

# Some Comments on Dan 11:36-39

Copyright (c) 2005 by Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

## Introduction

A number of different approaches to Dan 11:36-39 could be taken. One is faced with either having to choose among them and omit saying things that really need to be said or, alternatively, trying to say more in one paper than space will allow. Below I accept the latter risk for two reasons. First, there will be no opportunity to return to this topic once it has been discussed in this issue of *Historicism*. Now is the time. And second, at least one thing I hope to accomplish by writing is to learn and then to preserve a record of what was learned that will benefit others.<sup>1</sup> If any of my work (or anyone else's work) proves to have lasting value, it will be because of the information it contains. Or at least that is my belief. And so every effort will be made below to include as much factual information as possible.

## Opening Formula

Daniel 11:36 begins with a formula that has been discussed elsewhere: *w<sup>é</sup>áśâ kirşônô hammélek* "and the king will do as he pleases."<sup>2</sup> The significance of this formula is best seen at the level of the chapter as a whole. There are two things in particular that should be noticed about it.

"He will do as he pleases"

First, a statement that someone "will do as he pleases" occurs four times in Daniel. In Dan 11:36 we are considering the fourth of those occurrences.

- |    |  |                |
|----|--|----------------|
| 1. | He did as he pleased [ <i>w<sup>é</sup>áśâ kirşônô</i> ] and became great. (Dan 8:4)   | Persia         |
| 2. | "Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases [ <i>w<sup>é</sup>áśâ kirşônô</i> ]." (Dan 11:3)  | Greece         |
| 3. | "The invader will do as he pleases [ <i>w<sup>é</sup>yáśás . . . kirşônô</i> ]; no one will be able to stand against him." (Dan 11:16) | Rome (phase 1) |
| 4. | "The king will do as he pleases [ <i>w<sup>é</sup>áśâ kirşônô</i> ]." (Dan 11:31)  | Rome (phase 2) |

Using this formula four times is not so repetitive as one might think because four different statements are being made with it. The first is that the Persian ram would do as he pleased (8:4). The second is that Alexander the Great would do as he pleased (11:3). The third

is that the power which dislodged Antiochus IV Epiphanes from Egypt would do as it pleased (11:16). And the fourth is that the power which had been active throughout vss. 29-35 would do as it pleased (11:36). Each new occurrence of the formula makes a new statement and has reference to a different historical entity.

Nor is the list of entities referred to in this way selected at random. What we have is a subset of Daniel's well known list of world empires: Persia (8:4), Greece (11:3), secular Rome (11:16a), religious Rome (11:36). The essential pattern emerges despite the fact that Babylon is not mentioned. Babylon is not mentioned at all in Dan 11, or in Dan 8, and yet we are still justified in saying that the world empire motif is repeated four times--in chaps. 2, 7, 8, and 11.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand Rome (the last of the world empires) is subdivided, appearing in two distinct phases, each time the empires are listed.<sup>4</sup> In Dan 2 there is iron and then iron mixed with clay. In Dan 7 there is the dreadful fourth beast and then a little horn. In chap. 8 only the little horn is mentioned,<sup>5</sup> but this fact illustrates the point I am making. If the horn can appear without the beast it grows out of, the two are capable of being distinguished and are not fully identical. The empires presented here are numbers 2 (8:4), 3 (11:3), 4 in an earlier phase (11:16) (comparable to the dreadful fourth beast or to iron alone), and 4 in a later phase (11:36) (comparable to the little horn or to iron mixed with clay).

There is repetition here in a sense but no statement is made twice. The formula which says someone or something "will do as he pleases" is used four times with reference to four different powers drawn, in sequence, from Daniel's list of world empires.

The subject: "The king"

The second point to notice is that in the above introductory formula the word *hammélek* has the definite article. It is not "a king" (*mélek*) but "the king" (*hammélek*). In Hebrew a single letter distinguishes the two spellings (*mlk*, *hmlk*) but that letter will not go away.<sup>6</sup> It is there and its implications for most futurist interpreters and for Uriah Smith among historicists must be clearly understood. The fact that "The king will do as he pleases" in vs. 36 tells us that, whoever this is, he has been introduced before. Any model which asserts that a new king is brought to view in vss. 36-39 must be reevaluated. It is the same king that has occupied our attention in vss. 29-35.

*Implications for the futurist model.* According to one popular futurist interpretation there is a historical gap in Dan 11, which falls between vss. 35 and 36.<sup>7</sup> Up through vs. 35 events are confined to a period before and within the second century B.C., whereas from vs. 36 onward they are confined to a brief period just before Christ's return. There is no mention of anything that happens during the Christian era. The king of the North in vss. 21-35 is Antiochus IV Epiphanes but the king in vss. 36-39 and 40-45 is a still-future Antichrist.<sup>8</sup>

This view is untenable for a number of reasons, but the one which bears most directly on the present discussion is that when we come to the haughty king of vs. 36 the angel implies that we are expected to recognize him. This fact is crippling to the futurist model, or at least to those futurists who place a gap at vs. 36. One does not encounter the same entity in any reasonable historical sense both before and after an interim period of more than 2000 years.

I do not apply vss. 29-35 to Antiochus, but if a futurist wishes to do so, the text requires that he keep Antiochus in vss. 36-39 as well. Futurist scholars routinely set this requirement aside. According to H. C. Leupold, "As soon as the attempt is made consistently to apply these

verses to the king last spoken of, the difficulties begin to become overwhelming" (ibid., p. 510). This may well be, within the confines of Leupold's model, but grammatically the same king is in view both before and after vs. 36. So the difficulty of applying that figure to anyone other than the king last spoken of is also overwhelming.

The futurist dilemma does not spring from vs. 36 but from vs. 35 and the verses leading up to it. Leupold takes Antiochus as his starting point in vss. 21-35, shows that vss. 36-39 cannot be applied to him, and concludes that there must be a gap to account for the differences which separate the two applications. But this pits history against the text. If we must choose between them, the historical application is what must change. If the same entity is described by the same figure of a haughty king both before and after vs. 36 (as the syntax requires), and if that king cannot be Antiochus in vss. 36-39 (as Leupold indicates), it follows that vss. 29-35 do not speak of Antiochus either and there is no need for a gap. This latter argument will be at least as forceful as any evidence Leupold brings forward to show that vss. 36-39 cannot be applied to Antiochus.

Having qualified Leupold's positions, however, we should not merely set his work aside. In my view he gives us the key to a correct understanding of this difficult passage, perhaps without realizing he has done so. I now quote the rest of what he says in the statement quoted above:

As soon as the attempt is made consistently to apply these verses to the king last spoken of, the difficulties begin to become overwhelming. In the first place, why deal with the king in such detail (from v. 36) and then, after a good portion of his history has been covered, finally present his policies--as these four verses do--and then seemingly resume his history without having indicated why these policies should have been treated at the point where they are inserted?<sup>9</sup>

Here Leupold correctly points out that on either side of the present section there is an emphasis on "history," whereas within it the emphasis is on "policies." It is an important distinction. Verses 36-39 do not tell what the king does. We have already learned what he does in vss. 29-35. Instead they give us insight into the attitudes and, in Leupold's phrase, the "policies" which motivate such behavior. This fact has important implications. If one section of text describes the king's actions, and another shows his reasons for acting that way, the two must be studied together. When this is done, it becomes entirely natural that the second section should begin with a reference to "the king" and not merely "a king."<sup>10</sup> The time frame is the same. The actors are the same. Only the perspective is different.

