Worship in the Book of Daniel

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Worship is a dominant theme in the book of Daniel and lies at its very center. History and apocalyptics, stories and prophecy are intimately interlinked; therefore, what happened in the courts of Babylon and Medo-Persia locally (chaps. 1, 3–6) is magnified on the universal scale in prophecies (chaps. 2, 7–12) in a type and antitype relationship. The God of Daniel is always on the side of the oppressed until the end of time.

Worship is a dominant theme in the book of Daniel and lies at its very center. Together with the concept of judgment, it plays a crucial role in the unfolding drama of God’s people. There is an intense battle between true and false worship presented in this apocalyptic document. The issue is brought up in different stories describing events that happened in the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires, and is mentioned as well as one of the main problems during the time of the dominancy of the little horn and at the end of the world history.

The Great Controversy arises over the issue of worship (Davidson 2000:106–108), and the conflict between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan, will culminate with an intense struggle in this domain (Rev. 13–17; see Paulien 1994:122 and R. Stefanovic 2002:421–424). The heart of worship deals with a genuine relationship with God, not rituals; and in a broader sense, it includes the whole lifestyle
(see Deut. 10:12, 13; Isa. 1:11–17; 58:3–14; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:12–15, 21–24; Mic. 6:6–8; Zech. 7:3, 8–10; 8:16–18; Rom. 12:1).³ Etymologically, our English word “worship” derives from the Old English weordhscipe, meaning “assigning worthiness to God,” and thus it refers to giving God the recognition He deserves, acknowledging His worth for what He is and does.⁴ This ascribing worth to God calls for a proper response to Him that is expressed in one’s ethical behavior in everyday decisions.

History and apocalyptics, stories and prophecy, are intimately interlinked in Daniel. History is like a micro-cosmos, and eschatology is like a macro-cosmos; therefore, what happened in the courts of Babylon and Medo-Persia locally (chaps. 1, 3–6) is magnified on the universal scale in prophecies (chaps. 2, 7–12) in a type and antitype relationship. In the book of Daniel things are painted around worship, where true and false attitudes stand in an antagonistic position to each other. Only worship related to the God of truth is acceptable.

### Divine Judgment upon His People and Results of Right Decisions (Chapter 1)

The book of Daniel opens with an allusion to the issue of worship by stating that the Lord or Master (Heb. Adonay) delivered His household (literally gave King Jehoiakim) into the hand of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. It would have been disturbing for the ancient believer to read that God’s people were defeated by the Babylonian king, because that would mean that the Babylonian god Marduk was more powerful than Israel’s Yahweh. This is why the prophet Daniel explicitly articulates that it was the Lord who gave His people to their enemy (Dan. 1:2). Even though the specific reason for this tragedy is not supplied, Daniel provides the rationale for it later in the book. In the prayer recorded in chapter 9, which is marked by the ending period of the 70 years of Babylonian captivity, he declares: “We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets. . . . we have sinned against you” (Dan. 9:5, 6, 11), and he asks the merciful and faithful God of the covenant to intervene in favor of His people (see Dan. 9:17–19). Daniel’s deep confession explains that the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem came as the result of disobedience and rebellion. Other prophets speak about the same catastrophe of Jerusalem and emphatically state that what had happened was the consequence of idolatry and other sins. The prophet Ezekiel
expresses it very eloquently: “Son of man, do you see what they are doing—the utterly detestable things the house of Israel is doing here, things that will drive me far from my sanctuary” (Ezek. 8:6; see also Jer. 7:2–20; 10:1–10; Ezek. 8:7–18; 20:30–38; 22:1–16; Zech. 7:11–14). It is important to note that Ezra uses in Aramaic the same phraseology as Daniel when stating that God “delivered [literally gave] His people into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,” and explains why it happened: “Because our fathers angered the God of heaven” (Ezra 5:12). False worship was a great offence in the eyes of God. His people perverted genuine worship, and thus their relationship with God was lost. God removed His presence as a demonstration of judgment.

It does not come as a surprise that God’s people were attracted to pagan worship when one considers the sinfulness of human nature. Namely, in idolatry people can manipulate their gods, create them to their own image, design them to fit their imagination and lust, buy their favor according to the principle do ut des (“I give in order that you give”), and secure salvation by performing certain external rituals. In pagan cults things were visible, mechanical, appealing to the carnal senses. Morality was base and low. Gods were fabricated according to the desire of people; they were actually the projection of their fears and hopes.

Chapter 1 ends with the victory of the true God in Babylon, in the heart of the Babylonian territory, where according to the pagan understanding Marduk should reign. Daniel and his three friends are given positions of honor above all the other wise men (Dan. 1:19, 20) because they decided to be faithful to their living God.

**God of History, Daniel, and Nebuchadnezzar (Chapter 2)**

A prayer is mentioned for the first time in Chapter 2. Daniel and his three friends ask their God urgently for help. They “pleaded for mercy” (Dan. 2:19), because King Nebuchadnezzar wants to know his dream and its interpretation without disclosing the content to those who had to tell and interpret the dream (Dan. 2:9). The astrologers rightly answer: “There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! . . . No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men” (Dan. 2:10, 11). Daniel confirms that the special knowledge does not come from his wisdom but from a God in heaven (Dan. 2:27–30; compare Dan. 1:17). After God reveals the matter to Daniel, he praises the Lord (Dan. 2:19). The original Aramaic text underlines that Daniel “blessed [barich] the God of heaven,” i.e., he was grateful. When God responds to their prayers, Daniel expresses his deep thankfulness in magnificent praises recorded in Daniel 2:20–23.
After Daniel explains the meaning of the dream to the king, Nebuchadnezzar superbly honors him. The king “fell prostrate [nepal ʿal ʿanphohi] before Daniel and paid him honor [segid]\(^\text{10}\) and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him” (Dan. 2:46). This is the only place in the book where God’s faithful servant is given such homage, and Daniel does not refuse this exaltation. Why?

