

## CULTIC KINGDOMS IN CONFLICT: Liturgy and Empire in the Book of Daniel

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Interest in political theology, and the relationship between Church and state, and between religious faith and secular society have grown in recent years—in part in response to the challenge posed by militant expressions of Islam, the ongoing suffering of believers under atheist communist regimes, and the increasingly aggressive secularism of nations of the West. The theological issues being raised are as significant: What is the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the regimes of this world? How are believers to live in times and places when the expression of their faith is outlawed, discriminated against or discouraged? How should believers respond when the state commands the unconscionable?

The Book of Daniel sheds a surprisingly contemporary light on these questions. Few books in the biblical canon contain such a sustained interest in the issues of liturgy and empire, in the relationship between the religious worship of the true God and the civil and religious demands of the state.

In this essay, I want to explore these issues in the Book of Daniel. I wish to make the following three points, which build on each other: first, that *liturgical motifs* run throughout Daniel and, indeed, the book has a liturgical *telos* or purpose; second, that Daniel presents a running conflict between two “cultic kingdoms” or “liturgical empires”—the “Kingdom of God” and its inverted image, the “Kingdom of Man”;<sup>1</sup> third, that in Daniel, those who belong to the Kingdom of God and live in the Kingdom of Man (that is, the exiles from Judah) face crises that call into question the meaning of liturgy and sacrifice; indeed these crises require of them the ultimate sacrifice, the offering of their own lives, the making of their lives into a living sacrifice. Finally, I will conclude with some theological reflections about the

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<sup>1</sup> These terms, “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Man” are not found per se in Daniel, but nonetheless can, I believe, be applied to the concepts of the book with some justification. For example, although “Kingdom of God” does not appear, the phrase “his Kingdom” with reference to God occurs in Dan. 4:34, 5:26. By “Kingdom of Man” I intend to describe the reality presented in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2), in which an image in human form (it is described with “arms” above and distinct from its “legs” and “feet,” thus, it is not an animal) represents the succession of kingdoms until the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. The human form of the image conveys the “human-ness” (that is, non-transcendence) of the political systems it represents; the fact that all the successive kingdoms are portrayed as one human image indicates, I believe, that each successive kingdom is, from the perspective of the book, just another manifestation of a human system in opposition to God, in other words, the “Kingdom of Man.”

concerning the continuing relevance of the message of Daniel to the contemporary Church.

### *From Babel to Babylon*

Direct and indirect cultic and liturgical<sup>2</sup> references run throughout Daniel.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, arguably the central problem addressed in the text is the cessation of the “true liturgy,” the order of worship established by David and Solomon for Temple at Jerusalem. The true liturgy came to an abrupt end with the siege of Jerusalem in 605 B.C. and the Temple’s destruction by the invading Babylonians in 586 B.C. These crises of Israel’s cult, and the forced exile and captivity of the Israelites, form the narrative backdrop for Daniel.

The book’s liturgical focus is telegraphed immediately in the first two verses. After dating the opening events to Nebuchadnezzar’s raid of Jerusalem (605 B.C. by modern reckoning), the author focuses on the Babylonian king’s seizing of the sacred vessels from the Temple (“the house of God”) and their removal to the temple of Nebuchadnezzar’s god, presumably Bel Marduk, in “the land of Shinar.”<sup>4</sup>

These events are related even prior to mentioning the book’s protagonists. The message being communicated is that this book is not primarily about the virtues of some Israelite heroes or the vicissitudes of sixth-century B.C. Near Eastern geopolitics, but about worship. More specifically, this is a book about the conflict between true worship of the true God, represented by the Temple vessels, and false worship of a false god, represented by Nebuchadnezzar’s temple and god.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Throughout this essay I will at times use the terms “cultic” and “liturgical” as roughly synonymous, but there is a distinction between them. “Liturgy” refers to “a form ... according to which public worship is conducted”—in other words, “liturgy” indicates ritual (that is, according to a form) corporate (that is, public) worship. “Cult,” however, refers more broadly to “a system of religious veneration and devotion,” which would include liturgy but also personal practices such as private prayer, fasting and meditation. Thus, there is broad overlap between the semantic range of the terms, but “cult/cultic” are more general and “liturgy/liturgical” more specific.

3 Perhaps the most sustained study of cultic terminology and images in Daniel is Winfried Vogel, “The Cultic Motif in Space and Time in the Book of Daniel,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1999).

4 The abduction of the sacred vessels was indeed a very serious matter from the perspective of the Israelite cult. The sacred vessels were not to be seen, much less handled, by anyone except the priests of Israel; they were off limits to commoners and certainly to Gentiles. Gary Anderson has commented on the scandal given to the Jews when, as recorded by Josephus, the Roman general Pompey and his men entered the Jerusalem Temple and glimpsed the sacred vessels. “To See Where God Dwells: The Tabernacle, the Temple, and the Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition,” *Letter & Spirit* 4 (2008): 13–45, at 30–33. As Anderson points out, the Temple, its furnishings, and vessels, in varying degrees, were understood as visual representations of the presence of God himself.

5 “The removal of the Temple vessels seems to set the stage for the controversy regarding true and false worship that unfolds in the narratives as well as in the prophetic visions of Daniel.” Vogel, “Cultic Motif,” 330.

Leading with these events, the author has established the tension of his narrative and the questions raised by this turn of events—Who is the true God and who is really in control? Does Nebuchadnezzar’s military success reflect the superiority of his god to the God of Israel?<sup>6</sup>

The author’s use of the archaic and rare geographical designation, “the land of Shinar,” may also be a deliberate signal to readers. The land of Shinar is the site, according to the primordial narrative in Genesis, of the Tower of Babel.<sup>7</sup> There, the people of the earth after the flood wished to build a tower—probably a *zigurrat*, a Mesopotamian stepped temple—for their own glorification in opposition to God. God descends, quashes their building project, and scatters humanity, demonstrating that he has no rival to his control of human affairs.<sup>8</sup> The memory of this episode is thematically programmatic for Daniel.<sup>9</sup> The pattern of human challenge to the authority of God is repeated throughout the book, as foreign kings attempt to replace true worship of God with the worship of the state, only to meet with divine retribution. Though untold ages have passed since the events recorded in Genesis 11, Babel remains associated with Babylon as the site of the paradigmatic conflict between the Kingdom of Mankind and the Kingdom of God, and their respective forms of worship.

Following his introduction of this conflict, Daniel introduces his protagonists.<sup>10</sup> The four young Israelite aristocrats are described in cultic terms. They are free from any “blemish” (Hebrew: *me’um*), a term that calls to mind the standards for both sacrificial offerings<sup>11</sup> and priests<sup>12</sup> in the cult of Israel’s God. The youths’ three-year training recalls the ideal age of sacrificial animals in some texts.<sup>13</sup> Although they do not have any opportunity to participate in the Temple liturgy, they are depicted as concerned to retain the cultic purity that would enable them to do so. Accordingly, they avoid “defiling” themselves with the king’s “rich food,” which consisted of meat and wine.<sup>14</sup>

6 “Removing [the vessels] is thus a sign of the victory of Nebuchadnezzar and his god over the Israelite king and his god.” Goldingay, *Daniel*, 15.

7 Compare Dan. 1:22; Gen. 11:2.

8 Gen. 11:1–9.

9 “Land of Shinar” occurs only in Gen. 10:10; 11:2; Dan. 1:1; and Zech. 5:11. See the discussion in Goldingay, *Daniel*, 15.