Leupold's position on the haughty king has been discussed from the perspective of vs. 36. It will be useful to view it from the perspective of vs. 40 as well. Leupold and a majority of other futurists hold that there is one king in vss. 21-35 and another in vss. 36-45. I have argued that the cast does not change at vs. 36. At vs. 40, however, we reach the "time of the end" and the cast does change. Thus, while at vs. 36 the king remains the same, at vs. 40 there is a clean break. Verses 29-35 and 36-39, although different in style, apply to the same period of history--before the "time of the end." Verses 36-39 and 40-45 apply to different periods--the one before and the other during the "time of the end."<sup>11</sup>

*Implications for Uriah Smith's historicist model.* Seventh-day Adventist readers will be nodding their agreement as they follow the above argument against the futurist position. But there is a sequel. Uriah Smith also introduced a new cast of characters at vs. 36 and as a result his interpretation falls under many of the same criticisms that have been brought against

Leupold. For Smith the new king is not Antichrist and there is no gap. Instead he introduces France at the time of its celebrated and vehemently secular revolution (1789-99).<sup>12</sup> But the issue is not how to choose, among many alternatives, which power is the right one to bring forward for the first time at vs. 36. Any choice we might make along these lines would be as wrong as any other because the problem lies in the act of introduction, not in the identity of what is introduced. The cast must remain the same for Smith in the same way and for all the same reasons that have been mentioned in regard to futurist writers.

Smith was a formidable and influential scholar in our denomination's early history. He was one of the pioneers, but not the only pioneer. In my view James White steers a straighter course through the next ten verses than Uriah Smith does. See appendix.

### The broader context

I have argued above that no new characters are introduced at vs. 36 and yet the formula, "The king will do as he pleases," is clearly introductory in nature. In each of its earlier three uses this formula was used to introduce yet another power or phase of a power from Daniel's list of world empires. So how is this case an exception? In one sense it is not.

The events of vss. 29-35 were to continue "until the time of the end" (vs. 35). The king "will do as he pleases" (vs. 36) throughout the present section, i.e., until we come to the "time of the end" in vs. 40. These two expressions (the introductory formula and the two-fold reference to time) should be studied together. When they are, they will not only help us resolve the immediate problem but teach us a very interesting fact about Dan 11.

*An end point at vs. 35.* Let us compound the problem further before proceeding to a resolution. Both vs. 35 and vs. 40 refer to the "time of the end." The one section extends "until the time of the end," (vs. 35) and the other begins "At the time of the end" (vs. 40). What then do we do with the intervening verses? It is as though vss. 36-39 could be lifted out of the chapter without in any way disturbing the flow of history. Verse 35 ("so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end [*ad ʿet qēs*]") and vs. 40 ("At the time of the end [*ʾubʿet qēs*] the king of the South will engage him in battle") immediately adjoin each other in time. How can this fact be explained?

The solution comes when we realize that vss. 36-39 do not compete historically with the material that precedes them. They follow vss. 29-35 in a textual sense but historically the two sections do not follow each other but coincide. It is not the function of the present bloc to describe a new set of events—one that would take place at some intermediate point between the two references to the "time of the end," thus separating them in time. They cannot be separated. There is only one "time of the end." Verse 35 extends to it and vs. 40 extends from it. The verses that occur between these two points describe the attitudes and policies that would accompany actions described earlier in vss. 29-35. If this is the case, as Leupold has indicated, it is entirely natural that the events of vss. 29-35 should lead up directly to those of vss. 40-45 with no intervening gap.

*A beginning point at vs. 36.* The words, "The king will do as he pleases" (vs. 36), have an introductory function, but the power they introduce has been active since vs. 29. The reference to the "time of the end" (vs. 35) has a concluding function, but the events they encompass bring us up to vs. 40. It would seem to make at least equally good sense if these statements, which occur toward the middle of the larger combined section spanning vss. 29-39, were moved

outward to its peripheries. Thus, if the king were introduced before he did anything (in vs. 29) and if the reference to the "time of the end" came at the end of the section (in vs. 39), one could understand doing so. But that is not how the narrative is structured. See fig. 1

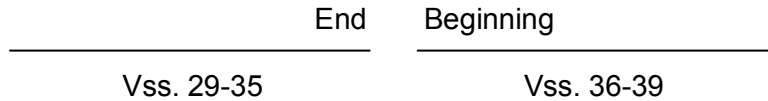


Fig. 1. Verses 29-35 in relation to 36-39. First statement.

We must confront the full force of these difficulties in order to appreciate the full significance of the fact which explains them. If vss. 36-39 go back over the same ground as vss. 29-35, showing us the same period of time from a different point of view, there is no more conflict. The two parts of the larger section contribute equally to our understanding of the whole. See fig. 2.

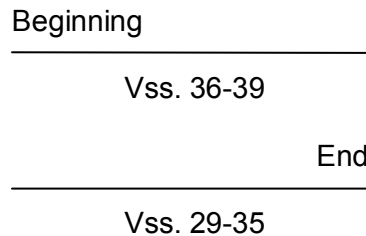


Fig. 2. Verses 29-35 in relation to 36-39. Second statement.

The above narrative technique has been used before. Two sections with different perspectives (vss. 16-22, 23-28) deal with events under secular Rome. No single piece of information is stated twice and yet one era of history provides the framework for both sections.<sup>13</sup> In the present case the angel speaks in two sections (vss. 29-35, 36-39) of religious Rome. Again there is no redundancy but both occur during the same era prior to the "time of the end." These are not isolated examples. The same technique will be used again in 12:1-3, which describes the same events as 11:44-45 but from a different point of view--during the "time of the end."<sup>15</sup> Each of the above sections (vss. 16-28, 29-39, and 11:40-12:3) divides in two. Each era (secular Rome, religious Rome before the "time of the end," religious Rome during the "time of the end") is covered twice, with paired subsections overlapping in time.<sup>16</sup> So what we say here in regard to vss. 36-39 is not unusual in the context of the chapter as a whole. Nor is it unusual in the context of the book as a whole. Repetition is part and parcel of Daniel's thought world.<sup>17</sup> The angel is speaking to Daniel in terms that he understands.

## Other Preliminary Remarks

The "time of the end" in vs. 35 should also be compared with the "time of wrath" in vs. 36. Both statements are proleptic where they occur,<sup>18</sup> since both look forward beyond events

in the near term to maintain a sense of farther reaching goal direction as this complex narrative unfolds.

"He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place." (vs. 36c-d)

There is much to be learned from the above statement. What the "time of the end" is the end of is the "time of wrath." During the "time of the end" the circumstances facing the church are more favorable than before. Otherwise there would be no transition, the earlier period would continue, and the "time of wrath" would simply be that much longer. Instead the "time of the end" begins, at least, as the cessation of wrath, which is the same as saying that it does in fact begin--that the opposite counterpart of wrath is introduced. During the "time of the end" the church has at least a temporary rest. It has freedom to think and to act on its convictions. More will be said about this in a later paper when we come to vs. 40.<sup>19</sup> But in vs. 36 the storm, which would not end until the "time of the end," is just gathering force. We are not here talking about persecution under the Caesars<sup>20</sup> but about the middle ages and events that would take place in Christian Europe. For many sincere Christians this was not an easy time to be alive. The storm of opposition would not last indefinitely, but neither would it subside any time soon. "He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed" (vs. 36).

## The Structure of the Passage

There is a question whether Dan 11:36-39 is written in poetic form. Its lines are not printed as poetry (i.e., with special indentations) in any translation of which I am aware and yet a number of scholars hold that the writing is technically poetic. Any answer to this question will depend at least in part on how the passage is outlined.

