

# Some Thoughts on Dan 4

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## Introduction

In Dan 4 Nebuchadnezzar reports seeing a dream about a great tree, which was eventually cut down. He does not know what the dream means and so consults his wise men, but they are unable to tell him. Finally he calls for Daniel, who warns the king that he is the one represented by the tree. Nebuchadnezzar himself is to be cut down because of his pride and other sins. Daniel then counsels him to repent. Perhaps disaster can still be avoided. But we are getting ahead of our story. The king begins with his other wise men and so must we. Only when we understand them can we understand Daniel in contrast with them, as Nebuchadnezzar did. Who were these other wise men and what sorts of interpretations could the king have expected to receive from them?

### Daniel's colleagues

(6) So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. (7) When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. (Dan 4:6-7)

When Nebuchadnezzar summoned "all the wise men of Babylon" (Dan 4:6), those who came represented four professional categories: "magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners" (vs. 7). Altogether there are eight lists similar to this one in the book of Daniel (1:20; 2:2, 10, 27; 4:7[4]; 5:7, 11, and 15).<sup>1</sup> A total of six professional categories are mentioned in them but never more than four in any one list. Below these categories are given in English alphabetical order based on NIV. See table 1.

Table 1  
Distribution of Terms  
(English)

Categories	References							
	1:20	2:2	2:10	2:27	4:7	5:7	5:11	5:15
Astrologers		X	X		X	X	X	X
Diviners				X	X	X	X	
Enchanters	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Magicians	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Sorcerers		X						
Wise men				X				X

We can learn some things about the above terms by studying the lists in which they occur, quite apart from their meanings in the original languages. Each term is used a countable number of times and in an objectively knowable sequence. In what follows, they are arranged by a combination of frequency of use and location relative to each other in the lists. See table 2.

Table 2  
Relative Frequency and Ordering  
of the Terms

Professional Categories	Number of Times that a Term Occurs				Total Lists
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
Enchanters	1	7			8
Magicians	5	1			6
Astrologers		1	3	1	5
Diviners			1	3	4
Wise men	2				2
Sorcerers			1		1

From table 2 we can generalize that there is a rough correlation between how often a term is used and where it will appear in any given list. High frequency terms tend to be placed ahead of others that are used less frequently. This rule holds roughly for five of the six entries ("enchanters," "magicians," "astrologers," "diviners," "sorcerers"). An exception is the general term "wise men," which appears only twice but heads the list both times. What I draw from these facts is that priority as to how many times an item is used and priority as to where it is placed are not two things but one. The one thing manifested in these two ways could be broadly identified as the degree of importance each category has in Daniel's thinking.

Knowing which categories were more important than others to Daniel gives us a window on his mind and this can help us identify the time in history when he wrote. Babylonian religion was not a monolithic whole. It underwent change over time and anything we can learn about it here will help us in dating the book.<sup>2</sup>

Daniel's lists of religious functionaries are informative for what they do not say as well as what they do say. If a later compiler were merely inserting a jumble of Babylonian professional titles for effect, as some allege, one would expect to see *asû* practitioners mentioned alongside their *āšipu* counterparts. Elsewhere they are often mentioned together.<sup>3</sup> In their day both the *asû* and the *āšipu* were considered medical people--the *asû* as a physician proper dealing with herbs or whatever (sometimes even performing surgery)<sup>4</sup> and the *āšipu* as a metaphysical healer dealing with evil spirits and other intangibles. But here *asû* is correctly omitted. The context is not one of healing but of dealing with the supernatural--the *āšipu*'s area of special expertise. In this regard notice that, whereas *asû* is never included in any of the lists, Hebrew *ʾaššāp* or Aramaic *ʾāšap* (borrowed from Akkadian *āšipu*) in its various forms appears in all eight of them. The person who recorded these lists was acquainted with his subject matter. The words he uses are foreign to us but they were not foreign to him.

The Babylonians noticed and recorded all kinds of natural phenomena (see 2 Chr 32:31).<sup>5</sup> The events they observed were either normal or unusual. Unusual events were interpreted as omens.<sup>6</sup> Omens were either favorable or unfavorable.<sup>7</sup> There was no concept of natural law.<sup>8</sup> The gods did whatever they pleased.<sup>9</sup> Their will and the ways they chose to express their will in nature were alike unpredictable. This did not mean that the future was beyond knowing,<sup>10</sup> however, only that the gods were capricious and that nature reflected their activity. Those shrewd enough to do so were left to work out the implications of any omens the gods might leave behind.<sup>11</sup>

The main business of a Babylonian god was to be served.<sup>12</sup> Because entire human populations were required in order to accomplish this objective, official religion dealt for the most part with the state or with the king as its special representative. At issue in either case was the general welfare.<sup>13</sup> Some scholars question (and others affirm) that the relationship between a king and his gods can properly be called a covenant.<sup>14</sup> Whether or not this term is used, the relationship between a god and the state that served him had to be renewed annually at the time of the spring new year's ceremony.<sup>15</sup> The primary relationship in all of this was between god and state.<sup>16</sup> If the king could ensure that the god continued to get what he wanted, that boded well for the future. If he could not, there were others who wanted to be king.