10 Dan. 1:3–4.

11 Lev. 22:22–25; Num 19:2; Deut. 15:21; 17:1.

12 Lev. 21:17–23; see Vogel, “Cultic Motif,” 336.

13 Gen. 15:9, 1 Sam.. 1:24,

14 Dan. 1:8.

This raises a question. Certainly the meat could be defiling because it was either from unclean animals<sup>15</sup> or slaughtered in a profane way,<sup>16</sup> but why reject the king's wine? Nothing is said in the Mosaic law about wine being "unclean." The issue here may not be the violation of *kashrut*, the Jewish dietary laws, alone. It may also be an issue of idolatry. The king's meat and his wine may have been ritually offered to the king's gods before being served and consumed, with a portion of the meat being sacrificed on the altars of the Babylonian deities and a portion of the wine poured out in libation. Rejecting even the king's wine may well indicate Daniel and his companions' commitment to *abstain from participation in the Babylonian cult*. Thus, they request instead water and vegetables, which were not part of the "king's rich food" and therefore would not have been ritually offered to the king's gods.<sup>17</sup>

Cultic and liturgical motifs continue in Daniel 2. The protagonists' lives are immediately put in danger by the conflict over the interpretation of the king's dream.<sup>18</sup> To prevent their being slain, Daniel offers "to show the king the interpretation" of the dream.<sup>19</sup> In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar had seen an "image" of a human being composed of various strata of materials—a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, legs of iron, and feet of clay.<sup>20</sup> This being was destroyed and replaced by a stone "not cut out by human hands" which grows into a mountain which "fills the whole earth."<sup>21</sup>

### *The Idol of the State and the Cosmic Rock*

What is this "image" (Aramaic: *tselem*) that the king sees?<sup>22</sup> It can hardly be a coincidence that in the chapter that follows Nebuchadnezzar sets up a golden "image" (*tselem*) in the plain of Dura.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the two narratives are mutually

15 Lev. 11:1–47.

16 Gen. 9:4; Lev. 19:26.

17 Compare Dan. 1:15. See the discussion of the possible reasons for Daniel's abstinence from the king's food in Goldingay, *Daniel*, 18–19. Goldingay mentions the explanation endorsed here—namely, that Daniel objected to the royal food offered to pagan gods—but rejects it for what I believe are inadequate reasons. He seems to understand the "vegetables" (Hebrew: *zerô'im*, lit. "seeds" or "sown things") provided for the young men as also coming from the king's table ("Daniel does not refuse to eat at all from the king's table," 18); yet it seems clear to me that Dan. 1:15 ("They were better in appearance . . . than the youths who ate the king's rich food.") implies that the vegetables and water being provided to Daniel and his companions were *not* the king's fare—and therefore would not have undergone the customary pagan rituals. See the helpful discussion in Vogel, "Cultic Motif," 267–72.

18 Dan. 2:1–13.

19 Dan. 2:14–16.

20 Dan. 2:31–33.

21 Dan. 2:27–35.

22 Dan. 2:31–35.

23 Dan. 3:1.

illuminating. The “image” of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream should be understood as a cult object, an *idol* similar to the golden idol he erects on the plan. The human form that he sees in his vision represents the sequence of human kingdoms<sup>24</sup> presented as one reality, the Kingdom of Man in different forms. But this idol also represents mankind’s *systems of idolatrous worship*, which, despite the infinite varieties of that worship, always amount to the same thing—namely, the *worship of the state as divine*.<sup>25</sup> Daniel’s implicit message is that the Kingdom of Man is an idol; it demands to be worshipped as if it were God.

But what of the destruction the king witnessed in his vision, the idol smashed and brought down by a rock “cut out by no human hand” which “became a great mountain and filled the whole earth”?<sup>26</sup> As described this rock is sacred, suitable for the Israelite cult, which called for uncut stones to be used for the altar of sacrifice.<sup>27</sup> But this stone that grows into a mountain must also be understood against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern, and specifically Israelite, concepts of temple-building.

In the ancient Near East it was an almost universal commonplace that any given temple mystically represented the great “cosmic mountain” that was the first to break above the primordial waters of the abyss at creation, and rose to form the habitable land.<sup>28</sup> This mystical image was recapitulated in the process of building

24 Dan. 2:37–43.

25 “The powerful king ... is demanding on behalf of the state a quasi-religious prostration before the image which the state erects.” John Goldingay, “Daniel in the Context of Old Testament Theology,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, 2 vols., eds. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:652. I agree with Goldingay except on one point: it is not a “quasi” religious prostration, but a fully religious prostration. Goldingay is choosing here not to explore fully the entwinement between state and cult in Babylonian culture. The polytheistic mythology undergirding Babylonian ritual was, essentially, coded politics, in which the High God was identified with the god of the dominant city-state, and myths were told of his combat with and defeat of lesser gods, who represented vassal states. The patron deities of the different states or city-states were in essence projected personifications of those states. This was particularly the case in Babylonian myths recounting Marduk’s rise to power, in which he overcomes and assimilates the traits of gods of other city-states, i.e. of Ea of Eridu and Enlil of Nippur. See the standard reference works on Babylonian religion, for example Roger W. Rogers’ still useful article, “Babylonia and Assyria, Religion of,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James A. Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1939 [1915]); available on-line: <http://www.bible-history.com/isbe/>.

26 Dan. 2:34–35.

27 Exod. 20:25; Deut. 27:5–6; Josh. 8:31; 1 Kings 6:7; 1 Macc. 4:47.

28 See John M. Lundquist, “What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology,” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, eds. H. B. Huffman, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 205–219; reprinted in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, Donald W. W. Parry, ed. (Salt Lake City: Desert, 1994), 83–117; E. A. E. Reymond, *The Mythological Origins of the Egyptian Temple* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1969); J. Spencer, “The Brick Foundations of Late-Period Peripteral Temples and Their Mythological Origin,” in *Orbis Aegyptorum Speculum: Glimpses of Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honor of H. W. Fairman*, ed. J. Ruffle, G.A. Gaballa, and

a temple—the foundation stone was first laid and from it, a great “mountain” was caused to “grow,” that is, the temple. This concept is illustrated in a key passage from the famous Gudea Cylinders, in which King Gudea’s construction of the Temple of Ningirsu in Lagash (circa 2112–2004 B.C.) is described: “[The builders] were making the temple grow (high) like a mountain range, making it float in mid-heaven like a cloud.”<sup>29</sup> Note here that the temple, clearly founded in the earth, grows up into the heavens and fills one’s field of vision (“float[s] in mid-heaven”).

The initial stone that is placed, the foundation or cornerstone, mystically represented the peak of the cosmic mountain breaking the surface of the primordial waters before rising to fill the heavens and earth.<sup>30</sup> The Israelite version of this cosmogonic picture identified the massive stone outcropping on the Temple mount—the *'eben shetiyya* or “foundation stone” on which the Temple rested and where the Dome of the Rock now sits—as the “cosmic rock,” the center and beginning of creation, the place of intersection between heaven and earth, the foundation of the Temple and the capstone over the shaft leading to the underworld.<sup>31</sup>

The stone of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, then, is probably to be identified conceptually with the foundation stone of Jerusalem’s Temple,<sup>32</sup> and the mountain

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K. Kitchen; (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1979), 132–37. According to Donald W. Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 126–51, at 133: “Every Near Eastern temple symbolically recalls a mountain.” See also Richard J. Clifford, “The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament,” *Biblica* 55 (1974): 443–46; W. Gaerte, “Komische Vorstellungen im Bilde prähistorischer Zeit: Erdberg, Himmelsberg, Erdnabel und Weltenströme,” (“Common Images in the Portrayal of Prehistoric Times: Earth-Mountain, Heavenly Mountain, Navel of the Earth, and Cosmic River”) *Anthropos* 9 (1913): 956–79; Maurice A. Canney, “The Primordial Mound,” *Journal of the Manchester University Egyptian and Oriental Society* 20 (1936): 25–40. “Temples were symbolically the ‘embodiment of the cosmic mountain’ representing the original hillock first emerging from the primordial waters at the beginning of creation.” G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 53. See Beale’s entire discussion, 51–56.

29 Richard E. Averbeck, “The Cylinders of Gudea (2.155),” in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2, eds. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 418–433, at 428.

30 This may well be the conceptual context for understanding Isa. 28:16: “Therefore thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘He who believes will not be in haste.’” Whatever the literal referent of Isaiah’s oracle, the language is that of temple-building. The foundation stone represented the emerging peak of the cosmic mountain-temple and therefore the harbinger of the restoration of cosmic order and peace between heaven and earth represented and realized by the completed temple.

31 The classic exposition of this Israelite world view is found in Joachim Jeremais, *Golgotha* (Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1926). Although the *full* picture of this Israelite cosmogony is only available in later Jewish literature like the Talmud, its similarity to ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies as old as the second millennium B.C. points to its antiquity, as do bits and pieces of the picture present in the biblical text (Isa. 28:16, Gen. 28), not the least in Dan. 2 itself.

