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Daniel

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5

Nebuchadnezzar's Vision of a Toppled Tree and His Madness

(4:1–37)



Overview

Daniel 4 presents a complex tale of the collapse of royal hubris in the Babylonian king's own words. The style is reminiscent of the Prayer of Nabonidus, a Qumran text about King Nabonidus of Babylon falling ill for seven years and then being cured by a Judean diviner. The storyteller's voice enters only in 4:19–33, where the king cannot speak. Poetic praise of God frames the tale (Dan. 4:3, 34b–35, 37), driving home that the Most High “does what he wills with the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth” (4:35).

Along with the tale of Belshazzar's feast, Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the toppling of a fabulous giant tree and his ordeal as a wild beast are central to Daniel's Aramaic court tales. The two stories stand in the middle of the Aramaic chapters' chiasmic structure, suggesting that they are of central importance. The overthrow of Babylonia occurs at this chiasmic center (Dan. 5:30–31), reversing Israel's exile. The king's pattern of deep descent followed by rise and exaltation parallels what the exiles are experiencing. Having endured a spiritual emptying, a kenosis, they may now hope for rising and re-creation.

Translation¹

^{4:1 [3:31]} King Nebuchadnezzar² to³ all nations, ethnic groups, and folk of all demographics⁴ living throughout the earth:
“May your well-being abound!⁵

^{4:2 [3:32]} “It seems fitting to me to recount the signs and wonders⁶ that the Most High God has performed in my experience.⁷

^{4:3 [3:33]} “How great are his signs,⁸
how powerful are his wonders!
His reign is a perpetual reign.
and his dominion endures from⁹ generation to generation.

^{4:4 [1:14]} I, Nebuchadnezzar,¹⁰ was at ease in my home, luxuriating¹¹ in my palace.¹² ^{5:2} I saw a dream that was terrifying me,¹³ mental images¹⁴ as I lay on my bed; visions in my mind¹⁵ kept tormenting me. ^{6:3} So I issued a decree¹⁶ to bring into my presence all the sages of Babylon, in order that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ^{7:4} Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans, and the diviners¹⁷ were coming in, and I would relate the dream to them, but they were not making its interpretation known¹⁸ to me. ^{8:5} But finally¹⁹ Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar after the name of my god,²⁰ and in whom is a divine, otherworldly²¹ spirit;²² and I related the dream to him. ^{9:6} O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a divine, otherworldly spirit is in you and no

mysterious secret wisdom²³ can overpower²⁴ you, [consider]²⁵ the visions in my dream that I have experienced—tell me [the dream's] interpretation.

^{10[7]}“The visions [invading] my mind while I was on my bed were as follows: I was watching, and look!²⁶

“There was a tree at the center of the earth²⁷
and it was enormously tall.

^{11[8]}The tree increased in size and strength,
its height was extending into the heavens,
and its visibility²⁸ to the end²⁹ of the entire earth.³⁰

^{12[9]}Its foliage was beautiful,
its fruit plentiful,
and it yielded enough food for all.³¹

The wild animals³² were finding shelter³³ under it,³⁴
the birds of the sky were nesting in its branches,
and all living beings were living off it.

^{13[10]}“I continued looking in the visions entering my mind on my bed, and look, an otherworldly³⁵ Monitor,³⁶ descending from heaven. ^{14[11]}He was shouting out and speaking as follows:

““Chop down the tree and lop off its branches,
denude it of foliage and scatter its fruit;³⁷
Let the animals flee from under it
and the birds from its branches.

^{15[12]}Yet leave the stump³⁸ in the ground,
in fetters of iron and bronze,
in the tender grass of the field.

Let it [or rather *him*]³⁹ be drenched with the dew of heaven,
and let him share earth's vegetation with the animals as his lot.

^{16[13]}Let his mind be altered to become subhuman,⁴⁰
let an animal's mind be given to him.

And let seven periods of time⁴¹ elapse for him.

^{17[14]}This sentence is by the decree of the Monitors,
the decision⁴² is a resolution of the otherworldly ones,⁴³
in order that⁴⁴ the living might know
that the Most High is sovereign over the human realm,
and may consign it⁴⁵ to whomever he wishes,
may set over it the lowliest of human beings.”⁴⁶

^{18[15]}“This very dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its interpretation, since none of the sages of my kingdom can make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for⁴⁷ a divine, otherworldly spirit is in you.’

^{19[16]}“Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while as his thoughts kept tormenting him. The king spoke up and said, ‘Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation torment⁴⁸ you.’ Belteshazzar replied, ‘My lord, I wish the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your enemies!’ ^{20[17]}The tree that you saw, which increased in size and strength, whose height was extending into the heavens and its visibility to the end of⁴⁹ the entire earth ^{21[18]}and whose foliage was beautiful, its fruit plentiful, and which yielded enough food for all, under which the wild animals were living⁵⁰ and in whose branches the birds of the sky were nesting—^{22[19]}it is you, O king; for you are great and strong, and your majesty has intensified and extended to the heavens and your dominion to the end of the earth.

^{23[20]}“In that the king saw an otherworldly Monitor descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump in the ground in fetters of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share his lot with the wild animals until seven periods of time elapse for him,” ^{24[21]}this is the interpretation, O king; it is the decree of the Most High, which impacts my lord the king: ^{25[22]}You are going to be expelled⁵¹ from human society and will make your home with the wild animals, and you will be fed grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with heaven's dew; and seven periods of time will elapse for you, until you recognize that the Most High is sovereign over the human realm and may consign it to whomever he wishes. ^{26[23]}And in that it

was commanded to leave the tree's stump, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that Heaven is sovereign.⁵² ^{27[24]}Therefore, O king, may my counsel be pleasing to you: Break with your sins⁵³ by doing what is right⁵⁴ and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor on the chance that an extension of your serenity⁵⁵ is possible.”

^{28[25]}All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ^{29[26]}Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of Babylon's royal palace. ^{30[27]}Reflecting [on his view of the city],⁵⁶ the king said, “Is not this, none other,⁵⁷ the great Babylon, which I, and no other,⁵⁸ have built as a royal residence by my own mighty power for my own majestic glory?” ^{31[28]}The words were still in the king's mouth; a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is being declared:⁵⁹ sovereignty has departed from you! ^{32[29]}You are being expelled from being human,⁶⁰ and you will make your home with the wild animals. You will be fed grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will elapse for you until you recognize that the Most High is sovereign over the human realm and may consign it to whomever he wishes.”

^{33[30]}Immediately⁶¹ the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was finalized.⁶² He was expelled from human society and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with heaven's dew until his hair had grown [feral and resplendent] like eagles' feathers, and his nails became like birds' talons.

^{34[31]}At the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven⁶³ and my reasoning⁶⁴ began returning to me.

“I blessed the Most High,
and praised and honored the Ever-Living One.
For his dominion is a perpetual dominion,
and his reign endures from generation to generation.⁶⁵

^{35[32]}All earth's inhabitants are counted as nothing,
and he does what he wills with the host of heaven
and the inhabitants of the earth.

There is no one worthy to vouch for him⁶⁶
or say to him, ‘Don't rule that way!’⁶⁷

^{36[33]}At that time my reasoning⁶⁸ was returning to me. And my majesty and aura of brilliance⁶⁹ were returning to me for the glory of my kingdom.⁷⁰ My ministers⁷¹ and my nobles began petitioning⁷² me [at court]; I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and I became much greater than before.

^{37[34]}Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, am praising, extolling, and glorifying the King of heaven,⁷³

“for all his deeds are right,
and his ways just,
and those who live lives of arrogance⁷⁴
he can humble.”⁷⁵

Interpretation

4:1–9. The account of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream begins and ends with the king's praise of God, voiced directly in the first person (Dan. 4:1–3, 34–35, 37). The chapter's opening praise takes the literary form of an epistle to all earth's peoples. The twice-repeated language of “signs and wonders” (vv. 2, 3) echoes diction from Deuteronomy about God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage (e.g., Deut. 6:22; 29:2).

The Egyptian exodus, of course, had redounded to God's universal renown (Exod. 15:14–16; Josh. 2:9–11; 9:9–10; 1 Sam. 4:8; cf. Lev. 26:45; Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22; Ps. 98:2–3). So too, Second Isaiah had emphasized the witness of earth's nations to Israel's return from exile, establishing God's universal reputation (Isa. 43:9; 52:10; 55:5). The theme of witness reverberates as Daniel speaks anew of “signs and wonders.” The plagues and exodus were about worldwide recognition of God's reign. Just so, God's mighty acts in Dan. 4, 5, and 6 witness to God's global reign, now on the eschatological horizon.

The unnamed central theme of Daniel's Aramaic chapters (Dan. 2–7), according to Jan-Wim Wesselijs,⁷⁶ is God's sovereign prerogative over why, when, and by whose actions “exile” begins and ends. The theme is supported by the Aramaic chapters' chiastic literary shape, at the center of which stand the stories of God's raising up and redirection of two foreign kings, Nebuchadnezzar and “Darius

the Mede,” a.k.a. Cyrus the Great. (I defend the correlation of Darius the Mede and Cyrus later in treating Dan. 5 and 6.) God repurposes both kings for servanthood (Jer. 25:9; 27:6; Isa. 45:1).

After God elevates Nebuchadnezzar and Darius the Mede, each soon makes a pronouncement about the true, living God. They have each learned of God’s prerogative and the perpetuity of God’s dominion (Dan. 4:3, 34–35, 37; 6:26–27). It is truly Heaven, and only Heaven, that runs things on earth. Each king allies with God and becomes God’s instrument in the long-range plans of Heaven for God’s people and for human history.

The idea of Nebuchadnezzar’s “servanthood” before God (Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) is greatly developed in Daniel’s scroll, beginning with Dan. 2:37’s affirmation of Heaven’s support of his reign as “king of kings.” Nebuchadnezzar is a veritable new Adam, God’s viceroy on earth (2:37–38), assigned by God as the Cosmic Tree’s representative (4:21–22).⁷⁷ This positive appreciation of the king presents an interpretive challenge. For the ancient rabbis, the expression “king of kings” is a divine epithet that could not have been used by Daniel while talking to a heathen monarch. They used interpretive gymnastics to avoid allowing Nebuchadnezzar to retain the superlative title.⁷⁸

Despite the rabbis’ discomfort, we must recognize a rhetorical strategy behind the exaltation of Nebuchadnezzar. As the book’s literary structure places Nebuchadnezzar (chap. 4) and Belshazzar (chap. 5) side by side, they emerge as contrasting or mirroring binary counterparts, married opposites, a bipolar antithesis. Not only do we have parallel tales of the humbling of proud kings, but the two chapters also interlock via Dan. 5:18–21, which recounts Nebuchadnezzar’s madness. Both chapters emphasize Daniel’s guiding spirit (4:8–9, 18; 5:11–12, 14). Further, though related lists of practitioners appear elsewhere in the book, the exact sequence of terms—“magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans, and diviners”—occurs in the scroll only in 4:7[4] and 5:11. So too, the “nobles” appear first in 4:36 and then figure prominently in chap. 5 (vv. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 23). Finally, both chapters describe an instant (*bah-ša’ātā*) divine response to royal hubris (4:33[30]; 5:5).

Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar are ideal opposites (antithetically paired type-figures; William Blake’s “contraries”).⁷⁹ Daniel 4 peers into the unseen world (*rāz*, v. 9[6]) and observes the pairing’s invisible backdrop. We see a contest pitting stately tree against feral, brutal beast. We peer into heavenly places and see the noble and the bestial juxtaposed. Outside the dream, one king dies in his obstinacy (5:30), the other converts (4:34–37[31–34]; cf. 2:46–47; 3:28). Here is wisdom: Choose the noble, the stately! In Daniel such sagacity gives rise to apocalypticism. I disagree with Newsom that Dan. 4 is not eschatological.⁸⁰ The contest of the feral and the noble begs for final, end-time resolution. Such resolution comes in Dan. 7’s defeat of the bestial and brutal.⁸¹ This aligns with Qumran’s 4QInstruction, which urges its readers to align with spiritual and angelic wisdom (4Q418 81 4–5) not the carnal, bestial realm. The latter is doomed to the eternal pit (4Q416 1; 4Q418 69 ii 6, 81 1–2). Like Daniel’s scroll, 4QInstruction both urges a study of the wisdom of mystery and warns of a coming eschatological judgment.