Private religion in Babylon was irrelevant on the above level. Taking a personal interest in the supernatural was regarded as idle curiosity.<sup>17</sup> Prior to Alexander's time the king and his courtiers were the only ones who had any reason to concern themselves directly with state religion, which was the only kind that mattered. Cities had gods.<sup>18</sup> People had cities. There was a relationship between them but it was indirect.<sup>19</sup> Gilgamesh, for example, was warned not to dabble privately with the supernatural. It was none of his concern:

Gilgamesh, fill your belly-  
day and night make merry,  
let every day be full of joy,  
dance and make music day and night.  
Put on clean clothes,  
and wash your head and bathe.  
Gaze at the child that is holding your hand,  
and let your wife delight in your embrace.  
These things alone are the concern of men.<sup>20</sup>

A great gulf separates the worldviews of Daniel's colleagues on the one hand and Daniel on the other. These men did not just worship different gods. The entire thoughtworld associated with such worship placed the two systems in contrast. The Babylonian wise men sought to know the future by examining sheep's livers, by searching for unusual alignments of planets or stars, and in many other ways.<sup>21</sup> They believed the gods were capricious and often hostile but that there was a correct answer to the question, What will occur?<sup>22</sup> Daniel also believed that this question could be answered--but only if God revealed the future. The Babylonians' concern about the future was not shared by their gods. The gods made no effort to reveal their will to mankind. If the king wished to have his wise men discover it on their own initiative, however, he could do so.<sup>23</sup>

## Daniel

"Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue." (Dan 4:27)

Three facts about the story of Dan 4 are especially significant. The first is that God approached Nebuchadnezzar rather than the reverse. The Babylonians practiced dream divination, but what they interpreted were not revelations. Babylonian gods took no interest in mankind except as they could get something from them. The God of heaven, however, came to Nebuchadnezzar with a specific message. He did not merely do something that caused a dream

to occur as its telltale omen. Yahweh had a personal interest in the king and sought him out rather than waiting for His will to be stumbled upon in some other way.

Second, Nebuchadnezzar was warned at one time and punished at another. By this I do not mean that in terms of Einsteinian mechanics no two events can be fully simultaneous and so from our perspective the one would have to follow the other.<sup>24</sup> I mean that a significant amount of time lapsed between the two events. According to Dan 4:29 Nebuchadnezzar was not punished until twelve months after he was warned. This waiting period is an important part of the story. Without it one could assume that Yahweh was punishing Nebuchadnezzar capriciously, just as any of the Babylonian gods might have done, thus allowing Nebuchadnezzar to think of Yahweh as being on the same level with them. In fact, however, Yahweh's purpose was firm. He could wait if that were necessary in order to bring it about.

There is a question how long Nebuchadnezzar was insane. Twice we are told the length of this period--in Dan 4:16 and 23--but the word used is ""times"" (Aramaic *iddānîn*). How long is a "time"? Our answer will be based on an interpretation of the Aramaic word. In most cases a "time" is a year, as a footnote in NIV points out. But seven ""times"" could just as easily be seven months as seven years and with both alternatives before us the former is more reasonable. If no one cut Nebuchadnezzar's hair or nails for seven months it would be literally true that "his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird" (Dan 4:33). If the period in question were seven years, on the other hand, such a description would no longer apply. Up to a certain point Nebuchadnezzar's hair would stick out like eagle's feathers, but then it would start to hang like rope. This description of his hair would only apply within a certain window of time. The king's nails also would gradually reach and then exceed the length described. Also, if the king were repeatedly unavailable for the annual New Year ceremony renewing the city's contract with Marduk, even so great a king as Nebuchadnezzar could not have survived politically. A period of seven months fulfills every aspect of the prophecy in a reasonable manner. But, whether we are talking about years or months, my point is that God was willing to wait--not only for the punishment to begin but also for it to have its effect. The God of heaven was not in a hurry but wanted only to do His work well. This aspect of His nature has not changed.

The gods of Babylon were not interested in individuals--not even individual kings. But Daniel's God was. His displeasure was not with the Babylonian people but only with their king. The kingdom itself would remain unaffected by Nebuchadnezzar's insanity. This is the third point. There would be no public disaster. Nebuchadnezzar's punishment was for himself alone.