32 Compare Isa. 28:16.

that grows from it is the cosmic Temple-mount.<sup>33</sup> And the dream itself that Daniel interprets should be understood as a clashing of empires and their liturgies—the idol of Kingdoms of Man being destroyed and superseded by the Temple-mountain of the Kingdom of God.

The conflict between the two kingdoms comes to a head in Daniel 3. Nebuchadnezzar sets up an idol, presumably of his god, Marduk, in the plain of Dura, and imposes compulsory liturgical worship before this image.<sup>34</sup> The body politic is assembled under the authority of all the civil officials of Babylon, and the decree is pronounced that all must participate in the state cult or face immediate and summary execution.<sup>35</sup> Daniel's three friends refuse: "We will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."<sup>36</sup> Nebuchadnezzar responds by condemning them to death in the fiery furnace, in effect making burnt offerings of the young Israelites.

In the edition of the narrative accepted as canonical in the ancient Church, that of the Greek Jewish scholar, Theodotion,<sup>37</sup> the three young men respond by worshipping God after the pattern of Israel's liturgical songbook, the Psalter. Azariah offers a "prayer of communal lament" patterned on Psalms 74, 79, and 80, among others. The three jointly sing a litany of praise modeled on Psalm 136. In moving from lament to praise, the prayer of Azariah and the song of the three young men taken together form a liturgical prayer similar to the *todah* (Hebrew: "thanksgiving") psalms, which accompanied "thank offerings" made in the Temple.<sup>38</sup>

The young worshippers are then delivered through the agency of a "son of God."<sup>39</sup> In amazement, Nebuchadnezzar issues a decree prohibiting blasphemy

33 Compare Isa. 2:2–3.

34 Dan. 3:1–2.

35 Dan. 3:3–7.

36 Dan. 3:8–18.

37 The Greek version of Daniel copied in Christian codices of the Septuagint is not actually the Old Greek (LXX), but rather Theodotion's translation. The Old Greek of Daniel was regarded by the Church as a poor translation that deviated too wildly from the Hebrew text tradition. Theodotion's version followed the Hebrew text tradition (that is, approximately the [proto-] Masoretic Text) closely where that text was extant, but also included the "additions" of the longer Old Greek text.

38 A quick and readable treatment of the relevance of the *todah* to the psalms is given in Michael Barber, *Singing in the Reign: The Psalms and the Liturgy of God's Kingdom* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2001) 76–80. For a description of the *todah*-cycle, the sequence of events in the life of the ancient Israelite that culminated in offering the *todah* or "thanksgiving" sacrifice, and its relevance for understanding the *Sitz-im-Leben* ("situation in life") of many of the psalms, see Hartmut Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1981), 128–33; and Harvey Guthrie, *Theology as Thanksgiving: From Israel's Psalms to the Church's Eucharist* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 1–30. Compare Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997) 126–37, 213.

39 Dan. 3:25.

against the God of Israel<sup>40</sup>—thus spreading the knowledge and fear of Israel’s God among the nations, which was one of the purposes of the Temple<sup>41</sup> and the liturgy.<sup>42</sup>

The clash of kingdoms is again symbolized in liturgical terms in Daniel 5. One of Nebuchadnezzar’s successors, King Belshazzar, during a great royal feast, orders that the vessels taken from the Temple be brought out so that he and his court might drink from them.<sup>43</sup> It was an offense against God for Gentiles to even see these vessels,<sup>44</sup> let alone for the king to handle or to drink from them. Not only Belshazzar and his officials, but even his wives and concubines take part; and while drinking they praise their idols. Thus, they transform their banquet into a quasi-liturgical event that in effect celebrates the triumph of the Babylonian gods over the God of Israel. To add insult to injury they conduct this liturgical feast using the very vessels fashioned specially to pour out libations to the God of Israel.

Because of this act of hubris, the God of Israel issues judgment against Belshazzar, who loses his life that very night.<sup>45</sup> Interpreting for the king the divine writing on the wall, Daniel stresses that the king’s cultic offense of profaning the Temple vessels is a sign that he had “lifted up [himself] against the Lord of heaven.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, the whole chapter concerns God’s vindication of his own cult against cult of the Babylonian gods.

### *Daniel in the Lion’s Den*

In Daniel 6, Daniel finds himself in conflict with the king over the matter of worship. King Darius—by far the monarch portrayed most sympathetically in the book—is manipulated into passing a law that essentially makes him Babylon’s sole god for a month.<sup>47</sup> Much to his chagrin, the law is immediately enforced against his favorite courtier, Daniel, who persists in praying three times daily toward Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup>

Although in itself a private devotion and not a public liturgy, Daniel’s orientation of his prayer toward Jerusalem indicates his desire to be in communion with the Holy Place, the site of the Temple, where the sacred liturgy had long been celebrated and, according to the promise of the prophets, would once more be celebrated again. And Daniel’s prayer and his plight are depicted in terms that evoke the Temple liturgy, especially the psalms sung in the liturgy. The portrait of Daniel

40 Dan. 3:29–30.

41 1 Kings 8:41–43.

42 Pss. 22:25–31; 47:1–9; 67:3–5.

43 Dan 5:1–2.

44 See Note 4 above.

45 Dan 5:30.

46 Dan. 5:23.

47 Dan. 6:1–9.

48 Dan. 6:10–15.

at prayer evokes two key liturgical texts: Psalm 55:17 (“Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice”) and 1 Kings 8:46–51, Solomon’s seventh and final major petition in his prayer for the dedication of the Temple, in which he asks God to hear the prayers of Israelite exiles who, in their land of captivity, direct prayers “toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name.”

The punishment Daniel receives for fidelity to the true cult is to be thrown to lions—a common metaphor in the psalms:

Save me from the mouth of the lion, my afflicted soul from the horns of the wild oxen! (Ps. 22:21)

How long, O LORD, wilt thou look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my life from the lions! (Ps. 35:17)

I lie in the midst of lions that greedily devour the sons of men; their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords. (Ps. 57:4)<sup>49</sup>

Subsequent events almost follow the “script” of such psalms. The lions do not eat Daniel; the overjoyed king lifts him out and in his place casts Daniel’s accusers, who are crushed.<sup>50</sup> The king then issues a decree compelling all the nations to worship (“fear and reverence”) the true God, the God of Daniel.<sup>51</sup> We have here a striking recapitulation of the experience of the psalmist in Psalm 57:

I cry to God Most High,  
to God who fulfils his purpose for me.  
He will send from heaven and save me,  
he will put to shame those who trample upon me. [Selah]  
God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness!  
*I lie in the midst of lions that greedily devour the sons of men;*  
their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords.  
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!  
Let thy glory be over all the earth!  
They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down.  
*They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves ...*  
I will give thanks to thee, O Lord, *among the peoples;*

49 In addition to these examples, one should compare Pss 7:2; 10:9; 17:12; 22:13; and 58:6.

50 Dan. 6:21–24.

51 Dan. 6:25–27.

I will sing praises to thee *among the nations*.  
 For thy steadfast love is great to the heavens, thy faithfulness to  
 the clouds.  
 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!  
 Let thy glory be over all the earth!

We can see the following similarities between Psalm 57 and the account of Daniel's vindication in Daniel 6: The threat to the worshipper consists of "lions"<sup>52</sup> and a "pit."<sup>53</sup> God sends help from heaven<sup>54</sup> and punishes the enemies of the faithful one.<sup>55</sup> With poetic justice, the enemies fall prey to the very trap they laid for the worshipper.<sup>56</sup> Finally, and most importantly, the God of Israel is recognized as the true God and is glorified among the nations.<sup>57</sup>

It is significant that Psalm 57 follows the *todah*-cycle pattern—moving from plea<sup>58</sup> to praise,<sup>59</sup> and its original cultic life-setting would seem to have been the offering of the *todah* or thanksgiving sacrifice.<sup>60</sup> Daniel is actualizing the *todah* experience in this narrative.