Is Dan 11:36-39 poetry?

Otto Eissfeldt is one influential scholar who holds that Dan 11:2-12:3, along with other major portions of chaps. 7-12, should be viewed as poetry. He states that,

Just as in i-vi the narrative occasionally rises to poetic rhythm, this happens again in vii-xii. In ix and x-xii the whole of the interpretation given to Daniel by the angel is in rhythmic form: ix,24-7; xi,2-xii,3. In viii the interpretation is poetic at least from the moment when it comes to speak of the last heathen king (viii,23-6). In vii not only is the whole interpretation poetic, but so too is the conclusion of the vision narrative which describes the appearance of the ancient of days and of the judgement court, and the appearance of the 'Son of Man'. The exalted subject-matter demands and receives an exalted form.<sup>21</sup>

Aage Bentzen, in a commentary published under Eissfeldt's general editorial supervision, offers syllable counts for some portions of Daniel.<sup>22</sup> And Bayer tries to show that the entire book can be versified.<sup>23</sup> He reproduces the Hebrew text of Daniel, indenting all of it as poetry. I think that not only Bayer, but also Bentzen and Eissfeldt, have taken their argument too far. The last chapters of the book of Daniel are organized in an intensely thoughtful manner. There are various literary patterns, including repetition (see above), which might have been used in a text that really was poetry. But in my opinion the bulk of Dan 11 is simply carefully organized prose. If this is the case, vss. 36-39 are an exception. Here we find genuine Hebrew poetry.

## Understanding the structural framework

In exploring the theory that Dan 11:36-39 was written as poetry my first step was to attempt the customary syllable counts. But doing so was premature. One does not count syllables by the paragraph or by the verse, but by the clause.<sup>24</sup> This raises the prior question of how to divide the clauses in Dan 11:36-39. I now think that this second matter is the one to which most of our attention should be directed in the passage, or at least it is the area where our investigation should begin. There is no benefit to be gained from counting syllables before it is very clear where the clauses are that contain them. Confining oneself to this higher level of detail at the outset would be a barren exercise in the present section. We must look for the patterns where they are if we wish to find them, and individual syllables are not the place to start looking.

*There is a structural theme.* The starting point for any analysis of Dan 11:36-39 must be the realization that it is a separate bloc of text within the chapter.

Above I argue that the present bloc is unique in the way we must apply it to history. Leupold would agree with this claim in principle but would apply it by separating vss. 36-39 from vss. 29-35. I would separate them from vss. 40-45 and submit that the latter arrangement is not only possible but necessary. The relationship between vss. 29-35 and 36-39 is that of bone to flesh. The second section without the first would lack historical substance, not because the things it says cannot be substantiated but because they deal with attitudes and policies rather than events. The outworking of those policies has already been documented in the earlier section. In this way the theory and the practice are brought together and laid open to public view.

Here I point out that if the above verses are distinct from the material surrounding them in regard to literary form as well as historical purpose, the two facts are consistent with each other. But while the first claim is noncontroversial, Eissfeldt would challenge the second because of his position that all of Dan 11:2-12:3 (Bentzen includes 12:4) are poetry. I submit that only vss. 36-39 are poetry.<sup>25</sup> The section is unique in both ways.

Next comes the observation that the section has four verses. Each verse has four statements and each statement in turn has two parts (a predicate and a complement). This is the theme around which the following variations are organized.

*The theme has variations.* Even where wrong--especially where wrong--the above pattern or theme will prove useful because it provides a backdrop against which to gauge our expectations and thus serves to focus the discussion.

The first clause of vs. 36 ("The king will do as he pleases") is extrametrical. It stands apart from the rest of the verse. This fact has been noted above. In what follows we concentrate on the remaining sixteen clauses.

A pattern extending across all sixteen clauses is that the relative order of predicate and complement alternates in the outer two verses (36, 39) but does not alternate in the inner two verses (37, 38). See tables 1 and 2.

Table 1  
Format for Outer Verses  
(Dan 11:36 and 39)

First Half of Line	Second Half of Line
Predicate	Complement
Complement	Predicate
Predicate	Complement
Complement	Predicate

Table 2  
Format for Inner Verses  
(Dan 11:37 and 38)

First Half of Line	Second Half of Line
Complement	Predicate
Complement	Predicate
Complement	Predicate
Complement	Predicate

There are three other major variations on the above theme. First, in the second clause of vs. 37, where we would expect a predicate there is none. Context makes clear that the predicate to be supplied is *lō' yābîn* "he will pay no attention" (literal gloss), as in the clauses on either side of it, but in fact those words do not appear. Second, in the third and fourth clauses of vs. 38, where we would expected to find predicates we find additional complements instead. And third, both vs. 38 and vs. 39 have relative clauses, which must be distinguished respectively from the sentences in which they occur. See table 3.



Table 3  
Abstract Overview of the Text of  
Dan 11:36-39

First Half of Line	Second Half of Line
Verse 36	
Extrametrical formula	
Predicate	Complement
Complement	Predicate
Predicate	Complement
Complement	Predicate
Verse 37	
Complement	Predicate
Complement	. . .
Complement	Predicate
Complement	Predicate
Verse 38	
Complement	Predicate
Complement, Relative clause	Predicate
Complement	Complement
Complement	Complement
Verse 39	
Predicate	Complement
Complement, Relative clause	Predicate
Predicate	Complement
Complement	Predicate

## Discussion

I have pointed out that clauses in outer verses (36 and 39) have one order (predicate : complement, complement : predicate, predicate : complement, complement : predicate), while those in inner verses (37 and 38) have another order (complement : predicate, complement : predicate, complement : predicate, complement : predicate). This fact is structural in nature.

There is also a thematic fact which should be understood in this same context. The assertions made in the first two verses are for the most part negative, while those in the last two verses are correspondingly positive. The king would "magnify himself against every god" (vs. 36) and would "show no regard for . . . any god" (vs. 37). These are negative statements. They show what the king would not do. He would not honor any god. On the other hand "he will honor a god of fortresses" (vs. 38) and make his followers "rulers over many people" (vs. 39). These are positive statements. They show what the king would do. He would honor his followers, presumably so that they in turn could more fully honor him. The king's relationships are primarily on a horizontal rather than vertical dimension. His attention is focused on earthly things. Here, incidentally, is the meaning of Dan 8:12 ("It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground"). See table 4.

Table 4  
Patterns Across Clauses

Role	Verse	Clause Constituents	Type of Statement
A	36	Alternates	Negative
B	37	Fixed	Negative
B'	38	Fixed	Positive
A'	39	Alternates	Positive

## The Text of the Passage

The text of the four verses under review is given below both in Hebrew and in a literal English gloss. Having quoted the passage, I then comment on it--first in regard to problem sentences and then in regard to problem words. The Hebrew text of Dan 11:36-39 appears in table 5 (abbreviations are NP = noun phrase, PP = prepositional phrase, VP = verb phrase) and a literal English gloss in table 6.