All three of these facts are remarkable when understood in the only context available for understanding them when the events of Dan 4 took place. The initiative and stability of purpose God showed in His dealings with Nebuchadnezzar and the personal nature of His interest in that king place Daniel's God in an entirely different category from the Babylonian deities Nebuchadnezzar was accustomed to worshipping.

There are things that we also can learn from these events in addition to whatever benefit Nebuchadnezzar might have gained from them. According to Daniel a person is responsible for his actions because they follow from moral choices that he is freely able to make. The future is not recorded ahead of time in sheep's livers or in the stars. We are all sinful--over that we have no control--but we can choose in any given instance whether or not to perform a sinful act. If we were clinically unable to control our actions, we would not be held responsible for them. The fact that God does hold us responsible is evidence that He considers those actions to be a free exercise of our own will. We are judged on the basis of whatever intelligent choices we make.

The corollary to this is that when a person turns from a course of sinful behavior, God, for His part, responds to that change in an appropriate manner. His actions are not random, nor are they predetermined by fate. And yet God knows in advance what our free choices will be. If we deny the first assertion, we cannot account for the fact that Daniel appeals to Nebuchadnezzar to renounce his sins. If we deny the second, we cannot account for the fact that God shows Nebuchadnezzar in advance what will happen to him if he does not. So let us accept both of these facts as biblical, explaining their cooccurrence as the Holy Spirit enables us to do that. Until He does, let us not judge God's mind by the standard of our own limitations.

## Discussion

The Lord wants to be our God and being infinite in majesty He deserves to be. But He also wants to be our Friend. He takes a personal interest in each of His human children. He could force us to serve Him in an external manner, but even an infinite God cannot force us to love Him. He cannot force us to serve Him from our hearts. Love cannot be taken. It can only be given.<sup>25</sup> Substitutes for love can be taken. An outward mockery of love can be taken. But God, being as infinite in wisdom as He is in power, knows exactly what He wants and is not deceived by hollow substitutes for it. So the same attributes that could on one level make God able to take our service by an act of His will rather than ours make Him unwilling to do so.

What we are talking here about giving or withholding is a need deeply rooted in God's nature--one that He cannot repress and cannot satisfy without the spontaneous service of love freely rendered by His creatures.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is true that we need Him, but, in a sense we can never fully comprehend, He also needs us.

Is there anything fundamentally inconsistent about a state of affairs in which favor is given freely (i.e., saving grace) and heart obedience is given freely in return (i.e., works pleasing to God)? The two can be contrasted, certainly, but here the question is whether they can coexist. This is tantamount to asking whether a relationship between God and man can involve genuine mutuality. If it cannot, then our relationship with God is a deception and we are pagans whether we choose to call ourselves that or not. If we know Jesus only as One who takes our service, we do not know Him at all (see Matt 25:12). On the other hand, if we open our hearts to Jesus in full and free obedience to all His commands because He is the One who established them and because we delight to serve Him, we come to know our Lord in a way that would not be possible in any other way. Any service we render to God is a return on a prior investment that He has already made in us through the death of His Son. He serves us first and we serve Him because we cannot ignore what He has done for us. Where is the legalism in such an arrangement?

What God wants from His human creatures more than any other one thing is mutuality--intelligent fellowship. Humankind was called into existence for this very purpose. It is our primary function in life both to supply and to enjoy fellowship with our Creator. This is not the Babylonian concept of being created in order to serve. Instead God created us in order to have an object on whom He could lavish His blessings. He is other-oriented in His dealings with us and expects us to be other-oriented in our dealings with Him, as well as with the rest of humanity. He expects us to pass the test that Lucifer failed because of his misunderstanding of God's nature. He expects us to be "like the Most High" (Isa 14:14), having once understood what He is truly like (see Matt 11:28-30).

Here is the broader context in which we must study God's need to be correctly understood. It is more than an emotional response on His part. The well being of the universe has been thrown in jeopardy by a failure on just this point. It is imperative for our own survival that throughout the universe all beings capable of higher thought should have an intelligent understanding of the One who called them into existence. In this, as in all other things, God puts our interests ahead of His own. We can read Mesopotamian literature from now until Jesus comes and never find anything remotely similar to this in it anywhere.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

In the present paper I have argued that God takes a personal interest in His human children. After two thousand years of Christianity we might take this for granted but for Nebuchadnezzar it was a revolutionary concept. A second point corresponding to the first is that God's great interest in us is consistent with His willingness, on occasion, to wait.