Israel’s wisdom traditions, with which Daniel is associated, know well the fact of underlying cosmic polarities (e.g., wise/foolish, Prov. 10:1; righteous/wicked, 12:5; diligent/lazy, 12:24; living/dead, 19:16). The point of the binary language of sapiential texts is not to suggest that all experience is black and white with no gray areas of ambiguity. Rather, such language exhorts us to wise choices that are aligned with the ideal patterns and typologies subsisting in heavenly places (in the hidden wisdom of Col. 1:26–27, in the *rāz nihyeh* in texts such as Qumran’s 4QInstruction). As Matthew J. Goff puts it, God’s wisdom (the *rāz nihyeh*) underlies the paths of all life. It “has pedagogical potential because of its association with the created order” (4Q417 2 i 8–9).⁸²

As an exercise in the visual interpretation of Scripture, let us consider our paired kings of Dan. 4 and 5 in conversation with William Blake’s marvelous engraving *When the Morning Stars Sang Together*, plate 14 in his *Illustrations of the Book of Job*.⁸³ One can imagine the images of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar represented to either side of God the Creator in Blake’s engraving. Like the figure of Helios, the sun god, Daniel understands Nebuchadnezzar as a sort of sun king. In contrast, Belshazzar (his

antithesis and married opposite, strongly associated with passion and revelry) parallels Selene—goddess of the moon, to the right—and is pictured tethered to two voracious snakes. What is fascinating is the unexpectedly constructive contributions that the Belshazzar/Selene side of the polarity might supply on a wise trajectory toward human ennoblement.

Sun chariots are spiritually dangerous. Nebuchadnezzar, like Phaethon in the Greek myth, scorches the world, unable to control the sort of spiritual energy represented by Blake's four horses. Snakes represent chaos, a darker numinousness, but by shedding their skins, they symbolize new life arising out of death. Belshazzar, like the self-eating ouroboros snake,⁸⁴ brings a necessary death to Babylon that ushers in fresh new life.

Nebuchadnezzar shifts from praise to report in vv. 4–5. His initial words are loosely poetic, easing the transition from his doxology. None among his royal staff of professional diviners could help with his terrifying dream omen—none, that is, except Daniel, who arrives as the final “big gun” in a long succession of potential interpreters.⁸⁵

Daniel's guiding spirit (4:8–9; cf. Wis. 9:10) helps him see people's potential for good. He points people away from bestial urges, shows them their star in the heavens. Later, we will see Daniel's guiding spirit doing more. Chapter 6 contains inklings that Daniel stands out among his three colleagues as a model of wisdom, thanks to the spirit's activity. In Sus. 45 Daniel's God-gifted wisdom is even called a “holy spirit.” In the Joseph stories, pharaoh pronounces that there is “no one so discerning and wise” as Joseph (Gen. 41:39), simultaneously spotting the “divine spirit” *in him* (*bô*, 41:38 NASB). Daniel, like Joseph, has joined forces with a sapiential, holy spirit sent from God.

The sapiential spirit in Dan. 4:8, 9, 18 (and 5:11, 14) recalls how God grants his Servant the accompaniment of his spirit in Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 48:16b; 59:21; 61:1. This spirit of God pushes Daniel, like the Servant, to turn in love even to God's enemies (Isa. 50:6). The king's ongoing oppression makes him the enemy (see Dan. 4:27), but God's servant Daniel gives the king a listening ear. He exposes himself to reprisals with his honesty.

4:10–12. As the king recounts his dream, he switches back to poetry to relate what he has seen. Why might he make the switch? Consider that both dreams and poetry are dense, compact media of expression, thick and multidimensional. Entering such worlds is like stepping inside an Escher drawing (<https://bit.ly/AnotherWorld2>).⁸⁶ We begin to see with what William Blake called “double vision.” We see the ordinary, material aspects of the world while also perceiving the spiritual, otherworldly realities that lie beyond space-time.⁸⁷ Peering out from higher dimensions, one's vantage expands. As we interpret the king's dream, we must not reduce it to allegory. In wisdom and apocalyptic texts, the contents of visionary reality are primary phenomena. Such contents are irreducible, not subjective and derivative. Like Lady Wisdom in Prov. 8, we must understand them in a realist sense, existing “objectively.”⁸⁸ To grapple with them is to access the foundations of our world, the darkness that is not dark to God (Ps. 139:12; Dan. 2:22). Transcendence in Daniel differs from earlier biblical texts, such as those speaking of a divine council.

Near the turn of the twentieth century, Hermann Gunkel intuited the growth process of the apocalyptic imagination, the sort of imagination found in Daniel. He considered the otherworldly, iconic images and entities of mythic poetry, such as ancient poetic accounts of creation. As explained earlier, we may call the macrostructures, such as the chaos dragon (Isa. 27:1; 51:9), populating these accounts “archetypes” (Hebrew *tabnît*).⁸⁹ In Dan. 4, a central archetype is the Cosmic Tree, an unseen “backbone” of the cosmos.⁹⁰

Gunkel showed how apocalyptic thinking emerges when macrostructures of creation such as chapter 4's Cosmic Tree invade history visibly and tangibly. That is why the raging sea of Dan. 7:2 is nothing other than the “formless void” of Gen. 1:2. It is why the winds of heaven that fall upon the churning sea are the selfsame winds that swept over the face of the primordial waters in Gen. 1's vision of cosmic creation.

To use technical terms, the apocalyptic crisis entails the materialization and “eschatologizing” of

archetypes. In workaday experience, spiritual entities are unseen or, like the angel commander in the fiery furnace, they represent themselves in the world of physics only partially. For hidden archetypes to fully invade history (to “eschatologize”), physics and metaphysics need new forms. We are talking about changes like those required for herbivores to be able to lie next to lions, as in Isa. 11:6; 65:25.⁹¹ I will return to the example of emergent “vegetarian lions” in treating Dan. 6’s terrifying lions’ pit.

The gigantic tree that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream is an ideal iconic symbol both in ancient Near Eastern iconography and across human cultures and world history. Scholars refer to it as the Cosmic Tree, the *Weltbaum*, or the “sacred tree.” Since there is more than one mythological tree in the ancient world, we should distinguish the sacred, “cosmic” tree from other trees such as the Tree of Life, sometimes associated with the goddess and sacred pole known as Asherah. All the best-known mythological trees appear in the Mari Investiture Panel from the eighteenth century BCE (<https://bit.ly/4fzu6E>).

Ancient Near Eastern kings aligned themselves with the tree symbol to represent themselves as heaven-appointed guardians and mediators of cosmic order and heavenly blessings. The tree, after all, connected earth and heaven. Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer write, “In Assyrian art, the stylized tree becomes a metaphor for the kingdom or the king that guarantees the world order. In precisely the same way, Ezekiel 31:2–9 describes the Egyptian king as an august world tree in the garden of paradise . . . (cf. Dan. 4:7–9).”⁹²

For an ancient instance of the Cosmic Tree tied to the stories of Daniel, consider the tree in the form of a royal staff on the Babylonian stele picturing King Nabonidus (<https://bit.ly/Nabonidus>). Nabonidus, wearing a conical headdress and a fringed garment, appears in the stele alone and larger than life. In keeping with his association with Sin, the moon god, the crescent moon is the largest celestial image on the stele, which emphasizes Sin’s supremacy. Features of the staff identify it with the Cosmic Tree.

The fifteen or so bands on the staff, absent only in the gripping area, resemble tree knots, that is, arboreal burls. The knots, like the knobs and stylized volutes on the Mari Investiture Panel’s middle trees, symbolically align with the various planes of cosmic architecture. The tree-staff is an ensign of divine authority, a standard symbolizing the king’s place at the cosmic axis interconnecting heaven and earth. This interconnection is represented by the astronomical symbols to the top right of the tree: the star of Ishtar-Venus, the winged disc of the sun god Shamash, and the crescent of the moon god Sin.

The Cosmic Tree arguably appears in Zech. 4 as a visionary menorah.⁹³ Its seven lamps stand for celestial bodies, as seen on the Nabonidus relief, while also named specifically as reconnoitering, scouting “eyes” (Zech. 4:2, 10b; cf. 2 Chron. 16:9). Omri Shareth has recently presented strong evidence that the “eyes” are not parts of God’s body but a supernatural “secret service” within the host of heaven.⁹⁴ He cites the idiom “eyes of the king,” known from the Persian Empire.⁹⁵ Unlike literal eyes, which come in pairs and are feminine, these divine agents are masculine and comprise a group of seven.

Zechariah 4’s “eyes” relate directly to Dan. 4’s Monitor (‘îr) figures. Although the term ‘îr occurs in Scripture only in Daniel’s scroll, 2 Chron. 16:9 shows that Zechariah’s reconnoitering, scouting “eyes” act like Dan. 4’s Monitors. They ferret out a ruler’s character.⁹⁶ Additional cross-references in Job 1:7 and 2:2 confirm this. Zechariah 4’s “eyes” are God’s Monitors, “watchers,” heavenly informers.⁹⁷ What in other texts are God’s personal “eyes” (2 Chron. 16:9; Ezek. 1:18) emerge in apocalyptic texts as sentient beings. The shared reference to these beings in Zech. 4 and Dan. 4 helps assure us that Zechariah’s menorah is the Cosmic Tree, as is the tree in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

Besides its seven Monitors, the menorah reveals itself as the *Weltbaum* in the appointed defenders flanking it, a Davidic ruler and a chief priest (Zech. 4:14).⁹⁸ The pair parallel the *apkallu* (hybrid guardians) who make protective gestures toward sacred trees in Assyrian art.⁹⁹ Buttressing the idea that two Judean leaders are present here is the parallel diarchic theology in Zech. 6:13, where a messianic figure and a chief priest sit together on two thrones. When God’s reign finally appears on earth, these two leaders will see eye to eye on everything. “Perfect peace will reign between these two” (NJB).

Whatever the denotation of the term *ṣantārôt* in Zech. 4:12 (NRSVue: golden “pipes”), it sounds like

the Greek word “centaur.”¹⁰⁰ It was likely chosen for its suggestion of hybrid guardian beings (*Mischwesen*) like those in Assyrian art. If actual, literal centaurs are present in Zech. 4, as Omri Shareth has recently argued, they may function as attendants of the two olive trees, as seen in Shareth’s visual reconstruction.¹⁰¹ Perhaps the centaurs accompany and mentor the two leaders. As Shareth notes, Chiron, the wise centaur of Greek mythology, was the “benevolent tutor of heroes.”¹⁰² He mentored Jason, heir to the throne of Iolcus, King Peleus, and Peleus’s son, Achilles.

Omri Shareth defends the presence of centaurs in Zech. 4:12 quite ably, although he disagrees that human leaders figure directly in the menorah vision. The latter argument is a weak one, however, and a fifth to fourth century BCE Persian-era cylinder seal confirms the view defended here.¹⁰³ I treat the image later when interpreting Dan. 7. The Persian king lies at the image’s center, mirrored on both sides by the Cosmic Tree. Human leadership and tree strongly interconnect, as in the Nabonidus stele and in Zech. 4.

The two guardians take the form of olive trees, rich with “fresh oil” (*yīṣhār*, Zech. 4:14 BBE, YLT, LSV; cf. LXX). The term “fresh oil” (*yīṣhār*) does not reference ritual anointing but designates the flanking guardians as oil suppliers for God’s lamps. Oil for anointing people is always *šemen*, but our text is about raw oil straight from the olive trees.¹⁰⁴ Talk of “fresh oil” neither excludes nor supports interpreting the olive trees as human leaders. Rather, the text is about the blessings of fertility that flow to earth along the cosmic axis. The flanking olive trees are rich with oil embodying the axis’s vitality.