Nebuchadnezzar recognizes Daniel to be a representative of his God. While the king falls before Daniel, he is actually paying honor to Daniel’s God who is, in the vocabulary of the monarch, “The God of gods, the Lord of kings, and Revealer of mysteries” (Dan. 2:47). The account makes it clear that even the mighty king can clearly recognize the superiority of the living God. The story underlines the difference between the true and false religion. However, it is important to note that Nebuchadnezzar does not accept (at least not yet) this great God as his personal God. The true God remains for him a distant God, He is the God of Daniel, but not his own God. (See especially his statement about “your God” in Daniel 2:47a.)

**Faithfulness of Three Friends in the Midst of Crisis (Chapter 3)**

On the threat of death, King Nebuchadnezzar orders all the different groups of his Babylonian empire’s officials\(^\text{11}\) to worship the golden statue he had erected (Dan. 3:5, 6).\(^\text{12}\) This royal legislative degree was accompanied with music,\(^\text{13}\) and the civil power of the land was to enforce it. Once again the issue that sprang up in this situation was worship.\(^\text{14}\)

How far could Daniel’s friends go to comply with the king’s command? They decide to go to the designated place, the plains of Dura, but they do not bow down to pay homage (npl and sgd; Dan. 3:15) to the king’s image or serve (plch)\(^\text{15}\) his gods. Because they dared to disobey, the king’s officials report the rebellious act of these foreigners to the king. The Aramaic text colorfully describes the attitude of hostility toward them in terms of “cannibalism.” Their malicious act is rendered as “they ate their pieces [‘achalu qartsehon]” (Dan. 3:8). Three Jews are accused of not paying attention to the king’s decree: “They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up” (Dan. 3:12).

The king summons Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and threatens them with a painful death. Nevertheless, they firmly state that they cannot worship an idol because they serve\(^\text{16}\) a living God who is able to rescue them from the fire. But even if their God will not save them, they boldly proclaim: “We will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Dan. 3:18). They have the courage to say no and go against the mainstream! It is important to underline that
those who are persecuted in the book of Daniel always show respect to authorities (Dan. 2:37; 3:16, 17; 6:21) even though they stand uncompromisingly for the truth.

In this crisis, Nebuchadnezzar acts like a god. He asks the three young men who did not bow before his gods and the golden image: “What god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” (3:15). The three friends boldly testify: “The God we serve is able to save us from it [fiery furnace], and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold” (Dan. 3:17, 18). In the climax of the story, however, Nebuchadnezzar himself openly proclaims: “They trusted him [God] and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. . . . No other god can save in this way” (Dan. 3:28, 29). Salvation comes only from the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The best fitted background for this event is the revolt against Nebuchadnezzar from December of 595 until January of 594 that is recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles: “In the tenth year the king of Akkad (was) in his own land; from the month of Kislev to the month of Tebet there was rebellion in Akkad . . . with arms he slew many of his own army. His own hand captured his enemy” (Wiseman 1956:73). The king had to secure his kingship; therefore, he required the loyalty oath (Shea 1982:30). To insure the loyalty of different groups of people, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that everyone had to bow down before the golden image he built as it represented his kingdom and his gods. Therto gods of Nebuchadnezzar is placed on an equality with falling down before the image” (Keil and Delitzsch 1972:180).

True worship is connected with trusting God. The three friends of Daniel “trusted in him [God]” (Dan. 3:28); this is why they stayed firm and were faithful to Him even under the most unfavorable circumstances. God never abandons His faithful ones, as can be demonstrated by the fact that even in the fiery furnace the Son of God is with them (Dan. 3:25), protecting them—to the big surprise of the king, the nobles, and all the royal advisers gathered there (Dan. 3:27).

It is evident that the connection between worship and persecution is here firmly established. Worship is closely associated with persecution, because under certain conditions to be faithful to the Lord demands standing in opposition and may involve a matter of life and death. In chapter 3 Nebuchadnezzar persecutes, but it is only an unplanned, accidental persecution due to his pride. It is a byproduct of his sinful ambition to rule as the greatest monarch and to secure his empire.
Nebuchadnezzar’s Conversion and Worship (Chapter 4)

Chapter 4 records the personal experience of King Nebuchadnezzar. He testifies about his own dramatic conversion, which occurred most probably toward the end of his life when his pride was “brought low” (Isa. 2:11).\textsuperscript{18} At the end of seven years of total humiliation, Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the Most High God and His rulership and worships the one true God. It is stated twice that the king praises, honors, and glorifies Him personally (Dan. 4:34, 37). He declares that God’s “dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. . . . Everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Dan. 4:34, 37).