We are living during a period of delay. Could it be that there is something God wants from this generation and that He is still waiting to see it? If the result He wants cannot be secured without a lapse of time, He is willing to wait, to make us wait, and yes to drive us wild with waiting. If necessary He can wait until our hair grows like eagles' feathers and our nails look like birds' claws. He can wait until we grow roots--like the tree stump left behind in Dan 4:23--or alternatively until we give Him what He wants.

What God wants is a people who reflect His image, a people who understand what He has been trying to say all this time and with whom He can enter a relationship of genuine mutuality. He wants just once to see His entire program implemented. Is this so unreasonable? Must He be misunderstood in every generation? The people we read about in the Bible could see only what God was doing in their own day and retell the stories of what He had done before. All this while God read the future as we would read an open book. But by now the entire panorama of biblical history is open before us as well. In our generation people can read what was still future then literally in an open Book. We can survey the entire scope of God's purposes in Scripture and see them--within certain parameters--as He has always seen them. Surely from such a perspective aided by the Holy Spirit it would not be necessary for us also to miss what He has been saying.

This generation must do more than turn the clock back to the sixteenth century (or the nineteenth). The great Reformers of an earlier day were men who loved God more than life itself and yet to a man they flew in the face of His law. Martin Luther saw the most profound significance in Genesis but could not make the connection between Gen 2:1-3 and Exod 20:8-11.<sup>28</sup> He could not understand in all its ramifications that a God who wants to be loved wants also to be obeyed. But this confluence of ideas is precisely the point that begs to be captured. Loving obedience, obedience based on and following from love rather than compulsion, is the foundation and cornerstone of God's government. Seventh-day Adventists also need to grasp this concept, but at least the truths we profess are consistent with grasping it. We keep the Sabbath not because we have forgotten the Reformation and not because Moses placed his commas here and here but because God created the world. There is no Bible translation that can butcher any passage or series of passages badly enough to obscure this point. Creating our planet is the ultimate act of service--and of love. Thus, returning love and service together is not heretical. On the contrary, it is consistent with everything God says to humankind in His Word (see Ezek 18:25, 30). It is surely consistent with His self-revelation in Christ. The events of Gen

1 and 2 are not only the foundation for Sabbath sacredness but for mankind's worship of the Creator in any form.

If we did not know that our earth and solar system were created for our benefit by a loving God, we would worship the earth itself, or the moon, or the sun, or some other object in nature. The Sabbath is not an afterthought in God's program for mankind. It is a token of loyalty to His government and any alternative to it will in the end serve as a token of disloyalty to His government. Our hearts' obedience will be given to someone and God wants to be that One. "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and my name is to be feared among the nations'" (Mal 1:14).

We must move beyond the cavil that mankind in his fallen condition cannot obey the law of God because it is too holy to be kept. God knew what we were like when He gave us His law. More than this, our fallen condition, which we now use as an excuse for open disobedience, is the very reason why He had to write its precepts down in a form that we would not forget and could not ignore. And yet the thought of obeying an infinite God is daunting. How can anyone keep God's law in a manner that satisfies the law Giver? And how would anyone else know if someone did (see Rom 14:4)? But God knows and here is what He says:

- (4) "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. (5) You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, (6) but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments." (Exod 20:4-6)

Here, in vs. 6, God says there are "thousands who love me and keep my commandments." At issue is not merely one person's outward compliance with the written code. On a spiritual level has any fallen child of Adam ever truly loved God from his heart and obeyed His commandments? Consider the book of Hebrews where faith is heart obedience.<sup>29</sup> In Heb 11 some thirty-seven specific examples of Old Testament obedience are held up to Christians as role models for New Testament faith.<sup>30</sup>

So, while we go in our various theological spirals wondering what these things could possibly mean, God waits. It should be clear by now that He is willing to do that. But there is something more He is willing to do. He is willing to restore the kingdom to us. He is willing to bring us back to our lost dominion under Christ. Let us not give up our confidence during the last hour before He does this. God knows, with an awareness we can never hope to equal, that we are dust. And yet He loves us. More than this, He desires our companionship. Let us believe what He says and be found waiting for Him when He comes.

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Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

<sup>1</sup>See James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>"For example, most of the early historical omens derived from the observation of the entrails of animals and this type of divination was early associated with royal behavior. By the first millennium the observation of celestial omens had taken its place in the public sphere. But even though the favored method changed, the perceived validity of the practice continued"

(Maria deJong Ellis, "Mesopotamian Oracles and Prophetic Texts: Literary and Historiographic Considerations," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 41 [1989]: 145-46). "The first evidence for personal horoscopes comes also from Babylonia; the earliest known example is dated to 410 BC and there are several 3rd-century texts of this type" (John Oates, *Babylon* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1979], p. 190). In Daniel we find people taking star omens and liver omens but no reference to personal horoscopes. This feature of later Babylonian religious life is appropriately absent. More attention should be given to the matter of change over time as a means of evaluating the professional world depicted in Daniel.