The olive trees are rooted in the same paradisiacal soil from which the *Weltbaum* draws blessed *Apsû* waters from the ground (Gen. 3:6). Life flows into the tree from heaven but also from these powerful cosmic waters, as seen in Ezek. 31:4, “Water [from the *Apsû*] flowed around [the *Weltbaum*] like a river, streaming to all the trees nearby” (NLT). Zechariah’s arboreal attendants are these “trees nearby” referenced in Ezek. 31. Only thus can we account for how rich with fresh oil the two olive trees appear.

Like all arboreal partners of the Cosmic Tree of Eden (Ezek. 31:4, 8), these two olive trees pulse with the sweet *Apsû* waters of life. In this they parallel the Assyrian *apkallu* guardians that I just mentioned, which often hold buckets (*banduddû*) of sweet *Apsû* waters to sprinkle on the Cosmic Tree using cones, purifying and sanctifying it.¹⁰⁵

In his dream in Dan. 4, Nebuchadnezzar is, himself, the Cosmic Tree. The leaders in Zech. 4 are interconnected with the world tree in a manner parallel to the tree’s nexus with the Babylonian king. This is the meaning of their fructification by the menorah and their reciprocity in supplying it with oil (v. 12). Again, we are assured by this telltale interrelation that Zech. 4 has its background in Cosmic Tree iconography.

In a sample image from Mitanni, a divine man protects a Cosmic Tree from wild, feral griffins, which are brutal, bestial forces of chaos that always threaten the cosmic order—that is, the health of the tree. Identifying traits of a Cosmic Tree include the stylized monopodial form, the fully symmetrical growth of paired branches, and the volutes ending each branch.¹⁰⁶ The Mitanni image (ca. 1350–1150 BCE) is currently in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The man in the image plays the role of “lord of the animals,” well-known from ancient Near Eastern iconography.¹⁰⁷

A major responsibility of Heaven is upholding the cosmic order by keeping the chaos represented by the monsters at bay. The gods often delegated this duty to kings.¹⁰⁸ As we saw in the Nabonidus stele, kings protected the tree but also channeled and wielded its sacred energy. Indeed, as the vicar of Heaven, a king incarnated the tree archetype. A clear example comes from a text in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta”: “My king is like a huge *meš* tree, [. . . .] son of Enlil; this tree has grown high, uniting heaven and earth; its crown reaches heaven, its trunk is set upon the earth.”¹⁰⁹

In ancient Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, kings were the delegated viceroys of divinity in the world. Genesis, in contrast, democratizes the royal role, the exercise of dominion over wild beasts and feral chaos. God installs Adam and Eve, the parents of all humankind, as royal regents to wield dominion over all wild things (Gen. 1:28). They take up the vocation of the “lord of the animals.” As Igor Bessonov deftly establishes, “The story of Adam and Ps 8, which also develops the theme of Gen 1:26, deal with

[humanity's] dominion over the natural world. Later Jewish and Christian traditions often understood Adam as the universal ruler of the entire world."¹¹⁰

Note that the terms “crowned,” “glory,” and “honor” in Ps. 8:5 directly connote humanity’s shared royal status as God’s vice-regents. As Keel and Schroer write, “The role of humanity within creation in Gen. 1:28 and Ps. 8:7 [v. 6 Eng.] is presented as a dominion established . . . by God, and to this extent people (like kings) . . . represent God.”¹¹¹ In contrast to much contemporary theology that finds Gen. 1:28 to be a threat to the well-being of nature, Sergius Bulgakov argues that as beings in the image of God, humans are responsible for bringing divine wisdom to climactic fruition in the world.¹¹² For him, it is bad theology to refuse to differentiate humanity as a species, to deny humanity’s unique status embodying both the finite and the infinite.¹¹³ Be that as it may, Dan. 4 envisions an ideal humanity as wise “lords of the animals,” protecting the vulnerable. Nebuchadnezzar fails at this task (Dan. 4:27),¹¹⁴ but Jesus insists that the Cosmic Tree will one day shelter frail fauna (Matt. 13:32).

Genesis 1:28 associates the *imago Dei* with dominion over wild beasts, parallel to the beasts (*hêwâ*) of Dan. 4:15[12], 16[13], 21[18], 23[20], 25[22], and 32[29] and Dan. 7. Nebuchadnezzar—a veritable new Adam (Dan. 2:37–38) and God’s sentinel at the Cosmic Tree (4:21–22)—should have borne the ideal *imago*, mediating wisdom. Instead, sadly, he sided with wild, feral chaos. This is confirmed in Dan. 7, where the lion that mirrors Nebuchadnezzar’s reign is, at least at first, a chaos monster specifically lacking both human posture and a human mind (7:4). The king’s commission as the *imago* collapses. He fails to live up to Zech. 4’s archetypal dream of ideal “olive trees” securing Sophia’s humanized, humane world.

Daniel 4’s focus on the Cosmic Tree echoes Scripture’s arboreal imagery for Davidic rule (see Judg. 9:7–15; 2 Kings 14:9; Isa. 2:6–21; 11:1; Jer. 21:14; 22:6–7, 23; 23:5; 33:15). Nebuchadnezzar, though no messiah, does parallel Zechariah’s messianic *šemaḥ* (Mark Boda: “Sprout”; NRSVue: “Branch”; Zech. 3:8; 6:12–14),¹¹⁵ stationed at Zech. 4’s Cosmic Tree (4:14). As subjects of Sophia, the leaders at the tree make wisdom tangible in God’s world. Beyond Zech. 4, an association of Davidic rule with choice cedars occurs in Jer. 22:6–7.¹¹⁶ So too, Ezek. 19:11–12’s arboreal representation of Judean kings uses *Weltbaum* diction straight from Ezek. 31:3, 10 (*bên ‘ăbōtîm*, through thick foliage). The kings’ royal scepters in Ezek. 19:11 recall the tree-staff of Nabonidus.

Ezekiel 17 describes Davidic royalty as topmost tree shoots and sprigs. The term “treetop” (*šammeret*) in Ezek. 17:3, 22 appears elsewhere only as the Cosmic Tree’s crown (31:3, 10). The messianic vision of Ezek. 17:22–24 could have inspired Dan. 4. Later in this commentary I defend the thesis that the “Son of Man” figure of Dan. 7:13 is none other than an incarnation of the “lord of the animals.” He is the David-tree of Ezek. 17:22–24. He subdues four beasts of chaos arising from the abyss, which parallel the feral griffins held in the hands of the divine man from Mitanni that I have just described.

4:13–18. The start of a new section of the dream is signaled by a shift in tense and a repetition of the language for reporting a dream-vision. Now we learn that the tree is not a static macrostructure. It can materialize in both supportive and condemnatory manners. There are multiple manifestations and shadow dimensions of the structures of wisdom underlying creation. In both wisdom and apocalyptic texts, the invisible realm and its contents are vibrant and dynamic. Wisdom is an active agent in Prov. 2:10, who befriends the soul. In Prov. 8–9 wisdom and folly each beckon us from outside ourselves. Don C. Collett shows that Prov. 8:30 in particular presents Wisdom as an active agent (*‘āmôn*, architect), existing alive separate from God’s person (*‘ešlô*, I was “at his side”).¹¹⁷

Daniel 4’s Cosmic Tree is susceptible to felling, as were the statues of Dan. 2–3. Some ancient traditions held that the wooden core of such metallic statues represented the Cosmic Tree (*Weltbaum*).¹¹⁸ God fells the tree, for God must humble the arrogant, as the wordplay in Dan. 4:37 drives home (cf. Ezek. 17:24). Heaven is determined to “bring low” (NRSVue, REB) the haughty, that is, to “humble” (NJPS, NIV) the proud. Excessive pride, egocentrism, and self-love directly assault God, for they obscure the *imago Dei*, which Sergius Bulgakov calls the “image of sacrificial and self-renouncing . . . love.” They contradict God’s “humility and altruism.” Bulgakov considers “self-love” an oxymoron, for

love requires a subject *and* an object. “A self-lover has no one and nothing to love.”¹¹⁹

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream sounds a great deal like Ezekiel’s metaphor of pharaoh (and Assyria) as the World Tree (Ezek. 31:1–18). There as here, after the description of the greatness and grandeur of the tree comes word of its toppling. Daniel’s interpretation of the dream, like Ezekiel’s application of his arboreal metaphor, communicates the message that pride goes before a fall. Although in pharaoh’s case this meant military defeat, for Nebuchadnezzar the threatened fall entails living as an animal. Despite the symbolic warning, Nebuchadnezzar persists in his pride and suffers for seven years.¹²⁰ (The Aramaic is ‘*idān*’, “times,” in Dan. 4:16[13], 23[20], 25[22], 32[29]; in Dan. 7:25 ‘*idān*’ means “year.”)

Nebuchadnezzar characteristically disregards the impoverished and oppressed. Like a tree canopy so high above the clouds that it cannot even see the ground, a narcissistic ruler cannot feel empathy for the vulnerable and the poor below. Verse 30 gives us a clear example of the king’s wanton self-aggrandizement. I have tried to bring out the tone of narcissism in my translation: “Is not this, none other, the great Babylon, which I, and no other, have built as a royal residence by my own mighty power?”¹²¹

The king’s words fit Bulgakov’s description of how a lust for power may approach a state of insanity. The remnants of what was once divine in a soul may be corrupted, devolving into a consuming energy focused entirely on the self, incapable of equilibrium or harmony. The king’s words, like “a peacock’s plumage,” are a mere vain, transient spectacle. They mask Nebuchadnezzar’s inner emptiness and corruption.¹²²

Keel and Schroer aptly note the positive dimensions of the posture of dominion taken by the heroic figure in the Neo-Assyrian seal A Hero Wards Off a Lion, 750–700 BCE (<https://bit.ly/3SPZ7uf>).¹²³ As in Ps. 8:6 the hero has a creature under his foot, but this entails neither brutality nor subjection. This is the protection of the weak,¹²⁴ the honest reckoning with the preoccupation of Gen. 1:28, the tension between wild/feral and human/settled. Until the eschaton, the human and the feral share a perilous proximity, with human settlement always vulnerable to collapse back into wild, bestial disorder.¹²⁵ The biblical world differs from ours in that Israelites did not hunt carnivores, but carnivores did endanger humans.

Unique to Dan. 4 within the Hebrew Bible is the appearance of preternatural beings called ‘*îrîn*’ (Monitors), whom many English translations term “holy watchers.”¹²⁶ Based on Zech. 4, we may connect them with the seven flames of temple lampstands—that is, *menorahs* (Zech. 4:10b). The menorah flames in the temple were icons of the heavenly host. The Hebrew word *mā’ôr* is used for a heavenly “light” in Gen. 1:14–16, for a star among the host of heaven. The word appears elsewhere in the Pentateuch only for a menorah’s lamps. In this context, the fact of seven lights per lampstand becomes significant. A menorah’s seven lamps represented the seven celestial lights that are visible to the naked eye—the sun, moon, and five planets (i.e., Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). According to Exodus, the lamp cups on temple lampstands like the one in Zechariah’s vision are shaped like the blossoms of almond trees (Exod. 25:33–34), an association connoting *watchfulness* (see Jer. 1:11–12’s wordplay). Jeremiah’s vision of an “almond tree” (Hebrew *šhāqēd*) is all about God’s *šhōqēd* (watching) to make sure that the divine promises materialize on schedule.

God’s watching eyes in texts such as Jer. 1:12; 2 Chron. 16:9; and Ezek. 1:18 become sentient beings, separate from God, in apocalyptic literature. These beings have wills that may oppose God. In the Aramaic texts of Enoch at Qumran, the ‘*îrîn*’ characteristically operate as conscious, personal, autonomous entities. They are “fallen” beings who fight God (see 4Q201, 4Q202, 4Q203). In 4Q202 col. 4 (1 En. 10.8–12) Gabriel moves against them. There are also good ‘*îrîn*’ in Enoch, such as the angelic ‘*îr*’ Raphael. Raphael is “the Monitor and the Holy One” in 4Q206, frag. 1 (1 En. 22.3–7).