Interestingly, King Nebuchadnezzar grew spiritually throughout the book of Daniel. According to the book, he first attacks Jerusalem and carries off the captives; consequently, he sees the superior knowledge of Daniel and his three friends (chap. 1); he acknowledges the God of Daniel (chap. 2); he praises the God of Daniel’s friends (chap. 3); he is humbled; and finally he comes to the Most High God with a contrite heart (chap. 4). There is a movement from Nebuchadnezzar’s distant attitude to God to his close relationship with Him. As time goes on, God teaches Nebuchadnezzar different lessons. First he hears of God, and then he gradually learns to know God personally. Finally, through the humbling experience of affliction, Nebuchadnezzar understands that “all his [God’s] ways are just” (Dan. 4:37) and worships Him “who lives forever” (Dan. 4:34).\textsuperscript{19}

Pagan Worship and God’s Judgment (Chapter 5)

According to chapter 5, King Belshazzar praises [shabach] false gods and uses for his idolatrous practices even the vessels from the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 5:2–4). This defiant syncretistic worship cannot go unpunished. False worship needs to be exposed, and the drunk and wicked king experiences divine judgment.\textsuperscript{20} When the living God is treated like humanly-created gods, the consequences strike. God’s sentence over him is unequivocal and categorical: “Mene, mene, tekel, parsin. . . . You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting” (Dan. 5:25, 27). “The same articles that were removed from the temple in Jerusalem as a sign of judgment on the conquered now become symbols of judgment on the conquerors: the king is killed and the kingdom falls to another ruler (Dan. 5:30, 31)” (Vogel 1999:281).

False worship, syncretism, and unbelief are under God’s judgment. There is no partiality in God: whether performed by God’s professed people (Dan. 1:1, 2;
9:4–19) or pagans (Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45; 4:28–33; 5:25–28; 7:26; 8:25; 11:45; 12:2),
everyone is judged. All are responsible for their actions and called to worship the
only true God. The living God works with each person in order to lead everyone to
know and follow the right path. Daniel expresses it to Belshazzar: “But you . . . have
not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up
against the Lord of heaven. . . . You did not honor the God who holds in his hand
your life and all your way. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription”
(Dan. 3:22–24).

**Daniel’s Worship and Deliberate Persecution (Chapter 6)**

Chapter 6 presents a deliberate and premeditated attack on Daniel because of
his worship of the true God. Daniel was a man of integrity, faithful, and without
fault in his conduct and state affairs. “He was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor
negligent” (Dan. 6:4); thus, his envious colleagues devised a plot against him based
on religious grounds. The text underlines that “the law of his God” (Dan. 6:5) was
the only accusation that they could use against him. Consequently, they demanded
that an unalterable decree would be issued that anyone who would “pray to any god
or man during the next thirty days, except to” King Darius would “be thrown into
the lion’s den” (Dan. 6:7; see Smith 1922).

Daniel prayed regularly as was his habit and did not hide his faith as he wit-
nessed about his Most High God. At times he had enjoyed some religious respect
and tolerance, but then it was deliberately and maliciously taken away. The legis-
lators in our story, instead of being impartial, selfishly planned their advantages.
Unfortunately, envy and lust for power are very bad advisors. Where there is no ex-
ternal control and accountability, there is basis for abuse. The worst tragedies occur
when one religious group forces its views on another group. Hatred, different con-
victions, sometimes even existence *per se*, can lead to intolerance and persecution!

Power tastes sweet, but its misuse has bitter and often deadly results. However,
the God of Daniel is a living God (6:20, 26), and He intervened in Daniel’s favor and
rescued him from the lion’s den and from the power of his enemies. If God is for
His people, who can stand against them (Rom. 8:31–39)? Even the “best” planned
attacks cannot do any harm to those who put their full trust in God (see Rom. 8:28;
1 Cor. 10:13; Rev. 13:15–17; 17:14). Daniel’s enemies were seeking to find a fault in
him (Dan. 6:5), but instead they found him seeking and trusting God (6:12, 23). In
God Daniel found his strength (see Arnold 1993:484, 485).
The final royal doxology recorded in the book of Daniel is magnificent. King Darius exalts the God of Daniel: “For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions” (6:26, 27).

Worship During Church History and at the End of Time (Chapters 7–12)

At this point, the book of Daniel transitions to a prophetical section, which incorporates the visions and dreams of Daniel. The prophetical part of the book (Dan. 7–12) presents an attack of a religio-political power called the little horn (Dan. 7–8) against God’s people.

The Little Horn Oppresses

The little horn crushes and seeks to annihilate the saints of the Most High who worship the true God. This anti-godly power persecutes God’s faithful followers (Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:10, 24, 25; 11:33, 44); but at the end of the world’s history, this oppressive power will be condemned and supernaturally destroyed (Dan. 7:26; 8:25; 11:45). No one helps the aggressor; no one is for him.

This prideful religio-political power speaks blasphemy (Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; 8:25; 11:36), prospers (Dan. 8:12, 24; 11:36), attempts to change God’s law (Dan. 7:25), puts God’s truth down (Dan. 8:12), fights even against the Prince of princes (Dan. 8:11, 25), and leads people astray into false worship by deception (Dan. 8:23, 25). Activities of the little horn are performed during the Christian church era and concentrate around worship. (See also 2 Thess. 2:3–12; Rev. 13:1–10.)

The phrase “the saints of the Most High” (qadishe ‘elyonin) occurs four times and uniquely in chapter 7 (Dan. 7:18, 22, 25, 27) and indicates the close relationship between God and His people. They worship and obey Him even in the midst of pressure, and this is why, when the time of God’s judgment comes, they are vindicated. The final sentence is pronounced in their favor (Dan. 7:22).
The Little Horn Replaces the Daily Ministry of Christ

The religio-political power of the little horn is directed “against the daily” (tamid). This activity is taken from the Prince of the host (Dan. 8:11), Jesus Christ. The term tamid means “the daily, continually, regularly,” and in the Pentateuch this word designates different activities related only to the services carried out by the priest in the courtyard and in the first part of the sanctuary, the holy place, but never in the Most Holy Place. (See for example, Exod. 25:30; 27:20, 21; 28:29, 38; 29:38, 42; 30:8; see also 1 Chr. 16:6.)