<sup>3</sup>See Paul E. Dion, "Medical Personnel in the Ancient Near East: *asû* and *āšīpu* in Aramaic Garb," *Aram* 1 (1989): 206-216. The one was a "medical practitioner proper," the other a "magical expert" (*ibid.*, p. 206).

<sup>4</sup>H. F. W. Saggs cites the law code of Hammurabi as follows: "'If an *asu* has made a serious incision in a gentleman with a bronze lancet and has brought about the man's recovery, . . . he shall receive ten shekels of silver.' Payment was proportionately less if the patient was of a lower social class. The surgeon's profession was not without risk, for if he caused the death or blindness of a patient of the gentleman class, his hand was cut off. Three other sections of the laws of Hammurabi refer to the *asu* mending broken limbs" (H. F. W. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* [New York: Mentor, 1962], pp. 442).

<sup>5</sup>F. Rochberg-Halton poses the following two questions about Babylonian astronomical practice: "(1) what kinds of astronomical observations are recorded in 'observational' texts?, and (2) how, in the context of Babylonian astronomical texts, are we to understand 'observation' as a method?" ("Between Observation and Theory in Babylonian Astronomical Texts," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50 [1991]: 108). "Beginning in the sixth century, a standard diary collected lunar, planetary, meteorological, economic, and, occasionally, political (or otherwise peculiar) events night by night, for 6 (or 7) months of a Babylonian year. These texts appear to provide raw data for several branches of divination (celestial, teratological, and *šumma ālu*-type) and perhaps, as Grayson has argued, for chronicles as well" (*ibid.*, p. 111). However this might be, "When there were clouds, mist, or fog and the moon could not be observed, the dates of the desired 'visibilities' were given anyway with the added statement NU PAP, 'I did not observe' (*ibid.*, p. 114). Rochberg-Halton argues that by the time the diaries started being kept Babylonian astronomy was "a fully mathematical science of great elegance and subtlety and, occasionally, of noteworthy accuracy" (*ibid.*, p. 107). There was a good deal of mathematics in Babylonian observation texts.

<sup>6</sup>As regards the time of full moon Jastrow points out, "Both the too early and the too late appearance were regarded as unfavourable omens, because of the element of abnormality, but the exact nature of the unfavourable omen varied with the months of the year" (Morris Jastrow, Jr., *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria*, American Lectures on the History of Religions, 9th series, 1910 [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911], p. 214). "All such occurrences [e.g., a thunderclap out of a clear sky, rain during the dry season (in the 4th, 5th, and 6th months), an apparently belated new-moon or full-moon, and, above all, eclipses of the sun or moon] would make a deep impression, and special care would be taken to note every event that followed, in the belief that all the signs here instanced being unfavourable, whatever misfortune or unlucky occurrence happened, it was a direct consequence of the unfavourable sign in the heavens, or was at all events prognosticated by the sign" (*ibid.*, p. 240).

<sup>7</sup>When doing liver divination a dozen or more specific observations would usually be noted. In one divination report, "The 'inspector' then adds as a summary that five of the signs are unfavourable, specifying the five he has in mind, and closes with the decision 'it is unfavourable'" (Jastrow, *Belief and Practice*, pp. 186-87). "As was stated above, the important feature of the interpretation given to a sign was its general character as favourable or unfavourable. The essential point was whether the sign was a good or a bad omen. Hence, in



many instances we find alternative interpretations given in the astrological collections --either good crops or recovery from disease, long reign of the king or success in war, uprising in the land or low prices in the markets,--always regarded as an ill omen,--peace, and grace of the gods or abundant rains, diminution of the land or insufficient flooding of the canals during the rainy season, invasion of locusts or disastrous floods. The number of such alternative interpretations was not limited to two. Often we find three or four and as many as six contingencies" (ibid., p. 245).

