell, Nebuchadnezzar’s decree (Dan 3:29) is his attempt to make “this god politically useful,”60 perceptively noting that at surface level, the king has deliberately shifted the issue from politics back to religion, to save his public reputation.61 Although she tempers her critique of Nebuchadnezzar’s character by

57 Valeta, 86.
58 Ibid., 86-87.
59 Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 58.
60 Ibid., 57.
61 Ibid., 56.
acknowledging his gain in knowledge of God by what he sees in the furnace, she qualifies it by arguing that his new knowledge is limited: he “defines and identifies the divine in terms of the human.”

Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar’s pious veneer is simply a cover for devious political manoeuvring. In contrast, Hebbard awards Nebuchadnezzar reasonably strong praise for his change after his “confrontation” with the three: “Nebuchadnezzar thus far has struggled with understanding his self-identity, and though his struggle is far from over, he has made no uncertain progress toward a more ideal perception.” Nevertheless, Hebbard manifests some reservations about Nebuchadnezzar’s belief that he is still “in control of life and death, and in godlike fashion deciding the destinies of his subjects,” and that Dan 3:29 is “the apparent Yhwh-fearing decree,” demonstrating “vanity” by its “repetition” with his previous “proclamation” (presumably 2:47). Likewise, Lucas sees only a “partial” conversion of Nebuchadnezzar to the God of the three protagonists, emphasising that his decree is “not a conversion to monotheism” but a “measure of conversion,” because “[h]e is still concerned about power” and “impressed by the power of the God of the Jews.” The reader will find difficulties trusting that Nebuchadnezzar underwent positive, stable change, while maintaining suspicions about his erratic backsliding, violent tendencies, arrogant love and admiration of power, especially the power over life and death, and his misuse of public piety to hide less admirable political motivations.

Regarding the claim that Nebuchadnezzar has backslid between his confessions of Dan 2:47 and 3:28, a counter-response is possible that Nebuchadnezzar does not immediately presume that Daniel’s God (2:47) is the same as “the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” (3:28), when the three announce their allegiance to their God (3:17). However, perhaps this is knowledge the reader could reasonably expect him to attain at this point in narrated time. His praise of “your God” (אֱלָהֲכוֹן) to Daniel (Dan 2:47) has “God” in the singular, but the

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62 Ibid.
63 Hebbard, 102.
64 Ibid., 102-3.
65 Ibid., 103.
66 Lucas, Daniel, 96.
pronominal suffix “your” in the plural, meaning one God of more than one person. Daniel’s use of the first-person plural (ָאֵם, Dan 2:36) informs Nebuchadnezzar that more than one person is responsible for communicating the divinely-given interpretation to him, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who may have accompanied Daniel’s court appearance after assisting him in prayer (vv.17–18), and whom Daniel requested to govern the capital province in his stead (v.49). The reader can reasonably expect that Nebuchadnezzar ought to have connected Daniel’s God and the God of the three, and that even if he intended to worship Daniel’s God in the form of the golden image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego display a more authentic piety. Could his confession in Dan 3:28 be less than sincere?

The other possibility open to the suspicious reader, that Nebuchadnezzar’s public piety hides his political machinations, is supported when his words in Dan 3:28 are seen to manipulate the memory of past narrated time for other characters who hear him. Collins’s judgment that Nebuchadnezzar’s “doxology” holds no “historical plausibility,” “especially as the Jews are herein commended for defying the edict of the king,” suggests the way in which the implied reader might hear the king’s words. Nebuchadnezzar’s act of praise (Dan 3:28) may lead the suspicious reader to ask why this king, who not so long ago insisted upon absolute obedience to himself (vv.4–6, 14–15), now praises those who were disobedient to him (v.28). Curiously, Nebuchadnezzar’s praise for the disobedient refers to himself not as “I” in the first person, but to “the word of the king” (וּמִלַּת מַלְכָּא שַּׁנִּיו, Dan 3:28) in the third person. Is he attempting to disassociate his present self from “the king” of the past who commanded death-by-fire for anyone refusing the worship of the golden image (Dan 3:4–6, 14–15)? Perhaps he has now regained sufficient self-control (since Dan 3:19) to manipulate carefully the situation to his own political advantage, while all his royal officials look on (vv.24, 27). Nebuchadnezzar may be employing the clever politician’s trick of “rewriting the past.”

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67 Rosenthal, 30.
68 Collins, Daniel, 191.
69 Compare Pyper’s negative evaluation of Solomon’s actions towards Joab and Shimei: “Solomon’s wisdom is the kind of statecraft that allows a king to renege on promises without actually exposing himself to the charge of breaking his word; a useful gift, perhaps, but dangerous and not particularly admirable.” Hugh S. Pyper, "Judging the Wisdom of Solomon: The Two-Way Effect of Intertextuality," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 18, no. 59 (1993): 31.
never really wanting to test Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s willingness to obey him by prostrating before the golden statue (despite what he had said in Dan 3:15): all this time, he always intended to test the trust and devotion of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to their God, even at the cost of their own bodies (v.28). Now that Nebuchadnezzar has witnessed them passing a test of fidelity to their God (Dan 3:24–25), perhaps he is implying that they have passed his test (v.28), to avoid embarrassment and dishonour before the gathering of high officials (v.27). For the reader to suspect that Nebuchadnezzar may be manipulating the memory of past narrated time at Dan 3:28, he or she would need to pause the time of narrating as the story is communicated through the verses of Dan 3, and either rerun the time of narrating by rereading the text, or remember that Nebuchadnezzar’s implied self-portrayal before v.28 may be different now.

Finally, the reader may also suspect that Nebuchadnezzar’s orientation to power through violence has not changed over narrated time thus far. His decree following his confession of praise reads:

“And by me a decree is issued, that every nation, people, or language which speaks an insult against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be dismembered and its house made a refuse heap (בְּבֵית נְוָלִי), because there is no other god who is able to rescue like this.” (Dan 3:29)

Nebuchadnezzar’s threat against any who would dishonour the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego alludes to his earlier decree, threatening any sage who could not tell him both dream and interpretation:

And the king said in response to the Chaldeans, “The word is promulgated by me, if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be dismembered and your homes made a refuse heap.” (Dan 2:5)

Even earlier in narrated time, Ashpenaz’s explanation of his “fear” to Daniel (Dan 1:10) would seem to be justified by these later portrayals of Nebuchadnezzar’s character, in his own words (Dan 2:5; 3:29).

And the head attendant said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who ordered your appointed portions and your drink, that if he sees your faces more miserable

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70 See Kirkpatrick’s reading of Nebuchadnezzar attempting to salvage his honour in Dan 3:29. Kirkpatrick, 105.
than the youths of your exilic group, it would endanger my head with the king (ר י י א ש א לַמֶלֶךְ).” (Dan 1:10)

Just as Nebuchadnezzar attempts to control his narrated present by manipulating the memory of the narrated past (Dan 3:28), he also threatens the ongoing existence, into the narrated future, of anyone who challenges his decree in the present (v.29).

**The Question about Nebuchadnezzar’s Fear**

Though the suspicious reader may question the depth and stability of Nebuchadnezzar’s change through Dan 3:1–30, perhaps the strongest argument that *some change* did occur, by what he saw in the furnace (vv.24–25), lies in his change of emotive state. In Dan 3:24, he expresses the state of בהל, in his action of rising quickly while startled (תְָוֵַ֖הּ וְָקָ֣ם בְהִתְבְָהָלָ֑ה). If the reader looks forward in the time of narrating, he or she would learn Nebuchadnezzar will again enter the hasty fright of בהל, but accompanied by fear expressed by the root דחל, upon experiencing his second dream.

> I saw a dream and it caused me fear (יֵדַחֲלֵנִי), and the imaginings on my bed, and the visions of my head alarmed me (יְבַּהֲלֻנַּּֽנִי). (Dan 4:2)

It is this same fear (יֵדַחֲלֵנִי) that Daniel claims the great image (צְל ִּ֥ם) of Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream provoked in anyone who saw it (יְבַּהֲלֵנִי, Dan 2:31). When he built another great image, this time entirely of gold (צְל ֣ם דִֽי־דְהַַּּ֔ב, Dan 3:1), perhaps he was trying to regain control as the source, and not the sufferer, of fear. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s suffering of בהל in Dan 3:24 places him on a path when he will suffer both בהל and דחל (4:2). Searching through Targumim Onqelos, Jonathon, Isaiah, Psalms, Job, Qoheleth, and Proverbs, fear expressed by the verb דחל occurs in 363 verses. The association of דחל with wisdom or being wise (חכמה, חכים) occurs in just Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 3:28; Tg. Isa. 33:6; Tg. Neb. Jer 10:7; Tg. Ket. Ps 111:10; Tg. Ket. Job 37:24; Tg. Ket. Prov 3:7; 14:6, but among some of these, there are grounds for comparison with Nebuchadnezzar. Above, I discussed the question of justice in Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:14–15). His threat of death-by-fire implies that he was attempting to cow them with a kind of fear. In contrast is the “fear” (ירא, 1 Kgs 3:28; יד, Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 3:28) which Solomon provokes in his people, by judging the case
of the dispute over the infant by two women (1 Kgs 3:16–27), precisely because he judges with “the wisdom of God” to administer justice.\(^{71}\)

And they heard, all Israel, the judgment which the king judged (אֶת־הַשְּׁפָט אֲשֶׁר שְׁפָט הַמֶּלֶךְ), and they feared before the king (ךְָֽי לֵּ֥א יָֽרְּאֵּֽו מ פְּנֵֵ֣י הַמֶָ֑לֶךְ), for they saw that the wisdom of God (כְּמַָ֧ת יְּהוָ֣ה) was in his inward parts, for doing justice (לַעֲשֵ֥וֹת מְּשְׁפָּט). (1 Kgs 3:28)

In comparison to Nebuchadnezzar’s rule over all peoples, nations (אַעֲמַּמַּיָּ֔א), and languages (Dan 3:4), Jeremiah praises God as “King of the nations” (מֶ֣לֶךְ הַּגוֹיִַּ֔ם), as one whom the nations will fear, and who surpasses all their “wise ones.”

Who will not fear you (מַי לֵּ֣א יָֽרְּאֵּֽו יָֽאֵּ֣ו מ פְּנֵֵ֣י הַמֶָ֑לֶךְ), King of the nations? Because for you it is befitting, for among all the wise ones (בְּכֵל־חַכָּמֵי), and among all their kingdoms, there is nothing like you. (Jer 10:7)

This fear of Yhwh again taken up in an act of praise, when the Psalmist names it “a beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10), associated with acting in fidelity to God’s covenant (cf. v.9) and praising God (which Nebuchadnezzar, at least, does at surface level, in Dan 3:28).

Finally, Proverbs associates “fear” with being wise and turning away from evil, and warns against being overconfident or wise in one’s own eyes: “turning away from evil” would be the ideal effect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s defiance could be expected to have on Nebuchadnezzar’s character.

How deep is Nebuchadnezzar’s fright at what he sees in the furnace (expressed by בהל, Dan 3:24), which may develop into fright expressed by דחל (4:2), which could form a starting point for Nebuchadnezzar’s growth into wisdom? I suspect that Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction to what

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\(^{71}\) However, cf. Pyper’s comparison of 1 Kgs 3 with 2 Kgs 6, from which he concludes that the trial Solomon judges in 1 Kgs 3:16–27 is not about “the establishment of justice,” but “the cleverness” of Solomon’s “ruse.” Pyper, 33.
he sees in the furnace is not completely reducible to a cynical grasp on power by the suspicious reader, because the king forgets his own self-interest to put himself into two types of danger while determining the truth of what he sees. The first danger is the potential loss of respect among his ministers by his question asked in haste (“Were not three men thrown into the fire, bound?” Dan 3:24). The second danger is to his own life, when he approaches the burning furnace (Dan 3:26) which has just killed his guards (v.22), carried away by his witness to the survival of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (v.25).

Then Nebuchadnezzar came close to the gate of the furnace of burning fire (קדש ברוקניא, חלות אתר צרא פּלֵ_rsaו), and he said in response, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of God most high, get out and come!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the furnace of fire. (Dan 3:26)

Nebuchadnezzar loses the sense of his own self-interest, and even self-preservation, long enough to approach dangerously close to the burning furnace. Whatever he has seen (Dan 3:24–25), his fright, or perhaps amazement and wonder, cancels out any prudent sense of avoiding a deadly fire. Unlike his guards (Dan 3:22), but like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (vv.25, 27), Nebuchadnezzar is not harmed by his own flames. Even if Nebuchadnezzar recovers his sense of self-control while the ministers examine the three (Dan 3:27), to impose control on others’ memory of the past (v.28) and their continued existence into the future (v.29), he is confronted with a sight, at least for a moment (v.24), which shocks him out of any thought for his own life (v.26).

Wisdom’s Eclipse

In this story of the eclipse of wisdom for Nebuchadnezzar, he makes a golden image which mimics the actions of wise characters, but also mimics the actions of others who make “gods” out of gold. His attempted coercion of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship his gods (Dan 3:14–15) is a judgment which fails at doing the justice and righteousness of an ideally wise king such as Solomon (1 Kgs 3:28; 10:9). His apparent change in Dan 3:24–30 is questionable to the suspicious reader. He offers the reader a fictive experience in which an unjust authority attempts to maintain control over the public memory of the past and individuals’ future lifespans. Nevertheless, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s resistance to
Nebuchadnezzar has the potential to correct him in the matter of knowledge (Dan 3:18). Perhaps the king’s moment of fear (Dan 3:24) is a tiny seed which may develop into the beginning of wisdom at some point in future narrated time.
Chapter 7: Nebuchadnezzar’s End, Beginning Again—Wisdom Attained? (Dan 3:31–4:34)

I will discuss the following three points about Dan 3:31–4:34. First, who is responsible for the first transformation of Nebuchadnezzar into a bestial character? This will involve examining both the role of others, such as God with the heavenly court and Daniel, and the role of Nebuchadnezzar himself. Second, who is responsible for Nebuchadnezzar’s second transformation into a new state of knowledge: others or himself? This will include a discussion of whether such “new” knowledge is instead old but recovered, and Nebuchadnezzar’s new awareness of the importance of “justice and righteousness” for kings, whether human or divine. Third, what is the significance of Nebuchadnezzar narrating part of Dan 3:31–4:34 (while declining to narrate those parts left to the anonymous narrator), and at a later point in time than the happening of the events narrated? This will involve a discussion of the disjunctions between the time of narrating and narrated time, and between the narrative voices, and of the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar intends to present the dream of the tree to his audience in a way not limited to Daniel’s interpretation. Members of Nebuchadnezzar’s audience might associate his “tree” with the tree of life or the tree of knowledge in Eden.

Nebuchadnezzar’s First Transformation in Narrated Time

Daniel 3:31–4:34 begins with Nebuchadnezzar’s “quasi-epistolary” communication to “all peoples, nations and languages” (Dan 3:31), praising the most high God’s signs and wonders (vv.32–33), and the perpetuity of God’s kingdom (v.33).


2 As Fewell argues, God’s sovereignty and its relationship to earthly kingship would seem to form a central theme of Dan 3:31–4:34. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics*, 77-78; also see Goldingay, 87; Seow, 65; Porteous, 65.
an angelic figure orders to be cut down and transformed into a beast (vv.10–14). Daniel interprets the dream by identifying Nebuchadnezzar with the tree (Dan 4:19), and warns him that his sovereignty will soon come to an end, and that he will enter a beast-like state, until he comes to know the sovereignty of the heavens (vv.22–23). Daniel’s interpretation proves accurate for Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:25–30). How do the character roles of God’s heavenly court, Daniel, and Nebuchadnezzar himself interact to bring about this bestial change in Nebuchadnezzar?

The Heavenly Court’s Role: Their Negotiations over Nebuchadnezzar’s Fate

To unpack the roles of other agents in effecting the change in Nebuchadnezzar’s character, I will analyse the “decrees” announced to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream (Dan 4:11–14) and from the heavens (vv.28–29), and the interpretation Daniel gives Nebuchadnezzar of the decree in his dream (vv.21–22). I seek to probe the politics of the heavenly court, insofar as it is hinted in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Daniel’s interpretation, and Nebuchadnezzar’s rooftop experience, to make a tentative interpretation of the divine motives, intentions, and actions implicit in the God of Daniel’s dealings with Nebuchadnezzar.