Rodriguez articulates it well: “‘Daily’ (Hebrew tamid) specified the daily/continual work of mediation and intercession of the priest on behalf of the people. Daniel 8:14 refers to the yearly service through the verb ‘to vindicate/cleanse’ (Hebrew nitsdaq) which Scripture also employs in sanctuary contexts” (Rodriguez 2002:51, 52).

The fulfillment of this attack on the daily points to the usurpation of the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary by the Medieval dominant church. This earthly priesthood administered forgiveness of sins by requiring confession to priests instead directly to the Lord Jesus Christ, by daily sacrificing Christ anew as the sacrament in the Eucharist, and by introducing numerous practices in contradiction to plain biblical teaching, such as praying to Mary and the saints for help and asking them to intercede for humans (ora pro nobis) in heaven, because their souls are in paradise.

Maxwell enumerates seven ways that Christ’s high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary was obscured by the little horn (2005:172, 173).

Hasel rightly spells out the problem: “The taking away ‘the continuance’ refers to the removal of the efficacies of Christ’s heavenly ministry by Rome through the introduction of substitute services, thus making ineffective Christ’s continual service in behalf of human beings” (1981:191). Rodriguez eloquently confirms:

“But the horn could only usurp the work of the Prince—‘it took away the daily . . . from him’ (verse 11)—and in an act of ‘rebellion’ it set up, or appointed, its own ‘host/army’ over or in control of the daily (verse 12). The truth of the sanctuary was rejected and cast to the ground. This vivid description of the damage caused by the little horn found its fulfillment in the apostasy of the Christian church announced by Paul (2 Thess. 2:3–12), resulting both in the removal of Christ as our only and exclusive mediator before the Father and in the introduction into the Christian church of many other mediating figures between God and the believer . . . . The fact that the horn usurped the role of the Prince and established a false priestly system does not mean that the work of the heavenly Prince/Priest came to an end. It simply became obscured” (2002:53; see also Goldstein 1988:61–63).
This overshadowing and usurpation of the intercessory ministry of Jesus is a counterfeit that leads people astray from the biblical truth. The mediatory role of Mary and the saints beclouds the efficacy of Jesus Christ’s ministry for us. However, true worship is focused solely on Christ, because He is the only Mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:3–6; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

The Little Horn Changes the Law

Furthermore, the little horn will attempt to change the law (Dan. 7:25), and as a result truth, which is the foundation of genuine worship, will be “thrown to the ground” (Dan. 8:11). The phrase “set times/appointed times and the law” (in Aramaic zimnin vedat) in the sentence “to change set times and the law” is best taken as a hendiadys (a literary unit consisting of two words expressing the same idea with a qualifier). The original Aramaic text states that this power will change the law (dat), an expression that is applied in other biblical texts to the divine or royal law. The plural term “times,” (zimnin, meaning “appointed times”) refers to repeated or multiple points or moments in time in connection to changes in God’s law. Vogel aptly declares: “The little horn usurps divine prerogatives in the attempt to change divinely appointed times” (1999:172). Steinmann affirms: “Therefore, it is likely that the zimnin, ‘times,’ refers to the worship times appointed in the OT, such as the Sabbath, festival days, and morning and evening sacrifices (when the temple stood). Hence the little horn seeks to prevent worship practices ordained by God in his Word” (2008:363; cf. 373, 374; see also Lucas 2002:193, 194).

The question is which law does the little horn try to change? Can one be more precise? If the little horn’s activities point to the Christian era (as it was stated above), then the text cannot have in view the change of festival days, because by the beginning of the Christian dispensation of time the spring Jewish festivals had already been historically fulfilled, and Christians are not obliged to observe any of them (Doukhan 2009:7–31). Thus, the only law that has a reference to time and is still valid is the Sabbath, because the observance of the Decalogue, the Magna Carta of morality, is mandatory for all (Matt. 5:17–20; Rom. 3:31; 7:12; 1 Cor. 7:19). Shea distinctly explains: “This Aramaic word [zimnin] has more of a function of a point in time, but it is in the plural form indicating repeated points of time. These are connected with God’s law (the word for “law” is singular in the original language). The feature of God’s law that best fits this description is the fourth commandment where the recurring seventh day is featured as a point of time, or as regularly occurring points of time” (1996:139). Thus, the religio-political power
Faithful Worship During the End-Time Crisis

The book of Daniel is about the end, and world history terminates in the time of the end (‘et qets; Doukhan 1987:2–7). This specific term occurs five times in the book, always in the prophetic section (Dan. 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9; for a detailed explanation of this term, see Pfandl 1992.)

God’s people, His faithful remnant, are called to restore a true picture of God and elevate and proclaim His truth. They are people of commitment and integrity. Because the saints of the Most High worshiped God during their lives and followed Him no matter what, they will receive the kingdom from the Son of Man (Dan. 7:27a) and will worship Him forever and ever: “He [the Son of Man] was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped [plch] him. . . . His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship [plch] and obey him” (Dan. 7:14, 27). This universal eschatological projection of their final victory with the Son of Man is a guarantee of a joyful, peaceful, and secured life throughout eternity.