A Sumerian letter-prayer of King Sin-iddinam of Larsa¹²⁷ reveals parallels to Nebuchadnezzar’s experience. Just as a Monitor now threatens Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:14), a “young man” appears to Sin-iddinam in a dream to “cast a spell.” The king sees the menacing lad at his feet, then standing at his head, and then the spell is cast. Both the King of Larsa and the King of Babylonia find that their dream

experiences turn out to be more than just dreams. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, the figure in his dream (Dan. 4:13, 17, 23, 26) reappears twelve months later outside his head (4:31). In the case of Sin-iddinam, the curse within his dream wreaks havoc in his physical body upon waking.

Gabriel too appears both in dreams (Dan. 8:16) and in waking reality (9:21). Noticing this phenomenon as it recurs in Daniel's scroll will be important for seeing how the book's apocalypticism pushes toward a resolution of all metaphysical dualisms. Daniel anticipates an interpenetration of the waking/sensory and the immaterial/heavenly.

These observations impel us to reconsider the meaning of the dualism of mantic, sagacious, and apocalyptic perception. Our ancient texts reveal human minds awakening to find the actors of their dreams penetrating the world of waking, consensus reality.

The movement of the Monitors between the two worlds is striking. It both assures us that these entities are objectively real, not allegorical symbols, and it contradicts any strict metaphysical dualism. It even points ahead to dualism's apocalyptic denouement. As Daniel's apocalyptic vision develops, the realms of Heaven and Earth increasingly merge. Episcopalians anticipate this merger each year at the Easter Vigil, proclaiming "How blessed . . . when earth and heaven are joined."¹²⁸

The four plural imperative commands in v. 14 address an unspecified group of actors. Elsewhere in Scripture, in other instantiations of the Cosmic Tree (e.g., Ezek. 31:3), terrestrial agents hew the mighty giant down. In Dan. 4, however, only a group of immaterial Monitors (v. 17 clarifies their plurality) fit well as primary actors. After all, it is the king's intangible mind that is "felled," not any material object or social entity. The harder one reflects on the dynamics of Dan. 4, the more the material and the spiritual interpenetrate. Here mind and matter cannot be essentially and finally distinct. This is a crucial point about biblical apocalypticism. Its aim is to overcome dualism, an aim that accords with Sophia's guiding force in what Bulgakov calls the world's "becoming."¹²⁹

It would be a grave misperception to think of the Monitors as subjective agents confined to Nebuchadnezzar's head. Ultimately all of God's host form *one* body, no matter that for now there are both material and immaterial members. A later development of this idea appears in the Qumran texts (1QM, 1QS, 1QSa 1.1, and 4Q554–55), according to which no border divides the pious members of the Dead Sea community on earth and truly heavenly figures. Seeds of this way of thinking will appear later in Daniel.

By the middle of Dan. 4:15, details emerge about how the immaterial Cosmic Tree will constellate in waking experience. It will instantiate itself in the experience of the king, whose mind begins as human but devolves into something feral and instinct-driven. The language of "fetters of iron and bronze" around the stump may allude to the king's initial confinement in restraints upon losing his reason. Arthur Boyd's 1973 painting *Chained Figure and Bent Tree* illustrates this reading.¹³⁰ Verse 15b, however, makes apparent the king's eventual release from confinement into the wild.

As of v. 28[25] the Cosmic Tree has constellated in the king's waking experience. The verb *maṭā'* means "reached,"¹³¹ fitting the idea of something immaterial and spiritual extending out from the Unseen Realm to impact an individual's mind, that of Nebuchadnezzar. In Boyd's painting, the tree holds the king captive as a prisoner. In v. 31[28], the voice of a Monitor falls (*nəpal*; see NJPS) from heaven (*šamayin*), initiating the incarceration. The rhetoric subordinates all terrestrial existence to a heavenly foundation where God rules "the host of heaven" and from where God projects God's rule (Dan. 4:35). Pause briefly to recall the key role of an immaterial realm of heaven in Daniel.

In apocalyptic literature, "heaven" is *not* a substitute term for God. Rather, repeat revelations of *šamayin* mean to insist that the reign of God *comes from somewhere*, where it has already organized itself, as the scroll's complex angelology attests. If the view of Omri Shareth, discussed above, is correct, the heavenly host even includes centaurs!¹³² Daniel is especially concerned with this unseen realm, using terms for heaven four times as much as elsewhere in the Bible. The word *šamayin* occurs in the scroll at least twenty-seven times.

Like the Cosmic Tree, the Monitor's voice constellates, that is, it breaks into the sublunary world. It is triggered by Nebuchadnezzar's hubris (v. 30). A phenomenon of triggering is apparent from the Aramaic

syntax, which juxtaposes two clauses (with no conjunction!). A clause of royal self-congratulation evokes its antithesis, a clause of Monitor materialization. The judgment is a clear reflex of the royal words of hubris.¹³³

Verses 13–14, 23, 25, 32 firmly establish a *sophianic* correlation: Rule like a feral, brutal beast and doom yourself to bestial degradation. In the dream the Monitor proclaims, “Let him share his lot with the wild animals [*ḥêwat bārā’*]” (4:23[20]). This happens beginning with v. 32[29]. The Monitor declares to the king, “You are being expelled from being human.” “You will make your home with the wild animals [*ḥêwat bārā’*].” The language is a performative utterance,¹³⁴ as in the REB rendering: “You are [hereby] banished from human society; you are to live with the wild beasts.”

Nebuchadnezzar’s experience of boanthropy here in chapter 4 will later resonate strongly with the bestial characteristics of the monster empires in Daniel’s apocalyptic vision in chap. 7. The description of removing eagle parts from the lion in 7:4 echoes the language of 4:33. So too, the human mind given to the lion correlates with the return of the king’s reason in the present chapter. The leopard-monster of 7:6 also has bird features like those of Nebuchadnezzar in 4:33. The term “claw” in our text appears elsewhere in the MT only in describing the visionary fourth beast in Dan. 7:19.

As I will note in treating Dan. 7, the Aramaic phrase “wild animal” (*ḥêwat bārā’*) used in describing Nebuchadnezzar’s degradation (Dan. 4:23, 25, 32) connotes feral, instinctual violence. It recalls the “wild animals” (Hebrew *ḥayyat ḥaśśādeh*) in texts like Hosea 13:7–8. In fact, the four monsters of chaos in Dan. 7 are an innerbiblical echo of Hosea 13’s four murderous beasts: the lion, the bear, the leopard, and a final, indeterminate *ḥayyat ḥaśśādeh*, who rips Israel’s chest open for its whelps to eat. I follow the suggested emendation in n. c–c of the NJPS version, reading the final bicolon after the athnach as follows: “The dogs shall devour them / a wild beast shall cleave them.” The Septuagint reads, “Whelps of the thicket will devour them there; wild animals of the field will tear them apart.” The “whelps” may be the beast’s offspring.

Such connections suggest that the cloud-riding figure of Dan. 7 is a true “lord of the animals.” He removes dominion from *ḥayyat ḥaśśādeh*, substituting a rule of wisdom and care. Intriguingly, the figure is both celestial (a cloud rider) and terrestrial (note the term *bar ’ēnāš*). Is he not the “creaturely god” described by Bulgakov, the ideal *imago*?

A horrifyingly raw survivalist spirit dominates the zoological realm in Daniel’s scroll, but Daniel never strips untamed nature of all God-inspired wisdom. Indeed, the scroll seems to affirm a peculiarly *creaturely* wisdom when Dan. 7:13 presents God’s ideal *imago Dei* as an *embodied* figure. In view of Daniel, Syriac Christianity’s ascetic practices rightly leverage *embodied physicality* in forming humanity in the *imago Dei*.

Ephrem the Syrian particularly embraced human physicality as a crucial tool of self-emptying for manifesting the image of God. In his theological practice, one portrays the *imago* in one’s eyes by letting charity shine there. One imprints the *imago* on one’s hands by using them to give alms. Susan Ashbrook Harvey writes that in this spirituality, “The body is the place in which salvation happens and the instrument by which it is done. . . . It provides the . . . expression by which the salvific process takes place.”¹³⁵

Multitudes found healing through pilgrimages to Simeon the Stylite’s pillar, where he embraced hunger, sickness, and despair to overcome them all. Simeon’s mortifications engaged their ills and won the battle between chaos and health.¹³⁶ Syrian ascetics viewed King Nebuchadnezzar’s ordeal as akin to Simeon’s asceticism. They saw both embodied experiences as models for emulating Adam and Eve’s pre-fall lifestyle.

Like the king during his seven years in the wild, the first couple “lived naked without shame,” “ate the food of the earth without toil,” and “lived in harmony among the animals.”¹³⁷ Adam and Eve enjoyed simplicity, selfless dependence, and a natural state of being in harmony with God’s creation, free from the toil and resentment that came after their expulsion from Eden. Emulating them, the ascetics made their bodies into “grazers” as a rule of life that attuned them to Eden’s lifestyle of wisdom. Sergius Bulgakov explains why we discover hidden wisdom of God in the animals’ realm. The “animal-

corporeal” realm lacks the personal self-consciousness and corruptible freedom of the human experience, so divine wisdom (Lady Sophia) “burns clearly” among animals, who depend on Sophia, “the inner voice of life.” Sophia is “calling creatures and leading them on the pathways of their life.”¹³⁸

Here is a constructive element in Nebuchadnezzar’s wilderness exile. The trial ennobles the king through an embodied encounter with Eden’s verdure. Note the four references to the dew of heaven drenching the king (Dan. 4:15, 23, 25, 33; see also 5:21).¹³⁹ In Hosea 14:5–6, God’s dew stimulates growth, creating a forest of oaks. In Isa. 26:19 a radiant dew brings the dead to life.¹⁴⁰ The Enoch tradition at Qumran associates dew with a wind from the South bringing earth well-being and renewal of life.¹⁴¹

4:19–27. No sooner has the king related the dream than Daniel comprehends its significance. The reader is struck with the sage’s empathy for the king. As noted earlier, Daniel’s interactions with a spirit of wisdom from God forms him in the image of an Isaian Servant, an other-centered soul with a compassionate heart (Isa. 50:4). The Servant suffers and in the process is gifted with the capacity to relate to others with care and love.

Daniel’s interpretation of the dream interrelates its iconic images and the invisible lures and spiritual molds that are impacting the king. The dream is no coded message. An informed reading does not reify the dream’s images, flattening them into cypher or allegory. As Daniel hears and interprets the dream, its contents expand our understanding of irreducible unseen patterns that underlie and shape experience and events. Archetypes do not cause events directly but are immaterial molds to which experience may conform. Such macroscopic patterns may lure and tempt us. The shadow side of an invisible spirit, a *Geist*, is at play, a mold of which Scripture is aware. Earlier in history, Assyria took up the role of a cedar of Eden (Ezek. 31:3–9) and found itself felled and its boughs fallen.

The Cosmic Tree of the king’s dream is autonomous, unfolding on its own steam, and its history of instantiations documents a persistent shadow side that must be reckoned with. The tree manifestly represents vibrant and active spiritual and heavenly content that impacts conscious experience for good or for ill on relevant, focused occasions. What constellates in experience is that which circumstances and choices catalyze and summon.

A rigid determinism is not compatible with biblical thinking, and it is not present in Dan. 4. If we are to accept the witness of Dan. 4 and its presuppositions, however, humanity’s free choices are neither random nor indifferent. As Sergius Bulgakov explains, humans actualize freedom “within a determinate given.”¹⁴² Nebuchadnezzar’s freedom is exercised within the “given” of the cosmic-tree macrostructure, his conformity to the contours of that structure, his relationship with God, and his openness to the warnings of the Monitors. Thus “freedom lets itself be convinced and compelled.”¹⁴³

A shared structure circumscribes human freedoms, of which the king dreams. The structure allows for human agency. In fact, it creates its possibility. Thus, v. 27 leaves Nebuchadnezzar with an authentic choice. He still has the chance to break with his pride. It is not too late to show mercy to the poor. Thus, Bernardo Kastrup is right to state: “To speak of irreducible macroscopic patterns is to think neither in terms of direct causality nor . . . strict necessity.”¹⁴⁴ Consider how Proverbs envisions a limited, fixed number of paths possible to traverse in life. Its wise maxims allow us to value the good paths hardwired into reality, but Lady Wisdom does not force them on us. This is no peripheral point in Israel’s wisdom thinking. The path metaphor and its assumption of a “moral reality” inherent in God’s creation figures prominently in Scripture’s wisdom texts.¹⁴⁵

4:28–33. The section that follows fills out chapter 4’s developing picture of how God is confronting and redirecting Nebuchadnezzar. First, “a decree of the Most High” (v. 24) draws attention to itself in a dream. Then, when the dreaming subject ignores the warning, a dynamic spiritual mold breaks through into consciousness and possesses him. He ends up spending a period of waking experience living out the dream that he had previously viewed but subsequently repressed. In the first instance, the king has agency in responding to the archetype (v. 27), but in the second, he is at its mercy (v. 33).