Daniel 6, then, describes the conflict of two cults, two systems of worship. The false cult of the state abolishes the true cult of God by enforcing exclusive worship of the state as embodied in the emperor. Daniel maintains fidelity to the true cult, with its ties to the Jerusalem Temple and its liturgy, and so is forced to recapitulate in himself the experience of the psalmist. However, the result is that the true cult is endorsed and promoted by the very head of the false cult, the emperor himself.

### ***Daniel 7–9: The Hope of the Liturgical Kingdom***

The set of visions that comprise Daniel 7–9 form the heart of the book's message, providing for the first time a substantive reason for hope among those who long for

52 Compare Ps. 57:4; Dan. 6:16.

53 Compare Ps. 57:6; Dan. 6:23–24.

54 Compare Ps. 57:5; Dan. 6:22.

55 Compare Ps. 57:3; Dan. 6:24.

56 Compare Ps. 57:6; Dan. 6:24.

57 Compare Ps. 57:9; Dan. 6:26–27.

58 Ps. 57:1–6.

59 Ps. 57:7–11.

60 Compare Ps. 57:9. Hermann Gunkel (*An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, ed. J. Begrich; trans. J. D. Nogalski, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies [Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1998]) classified Ps. 57 as an "individual complaint song" (at 121), but posited the original life-setting of such songs as involving the pledge of the *todah* or thanksgiving sacrifice (at 184–85). Gunkel classifies Ps. 57:9–12 as a "thanksgiving song" at the end of a "complaint song," and proceeds to describe the *todah* setting in which such psalms functioned (at 199–201).

the restoration of true worship of God. According to these visions, following the succession of kingdoms of men still to come, the saints or holy ones of the Most High will inherit the universal kingdom, the liturgical Temple-kingdom portrayed as the Temple mount in the vision of Daniel 2.

In Daniel 7, the succession of four worldly kingdoms portrayed as metallic sections of the image in Daniel 2 are now portrayed as a sequence of beasts, which highlights the beastly, sub-human character of these regimes. At the end of the sequence of beasts, the “Ancient of Days” appears and sits in judgment over these kingdoms from his throne, from which pours a river of fire. This is the heavenly throne room of God, the antitype of which the earthly sanctuaries were the type.<sup>61</sup> The Garden of Eden and the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple were held to be representations of this heavenly throne room; rivers flowed<sup>62</sup> or would<sup>63</sup> pour forth from both.

Daniel 7:9–14 envisions the reality only dimly represented by the earthly sanctuaries Israel had known or anticipated. Into this heavenly Holy of Holies or throne room comes the “one like a Son of Man” riding on the “clouds of heaven.” He receives from the Ancient of Days the universal and everlasting kingdom;<sup>64</sup> curiously, his reception of the kingdom is subsequently interpreted as its reception by the “people of the saints of the Most High.”<sup>65</sup> For this reason, the “Son of Man” is sometimes taken as nothing more than a symbolic representation of the people of God. However, the text need not be understood in such a way as to rule out the possibility of the “Son of Man” as a individual person; he could be an individual who is also a corporate representative, such as a king or high priest.

It is not without reason that commentators have seen in Daniel 7:9–14 a reflection of the *yom kippur* or Day of Atonement liturgy. The “one like a son of Man,” the corporate head of the “saints of the Most High” presented in the throne room of the Ancient of Days, may well recall the Day of Atonement liturgy in which the High Priest, clothed, according to Josephus, in a robe of blue representing the sky and the heavenly bodies,<sup>66</sup> entered into the earthly representation of the divine throne room—the Holy of Holies—to represent the people of Israel before their God. Indeed, *yom kippur*, the Day of Atonement, was regarded as a

61 See Vogel, “Cultic Motif,” 115–37.

62 Gen 2:10.

63 Ezek 47:1.

64 Dan. 7:14.

65 Dan. 7:27.

66 Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 3, Chap. 7, 159–161, in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 89; see also Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 2:143, in *The Works of Philo: New Updated Edition*, tran. C. D. Yonge, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 503; compare Dan. 7:13: “with clouds of heaven.”

solemn “judgment” on the people of God,<sup>67</sup> a judgment mitigated and expiated by the intercessory ministry of the High Priest.

In Daniel’s vision, judgment is rendered in favor of the “saints,” and they receive the universal and everlasting kingdom,<sup>68</sup> in other words, the kingdom of God.<sup>69</sup> Notably, the kingdom is not delivered to them by military might or human initiative, but by judgment of God, expressed in the “divine passive.”<sup>70</sup>

The vision of Daniel 8 serves to further illuminate the message of Daniel 7. Once again we have a lopsided animal, a ram with one horn larger than the other,<sup>71</sup> succeeded by flying beast marked by four appendages, in this case a goat with four horns.<sup>72</sup> It has been noted that in Jewish liturgical tradition, both ram and goat are “clean” animals for sacrifice, but it is not clear if such a liturgical connection was intended by the author of Daniel. In any event, the goat’s triumph over the ram segues into a direct assault against God and the worship due him: the *tamid* or continual burnt offering is suppressed and the sanctuary of the Temple is “overthrown.”<sup>73</sup> This is the real difficulty presented by the “goat” and his “horns”—not the defeat of the ram, which is in itself indifferent, but the perverse hubris of assaulting the cult of the true God, an assault which in reality is an act of aggression against God himself. However, as in Daniel 7, the vision ends in hope: divine power shall put an end to the goat and his horns,<sup>74</sup> and the sanctuary shall be restored.<sup>75</sup> The “goal” of the whole vision is the restoration of the true liturgy and sanctuary.

The same may be said of Daniel 9, regarded by many as *the* pivotal vision in the book as a whole.<sup>76</sup> The entire chapter is concerned with the restoration of the

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67 Dan 7:10.

68 Dan 7:27.

69 Dan 6:26.

70 Dan 7:11–12, 14, 27.

71 For instance, the bear of Daniel 7.

72 Compare the winged leopard of Daniel 7.

73 Elias Brasil de Souza argues that the *tamid* here should be understood not as referring solely to the regular morning and evening offering with which the term is often associated, but to the ongoing Temple liturgy as a whole. *The Heavenly Sanctuary / Temple Motif in the Hebrew Bible: Function and Relationship to the Earthly Counterparts*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 7 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2005), 457; compare at 440–469 for discussion of cultic language in Daniel 7–9.

74 Dan. 8:25.

75 Dan. 8:14.

76 For a full treatment of the interpretive issues surrounding Daniel 9, which I can only summarize here, see John S. Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series 115 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 212–32; Bergsma, “The Persian Period as Penitential Era: The ‘Exegetical Logic’ of Daniel 9:1–27,” in *Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd*, eds. Gary Knoppers and Lester L. Grabbe, Library of Second Temple Studies 73 (New York: Continuum / T & T Clark, 2009); and Vogel, “Cultic Motif,” 243–59.

sanctuary and cult. The chapter is typically misconstrued to depict Daniel's prayer for understanding the prophet Jeremiah's prophecy of "seventy years,"<sup>77</sup> followed by the appearance of an angelic interpreter who reveals that Jeremiah's "seventy years" really meant "seventy weeks of years."<sup>78</sup> However, Daniel's prayer<sup>79</sup> is penitential, a plea of repentance on behalf of the nation of Israel for the restoration of "your city" and "your people." Daniel understands Jeremiah's prophecy of "seventy years for Babylon" prior to the restoration of Jerusalem to be contingent on the repentance of the people, which has not taken place.<sup>80</sup> The Angel Gabriel appears in answer to Daniel's plea, with the good news that his prayer will be fulfilled, but the bad news that its fulfillment will be delayed by a factor of seven. This factor is taken from Leviticus 26, where lack of repentance is recompensed with sevenfold punishment. The heart of Daniel's prayer is concern for the holy city, especially the sanctuary (*miqdash*).<sup>81</sup> Likewise, the city and sanctuary are at the heart of Gabriel's prophetic reply.<sup>82</sup>