The dominant thought and the most crucial motif in the book of Daniel is the theme of divine judgment. God is our Judge (the name Daniel means “God is my Judge”), and we are all under His judgment! He has the final word. Humans are not in charge; they can only play God. With this prevalent concept, the book starts (Dan. 1:1, 2), climaxes at the center (7:9–14), and ends (Dan. 12:13), and is packed in between each story or prophetic section with the theme of judgment (Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45; 3:22–27; 4:33, 37; 5:22–28; 6:23, 24; 8:25; 9:7, 11, 16, 24–27; 11:45). At the judgment, the God of Daniel will reveal who is who, will demonstrate that He always stands on the side of the persecuted (Dan. 3:29; 6:27; 7:22; 12:1, 2; compare with Isa. 63:9), and as the Revealer of history will unmask the character and fate of all persecutors, who will receive their just punishment while the persecuted receive their great reward as God pronounces judgment to their advantage (Dan. 7:22).
Pace, 2008:308, 309; Z. Stefanovic 2007:379–381). The verb “to pray” in Daniel 9:4 is better translated as “to intercede” (Hebrew root *palal* is in *hithpael*). The emphasis is on Daniel's intercessory and passionate prayer as part of his worship. This prayer is tied to the fervent search in the prophetic Word. The study of Jeremiah's prophecy about the 70 years of Babylonian captivity leads him to understand the urgency of the present situation, because this prophetic period is about to be fulfilled (see Dan. 9:2).

Daniel's prayer (9:4–19) is related to gratitude for God's faithfulness, patient waiting, and urgent request for God's intervention. This mixture provides a very special taste for his approach to God. His honesty and sincerity is apparent and deep. Daniel opens his heart to God, and he even addresses God by YHWH (the Lord). This is a unique feature, because in all 12 chapters of the book of Daniel, only here is God's proper name used (see Exod. 3:13–15). He is the Lord of His followers, the Lord of the covenant, God who intervenes in favor of His people. Worship as well as judgment is possible and is built on the concept of God's covenantal faithfulness. Because God is gracious, faithful, and just, one can worship Him, and because He keeps His eternal covenant of love, He is righteous in His judgments. While Daniel was still praying, the answer came from God (Dan. 9:21) in order to give him the understanding of the previous vision from chapter 8 concerning the evening and morning prophecy (Dan. 8:26).

In the final section of the book of Daniel (chaps. 10–12), it is twice stated that Daniel is in worship. He is fasting and praying, and God responds to his pleas for mercy (Dan. 10:2, 12). This fasting and praying results in the coming of God's messenger to him saying twice that he is highly esteemed by God (Dan. 10:10, 19). In chapter 10 this mourning for three weeks is associated with prayer: “Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them” (Dan. 10:12). Doukhan comments: “Daniel had barely begun his prayer when already his words were heard. His three weeks of praying and fasting were not even necessary. From the first day God had heard his prayer. Scripture does not record the words of such a lengthy prayer, as though to remind the reader of the little value words have before God. The Lord hears the prayer before it is even formulated, let alone embellished by words. The content of prayer is more important than the form it takes” (2000:161).

During the same three-week period that Daniel had been praying and fasting, the angel Gabriel and Michael, his superior, had been wrestling with “the prince of the Persian kingdom” (Dan. 10:13). Daniel's spiritual battle was somehow
connected to the bigger conflict. “Daniel’s prayer, which seemed to us so small and futile, had in fact cosmic repercussions” (Doukhan 2000:161).

Daniel’s prayer and fast led to the vision of the heavenly High Priest dressed in a linen robe with a gold belt (Dan. 10:5, 6; see also Exod. 28:4, 5, 8; Lev. 16:4, 23) whose whole being seemed to be aflame. Jesus Christ appeared to Daniel (compare with Josh. 5:13–15; Ezek. 1:26–28; Rev. 1:12–18). While worshiping we might and should see God (Ps. 11:4, 7; 27:4, 8, 13; 63:2).

Final Victory

Daniel 12:3 underlines the fact that at the end of time there will exist people who will “lead many to righteousness” (see also Dan. 11:33). They will teach others about the true character of God in order to build a genuine relationship, with Him in worship which will be reflected in the whole ethical lifestyle of God’s followers. Daniel ends his book with critical remarks: “Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked” (Dan. 12:10). Two groups of worshipers are contrasted. On the one side are those who will let God purify them; they will grow in their relationship with Him and their worship will transform them, because God is at the center of their thinking, feeling, imagination, and all actions. On the other side are the wicked with their cold attitudes, stubbornness, selfishness, and indifference. Hill correctly observes: “More disturbing, perhaps, is the biblical pattern of the intensification of evil before it is finally defeated” (Hill 2008:210.) The first group of people is called wise in comparison to the contrasting group (Dan. 12:10b). The behavior of the wise reflects God’s given lifestyle for them (Deut. 6:4–9; 10:12–21; Rev. 14:7, 12). Michael is for them, their names are written in the book of life (Dan. 12:1), and they wait for the resurrection to eternal life (Dan. 12:2, 13).

The book of Daniel announces that at the end of time, when everything is in turmoil and no one, humanly speaking, is for God’s oppressed people, Michael, the great heavenly prince (Dan. 12:1), will stand up for them and deliver them from the hand of their enemies, who are associated with the little horn and the king of the north. God will intervene for His people, and those who teach and lead others to righteousness will be resurrected and rescued (Dan. 12:2, 3, 13). They will receive eternal life. This beautiful climax of the book gives the persecuted hope, strength to persevere, and courage to live faithfully.
Conclusion and Practical Applications for Mission

The concept of worship is the backbone of the book of Daniel. This is the dominant feature through the historical as well as the prophetic parts of the book in their crucial passages. Local struggles with worship point to the universal and eschatological antitypical fulfillment.