As mentioned earlier, the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness reverberates with an ancient tradition

(attested in the Nabonidus Chronicle from Babylon and in the Haran inscriptions) that Nabonidus, last king of Babylon, was erratic, even insane. Among the Dead Sea fragments is a prayer of Nabonidus (4QPrNab) much like the prayer attributed to Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4:34–37, which also speaks of seven years of sickness involving some sort of inflammation (cf. 4:16[13], 23[20], 25[22], 32[29]). Perhaps one should imagine inflammations leading to animal-like contortions of the body.

Nebuchadnezzar's willful repression of his dream's warning is so outrageous as to be comedic: "Is not this, none other, the great Babylon, which I, and no other, have built as a royal residence by my own mighty power for my own majestic glory?" (4:30[27]). Most translations tone down the sheer arrogance, but Edward Cook notes the narcissism the syntax conveys.¹⁴⁶ As Ethan Knudson demonstrates, the outrageous wording of the boasts in Dan. 4:30–31 plainly prefigures the more sinister blasphemies of Dan. 7's end-time tyrant.¹⁴⁷ Nebuchadnezzar's "mouth" (*pum*) is full of hubris (4:31[28]); he claims Babylon to be "boastworthy" (*rab*, 4:30[27]); and the prideful "word" (*millâ*) is still in his mouth when judgment falls (4:31[28]). Just so, Dan. 7's end-time tyrant's "mouth" (*pum*) will "speak" (*mālal*) "boastfully" (*rab*) according to v. 8.

Let us pause to consider the seriousness with which the book of Daniel takes Nebuchadnezzar's base, instinctual drives as he devolves into boanthropy—primitive drives related to thirst, hunger, sexuality, and territoriality. When higher level "human" functioning deteriorates, as in some cases of Alzheimer's disease, primitive urges and drives can take over. Patients (though still human, of course) may steal food and hit others.

Bestial urges are present in all humans, not just patients with brain disorders. Biologically healthy celebrities regularly give in to them. Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, and Ghislaine Maxwell all surrendered to animalistic drives and committed horrendous immoral acts. Nebuchadnezzar differs from them in his repentance and rehabilitation.

Forsaking the *imago Dei*, Nebuchadnezzar's mind unravels, and he becomes an unreflective, amoral, wild beast. I wish to avoid using popular language of a "reptilian" brain, since current neuroscience rejects it. The human brain did not evolve by adding an extra "layer" atop a reptile brain. Nonetheless, moral reasoning, existential pondering, and reflective awareness of transcendental experience are still today largely seen as unique to humans, though certain animals exhibit behaviors that suggest parallels, and artificial intelligence systems simulate aspects of these processes without experiencing them in the same way.¹⁴⁸ By v. 32 the text's rhetoric emphasizes human civility and status as what the king is losing (see the translation note on 4:32 above). Then v. 33 clarifies that there are attendant physical changes. Nebuchadnezzar is not just living in the wild but has grown hair like eagle's feathers and nails like bird's claws. The king's radical new beastliness parallels that of Enkidu, the wild man of Mesopotamian lore.¹⁴⁹

Verses 34 and 36 specify that the alteration of Nebuchadnezzar's *lābab* (v. 16[13], "heart," NJB) entails a loss of human reasoning (*manda'*). The Aramaic term *lābab* (v. 16[13]) has a broad range of senses and by itself could possibly just mean that the king will have to live as humbly as an animal (see Dan. 5:21). One's reasoning (*manda'*, v. 34[31]), however, involves advanced mentation, including spiritual reflections and insights. Thus in Dan. 2:21 and 5:12 *manda'* means the kind of wisdom that God gives to sages. It entails a *rūaḥ yattīr*, a superhuman spirit, and when used with *śoklātānū* (as in 5:12), an aptitude for insight.

Nebuchadnezzar's poor choices in Dan. 4 mean that he egregiously overshoots an archetypal ideal of ruling his empire as God's delegated viceroy. The twin archetypes of a royal *imago Dei* and a "lord of the animals" are aspirations and spiritual lures. Like a guiding star in the heavens, they beckon toward a future that is not immediately tangible. Nebuchadnezzar is a type of Pinocchio, lured to ennoblement but finding the journey both rocky and circuitous. This sort of journey is inherently nonlinear. By nature, it entails circling around an ideal, spiraling gradually into a comprehension of truth.

In the pursuit of a starry, celestial ideal, the initial phase of the trek is often chaos and ruin. What is worse, when the initial setback is overcome and a new level of stability is achieved, this too is inevitably but an incomplete and provisional accomplishment. One of the underlying reasons why some individuals

do not grow as God's image is that the path of transformation is marked by intermittent plateaus and setbacks, recurring periods of stagnation or catastrophe. Lack of awareness of this pattern is downright detrimental; pressing forward only to collapse in pursuit of a high ideal leads many to give up totally.

4:34–37. The phrase “At the end of that period” (v. 34; cf. v. 29) introduces a new section with a new time frame. The verse's syntax emphasizes “I, Nebuchadnezzar”; he is speaking again in the first person.¹⁵⁰ Until now, the reader has not heard from Nebuchadnezzar directly since the time that Daniel began the interpretation of his dream (v. 19[16]). As the king begins to speak, we are invited to savor a poetic interlude framed by a rhetorical device of resumptive repetition, in which the start of v. 36 repeats diction from v. 34a. In newfound reverence, the king confesses in poetry that God's transcendent, hidden reign represents the only truly substantial, everlasting sovereignty:

I blessed the Most High,
and praised and honored the Ever-Living One.
For his dominion is a perpetual dominion,
and his reign endures from generation to generation.
All earth's inhabitants are counted as nothing,
and he does what he wills with the host of heaven
and the inhabitants of the earth.
There is no one worthy to vouch for him
or say to him, “Don't rule that way!” (Dan. 4:34–35)

Verse 35 represents a succinct articulation of the apocalyptic cosmology of Daniel's book. In intricate poetic parallelism, it outlines the holism of reality's two layers, “heaven” and “earth,” under God's sovereignty. The second poetic colon names the foundational plane of spirit as “heaven,”¹⁵¹ which is a transcendental realm unto itself occupied by a “host.” God is not identified with this world (as if God were Being itself [mysticism or pantheism]) but rules a multitudinous heavenly host as its creator.

Thus, heaven is a “made thing,” with dynamic actors and a chain of command. A “decree of the Most High” (v. 24[21]) passes down the command structure and becomes a “decree of the Monitors” (v. 17[14]). Heaven is thus its own organized, tiered, transcendental space where God's reign is being staged. The Monitors operate in the nexus where dimensions of transcendence meet dimensions of immanence. Their role presupposes a tiered cosmos with multiple dimensions beyond those imagined in most ancient cosmologies. It is thus insufficient to harmonize Daniel's ontic perspective with the ancient Near Eastern imagery of a divine council where God sounds out policy.¹⁵²

It is in heaven, for now, that God's reign organizes itself (the Lord is “God in heaven,” Dan. 2:28; “Lord of heaven,” 5:23; “the God of heaven,” 2:18, 19, 37, 44). For now, God rules from heaven (4:37). Nebuchadnezzar remains king on earth (see also 2:37–38). At the eschaton, though, as we saw in Dan. 2:44, heaven projects novel realities into the world. What will it be like to experience those realities?

The beginnings of an answer appear in Zech. 4:10b–14, the early apocalyptic prophecy noted above, in which the Cosmic Tree materializes on earth. There is a notable interconnectedness of earth, God, and God's host. Arrayed about the “Lord” (4:14), God's “olive trees” become fertile. Receiving God's vitality, they offer their oil back to God (4:12). The Monitors (4:10b) range throughout the terrestrial sphere.

Also presaging the coming new world, Nebuchadnezzar gains an “aura of brilliance” as he finds his dominion restored to him (Dan. 4:36; see the second translation note on 4:36[33]). The term “aura” (*zîw*) in v. 36 recalls the irradiated face of Moses when he brings down from Mount Sinai the tablets of God's reign over Israel. Targum Onkelos applies the same Aramaic term *zîw* to Moses's visage in Exod. 34:29–30 and Deut. 34:7.

As Nebuchadnezzar emerges from his trial of feral boanthropy, he reminds us of the transformed Moses—altered, terrifying! In Exod. 34:29 MT Moses's face is glowing and/or “horned” (*qāran*; see Aquila and the Vulgate). The iconography of Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals pictures the *melammu*, a parallel to Moses's glow, as radiating hornlike beams.¹⁵³ Just as Moses showed something like glowing animal horns, Nebuchadnezzar has an “aura” (*zîw*) in Dan. 4:36[33] suggestive of a synthesis of frail

humanity, volatile animality, and holy divinity. Perhaps he has sublated aspects of his descent into life as a wild beast. Be that as it may, his appearance is changed, transformed, beyond a normal, banal, human semblance. In this he reminds the reader of the Isaian Servant: “Marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, . . . beyond that of mortals” (Isa. 52:14).

Theological Reflections

Most of us have heard people recount dreams of finding themselves in situations far ahead on the horizon of time. We may have listened as a woman tells us a dream of visiting the exact house that she will later purchase. We may have overheard siblings sharing nearly identical dreams of their parents’ woes, even when the parents’ struggles are hidden. Sometimes family members or close friends dream the same dream.

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is not without parallel. Three sisters once independently suffered years of frightening dreams about their mother.¹⁵⁴ As they slept, she appeared to them as a dangerous animal. This confounded the girls, since the woman was sane and loving. Years later the dreams’ uncanny truth revealed itself. The mother began crawling about and imitating the grunting of a pig, the barking of a dog, and the growling of a bear. Her illness did not make her a monster, of course, but her daughters’ dreams did seem to anticipate her visible new disability. How similar to Dan. 4!

Were the sisters’ dreams subtly presaging their mother’s impending disability? It is a live possibility, especially since any observable clues in the mother’s behavior at the time of the dreams went unnoted and unrecognized. If present at all, such indications were entirely off the grid of conscious, reflective awareness. Such a possibility might seem extraordinary, and some of my readers will surely be skeptical, but it is not without precedent both inside and outside of Scripture. In Dan. 4, Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel understand certain dreams to offer images and insights imbued with meanings that transcend waking awareness—meanings that resonate deeply when later events unfold.

We see phenomena parallel to the sisters’ dreams in certain urgent drives, intuitive perceptions, and premonitions that sometimes seem to carry a prescient quality. Seminarians whom I teach experience “calls,” which they insist are independent of their own wills (see Jer. 20:9). Certainly, Scripture holds that real prophets experience visions that are *not* “of their own minds” (Jer. 14:14; 23:16; see also Ezek. 13:3).

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, of course, more is at stake than a personal premonition. His dream includes material of wide, communal relevance. Far from something individual and subjective, the king’s dream traces neither to his undigested supper nor to the surfacing of suppressed experiences. He senses autonomous spiritual and transcendental processes, unfolding either on their own or at God’s direction.

Does the dream’s revelation that God controls political affairs (Dan. 4:25) convey an idea of predestination? No, “determinism” and “predestination” are misleading terms in the present context. The impingement neither of base, instinctual drives nor of divine, spiritual prerogatives abrogates the conscious soul’s responsibility for ethics and virtue.