In Nebuchadnezzar’s account of his second dream, a single “watcher and holy one” (Dan 4:10) makes a decree against the tree:

> 11b Hew down the tree and cut off its branches, strip its foliage and scatter its fruit, let the beasts flee from underneath it, and the birds from its branches. 12 Nevertheless, leave its rootstock in the earth, and with bands of iron and bronze in the grass of the field, and with the dew of heaven let it be wet, and with the beasts let its portion be the grass of the earth. 13 Let its heart from a man’s be changed, and the heart of a beast will be given to it, and seven times will pass over him.” (Dan 4:11b–13)

Following these words is a reference to a “decree of watchers” (בִּגְז רִַּ֤ת עִירִין֙, Dan 4:14), which may refer to these words (vv.11b–13) or to the words which follow (v.14b). The form of Dan 4:11b–13 implies a decree: the holy watcher’s speech contains a set of plural imperatives addressed to its audience (וּגִֹ֤ד ... וְקַּ֣צוּ ... אַּתִַּּ֥רוּ ... וּבַּדַּ֣רוּ ... שְׁבַֻּ֔קוּ, vv.11–12), and is introduced by the phrase “he cried out with force” (קָר ֙א בְחֵַ֜יִל, v.11a), like Nebuchadnezzar’s herald (קָר ֣א בְחָָ֑יִל, 3:4, whose announcement is called a “decree,” שָ֣מְתָ טְעִם, v.10). The angelic herald announces
a decree for his own King, from whose realm (“the heavens”) he descended (מִן־שְׁמַּיֵָ֖א נָחִֽת, Dan 4:10), and whom Nebuchadnezzar will recognise as “King of the heavens” (ךְִלָּלָ֖שְׁמַיֵָ֖א) at the end of his story (Dan 4:34). The target of this decree is described in complex, polymorphic terms.³ It is a tree which is to be cut down, stripped of its branches, bound in iron and bronze and reduced to its rootstock, but also assigned heaven’s dew for its bathing, the grass of the earth for its food, and the beasts for its companions (Dan 4:11–12). At the same time, the arboreal figure originally had the mind of a human being, which is to become the mind of a beast, for a duration of “seven times” (Dan 4:13). Of all the elements in this decree, the significance of heaven’s dew, the grass of the earth, the beast-companions (Dan 4:12b), and the passing of “seven times” (v.13) is underlined the repetition of these elements in Daniel’s interpretation of the dream-decree (v.22), and in the decree pronounced outside the dream account itself (v.29).

At first glance, a chorus of watchers and holy ones seems to pronounce a second decree in Dan 4:14b.

³ Seow characterises the transformation process in Dan 4:12–13 as a “sequence [which] defies logic.” Seow, 68. He attempts to resolve the absurd nature of the dream imagery in the following synthesis: “In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream fantasy, the tree changes into an animal that changes into a human being who changes, again, into an animal. Still, all three—the tree, the animal, and the human being—are really one. The tree that provided for other living things becomes an animal that needs to be provided for, and that needy animal turns out to be a human being.” Ibid., 69.
of watchers” is identified as containing what may tentatively be translated as “the word” or “the decree” (נִשְׁפַּת). When found in a Hebrew text, this word נִשְׁפַּת means a “(royal) decree” (Esth 1:20) or a judicial sentence against a crime (Qoh 8:11). In Aramaic, however, it means a written response (i.e. a letter) (Ezra 4:17; 5:7, 11), or a judicial defence given verbally in response to an accusation (Dan 3:16). Only in Ezra 6:11 does it seem to refer to a decree enforced by the authority of a king. Since it seems odd to speak of a decree within another decree, I find it preferable to think of the watchers’ decree as containing a response of some sort: “the response” (נִשְׁפַּת) to some request (Dan 4:14a).

Parallel with “in a decree of watchers was the response” is “and speech of holy ones was the request/question (שְׁא לָה)” (Dan 4:14a). The herald who announces the decree of Dan 4:11b–13 also represents this group of קַדִישִּׁים, as “a watcher and holy one” (שׁעִיר וְקַדִַּי, v.10). Unfortunately, the Aramaic noun נִשְׁפַּת occurs in the Masoretic Text only in Dan 4:14. The Hebrew noun נִשְׁפַּת in the Masoretic Text refers to a “petition” someone makes to their God (1 Sam 1:27; Job 6:8; Ps 106:15; but a [petitionary?] sacrifice in 1 Sam 2:20), to their king (1 Kgs 2:20; Esth 5:6, 7, 8; 7:2, 3; 9:12), or to someone with greater political influence than the petitioner (1 Kgs 2:16). Happily, some of the Targumim interpret נִשְׁפַּת in Hebrew as נִשְׁפַּת in Aramaic (Tg. Neb. Judg 8:24; Tg. Neb. 1 Sam 2:20; Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 2:16, 20; Tg. Esth. I 5:6, 7, 8; 7:2, 3; 9:12; Tg. Esth. II 5:6, 7, 8; 7:2, 3; 9:12; Tg. Ket. Job 6:8; but cf. וָב for נִשְׁפַּת, Tg. Neb. 1 Sam 1:27; וָב for נִשְׁפַּת, Tg. Ket. Ps 106:15). “The request” (שְׁא לָה) made by the “holy ones” (Dan 4:14a) could be their “petition” for some deed to be enacted, addressed to their King (see Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 2:20; Tg. Esth. I 5:6, 7, 8; 7:2, 3; 9:12; Tg. Esth. II 5:6, 7, 8; 7:2, 3; 9:12), who is also their God (see Tg. Neb. 1 Sam 2:20; Tg. Ket. Job 6:8). Alternatively, “the request” could be the “question” of the angelic courtiers for understanding some decree already decided (i.e. a “question” for information, Dan 2:10, 11, 27; Esth 5:9, 10). Their “request” or “question” is for the sake of what follows (עַד־דִיָּרְת): “they would know, the living, of the sovereignty of the

4 See the two main entries in Holladay, Lexicon, 418.
5 Cognate to “question” or “request” (שְׁא לָה), נִשְׁפַּת occurs in references to Nebuchadnezzar’s requests for information (Dan 2:10, 11, 27; cf. Ezra 5:9, 10), but could also be a “request” or a “demand” for a (verbal) task to be done (cf. the “request” for a non-verbal task, Ezra 7:21).
6 The exception is Judg 8:24, where Gideon “requests” a task from those under his authority.
Most High in the kingdom of human beings, and to whoever [God] wills [God] gives it, and the lowest of human beings [God] raises over it” (Dan 4:14). This appears to be the motive for the holy ones’ “request” (whether for an act or for information). However, since it seems that they already possess mental clarity of the purpose of their request (knowledge about God’s sovereignty over humanity), then יִנְדְע֣וּן חַַּ֠יַּיָא must be a “request” for an act to be performed, but so that knowledge may be given to others: “the living” (יֵנְדַעְתָּנָה, Dan 4:14). Their “request” is only a “question” on behalf of others, not themselves.

This would seem to be the temporal sequence (in narrated time) of the heavenly politics behind what happens to Nebuchadnezzar. A group of angelic beings nominated as the “holy ones” issue a petition to the King of the heavens, with the desire that “the living” will come to an advanced position of knowledge (such as that found in Dan 4:14b). A decree is issued in response, which came about by the deliberations of a group of angelic beings nominated as the “watchers” (Dan 4:14a), under authorisation of their King. The King of the heavens sends down a herald who is “a watcher and holy one” (Dan 4:10), who represents both sides of the chorus line as they dialogue with each other.7 The herald then announces the decree concerning the tree to the dreamer of the dream in which the angelic figure appears: Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar, who narrates the dream, seems to reverse the temporal sequence in the time of narrating. First Nebuchadnezzar speaks of the herald descending to make the decree (Dan 4:10–13); second, of this decree as a deliberation of watchers; third, of the holy ones’ request (v.14a); fourth, of the motivation for their request (v.14b).

**Daniel's Role: Interpreter and Advisor**

This decree of the watchers (Dan 4:11b–13) repeats with variation in Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (vv.21–22). Daniel appears to understand the decree differently from the way Nebuchadnezzar narrates it. However, the king has expressed confidence in

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7 I am opposing “watchers” and “holy ones” only as two distinct voices among an angelic host, without intending to imply that they oppose each other in allegiance to God. Collins notes that “Watchers” became the name of “fallen angels,” but this was not always the case (224), and that “Watchers and holy ones” are “approximate synonyms” here (226). Collins, Daniel, 224-26.
Daniel’s ability, “I know that a spirit of holy gods is in you” (ךְַּ֔ה יִדְע ַ֗ת דִַ֠י ר֣וּחַּ אֱלָהִִ֤ין קַּדִישִׁין֙ בָ, Dan 4:6), possibly his understanding of the “holy ones” in his dream (ךְַּ֔ה יִדְע ַ֗ת דִַ֠י ר֣וּחַּ אֱלָהִִ֤ין קַּדִישִׁין֙ בָ), since he links Daniel’s name to his god’s name, possibly Bel (“Daniel, whose name Belteshazzar is like the name of my god,” רֹא הָיָּ֣ר בֱּלְטֶשַׁעַּצַּר֙ כְּשֻׁ֣ם אֱלָהִַּ֔י, v.5). 8 In response to Nebuchadnezzar’s request to “speak the interpretation” (וּפִשְׁרֵָ֖א מַּלְכָָ֑א, Dan 4:6), Daniel identifies his interpretation precisely at his reference to the decree as God’s, not of the watchers: “and the decree of the Most High has come upon my lord the king” (וּגְז רִַּ֤ת עִלָיָא הִַּ֔יא דִִּֽ֥י מְטֵָ֖ת עַל־מַּרְאִי מַּלְכָֽא, v.21). 9 Daniel presents the decree as a conflation of Nebuchadnezzar’s decree of watchers and the holy ones’ request: compare the decree as interpreted by Daniel (Dan 4:22) with the second half of the dream-decree announced by the herald (vv.12b–13) and with the holy ones’ petition (v.14b).

Daniel:

“And you will be driven from humanity, and with the beast of the field will be your home, and the grass will feed you like an ox, and the dew of the heavens will wet you. But seven times will pass over you, until you know that the sovereignty of the Most High is over the kingdom of humanity, and to whomever [God] wills [God] gives it.” (Dan 4:22)

The herald:

12b... with the dew of heaven let it be wet, and with the beasts let its portion be the grass of the earth. 13 Let its heart from a man’s be changed, and the heart of a beast will be given to it, and seven times will pass over him.” (Dan 4:12b–13)

The holy ones:

“The living will know that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of humanity, and to whomever [God] wills [God] gives it, and the lowest of humanity [God] raises over it.” (Dan 4:14b)

In conflating the second half the herald’s announcement with the holy ones’ petition, Daniel also reinterprets this decree so to identify Nebuchadnezzar both with the tree to be cut down and made an animal, and with “the living” who will receive knowledge by witnessing this event. Both bane and boon are redirected towards Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel also specifies the kind of animal Nebuchadnezzar will become like (an ox, Dan 4:22), and expands on the role of “seven

8 Keeping in mind, of course, that the historical Nebuchadnezzar’s personal god was not necessarily the same one. See Lucas, Daniel, 109; Hartman and Di Lella, 171; but cf. Seow, 66.

9 Daniel’s correction of Nebuchadnezzar’s presuppositions is also noted by Goldingay, 88.
times” as the duration through which he will gain knowledge and be re-established over his
kingdom (vv. 22–23, picking up on the symbol of the rootstock, vv. 12, 23).

When Nebuchadnezzar hears the decree a second time, while awake and walking on his palace
roof, his diurnal experience of the voice from the heavens (Dan 4: 28–29) shares more in
common with Daniel’s interpretation than Nebuchadnezzar’s narration of his nocturnal
experience. Compare Daniel’s interpretation (Dan 4: 22) against the dream-angels’ words
reported by Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 12b–13, v. 14b):

28The word was still in the mouth of the king when a voice from the heavens fell: “To you
they spoke, Nebuchadnezzar O king, your kingdom is taken away from you! 29And from
human beings you will be driven, and with the beast of the field your dwelling, grass like
oxen will feed you, and seven times will pass over you, until you know that the sovereignty
of the Most High is over the kingdom of human beings, and to whoever [God] wills [God]
gives it.” (Dan 4: 28–29)

The voice from the heavens agrees with Daniel’s interpretation, most importantly, that
Nebuchadnezzar is the targeted recipient of both the bestial transformation and the gain in
knowledge, but secondarily, that the animal is specified as an ox, and that the seven times’
purpose is for acquisition of knowledge of God’s sovereignty over human kingdoms. When the
bestial transformation occurs, the narrator confirms the heavenly voice’s and Daniel’s words
that Nebuchadnezzar was driven away from human society and ate grass like oxen, but also
adds the note that his body was soaked by the heavens’ dew, and he acquired a bird-like
appearance:

In that moment, the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar, and from human
beings he was driven, and the grass like oxen he ate, and from the dew of the heavens his
body was soaked, until his hair like eagles became great, and his nails like birds. (Dan 4: 30)

Here the narrator picks up an element found in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-angel’s words, the
soaking of the body with heaven’s dew (Dan 4: 12), follows the heavenly voice and Daniel in
comparing Nebuchadnezzar to oxen (vv. 22, 29), but also adds the avian aspects of
Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation (v. 30). Daniel, as interpreter of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream,
corrects him with a more accurate expectation of the heavenly voice’s words, that he is the
target of his own dream, but neither heavenly voice, Daniel, nor Nebuchadnezzar anticipate
every aspect of his bestial transformation described by the narrator.
Daniel also acts as an advisor to Nebuchadnezzar, concerning the possibility of delaying the ill
effects of the decree by abolishing his sins and offences with righteousness and mercy.

“Therefore, O king my king, let it be pleasing for you, and abolish your sins with
righteousness, and your offences with showing mercy to the afflicted, if it is to happen that
your prosperity will be stretched out.” (Dan 4:24)

The reader should not find Daniel’s identification of Nebuchadnezzar’s “sins” and offences
surprising, but recall his intention to impose defiling food upon his captives (Dan 1:5, 8),
his threats of death against his court sages for not carrying out impossible demands and even
acting upon those threats (2:10–13), and his enforcement of idolatrous worship upon his
entire imperial staff, backed up with more death threats which are also acted upon (3:4–6, 19–
20). Perhaps even one of Nebuchadnezzar’s first acts in the book of Daniel, sacking the
temple upon successfully besieging Jerusalem, also marks the beginning of his “sins” (Dan
1:2). Later in narrated time, Daniel’s judgment of an absent (and presumably deceased)
Nebuchadnezzar, in his indictment against Belshazzar, is significantly less diplomatic, not
only against Nebuchadnezzar’s successor, but also Nebuchadnezzar himself:

18“You, O king! The most high God gave the kingdom and the greatness and the honour
and the majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. 19 And because of the greatness [God] gave
him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before his presence. Whomever he willed, he could have killed, and whomever he willed, he could let live, and
whomever he willed, he could exalt, and whomever he willed, he could bring low. 20 And
likewise his heart became exalted and his spirit became hardened to presumption, he was
deposed from the throne of his kingdom, and they took honour away from him.” (Dan
5:18–20)

If the reader may be presumed sympathetic with Daniel’s perspective, then Nebuchadnezzar’s
use of the power granted him over his people (having killed and letting live, exalting and

10 However, the question of the perceived “sinfulness” of this action depends somewhat on the implied reader
sharing (or least esteeming) Daniel’s commitment to avoid “defilement” (Dan 1:8), and the reader’s judgment of
authority figures who make such a commitment more difficult.
11 Here I am presuming the implied reader’s judgment that a king’s power to inflict death, and even to reinforce
such an act with an official decree, is not in itself justification for such an act, but is subject to a higher sovereignty.
12 Once more, I am of the understanding that the implied reader is opposed to the imposition of idolatrous worship
upon a significant population of different ethnic, national, linguistic (and religious) backgrounds, some of whom
also hold the reader’s own commitment to non-idolatrous worship.
13 In the Septuagint reading of Dan 4:22, Daniel attributes Nebuchadnezzar’s desolation of the “house of the living
God” (καθότι ἐξερήμωσες τὸν ἱερὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζώντος) to his “arrogance” (ὑψώθη σου ἡ χαρδία ὑπερφανεία), but
also to “the sins of the sanctified people” (ἐπὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦ θεοσφήνου, Dan 4:22 LXX), alluding
back to Dan 1:2 LXX, which—however—attributes the event wholly to God “handing over” the temple and its
vessels to Nebuchadnezzar, not to Nebuchadnezzar’s pride.
14 As ably noted by Valeta, 135.
humble), especially its arbitrary use ("whomever he willed," אֲשֶׁר לָהֶו מִלָּה, is a fourfold repetition in Dan 5:19), seems to invite censure. The preposition beginning Dan 5:20, וְדִי־הֲוִָ֤ה צָב א֙ ("And like that ..."), ties Nebuchadnezzar’s arbitrary use of power with the strengthening of his heart in arrogance. Daniel also implies God’s judgment by Nebuchadnezzar’s loss of his throne, kingdom, and honour (Dan 5:20).

However, at the point in narrated time of Dan 4:24, Daniel expresses hope for Nebuchadnezzar’s reform, that he might turn away from his “sins” (חֲטָיָּו) and “offences” (עֲוָיָתָו) for “righteousness” (בְצִדְָקָ֣ה) and “showing mercy to the afflicted” (בְמִחַּ֣ן עֲנָָָּ֑֏יִן, Dan 4:24). In advising him in this way, Daniel also expresses the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and prosperity may be stretched out in narrated time (ךְֵ֖ה תֶָה אַּרְכֵָ֖ה לִשְׁל וְתָֽ). Daniel shows much diplomatic tact in giving this advice to Nebuchadnezzar, especially when he does not suffer any consequences for alluding to the king’s sins and offences, which none of the other court sages have done.¹⁵ Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was first prepared (or softened) for Daniel’s implicit incrimination, by his expressed wish that his interpretation would not turn out to be true: “My lord, let the dream be for those who hate you, and its interpretation f...” (Dan 4:16). Nebuchadnezzar seems also to read Daniel’s severe distress and anxious thoughts, reflected in his sudden loss of composure (הָּשָׁתְוִָתֹו וָּלְשֶׁאָזַּרֹו), as the emotional authenticity of his goodwill for the king, since this reaction elicits Nebuchadnezzar’s reassurance, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or the interpretation worry you” (ךְֵ֖ב לְטְשַּׁאצַּר֙ חֶלְמִָ֤א וּפִשְׁר א֙ אַֽל־יְבַּהֲלָ). Is it possible that Daniel’s diplomatic tact softens his advice too much to provoke Nebuchadnezzar to action? Nebuchadnezzar’s reign will end in twelve months of narrated time (Dan 4:26), and six verses in the time of narrating (v.30), after Daniel gives his advice (v.24).