Table 5  
The Text of Dan 11:36-39  
(Hebrew)

First Half of Line	Syntax	Second Half of Line	Syntax
Verse 36			
<i>w<sup>e</sup>āsâ kiršônô hammélek</i>			
<i>w<sup>e</sup>yitrômēm w<sup>e</sup>yitgaddēl</i>	VP	<i>ʿal-kol-ʾēl</i>	PP
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ʿal ʾēl ʾēlīm</i>	PP	<i>y<sup>e</sup>dabbēr niplāʾôt</i>	VP
<i>w<sup>e</sup>hišlîʿh</i>	VP	<i>ʿad-kullâ* záʿam</i>	PP
<i>kî neh<sup>e</sup>rāšâ</i>	NP	<i>ne<sup>e</sup>šātâ</i>	VP
Verse 37			
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ʿal-ʾlōhê ʾabôtayw</i>	PP	<i>lōʾ yābîn</i>	VP
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ʿal-ḥemdat nāšîm</i>	PP	...	[VP]
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ʿal-kol-ʾlōʿh</i>	PP	<i>lōʾ yābîn</i>	VP
<i>kî ʿal-kōl</i>	PP	<i>yitgaddāl</i>	VP
Verse 38			
<i>w<sup>e</sup>leʾlōʿh māʿuzzîm</i>	PP	<i>ʿal-kannô y<sup>e</sup>kabbēd</i>	VP
<i>w<sup>e</sup>leʾlōʿh</i>	PP	<i>y<sup>e</sup>kabbēd</i>	VP
<i>ʾšer lōʾ y<sup>e</sup>dāʿūhū ʾabôtayw</i>			
<i>b<sup>e</sup>zāhāb</i>	PP	<i>ûb<sup>e</sup>késep</i>	PP
<i>ûb<sup>e</sup>ʾeben y<sup>e</sup>qārâ</i>	PP	<i>ûbaḥ<sup>a</sup>mūdôt</i>	PP
Verse 39			
<i>w<sup>e</sup>āsâ</i>	VP	<i>l<sup>e</sup>mibs<sup>e</sup>rê māʿuzzîm</i>	PP
<i>ʿim-ʾlōʿh nēkār</i>	PP	<i>yarbeh kābōd</i>	VP
<i>ʾšer hikkîr*</i>			
<i>w<sup>e</sup>himšîlām</i>	VP	<i>bārabbîm</i>	PP
<i>waʾdāmâ</i>	NP	<i>y<sup>e</sup>ḥallēq* bim<sup>e</sup>hîr</i>	VP

In table 5, the starred forms (*kullâ* "is finished" [vs. 36], *hikkâr* "he recognized" [vs. 39], and *y<sup>h</sup>hallēq* "he will divide" [vs. 39]) represent problem words. These are explained below.

Table 6  
The Text of Dan 11:36-39  
(English Gloss)

First Half of Line	Second Half of Line
<i>Verse 36</i>	
<i>and the king will do as he pleases</i>	
<i>and he will lift himself up and enlarge himself and against the God of gods and he will succeed for what has been determined</i>	<i>above every god  he will speak outrageously until [the time of] wrath is finished will be done</i>
<i>Verse 37</i>	
<i>and to the gods of his fathers and to the desire of women and to every god for above every god</i>	<i>he will pay no attention ... he will pay no attention he will enlarge himself</i>
<i>Verse 38</i>	
<i>and a god of strength and a god, which his fathers did not know with gold and with precious stones</i>	<i>he will honor in his place he will honor  and with silver and with desirable things</i>
<i>Verse 39</i>	
<i>and he will do [thus] with a foreign god, which he recognizes, and he will cause to rule and [the] land</i>	<i>to fortresses of strength he will increase honor  many he will divide at a price</i>

### Problem sentences

Each verse of our passage has some unusual feature which merits comment. In no case is the difficulty very great, but it will be useful to point out what the issues are.

*Verse 36, extrametrical clause.* The unusual feature in vs. 36 is the opening formula, "The king will do as he pleases," discussed above.

*Verse 37, clause 3: missing predicate.* There are four references to deities in vs. 37. Clause 1 speaks of "the gods of his fathers," clause 2 "the one desired by women," clause 3 "any god," and clause 4 "them all" (i.e., the deities referred to in the first three clauses). If the king rules from Rome, as I claim, one might expect him to worship the same gods that earlier rulers of Rome worshiped. But he does not. "He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers" (clause 1), i.e., his predecessors--a sense that would help to clarify Daniel's intent in chap. 5 as

well--"nor will he regard any god" (clause 3). The predicate in both cases is *lō' yābîn* "he will pay no attention" (literal gloss).

In clause 2 there is a strong implication that the same predicate (*lō' yābîn*) applies, i.e., that the king would pay no more attention to "the one desired by women" than to any other deity. But the words are not stated. Clause 2 has no predicate. The sense of the passage, however, is given correctly in NIV: "He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women" (clauses 1 and 2).

*Verse 38, clauses 3-4: more missing predicates.* The precious metals and other items of wealth mentioned in the second half of vs. 38 augment statements made in the first half of that verse. Based on comparisons with other verses in the section there is a structural expectation that one predicate will appear with "gold and silver" (clause 3) and another with "precious stones and costly gifts" (clause 4). Both are missing.

There is a pattern here. No predicates are missing from vs. 36, one is missing from vs. 37, and two from vs. 38. First zero, then one, then two. The lack becomes progressively greater. This is reminiscent of qinah meter, the meter of laments.<sup>26</sup>

*Verse 39, clauses 1-2: missing particle.* The Hebrew particle *w<sup>e</sup>-*, commonly translated "and," has a wider range of meanings than its English counterpart. In English the word "and" connects an earlier thought to one that follows. Hebrew *w<sup>e</sup>-* has this function also but is not limited to it. In fifteen out of thirty-nine books in the Hebrew Old Testament (more than one third, 38.5%) some form of the particle in question is the first letter of the first word in the book.<sup>27</sup> In such cases *w<sup>e</sup>-* can hardly be joining an earlier thought to a later one. At the beginning of a book there is no earlier thought.<sup>28</sup> So at least one function of *w<sup>e</sup>-* is precisely to introduce a new thought.

As a rule, in Dan 11:36-39 and elsewhere, each new clause or phrase is introduced with *w<sup>e</sup>-* (or its phonological variant *û-*). But in vs. 39 the expected *w<sup>e</sup>-* is missing. This much is clear. The problem is that one cannot be entirely sure where it is missing. There are two possible locations and all we know at the outset is that one of them begins a new clause. We do not know which one. Below are the three clause fragments that combine, in some way, to form two clauses (1 and 2). One thing we can be sure of is that the middle fragment does stand alone.

Fragment 1: *w<sup>e</sup>cāšâ l<sup>e</sup>mibš<sup>e</sup>rê mā<sup>e</sup>uzzîm*

Gloss: and he will do [thus] to fortresses of strength

Fragment 2: *im <sup>e</sup>lô<sup>h</sup> nēkār <sup>e</sup>šer hikkîr*

Gloss: with a foreign god, which he recognizes,

Fragment 3: *yarbeh kâbôd*

Gloss: he will increase honor

At this point it would be equally possible to combine the first two fragments as clause 1 and take the third separately as clause 2 or, alternatively, to isolate the first fragment as clause 1 and combine the remaining fragments as clause 2.

## First Alternative

## Clause 1

Hebrew: *w<sup>ε</sup>āsâ l<sup>ε</sup>mibš<sup>ε</sup>rê mā<sup>ε</sup>uzzîm ʿim ʾlô<sup>ah</sup> nēkār ʾšer hikkîr*

Gloss: And he will do [thus] to fortresses of strength with a foreign god, which he recognizes.

## Clause 2

Hebrew: *yarbeh kâbôd*

Gloss: He will increase honor.

## Second Alternative

## Clause 1

Hebrew: *w<sup>ε</sup>āsâ l<sup>ε</sup>mibš<sup>ε</sup>rê mā<sup>ε</sup>uzzîm*

Gloss: And he will do [thus] to fortresses of strength.