Thus, it is quite significant that, at the point when Nebuchadnezzar brings down judgment upon himself, v. 31 shifts to language that sounds reactive and responsive (“voice” rather than “Monitor,” and “fall” rather than “descend”). The rhetoric puts the focus on Nebuchadnezzar’s agency. He has evoked a spiritual pattern subsisting in latency. Its activation appears largely as a reflex of his stubbornness. Daniel’s scroll ends with notes echoing these truths, assuming human agency, affirming human responsibility. It calls us to study the visions (12:4), be faithful (12:10), and wait patiently (12:12).

Prior to the rise of apocalypticism, Israelite wisdom traditions reflected on the interplay of human choice and cosmic ordering. The sages knew that God “hardwired” both cosmos and history with a latent patterning that leans toward justice and frustrates hubris, though not in any simple, mechanistic fashion. Only with all else being equal (*ceteris paribus*) does it do its work clearly. Here, they anticipated Immanuel Kant’s conviction about a “moral substratum of the physical world,” about all sublunary experience “existing within a larger, moral reality that permeates the physical world yet goes beyond

it.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, “the very stones in the walls cry out” against evildoers, “and the beams in the ceilings echo the complaint” (Hab. 2:11 NLT). As Andrew Errington puts it, wisdom thinking presupposes the possibility of an *objectively* well-lived life, a “*genuinely* successful life.”¹⁵⁶ In Proverbs, Michael Baris argues, the mainstay theme is “the fundamental structure of Wisdom/*logos* as moral substratum of the world.”¹⁵⁷

The sacred, holy tree is aglow with luminous splendor, an “aura of brilliance” (Dan. 4:36). Such splendor may lure and overwhelm the psyche. In this manner “arboreal” lusts enticed and dragged down King Nebuchadnezzar. In earlier examining Blake’s engraving *When the Morning Stars Sang Together*, I noted the danger associated with spiritual lures, referencing the luminous sun chariot in the work. As part of a series of artworks on Nebuchadnezzar, Arthur Boyd depicts the king falling to the earth in flames, having succumbed to this exact danger. He appears in the guise of a fiery meteor heading for a waterfall in the Australian bush (<https://bit.ly/KingOnFire>). The oil painting is titled *Nebuchadnezzar on Fire Falling over a Waterfall* (ca. 1967). Surprisingly, later paintings in the series reveal an eventual positive outcome of the fiery plummet. Before surfacing victorious with a fish, the kingfisher bird dives deep under water, its plumage afire.

Daniel 4 centers on the problematic of sovereignty. What constitutes perfect sovereignty and ideal earthly dominion? How should we best understand and perhaps aspire to an idyllic life lived under the sacred tree’s sheltering boughs (4:12)? Daniel 7 contrasts wild beasts, some of which devour and destroy, and the figure “like a human being.” The figure models dominion based on virtue rather than survival of the fittest.

Please do not misunderstand. Chapter 4 is not about dehumanizing the mentally ill. Remember, Nebuchadnezzar was acting like a savage, instinct-driven beast even before his mental break. His judgment fits his crimes (Wis. 11:16). Neither does the text ultimately disparage life among animals. As the Syrian ascetics noted, living with God’s creatures was not a mere condemnation but a sort of antidote to egoistic grandiosity.

Should we not on principle be suspicious of any theology of human “dominion”? Might Gen. 1, from which Daniel adapts the motif of dominion, not be susceptible to a critique of speciesism? There is space here for only two brief responses to this concern. First, recall the relevance of the Neo-Assyrian seal A Hero Wards Off a Lion, treated above. I argued for a positive reading of the hero’s “dominion,” his having a creature beneath his foot (as in Ps. 8:6). The scene has nothing to do with oppressing the creature. Rather the hero takes responsibility for shielding the helpless from the powerful.

Second, modern readers need to remember that the human realm and the feral realm were closely proximate in the biblical world, with the former much more vulnerable than in modern life. It could collapse at the hands of the latter. Some readers will know something of the dark, shadow side of feral animals’ drives. Even adorable seals have a shadow life as sexually aggressive predators, even against immature females, and as ruthless persecutors of any offspring perceived as weak. So too, young chickens are known to peck mercilessly at any siblings who are disabled or deformed. They pull out their feathers and wound them with their beaks. They will even postpone eating their own food to allow more time for tormenting their victims.

In humans, the spirit of the *imago Dei* ideally counters all instinctual hungers and lusts that drive such behaviors. It opens the soul up to antithetic spiritual lures, lures toward what is higher than self-interest.¹⁵⁸ In other words, the Spirit’s pull counters powerful and compelling drives toward satisfying physical needs and compulsions.

Daniel’s scroll envisions a coming eschatological dominion, oriented on transcendental ideals sourced from above. It will be those people who are lured from above onto a journey into God’s image who receive the reign of God. We must, however, expect the path toward the image of God to be rocky and circuitous. We must also understand the *imago Dei* as paradoxical, entailing an embrace of frailty (Dan. 4:17, 27, 37).

A second of Arthur Boyd’s paintings in his Nebuchadnezzar series offers us a visual meditation on these insights. Titled *Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of the Tree* (1969), it is included in an exhibition named

“Back from the Brink” on the site VCS, *Visual Commentary on Scripture* (<https://thevcs.org/back-brink>). Within the painting series, the work represents the rebirth or resurrection of Nebuchadnezzar as his reason returns. As he emerges from kenosis, his body pushes an ideal sacred tree up to the horizon line. It has been a rough and winding road, but the king and the tree are now in perfect sync.

The insight that God’s image lures us to embrace frailty and reverence is suggested as well.¹⁵⁹ God’s turning Nebuchadnezzar into an “animal” was an antidote to extreme human arrogance, a reminder of his creatureliness and the interconnectedness and splendor of God’s creation, of which Nebuchadnezzar is just a tiny part. As with Isaiah’s Servant in Isa. 53:10, the king returns from the brink to see his seed sprout. So too, he is now one of the fruitful olive trees synched with the sacred tree in Zech. 4:11, 14.

At the end of his dream (Dan. 4:17[14]), Nebuchadnezzar hears the Monitor proclaim a paradoxical inversion of normal politics that resonates strongly with Ps. 8. In addition, the proclamation employs the term *’ēnāš* twice, which further connects the verse to Ps. 8, whose text maintains that God’s ideal people are an *imago Dei* by their humbly reflecting Yhwh’s glory in their utter frailty (Ps. 8:5[6]). (Psalm 8 uses an expanded poetic vocabulary to reflect lyrically on Gen. 1.) The use of *’ānāšīm*, a Hebrew form¹⁶⁰ meaning “human beings,” in Dan. 4:17 broadens the interpretive context by inviting a dialogue with Hebrew texts such as Job 37:24, which interconnect recognition of frailty and reverence.

The superiority of frailty and reverence to bestial sensuality is a theme in Albrecht Dürer’s late fifteenth-century woodcut *The Penance of St. John Chrysostom*, illustrating a medieval legend (<https://bit.ly/3SiMtTh>). In the legend, John impregnates a woman and then hurls her off a cliff in a gesture of remorse. Since he has acted like a wild beast, the bestial “penance” of Nebuchadnezzar materializes as John’s fate. He appears on all fours in the center-left background. Blake later depicts Nebuchadnezzar in this pose.¹⁶¹

Of theological and spiritual interest in the woodcut is the contrast between John’s bestial state and the mother’s direction of selfless love to her defenseless child in the middle foreground. In yet another echo of Isa. 53:10, the woman has returned from the dead to see her seed flourish in loving purity. God has not allowed her suffering and death at the hands of her male “lover” to be the last word. Her deeply human self-giving manifestly trumps the feral, self-centered consciousness visited upon John in the legend.

In the story of Daniel in the lions’ pit, we will see the ordeal of John’s lover reenacted in our hero’s near martyrdom. Just as God raises the selfless mother to see her offspring again, Daniel rises again from his deathly descent. His “offspring” are all who embrace his wise spirit of servanthood. As mentioned earlier, a kingfisher emerges from underwater with a fish in its beak. Just so, imagine Daniel emerging from the lions’ pit with a symbolic fish in the “beak” of his soul, symbolizing the transformation of his soul. He catches his “fish” by diving deep into thick sapiential darkness to encounter and sublimate his creatureliness and his connectedness with all that is earthbound and humble. Such reflections as these recall the necessary role that Blake allots to Selene in his powerful engraving *When the Morning Stars Sang Together*, examined earlier.

¹ In the translation that follows, the superscript verse numbers in square brackets indicate the numbering of the MT.

² Daniel 3:31–33 in the MT (see the NJPS) is Dan. 4:1–3 in most English translations (e.g., NRSVue, NIV). Catholic Bibles (e.g., NABRE, NJB) number these verses Dan. 3:98–100.

³ A formulaic epistolary introduction in Aramaic (see Ezra 7:12; Muraoka, *Reader*, 50).

⁴ For this rhetoric, see Dan. 3:4 and the second translation note on 3:29.

⁵ The imperfect verb has volitional nuance here (see Van Pelt, *BBA*, 96 §14.5, 181n53; J. Cook, *BHHB*, 193). For extrabiblical parallels, see Schwiderski, *Handbuch*, 330.

⁶ Rhetoric of “signs” and “wonders” occurs in 4:2–3 and 6:27, where kings proclaim God’s power to all peoples. Kottsieper (*TDOT Aramaic* 16:99, *t* and *tmh*) notes that in Daniel, as in the Pentateuch, signs and wonders lead all peoples to acknowledge God.

⁷ Against Rosenthal (§83) and the NABRE, Muraoka (*Reader*, 50) understands *’immi* to mean “experienced and witnessed by me” (as in Ps. 86:17; cf. Judg. 6:17). See the NJB.

⁸ An exclamation, not a real question. For the diction, see Van Pelt, *BBA*, 58–59 §9.6.1; Callahan, *BABI*, 31; Muraoka, *Reader*, 50–51; J. Cook, *BHHB*, 194; Rosenthal, §92.