¹⁵ Some interpreters do not regard Daniel as expressing diplomatic tact in the sense that he is acting politely while hiding his grievance against the king, but that he is expressing unfeigned solicitude for Nebuchadnezzar (especially when drawing upon the text of Dan 4:16). For example, see Hebbard, 117; Goldingay, 94; but cf. Valeta, 93. However, even if Daniel is showing authentic concern for the king in Dan 4:24, he would still seem to be doing so in a way that is careful, in that the reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s sins could be interpreted by the king as a generic reference applicable to any human ruler, and not in the sense that Nebuchadnezzar is a particularly incorrigible sinner.
Nebuchadnezzar’s Role: His Boast of Building a House for Himself as King (Dan 4:27)

Nebuchadnezzar’s boast (Dan 4:27) also contributes to his transformation into a bestial character (v.30). The immediate response of a divine or angelic voice announcing the loss of his kingdom, when “the word was still in his mouth” (דוע מלחא בפש, Dan 4:28), indicates the significance of his boast, by proximity in both narrated time and the time of narrating. However, “at the end of twelve months” (Dan 4:26) indicates some passing of narrated time for the king since he heard Daniel’s advice (v.24), but such a time-lapse is obscured to the reader by the passing of only two verses of the time of narrating. On his palace roof (Dan 4:26), Nebuchadnezzar makes his boast (v.27) at the greatest spatial elevation he can achieve, and so as close as he can come to “the heavens” (v.28), and perhaps as most like his dream-tree he can be, since its height “reached the heavens” (v.8). Nebuchadnezzar’s spatial elevation reflects his elevation in self-perception, looking down upon Babylon as his construction, an image of “the strength, power, and honour of my majesty” (Dan 4:27). Nebuchadnezzar’s elevation on the roof also makes him like the golden head on the tall image of his first dream (ידא תלמה דכנ רב, Dan 2:31), which he may have identified with by constructing his great, golden image in the plain of Dura near Babylon (3:1). Notably, Nebuchadnezzar’s boast (Dan 4:27) reflects some of Daniel’s previous words to him (2:37; 4:19). To the extent that Nebuchadnezzar’s boast applies Daniel’s words to himself, its effect of provoking divine judgment against him seems curious at first:

“You, O king, are the king of kings, that the God of heaven has given the kingdom (מלכות), wealth (כסא), strength (תפקיד), and splendour (יום) to you. (Dan 2:37)

“You are he, O king, who has become great (רבי) and strong (חזון), and you have exalted your greatness (רברך), and you reach to the heavens and your kingdom to the ends of the earth.” (Dan 4:19)

16 It is generally recognised that Nebuchadnezzar’s boast reveals his “pride,” “arrogance,” or “hubris” to the reader. Valeta, 94; Lucas, Daniel, 116; Redditt, 84; Philip R. Davies, Daniel, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1985), 94; Anderson, 48; Hammer, 54; Porteous, 72; cf. Goldingay, 95.

The king responded and said, “Is this not it, Babylon the great, which I have built as the house of the kingdom (טְנַה) in the strength (נְּבָא), wealth (נְּשַׁמָּה), and splendour (נְּמוּר) of my majesty?” (Dan 4:27)

As Daniel attributed to him, so now Nebuchadnezzar attributes to himself “strength,” “wealth,” “splendour,” “greatness,” and the “kingdom.” What is the difference between Daniel attributing these qualities to Nebuchadnezzar, and Nebuchadnezzar doing the same for himself? First, there may be a difference in characterisation, concerning the attribution of qualities by another in the second person and doing this for oneself in the first person, between praising oneself and being praised. Second, Daniel’s words differ from Nebuchadnezzar’s, in that God gave him the kingdom, the wealth, the strength, and the splendour (Dan 2:37). 18

The other aspect of Nebuchadnezzar’s words is that he, as “king,” boasts of “building” a “house” for his “kingdom”:

Searching for co-occurrences of “build” (בנה), “house” (בַּיִת), and “king” (ךְּמֶל) or “kingdom” (מלכ), in Targumim Onqelos, Jonathon, Isaiah, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, and Chronicles, does not bear fruit. Fortunately, searching for the linkwords בנה, בַּיִת, and ךְּמֶל in the Masoretic Text produces results, in both the Hebrew (2 Sam 5:11; 1 Kgs 2:36; 3:1; 6:1–2; 9:1, 10, 15; 22:39; 2 Kgs 16:18; 1 Chr 14:1; 28:2; 2 Chr 2:2, 11; 8:11; 34:11; 35:3; 36:23; Ezra 1:2; 4:3) and Aramaic sections (Ezra 5:8, 11, 13, 17; 6:3, 8). Beginning with the Hebrew intertexts and finishing with the Aramaic ones sets Nebuchadnezzar’s boast (“building” a “house” as “king,” Dan 4:27) within a broader pattern of past and future narrated time. First, “building” a “house” is an action the wood- and stone-artisans of Hiram, “king of Tyre,” perform for David:

And Hiram, king of Tyre (טְנַה צְּר), sent messengers to David, and cedar wood, and crafters of wood, and crafters of stone walls, and they built a house (סְָּבָאָבָא) for David. (2 Sam 5:11)

And Hiram, king of Tyre (טְנַה צְּר), sent messengers to David, and cedar wood, and crafters of walls, and crafters of wood, for building for him a house (בַּיִת טְנַה צְּר). (1 Chr 14:1)

18 This would seem to avoid making Daniel’s self-attribution of wisdom and strength suffer the same fault as Nebuchadnezzar’s boast, because Daniel at least acknowledges God as the giver (Dan 2:23).
The “king” most often associated with “building” a “house,” Solomon, is initially involved with that of another. In the process of removing political threats to his throne, he orders Shimei, who had cursed David, to build a house for himself in Jerusalem, and remain under house arrest:

And the king (ךְהַמֶלֶל) sent and he called for Shimei, and he said to him, “Build for yourself a house (בְָּֽנֵה־לְּךֵָ֥ בַ י ת) in Jerusalem, and you will dwell there, and you will not go out from there, whither nor whither.” (1 Kgs 2:36)

Next, Solomon’s “building” of his own royal “house,” and the “house” of Yhwh, is forecast at the point in narrated time when he becomes allied to Egypt’s “king” by marrying Pharaoh’s daughter:

And he became related by marriage, Solomon with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt (ךְמֵֶ֣לֶךְ מ צְּר ָ֑י ם), and he took the daughter of Pharaoh, and he brought her to the city of David, until he completed building his house, and the house of Yhwh (ךְלֵ֥בֶן אֲשֶ ר ב נ ָׂ֜ה הַמֵֶּ֤לֶךְ שְּלֹמ ה  לַָֽיהו ִ֔ה), and the wall surrounding Jerusalem. (1 Kgs 3:1)

Solomon’s completion of “building” the “house” for Yhwh, as “king over Israel,” is set in narrated time at 480 years after the Israelites were brought out of Egypt, alluding back to the narrative of the exodus, when, unlike Solomon and his father-in-law, Moses and Pharaoh were in conflict:

1And it happened in the four hundred and eightieth year, for the bringing out of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, in the fourth year, it was the month of Ziv, the second month, for King Solomon (ךְלֵֹ֥ם שְּלֹמֹ֣ה) over Israel, and he built the house for Yhwh (ךְוַ֥י ֵ֥בֶן הַבֵַ֖י ת לַיהו ָֽה), was sixty cubits its length, and twenty cubits its width, and thirty cubits its height. (1 Kgs 6:1–2)

The next three intertexts refer to Solomon’s completion of his own “house” in addition to the “house” of Yhwh:

And it happened as Solomon completed building the house of Yhwh, and the house of the king (ךְלֵ֥בֶן אֲשֶ ר ב נ ָׂ֜ה הַמֵֶּ֤לֶךְ שְּלֹמ ה  לַָֽיהו ִ֔ה), and every desire of Solomon which he delighted in making. (1 Kgs 9:1)

And it happened at the end of twenty years, that Solomon built the two houses, the house of Yhwh and the house of the king (ךְאַשְׁרַיָּהוּ שְלַֽפֶּנֶּה אֲשֶ ר ב נ ָׂה הַמֵֶּ֤לֶךְ), (1 Kgs 9:10)

And this is the matter of forced labourers, whom King Solomon brought up for building the house of Yhwh, and his house (ךְכַּנֶּנֶּה אַּדָּמָּהוּ הַמֵֶּֽלֶךְ), and the terrace, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer. (1 Kgs 9:15)
Between 1 Kgs 9:1, 10 is God’s second appearance (v.2) and promise to Solomon of a perpetual
dynasty, “forever” (לְעֹלָָ֑ם, v.5), on the condition that his successors follow God’s
commandments, ordinances, and “judgments” (לַּעֲש֕וֹת כְכֵֹ֖ל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִָ֑יךָ חֻקִַּּ֖י וּמִשְׁפָטֵַּ֖י תִשְׁמֹֽר, v.4), and
do not serve nor prostrate before other gods (וַּעֲבַּדְתֶם אֱלֹהִ֣ים אֲח רִַּ֔ים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֵֶ֖ם לָהֶֽם, v.6). Between
1 Kgs 9:10, 15 is an exchange of gifts between Hiram and Solomon, Hiram’s wood and gold for
Solomon’s twenty cities (v.11), whose condition angers Hiram (vv.12–13), who had given
Solomon 120 talents of gold (v.14). First Kings 9:15 gives a glimpse that Solomon may also
have acted unjustly in the treatment of his labourers for his building projects.\(^9\) Thus, a split
between the justice of Solomon’s judgments (1 Kgs 3:9, 11, 28; 10:9) and the injustice of
Solomon’s building projects (9:15) first surfaces.

In the parallel account in Chronicles, David, as “king,” speaks of his original intention to
“build” a “house” for the ark of the covenant:

   And David the king (ךְהַמֶּלֶךְ) rose upon his feet, and he said, “Hear me, my brothers and my
   people. I, with my heart for building a house (ל בְּנוֹת בֵַּ֖י ת) of rest for the ark of the covenant
   of Yhwh, and for the stool of the feet of our God, I have been prepared for building (ל בְּנָֽוֹת).”
   (1 Chr 28:2)

However, because of David’s warfare and bloodshed, God denies him this honour (1 Chr 28:3),
leaving the task to his son Solomon (v.6). In memory of Hiram’s assistance to David for
building his royal house, Solomon asks “the king of Tyre” for the same assistance when he
decides to build Yhwh’s house:

   And Solomon sent to Hiram, the king of Tyre (ךְהַמֶּלֶךְ צֵּ֖ר), saying, “Just as you did with David
   my father, and you sent to him cedar for building for him a house (ל בְּנוֹת לֵ֥וֹ בֵַּ֖י ת) for dwelling
   in.” (2 Chr 2:2)

Hiram praises Israel’s God for giving David a “wise, knowing, intelligent, understanding” son,
qualities which he associates with Solomon’s fitness for “building” Yhwh’s “house” and his
own:

   And Hiram said, “Blessed is Yhwh, the God of Israel, who made the heavens and the earth,
   who gave to David the king (ךְהַמֶּלֶךְ) a son, wise, knowing, intelligent, and understanding (…

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\(^9\) Somewhat in parallel, Goldingay (interpreting Dan 4:27) suggests that “[p]erhaps the attention
[Nebuchadnezzar] gave to building projects should have been given to a concern for the needy …, or perhaps the
sense of achievement at these has usurped the place of a desire for a sense of his achievements in the area of
justice.” Goldingay, 95.
Perhaps from embarrassment of Solomon’s marriage to a non-Israelite, the Chronicler has him “build” a “house” for Pharaoh’s daughter outside Jerusalem, fearing she might jeopardise the holiness of Yhwh’s ark:

And the daughter of Pharaoh Solomon brought up from the city of David, to a house which he built for her, because he said, “A woman will not dwell within the house of David, the king of Israel, since it is holy, those where it came to them, the ark of Yhwh.” (2 Chr 8:11)

Notably, the Chronicler does not repeat Solomon’s “love of many foreign women” (1 Kgs 11:1), in disobedience of God’s commandment (v.2), and that his thousand wives (v.3) led his heart astray in his old age, to worship “other gods” (v.4).

The reign of Israel’s king, Ahab, ends on a note of the ivory house he built for himself:

And the rest of the deeds of Ahab, and everything that he made, and the house of ivory which he built, and all the cities which he built, are they not written upon the book of the daily matters of the kings of Israel? (1 Kgs 22:39)

The Judean king Ahaz misappropriates the bronze altar in the house of God for his own personal use (2 Kgs 16:14–15), since he was impressed by the Damascene altar of Tilgath-pilneser, which he orders his priest Uriah to reconstruct for sacrifice in Jerusalem (vv.10–13).

The Assyrian king also influences his building work inside his own house:

And the covering of the Sabbath which they built in the house, and the entrance of the king, the outer one turned over in the house of Yhwh, before the face of the king of Assyria. (2 Kgs 16:18)

Six years after the narrated time of Josiah’s reforms in Judah (cf. 2 Chr 34:3, 8), enacted through destruction of the places of worship for Baals, Asherahs, and other deities (vv.3–7), he finances the rebuilding of the house of God (vv.9–10). The “builders” use his money to restore the “houses” that previous Judean kings had allowed to deteriorate:

And they gave it to the craftspeople and to the builders, to buy hewn stones and wood for binding the houses which they had let spoil, the kings of Judah. (2 Chr 34:11)

After the discovery of the book of Torah in the ruined areas of the house of God (2 Chr 34:14–19), the warning and consolation of the prophet Huldah (vv.22–28), and Josiah’s renewal of
the covenant (vv.30–32), Josiah orders the Levites to bring the ark back to the “house” that Solomon, “king of Israel,” had “built”:

And he said to the Levites, the ones who brought understanding to all Israel, the ones holy to Yhwh, “Give the ark of the holy place into the house which he built (בַּי ת אֲשֶ ר ב נ), Solomon, the son of David, the king of Israel (מֵֶלֶךְ י שְּר אִֵ֔ל). There will be no burden for you on the shoulders. Now, serve Yhwh your God and [God’s] people of Israel. (2 Chr 35:3)

Josiah’s reforms came, but perhaps too late, because all the above references to “kings” “building” “houses” occur in narrated time that is past to Nebuchadnezzar’s story, the king into whose hand God delivered Jerusalem and the vessels of God’s house (Dan 1:1–2). However, Nebuchadnezzar’s own reign is limited in future narrated time, because the other intertexts occur when his own story has come to an end. Upon the end of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom and the Babylonian exile, Cyrus, “king of Persia,” makes his decree for the “rebuilding” of God’s “house”:

Thus says Cyrus, the king of Persia (מֵֶלֶךְ פְּר ה), “All the kingdoms of the earth, [God] gave to me, Yhwh, the God of the heavens, and [God] appointed me, for building for [God] a house (לֵֽא ה וֵֽו בִּי ת) in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you, out of all [God’s] people, Yhwh his God is with him, and let him go up!” (2 Chr 36:23)

Thus says Cyrus, the king of Persia (מֵֶלֶךְ פְּר ה): “All the kingdoms of the earth, [God] gave me, Yhwh, the God of the heavens, and [God] appointed me, for building for [God] a house (לֵֽא ה וֵֽו בִּי ת) in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.” (Ezra 1:2)

However, tensions arise when the Samaritans attempt to join in the rebuilding efforts for the house of God (Ezra 4:1–2), and the returnees’ leaders Zerubbabel and Jeshua refuse them, referring to the decree of Cyrus the king:

And he said to them, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of the fathers, to Israel, “It is not for you and for us, building a house for our God (לָו בֵּית לֵא ה וֵֽו נ), because we as one will build for Yhwh, the God of Israel, just as he commanded us, King Cyrus, the king of Persia (מֵֶלֶךְ פְּר ה וֵֽו ק ר METHODS ה ל א ש ב נ).” (Ezra 4:3)

This refusal results in an attempted sabotage of the rebuilding efforts, by poisoning their reputation in the eyes of their Persian overlords (Ezra 4:4–16), which is successful in the narrated time of Artaxerxes’s reign (vv.17–24). The last subset of intertexts containing the linkwords “build” (בֹ נ), “house” (בֵּית), and “king” (מֶלֶךְ) occur in the Aramaic section of Ezra (5:8, 11, 13, 17; 6:3, 8). These take place in the narrated time of Darius’s reign (Ezra 5:5), when the returnees act to restore royal permission to rebuild the house of God by sending Darius a
letter (vv.7–17). In their letter, they remind “the king” of previous work done in “rebuilding” God’s “house”:

Let it be known in the future to the king (לְּמַלְּכ ִ֗א), that we went to Yehud, the province for the house of the great God, and it was being built (לְּבֵית אֱל ֵ֣א רַב ִ֔א וְּהֵ֤וּא מְתָבְּנֵא), rolling-stone and carved wood, and this work is being done eager-ly, and it is prospering in their hands. (Ezra 5:8)

They also connect their present in narrated time to the narrated past, when they inform Darius that their “building” of the “house” is what “a great king of Israel” (Solomon) had done:

And so, the returned word was saying, “We are they, servants of the God of the heavens and the earth, and building the house (וּב נֵַַּֽ֤י ן בַיְּת א) that was built from former times, this has been many years, and a king (ךְֵּ֖) for Israel, a great one, built it (בְּנ ֵ֖ה י) and completed it.” (Ezra 5:11)

They also point Darius to more recent past narrated time, the decree of “Cyrus the king” to “build” God’s “house”:

“However, in the first year for Cyrus, the king of Babylon (מַלְּכ ֵּ֖א ד ֵ֣י ב בֶָ֑ל), Cyrus the king (מַלְּכ א) set a decree, this house of God to be built (בֵית־אֱל ה ֵ֥א דְּנ בְּנֵָֽא).” (Ezra 5:13)

They end their letter by pleading with “the king” (Darius) to search the archives, in the king’s storehouse, for Cyrus’s decree commanding the “building” of God’s “house”:

“And now, if for the king (עַל־מַלְּכ ֵ֣א) it is good, let him investigate in the house of treasure of the king (ֵ֣בְבֵ ית ג נְּזַי ָׂ֜א ד י־מַלְּכ), there in Babylon. If there exists what from Cyrus the king (מַלְּכ א) set a decree, for the building of this house of God (ךְֵּ֖) in Jerusalem. And the will of the king (מַלְּכ ָ֛א) concerning this, let him send to us.” (Ezra 5:17)

Darius commands such a search (Ezra 6:1), but success only occurs in the Median capital Ecbatana (v.2). The decree of Cyrus’s first year is found again:

In the first year for Cyrus the king (מַלְּכ ֵ֖א), Cyrus the king (מַלְּכ א) set a decree, the house of God in Jerusalem, let it be built (בֵית־אֱל ה ֵ֥א ב ָֽירוּשְּלֶם  בַיְּת ֵ֣א י תְּבְּנִֵ֔א), a place where they sacrifice sacrifices, and its foundations to be laid, its height sixty cubits, its width sixty cubits. (Ezra 6:3)

This decree ends with a command to restore the vessels of gold and silver, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the house of God, back to their rightful place (Ezra 5:5; cf. Dan 1:2; 5:2). Darius then commands the governor Tattenai not only to allow the rebuilding efforts (Ezra 6:6), but also to pay the costs out of the king’s treasury to “build” the “house” of God:

And from me is set a decree, for what you will make with the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God (לְּמ בְּנֵֵּ֖א בֵית־אֱל ה ֵ֣א), and from the treasures of the king (בְּבֵ ית ג נְּזַי ָׂ֜א ד י־מַלְּכ) that
was tributed across the river, the exact cost will be given to these men, that will not be made to cease. (Ezra 6:8)

Darius’s order of the death of anyone hindering this effort, and that their “house be made a refuse heap” (בַּיְתָהּ נְוָלִּוּ יִתְעֲבֵד, Ezra 6:11), is reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar’s decreed punishments (רַעְשָׂתְּיִהְוָהּ נְוָלִּוּ יִתְעֲבַּ֛וּ נִלְּיִשְׁתָּמֵ֖ו, Dan 2:5; רַעְשָׂתְּיִהְוָהּ נְוָלִּוּ יִשְׁתָּמֵ֖ו, 3:29). In making his boast of “building” his “house” as “king” (Dan 4:27), Nebuchadnezzar alludes to a wider pattern of past and future narrated time, which sets his narrated present between the “building” of God’s “house” by the wise king Solomon, and the “rebuilding” of God’s “house” when Nebuchadnezzar’s own kingdom has come to an end. It is this context which makes Nebuchadnezzar’s boast of his own “strength,” “wealth,” “splendour,” “greatness,” and “kingdom” (Dan 4:27) provocative to the divine voice announcing his overthrow (vv.28–29). The fault of Nebuchadnezzar’s boast lies in his lack of knowledge of his own time as limited by a beginning and an end. Just as vessels he seized from “the house of God” (Dan 1:2) marked a past narrated time far preceding his own, going back to the wisdom of Solomon, so too they mark a future narrated time when his reign will be no more.

Nebuchadnezzar’s downfall, and his transformation into a beast (Dan 4:30), thus occurs in the interplay of several actors: the angelic court negotiating over Nebuchadnezzar’s fate, desiring a gain in knowledge for “the living” (v.14), so they call for a decree against the tree (vv.11–13); Daniel, as an interpreter who applies Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to himself (vv.17–23), but also an advisor who suggests the possibility that he might delay his overthrow (v.24); Nebuchadnezzar, whose proud boast of building himself a house (v.27) provokes the heavenly voice to take action immediately (vv.28–29).

**Nebuchadnezzar’s Second Transformation in Narrated Time**

This is the transformation of Nebuchadnezzar’s mind into a new, or renewed, state of knowledge (Dan 4:31–34). Knowledge returns to Nebuchadnezzar “at the end of the days” (לִקְצָת יּוֹמַּיָּה) when, in his own voice, “I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to the heavens” (Dan 4:31). Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial transformation was not intended to last indefinitely, since the decree imposed a temporal limit of “seven times” (שִׁבְעִָּ֥ה עִדָנִֵ֖ין, Dan 4:13; cf. vv.20, 22, 29).
Time plays a role in Nebuchadnezzar’s second transformation, and his own role is implied by his act of lifting his eyes heavenwards (Dan 4:31). Daniel’s role is less explicit. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s profession hints at Daniel’s contribution by acknowledging the King of the heavens’ ways as “justice” (אָרְחָת הָעָלָמִים, Dan 4:34), which forms a word pair with “righteousness” (צדק) in Targumim Onqelos, Jonathan, Isaiah, Psalms, Qoheleth, and Proverbs (usually translating מִשְׁפָט and צִדְקָה), the attribute Daniel encourages Nebuchadnezzar to adopt as king (בְצִדְָקָה, v.24). Nebuchadnezzar speaks of his knowledge as “returned” (תַּעֲבֹר עֲלֵי, Dan 4:31, יָעֹבֵר עֲלֵי שִׁלֹה, v.33), raising the question of when Nebuchadnezzar displayed such knowledge before. Although the reference may be to his human capacity for reason,20 it is worth asking whether his acts of praise (Dan 2:47; 3:28, 31–33) might exhibit a gradual growth in “knowledge,” lost in his bestial transformation (4:30), but now “returned” (4:31–34). Alternatively, might his knowledge displayed in Dan 4:31–34 be completely new?

**Time’s Role: “Seven Times”**

“At the end of the days” (וְלִקְצָת יֽוֹמַּיָה, Dan 4:31) is a phrase suggestive of some appointed period now passed: the narrated time of Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial transformation (v.30). The period of “seven times” in narrated time develops along the time of narrating, from the duration for Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-tree’s changed status (Dan 4:13, 20), to the duration until Nebuchadnezzar will “know” God’s sovereignty over human kingdoms (vv.22, 29).21 First in the time of narrating, the holy watcher’s decree, within Nebuchadnezzar’s dream concerning “the tree,” sees “seven times” as the narrated time for the tree’s change from a human mind to an animal’s:

> “Let its mind from a man’s be changed, and let the mind of a beast be given to it, and seven times will pass over him” (שבָּבוֹר עִמָּו יַחְּלְּפֵּן עֲלָוֹה י).” (Dan 4:13)

Second in the time of narrating, Daniel’s repetition of the dream-decree presents “seven times” as the narrated time that the cut-down tree will spend with the beasts of the field:

> “And that which the king saw, a watcher and holy one descended from the heavens and said, ‘Hew down the tree and destroy it, except leave its taproot in the earth and in bonds

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20 Towner, 64; cf. Seow, 72-73.
21 Newsom interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial transformation as the beginning of his “rite of passage” across “seven seasons [that] constitute a liminal period.” Newsom and Breed, 149.
of iron and bronze in the grass of the field, and with the dew of the heavens let it be soaked, and with the beast of the field let its portion be, until seven times pass over it. (Dan 4:20)

Third in the time of narrating, Daniel’s “interpretation” (פִשְׁרֵאָ֖) of God’s “decree” (וּגְז רִַּ֤ת עִלָיָא), third in the time of narrating, Daniel’s “interpretation” (פִשְׁרֵָ֖א) of God’s “decree” (וּגְז רִַּ֤ת עִלָיָא), understands the narrated time of “seven times” as the duration for Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial transformation and for the time he must endure until he “knows” God’s sovereignty:

“And you will be driven away from human beings, and with the beast of the field will be your home, and the herbage like oxen will feed you, and from the dew of the heavens will be for you a soaking, but seven times will pass over you, until you know (עשָׁבַת עַד דִּי־תִנְדַע עֲלָוֹה יַחְלְפֵ֥וּן עֲלָֽוֹ) that the sovereignty of the Most High is over the kingdom of humanity, and to whomever [God] wills [God] gives it.” (Dan 4:21)

Fourth in the time of narrating, for the heavenly voice, “seven times” is again the narrated time for Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial transformation, and necessary for his second transformation into knowledge:

“And from human beings you will be driven, and with the beast of the field will be your home, and the herbage like oxen will feed you, but seven times will pass over you until you know (עשָׁבַת עַד דִּי־תִנְדַע עֲלַּיִךְ יַחְלְפֵ֥וּן אֲרֵ֥כוֹת עַד דִּי־תִנְדַע (עֲלָוֹ) that the sovereignty of the Most High is over the kingdom of humanity, and to whomever [God] wills [God] gives it.” (Dan 4:22)

As the plot of Dan 3:31–4:34 unfolds along the time of narrating, “seven times” is a period of narrated time, that begins as the duration of the dream-tree’s bestial transformation, and ends as the duration of Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial transformation necessary for the knowledge he demonstrates in 4:31–34. Time thus plays its own role, for Nebuchadnezzar to know “that the sovereignty of the Most High is over the kingdom of humanity, and to whomever [God] wills [God] gives it” (וְשִׁבְעִָּ֥ה עִדָנִֵ֖ין יַּחְלְפ֣וּן עֲלַּיִךְ עַּ֣ד דִֽי־תִנְדַַּ֗ע), third in the time of narrating, Daniel’s “interpretation” (פִשְׁרֵָ֖א) of God’s “decree” (וּגְז רִַּ֤ת עִלָיָא), Dan 4:22, 29. After the period of “seven times,” Nebuchadnezzar displays the following knowledge:

39b[God’s] sovereignty is an eternal sovereignty (דִִ֤י שָׁלְטָ֣ן עָלַַּּ֔ם), and [God’s] kingdom is with generation and generation (וּמַּלְכוּת ֵ֖הּ עִּמְּדָֽיִּ֙ וְדָֽר). And all who dwell on the earth are thought of as if nothing, and whatever [God] wills [God] does (כֹּמֶּ֣מִצְבְי ַ֗הּ עָב ד֙) with the host of the heavens and the dwellers of the earth. And there is no one who can strike out with his hand and say to [God], “What have you done?” (Dan 4:31b–32).

The period of “seven times” was meant to confer upon Nebuchadnezzar knowledge of God’s sovereignty over human kingdoms and God’s complete freedom of will in assigning anyone upon a human throne (Dan 4:22, 29). Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates acquired knowledge of
God’s sovereignty and kingdom, but as something transcending time, “eternal” and spanning every “generation” (Dan 4:31), and knowledge of God’s complete freedom of will, not simply with human thrones, but with all heavenly armies and earth-dwellers (v.32). Nebuchadnezzar seems to have acquired a knowledge of God’s sovereignty and arbitration beyond what was explicitly intended for him. His belief that all earth-dwellers are considered “as if nothing” (קוֹלֵל אֶצְרֵי אַרְצוֹ אֲלֵי נֶפֶשׁ, Dan 4:32), in comparison to God, might be at odds with the narrator’s belief that God shows mercy and compassion to earth-dwellers such as Daniel (1:9). Nebuchadnezzar’s exaltation of God at the expense of both heavenly and earthly creatures (Dan 4:32) may reflect his experience of survival while “eating herbage like oxen” (וְעִשְּבָּה כְתוֹרִים יַאֲכַּל), being soaked with “from the dew of heaven” (וּמִטָּל שְּמַּיַּא תִּמְצַתֵּא), and growing “nails (or claws) like birds” (וְטִפְרִּוֹהִי כְצִפְרִֽים, Dan 4:30, cf. צִפָּרִים שְּמַּיַּא in vv.9, 18).

In some ways, Nebuchadnezzar’s reception of knowledge through time is analogous to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah’s reception of knowledge and wisdom in Dan 1:17. Just as Nebuchadnezzar eats herbage like oxen and is soaked with dew until, “at the end of the days” (וְלִקְצָת יֽוֹמַּיָה, Dan 4:31), so too Daniel and his friends “eat seeds” and “drink water” (מָכְרַת תְּשׁוּחַ, יָמִים עֲשָרָֽה, 1:12), until, “at the end of the ten days”:

> And at the end of ten days (מִקְצָת יָמִים עֲשָרָֽה), their appearance seemed better and fatter of flesh than all the youths who ate the fine foods of the king. (Dan 1:15)

In making a connection between Daniel’s earlier diet and Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial one, I am indebted to Gardner’s observation that Daniel’s diet of “seeds” (זָֹּּוּעַ זְָּרַע, Dan 1:12) is allusive of the primordial human diet of “seed and seed” (זֹּרִּיעַ זֹּרַע, Gen 1:29). Genesis 1:29 connects a diet of “seed and seed” with “all the herbage” (אֶת־כָּל־עֹשֶּׁב זֹּרַע), and God also gives “herbage for eating” (עֹשֶׁב לְאָכְלָה) to “every beast of the earth and bird of heaven” (וּלְכָּל־חַיַּ֣ת הַָ֠אָרֶץ וּלְכָּל־ע֙וֹף)

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23 Gardner, "Eating of 'Seeds'," 60.
הַּשָמֵַּ֜יִם, v.30; וּלכָל חַּיַּת אַּרעָא וּלכָל עוֹפָא דִשׁמַּיָא (Tg. Onq. Gen 1:30). The Aramaic wording is different for Nebuchadnezzar’s dwelling with “the beast of the field” (ךְַ֗וְֽעִם—ח יוֵַּ֧ת בָרָ֣א מְדֹרָךְ, Dan 4:29) and becoming like “birds” (כְצִפְרִֽין, v.30, cf. in vv.9, 18), but his oxen-like diet of עשב correlates (vv.22, 29, 30, cf. v.12). Through narrated time, Daniel and his friends spend ten days, then three years, eating “seeds” (Dan 1:16), and Nebuchadnezzar spends “seven times” eating herbage (4:22, 29, 30). Through this period of narrated time, God gives Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah “knowledge, and skill in all writings, and wisdom” (מדע והשכל בכול ספרים וחכמה, Dan 1:17). Just as Nebuchadnezzar displays his returned knowledge “at the end of the days” (וְלִקְצָת יֽוֹמַּיָה, Dan 4:31), so too Daniel and his friends display themselves “ten times” (עשר יָדַ֗וֹת) better than all Nebuchadnezzar’s sages, in “every matter of wisdom, of understanding” (ָלָּל דְבַר חָכְמַּת בִינַָּ֔ה, 1:20), when they are summoned before him “at the end of the days”:

And at the end of the days (הל텀ת הילויים) when the king ordered to summon them, and the chief eunuch brought them before Nebuchadnezzar. (Dan 1:18)

At the end of Nebuchadnezzar’s story, he becomes like Daniel and his companions who ate a vegetarian diet for a set period of narrated time, before being given an opportunity to demonstrate their “wisdom” and “understanding” to their new king. After the period of “seven times” on a similar diet, Nebuchadnezzar is permitted to demonstrate his “knowledge” (Dan 4:31, 33) before the God he now calls “King of the heavens” (v.34).24

Daniel’s Role: Advising “Righteousness”

Daniel’s advice to Nebuchadnezzar is to abolish his “sins” with “righteousness” (צדקה), and his “offences” with “showing mercy to the afflicted,” and perhaps his “prosperity” may be “stretched out” (Dan 4:24). My word of focus, “righteousness” (צדק), had come to mean “almsgiving” for the needy, aligning with Daniel’s hope for Nebuchadnezzar “to show mercy to the afflicted” (Dan 4:24).25 However, Nebuchadnezzar alludes to Daniel’s hope for

25 Collins, Daniel, 230; Newsom and Breed, 145; Lacocque, Le livre de Daniel, 72; Pace, 137; cf. Goldingay, 81; Lucas, Daniel, 113.
“righteousness” (בְצִדְָקָ֣ה) in the one he addresses as “O king my king” (מלך מלכּי, Dan 4:24), when Nebuchadnezzar praises “the King of the heavens” (מלך שְׁמַיַּא), whose “deeds are truth, and ways are justice” (כָל־מַעֲבָדוֹֹּי קְשַׁט וְאֹרְחָת ֵ֖הּ דִָ֑ין, v.34). The word דִין generally means “judgment.” However, Targumim Onqelos, Jonathon, Isaiah, Psalms, Qoheleth, and Proverbs often set דִין in parallel with צִדְקָה, usually interpreting מִשְּפָט and צְדָקָה respectively, implying a “judgment” that is “just.” In this context, Nebuchadnezzar’s praise of his “King” (מלך מלכּי) for exercising דִין (Dan 4:34) echoes Daniel’s hope that his “king” (מלך מלכּי) might exercise צִדְקָה (v.24). This is Daniel’s small but significant contribution to the restored Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge of kingship in the image of the heavens’ King.