Social, economic, and political concerns may be present in Daniel 9, but in this section of the book as elsewhere, the principle concern is always the cult. Daniel characterizes his prayer as "presenting my supplication ... for the holy hill of my God," and Gabriel comes to answer him "at the time of the evening sacrifice," a reference to the *tamid* or continual burnt offering so prominent in the previous chapter.<sup>83</sup> Gabriel predicts a penitential period for "your people and your holy city" that follows a liturgical pattern: "seventy weeks [of years]," or four hundred ninety years. A "week [of years]" is a concept attested only in Leviticus, in the chapter dedicated to super-annual liturgical cycles, that is cycles greater than a year in length. There are two of these: the sabbatical year, which occurs at the end of every "week" (set of seven) years,<sup>84</sup> and the jubilee, which occurs after seven weeks of years, that is forty-nine years.<sup>85</sup>

The four hundred ninety years of Gabriel's prophecy are clearly a liturgical-calendrical reckoning, marking off ten jubilees, or what some scholars have called a "great jubilee" cycle—ten being a number of fullness or completion. Whatever other significance the period of four hundred ninety years had for the ancient readers of Daniel, the liturgical time period did emphasize the fact that history was progressing according to the rhythms of the true cult, whether the earthly

77 Dan 9:1-19; compare Jer. 25:10-11; 29:10-14.

78 Dan 9:20-27.

79 Dan. 9:3-19.

80 Dan. 9:13.

81 Dan. 9:17.

82 Dan. 9:24-27.

83 Dan. 8:11-14.

84 Lev 25:1-7.

85 Lev. 25:8-55.

sanctuary was functioning or not. The divine liturgy controls history—a message that will later be emphasized in the New Testament’s Book of Revelation.

The purpose of the four hundred ninety penitential years is “to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a Holy of Holies.”<sup>86</sup> The language used here borrows from the technical terminology of the cult. The only other chapter of the Hebrew Bible where one finds the coincidence of most of these terms—“transgression,” “iniquity,” “atone,” “anoint,” “holy,” and “seven”—is Leviticus 16, which describes the Day of Atonement liturgy. Perhaps, then, the four hundred ninety-year period is to be understood as an atonement liturgy on a very large scale.

The most obvious reading of the text is to understand that the six infinitive clauses in Daniel 9:24—“to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place”—will be fulfilled at the end of the four hundred ninety-year period. This is the first hint at the actual duration of time involved before the anticipated restoration of the people of God portrayed in earlier sections of Daniel. The visions of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, with their successions of metals or beasts, gave no indication of the number of years required for the visions to come to completion. The canonical placement of the angelic oracle of Daniel 9:24–27 after these earlier visions suggests that the triumphant expansion of the Temple-mountain in Daniel 2 and the acquisition of the kingdom by the saints of the Most High in Daniel 7 are to be understood as simultaneous with, or even perhaps identical to, the events described in the infinitive clauses of Daniel 9:24.

Curiously, the way the culmination of the four hundred ninety years is described in Daniel 9:26–27 is far from what the reader might expect. Indeed, it is quite negative. The Messiah is cut off—probably meaning killed—and left with “nothing,” the city and sanctuary are destroyed in “flood” and war, sacrifice and offering cease once again, and a “desolator” arrives. The only clearly positive event described at the end of the four hundred ninety years is the “decreed end” being poured out upon the “desolator.” No great triumph for the people of God is described—no military victory, triumphant entry to Jerusalem, or glorious reign over their foes.

How is the reader to understand this disturbing oracle? Is the fulfillment of the goals of Daniel 9:24 simply left not narrated, leaving one is to understand an undescribed glorious age to follow immediately upon the events predicted in Daniel 9:26–27? Or in some mysterious way, is the “ending of sin,” “atonement for iniquity,” “anointing of a Holy of Holies,” and other good things of Daniel 9:24 simultaneous with the apparently disastrous events of the last two verses of the chapter? To push the issue further, could the triumphant expansion of the Temple-

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86 Dan 9:24.

mountain;<sup>87</sup> the reception of the kingdom by the “son of Man”/saints of the Most High;<sup>88</sup> and the destruction of Messiah, city, and sanctuary<sup>89</sup> really be different perspectives on the same climactic events? It would be hard for the ancient reader to see how they could be, and yet the sudden and disturbing ending of the oracle of Daniel 9:24–27 injects an sense of mystery into the sequence of visions in Daniel 2–9, suggesting that the manner of fulfillment of these visions may not be straightforward or predictable.

To sum up the message of Daniel 7–9, then, the central and pivotal visions of the book: Daniel 7 concerns the coming restoration of the kingdom; Daniel 8 the restoration of the divine liturgy (the *tamid*); and Daniel 9, the restoration of the sanctuary. The juxtaposition of these visions one after another suggests that they are all different perspectives on the same events or event. Kingdom, liturgy, and sanctuary are not sharply distinguished in the Book of Daniel; they are all interrelated. The visions of Daniel 7–9 introduce a note of hope not clearly present earlier: the kingdom will be given to the saints of the Most High<sup>90</sup> and the sanctuary will be restored.<sup>91</sup> Yet the mysterious angelic oracle at the end of Daniel 9 complicates what would otherwise be a clear picture. While not calling into question the certainty and truth of previous visions, it suggest the path to their fulfillment may be complex, even paradoxical.

### *Summing Up the Liturgical Motifs and Telos of Daniel*

The liturgical and cultic themes and motifs from the first nine chapters of the book noted above must suffice to demonstrate Daniel’s liturgical focus. If space permitted, we might unpack the liturgical motifs in the remainder of the book, such as the priestly connotations of the “man dressed in linen” in Daniel 10:5 and 12:6<sup>92</sup> and the obvious focus of Daniel 11–12 on the events leading up to and surrounding the interruption of the Temple liturgy, and its anticipated restoration.<sup>93</sup> We might even note that in the Septuagint Greek text, the text of Theodotion, the book ends with two stories of Daniel exposing the cult of Bel (Marduk) as a sham.<sup>94</sup>

87 Dan. 2:35.

88 Dan. 7:14, 27.

89 Dan. 9:26–27.

90 Dan. 7:27.

91 Dan. 8:14.

92 Vogel, “Cultic Motif,” 235–43.

93 Especially Dan. 11:31 and 12:11–12.

94 The Babylonian high god, Marduk, was known as Bel Marduk (Lord Marduk) or simply Bel. A storm god, he is analogous to Jupiter, Zeus, Ba’al, and Thor. He was symbolized by a serpent or dragon.

However, from this brief overview we can make the following observations: First, from the account of the abduction of the Temple vessels,<sup>95</sup> to the mysterious calculation of the time of the restoration of the *tamid*,<sup>96</sup> to Daniel's exposé of the cult of Bel,<sup>97</sup> the book displays a *liturgical telos*—that is, an orientation and focus on the true liturgy, especially its current disruption and future restoration.

Secondly, throughout the book, we are presented with a sharp contrast between two rival cultic kingdoms and their corresponding, mutually-exclusive liturgies. On the one hand there is the idolatrous and beastly Kingdom of Man, which demands worship of itself in the person of the Emperor or his patron deity, and subjugates the spiritual (worship) to serve political ends. On the other, there is the Kingdom of God, which demands worship of the true God from every tribe, tongue, and nation, and subjugates the political (the power of the state) to serve spiritual ends (true worship).<sup>98</sup>

### *Self-Sacrifice as Alternate Liturgy*

Daniel begins with the disruption of the Temple liturgy by Nebuchadnezzar's siege, and the author obviously intends his readers to be aware that not long afterward, in 587 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple and put an end to its liturgy. The narrative presumes this event, while not explicitly mentioning it. The dramatic action occurs when Daniel and his companions are exiled from Jerusalem and forcibly incorporated into the Kingdom of Man in its then-current form, the Kingdom of Babylon. Along with their countrymen and coreligionists, the protagonists of Daniel no longer have access to the true liturgy and are compelled on pain of death to participate in a false one. Thus is raised most poignantly one of the central questions of the Book of Daniel: how are the faithful worshippers of Israel's God to live and keep their faith when they have been cut off from their source of worship and are forced to live in a strange land?<sup>99</sup>

The answer of Daniel is that believers in the true God must be willing to consent to their own deaths and, in so doing, to make their lives a kind of *sacrificial liturgy*. Their sacrificial offering of their lives, Daniel suggests, substitutes for the forestalled Temple liturgy, and may in fact accomplish more effectively one of the

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95 Dan. 1:2.