## Clause 2

Hebrew: *ʿim ʾlô<sup>ah</sup> nēkār ʾšer hikkîr yarbeh kâbôd*

Gloss: With a foreign god, which he recognizes, he will increase honor.

I prefer the second alternative for two reasons. To start with, from a structural point of view only vs. 38 and 39 have relative clauses. In vs. 38 the relative clause is associated with clause 2 and more specifically with the first half of that clause (its complement):

"And a god, which his fathers did not know, he will honor." (vs. 38, clause 2, literal gloss)

Under the second alternative above, the relative clause in vs. 39 also occurs in the first half of the verse's second clause, which once more is the complement of that clause.

"With a foreign god, which he recognizes, he will increase honor." (vs. 39, clause 2, literal gloss)

In both cases, despite the king's refusal to show regard for any god, there is a "god" who is honored anyway, despite this fact—one might say because of this fact. The king's fathers (his predecessors in Rome) did not know about this "god" in the sense that they were unaware of his existence. More than this, if they had been told, there would still have been no place in their pantheon to accommodate him. The willful king, on the other hand, does know about the foreign "god" who is honored by his course of action and recognizes, at least in some degree, what issues are involved in doing what he does. Thus, the second clause of vs. 38 and the second clause of vs. 39 exactly correspond to each other when combined in the proposed manner.

The essential difference between the two clauses is that whereas the king's fathers do not know, the king does know, about the foreign "god" (he "recognizes" him). When the structural similarities are understood the semantic contrast becomes clear. And I would suggest that making it clear is the main reason why the thought is repeated this way, in comparable locations within the two verses.

My next reason for preferring the second arrangement of clauses is thematic. The emphasis, in the second clause of both vs. 38 and vs. 39, is on "honor." It is not that the foreign "god" enables the king to do military exploits primarily and that he increases honor in addition. On the contrary, any military exploits are mentioned to show how the foreign "god" would help the king honor his subjects. It is honor that provides a context for force in this passage and not the reverse.

The king is lavish with his gold and silver (vs. 38). Where does he get these things? He takes them from the "fortresses of strength" (vs. 39), in the same way that the kings of states close to Israel would despoil the wealth of the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> With the resources obtained in this way the king increases honor among all who accept his authority and prestige. He does this by causing many to rule and by dividing the land for them at a price, thus gaining still more wealth and recognition from his beneficiaries.

The above emphasis on wealth, honor, and recognition runs throughout the second or positive half of the passage (vss. 38-39), as opposed to the first or negative half (vss. 36-37). The second combination of clause fragments above enables us to grasp two important facts about the section. First, the king stands in a role that is somehow comparable that of to his imperial predecessors or "fathers" in Rome (vs. 37, clause 1). And second, while they opposed God in ignorance, he acts intelligently. The contrast is between what the king does know as opposed to what his fathers did not know. Having grasped this point we are in a position to understand why the king's haughty behavior receives so much attention and why it is condemned so harshly.

### Problem words

So far I have discussed the uniqueness of Dan 11:36-39 as a section, the blocs of text within that section, and some problem sentences within those blocs. Having done so, it is now appropriate to discuss individual problem words. The single most significant term in the passage (hemdat našim "the one desired by women" [vs. 37]) is discussed in another paper.<sup>30</sup>

*Verse 36: kâlâ / kullâ.* In the third clause of vs. 36 the Hebrew says *ʿad-kâlâ zâʿam*. These words mean "until [the] end of [the] wrath." The problem is that this sense demands that *kâlâ* ("end") be interpreted as a noun in construct with ("of") *zâʿam* ("wrath"). But *kâlâ* is not typically construct in form<sup>31</sup> and in any event the ancient versions take it as a verb. Theodotian and the Septuagint (Greek), the Vulgate (Latin), and the Peshitta (Syriac) all give this word the same sort of verbal meaning:

Theodotian	<i>mechris hou suntelesthē hē orgē</i> "until the wrath is completed"
Septuagint	<i>heōs an suntelesthē hē orgē</i> "until the wrath is completed"
Vulgate	<i>donec compleatur iracundia</i> "until [the] wrath is completed"
Peshitta	<i>ʿad nešlam rūgzā</i> "until the wrath is completed"

Glosses such as "end of" or "completion of" have the same intent as that conveyed by saying "is completed," but the thought, similar as it may be, is conveyed by different grammatical means and they cannot both support the same Hebrew vowel pointings. Reading the consonants *klh* as a noun we have the attested vocalization *kālâ* ("completion [of?]", while reading them as a verb would imply a pointing such as *kullâ* ("is completed," Pual conjugation). No change of consonant letters is required in order to understand this word the same way as all the major versions of antiquity. In any event, there is no difference in meaning whichever reading we accept.

*Verse 39: \*hakkîr / yakkîr / hikkîr.* The word *\*hakkîr* is not one form but a combination of two. The consonants are those of *hikkîr* "he recognized" but apparently the scribes preferred the form *yakkîr* "he will recognize."<sup>32</sup> The only difference is that one is, roughly speaking, past tense and the other is future.

*Verse 39: w<sup>e</sup>hallêq / y<sup>e</sup>hallêq.* The verb form *w<sup>e</sup>hallêq* "and he will divide" (converted perfect) should be read *y<sup>e</sup>hallêq* "he will divide," with initial *yodh* (*y*) instead of initial *waw* (*w*). Here the difference is significant. At issue is how the clauses of vs. 39 are divided and whether what I have called the structural theme of the section is valid as a generalization.

Over time the letters *waw* (*w*) and *yodh* (*y*) became virtually indistinguishable from each other in form.<sup>33</sup> After the exile a Jewish scribe would sometimes draw faint lines across his papyrus sheets, or whatever material he was writing on, to help keep the rows of letters straight. These letters, instead of being drawn from the line upward, as when someone writes on a ruled tablet in English, were drawn from the line downward. Some letters (such as *lamedh*, *l*) had ascenders that would go above the line but there was always one part of the letter that went below the line. How far below depended on which letter was being drawn. Many went down far enough to fill an imaginary square on the page, giving the impression that a letter was about as deep as it was wide, hence the term "square script."<sup>34</sup>

The letter *waw* (*w*) consists of a single downward stroke that ideally would extend to the bottom of the imaginary square described above. The letter *yodh* (*y*) starts in the same way as *waw* but does not go quite so far down. For post-exilic scribes it was the smallest letter of the alphabet (the "jot" of Matt 5:18, KJV). The only difference between *waw* and *yodh* was how far the scribe went before lifting his pen. If he was in any haste the two letters could become virtually indistinguishable, as they routinely were at Qumran.

That this could have happened in the case of *\*w<sup>e</sup>hallêq* (*y<sup>e</sup>hallêq*) in Dan 11:39 is not the question. It could have. The question is whether it did. If the prophet really did write *waw*, the question becomes how to make syntactic sense of the passage because clauses 3 and 4 would then read, "and he will cause many to rule, and the land, and he will divide at a price." Here the clause has both a noun it does not need and a transitive verb which needs a noun it cannot find. All difficulty vanishes, however, when the extra noun is allowed to serve as the object of the transitive verb. This can be done by assuming that *w<sup>e</sup>hallêq* (with *waw*) is really *y<sup>e</sup>hallêq* (with *yodh*). In this case the clause reads, "and the land he will divide at a price."