First, the twin attributes of “righteousness” and “justice” are the way God governs creation and humanity, or are blessings God bestows upon the earth:

“For I have made known to him (יְּדַעְת ִ֗יו; גְּלֵי 큔ְֹープַּיִי, Tg. Onq. Gen 18:19), so that he may command his children and his house after him, and they will keep the path of Yhwh, for doing righteousness and justice (דֵֶ֣רֶךְ יְּהו ִ֔ה לַעֲשֵ֥וֹת צְּדַקֶּ֖ה וּמ שְּפָ֑ט; אַוֹרְחָנ דְּתַּקְוֶ֣ת אֲוַרְחַ֑ן דִָ֑ין, Tg. Onq. Gen 18:19), so that Yhwh will bring upon Abraham what [God] spoke concerning him.” (Gen 18:19)

And it will settle in the wilderness, justice and righteousness (מֵשֶׁ֗ט וּצְּדַקֶּ֖ה; ע בְּדֵי ד ינ א וְּע בְּדֵי צְּדַקֶּ֖ה, Tg. Isa. 32:16), in the orchard it will dwell. (Isa 32:16)

Loving righteousness and justice (אְהֵב צְּדַקֶּ֖ה וּמ שְּפָ֑ט; רחים צדקתא ודינא, Tg. Ket. Ps 33:5), the fidelity of Yhwh fills the earth. (Ps 33:5)

Your righteousness (צדַק; צִדְקָה, Tg. Ket. Ps 36:7) is like the mountains of God, your judgments (ишֶׁפֶט; קוֹשֵׁט, Tg. Ket. Ps 36:7) the great abyss, human being and beast you will save, Yhwh. (Ps 36:7)

And it is brought out like the light of your righteousness, and your justice (צָדַקֶּת הצָּדַקֶּת; צִדְקָה ודִּינַּא, Tg. Ket. Ps 37:6) like the noon. (Ps 37:6)

Righteousness and justice (ישֶׁפֶט; צִדְקָה מִשְּפָט, Tg. Ket. Ps 89:15) support your throne, fidelity and truth (יתוֹּפִי; וֶָ֜אֱמִֶ֗ת, Tg. Ket. Ps 89:15) meet in front of you. (Ps 89:15)

For unto the righteous one justice will return (ארום עד צדַקֶּת יתוב דִּינַּא; יָרֵומ עב דין צדקתא יתוב דִּינַּא, Tg. Ket. Ps 94:15), and after it all the upright of heart. (Ps 94:15)

Cloud and dark cloud surround [God], righteousness and justice (ישֶׁפֶט; צִדְקָה וסֵפַט, Tg. Ket. Ps 97:2) support [God’s] throne. (Ps 97:2)

26 Holladay translates פָּד as “judgment,” but as “justice” in Dan 4:34. Holladay, Lexicon, 402. Rosenthal translates this word as “justice, court, law suit, judgment.” Rosenthal, 86.
And strong King, you are a lover of justice (משפיע; זדינה, Tg. Ket. Ps 99:4), you have established uprightness, justice, and righteousness (משפיע ודינא; משפיע ודינא, Tg. Ket. Ps 99:4) in Jacob, you have done it. (Ps 99:4)

A doer of righteous acts (עביד צידקתא; עביד צידקתא, Tg. Ket. Ps 103:6) is Yhwh, and just acts ( IDM תר وك; דיני, Tg. Ket. Ps 103:6) for everyone oppressed. (Ps 103:6)

Middle of the night, I will rise to praise you, concerning the judgments of your righteousness ( IDM תר וצ; דיני צדקך, Tg. Ket. Ps 119:62). (Ps 119:62)

The beginning of your word is truth (אמת; קשוט, Tg. Ket. Ps 119:160), and forever is every judgment of your righteousness ( IDM תר וצ; כל דיני צדקתך, Tg. Ket. Ps 119:160). (Ps 119:160)

My tongue will answer your utterance, because your commandments are righteous ( IDM תר וצ; כל דיניך צדקתא, Tg. Ket. Ps 119:172). (Ps 119:172)

“Shaddai, we cannot find, great of strength and justice, and plentiful of righteousness (שַג יא־כח ומשפט וצדקה; בסוגעי מדע תוקפא ודינא וסוגעי צדקתא, Tg. Ket. Job 37:23), [God] will not overpower.” (Job 37:23)

Second, God expects “righteousness” and “justice” from earthly rulers, or from God’s people, and promises them rulers with these qualities:

Thus says Yhwh: “Guard justice and do righteousness (משמר ומשפט וצדק; טור ודריך ודינא וצדקתא, Tg. Isa. 56:1), since it is near, my salvation to come, and my righteousness to be revealed ( IDM תר וצ; כל דיני צדקתך, Tg. Isa. 56:1).” (Isa 56:1)

Thus says Yhwh, “Do justice and righteousness (עשו משית וצדק; עביד ודינא וצדקתא, Tg. Neb. Jer 22:3), and rescue the robbed one from the hand of the oppressor. And the sojourner, the orphan, and the widow, do not oppress and do no violence, and innocent blood do not pour out in this place.” (Jer 22:3)

Behold! Days are coming, a saying of Yhwh, and I will raise up for David a righteous shoot (צמח צדיק; מישיחא דнятие, Tg. Neb. Jer 23:5), and he will reign as a king, and he will be intelligent, and he will do justice and righteousness ( IDM תר וצ; ויהיב ודיביד ודינא וצדקתא, Tg. Neb. Jer 23:5) in the land. (Jer 23:5)

In those days, and in that time, I will make sprout up for David a shoot of righteousness, and he will do justice and righteousness ( IDM תר וצ; ומישיחא דнятиיה דינא וצדקתא, Tg. Neb. Jer 33:15) in the land. (Jer 33:15)

¹Solomon’s: O God, your judgment (משפטת; משפטת, Tg. Ket. Ps 72:1) give to a king, and your righteousness ( IDM תר וצ; ודינא וצדקתא, Tg. Ket. Ps 72:1) to a king’s son. Let him judge your people in righteousness ( IDM תר וצ; בצדקה, Tg. Ket. Ps 72:2), and your afflicted ones in justice ( IDM תר וצ; בהלכות דינא, Tg. Ket. Ps 72:2). (Ps 72:1–2)

Fortunate are the keepers of justice, and the one doing righteousness ( IDM תר וצ; קשיטאי דינא וצדקתא, Tg. Ket. Ps 106:3) at every time. (Ps 106:3)

I have done justice and righteousness ( IDM תר וצ; עבדי ומישיחא דнятиיה דינא וצדקתא, Tg. Ket. Ps 119:121), do not give me rest for my oppressors. (Ps 119:121)
Third, however, there are two exceptions, where “righteousness” and “justice” are either meant ironically, or כִּי is given the sense of “a killing judgment” (interpreting “bloodshed”), in opposition to “righteousness”:

Rescue me from bloodshed (כִּי וְנַפְשְׁנִי; “from a killing judgment,” Tg. Ket. Ps 51:16), O God, God of my salvation, and my tongue will shout out joyfully your righteousness (כִּי וַאֲנַהְוָה תִּשָּׂאֶת; Tg. Ket. Ps 51:16). (Ps 51:16)

If oppression of the poor and robbery as justice and righteousness (וְיִדְמֵֽנ כַּפֶּרֶץ; Tg. Ket. Qoh 5:7) you see in the province, do not be astounded over the business, for a high one is over a high one watching, and high ones over them. (Qoh 5:7)

The connection with wisdom is more explicit in Proverbs and its Targum, which counsel their listeners to adopt the practice of “righteousness” and “justice”:

Good is a little with righteousness (בְּצְדֶקֶת אָדָם; Tg. Ket. Prov 16:8), more than much profit without justice (בְּלֵא מְשֵׁלָה; Tg. Ket. Prov 16:8). (Prov 16:8)

Doing righteousness and justice (בְּצִדְקָה וְמְשֵׁלָה; Tg. Ket. Prov 21:3) is more desirable to Yhwh than sacrifice. (Prov 21:3)

Finally, walking along “ways of righteousness” and “paths of justice” is an attribute of Wisdom herself:

In the way of righteousness (בָּאָרְחָה כְּצְדֵּקֶת; Tg. Ket. Prov 8:20) I will walk, among pathways of justice (כָּבָד, Tg. Ket. Prov 8:20). (Prov 8:20)

Wisdom cries out to all humanity (אֱלֵי בְנֵי אָדָמָא; Prov 8:4) to listen to her “truth” (כִּי אֱמֶת; Prov 8:7; cf. דָּקֶת, Dan 4:34), her words of “righteousness” (כָּבָד, Prov 8:8; cf. דָּקֶת, Dan 4:24), to “understand” (כִּי אֱמֶת, Prov 8:9; דָּקֶת, Tg. Ket. Prov 8:9), to find “knowledge” (כְּלָאָה דָּקֶת, Tg. Ket. Prov 8:9), knowledge better than gold (כְּלָאָה הָאֹזֶן בְּדָקֶת, Prov 8:10; דָּקֶת, Tg. Ket. Prov 8:10, cf. v.19; בַּגַּלְפַּרְשִׁים כְּלָאָה נַפְשִׁים, Dan 3:1), counsels “fear of Yhwh” as “hatred of evil” (יִרְאֶת יְהוָה שְּנִעַת רַע, Prov 8:13; יִרְאֶת יְהוָה שְּנִעַת רַע, Tg. Ket. Prov 8:13), and to turn away from

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27 For Bergant, the image of the “corruption” of “public officials,” making “a mockery” of “justice,” reflects Qoheleth’s realism, rather than cynicism. Bergant, Job; Ecclesiastes, 257.
29 For Camp, both “Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman” express themselves by means of “the tongue”: “the right speech of the sage and the perverted speech of the deceiver.” Ibid., 52.
“pride and arrogance” (גָּאֹן, Prov 8:13; cf. מַגֶּל, Dan 4:34). Perhaps most significant for Nebuchadnezzar are Wisdom’s words:

By me kings reign (מלכִּים מַלִּכִּים, Tg. Ket. Prov 8:15), and rulers prescribe righteousness (צדָҚִים, Tg. Ket. Prov 8:15). By me princes govern, and nobles, all judges of righteousness (כהלָּוָיָה רָבַּי מִשְׁפָּרִים, Tg. Ket. Prov 8:16).

Implicitly, Nebuchadnezzar connects Daniel’s advice that “righteousness” (צדקָה, Dan 4:24) is the most favourable course of action he can take as king, with his acquired knowledge of the heavens’ King’s ways as “justice” (דִּין, v.34). It is possible for the reader to align the conjoined voices of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar with other biblical voices, which recognise God as a righteous and just King over creation, and who expects righteousness and justice from earthly kings—not least the voice who takes these qualities to herself when speaking as “I, Wisdom” (אני חכמה, Prov 8:12).

**Nebuchadnezzar’s Role: Looking Upwards**

For his transformation towards knowledge, Nebuchadnezzar contributes the action of lifting his eyes heavenwards (אֲנָה נְבוּכַּדְנֶצֵַּר עַיְנַּ֣י׀ לִשְׁמַּיָ֣א נִטְל ַ֗ת, Dan 4:31). This phrase is suggestive of a metaphorical spatial change in Nebuchadnezzar. In directing his eyes upwards (Dan 4:31), Nebuchadnezzar reverses his downward gaze upon Babylon (v.27). He was elevated spatially upon his palace roof (Dan 4:26), now his perspective shifts to one from below, his eyes upon the heavens above him (v.31). Before, he was like the tree of his dream reaching to the heavens (רְבִָּ֥ה אִֽילָנֵָ֖א וּתְָקִָ֑ף וְרוּמ הּ֙ יִמְט ֣א לִשְׁמַּיַָּ֔א, Dan 4:8; רְבֵַּ֖ית וּתְָק ָ֑פְתְ וּרְבוּתִָ֤ךְ רְבָת֙ וּמְטָ֣ת לִשְׁמַּיַָ֔א, v.17, 19), but coming in from the fields where the beasts dwell, he had become like those provided for by a tree while beneath it (תְּדוּר֙ ח יוַּ֣ת בָרַָ֗א, v.9, 18) and by the heavens above (משקָלְו, v.20, בּוּסֵל שָׁמָּאִים לִשְׁמַֹּאֵה, v.22, שְׁמַּאֶה שִׁמָּאִים לִשְׁמָאֵה, v.30). Before, Nebuchadnezzar was elevated in his self-perception, seeing “the strength, power, and splendour of my majesty” (בְּתֵּקַּח חֲזִיִּ֖י ולִיָּקִָּ֥ר הַדְּרִֽי, Dan 4:27), and he becomes so again: “and the splendour of my kingdom, my majesty, 30 See Seow, 72.
31 For a different analysis of the spatial symbolism of “high” and “low,” understood as “lofty” and “crude,” for the court tales in Daniel, see Valeta, 130-35.
and my splendour returned to me” (וְלִיקַּר מַלְכוּתִֵ֚י הַדְרִי וְזִוִּי יְת֣וּב עֲלַַּ֔י, v.33) but the idea of a “return” suggests that such a self-perception had been lost. Nebuchadnezzar’s upwards gaze is also suggestive of his awareness of “the King of the heavens” (לְמֶ֣לֶךְ שְׁמַּיַָּ֔א, Dan 4:34). Nebuchadnezzar’s naming of God as “Most High” (אֱלָהֵָ֖א עִלָיָא, Dan 3:32, 4:31), a “name” he learnt from the holy watcher in his dream (אֱלָהֵָ֖א עִלָיָא, v.21, אֱלָהֵָ֖א, v.22), and the heavenly voice (אֱלָהֵָ֖א, v.29), is also suggestive of his knowledge that God is “above” him. To this deity he assigns the prerogative of “being able to bring low whoever walks in arrogance” (וְדִי֙ מַּהְלְכִ֣ין בְג וַָּ֔ה יָכִֵ֖ל לְהַּשְׁפָלָֽה, Dan 4:34). Despite the charge that Nebuchadnezzar may still possess “pride” or “hubris,” is it possible he concedes that God has acted with “truth” (קְשַֹּׁ֔ט) and “justice” (דִָ֑ין) in bringing him low (Dan 4:34)?

In the Masoretic Text, “to lift” (נטל) in Aramaic occurs elsewhere only for the first beast Daniel sees rising out of the great sea (Dan 7:2–4), without reference to eyes or heaven, but comparable in undergoing its own transformation to become humanlike (v.4). The lion-eagle hybrid of Dan 7:4 mimics Nebuchadnezzar: where Nebuchadnezzar lifted his eyes to the heavens (אֲנָ֙ה נְבוּכַּדְנֶצֵַּ֜ר עַּיְנַ֣י׀ לִשְׁמַּיָ֣, Dan 4:31), it is “lifted from the earth”:

The first one was like a lion and it had wings of an eagle (וְגַּפִִּ֥ין דִֽי־נְשֵַּׁ֖ר). I was looking until its wings were plucked out and it was lifted from the earth (וּנְטִ֣ילַּת מִן־אַּרְעַָ֗א), and upon its feet it was made to stand like a human being (כֶאֱנָ֣שׁ הֳקִיםַַּּ֔ת), and a human mind was given to it (הּוּוּלְבִַּּ֥ב אֱנֵָ֖שׁ יְהִִּ֥יב לַֽ). (Dan 7:4)

The difference is that where Nebuchadnezzar is active in lifting his own eyes (Dan 4:31), the first beast is passive in being lifted (7:4). Furthermore, where Nebuchadnezzar became like an eagle (שַּעְר ָ֛הּ כְנִשְׁרִִּ֥ין רְבֵָ֖ה, Dan 4:30), this creature loses its eagle identity: “its wings were plucked out” (וּנְטִ֣ילַּת מִן־אַּרְעַָ֗א, 7:4). Where the dream-tree (that Daniel identifies with Nebuchadnezzar) lost its human mind to be given a bestial mind (לִבְב הּ֙ מִן־אֱנוֹשָׁא יְשַּׁנַּּ֔וֹן וּלְבִַּּ֥ב ח יוֵָ֖ה יִתְיְהִ֣יב ל, Dan 4:13),

32 As ably noted by Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 77; Valeta, 94.
33 See Lucas, Daniel, 113.
34 However, Nebuchadnezzar may not be in an exclusive monotheistic relationship with Israel’s God. He sees Daniel’s alternative name “Belteshazzar” as a reminder of the name of his personal god (possibly Bel, שַּעְר ָ֛הּ כְנִשְׁרִִּ֥ין רְבֵָ֖ה, Dan 4:5). He also sees “Belteshazzar” as the sign that “a spirit of holiness is in him” (Dan 4:5), which probably means “holy gods” rather than “holy God,” on the lips of Nebuchadnezzar. Bob Becking, “A Divine Spirit is in You’: Notes on the Translation of the Phrase rûaḥ ‘ʾāḥîn in Daniel 5,14 and Related Texts,” in The Book of Daniel: In the Light of New Findings, ed. A. S. Van der Woude (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 516-17.
35 Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 77; Valeta, 94; see also Towner, 66; cf. Goldingay, 96-97.
this creature, initially identified as one of four חֲיוֹן (7:3), is given a human mind (וּלְבִַּּ֥ב אֱנֵָ֖שׁ יְהִִּ֥יב, v.4). The transformation of the lion-eagle hybrid into a humanlike figure (Dan 7:4) appears as a mirror image to Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation into an ox-eagle hybrid (4:30). When Nebuchadnezzar lifts his eyes heavenwards (Dan 4:31), and his first transformation is reversed by the return of knowledge (vv.31, 33), he is like, but not identical to, the first beast lifted from the earth and given a human mind (7:4; cf. 4:13).