<sup>8</sup>"Astrology, along with other superstitions, was doomed the moment it was recognised that whatsoever occurred in the heavens, even including all unusual phenomena, was the result of law--eternal and unchanging law. In place of astrology, we see, therefore, a genuine science coming to the fore, which starting from the axiom of regularity in the universe, set out to find the laws underlying the phenomena of the heavens. In the three centuries following the Persian occupation of the land we find the Babylonian priests exchanging their former profession as diviners for that of astronomers" (Jastrow, *Belief and Practice*, p. 253). "If the signs in the heavens were due to immutable laws, then the study of these signs could no longer serve to determine what the gods were purposing to do on earth" (ibid., p. 254). "Strange to say, however, the rise of astronomy and the decline of astrology in Babylonia were coincident with the introduction of astrology into the lands swayed by Greek culture. The two movements are connected" (ibid., pp. 254-55). "The recognition of law in the heavens, which eventually put an end to astrology in Babylonia, was the very factor that gave to the transplanted system a new hold among the Greeks" (ibid., p. 258). <sup>9</sup>"Success in any undertaking being dependent upon the co-operation of the gods, it was all important to ascertain whether or not that co-operation be forthcoming. The constant, unforeseen changes in nature, in the varying appearance of the heavens, in the unstable phenomena on earth, thus found expression in man's associating caprice and changeability with the arbiters of human destinies. One could never be sure of the mood of the higher Powers. They smiled one day only to frown the next. It was, therefore, a matter of incalculable practical importance to learn if possible their disposition at any given moment" (Jastrow, *Beliefs and Practice*, pp. 143-44). "The gods, whose manifestations are to be seen in the heavens, still act according to their own fancy, yet they at least act in concert. Each separate deity is no longer an unrestrained law unto himself; and, moreover, what the gods decide is certain to happen. Astrology makes no attempt to turn the gods away from their purpose, but merely to determine a little in advance what they propose, so as to be prepared for coming events" (ibid., pp. 209-10).

<sup>10</sup>"On earth man is placed in [a matrix of] time: The moment is present, the past he has painfully experienced. The future is closed to him. If he knew that, he could turn impending misfortune aside. Therefore man strives in his cast down state to determine the future through oracles. To that end he must come into relationship with the Powers that know the future, i.e., with the gods" (Rosmarie Leiderer, *Anatomie der Schafsleber im babylonischen Leberorakel: Eine makroskopisch-analytische Studie* [Anatomy of the Sheep's Liver in Babylonian Liver Oracles: A Macroscopic-Analytical Study] [Munich: W. Zuckschwerdt Verlag, 1990], p. 13). "The longing to penetrate the future is one of the active, impelling motives in all religions, ancient and modern. The hourly needs of daily life, combined with an instinctive dread of the unknown, lead man to turn to the Powers, on which he knows himself dependent, for some signs which may indicate what these Powers have in mind to do. Divination at one end of the chain, and uplifting invocation at the other, are prompted by the longing to break the fetters, and tear the veil from the mysterious future" (Jastrow, *Beliefs and Practice*, p. 143). "This primitive process of divining the future [by means of sheep's livers], gradually elaborated into a complicated system, spread far and wide through the influence shed on the ancient world by the Euphratean culture" (ibid., p. 191). "Divination represented, basically, a technique of communication with the gods who, according to Babylonian religious thought, shaped the destinies of all mankind, individually and collectively. Its purpose was to ascertain the will of the gods, to the Babylonian synonymous

with the prediction of future events" (Oates, *Babylon*, p. 178). "To read the deity's mind is to know the future" (ibid., 155).

<sup>11</sup>"The high antiquity to which divination through the liver can be traced back in the Euphrates Valley justifies the conclusion that the application of the term *bârû* to the 'inspector' of the signs on the liver represents the oldest usage, and that the term was subsequently employed to designate other forms of divination, all of which, however, involved the scrutiny and interpretation of signs. So he who gazed at the heavens and read the signs to be noted there was also called a *bârû* and, similarly, the name was given to the priest who divined the future through noting the action of drops of oil poured in a basin of water, or through observing clouds or the flight of birds or the actions of animals, or who could interpret any other phenomenon which because of its unusual or striking character aroused attention" (Jastrow, *Beliefs and Practice*, p. 164). "The field of divination was still further enlarged by the inclusion of all unusual happenings in the life of man, or of animals or in nature, which, in any way, aroused attention. . . . Extensive collections of all kinds of these everyday omens were made by the priests (just like the liver divinations), the aim whereof is to set forth, in a systematic manner everything of an unusual character that followed the omen. The scope is boundless, embracing as it does strange movements among animals, such as the mysterious appearance and disappearance of serpents, which impart to them a peculiar position among all ancient nations; or the actions of dogs who to this day, in the Orient, enjoy some of the privileges accorded only to sacred animals. The flight of birds was regarded as fraught with significance; swarms of locusts were a momentous warning in every sense of the word; with ravens also the Babylonians, in common with many another nation, associated forebodings, though not always of a gloomy character" (ibid., pp. 202-3). "Naturally, the phenomena ascribed to Adad furnished a particularly wide scope for the astrologer. The character and ever-changing shapes of clouds were observed, whether massed together or floating in thin fleecy strips. Their colour was noted, whether dark, yellow, green, or white. The number of thunderclaps, the place in the heavens whence the sound proceeded, the month or day or special circumstances when heard, were all carefully noted, as was also the quarter whence the lightning came, and the direction it took, the course of winds and rain, and so on, without end" (ibid., pp. 232-33).