## The Meaning of the Passage

A number of apparent contradictions lie on the surface in Dan 11:36-39. So it is essential that we understand each verse well before going on to the next one and that we proceed in a disciplined manner. The thoughts expressed by the angel and written down by Daniel are not contradictory in the sense of being inconsistent with each other. But they might well contradict established opinions as to what is and is not a possible interpretation. For example, preterist, futurist, and historicist scholars alike have found it difficult to reconcile the angel's statements that the king will not "regard any god" (vs. 37) and yet "will honor a god of fortresses" (vs. 38). If he shows no regard for the "god of fortresses," how can he be said to honor him? Again, what is the king's relationship to the "foreign god" (vs. 39)? The king has no regard for anyone higher than himself, i.e., he has a negative orientation toward higher authority. This fact is what makes the first two verses of the section negative. He has a positive orientation toward his subjects precisely because they are subject to him. So why should the "foreign god" help someone who shows only disregard for deities? The fact that he is more than willing to do so is a problem for any school of interpretation.

Below I show that under one set of historicist assumptions the peculiar status of the "foreign god" not only fails to contradict the statements in vs. 37 but is a natural extension of them which deserves considerable emphasis. Thus, while the two verses are capable of disagreeing with each other, the reverse is also true. They are capable of being perfectly compatible--but not under just any set of assumptions. One of the tasks before us, therefore, is to develop a set of assumptions that will make it possible not only to get around the above difficulty in some way but to turn it into a central pillar of the interpretation. This can be done in a straightforward manner.

The passage refers to more than one deity

In the four verses of Dan 11:36-39 there are eleven clear references to a deity. But there is a question which deity that is. See table 7.



Table 7  
References to Deities in Dan 11:36-39

Hebrew	English (NIV)
Verse 36	
kol-ʾēl ʾēl ʾēlīm	Every god The God of gods
Verse 37	
ʾēlohē ʾabōtāyw ḥemdat nāšīm kol-ʾēloh kōl	The gods of his fathers The one desired by women Any god Them all
Verse 38	
ʿal kannō ʾēloh māʿuzzīm ʾēloh ʾašer lō yēdāʿūhū ʾabōtāyw	Instead of them (lit., him) A god of fortresses A god unknown to his fathers
Verse 39	
ʾēloh nekār	A foreign god

We can be sure at the outset that not all of these eleven references are to the same deity. The "god of fortresses" (vs. 38), for example, is not the same as the "God of gods" (vs. 37). But beyond this it is unclear exactly who these deities are or even how many there are. As suggested above, it will not be useful to begin this part of the discussion with strongly formulated presuppositions as to what we can and cannot find there. C. F. Keil, the dean of an earlier generation of commentators, suggests that

The "god of fortresses" is the personification of war, and the thought is this: he will regard no other god, but only war; the taking of fortresses he will make his god; . . .<sup>35</sup>

Modifying this thought somewhat I would say that it is not the taking but the holding of fortresses that best satisfies the requirements of the passage. The implications are quite different in these two cases. In Keil's view the king is first and foremost a warmonger (vs. 37) who only incidentally is consumed with self-interest (vs. 36). In my view the idea of self-interest is the only one expressed. On the one hand the king "will exalt and magnify himself above every god" (vs. 36, cf. Ezek 36:17), and on the other he delights in the holding of fortresses, i.e., in the possession of power, to the extent of making it for all intents and purposes into a god.

This does not mean, however, that he worships power in the sense of professing to worship it. If Christians can worship their television sets by placing a higher value on the time they spend with them than the time they spend with God, allowing the one to crowd out the other, it is not difficult to understand how the above king could worship the possession of power when he has so much of it to idolize. Nothing more is implied here than that the possession of power is what the king values most. It is not necessary to assume that he publicly admits this is the case. Consider the following parallel passage:

(6) "I am raising up the Babylonians,  
that ruthless and impetuous people,  
who sweep across the whole earth

to seize dwelling places not their own.  
 (7) They are a feared and dreaded people;  
 they are a law to themselves  
 and promote their own honor.  
 (8) Their horses are swifter than leopards,  
 fiercer than wolves at dusk.  
 Their cavalry gallops headlong;  
 their horsemen come from afar.  
 They fly like a vulture swooping to devour;  
 (9) they all come bent on violence.  
 Their hordes advance like a desert wind  
 and gather prisoners like sand.  
 (10) They deride kings  
 and scoff at rulers.  
 They laugh at all fortified cities;  
 they build earthen ramps and capture them.  
 (11) Then they sweep past like the wind and go on--  
 guilty men, whose own strength is their god."  
 (Hab 1:6-11)

The Babylonians of course had a pantheon of deities to whom they paid the formalities of worship. Habakkuk does not deny this when he calls them "guilty men, whose own strength is their god" (vs. 11). The prophet is not here speaking of cultic regulations but of an inner state of mind. In the same way, the fact that the king in our passage "will exalt himself above them all" (vs. 37; i.e., above "any god"), does not mean he is an atheist. It means he is self-centered. Nor does the fact that he makes a god out of the possession of power mean that he worships it in any literal cultic sense.

Who does the king worship?

We are now left to determine who or what the king does worship--in a cultic sense. The answer might be problematic in a number of ways, but at least it is clear.

Verse 38 begins with the words *al kannô* "instead of him." The NIV rendering "Instead of them" has no textual basis whatever. More than this, there is no support for it in any of the ancient versions. If the text read *al kannām*, which it does not, then NIV would have translated those words correctly. But what the Hebrew says is *al kannô*. The reference is to a singular antecedent, not to a plural antecedent. It is, "instead of him," not "instead of them."

So what is the singular antecedent referred to in this way? To find it we must return to vs. 37 because the words *al kannô* are among the first to occur in vs. 38 and it is clear that they refer back to a deity that has been mentioned before. This is equivalent to saying that the words in question do in fact have an antecedent--something earlier to which they refer. And it must be found in vs. 37 despite the fact that what that verse consists of is a list of deities for whom the king is specifically said to have no regard. But honor and worship are not the same, a point we return to below, nor does the king's theory necessarily correspond to his practice. If it did, we

would not be reading about him here. There are four references to deities in vs. 37. The antecedent of *ʿal kannô* must be one of them. See table 8.

Table 8  
References to Deities in Vs. 37

Deity	Number
"the gods of his fathers'	Plural
"the one desired by women"	Singular
"any god"	Collective
"them all"	Plural

The reference in clause 1 to "'the gods of his fathers'" may be set aside at the outset because it is plural. There can be no grammatical agreement between these many "'gods'" and the one in whose place *ʿal kannô* the king honors "'a god of fortresses'" (vs. 38). This leaves clauses 2 through 4. Keil dismisses clause 4 ("them all") and argues for 3 instead ("any god").

*ʿal kannô* has here the same meaning as in vers. 20, 21, and 7: "in his place or stead" (Gesenius, de Wette, Kliefoth, and others). But the suffix is not, with Klief., to be referred to *ʿal kôl* [clause 4]: in the place of all that, which he did not regard, but it refers to *kol-ʿelôʿh* [clause 3]: in the place of every god, which is not overthrown by the objection that in that case the suffix should have been plur., because the suffix is connected with the singular *ʿlwh*.<sup>36</sup>

I agree that the suffix is not to be referred to *ʿal kôl* ("them all," clause 4). But neither is it to be referred to *kol-ʿelôʿh* ("any god," clause 3). Keil would have been correct that *ʿelôʿh* ("god") is singular if it had occurred alone. But it occurs with a word that means "all" or "every." This is an important fact since it shows that this term is a collective reference to an entire class of deities and collectives of this sort were interpreted as grammatically plural in late biblical Hebrew--fully equivalent to *ʿal kôl* ("them all," clause 4).<sup>37</sup>

So the sequence: plural, singular, collective, plural in table 8 (above) can be restated as: plural, singular, plural, plural. Verse 38 does not open with a reference to just "'any god.'" It opens with a specific reference to "'the one desired by women.'" This is the only antecedent that is grammatically allowable for *ʿal kannô* ("instead of him"). We could attempt to change the word we are translating in vs. 38, as NIV appears to have done, but barring this there is no other way to avoid the above conclusion. The question is not whether these facts are facts. The question is what conclusion to draw from them.