Nebuchadnezzar’s Development in Knowledge through Narrated Time

At the end of his story, Nebuchadnezzar claims that “knowledge returned” to him (וּמַּנְדְעִי עֲלַּ֣י יְתַ֔וּב, Dan 4:31, מַּנְדְעִי׀ יְת֣וּב עֲלַַּ֗י, v.33), not that such knowledge was given to him for the first time. If he already once possessed such knowledge, when? Since his words in Dan 4:31–34 take the form of an act of praise—“I blessed” (כָּרִךְ, v.31), “I praised” (שַּׁבְחֵת, v.31, מְשַּׁבַּ֙ח, v.34), “I glorified” (וְהַדְרֵת, v.31, וּמְהַדַּר, v.34), and “I exalted” (וּמְרוֹמֵם, v.34)—for the deity he names “the Most High” (וּלְעִילָ֑י, v.31), “the Living One of Eternity” (וּלְחִַּּ֥֝י עָלְמֵָ֖א, v.31), and “the King of the heavens” (לְמֶ֣לֶךְ שְׁמַּיַָּ֔א, v.34), it is appropriate to compare his knowledge in 4:31–34 with his previous acts of praise (2:47; 3:28, 31–33). Since the question of Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge at the end of his story implies the question of his wisdom, it is also worthwhile to compare Nebuchadnezzar’s praises with Daniel’s hymn (Dan 2:20–23), to examine how far he might mimic Daniel. Daniel’s hymn, which may measure Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge and wisdom, reads:

20Daniel responded and he said, “It will be, the name of God blessed from eternity and unto eternity, because the wisdom and the strength are [God’s]. 21And [God] changes times and appointed times, deposing kings and raising kings, [God] gives the wisdom to wise ones and the knowledge to the knowers of understanding. 22[God] reveals deep things and hidden things, [God] knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with [God]. 23For you, O God of my ancestors, praising and lauding I am, because the wisdom and the strength you have given me, and now you have made known to me what we requested from you, the matter of the king you have made known to us.” (Dan 2:20–23)

For comparison with Nebuchadnezzar’s present state of knowledge (Dan 4:31–34), his first act of praise reads:

...
The king responded to Daniel and said, “It is from truth that your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a Revealer of secrets, since you have been able to reveal this secret.” (Dan 2:47)

Nebuchadnezzar previously called Daniel’s God “God of gods and Lord of kings” (אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהִים מלָעֳמִר מָלַךְ, Dan 2:47). He now praises “the Most High” (אֱלֹהֵי לָעַיָּא, Dan 4:31) since “as [God] wills, [God] does, with the host of the heavens and the dwellers of the earth” (וּכְמִצְבֶּי אֱלֹהֵי שְׁמַיַּא בָּחָלָה לָאָרָעָא, v.32). God doing as God wills with the host of the heavens (Dan 4:32), and being named “King of the heavens” (v.34), is suggestive of God’s prominence among other gods, as “God of gods” (2:47). The same applied to the dwellers of the earth (Dan 4:32) is also suggestive of God’s lordship over earthly kings (2:47). However, Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge of God’s kingship has developed to include awareness of his own re-establishment over his kingdom (וְעַל מַלְכוּתִי הָתְקָנַת, Dan 4:33), and that “whoever walks in arrogance, [God] is able to bring low” (וְדִי מַּהְלְכִּין בְּג וַָּ֔ה יָכִֵ֖ל לְהָָֽשָּׁל, v.34). This would seem to bring his knowledge of God’s lordship over kings (first expressed in Dan 2:47) closer to Daniel’s praise of God for “deposing kings and raising kings” (מְהַעְד מַּלְכִים וּמְהָָק מַלְכִים, v.21), especially after hearing the heavenly voice judge him with the verb הדע, “Nebuchadnezzar, O king, your kingdom is taken from you” (ךְָּנְבוּכַּדְנֶצַּר מַלְכַָּא מַּלְכוּתֵָ֖ה עֲדִָּ֥ת מִנָּֽ), Dan 4:28).

Nebuchadnezzar also praised Daniel’s God as “a Revealer of secrets, since you have been able to reveal this secret” (וְגָלֵא רָזִיָּא לְמַלְכָא לְמִגְלַא רָזִיָּא, Dan 2:47). This is perhaps the closest he comes to praising God’s knowledge. He had heard Daniel link “the God of the heavens” as the one who “reveals secrets” with “making known” to him the future (אִיתַַּי אֱלִָ֤הּ בִשְׁמַּיָא גָל ֣א רָזִַּ֔ין וְהוֹדַַּ֗ע לְמַּלְכָא נְבוּכַּדְנֶצַַּּ֔ר מִָּ֥ה דִִּ֥י לֶהֱו ֵ֖א בְאַ֢חֲרִית יוֹמַּיָָא, Dan 2:28, v.29). Nebuchadnezzar also heard Daniel discount his own “wisdom” in his ability to disclose the “secret” (לָא בְּשַׁמַּא יְרֵאֵי אֵלֹהֵי יְהוֹדְעַּוּן וְרַּעְיוֹנ לִבְבֵךְ תִנְדַּע, Dan 2:30). Nebuchadnezzar’s first act of praise, of both God and Daniel for “revealing” (Dan 2:47), is the closest he comes to Daniel’s

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36 Newsom reads this verse as “a recognition by Nebuchadnezzar of the Jewish God as ultimate source of knowledge and sovereignty,” but “he has not yet grasped the full implications of what he has affirmed.” Newsom and Breed, 84-85.
praise of God for “revealing deep and hidden things” (אלהי, וב, v.22), which Daniel links with God “knowing what is in the darkness” (יLabour, v.22), and “giving the wisdom to wise ones and the knowledge to knowers of understanding” (יLabour, וב, v.21). Nebuchadnezzar’s awareness of God’s knowledge or wisdom is not explicit in Dan 4:31–34. However, when Nebuchadnezzar narrates his own story (Dan 3:31–4:15, 31–34), at a time later than the events narrated in the story (and therefore potentially reflective of his knowledge gained in 4:31–34), he will identify Daniel as one for whom “no secret is difficult” (клонיה לאלים, 4:6), because “a spirit of the holy gods is in him” (דָּי רַוחַ אֱלָהִים קַדִישִים בָּהּ, v.5,ךְַּ֔דִַ֠י ר֣וּחַ אֱלָהִִ֤ים קַדִישִׁין֙ בָֽ, v.6,ךְַּ֔דִַ֠י ר֣וּחַ אֱלָהִִ֤ים קַדִישִׁין֙ בָֽ, v.15). When he last identifies this “spirit” in Daniel, he acknowledges that Daniel surpasses all his other “wise ones” in the ability to “make known” a dream’s “interpretation” (ופִַּשְׁרָא אָמַר כָל־קְבֵל לָּא־יָכְלִין פִַּשְׁרָא לְהוֹדָעֻתַּנִי וְאַנְתָה כָּה ַּל, Dan 4:15). In the narrated time of Nebuchadnezzar’s second year (Dan 2:1), he heard of his sages’ inability to uncover a “secret” (רָזָה) from Daniel (v.27), but also from the sages themselves (vv.10–11). Three years after Daniel came to Babylon in narrated time, Nebuchadnezzar discovered Daniel and his companions to surpass all his “magicians and conjurers” for “every matter of wisdom of understanding which he sought from them” (וכָל דְבַר חָכְמַת בִּינַה אֲשֶׁר־בִּקֵשׁ מֵהֵם, Dan 1:20). Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge in Dan 4:31–34 does not recall Daniel’s or his God’s ability to reveal secrets, or their knowledge or wisdom. However, when he narrates Dan 4:5–6, 15, his knowledge then recalls Daniel’s special bond with a deity, his mastery over secrets (2:47), and his surpassing all other sages in matters of “wisdom” (1:20) and dream interpretation (4:15).

Nebuchadnezzar’s second act of praise for the God of Daniel’s companions reads:

The king responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent [God’s] angel and rescued [God’s] servants who put their trust in [God]. But the order of the king they disobeyed and gave their bodies, because they would not serve nor bow down before any god but their God.” (Dan 3:28)37

37 Newsom reads Dan 3:28, “[i]f the story ended there,” as implying “that Nebuchadnezzar has fully grasped the relation between divine and human sovereignty,” but v.29 as his “disturbing” command issuing a “threat of gruesome execution,” which shows that “the education of Nebuchadnezzar is not yet complete.” Ibid., 113.
Nebuchadnezzar praised their God’s fidelity, but, implicitly, also God’s strength. He acknowledged their God “who sent [God’s] angel and rescued [God’s] servants” (דִֽי־שְׁלִַּ֤ח מַּלְאֲכ הּ֙וְשׁ יזִ֣ב לְעַּבְדַּ֔וֹהִי, Dan 3:28), an action he attributed to their God’s “ability” surpassing all other gods (כָּל־קֳב ַ֗ל דִ֣י לִָ֤א אִיתַּ֙י אֱלָ֣ה אָחֳרַָּ֔ן דִֽי־יִכִֻ֥ל לְהַּצָלֵָ֖ה כִדְנָֽה, v.29). Nebuchadnezzar again attributes “ability” to “the King of the heavens,” in “bringing low whoever walks in arrogance” (וְדִי מַּהְלְכִ֣ין בְג וַָּ֔ה יָכִֵ֖ל לְהַּשְׁפָלָֽה, Dan 4:34). Nebuchadnezzar also implicitly recognises God’s strength in God doing as God wills “with the host of the heavens and the dwellers of the earth” (נְבֵמַּבָּ֛כִּים עָבְּר, Dan 4:32). Daniel will later associate God’s gift to Nebuchadnezzar of “the kingdom, and the greatness, and the splendour, and the majesty” (מַלְכוּתִָ֤א וּרְבוּתָא֙ וִיקָרָ֣א וְהַּדְרַָּ֔ה, Dan 5:18) with Nebuchadnezzar being able do whatever he willed, whether killing, letting live, exalting, or bringing low (וְדִֽי־הֲוָ֙ה צָב ֵ֜א הֲוָ֣א קָט ַ֗ל וְדִֽי־הֲוִָ֤ה צָב א֙ הֲוָ֣ה מַּח ַּ֔א וְדִֽי־הֲוִָ֤ה צָב א֙ הֲוָ֣ה מָרִַּ֔ים וְדִֽי־הֲוִָּ֥ה צָב ֵ֖א הֲוִָּ֥ה מַּשְׁפִֽיל, v.19). In his boast, Nebuchadnezzar associated his own splendour and majesty with his strength and power (בִתְָקִַּּ֥ף חִסְנִֵ֖י וְלִיָקִָּ֥ר הַּדְרִֽי, Dan 4:27). The idea of strength is implied by Daniel’s and Nebuchadnezzar’s ideas of a king’s ability to do whatever that king wills (Dan 4:32; 5:19). Nebuchadnezzar’s implicit attribution of strength to God is suggestive of Daniel’s praise of God as one who possess “strength” and gives “strength,” which Daniel conjoins with possessing and giving “wisdom” (דִֵ֧י חָכְמְתָָ֛א וּגְבוּרְתֵָ֖א דִִּ֥י ל ֽהּ־הִֽיא, 2:20, יִֽהְבְתָ לִָ֑י וְדִֵ֧י חָכְמְתָָ֛א יְהַּ֣בְתְ לִָ֑י, v.23). However, Nebuchadnezzar’s words do not hint at any association between divine wisdom and divine strength (Dan 4:31–34).

Nebuchadnezzar’s third act of praise attributes to God “an eternal kingdom”:

“[God’s] signs—how great!—and [God’s] wonders—how strong! And [God’s] kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and [God’s] sovereignty is with generation and generation.” (Dan 3:33)\(^{38}\)

Nebuchadnezzar repeats his praise of God’s perpetual kingdom and sovereignty with only the minor variation of synonym transposition: “[God’s] sovereignty is an eternal sovereignty, and [God’s] kingdom is with generation and generation” (שָׁלְטָנ הּ֙ שָׁלְטָ֣ן עָלַַּּ֔ם וּמַּלְכוּת ֵ֖הּ עִם־דִָּ֥ר וְדָֽר, Dan 4:31; cf. מַלְכוּת הּ֙ מַלְכ֣וּת עָלַַּּ֔ם וְשָׁלְטָנ ֵ֖הּ עִם־דִָּ֥ר וְדָֽר, 3:33). Because the wording which expresses

\(^{38}\) Newsom also reads “everlastingness” as “what distinguishes divine sovereignty from human sovereignty.” Ibid., 135.
Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge in Dan 3:33; 4:31 is so close, I will treat Dan 3:31–33 and 4:31–34 as simultaneous with respect to the development of Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge, which now includes God’s transcendence of time. Nebuchadnezzar first heard from Daniel about “the God of the heavens” who “will raise a kingdom forever” (יְקִים֩ אֱלָ֙הּ שְׁמַּיִָ֤א מַּלְכוּ֙ דִִ֤י לְעָלְמִין֙, Dan 2:44).39 When Nebuchadnezzar praises God’s perpetual kingdom and sovereignty (Dan 4:31), he also praises all God’s deeds and ways as “true” and “just” (כָל־מַּעֲבָדוֹ֙הִי֙ קְשַֹּׁ֔ט וְאֹרְחָת ֵ֖הּ דִָ֑ין, v.34). Could Nebuchadnezzar associate the eternity of God’s kingdom with God’s kingship as perfectly just? When Daniel warned Nebuchadnezzar that he would lose his status as king (Dan 4:22), he also advised him to cease his “sins” (ךְֵ֖וַּחֲטָיָ) and “offences” (ךְֵ֖וַּעֲוָיָתָ) by practising “righteousness” (בְצִדְָקָ֣ה) and “mercy to the afflicted” (בְמִחַ֣ן עֲנָָָּ֑֑֑יִן), with the possibility that “perhaps your prosperity will be stretched out” (ךְֵ֖ה ָ֛ן תֶהֱו ִּ֥א אַּרְכֵָ֖ה לִשְׁל וְתָֽ). Nebuchadnezzar heard from Daniel’s advice that a king’s reign could be extended in time if he practised “righteousness” (Dan 4:24). There is potential for Nebuchadnezzar to see God’s kingship as eternal (Dan 3:33; 4:31) because God is a perfectly just King (4:34). Nebuchadnezzar also blesses this God who “lives forever” (רְכַּ֔ת וּלְחִַּּ֥י עָלְמֵָ֖א, Dan 4:31), recalling his subjects who wished him to “live forever” as king, perhaps without complete sincerity (מַלְכָא֙ לְעָלְמִ֣ין חֱיִַּ֔י, 3:9). However, his blessing of God who lives forever (Dan 4:31) aligns his knowledge with Daniel’s forecast that God’s name will be “blessed from eternity and unto eternity” (מְבָרַַּּ֔ךְ מִן־עָלְמֵָ֖א וְעַ֣ד־עָלְמָָ֑א, 2:20).

In his second transformation, Nebuchadnezzar claims that “knowledge” has “returned” to him (Dan 4:31, 33). Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge, expressed in his last act of praise (Dan 4:31–34), has developed from his first act of praise (expressing his knowledge of Daniel’s God as one who reveals secrets, and potentially as the source of knowledge and wisdom, 2:47), through his second (of the ability of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to overpower his order for their deaths, implicitly expressing knowledge of God’s strength, 3:28–

39 Likewise, Newsom reads the repetition of Dan 3:33 in 4:31 as the sign that Nebuchadnezzar “has finally understood the significance of the first dream vision in 2:31–35, 44, which visually contrasted the transitory nature of human sovereignties with the eternal quality of divine dominion.” Ibid.
29), to his third (that God’s kingdom is eternal, 3:33; 4:31, potentially linking with his knowledge of God as the just King, 4:34).

**Nebuchadnezzar’s Time of Narrating**

Daniel 3:31–4:15, 31–34 is written in the voice of “I, Nebuchadnezzar,” while Dan 4:16–30 presents him in the third person as simply “Nebuchadnezzar,” or “the king.” This mixture of first-person and third-person narration makes Dan 3:31–4:34 unusual among biblical narratives. Even more unusual is that the character-narrator is an apparent antagonist. As Seow rightly notes, “[t]he account is presented as an open letter by Nebuchadnezzar addressed ‘to all peoples, nations, and languages that live throughout the earth’” (Dan 3:31), by which “the author implies that the content of this account is a matter for public consumption,” and “not merely a private and personal matter.”