<sup>12</sup>Central to Mesopotamian religious practice was the belief that man was created in order to serve the gods. This was interpreted literally and the deity, like the king, was cared for, fed, clothed and so forth by his courtiers, probably a more accurate word than 'priests' to describe many of the temple functionaries" (Oates, *Babylon*, p. 174; see also p. 123).

<sup>13</sup>The interpretations themselves in these collections relate, almost exclusively, to the general welfare and not to individual needs or desires. They refer to warfare; to victory or defeat; to uprisings and devastations, pestilence and crops. Individuals are not infrequently referred to, but the reference is limited to the ruler or to members of his household, under the ancient view taken of royalty, that what happens to the king and his household affects the fortunes of the country for good or evil. This, of itself, does not exclude the possibility that private individuals consulted the *bârû* priests, and had liver examinations made on their own behalf. It must be remembered that our material consists of official records; but it may be said in general that the gods were supposed to concern themselves with public affairs only, and not with the needs of individuals" (Jastrow, *Beliefs and Practice*, p. 177).

<sup>14</sup>The Old Babylonian Aleppo Adad oracles show, and the Kititum oracle implies, the relationship between god and king is one of direct mutual obligations. The Neo-Assyrian oracle referred to as an *adû*, 'treaty,' 'compact' makes this relationship clearer. The concept of 'covenant' is thus emphatically attested, but there is no idea of a long-term 'Covenant.' There is a treaty, but it is dependent on adherence to the treaty terms by the human partner and only implicitly relies on patterns of interaction established in the past. It is *not* a promise of eternal election and support" (Ellis, *Mesopotamian Oracles*, pp.176-77). "Saggs' reservation

concerning covenant terminology is not necessary: we have seen that the ancient Mesopotamian sources give evidence for a covenant terminology as well as for a dependence on ancient divine plan. But the relationship between the two with regard to the concept of destiny as seen in relation to either rulers or the state is rather different from that usually assumed in the discussions" (ibid., p. 181)

<sup>15</sup>"Study of Plate I will reveal many points of interest in the working-out of the intercalary system. In the earlier periods there is a marked preference for second Ululus, perhaps going back to the time when the year began in the autumn with the month Tashritu. A gradual shift from Ululus to Addarus in later periods can be seen" (Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.-A.D. 45*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, no. 24 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942], p. 3). The introduction to the 1956 edition (Brown University Studies, vol. 19 [Providence, RI: Brown University Press]) was entirely reworked and omits this important fact.

<sup>16</sup>"... the current contract between god and king was renewed (or at least newly re-acknowledged) during the New Year's festival" (Ellis, *Mesopotamian Oracles*, p. 177). "A ruler's legitimate status was initially asserted at the time of his successful assumption of the throne, and was often phrased in terms of predetermined divine election. His destiny was then annually reaffirmed in the context of the New Year's ritual. A god's relationship with a ruler can in fact be shown at least once to involve specific covenant terminology, as is illustrated in the case of the Neo-Assyrian oracle referred to as an *adû*. Similarly, we can demonstrate in Old Babylonian sources the expectation of *quid-pro-quo* behavior, honoring understood terms in a contractual agreement. It must be stressed that all these occurrences are found in contexts which emphasize the *ad hoc* quality of the covenant or treaty. The available evidence can be summed up in the following terms: A god's relationship, and his long-term concern, was with his state" (ibid., pp. 181, 182).

<sup>17</sup>"It must be remembered that our material consists of official records; but it may be said in general that the gods were supposed to concern themselves with public affairs only, and not with the needs of individuals. This is in keeping with what we know generally of Babylonian-Assyrian culture, which reveals the weakness of the factor of individualism. The country and the community were all in all; the individual counted for little, in striking contrast, e.g., to Greek culture, where the individual almost overshadows the community" (Jastrow, *Beliefs and Practice*, pp. 177-78). "Thus as in the case of hepatoscopy, the point of view was always directed to the general welfare. Private affairs hardly entered into consideration; not for such were the stars to be read. The *bârû* priests did not painfully search the heavens to find out under what special conjunction of planets a humble subject was born, or try to determine the fate in store for him. This aspect of astrology is conspicuous by its absence" (ibid., pp. 240-41). "This trait of solidarity of king and people and gods, as opposed to individualism, marks the Babylonian-Assyrian religion in all its phases" (ibid., p. 242). "Much of what has been written about Mesopotamian religion describes only that directly relevant to the priests or the king. What part this official religion played in the lives of ordinary citizens we have yet to discover, but there must remain a strong presumption that its influence was relatively unimportant" (Oates, *Babylon*, pp. 170-71).