The conclusion I draw is that the king--as regards his own public claims--worships "'the one desired by women'" (vs. 37, clause 2). He does not in fact honor "'the one desired by women'" but does worship Him in a cultic sense, i.e., in the sense of professing to worship Him. This distinction between worship and honor must be appreciated if we ever wish to understand what Daniel says about the power in question.

"The one desired by women" is not  
"a foreign god"

The words *ʿal kannô* (lit., "instead of him") have been examined from the point of view that they have a singular antecedent and we have now established what that antecedent must be. They should also be examined from the point of view that they show what expectations people have of the king. And, if we assume reasonably that their expectations are based on the king's claims for himself, they reveal the nature of those claims. They are far different from anything we might assume based on what the angel says about the king's behavior.

I have argued in earlier papers that Dan 11 can be divided naturally into three approximately equal parts (vss. 2-15, 16-28, and 29-45), that each bloc of text represents a bloc of time, and that the blocs (though not necessarily the verses within them) are ordered with respect to time. I have also argued that the chapter divides naturally into two approximately equal parts (vss. 2-22, 23-45), with the death of Christ on a Roman cross at the center of everything the angel says to Daniel in this last vision of the book (vs. 22).

When these two facts are brought together they provide a sound basis for applying the entire chapter to history. If Christ is allowed to assume His rightful place at the center of the chapter, we establish the timeframe for the middle third of Daniel's last vision as being in and around the first century A.D. If this is the case, the first third will be set in an earlier period, i.e., at a time before the cross, and the last third will be set in a later period, i.e., after the cross.

In this context "the one desired by women" (vs. 37), in the last third of the chapter, is not some pagan deity.<sup>38</sup> It is Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup> The king professes to worship Christ in his capacity as the head of the Christian church on earth. By pursuing a wholly willful and self-centered course of action, however, he deprives Christ of honor. It is the disparity between what the king claims to do and what he does that fills the passage with contradictions. These do not derive from the way in which the prophecy was written or transmitted. They derive from the nature of its subject matter. The king honors Christ with his claims but dishonors Him with his deeds.

One can worship without giving  
honor

Consider the following passage, in which God is speaking to the high priest Eli:

"Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?"

(30) "Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: 'I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever.' But now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me [*m<sup>o</sup>kabb<sup>e</sup>day*] I will honor [*ʿkabbēd*], but those who despise me will be disdained.'" (1 Sam 2:29-30)

Eli correctly professed to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. He is not criticized for his profession. He is criticized for the way he carried out his responsibilities. It was in this latter area

that he failed to honor the Lord, regardless of the fact that in his official role as high priest he led the nation in worship.

In the above passage God not only requires honor from people but promises to give honor to certain ones as well. This is not a commitment that He will speak well of them but that He will find tangible ways to demonstrate His high regard--just as He expects us to do for Him. This distinction runs throughout Scripture, as when the Lord says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me [*kibb'dûni*] with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isa 29:13). See also Matt 21:28-32.

One can honor without giving  
worship

We have learned two things from our comparison of vss. 37 and 38. First, the king "will show no regard for . . . any god" (vs. 37). And second, the king creates for himself the expectation--documented by the way in which it is violated--that he has a very high regard indeed for "the one desired by women" (vs. 37).

But if Christ is dishonored by the king's willful course, there is a "god" who is not dishonored by it. This is the point we come to now. Who is this other "god"? It is one thing to say that the king makes a god of his strength or his possession of power, thus withholding honor from the One he claims to worship. But there is a "god" who is honored by the fact that he does such things.

In what follows it is imperative that we grasp the significance of what has been said so far. We must understand more than the fact that the king has a haughty attitude. This much lies on the surface. The nature of the king's claims must be understood as well. It is not until we have both pieces of information and compare them that the contradictions inherent in the passage can be seen for what they are. By a process of reasoning, the king claims to worship "the one desired by women" (vs. 37). Having once assimilated this important fact we are ready to proceed. But we must not work from the back of the passage to the front. We are not ready to go on until we have clearly understood the information gleaned from the passage so far. When the angel says, "a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts" (vs. 38), we are not reading about a god that the king worships. We are reading about a "god" that the king honors. The two concepts are not the same in principle and here they are not the same in practice either.

The gold and silver, precious stones, and other things that honor the foreign "god" are not cultic gifts. But if they are not, how could he be honored by them? I answer that he is honored by the fact that the king has these things, and rejoices to have them, and places a higher value on them than on other things of higher value. The possession of wealth and power preoccupies the king and this fact in and of itself is what brings honor to this mysterious "god." Such a conclusion should not be rejected merely because it is puzzling. By facing the unexplained implications of the model directly we gain an insight that will be invaluable in completing our exegesis of the passage.

The "god" that is honored by the king's preoccupation with power and wealth is honored precisely because these things divert his attention from the One who ought to receive it--i.e., the One desired by women. The "god" in question is therefore the opposite counterpart of the One whom the king does in fact worship and outwardly claims to honor.

In earlier times the religions of Rome had known nothing of dualism. The Roman pantheon, like the Greek pantheon before it, had no deity whose task it was to personify evil.<sup>40</sup> It was of course clear that some people acted from unworthy motives and few Romans were blind to the perfidy of their leaders. But the idea that evil was the special domain of a single "god," who was unalterably opposed to virtue or to other more noble deities, was foreign to their thinking. Outside the Jewish scriptural tradition the closest counterpart of such dualism is found in Persia, not Rome.<sup>41</sup> Nor was it a matter of identifying a suitable deity and installing him in the appropriate legends. The whole concept of personified evil was lacking.

It is not necessary for the enemy of Christ to be worshiped in order to be honored. On the contrary, this result is obtained by default whenever Christ is deprived of honor. In this context it becomes entirely understandable that the king could honor a foreign or alien "god" with gold and silver that the king would never think of offering to him. It is enough that the king's wealth should occupy his mind to the exclusion of other more significant matters.

What sets the king apart in this regard is not that he preoccupies himself with material things. Instead it is the fact that, having so much wealth and so much power on the one hand, on the other he has so weighty a responsibility to point people beyond such matters to objects of infinite worth.

Recognition is not the same as  
acknowledgement

"He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him [<sup>רֹשֵׁר</sup> *hikkîr*]. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price." (vs. 39, NIV)

A test of the proposed interpretation comes in vs. 39 where there is more than one problem with the translation. NIV uses the word "acknowledge" and translates the singular word *hikkîr* (discussed in an earlier section) as a plural. Thus, the king's subjects "acknowledge" him. This all makes very good sense, but it is not what the text says. When the word is translated more correctly as a singular it is clear that the king is the one who does the "acknowledg[ing]." But can it be said in any justifiable sense that the king we have in view "acknowledge[s]" the enemy of Christ? It would be absurd to say so. Would it be any better to say that the "foreign god" "acknowledge[s]" the king, leaving open the possibility that he has acted in ignorance? It might be possible to translate this way (at least the verb has a singular subject), but in that event why is the king singled out for such pointed criticism?