- ⁹ On the temporal use of *ʿim*, see Rosenthal, §83; J. Cook, *BHHB*, 194, 224.
- ¹⁰ The OG adds at the start of v. 4: “In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, he said . . .” This links the text with Babylon’s destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.
- ¹¹ “In full leaf” (*HALOT* 2:1983, *raʿānan*), “fresh, luxuriant, lush, leafy” (Mommer, *TDOT* 13:558, *rʿnn*). The word choice anticipates the upcoming cosmic-tree symbolism.
- ¹² The tale will double back to the locale in vv. 29–30; see Newsom and Breed, *Daniel*, 135.
- ¹³ See Callahan, *BABI*, 86, 143. The verb form indicates ongoing, transitive past action.
- ¹⁴ The term *harhōr* points to contents encountered within a “dream” (a mental experience during sleep). The term “fantasy” (NRSVue, REB) is misleading, but “apparition” (Muraoka, *Reader*, 51) fits, if understood as an “immaterial appearance” (*OED* def. 9a).
- ¹⁵ As the plural form *ḥezwê rēʾš* implies, the reference is to a dream’s revelatory *contents* (see the phrasing of 4:9). As in 2:28, these are not “visions of my head” (ESV, cf. NET) if that means a subjective construct. As v. 9 shows, these visions *invade* a person’s mind.
- ¹⁶ See the first translation note on Dan. 3:29.
- ¹⁷ Daniel 5:11 has the same string of experts. On “diviners,” see the third translation note on Dan. 2:27.
- ¹⁸ The OG omits the verses, likely viewing Daniel as too important (2:48; 4:9[6]) not to be consulted first. See Van der Kooij, “Compositions and Additions,” 435.
- ¹⁹ The phrase *ʿad ʾohōrēn* occurs in Egyptian Aramaic texts with the sense “at last.”
- ²⁰ If the Akkadian name is *balāṣu-uṣur*, “[May a god] guard his life,” the god is Marduk, also called Bel. The MT vocalization warps the name to sound like “Bel.” If the name is *Bēlēt-šarra-uṣur*, “may Belet protect the king,” the deity is Marduk’s consort, Belet.
- ²¹ See Kornfeld, *TDOT* 12:522, *qdš*. “Otherness” is inaccessible to the regular senses.
- ²² See Dan. 4:18; 5:11, 14; 6:3; cf. Exod. 31:3; 35:31. Is the spirit an impersonal quality or power (see CEV)? Susanna 45 (Theod.) suggests otherwise. Here Daniel’s “holy spirit” is God’s indwelling interface for acting on the inner will, as in Wis. 1:6; 7:27b; 9:11.
- ²³ On the Persian loanword *rāz* and apocalypticism, see the third translation note on Dan. 2:18. Robert Calvin traces the language of hidden wisdom in Col. 1:26–27 to the apocalyptic concept of the *rāz nihyeh* in texts such as ours (see esp. Qumran’s 4QInstruction). See R. Calvin, *New Existence*, 230.
- ²⁴ The verb *ʾānas* suggests negative pressure. Some otherworldly mysteries are not merely difficult (NRSV, NIV) or baffling (NJPS) but seize and haunt (*First Testament*: “defeat”; WEB: “trouble”). At Qumran, 4Q531 17.9 speaks of a dream that “oppressed” (*ʾns*) a giant, robbing him of sleep. See Kottsieper, *TDOT Aramaic* 16:54, *ʾns*.
- ²⁵ The NET follows a suggestion in the *BHS* apparatus and emends the noun *ḥēzû* (vision) to *ḥāzî*, the imperative of *ḥāzā(h)*, “consider.” However, the text of the MT as it stands, if taken as a *casus pendens* construction, may be read without emendation as having precisely this meaning. For detailed discussion, see J. Cook, *BHHB*, 201.
- ²⁶ This is a generic formula for beginning a dream-vision report; see Dan. 2:31; 7:2.
- ²⁷ The diction of v. 11[8] signals that *ʾāraʿ* means “earth,” rather than simply “land.”
- ²⁸ I follow most English translations in rendering *ḥāzôt* as “visibility.” Another possible rendering, following Theod., is “canopy” (see *BARH*, 20) or “dome” (*HALOT* 2:1873, *ḥāzôt* #2).
- ²⁹ The term *sōp* appears in Late Biblical Hebrew as an Aramaism; see Hurvitz, *Concise Lexicon*, 188. The noun occurs in the plural in some Qumran texts, referring to earth’s farthest horizons (see 11Q10 10.1).
- ³⁰ Against the NET, the diction (with *kōl*) supports a global interpretation (REB: “earth’s farthest bounds”; TEB: “seen by everyone in the world”). See J. Cook, *BHHB*, 203.
- ³¹ The Cosmic Tree nourishes life *in toto* (see Rosenthal, §96; Muraoka, *Reader*, 52).
- ³² See the first translation note on Dan. 2:38; and *BARH*, 20. Like the parallel Hebrew phrase *behēmat haššādeh*, the singular is collective, “wild animals” (e.g., 1 Sam. 17:44 NIV, CEB, NLT).
- ³³ Each poetic colon of the tricolon has an imperfect verb describing past ongoing action.
- ³⁴ A prepositional phrase referencing the tree begins each colon of the three-part line. As J. Cook (*BHHB*, 2030) notes, the syntax underscores the singular role of the tree.
- ³⁵ The waw on *wāqqaddiš* forms a hendiadys (Muraoka, *Reader*, 52). The being is preternatural (see the third and fourth translation notes on Dan. 4:8[5]) but not automatically good. Thus at Qumran in 4Q201, God comes to earth to punish the *ʾîrîn* (Monitors, Oculi).
- ³⁶ The term *ʾîr* (NRSVue: “watcher”) occurs only in Dan. 4:13, 17, 23, in each case connected with holiness (i.e., preternatural otherness) and thus normally inaccessible to conscious rumination on sensory information (i.e., we normally find them only in dreams or visions). What appears in prophetic literature as God’s semiautonomous “eyes” or *Oculi* (Ezek. 1:18; Zech. 4:10) emerges in apocalyptic literature like Daniel as fully autonomous and sentient. As God’s monitors, roving “eyes” reveal themselves as conscious.
- ³⁷ At Qumran (1QapGen 13.17), the two verbs describe a wind stripping a visionary tree.
- ³⁸ The phrase *ʾiqqar šoršôhî* (*HALOT* 2:1953, *ʾiqqar*, “main root, [tap-root]”) refers to the tip of the rootstock or “deepest root” (CEB). The Septuagint reads, “Spare one of its roots.”
- ³⁹ The Aramaic here, and in what follows, may equally refer to the Cosmic Tree (“it,” grammatically masculine, CEB, NJB, NET) or to the king (“him,” NRSVue, NJPS; “this man,” GNT). The Cosmic Tree begins to fade from view here, although the CEB maintains the image of a sentient tree throughout the poem.
- ⁴⁰ A regression away from what is *ēnāš* (human; also in Dan. 5:21) is presupposed in 7:4. The new *ēnāš* figure in 7:13, ruling in God’s image (Gen. 1:26–28), emerges to overcome the human propensity for such regression, perfecting the ideal of Dan. 2:38; 4:12.
- ⁴¹ The sentence of seven periods (or “seasons” NJPS; on *ʾiddân*, see *BARH*, 21), probably seven years (NABRE, GNT), also appears in

vv. 23, 25, 32. “Seven” symbolizes full completeness (Dan. 3:19) and later in the book becomes linked with history’s final tempestuous (but necessary) ordeal before God’s reign finally begins (e.g., 9:27).

⁴² The Aramaic diction implies heavenly deliberation over a question or issue to be decided (see Muraoka, *Reader*, 52) resulting in a “verdict” (NJPS, NIV, NJB). The preternatural announcers of the verdict have consulted the Most High (4:24).

⁴³ As in v. 13, the *’rîn* (Monitors) and the *qaddîšîn* (NRSV: “holy ones”) are the same.

⁴⁴ The use of *’ad* (2:30 has *’al*) represents assimilation to *dibrat*; see Rosenthal, §86.

⁴⁵ The imperfect signals characteristic action, here in the present (Callahan, *BABI*, 143).

⁴⁶ “Lowliest” reflects a superlative expression (J. Cook, *BHHB*, 209). The term *’ēnāš* (used twice) and the theme of God’s inversion of normal politics resonate with Ps. 8. The use of *’ānāšîm*, a Hebrew form (see Callahan, *BABI*, 33n32; Rosenthal, §42; Muraoka, *Reader*, 52), broadens the interpretive context by inviting a dialogue with Hebrew texts like Job 37:24, which stress human frailty and a correlative reverence. The Hebrew singular form *’ēnôš* is the ketiv in Dan. 4:16[13], with its connotations of human vulnerability (see Job 4:17; 7:1; 14:19; 25:6; 28:13; 33:12; Ps. 103:15; Isa. 51:12).

⁴⁷ On the causal use of the particle *dî*, see Van Pelt, *BBA*, 184n20; Rosenthal, §86.

⁴⁸ The verb is singular, probably viewing the compound subject as a unified totality.

⁴⁹ The MT lacks “the end of,” a part of this diction earlier in v. 11[8]. This is the meaning, even if v. 20 is not emended (see NRSV; note the change in the NRSVue).

⁵⁰ Verse 12[9] had the more poetic phrasing “were finding shelter.”

⁵¹ A new verb appears in the chapter. The impersonal plural participle (“[they’re] going to expel”) must be rendered in English as a passive. See Muraoka, *Reader*, 30 §17.6.

⁵² The final clause echoes the end of v. 17[14] above, but with “Heaven” replacing “the Most High.” The change is not out of a desire to avoid direct mention of God (a common view since the 19th-century work of Gustaf Dalman). Rather, rhetorical artistry employs metonymic references, driving home the reality of an otherworldly expanse (“heaven”; see Dan. 4:2 [3:32], 8[5], 13[10], 17[14]). See Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 27–30. In the apocalyptic theology of Daniel, the reign of God *comes from somewhere*.

⁵³ The diction reflects Aramaic legal idiom, where a debtor may “tear loose” a promissory note from his creditor’s clutches. See Gzella, *TDOT Aramaic* 16:612, *prq*.

⁵⁴ The Greek text specifies the meaning as *eleos*, “alms.” The giving of alms (see, e.g., Muraoka, *Reader*, 53) is not the focus here, however, since the narrowing to that meaning is first perceptible only in 4Q198 1.1 (Tob. 14:2). See Gzella, *TDOT Aramaic* 16:634, *šdq*.

⁵⁵ The noun echoes the cognate adjective *šālēh* in v. 4[1], and we are brought full circle.

⁵⁶ The syntax signals that the king reflects on (NASB 1995) or comments on (ISV) his view (NLT).

⁵⁷ Contra Newsom and Breed (*Daniel*, 126–27), a rhetorical question (see Callahan, *BABI*, 31). The emphatic syntax is comparable to Dan. 2:38 (Muraoka, *Reader*, 29, 53 §17.2).

⁵⁸ The pronoun adds emphasis; see E. Cook, *Biblical Aramaic*, 220.

⁵⁹ The plural participle with indefinite subject has a passive sense (Callahan, *BABI*, 105).

⁶⁰ Compare v. 25[22], but the word order here emphasizes the loss of humanity.

⁶¹ See Dan. 3:6, 15 and 5:5, where the king’s verbiage, unlike here, is just hyperbole.

⁶² The verb *sûp* appeared in 2:44, where it referenced God’s eradication of all opposition.

⁶³ A gesture of dependence, acknowledging God’s sovereignty (Pss. 25:15; 121:1; 123:1–2; 141:8; Jon. 2:4, 7; Sus. 9), but one that an animal can make. On “heaven” as more than a mere surrogate term for “God,” see the translation note above on v. 26[23].

⁶⁴ More so than earlier terms in the chapter, *manda’* (reasoning) indicates advanced human capacities of mind. In Dan. 2:21 and 5:12 it is the wisdom that God gives to sages.

⁶⁵ The diction of the final bicolon mirrors Dan. 4:3 [3:33] above. A toggling of the synonyms *reign* and *dominion* creates a chiasm marking the pericope’s outer boundaries.

⁶⁶ Most English translations understand the verb to refer to “warding off God’s hand,” but Lipiński cogently argues that we have an Aramaic idiom involving a gesture of oath-keeping here (*TDOT Aramaic* 16:409, *mḥ’/mḥ*). The diction is much older than Daniel’s composition, suggesting the hymnic language here comes from older texts.

⁶⁷ The Aramaic reads literally: “. . . or say to him, ‘What are You doing?’” CEB: “What do you think you are doing?” REB: “No one can . . . question what he does.” See Job 36:23.

⁶⁸ The phrasing around *manda’* (reasoning) parallels that in v. 34[31].

⁶⁹ The term appeared in Dan. 2:31 of the dazzling aura of Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue. A good example of *zîw* as a royal characteristic is Adad-Nirari III’s boasting of vanquishing the Hittites when “(my) fearful splendor overwhelmed them.” “Saba’a Stela (2.114E),” trans. K. Lawson Younger Jr. (*COS*, vol. 2, p. 275, lines 11b–20).

⁷⁰ The vocabulary echoes v. 30[27]; thus the king’s “majesty” (*ḥādar*) and “glory” (*yəqār*) were not evils in and of themselves but became so only when they led to a royal self-conceit that did not redound to the honor of God, who grants a viceroy majesty (e.g., Isa. 11:10).

⁷¹ As in Dan. 3:27, the phrase encompasses all royal advisers (NIV) and courtiers (REB).

⁷² See the use of *bā’ā’* in Dan. 2:16, 49. REB and *HALOT* (2:1836, *b’*, [Pael]) suggest “sought audience.”

⁷³ The unusual phrase “King of heaven” may represent Nebuchadnezzar’s customary polytheistic diction (see Jer. 7:18; 44:17–19, 25). At the same time, however, it reinforces other language in Dan. 4 (vv. 26[23], 34[31], 35[32]) visualizing heaven as a complex realm where an incorporeal host is arrayed and from which God’s end-time reign descends (*nəpal*, v. 31[28]).