However, the effect of mixed narration is that while the whole of Dan 3:31—4:34 is communicated in the hearing of the reader, not all of it can be assumed to be Nebuchadnezzar’s intended communication “to all peoples, nations, and languages.” As Fewell observes, “we may hear two communications, one that is internal to the story world, another that crosses the boundary of the story world. The first is what the ruler of the world commands his subjects to hear, the second is the speech of a king long deceased to readers familiar with his fate.” In this instance, the implied reader is privileged with knowledge over the internal world audience, being privy to information that Nebuchadnezzar does not communicate to his own audience. The implied reader learns from the third-person narration that Nebuchadnezzar is the “tree” and then the “beast” of his own dream, but Nebuchadnezzar’s audience does not necessarily learn this from what he himself communicates. Fewell asks why the third-person “narrator allows Nebuchadnezzar to tell part of his story, but does not allow him to tell all,” and argues that the central position of the third-person narration in a chiastic structure emphasises the importance of Daniel’s

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40 Seow, 64.
42 This is what Meir Sternberg would call a “reader-elevating” strategy, where the implied reader has access to information of which some characters are ignorant. Sternberg, 164.
43 Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics*, 73.
interpretation of the dream and its fulfilment.\textsuperscript{44} The significance of Fewell’s argument is that “[t]he presence of this [third-person] narrator emphasizes that there is no way Nebuchadnezzar could have access to Daniel’s knowledge and wisdom except that he be told,” and “that Daniel’s knowledge and wisdom are exclusive to him.”\textsuperscript{45} In contrast, Hebbard identifies the purpose of Nebuchadnezzar’s narration as educative and hermeneutical: “to relay the story of his own conversion to Yahwism in order that others may also come to acknowledge Yhwh as the universal God and king.”\textsuperscript{46} He argues that Nebuchadnezzar performs the role of a “hermeneut” by giving “his own interpretation of God’s activity in his life,” and by “writing to a wide readership inclusive of all people worldwide” when speaking of his experiences.\textsuperscript{47} When Nebuchadnezzar narrates his own story, there is material he leaves out for his own audience, raising the question that he has impoverished the understanding of his dream, as supplied by Daniel. It also serves to complicate the “time of narrating” in Dan 3:31–4:34 with respect to “narrated time,” since there are two narrators narrating. However, the gap Nebuchadnezzar leaves for his audience may be filled in a way that goes beyond Daniel’s interpretation (Dan 4:16–24) and the punitive experience of his first transformation (vv.25–30). Nebuchadnezzar’s gap in his narrating allows his dream narration to be filled by metaphors not limited to Daniel’s identification of him as the target of his dream. Nebuchadnezzar may want to assign the identity of the tree to the king who will depose him, but readers of his letter might call to mind the tree of Jotham’s parable (Judg 9:7–20) or the trees of Eden (Gen 2:9, 17; 3:22).

**The Disjunction Between the Time of Narrating and Narrated Time**

The “time of narrating” in Dan 3:31–4:34 is complicated by the duality of voices narrating, which also complicates the interaction between the “time of narrating” and “narrated time” in Dan 3:31–4:34. Nebuchadnezzar initiates this time of narrating by addressing “all peoples, nations, and languages” in the form of a circular letter (Dan 3:31), and he promises to recount

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Hebbard, 40.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 42.
God’s “signs and wonders” (v.32). The repetition of Dan 3:33 with only minor variation in 4:31 suggests that the time when Nebuchadnezzar narrates happens soon after his second transformation of knowledge in the narrated time of 4:31–34.

In Dan 4:1, Nebuchadnezzar narrates events which are past relative to the time he makes his epistolary greeting in 3:31–33.48 The time in which he narrates, his “time of narrating,” is his letter-writing voice introduced in Dan 3:31, but he then speaks of sitting and resting in his palace, and interacting with his courtiers (4:1–6), as events in past narrated time. In other words, Dan 4:1 signals a flashback, a retrospective moment, for Nebuchadnezzar.49 Next in the time of narrating is Nebuchadnezzar’s communication to Daniel of his dream (Dan 4:7–14). Since Nebuchadnezzar’s dream occurred the night before (Dan 4:2), his narration of it to Daniel (vv.7–14) is of another event in past narrated time, relative to the time of narrating, just as his flourishing in his palace (v.1) is an event narrated in time past to the time of narrating (Nebuchadnezzar’s letter-writing voice, 3:31–33). His dream narrative (Dan 4:7–14) is a narrative embedded within a narrative (vv.1–15), embedded within another narrative (3:31–4:34). Included within Nebuchadnezzar’s dream narrative is the speech of angelic figures (Dan 4:11–14). Although the time of their speech is set within the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 4:2), and then the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s narrating his dream to Daniel (v.7), their words refer to an event that will happen in narrated time future to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and the time he narrates his dream to Daniel: the symbolic cutting down and transformation of the tree, designated to last for a period of “seven times” (v.13). While Nebuchadnezzar refers to his past in narrated time, the angelic figures he recalls forecast his future in narrated time, if we read their speech while influenced by Daniel’s identification of Nebuchadnezzar with the tree (Dan 4:19). Nebuchadnezzar finishes speaking as “I, Nebuchadnezzar” in Dan 4:15, when he asks Daniel to interpret the dream, before he becomes “the king” in the third person in v.16.

48 Fewell notes “[t]he distortion of the natural chronological order” beginning in Dan 4:1, which leads the reader “to piece together the puzzle of the past.” Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 63.
49 As Fewell observes at Dan 4:1–2, Nebuchadnezzar “takes us back into his past.” Ibid., 64.
Beginning in Dan 4:16, Nebuchadnezzar no longer narrates his own story, but reverts to being a character represented in the third person.\textsuperscript{50} He is no longer “I, Nebuchadnezzar,” but “Nebuchadnezzar” or “the king.”\textsuperscript{51} No longer the narrator, it is at this point that Nebuchadnezzar begins to lose control “of his own story.”\textsuperscript{52} The time narrated in Dan 4:16–24 is dominated by Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which diverges from Nebuchadnezzar’s narrating of his dream to Daniel.\textsuperscript{53} Where Nebuchadnezzar had not identified himself as the tree, Daniel now declares, “You are it, O king!” (Dan 4:19). Daniel also limits “the living” who will receive knowledge (Dan 4:14) to Nebuchadnezzar (v.22).\textsuperscript{54} The time of narrating may flow smoothly for the reader moving quickly from Nebuchadnezzar’s narrating to the third-person narrating, but time, as it is presented to the reader, is no longer under Nebuchadnezzar’s control, but now falls under the control of the unnamed narrator, in the way that time is narrated. Daniel’s identification of Nebuchadnezzar with “the tree” and “the living” makes the angels’ speech (Dan 4:11–14) refer to his future in narrated time (which will unfold in vv.25–30).

The next scene in the time of narrating begins starkly: “all of this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king” (Dan 4:25). Daniel 4:25–30 is situated in the future relative to the court scene involving Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, “at the end of twelve months” (v.26). However, the phrasing of Dan 4:25, “all of this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king,” seems to indicate that the narrated time of the scene of the palace roof is still past relative to the time of narrating in which the unnamed narrator speaks. It is not known whether Nebuchadnezzar followed Daniel’s advice to exchange his sins and iniquity for righteousness and showing mercy, or whether he still remembers his dream and Daniel’s interpretation: a king can be kept busy

\textsuperscript{50} However, see Meadowcroft’s argument that “identification of narrative voice does not necessarily equate to recognition of narratorial point of view.” Timothy J. Meadowcroft, "Point of View in Storytelling: An Experiment in Narrative Criticism in Daniel 4," Didaskalia 8, no. 2 (1997): 32. In her first edition of Circle of Sovereignty, Fewell argued that although a different “narrative voice” appears in Dan 4:16, “the perceptual point of view remains the same—at least for the time being.” Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories, 97. However, Fewell seems to have revised her position when interpreting the shift in narration (Dan 4:15–16): “the two narrators are not necessarily expressing the same point of view.” Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 68.

\textsuperscript{51} As noted by Collins, Daniel, 228.

\textsuperscript{52} As ably observed by Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics, 75.

\textsuperscript{53} Fewell notes that Daniel “soften[s] the judgment.” Ibid., 70.

\textsuperscript{54} See ibid.
with many court and state affairs over a year. Yet this year in narrated time flashes past in the time taken to narrate from Dan 2:24 to v.26. Perhaps the third-person narrator intends to emphasise the lack of change in Nebuchadnezzar’s self-exalting attitude (Dan 4:27) by means of this time-lapse, which aligns with his earlier state of “ease” and “flourishing” (v.1).

The final scene in the time of narrating is Dan 4:31–34, when the unnamed narrator gives way for Nebuchadnezzar to become “I, Nebuchadnezzar” again. The time of narrating has once more fallen under Nebuchadnezzar’s control, when he is free to portray narrated time as he sees fit. It seems a little ambiguous as to which time is narrated by Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4:31–34. In his own narration (Dan 4:31–34), he has now come to an awareness of the sovereignty, strength, and perpetuity of God’s kingdom, that earthly kingship is nothing in comparison, and that God rules with truth and justice. Nebuchadnezzar, rather surprisingly, also praises God as the King of the heavens who humiliates those who walk in arrogance.

Perhaps he intends to show himself as one changed from making his proud boast of building Babylon (Dan 4:27). Here time, as represented in Daniel 4, has come full circle, in which Nebuchadnezzar is represented as having attained the perspective which he shows in the beginning of his letter: God’s sovereignty is an eternal sovereignty, and his kingdom is with generation and generation (Dan 4:31; cf. 3:33). At the beginning of his letter, Nebuchadnezzar promised to recount “the signs and wonders which God most high did with me, it is pleasing in my presence to recount” (Dan 3:32), and the signs and wonders which Nebuchadnezzar promised to recount have now been recounted. But did Nebuchadnezzar fulfil his promise that it would be he himself who recounts God’s “signs and wonders,” as he implies he will do at the beginning of his letter (Dan 3:32)?

It is upon a second reading of Dan 3:31–4:34 that the distinction between the time of narrating and narrated time bears fruit. In a sense, the events of this chapter happen twice. First, in narrated time, Nebuchadnezzar flourishes in his court, has his dream, has his dream interpreted, and suffers the ill effects of not understanding the message of his dream, and only then does he understand the dream’s message about God’s sovereignty. Second, in the time of his own narrating, Nebuchadnezzar recalls these events in narrated time, in a message
addressed “to all nations, peoples and languages” (Dan 3:31), a message to which the reader is also privy. However, Nebuchadnezzar does not narrate all the events in Dan 3:31–4:34. Despite Nebuchadnezzar’s claim that it gives him pleasure to recount the “signs and wonders” God did with him, there are some signs and wonders which he will not recount to his audience of “all nations, peoples and languages.” Why not? What would be lost from Dan 3:31–4:34 if only Nebuchadnezzar’s first-person narration were kept, limited to the message he intends to communicate?

The scene of Daniel’s interpretation would be lost (Dan 4:16–24), with his explicit identification of Nebuchadnezzar as the tree to be chopped down and transformed into a beast, and as the one to learn the lesson about God’s sovereignty. In the time in which Nebuchadnezzar narrates, he would rather not identify himself as the target of his own dream, as either the tree or the living who will learn from its example. The rooftop scene would also be lost, when he makes his arrogant boast, and the heavens’ voice confirms Daniel’s interpretation of the dream against Nebuchadnezzar’s own narration of his dream. Instead, the narrative which Nebuchadnezzar communicates to “all nations, peoples, and languages” moves directly from his account of his court and his dream (Dan 4:1–15) to Nebuchadnezzar’s praise of God for restoring his kingdom, that God’s sovereignty is just, true, and eternal, and that God humbles the arrogant (vv.31–34).

Nebuchadnezzar narrates after his experience of being targeted by the divine judgment implicit in his own nightmare, and having that nightmare come true, without wanting to identify himself in that experience directly. Instead, Nebuchadnezzar presents the tree as a metaphor not of himself, but leaves it to be filled in by whoever is the dominant king after his downfall. When he narrates his dream to Daniel, and thus to “all peoples, nations, and languages” (Dan 3:31), he introduces the tree and the holy watcher in his dream with “I saw” (חָז֣ה הֲוָ֛ית, 4:7, חָז֣ה הֲוָ֛ית אֲנֵָ֖ה מַּלְכָּ֣ר, v.10, דְּנָה֙ חֶלְמָ֣א חֲזַּ֣ית אֲנֵָ֖ה מַּלְכָּ֣ר נְבוּכַּדְנֶצַּֽר, v.15), describing the elements of

55 As Fewell observes, because Nebuchadnezzar’s narrative explains his praise in Dan 3:31–33, “we enter the story at the end.” Ibid., 63.
his dream from the perspective of an observer, rather than a participant in the dream. By disassociating himself from his own experience when he tells the world about it, Nebuchadnezzar is saying, “What happened to me, can happen to anyone.” Indeed, the only sign or wonder of God most high which Nebuchadnezzar narrates, besides the dream itself, is his glorious restitution and acclamation of God’s sovereignty as eternal, just, and true. However, it is thanks to the unnamed narrator interrupting the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s narrating, that the reader is informed of the narrated time when Nebuchadnezzar was the recipient of the punishment he avoids narrating, but allows to be applied to whoever may hold authority over the kingdoms of humanity in the present of his audience. Long after Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, “My lord, let your dream be for your enemies, and its interpretation for your adversaries!” (Dan 4:16), perhaps Nebuchadnezzar wished to understand Daniel’s words literally.

By not narrating Daniel’s reaction, interpretation, and advice (Dan 4:16–24), nor the rooftop experience and bestial transformation (vv.25–30), Nebuchadnezzar leaves the identity and meaning of the tree (v.7), and of “the living” who will receive knowledge (v.14), open to other interpretations for his audience. Nebuchadnezzar’s narrated knowledge in Dan 4:31–34 seems to be the interpretation of his dream he gives his audience. Although he tells his audience of his confidence in Daniel’s ability to interpret the dream (Dan 4:15), he never narrates Daniel doing so, leaving his audience to wonder if Daniel left Nebuchadnezzar to interpret his dream on his own. Nebuchadnezzar’s claim, “knowledge returned to me” (נַדְעִי עֲלַּ֣י יְתַּ֔וּב, v.33), without the context of his bestial transformation for his audience, leaves them to surmise that “knowledge” of his dream and its meaning returned to him.

56 To speak in Ricoeurian language, Nebuchadnezzar hears a message spoken to him, which applies to him in his situation. However, when he writes down the message and sends it out to the peoples in an epistolary form, this message loses its original context of Nebuchadnezzar’s life situation, and its meaning enters the life situation of a multitude of others. See Ricoeur’s rewritten lecture, “Speaking and Writing,” in Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, 25-44.

57 Another point of difference between Nebuchadnezzar’s self-characterisation (in Dan 4) and the narrator’s characterisation of him (in Dan 2) is that the king presents himself as no longer threatening his sages with death for failing to interpret his dream, and even tells them his dream beforehand (Dan 4:3–4; cf. 2:5–6). Valeta believes that the change is due to God’s “humbling” of him or the dream making him “afraid, nay, terrified” (Dan 4:2). Valeta, 90. However, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar has rethought the kind of image he wishes to project before his subjects?
Nebuchadnezzar's statement, “my eyes to the heavens I lifted” (Dan 4:31), leaves his audience to ask if he looked “to the King of the heavens” (v.34) for his knowledge. His praise of the Most High for restoring his “honour, kingdom, majesty, and splendour” (Dan 4:33), for re-establishing him over his kingdom (v.32), for the heavenly King’s deeds of truth and ways of justice (v.34)—without narrating the heavenly voice’s judgment of him (vv.28–29)—leaves his audience to wonder if Nebuchadnezzar is praising God for rectifying an unjust situation of another earthly king suppressing his rule. Nebuchadnezzar’s praise of the Most High’s eternal kingdom and sovereignty (Dan 4:31), over the heavens and the earth (v.32), demonstrated in the heavenly King’s ability to bring low those who walk in arrogance (v.34), leaves his audience to ask if Nebuchadnezzar is identifying the lofty tree in his dream with another earthly king who had unjustly deposed him. Finally, Nebuchadnezzar communicates his dream (Dan 4:7–14) and his “knowledge” (vv.31, 33) to “all peoples, nations, and languages” (3:31), leaving his audience to identify themselves with “the living” who will “know” (4:14) that “the sovereignty of the Most High is over the kingdom of human beings, and to whoever [God] wills, [God] gives it, and the lowest of human beings [God] raises over it” (4:14). By occluding his participation in his own dream and its aftermath (Dan 4:16–30), Nebuchadnezzar has transitioned from receiving “knowledge” from the dream and its consequences, to one who communicates another “knowledge” to his audience. Even so, his own painful lesson is not hidden to the reader, thanks to the intrusion of the third-person narrator.