There is no explicit definition of worship in the book of Daniel. However, it becomes clear that genuine worship is not simply a liturgy, a set of rituals, or an organized program, but rather it is a joyful, respectful, and active response to God for who He is and for what He does. Worship originates in God, and it is a recognition of His worth; it is a response to seeing God in His majesty, honor, sovereignty, holiness, greatness, faithfulness, and graciousness, which evokes awe, love, respect, thankfulness, and willingness to obey in every circumstance of life. Worship is thus centered on God and must be always theocentric.

To worship God in truth is crucial (Gen. 24:27; Ps. 117:2; 138:2, 3; Isa. 25:1; compare John 4:23, 24). Whenever truth is put down, worship is distorted. Genuine and false worship are incompatible. God is true in His commitment to His people, which is expressed in His faithfulness toward His covenant, which is a legal establishment and regulation of the relationship between Himself and His people. One cannot command worship, because worship is something that comes from the heart and is voluntary. It cannot be forced. No one can worship for somebody else. Worship is a personal response to the goodness of God. Persecution or force cannot take away from people the inner liberty to worship.

God’s rulership is universal, and one can worship God in any place, even in the territory of the enemy. One can stand firmly for one’s own biblical convictions in a foreign country but at the same time one needs to be polite and respectful. In the whole book of Daniel, God’s people behave and react with respect even to those who oppress them.

True worshipers are persecuted when the truth of God is changed and His law is altered. Attempts to change the law, which includes the Sabbath command, means to put down worshiping the Creator God. Superficial, perverse, or syncretistic worship is judged and condemned by God, because false worship destroys the very foundation of life’s principles and laws of relationship.

Issues of worship dominate in times of crisis. Worship comes to center focus and shows that it is the core matter. It is often a life-death issue. Music can play a positive or negative role in worship by leading people astray or closer to God. Worshipers are those who fear the Lord (Ps. 118:4), revere the Lord (Ps. 135:20) and approach Him in fear and joy at the same time (Ps. 2:10–12; 34:9; 67:7; 96:4).
Even though the prophetic word predicts that there will be religious persecution again, it should not lead to a pattern of fatalism or passive resignation, nor should this be understood as an indication of a deterministic mentality. No attitude of “I can do nothing” is envisioned here. God tells us these things so that we may act, stand for religious liberty, and do the maximum to change the flow of history. God does not foretell in order to provide only information. He does not want sinners to die as informed sinners (Jonah 3, 4). He speaks in advance that “His will” will be accomplished (Isa. 55:11; 40:8). He foretells so that right decisions and actions will be made (Dan. 12:3).

The God of Daniel is always on the side of the oppressed. He intervened in favor of Daniel and his three friends; He delivered the saints of the Most High from the hand of the little horn and the faithful followers of God from the power of the king of the north. What happens to them is happening to Him! Those who touch them fight against God Himself (Hag. 2:8; the Son of Man in chapter 7 is the Representative of His followers, the saints of the Most High). God is on the side of those who dare to disagree, who dare to be different by doing what is right! He intervenes in favor of His own! This God even resurrects His faithful people.

One should not play god or act as a possessor of truth. We cannot own the truth. Truth can only possess us! We can love the truth, know the truth, search for the truth, understand the truth, divide the truth, proclaim the truth, hate the truth, twist the truth, deny the truth, etc., but we cannot possess the truth! Truth (with a capital T) can only possess us, and only on the condition that we allow God to do it for and in us! His Word is Truth. Possessors of truth are very dangerous, they are exploiters and emotional abusers of others. Where there are strong fanatical religious convictions, there may also be religious intolerance! Envy and pride certainly lead to putting down freedom of conscience. However, not only wicked people persecute. The “good” people do it as well when they insist that others must do everything according to their views, and when they impose on others their own understanding of truth. Persecutors think that they are the possessors of truth! This is why I am afraid of people who think they are always right in worship.

Paradoxically, persecution brings witnessing possibilities that otherwise would be impossible. Witnessing to the mighty of the earth sometimes brings new unexpected converts to God, who in turn can be a light to many highly influential and positioned people. (See, for example, Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion story and testimony in Daniel 4). Being respectful, but at the same time straightforward, is the best response to the powerful. One never knows what good fruit it may bear. In view of the importance and crucial position of worship in life, it is no wonder that
God’s final summary appeal to humanity is to worship the Creator God (Rev. 14:7). Those who stand for God and His truth, those who live His law and lead others to righteousness, will be resurrected to eternal life and shine (Dan. 12:2, 3). Resurrection is the culminating hope of God’s people, who then will live in God’s presence forever in His kingdom (Dan. 7:26). This goal is the ultimate reward of God’s faithful worshipers. Thus, the book of Daniel is not about Daniel but about the God of Daniel who invites, as the whole book attests, to worship Him in truth, love, and reverence. Those who do it are wise (Dan. 11:33-35; 12:10).

Notes

1 In English Bibles, the word “worship” usually occurs in the book of Daniel at least 11 times: Daniel 3:5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 (twice), 18, 28 (in KJV, NKJV, NIV, NAU), and in some translations also in Daniel 2:46 (KJV), 7:14 (NKJV), and 7:27 (NIV).

2 It seems that worship in the universe is as old as the creation of living beings (Jer. 17:12; Job 38:7), and on earth it is as old as humankind (Gen. 4:3–5; 8:20, 21).