⁷⁴ “Arrogance” (*gēwā*) entails breaching constraints on ambition, forsaking charity, and rejecting reliance on God (Prov. 16:18–19). Its antithesis is reverence (Prov. 8:13; 15:33).

⁷⁵ Wisdom traditions celebrate God’s abasement of the proud wicked (Prov. 11:2; 28:23; Job 40:11–12). Proverbs 29:23 uses wordplay to express the inverse correlation of pride and honor: Pride brings humiliation, but humility leads to honor. A spatial metaphor (lofty vs. earthbound) is in play: Arrogance brings one *low*, but the *lowly* are poised to gain honor.

⁷⁶ Wesselius, “Literary Nature,” 270–72.

⁷⁷ The correlation between Nebuchadnezzar and Adam was obvious even to ancient commentators. Thus Ephrem the Syrian states that “in this king did God depict Adam.” Ephrem interprets the king’s return to his throne as parallel to humanity’s promised return to Eden. For discussion, see Bessonov, “Image of the New Adam,” 8–9.

⁷⁸ See Henze, *Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar*, 112.

⁷⁹ Blake expresses these contraries in his poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

⁸⁰ Newsom and Breed (*Daniel*, 135) claim that Dan. 4 is about authorizing a “Gentile imperium.”

⁸¹ As Bessonov (“Image of the New Adam,” 10) puts it, “Underlying the structure of Dan 4 and 7 is the constantly recurring antithesis of human and animal. . . . Both Dan 7 and 4 have a structural analogy with the story of Adam.” See also Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 90–91.

⁸² Goff, *4QInstruction*, 15.

⁸³ The full engraving is available on both Wikimedia Commons and Google Arts and Culture (<https://bit.ly/MorningStars>). On Blake’s affinity for Job, see Higgs, *William Blake*, 312–14; Vernon, *Awake!*, chap. 11, “No Other Christianity.”

⁸⁴ We observed the ouroboros snake on the alchemical crucible referenced in chap. 3. Also of interest is Guido Cagnacci’s 17th-century painting *Allegory of Life*, which depicts a woman staring up at the mythological tail-eating snake (<https://bit.ly/Cagnacci>).

⁸⁵ For this interpretation, see the translation notes on 4:7–8 above.

⁸⁶ *Another World II*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Another_World_\(M._C._Escher\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Another_World_(M._C._Escher)).

⁸⁷ For William Blake, objects in the physical world have deeper, spiritual realities subsisting behind them. See Higgs, *William Blake*, 21–23. Vernon (*Awake!*, 107) gives the examples of seeing a nymph in a flower bloom and seeing God’s light in the sun.

⁸⁸ M. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 356. Fox writes that Wisdom is not a subjective construct but has objective reality distinct from both God and the world. She always keeps one foot in the “extra-temporal, extra-mundane” realm.

⁸⁹ On *tabnît*, see Exod. 25:9. Sergius Bulgakov (*Bride of the Lamb*, 55) notes that the Bible and the church knew of archetypes long before C. G. Jung and M. Eliade. In patristic and scholastic thought, the idea of creation’s roots in Wisdom boils down to the idea of ideal “prototypes.”

⁹⁰ The Cosmic Tree, the archetypal axis of the cosmos, is a recurring mythological motif in various cultures and world religions. Significant examples follow immediately below.

⁹¹ Why does an impossible scenario involving a lion surviving on straw resonate with so many readers, become popular as art (<https://bit.ly/3AmYijH>), and feel “right”? Bernardo Kastrup explains how the archetype is always there, “diffused in the interstices of egoic awareness” (*Why Materialism Is Baloney*, 122). Bulgakov (*Bride of the Lamb*, 178) similarly speaks of “secret recesses” of the human mind where are found “palpable revelations” of “the prototypes of the world.”

⁹² Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 44.

⁹³ The lampstand and flanking olive trees in the vision of Zech. 4 are notoriously difficult to envision. For one representation, see the image on the eighteenth-century Hanukkah Lamp from Italy available through Google Arts and Culture (<https://bit.ly/Zech-4>).

⁹⁴ Shareth, “Centaur and the Sacred Tree,” 19–20.

⁹⁵ Oppenheim, “Eyes of the Lord,” 176–80; Niditch, *Symbolic Vision*, 111–13; Ristau, *Reconstructing Jerusalem*, 155.

⁹⁶ While the subordinate infinitive clause focuses on benevolence, the larger context shows that the reconnaissance is two-edged (as in Ps. 37:37–38).

⁹⁷ See Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old*, 31.

⁹⁸ I follow a common scholarly view in thus identifying the defenders as Davidic ruler and chief priest. For bibliography, see Boda, *Zechariah*, 314n129. See also Van der Woude, “Zion as Primeval Stone,” 239–40. Against my view, Boda identifies the defenders as prophets. Certainly, Boda (*Zechariah*, 316) is correct that royal anointing is absent from Zech. 4:14; the oil in the text merely fuels the lampstand.

⁹⁹ For an example, see the Cosmic Tree with protecting *apkallu* from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Iraq, 883–858 BCE, <https://bit.ly/apkallu>.

¹⁰⁰ For this proposal, backed by extensive philological discussion, see Rogland, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, 146–47.

¹⁰¹ Shareth, “Centaur and the Sacred Tree.” The reconstruction is on p. 14.

¹⁰² Shareth, “Centaur and the Sacred Tree,” 18.

¹⁰³ See Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 45, fig. 35.

¹⁰⁴ For discussion and bibliography, see Rogland, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, on Zech. 4:14.

¹⁰⁵ For discussion, see Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 159–66 (chap. 2).

¹⁰⁶ See <https://amzn.to/49Hqj5a>.

¹⁰⁷ For discussion of the “lord of the animals,” see Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 44, 166.

¹⁰⁸ Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 161.

¹⁰⁹ “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” ETCSL 1.8.2.3, lines 519–24.

¹¹⁰ Bessonov, “Image of the New Adam,” 13.

¹¹¹ Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 143.

¹¹² Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 84–85.

¹¹³ Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 144; Bessonov, “Image of the New Adam,” 7–9. Note esp. the verbal resonance of Gen. 3:18 and Dan. 4:32. In all of Scripture, only Adam and Nebuchadnezzar are condemned to eat “grass.”

¹¹⁵ Boda, *Zechariah*, 249–50, esp. n. j.

¹¹⁶ For discussion, see Boda, *Zechariah*, 644.

¹¹⁷ Collett, *Figural Reading*, 94. Collett rightly insists that Wisdom has objective “ontological status.” Note her double claim of ‘ehye(h) in Prov. 8:30 (Collett, *Figural Reading*, 97–98).

¹¹⁸ See Hurowitz, “Mesopotamian God-Image”; Hurowitz, “What Goes In Is What Comes Out”; Dietrich, “Der Werkstoff wird Gott.”

¹¹⁹ Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 156.

¹²⁰ See Hartman and Di Lella, *Book of Daniel*, 172.

¹²¹ See Muraoka, *Reader*, 29, 53 §17.2; J. Cook, *BHHB*, 220–21.

¹²² See Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 158.

¹²³ The rendering linked here represents an imaginative visualization. For a simple line-drawing of the seal impression, see, e.g., Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 145, fig. 144.

¹²⁴ Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 144–45.

¹²⁵ See Lev. 26:6; Ezek. 5:17; 14:15, 21; 33:27; 34:5, 8, 25, 28. Ezekiel’s sources in the Holiness School paralleled enemy armies and wild predators as twin threats (see Lev. 26:6). This does not mean that God leaves no place for wild animals (see Lev. 25:7).

¹²⁶ Theodotion simply transliterates ‘îr into Greek.

¹²⁷ “Letter-Prayer of King Sin-Iddinam to Nin-Isina (1.164),” trans. William W. Hallo (*COS*, vol. 1, pp. 532–34).

¹²⁸ “Easter Vigil,” Book of Common Prayer, 287.

¹²⁹ Sophianicity is the guiding force in the “world process” (*Bride of the Lamb*, 223).

¹³⁰ See <https://bit.ly/3swwoRC>. The artwork’s human figure, Boyd himself, takes up the posture of Nebuchadnezzar.

¹³¹ See J. Cook, *BHHB*, 219.

¹³² See Shareth, “Centaur and the Sacred Tree”; and my comments on 4:10–12.

¹³³ See J. Cook, *BHHB*, 221.

¹³⁴ The plural participle with indefinite subject has a passive sense that can be employed in performative utterances. See E. Cook, *Biblical Aramaic*, 194 §316c.

¹³⁵ See Harvey, “Embodiment in Time and Eternity,” 117–18.

¹³⁶ Harvey, “Embodiment in Time and Eternity,” 117.

¹³⁷ Harvey, “Embodiment in Time and Eternity,” 119. See also Wimbrush, *Ascetic Behavior*, 66–80; G. Anderson, “Original Form.”

¹³⁸ Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 131–32.

¹³⁹ Gzella (*TDOT Aramaic* 16:787, *šmyn*) describes the phrase “dew of heaven” as a “positively connoted term” about God’s nourishing creation. Verse 15[12] has two references to the verdancy of creation’s third day (Gen. 1:11–12). The second of these (marked d-d in *BHS*) echoes the creation account and sounds Hebrew. It inspired the Aramaic sounding “tender grass of the field” (marked b-b in *BHS*) as a gloss.

¹⁴⁰ See also Pss. 110:3; 133:3; KTU 1.19 I 38–46; 2 Bar. 29.7; 73.2; 3 Bar. 6.11; 10.9; Pirke Rabbi Eliezer 34; Yalqut Shimoni II, 988.

¹⁴¹ Another wind from the southeast seems to bring a negative, destructive dew. See García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 449.

¹⁴² Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 145.

¹⁴³ Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 145.

¹⁴⁴ See Kastrup, *Decoding Jung’s Metaphysics*, 53.

¹⁴⁵ See Errington, *Every Good Path*, 116.

¹⁴⁶ The pronoun adds emphasis; see E. Cook, *Biblical Aramaic*, 220 §356.

¹⁴⁷ Knudson, “Rereading (Re)writing,” 44–45.

¹⁴⁸ What qualifies as moral reasoning, existential reflection, or reflective awareness is subject to interpretation and can differ across academic fields.

¹⁴⁹ The bestial otherness of Enkidu is captured in the 2019 wooden sculpture *Espejo*, by Pablo Moya (<https://bit.ly/PabloMoya>). As the Spanish title, which means “mirror,” suggests, Moya wants viewers to recognize Enkidu’s animal instincts as part of our own identities.

¹⁵⁰ Muraoka (*Reader*, 54) aptly identifies the *casus pendens* position of the phrase.

¹⁵¹ For discussion, see Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 47; Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 80; Simon, *Heaven in the Christian Tradition*, 52–85.

¹⁵² For this commonly expressed but erroneous view, see, e.g., J. Cook, *BHHB*, 216; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel*, 140; J. Collins, *Daniel*, 228.

¹⁵³ The seals can depict the *melammu* as a circle of triangles topped with protruding spheres. Thus a lapis lazuli seal from the eighth to seventh centuries BCE shows a divine symbol emitting a six-point *melammu* (<https://bit.ly/conoidseal>). For more examples, see Oshima and Gruseke, “She Walks in Beauty,” 47, 59, 64–75; Jarrard, “Double Entendre,” 395, 403–4, figs. 1–3, and the bibliography cited there. For the

notion of the *melammu* as solid horns of light, see S. Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face.”

154 For the account, see Jung, *Psychology and Education*, 44–45 §107.

155 On Kant’s theology here, see Palmquist, “Kant’s Moral Panentheism,” 17, 20.

156 Errington, *Every Good Path*, 17, italics original.

157 Baris, “Iniquities Ensnare the Wicked,” 136; quoted in Errington, *Every Good Path*, 16.

158 The human soul is a sort of battleground where instinct and spirit pull at us from opposite directions. See Kastrup, *Decoding Jung’s Metaphysics*, 12–15.

159 Evens, “Balance of Powers.”

160 See Callahan, *BABI*, 33n32; Rosenthal, §42; Muraoka, *Reader*, 52.

161 See <https://thevcs.org/back-brink?first=2956#balance-powers>.

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