<sup>18</sup>"As a direct consequence of the high position assumed by Babylon after the union of the Euphratean states under Hammurapi, the patron deity of that city is advanced to the position of head of the pantheon. Had the astrological system been devised at an earlier period, Enlil, the chief god of Nippur and the head of the earlier pantheon, would have been associated with Jupiter, and Ninlil (or, possibly, Nanâ of Uruk) with Venus, while, had the priests of Eridu been the first to make each planet a personification of one of the great gods, they would have assigned the most important place among the planets to Ea, as the chief deity of Eridu" (Jastrow, *Beliefs and Practice*, p. 218).

<sup>19</sup>Oates, *Babylon*, p. 168.

<sup>20</sup>Private individuals of course had their private deities and worshiped them with all due superstition. These could be compared with the patron saints seen today in the sense that such veneration does not supplant the larger system of Catholic Christianity as a whole. Private devotion of this sort is seen as largely irrelevant to the main current of Christian teaching. It is just something people do. In the same way, the claim here is not that the religious impulse in ancient Babylon was suppressed on an individual level but that it was irrelevant to the system of official worship as a whole.

<sup>21</sup>See n. 11 above.

<sup>22</sup>"It was not merely the individualist spirit of Greek civilisation that led the Greeks to make an attempt to read in the stars the fate of the individual, but the current doctrine of preordained fate, which takes so large a share in the Greek religion, and was therein an important factor. Thanks to this doctrine, the harmonious combination of Greek astronomy and Babylonian astrology was rendered possible. . . . The basis on which the modified Greek system rests is likewise the same that we have observed in Babylonia--a correspondence between heaven and earth, but with this important difference, that instead of the caprice of gods we have unalterable fate controlling the entire universe--the movements of the heavens and the life of the individual alike" (Jastrow, *Beliefs and Practice*, pp. 257-58).

<sup>23</sup>See Hardy, "Babylonian Religious Functionaries Mentioned in Daniel," in this issue of *Historicism*.

<sup>24</sup>For Einstein the breakdown of simultaneity has to do with motion. "Are two events (e.g. the two strokes of lightning A and B) which are simultaneous with reference to the railway embankment also simultaneous relatively to the train? We shall show directly that the answer must be in the negative" (Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*, trans. Robert W. Lawson [New York: Crown, 1961], p. 25; see pp. 25-27). "The notion that the speed of light is the same is really the key to understanding the important physical consequences of special relativity. The first important consequence is that what we mean by 'simultaneous' may depend on our frame of reference" (Clifford M. Will, *Was Einstein Right? Putting General Relativity to the Test* [New York: Basic Books, 1986], p. 251).

<sup>25</sup>Here is the context in which we should understand the Golden Rule (see Matt 7:12). Christ does not require us to meet the other person half way but to give just as completely as we would like to receive. The ratio He has in mind is not 50/50 but 100/0--in a direction opposite to our natural inclinations.

<sup>26</sup>See Hardy, "What Augustine Did Not Tell Us About the Nature of Man," *Historicism* No. 25/Jan 91, pp. 32-52; see especially pp. 33-37.

<sup>27</sup>It is important to understand how nations other than Jews entered covenants with their gods. But if the nature of the relationship is affected by the nature of the parties to it, then there will come a point at which any parallels we might think we see break down. The only way for the other peoples' covenants to be identical to that enjoyed by the Jews would be for their gods also to be the same and this can never be. There is only one God and the relationship He invites to enter with Him is as unique as He is (see Exod 19:5; Deut 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Eccl 2:8). If the pagan gods cannot offer this kind of relationship, they cannot offer this kind of covenant--regardless how many formal similarities there might be between the two.

<sup>28</sup>"First, the Sabbath is only ceremonial" (Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, Luther's Words, vol. 54, Helmut T. Lehmann [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967], p. 52). From this we are left to assume that the creation of the world was only ceremonial.

<sup>29</sup>According to Dennis Hamm faith in the book of Hebrews is heart-obedience (see idem, "Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Jesus Factor," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 [1990]: 284, 287), a concept he derives from Heb 10:1-18 and Ps 39 LXX. According to Ellen White, "Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of

the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience" (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 65).

<sup>30</sup>See Hardy, "On the Relationship Between Praise and Works," n. 2, p. 5 in this issue of *Historicism*.