3 The Hebrew word ‘aboda, “service, worship” means actually doing the will and/or the work of God. To worship God means to serve Him. However, worship also points to prostrating oneself before God. For understanding of worship generally and in the Old Testament, see Balentine (1999), Best (2003), Block (2005), Bromiley (1976), Davies (1962), Hattori (1993), Hill (1993 and 1996), Holmes (1984), Martin (1988), Peterson (1992), Watts (1958), Webber (1994).

4 See “Etymology of worship” in http://homepage.mac.com/paulbeedle/worship.html: “WORSHIP (n) O.E. worðscip, wurðscip (Anglian), weorðscipe (W. Saxon) ‘condition of being worthy, honor, renown,’ from weord ‘worthy.’ Sense of ‘reverence paid to a supernatural or divine being’ is first recorded c.1300. The original sense is preserved in the title worshipful (c.1300). The verb is recorded from c.1200.”…—SHIP O.E. -sciepe, Anglian -scip ‘state, condition of being,’ from P. Gmc. -skapaz (cf. O.N. -skapr, O.Fris. -skip, Du. -schap, Ger. -schaft), from base skap- ‘to create, ordain, appoint.’”

5 Daniel, prophet of the 6th century B.C., lived firmly by biblical principles, and yet he endured two different political systems (in the Neo-Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires), survived six Babylonian kings (Nebuchadnezzar, Amel-Marduk, Nerglissar, Labashi-Marduk, Belshazzar, Nabonidus) and two Medo-Persian rulers (Darius the Mede and Cyrus). As a statesman he was a successful minister in the Babylonian royal court and a prominent prime minister in the Medo-Persian kingdom, as well as the president of
the Royal Academy. Surprisingly, as a wise man, a Jew, a foreigner, and a captive, he was
the prominent counselor to many kings of different national and religious backgrounds.
Life was not always easy for him, but he stayed in the court services in Babylon at least
until the first year of Cyrus (Dan. 1:31), died at a ripe old age most probably in his 90s (ca.
622–530), and mostly stayed wisely out of trouble in the situations of different strict royal
commands.

6Nebuchadnezzar also took the vessels from the Jerusalem temple of God (Dan. 1:2). The
temple and the vessels were symbols for God's presence among His people. Vogel aptly
explains: “Removal of the vessels indicated the absence of God and the end of the special
provisions of the cult that were meant to sanctify the people and bring them closer to
God” (Vogel 1999:279).

7“The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every
heathen religion . . . Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin” (White 1898:35,
36).

8For example, the sexually perverse practices during the spring and fall fertility festivals
(see Davidson 2007:85–97).

9There are six explicit passages when prayers are pointed out in the book of Daniel:
(1) Two times with Daniel's recorded words (Dan. 2:18–23; and 9:4–19); (2) Once King
Nebuchadnezzar praises God (Dan. 4:34, 37); (3) Once a pagan king's worship activity is
mentioned (Dan. 5:4)—Belshazzar prays to different gods; and (4) Two times when Dan-
iel's praying is singled out but without actual wording (Dan. 6:10, 11 and 10:2, 12).
For a detail discussion on prayers in Daniel, see Paul B. Peterson (1998).

10The Aramaic root sgd (“to pay homage to” with lamed) occurs 12 times in the Bible, and
only in Daniel 2 and 3: (1) to pay homage to God or to idols—Daniel 3:5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12,
14, 15 [twice], 18, 28 (in 3:12, 14, 18, 28 it is in parallel with the root plch); and (2) to pay
homage to people—Daniel 2:46. This word expresses the idea of doing homage by pro-
stration (like the Hebrew term hishtachawah or the Greek word proskuneo, “to prostrate
oneself in reverence”).

11The list of eight groups is enumerated twice; see Daniel 3:2, 3. For other summary lists,
see Dan. 3:4, 7, 27, 29.

12The measurements of the statue were 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide. Number 6 defines
Babylon; it is a Babylonian number (see R. Stefanovic 2002:417).
Four times the list of musical instruments of Nebuchadnezzar's orchestra is mentioned (Dan. 3:5, 7, 10, 15).

The word “worship” (sgd) occurs 11 times in this chapter (Dan. 3:5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 [twice], 18, 28); the term “serve [gods]” (plch) is mentioned 5 times (Dan. 3:12, 14, 17, 18, 28); and the expression “fall down” (npl) is cited 6 times, always in association with the word “worship” (sgd; 3:5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15).

The Aramaic root plch (“to serve [God or gods]”) occurs 10 times (Dan. 3:12, 14, 17, 18, 28; 6:16, 20 [in BHS 6:17, 21]; 7:14, 27; and Ezra 7:24 (“servants”; plural participle). The noun polchan (only in Ezra 7:19) means “work, divine service, worship.”

Note the contrast the biblical text makes in playing with the word “serve” (plch). The three friends of Daniel do not “serve” pagan gods, but they “serve” the living God. The same verb plch is used in both situations in order to stress the difference in worshiping. For not serving gods, see Dan. 3:12, 14, 18, 28; and for serving God, see Dan. 3:17 and 28 (implied by contrast).

About the possibility of worshiping the king in Babylon, see Mercer (1916).

Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C.

What a contrast with the behavior of God’s people of that time who were stubbornly refusing God’s repeated call for repentance and were “growing” in wickedness (for example, Joel 2:12–17; Jer. 4:1; 7:3, 4; Ezek. 14:6; 18:30, 31; 33:11, 12). Their final fate was the Babylonian exile.