96 Dan. 12:12.

97 Dan. 14.

98 Vogel summarizes the situation well: "The cultic motif considerably aids in understanding the kingdom theme in Daniel. From the very outset the cultic emphasis reveals that the conflict described is between the divine king Yahweh who resides in his house and the pagan god-kings. ... The conflict is between two systems of cultic worship and allegiance, Babylon and Jerusalem, a conflict that is even more accentuated by the total contrast of the opposing positions." "Cultic Motif," 338–39.

99 Compare Ps. 137:4.

goals of the Temple liturgy—namely, the recognition and worship of the true God among the nations.

In what follows, I want to advance a canonical reading of Daniel 1–3<sup>100</sup> in which the three young men are offered as living sacrifices in an alternate liturgy that finds favor with God and accomplishes God’s will among the nations. I will focus on three areas: the literary and conceptual relationship between the Temple vessels and the young Judean exiles; the liturgical overtones of the description of the young men’s persecution; and the significance of the *todah* pattern in the prayer of Azariah.

In terms of the narrative of Daniel, it seems odd and out of place that the book begins with the capture of the Temple vessels, which will not be mentioned again until much later in the text.<sup>101</sup> Why even mention them in the opening verses? Part of the answer may well be, as I suggested above, to telegraph the book’s focus and intention. But perhaps also the author is making a connection between the Temple vessels and the four young Judean exiles.

The Temple vessels—objects of beauty and purity, dedicated to God—are captured and forced into service in the house of a foreign god. In much the same way, the Judeans are young men of beauty and cultic purity (“without blemish”). They are dedicated to the God of Israel as indicated by their theophoric names—Daniel (literally, “God is my judge”), Hananiah (“God has been gracious”), Mishael (“who is like God”), and Azariah (“whom God aids”). And they are exiled and coerced into the king’s cult, which is indicated by the king changing their theonyms to names reflective of the Babylonian deities—Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego, respectively.

Perhaps these Judean nobles are to be understood as living instruments of the liturgy, dedicated to the worship of God. Just as the Temple vessels, in a sense, “resist” being incorporated into the worship of Babylon’s gods during the idolatrous feast of King Belshazzar, so the young men resist being incorporated into King Nebuchadnezzar’s cult. There are liturgical overtones to their consent to death in the fiery furnace. Of course, the animals sacrificed to God in the Temple were burned up as a “pleasing aroma” before him; so the young men are to be consumed in flame for their fidelity in worship to God. Is this just narrative coincidence? Is it a species of theological maximalism to see in this episode the young men “offering their bodies a living sacrifice” and as a “spiritual act of worship” here?<sup>102</sup>

I would suggest not. The theme of Daniel 3 is clearly that of true versus false worship, and the young men’s refusal to participate in Nebuchadnezzar’s idolatrous liturgy is the cause of their persecution. Moreover, their actions in the

100 In the Catholic canonical version, that is the Greek translation of Theodotion. See Note 37 above.

101 See Dan. 5.

102 Compare Rom 12:1.

furnace are given a strongly liturgical coloring, with the three praying and making acts of worship. Azariah raises his voice in a classic lament psalm, mourning the destruction of Jerusalem, the “holy city” and site of the Temple,<sup>103</sup> and referring to the shame and disgrace which has fallen on “your *servants* and *worshippers*” (*douloi kai sebomenoi*).<sup>104</sup> The prayer’s centerpiece is a theological meditation that includes many significant references the Temple liturgy:

And at this time there is no prince, or prophet, or leader, no *burnt offering*, or *sacrifice*, or *oblation*, or *incense*, no *place* to make an *offering* before thee or to *find mercy*. Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted, as though it were with *whole burnt offerings* (*holocausts*) of rams and bulls, and with tens of thousands of fat lambs; such may our *sacrifice* be in thy sight this day, and may we wholly follow thee, for there will be no shame for those who trust in thee.<sup>105</sup>

Here there is explicit acknowledgment of the theological and liturgical crisis the people of Israel are experiencing—there is no liturgy nor even the possibility of performing the liturgy, which is the ordinary means of being reconciled with God.<sup>106</sup> Instead, following the thought of Psalm 51:16–17, Azariah prays that “a contrite heart and a humble spirit” may substitute for “whole burnt offerings.”

Yet, the reader cannot help but notice, that all the time that Azariah prays, he himself, along with his companions, is being burnt whole in the fiery furnace. Thus, the text hints that it is not simply *the contrition and humility* of the young men that substitutes for the Temple sacrifices, but *the young men themselves* who are being offered *in lieu of animal sacrifices*. For example, Azariah prays that the young men may “be accepted” (*prosdechomai*),<sup>107</sup> a petition common in the Septuagint to appeal for God’s favorable response to a sacrifice:

[O God,] accept (*prosdechomai*) this sacrifice on behalf of all thy people Israel and preserve thy portion and make it holy. (2 Macc. 1:26)

103 In the discussion that follows, I will refer to the *Prayer of Azariah* which, along with the *Song of the Three Young Men*, is inserted between Dan. 3:23 and 3:24 in Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Russian Orthodox editions of the Bible, and included among the Apocrypha in other editions. The quotations here are from *Prayer of Azariah*, 5

104 *Prayer of Azariah*, 10.

105 *Prayer of Azariah*, 15–16. Emphasis added.

106 Lev. 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31.

107 *Prayer of Azariah*, 16

Do not say, "He will consider the multitude of my gifts, and when I make an offering to the Most High God he will accept (*prosdechomai*) it." (Sir. 7:9)

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept (*prosdechomai*) them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. (Amos 5:22)<sup>108</sup>

Likewise, when Azariah prays, "thus may *our sacrifice* be in thy sight,"<sup>109</sup> one may rightly ask, what is the referent for "our sacrifice [*thysia*]?" Does it consist merely of their contrition, or of the young men *themselves*, who have consented to become like living holocausts? The grammar of the text permits both readings. Thus we have in Azariah's prayer a distinct movement toward a concept of self-sacrifice expressed that will be more explicitly expressed elsewhere in the canon. In this regard, the Book of Wisdom, which was likely written about a half-century after Daniel, is worth quoting in context:

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. ... For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; *like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted [*prosdechomai*] them.* In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them for ever. (Wisd. 3:1–8)

Several parallels are notable between the "righteous" in Wisdom and the experience of the young men in Daniel. First, no harm comes to them,<sup>110</sup> and they have a firm hope in their survival.<sup>111</sup> Second, they are tried in a "furnace," and "accepted" like a burnt offering.<sup>112</sup> Finally, they are rewarded with rulership over the nations.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, both texts display a developing understanding of the mystical relationship between the suffering of the righteous and the sacrificial liturgy.

108 Compare also Hos. 8:13 (LXX); Mic. 6:7; Mal 1:8, 10, 13; Ezek. 20:40, 41; 43:27.

109 *Prayer of Azariah*, 17.

110 Compare Wisd 3:1; *Prayer of Azariah*, 27; Dan. 3:27.

111 Compare Wisd. 3:4; Dan. 3:17.

112 Compare Wisd. 3:6; *Prayer of Azariah*, 15–16.

113 Compare Wisd. 3:8; Dan. 3:30.

### *The Todah in the Prayer of Azariah*

There is a further aspect of the narrative of the three young men in the Septuagint edition that lends a liturgical character to the whole episode. As I have mentioned, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, when taken together, complete a *todah* cycle, that is, the movement from lament to praise characteristic of many individual psalms and of the canonical shape of the Psalter itself.

Some comment on scholarship on the *todah* is appropriate. *Todah* translates as “praise” or “thanksgiving.” The *todah* sacrifice—the “sacrifice of praise” or “thanksgiving”—was a particular liturgical ritual whose basic characteristics are given in Leviticus 7:11–15. It was a voluntary sacrifice offered to God in gratitude for a particular favor, generally salvation from a severe crisis of some sort, and it was a festive occasion.<sup>114</sup>

By *todah* cycle, I refer to the sequence of experiences through which the individual would pass, culminating in the liturgical offering of the *todah*. These experiences would begin with a situation of distress, such as illness or attack, that would cause the believer to cry out to God and, often, to vow to offer the *todah* or thanksgiving sacrifice when God delivers him. There would follow an act of divine deliverance, often not explicitly described in the psalms. In thanksgiving, the worshipper would then process to the Temple in the company of family and friends, perform his vow to sacrifice the *todah*, praise God publicly by recounting the distress from which God delivered him, and share a festive meal with his entourage.