**Expanding the Metaphor of Nebuchadnezzar’s Tree**

If some of Nebuchadnezzar’s audience received his narration (Dan 3:31–4:15, 31–34), without the third-person narration of Daniel’s response and Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial transformation (4:16–30), and yet they were suspicious of Nebuchadnezzar’s presentation and implied interpretation, what options are open to them? If they were to ask the meaning of “the tree” (Dan 4:7, 8, 11) across Targumim Onqelos, Jonathon, Isaiah, Psalms, Job, Qoheleth, Proverbs, and Chronicles, 118 intertextual verses would be available. When they listen to Nebuchadnezzar narrating as “king” (Dan 3:31; 4:15), and praising another “King” (Dan 4:31,
אש, 4:34), they may suspect Nebuchadnezzar’s “tree” concerns a “king,” and limit their options to co-occurrences of יְהֹוַדְעֻנַּּ֔י or the verb מַּלְכָּ֣י. Likewise, when they hear Nebuchadnezzar present his own “knowledge” of his dream (יָדַּעְתִּ֨י, Dan 4:3, מָלֵ֖ק, v.15, יַדַּעְתִּ֤י, v.31, מָלַ֣ק, v.33), not possible for his “wise ones” (חַ֣כִּים, 4:3, כָּל־חַ֣כִּים מַּלְכוּתִּ֗י, v.15), they may inquire into the connection between his “tree” (אִילָן), and “wisdom” (חָכְמָה), “wise one” (חַכִּים), “to be/make wise” (חכם), “to know” (יֵדַע), or “knowledge” (מַדְעִי).

A reader connecting Nebuchadnezzar’s “tree” (אִילָן) to מֶלֶך or מַלְכָּי will encounter Jotham’s parable (Judg 9:7–20), told in response to the premature appointment of Abimelech, son of Jerubbaal, as king in Shechem (vv.1–6).

88Walking, the trees (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:8) walked to anoint over themselves a king (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:8), and they said to the olive tree, ‘Be king over us (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:8)!’ ... 89And the trees (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:10) said to the fig tree, ‘Come you, be king over us (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:10)!’ ... 90And the trees (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:12) said to the vine, ‘Come you, be king over us (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:12)!’ ... 91And all the trees (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:14) said to the bramble, ‘Come you, be king over us (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:14)!’ ... 92And the bramble said to the trees (אֶל־ה עֵצֵים; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:15), ‘If in fact (בֶאֱמֶ֣ת; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:15) you are anointing me as a king over you (לְּמֶ לֶךְ  עֲלֵיכִֶ֔ם; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:15), come and seek refuge in my shadow (בְּצ לָ֑י; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:15). And if not, fire (אֵש; Tg. Neb. Judg 9:15) will go out from the bramble and it consume the cedars of Lebanon.’” (Judg 9:8, 10, 12, 14–15)

Nearly all the “trees” asked to be “king” are too reluctant to take up the offer (Judg 9:9, 11, 13), with exception of the bramble, whom Jotham identifies with Abimelech (vv.16–20). Readers in Nebuchadnezzar’s audience hearing his narration of the dream-tree cut down (Dan 4:7–14), may read Jotham’s parable and conclude that wanting to be king is not prudent, and that Nebuchadnezzar was only re-established over his kingdom (v.33) by judgment of the heavenly King acting in “truth” (בֶאֱמֶ֣ת, v.34), as the bramble says (כָּל־חַ֣כִּים מַּלְכוּתִּ֗י, Tg. Neb. Judg 9:15). However, readers among “all peoples, nations, and languages” (לְעַּמְמַּיַָּ֞א אֻמַּיֵָ֧א וְלִשָנַּיָֽא לְֽכָ, Dan 3:31), who remember being summoned before Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image (יָדַּעְתִּ֨י, קְשׁוֹט, v.6). They

58 Other possibilities are Isa 7:2; Tg. Isa. 7:2; Jer 3:6; Tg. Ket. Jer 3:6.
59 However, perhaps “only fools would … listen to the promises of the bramble,” that “could neither offer protection from rain nor create fire,” as argued by Charles F. Melchert, ”Creation and Justice among the Sages,” Religious Education 85, no. 3 (1990): 375.
may ask if Nebuchadnezzar is a king like Abimelech, who also “burnt with fire” (לְפָרְשִׁיָּה בָא, Tg. Neb. Judg 9:52).

Readers who ask about Nebuchadnezzar’s “tree” (אִילָן) and “knowledge” (ידע, מַנְדַּע) or “wisdom” (חָכָם, חַכִים, חכם) will recall, that in Eden:

And Yhwh God made to grow, from the soil, every tree (כ ל־עֵץ; כ ל א ילָן, Tg. Onq. Gen 2:9) desirable to sight, and good for eating, and a tree of life (וְּעֵץ הַָֽחַי יָם; וְּא ילָן חַיַי א, Tg. Onq. Gen 2:9) in the midst of the garden, and a tree of knowledge of good and evil (וְּעֵֹ֕ץ הַדֵַּ֖עַת טֵ֣וֹב ו ר ִ֔ע; וְּא ילָן דְּא כְּלֵי פֵירוֹה י ח כְּמ ין בֵין ט ב לְּב יש, Tg. Onq. Gen 2:9). (Gen 2:9)

About this “tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9) which Targum Onqelos interprets as “a tree that, eating its fruit, makes wise between good and evil” (Tg. Onq. Gen 2:9), God sets a commandment that such knowledge or wisdom was not intended for the first human beings:

“And from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (וּמֵעִֵ֗ץ הַדַּ֣עַת טֵ֣וֹב ו ר ִ֔ע; וּמֵא ילָן דְּא כְּלֵי פֵירוֹה י ח כְּמ ין בֵין ט ב לְּב יש, Tg. Onq. Gen 2:17), you will not eat from it, since on the day you eat from it, dying you will die.” (Gen 2:17)

Nevertheless, the primordial man and woman eat its fruit, prompting God to bar their way to the tree of life:

And Yhwh God said, “If humanity has become like one of us, for knowing good and evil (ל דֵַּ֖עַת טֵ֣וֹב ו ר ָ֑ע; לְּמ ידַע ט ב וּב יש, Tg. Onq. Gen 3:22), and now, lest he stretch out his hand and take even from the tree of life (מֵעֵֵ֣ץ הַָֽחַי ִ֔ים; מֵא ילָן חַיַי א, Tg. Onq. Gen 3:22), and eat, and live forever (ו חֵַ֥י לְּע ל ָֽם; וְּיֵיחֵי לְּע לַם, Tg. Onq. Gen 3:22).” (Gen 3:22)

Yhwh God expresses a fear that they might also “live forever” (וָחִַּּ֥י לְעֹלָֽם, Gen 3:22; מַלְכִּֽי לְעָלְמִ֣ין חֱיִַּ֔י, Tg. Onq. Gen 3:22). Readers among Nebuchadnezzar’s audience (Dan 3:31), acting out of court protocol, may have previously said to him, “O king, live forever!” (מַלְכָא֙ לְעָלְמִ֣ין חֱיִַּ֔י, 2:4; מַלְכֵָ֖א לְמِיָּ֣י חֱיִֽי לְעָלָּ֔ם, 3:9). However, they hear him identify another “King” (לְמֶ֣לֶךְ שְׁמַּיַָּ֔א, Dan 4:34), whose kingdom is eternal (מַלְכוּת הּ֙ מַלְכ֣וּת עָלַַּּ֔ם, 3:33; cf. 4:31), and who truly “lives forever” (וּלְחִַּּ֥י עָלְמֵָ֖א, 4:31). At some distant point in future time, this may be a privilege shared by “the many made

61 However, see Gardner’s argument for the merging of Torah and wisdom as ways to the tree of life, in Sir 24; Prov 3:1–2, 13, 16, 18, 23–24. “The paths, then, of keeping the Torah and adherence to Wisdom converge: both lead to eternal life.” Anne E. Gardner, “The Way to Eternal Life in Dan 12:1e–2 or How to Reverse the Death Curse of Genesis 3,” Australian Biblical Review 40 (1992): 11.
62 This was a standard royal greeting formula in the ancient Near East. Collins, Daniel, 156.
righteous” (תִּפְנֵיָּה נָרִיָּה, Dan 12:3): they too will “live forever” (אֵלֶּה לְחַיֵּי עוֹלָּם, v.2). For readers in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, however, “wisdom” and “knowledge” coming from “the tree” is a reminder of the limits imposed on one’s own future, ending in eventual death, possibly delayed by practising “righteousness” and “mercy to the afflicted,” possibly hastened by “sins” and “offences” (Dan 4:24). The time of “living forever” is not yet.

**Nebuchadnezzar’s End**

Nebuchadnezzar’s first transformation, into a bestial character (Dan 4:30), involves different actors interacting with each other, such as the negotiations in God’s heavenly court over the king, expressed in a decree (vv.11–13), so that his example might provide knowledge for “the living” (v.14); Daniel, whose interpretation corrects Nebuchadnezzar’s understanding by applying the dream to him (vv.17–23), but whose advice allows a chance of delay (v.24); Nebuchadnezzar, standing proudly on the palace roof (v.26), boasting of building himself a house (v.27), a vocal mimicking of wise Solomon’s building a house for God, and rebuilt after Nebuchadnezzar. All this leads the heavenly voice to act against Nebuchadnezzar (vv.28–29).

Nebuchadnezzar’s second transformation, into a new state of knowledge (Dan 4:31–34) that recalls his and Daniel’s earlier expressions of knowledge (2:20–23, 47; 3:28, 31–33), eventuates from the passing of “seven times,” ends upon Nebuchadnezzar looking up to the heavens (4:31; reversing his previous downwards gaze, v.26), and may be influenced by Daniel’s advice to reign with “righteousness” (v.24, cf. v.34). Upon ending his story in narrated time, Nebuchadnezzar begins it again in his own time of narrating. What he communicates to his worldwide audience hides his involvement as the target of his own dream, leaving them to

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63 Portier-Young links Dan 12:3 with 9:24, 27, arguing that the *maškîlîm* will lead Israel to a covenantal renewal, atoning for sin to enter “a new age of righteousness and justice.” Portier-Young, 255.

64 Gardner identifies the “many” with Israel, about whom Solomon asks God “for ‘wisdom and knowledge’ so that he can judge them” (1 Kgs 3:8–9; 2 Chr 1:9). Gardner, “Way to Eternal Life,” 9. That Solomon asks for the ability “to discern between good and evil” (לְהָבִֵ֖ין ב ֽין־ט֣וֹב לְרָָ֑ע, 1 Kgs 3:9; שׁלְמֹסֶר ב ין טָב לְבִי, Tg. Neb. 1 Kgs 3:9) links a Solomon-like judgment to the tree of knowledge and wisdom (Gen 2:9, 17; 3:22; Tg. Onq. Gen 2:9, 17; 3:22). J. A. Davies argues that Solomon in First Kings is “an Adam figure who … typifies a fulfilment of aspirations for a restored Eden,” but is also “responsible, through his disobedience, for a second expulsion from the sanctuary-land … .” J. A. Davies, 40.

65 However, Gardner argues that in the time of Dan 12:1-2, “the ‘death pronouncements of Genesis 3 could be overturned,” through “adherence to the covenant, humility or fear of the Lord, following the path of wisdom and association with a righteous one.” Gardner, “Way to Eternal Life,” 19.
surmise that it applies to any king after Nebuchadnezzar. However, for readers who merge with the worldwide audience in a fictive experience of time, who do not hear Daniel’s interpretation but are not satisfied by Nebuchadnezzar’s, they may see “the tree” in a dual image alluding back to the primordial beginning, when one tree was accessible and provided knowledge, wisdom, but also death, and another tree inaccessible that provided eternal life.
Chapter 8: Did Nebuchadnezzar Learn Wisdom?

Over the course of his story in narrated time, Nebuchadnezzar's state of knowledge has developed from first becoming acquainted with the temple vessels and wise Judean youths who surpass all his other sages (Dan 1); through experiencing a dream, about which his sages cannot supply knowledge, except Daniel, who makes Nebuchadnezzar's future known to him (Dan 2); through his imitation of his dream by constructing a golden image, when Nebuchadnezzar displays ignorance of Torah and justice in judging Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but they attempt to correct his lack of knowledge (Dan 3); unto his dream of the tree, which leads to his end in narrated time, but from which he also acquires knowledge to begin a new narration (Dan 4). Does Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge suffice for wisdom?

Nebuchadnezzar's seizing of the vessels of the house of God is his first encounter with the wisdom of Solomon and Hiram-abi, since they are material reminders of the past in narrated time. Nebuchadnezzar's following action of taking wise, understanding, knowing youths from Jerusalem to be educated in his own court, so that they may advise him, implies his desire for Judean wisdom. However, the vessels of the house of God are also a material forecast of the narrated future, when Nebuchadnezzar's reign will be no more.

Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream is a “secret” which requires Daniel's wisdom to uncover, but also implies a prophetic role for Daniel, and Daniel’s wisdom to interpret. Daniel interprets the king’s dream as a forecast to the narrated future, when kingdoms like Nebuchadnezzar’s will be no more, making way for an eternal kingdom ruled through the practice of Torah (as implied by the image of the stone from the mountain). Daniel’s role as dream-interpreter implies his likeness to Joseph, and like Pharaoh who recognised Joseph's wisdom, Nebuchadnezzar recognises Daniel’s wisdom. However, whether Nebuchadnezzar has absorbed the wisdom implicit in Daniel’s communication of knowledge remains to be seen.

Nebuchadnezzar’s act of making an image of gold implies his similarity to Bezalel and Solomon, two wise characters who also made objects of gold. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s action also implies a likeness to disobedient Israelites who made “gods” of gold. Nebuchadnezzar's judgment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego demonstrates ignorance of
Torah and of justice, but their resistance offers Nebuchadnezzar the possibility of change through correction, especially by his witness of them in the furnace with a fourth, godlike figure.

Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream signals the nearing end of his kingdom and his story in narrated time. Nebuchadnezzar’s end comes about through the negotiations of angels in dreams, who desire an example to enlighten the living, an end made known to him by Daniel’s interpretation. Though Daniel offers hope in his advice, an ending happens suddenly upon Nebuchadnezzar’s proud boast on the rooftop of building himself a house. Nebuchadnezzar’s arrogant words mimic those of Solomon, who, in the distant past of narrated time, built a house for God. Nebuchadnezzar’s words also mimic the concern of Judeans returning from exile to rebuild the house for God, in the narrated future beyond Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. Even so, Nebuchadnezzar’s experience of losing his kingdom allows a new transformation, into knowledge expressed in words which mimic Daniel’s praise and awareness of God as the possessor of wisdom, strength, and an eternal kingdom. However, where Daniel saw wisdom in God, Nebuchadnezzar instead sees truth and justice. The knowledge that a king should be just is perhaps the closest Nebuchadnezzar comes to wisdom. However, Nebuchadnezzar’s abridged narration of his second dream leaves out the identity of the tree as himself who fell. Nebuchadnezzar’s failure to narrate leaves a gap for readers, who merge with his worldwide audience, to reinterpret the tree as either of the two from the primordial beginning, one which gave knowledge, wisdom, and death, the other eternal life.

Nebuchadnezzar’s story leaves many uncertainties for the reader. Why did God allow him to conquer Jerusalem in the first place? What was so offensive about his diet to Daniel and his friends? How well does Nebuchadnezzar know his first dream, without needing to be told by Daniel first? Can the reader safely assume that Daniel acquired all knowledge of the dream from God, without being informed of the imagery by Nebuchadnezzar beforehand? Need Nebuchadnezzar follow Daniel in identifying himself as the golden head who will be crushed? Does Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image reflect his pious devotion to his own gods, his anxious need for political control, or his arrogant hubris? Does he really change upon witnessing the
miracle in the furnace, or does he attempt to maintain control of the public memory of the past to safeguard his present? Perhaps the most significant uncertainty is the gap Nebuchadnezzar leaves in his own narration. What sense is the reader to make of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the tree, if it is divorced from Daniel’s interpretation and the king’s rooftop experience, when Nebuchadnezzar re-narrates it?

Despite these uncertainties, it is possible to read Nebuchadnezzar’s story as his attainment of wisdom. His order for wise youths to be taken from Judah, after he acquires Solomon’s temple vessels, and educated in his court, implies his desire for wisdom. Though, at first, he may not fully comprehend the implicit wisdom of his first dream—that human kingdoms not founded on the justice of Torah will eventually end—he witnesses the divine rebuff of his own injustice in the survival of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in his furnace, and—after he loses and regains his own kingdom—he will come to know the need for kings to rule with justice if their reigns are to endure. Although he presents his second dream to his audience in a manner departing from Daniel’s identification of him as the tree, Nebuchadnezzar understands and interprets his dream as a warning to any king who may “walk in pride” (Dan 4:34). If Nebuchadnezzar finally understands his dreams as signs of the divinely-imposed, temporal limits placed on unjust rulers, then he ends his story in knowing Daniel-like wisdom.

However, the reader still bears responsibility and faces other possibilities when appropriating Nebuchadnezzar’s story to acquire wisdom for themselves, in their own “fictive experience of time.” During Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, it is his “own” time, but it is up to the reader to make connections in his story which reveal that his time does not remain in his possession, neither was time Nebuchadnezzar’s “own” from the beginning. It is up to the reader to keep watch over Nebuchadnezzar’s attempts to “control” time when it is his “own.” The reading that Nebuchadnezzar gains wisdom about his limited duration in time is made possible by the reader making connections between his story and those of others. Finally, the reader has a responsibility to be vigilant when figures like Nebuchadnezzar attempt to rewrite the past flow of time in the memory they propose for the future—but this is also an opportunity to gain
wisdom from the example of their experience, when that powerful figure no longer “owns” the present.
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