For insights into King Belshazzar’s fearful reaction, see Wolters (1991).

Similar royal doxologies occur in Daniel 2:47; 3:28, 29; and 4:3.


The little horn will prosper for three and a half times (Dan. 7:25; this prophetic time period is mentioned seven times in Scripture—Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5—as three and a half years/times, forty-two months, or 1,260 days). The domination of the little horn during those three and a half prophetic years (Dan. 7:25) is calculated according to the prophetic chronology for a period of 1,260 years beginning in 538 C.E. and ending in 1798 C.E. For details, see Doukhan (2000:108–111) and Shea (2005:122–124).
In addition, they are twice called simply “the saints” (Dan. 7:21, 22) and they are called “the holy people” in Daniel 8:24 and 12:7. God’s faithful people are also characterized as “wise” (Dan. 11:33, 35; 12:3, 10).

Shea asserts: “Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this Hebrew word *tamid* (daily) is used as a modifier, referring to something that goes on daily, continually, or constantly. Here, however, the word is used as a noun; no word follows it for it to modify” (Shea 2005:182). See also Maxwell (1981:156–166) and Lucas (2002:216, 217).

Shea acutely explains: “The small horn now represents the heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ as requiring human or priestly activities on earth to mediate its grace to humanity. Human intermediaries have been interjected between God and the people. One of the central issues of the Reformation was a rejection of this very point. . . . Each individual may have personal access to Jesus Christ and God. This leaves no room for the mediation of priests, saints, angels, or Mary—as in the Roman system” (2005:181).

The term *dat* (“law”; in Dan. 7:25 is singular) refers to the divine or royal law/decree and is used 14 times in the Aramaic portion of the Old Testament —Ezra 7:12, 14, 21, 25, 26 (twice), and Daniel 2:9, 13, 15; 6:6, 9, 13, 16; 7:25 (and an additional 21 times in the Biblical Hebrew). The Biblical Aramaic has several words for law/decree/edict/prohibition: *dat*, *nishtevan* (Ezra 4:18, 23; 5:5), *gezerah* (Dan. 4:14, 21), *qeyam* (Dan. 6:8, 16), ‘esar (Dan. 6:8, 9, 10, 13 [twice], 14, 16), and *pitgam* (Ezra 4:17; 5:7, 11; 6:11; Dan. 3:16; 4:14), but the term *dat* is the strongest and most specific—the only one pointing to the divine law (like in Dan. 6:6 or Ezra 7:12).

The word *zimnin* (“times, appointed times”; plural form from *zemain*; the same word is also used in Hebrew) describes the specific point in time and is used 11 times (Ezra 5:3; Dan. 2:16, 21; 3:7, 8; 4:33; 6:11, 14; 7:12, 22, 25; it is also employed 4 times in the Hebrew Bible: Eccl. 3:1; Ezra 9:27, 31; Neh. 2:6) in comparison to another Aramaic word for time ‘*iddan*” (“time, year”) which refers more to a season or period of time. (It appears 13 times: Dan. 2:8, 9, 21; 3:5, 15; 4:13, 20, 22, 29; 7:12, 25 [three times].)

Zdravko Stefanovic concurs: “The Semitic noun *zimnin*, ‘set times,’ is used in the Old Testament for the important days of the Hebrew calendar (Ezra 10:14; Neh. 10:34; 13:31; Esther 9:27, 31). The second noun, *dat*, ‘law,’ is in singular and should be considered the Aramaic equivalent to the Hebrew word *Torah*. . . . Therefore, the whole expression means ‘the set times regulated by the law,’ and it includes the seventh-day Sabbath” (2007:274).

KJV uses the word “end” 27 times (Dan. 1:5, 15, 18; 4:11, 22, 29, 34; 6:26; 7:26, 28; 8:17, 19 [twice]; 9:24, 26 [twice]; 11:6, 27, 35, 40, 45; 12:4, 6, 8, 9, 13 [twice]); NKJV employs
this term 26 times (Dan. 1:5, 15, 18; 4:22, 29, 34; 6:26; 7:28; 8:17, 19; 9:24, 26 [twice], 27; 11:6, 13, 18, 27, 35, 40, 45; 12:4, 8, 9, 13 [twice]); and NIV, 24 times (Dan. 1:15, 18; 2:44; 4:34; 5:26; 6:26; 7:28; 8:17, 19; 9:24, 26 [twice], 27 [twice]; 11:18, 27, 35, 40, 45; 12:4, 9, 12, 13 [twice]).

31 For the theology of divine judgment and its meaning, see Moskala 2004.

32 The Aramaic text employs the so-called “lamed of advantage,” i.e., divine judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, which means for their favor and advantage—dina jehib leqadishe eljonin.


34 It is interesting that Vogel argues that Daniel 10 alludes to the Day of Atonement. For details, see Vogel 1999:208–243.


36 For the relationship between the vision of the man in linen in Daniel 10:5, 6 and Joshua 5, Ezekiel 1, and Revelation 1, see Doukhan 2000:159, 160. For the connection between Daniel 10, Ezekiel 1, and Revelation 1, consult Shea 2005:234, 235; Longman 1999:246–253; Pace 2008:309–312.

37 Seow underlines that Michael is with His people, because He is their great Prince and Protector. He is present during the turbulent events of world history and, finally, He intervenes on their behalf (2003:186).

38 Commenting on Daniel 12:2 Collins asserts: “There is virtually unanimous agreement among scholars that Daniel is referring to the actual resurrection of individuals from the dead, because of the explicit language of everlasting life” (1993:391, 392).