Since the pioneering work of Hermann Gunkel, scholars have proposed that the offering of the *todah* was the *Sitz-im-Leben* (“setting in life”) of several key psalms, such as Psalms 22, 68, and 116, which exhibit a characteristic movement from lament over the crisis afflicting the psalmist to praise for God’s deliverance from the crisis.<sup>115</sup> With its concentration of lament psalms in the first book of the Psalter (Psalms 1–41) and the hymns of praise in the Psalter’s fifth and final book (Psalms 107–150), it may be observed that the canonical shape of the Psalter as a whole exhibits this *todah* movement from lament to praise.

From a canonical perspective, the move from lament to praise in Daniel 3 (Theodotian) lends a *todah* character to the three young men’s almost “liturgical” consent to self-sacrifice. Of course, though they consent to die, they are in fact delivered. In a sense, they are raised from the dead. As such, the scene functions

114 See descriptions of the *todah* life-setting in Gunkel, *Psalms*, 199–211; Gese, *Essays*, 128–33; Guthrie, *Theology as Thanksgiving*, 1–30; and Barber, *Singing in the Reign*, 76–80.

115 What is said there about Gunkel’s analysis of Ps. 57 is equally applicable to Ps. 22. Likewise, Claus Westermann (*Praise and Lament in the Psalms* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1981]) helpfully notes that most lament psalms move from plea to praise (at 33, 75), and moreover that the songs of lament correspond to and find their resolution in what he calls the “songs of thanksgiving” (at 27–30). Westermann does not recognize the significance of the *todah* sacrifice as the *Sitz-im-Leben* of this movement from plea to praise; Guthrie addresses this *lacuna* in Westermann’s work in *Theology as Thanksgiving*, 12–25.

canonically as one of many types and anticipations of the central mystery of the faith, the resurrection of the Christ from the dead. It is no coincidence that, as Christ himself consented to his quasi-liturgical self-sacrifice on the cross, he invited onlookers to interpret his death in light of the one psalm that gives us perhaps the fullest account of the *todah*-cycle,<sup>116</sup> quoting its first line from the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”<sup>117</sup>

It is significant that several of the *todah* psalms conclude with an exhortation to universal praise of the Lord, even among the “nations,” that is, the Gentiles.<sup>118</sup> The psalms frequently call for the nations to praise the Lord of Israel;<sup>119</sup> indeed, the *Sitz-im-Leben* of most of the psalms was the Temple liturgy and it should be noted that the liturgy of the Temple was meant to bring the knowledge of the Lord to the nations. Solomon made this clear in the fifth petition of his prayer at dedication of the Temple: “that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you.”<sup>120</sup>

Thus, when read in canonical context, we see new dimensions to the self-offering of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In consenting to their deaths in testimony to the worship of the true God, they become, as it were, sacrificial holocausts; and yet they experience deliverance from the deaths they willingly accepted, resulting in the true God being praised by Nebuchadnezzar, as the head of the Kingdom of Man.<sup>121</sup>

This same pattern—consent to death for the sake of true worship ultimately leading to the universal knowledge and praise of the Lord—repeats in the narrative of Daniel in the den of lions, which also culminates in the foreign king issuing a universal decree ordering worship Israel’s God.<sup>122</sup>

It might be said, then, that in their exile Daniel, given the absence or unavailability of the Temple liturgy, the Judeans are asked to consent to personally serving as the sacrificial offerings in an “actualized” liturgy that results, ironically, in perhaps a more effective proclamation and praise of God among the nations than the Temple liturgy had ever produced to that time.

The question then becomes: is there any precedent for the concept of personal consent-to-death as intrinsically related to the Temple liturgy? I believe we can find such a precedent in the Jewish interpretive tradition concerning the *Aqedah*, or “binding” of Isaac.

116 See Ps. 22.

117 Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34; compare Ps. 22:1.

118 See Ps. 22:27–28.

119 Pss. 47:1; 66:8; 67:3–5; 72:11; 86:9; 96:7; 97:6; 99:1–2; 102:15, 22; 117:1; 148:11.

120 1 Kings 8:41–43.

121 Dan. 3:29–30.

122 Dan. 6:26.

There is good evidence that long before the coming of Christ, a link was made in the Jewish tradition between the mountain in Moriah where Isaac was offered and Mount Moriah, the site of the Temple.<sup>123</sup> The rock on which Solomon's Temple stood was thought to have been hallowed by Abraham's consent to sacrifice his son, and Isaac's willingness to offer himself in sacrifice to the Lord for the sake of his father.<sup>124</sup> As is well known, in later Jewish tradition, the merit and efficacy of all the Temple sacrifices was attributed to the *Aqedah*.<sup>125</sup> Isaac's self-sacrificial consent was truly meritorious; all animal sacrifices were memorials and commemorations of this original meritorious self-sacrifice.

It seems likely that this understanding of the *Aqedah* in relationship to the Temple cult was already in place when the Book of Wisdom was being written and the Septuagint edition of Daniel compiled.<sup>126</sup> The sacrificial liturgy of the Temple commemorated and substituted for the personal self-sacrifice of Isaac, the father of Israel. Now, in Daniel, during the exile, in the absence of the sacrificial liturgy of the Temple, individual Israelites are called once again to imitate their forefather and consent to their own deaths as an act of obedience and worship to the Lord. If the *Aqedah* is the prototypical and foundational sacrifice of the Temple liturgy, then the "real" and meritorious liturgy always was a voluntary act of self-sacrifice; the "symbolic" liturgy memorialized it. When the "symbolic" liturgy is destroyed, the worshippers of God are asked once again to participate in the "real" liturgy.<sup>127</sup>

123 On this, see most recently Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University, 2009), 117–18, and the literature cited therein.

124 See Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 123–30 and literature cited therein.

125 See C. T. R. Hayward, "Present State of Research into the Targumic Account of the Sacrifice of Isaac," *Journal of Jewish Studies* (1981): 127–50, at 48–49; compare *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:11 on Lev. 1:5, 11. See also, Jo Milgrom, *The Binding of Isaac: The Aqedah, A Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art* (Berkeley, CA: Bibal, 1988), 66–70.

126 See Robert Hayward, *Divine Name and Presence: The Memra*, Publications of the Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies (Totowa, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun, 1981), 131; and Hayward, "Shem, Melchizedek, and Concern with Christianity in the Pentateuchal Targumim," in *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honor of Martin McNamara*, eds. Kevin J. Cathcart and Martin Maher, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 230 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 79, 130–34. Hayward points out several key similarities in theology and scriptural interpretation between the Targums and Jewish literature dating from approximately the second century B.C. Furthermore, these commonalities are frequently suppressed or revised in later rabbinic literature. On this basis, Hayward argues that the Targums largely represent pre-Christian, Jewish interpretive traditions.

127 One scarcely need mention how this concept of the relationship of self-sacrifice to the liturgy is taken up in the New Testament and applied primarily to Christ, who in certain passages is clearly marked as the anti-type of Isaac (John 3:16). The term "only-begotten" (*monogenes*) in John 3:16 is widely held to be a Greek rendering of the Hebrew term "one and only" (*yahid*) which occurs three times in Gen. 22 (vv. 2, 12, 16).

### *Daniel in the Twenty-first Century*

As we have seen, two themes, liturgy and empire, dominate the Book of Daniel. Almost all the major conflicts of the first half of the book arise from the clash of two mutually exclusive *liturgical empires* or *cultic kingdoms*: the Kingdom of Man embodied in the conquering monarch, and the Kingdom of God, the defeated monarchy of Israel. The underlying practical issue in Daniel is how are the Israelites to live as a subject people in a state that does not respect their religious beliefs and rituals and indeed compels them to participate in religious practices that are contrary and offensive to their beliefs. The answers provided by the book are complex and sometimes surprising.

This issue is perennial and remains an especially important question for Christian readers of Daniel today who, likewise live in a kind of “exile.” What can be learned from the perspective of Daniel? In fact, read in this light, Daniel is quite contemporary. First, it is notable that both Daniel and his companions serve in the King’s palace and later in his imperial administration.<sup>128</sup> It is said that they served with great skill and fidelity;<sup>129</sup> in fact, the text commends them for their loyal and valuable service, and never suggests that such service is in conflict with their commitment to God.

One could imagine the author adopting a different approach. It could have been argued, for example, that any service rendered to the Babylonian monarch was a betrayal of the people of Israel whom he had conquered and oppressed, and whose holiest site, the Temple, he had destroyed. It could have been argued that any cooperation or loyalty shown to the regime would necessarily have involved a form of moral cooperation with the idolatry and pagan practices of the states. Such was the view taken by the Zealots in the time of Jesus and by many others since.

However, the author of Daniel does not adopt this paradigm of complete non-cooperation in the Kingdom of Man. Instead, we find in Daniel something similar to the approach that grew out of Christ’s teaching in the Gospels, and is found in the apostolic Church and in the writings and practice of the early Church Fathers. In effect, Daniel and his companions “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.”<sup>130</sup> It is permissible and even laudable for Daniel and his companions to participate in the civil service of the Babylonian empire; they show loyalty<sup>131</sup> for the civil ruler and to render faithful counsel to him. This is all the more remarkable since one of the monarchs, Nebuchadnezzar, was responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem, the confisca-

<sup>128</sup> Dan. 1:4; 2:48–49.

<sup>129</sup> Dan. 1:17–20.

<sup>130</sup> Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25.

<sup>131</sup> Dan. 4:19; 6:22.

tion of the Temple vessels, and the razing of the Temple itself. Nonetheless, Daniel serves him faithfully and offers him faithful counsel.

Service of the state's political apparatus is not the issue, but service of the state cult, in which Daniel and his companions refuse to participate. The state they could serve, but not the gods of the state. We can see here strong lines of similarity with the attitude of the early Church toward the Roman state. The attitude of Daniel and his companions recalls the apostolic Church's practice of praying for the Emperor while refusing participation in the pagan rituals. The attitude modeled by Daniel and his companions was later articulated, to a certain extent, by St. Paul<sup>132</sup> and **announced** (?) powerfully in Christian history by St. Thomas More. More summarized the principle in the phrase attributed to him as his last words before his beheading by agents of Henry VIII: "I die the king's good servant, but God's first."<sup>133</sup>

Of course, in More's case there came a time when the law of the King required actions in direct conflict with the law of God. So it was also with Daniel and his companions—and in their case the conflict arose over the issue of worship. Cut off from the Temple liturgy, exiled in a foreign land under a totalitarian regime, the Judean youths find that fidelity and obedience to God will require consenting to their own deaths rather than cooperating with the idolatrous worship commanded by the state.

As we have seen, when read canonically, the three young men in Daniel 3 essentially become holocausts in "substitute" for the Temple holocausts that could no longer be offered. And we saw how, from a broader perspective, the Temple holocausts themselves that were a memorial and "substitute" for Isaac's meritorious consent to death on Mount Moriah. And in Daniel, as in certain psalms and prophetic writings,<sup>134</sup> we are able to trace a movement in the idea of sacrifice—from the "substitutionary" idea of offering something in the place of or as a symbol of one's own life, to offering one's life itself. Daniel and his friends learned this lesson in the sacrifice that God truly desires in the crucible of the of political totalitarianism.

Commanded to worship strange gods in a strange land, Daniel and his friends learned that their very lives were to become a liturgy, anticipating what St. Paul would call "spiritual worship."<sup>135</sup> Cut off from the Temple, the youths be-

132 See Rom. 13:1–7; compare Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13–14.

133 This phrase from Robert Bolt's play "A Man for All Seasons" (New York: Vintage International, 1990 [1962]) is an adjustment of More's actual last words: "I die the king's good servant, and God's first." Compare James Monti, *The King's Good Servant but God's First: The Life and Writings of St. Thomas More* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997).

134 Compare Jer. 7:21–24; Micah 6:6–8; Hos. 6:6; Pss. 40:1–11; 50:9–13.

135 Rom. 12:1.

come incorporated into the “real” liturgy; or, expressed differently, they undergo a profound experience of the reality re-presented symbolically in the Temple liturgy, the reality of a worship of God which involves the total self-gift of the worshipper. In the two primary instances of this worship-through-self-gift in Daniel,<sup>136</sup> God acts in an extra-ordinary fashion for the deliverance of his worshippers, with the result that knowledge and praise of the Lord—one of the goals of the Temple and its liturgy—are spread among all the nations.

Therefore, Daniel is a book of hope, showing with some irony that in the midst of what appears to be the bleakest of times for people of God—with no political expression of God’s kingdom and no opportunity to celebrate the true liturgy—nonetheless true worship is still offered in a more profound form. Being a book of hope, the narrative focuses on inspiring events where God’s hand was clearly evident in an extra-ordinary act of salvation. However, within the narrative itself, neither Daniel nor his companions had any clear assurance of God’s supernatural intervention prior to their consent to their own deaths.

Jewish and Christian readers, moreover, know all too well that countless believers since Daniel’s day have refused to bow the knee to the pagan gods and were consequently consumed in flames or by wild beasts without any visible indication of divine intervention.

Thus, Daniel reads as a call to emulate the courage of these young men who faced death with no certainty of deliverance. The youths’ statement to Nebuchadnezzar articulates their resolution to stay faithful to the true cult whether or not God intervenes: “O Nebuchadnezzar ... Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us .... *But if not*, be it known to you, O king, that *we will not serve your gods.*”<sup>137</sup> In the subsequent history of Judaism and Christianity, the hope of God’s deliverance was not fulfilled immediately but postponed to the *eschaton*, the resurrection of the dead, one of the earliest explicit descriptions of which is found in Daniel 12:1–4.

Such was the case for two of the apostolic fathers and martyrs, St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp, who, in appropriately Danielic fashion, died one by burning and the other by lions. Notably, in the memorials of their martyrdoms, their deaths are described in strikingly liturgical language. Ignatius describes his imminent death in the arena as follows:

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<sup>136</sup> Dan. 3, 6.

<sup>137</sup> Dan. 3:17.

Pray leave me to be a meal for the beasts, for it is they who can provide my way to God. I am His wheat, ground fine by the lion's teeth to be made purest bread for Christ.<sup>138</sup>

Likewise, Polycarp's martyrdom at the stake is described in this way:

So they did not nail him, but tied him instead. Then he, having placed his hands behind him and having been bound, like a splendid ram chosen from a great flock for a sacrifice, a burnt offering prepared and acceptable to God. ... For the fire, taking the shape of an arch, like the sail of a ship filled by the wind, completely surrounded the body of the martyr; and it was there in the middle, not like flesh burning but like bread baking or like gold and silver being refined in a furnace. For we also perceived a very fragrant odor, as if it were the scent of incense or some other precious spice.<sup>139</sup>

In both statements one sees Eucharistic allusions, pointing to the martyr's death as a kind of liturgical actualization, a conforming of the Christian in his self-offering to the reality re-presented in the Eucharistic liturgy. This theology of the "death of the saints" is the full flowering of the concepts we have seen in development in the Book of Daniel.

Many twenty-first century Christians find themselves living in a religious and political situation that resembles more that of Daniel and his companions than the Israelites in the glory days of David and Solomon. For them, the Book of Daniel continues to speak a message of hope. The progress of the Kingdom of God is not measurable by political yard sticks. Like the witness of Daniel and his compatriots, the witness of the faithful today under various forms of political repression may, paradoxically, prove more effective in achieving the *telos* of God's liturgy—spreading knowledge and praise of him to the ends of the earth.

<sup>138</sup> Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, 4. Text in *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch*, trans. and annot. James A. Kleist, Ancient Christian Writers 1 (New York: Paulist, 1946), 81–82.

<sup>139</sup> *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, 14–15. Text in *The Didache, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Epistles and the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, the Fragments of Papias, the Epistle to Diognetus*, trans. and annot. James A. Kleist, Ancient Christian Writers 6 (New York: Paulist, 1948), 97–98; compare Wisd. 3:6.