Such obstacles to an application of the passage during the Christian centuries are formidable. Indeed, it was arguments like these, as well as a desire to learn from his contemporaries, that led Uriah Smith to conclude that the papacy did not satisfy the historical requirements of this particular passage, despite the obvious parallels with earlier chapters. See appendix. He turned instead to revolutionary France, which was openly hostile to religion at an appropriate time in history.<sup>42</sup> France was a sidetrack and a diversion.

Once we get past the grammatical technicality that *hikkîr* is singular, the next task is to determine what that singular word means. It does not mean "acknowledge." A better rendering would be "recognize." In English the difference between these two words is one of knowing and, assuming that one knows, admitting the fact. There are situations where the one word is

appropriate and the other simply is not. The two concepts are not the same in English or in Hebrew. Let me illustrate this point.

When Jacob appeared before his father covered with goat skins in order to obtain Esau's birthright by fraud, his father "did not recognize him [*lō' hikkîrô*], for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau" (Gen 27:23). It is not the case that Isaac knew it was Jacob and refused only to admit that he knew. He did not know. Thus, it would not have been correct in Gen 27:23 to translate, "He did not acknowledge him."

In the story of how Joseph's brothers came to buy grain from him in Egypt we read that, "Although Joseph recognized his brothers [*wayyâkkēr*], they did not recognize him [*lō' hikkîrûhû*]" (Gen 42:8). The whole point of the story is that Joseph did not at this time acknowledge his brothers. He waited until later to do that. But he did recognize them. He knew who they were.

When a small company of Danites left their tribal home and set out toward the north during the time of the judges they stopped at the home of a man named Micah. "When they were near Micah's house, they recognized [*hikkîrû*] the voice of the young Levite" (Judg 18:3). It is not that they knew the Levite was there all along and only admitted that they knew when they were near the house. They did not recognize the man's voice until they heard it. They did not hear it until they got near. As these examples show, the difference between recognizing and acknowledging can be significant and I submit that it is significant in the passage before us.

The best rendering for *hikkîr* in Dan 11:39 is "recognize," just as in the examples above. This fact is important because, as I apply the figure of the willful king, he does not in any way acknowledge the "god" who delights to see his love of power and wealth and his abuses of authority. He would be horrified at the thought of doing so. And yet he knows in his heart when he does these things that what he is doing is wrong. He is not entirely deceived as to the nature of his actions.

I have not attempted in this paper to document the sins and shortcomings of the popes from roughly A.D. 500 to 1800. Dwelling on the failures of those who have occupied this high office would only honor the one who is ultimately responsible for causing them. But the reader should realize that it would be easy to supply the missing details.<sup>43</sup> We are not talking about things done in a corner. The events of the high middle ages are on public record and no feature of that record is so prominent as the succession and influence of the medieval popes. As different persons over the period in question successively took upon themselves the responsibility of leading the church of Christ on earth there will have been varying degrees of awareness that something was wrong. But there was at least some degree of awareness. This conclusion is supported by the text and is reasonable.

## Parallels to the Passage

There is a question how Dan 11:36-39 relates to other Old Testament prophecies and how it in turn has been interpreted in the New Testament. What the angel says to Daniel is not unrelated to the rest of the Old Testament and, predictably, its closest ties are to the work of other prophets writing shortly before and during the exile. A consistent picture emerges from the various sources if we will bring all of those sources into the discussion. Below are a few representative examples.

## Old Testament

*Isaiah.* In Isaiah the Lord accuses Assyria of making the following boast:

"By the strength of my hand I have done this,  
 and by my wisdom, because I have understanding.  
 I removed the boundaries of nations,  
 I removed the boundaries of nations,  
 like a mighty one I subdued their kings.  
 (14) As one reaches into a nest,  
 so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations;  
 as men gather abandoned eggs,  
 so I gathered all the countries;  
 not one flapped a wing,  
 or opened its mouth to chirp." (Isa 10:13-14)

Whether the angel's words reminded Daniel of this passage when he said, "He will exalt and magnify himself above every god . . . he will honor a god of fortresses" (Dan 11:36-38), I cannot say. The angel's words remind me of what Isaiah said and (the point to notice) it is clear that they describe a similar state of affairs.

*Ezekiel.* In Ezek 35 there is a prophecy against Edom. At one point the Lord brings the following charge against Edom:

"You boasted against me [*wattagdîlû ʿālay*] and spoke against me without restraint, and I heard it." (Ezek 35:13)

The words "You boasted against me" are similar in the Hebrew to two expressions from Dan 11: "He will exalt and magnify himself above [*wʿyitgaddēl ʿal*] every god" (vs. 36) and "will exalt himself above them all [*ʿal-kōl yitgaddāl*]" (vs. 37). The main difference grammatically is that the example from Ezek 35 is in the Hiphil conjugation, while the two examples from Dan 11 are in the Hithpael conjugation. But the intent is the same. To boast against God exhibits the same attitudes as magnifying oneself above Him or exalting oneself above Him. This two-fold verbal link between Ezek 35:13 and both Dan 11:36 and 37 indicates that the attitudes of Edom during the period of the exile offer a potential source of insight into the attitudes of the willful king in Dan 11:36-39.

*Babylon as the prototypical northern conqueror.* The king of the North in Dan 11:36-39 is a northern conqueror. He is not the only one to occupy that role in the Old Testament. There are many precedents for his activity. Assyria has been mentioned in this regard. Nor does the hostile power have to come from the North. Edom exhibited all the same attitudes toward Jerusalem that Assyria did during the reign of Hezekiah. The most notable prototype for Daniel's king of the North, however, is not Assyria or Edom, but Babylon. This interpretation is all the more plausible because Daniel himself was taken captive by a Babylonian king sweeping down out of the North in 605 B.C.<sup>44</sup>

The entire book of Jeremiah develops the theme of Babylon as a northern conqueror (see especially chaps. 50-51) and a similar claim can be made for Ezekiel (see chaps. 21, 24).



Such comparisons are appropriate here because of the obvious link between the king of Babylon in contemporary prophecies and the king of the North in Dan 11. The oracle against Tyre in Ezek 27 and 28 should also be brought into this discussion, notwithstanding the fact that Tyre never invaded Judah, because in Dan 11:36-39 we are dealing with attitudes closely paralleled by those of the king of Tyre. Even if these were the only passages that have any bearing on the northern conqueror motif in the Old Testament, they still would not exhaust the topic because what we have seen in vss. 36-39 and earlier in vss. 29-35 is amplified and expanded to eschatological proportions in the angel's concluding remarks (vss. 40-45). But that is another topic.<sup>45</sup>

## New Testament

More germane to us than how Daniel understood the writings of other earlier and contemporary prophets is how the various New Testament writers understand Daniel. The Holy Spirit has made His intentions clear through inspired writers and we should benefit from what He has shown them. Their message is not shrouded in mystery. Obscurity is not the problem. On the contrary, what they say is much too clear and we find ourselves thinking, "It cannot mean that." Consider two examples.

*2 Thessalonians.* Paul was characteristically forthright in warning the church in Thessalonica of the dangers it would face before Christ's return:

(1) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, (2) not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. (3) Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. (4) He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

(5) Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? (6) And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. (7) For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. (8) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. (9) The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, (10) and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (11) For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie (12) and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 Thess 2:1-12)

Two sets of questions arise at this point. First, was Paul saying the same thing as Daniel and, if so, was he aware of the fact? That is one issue. And second, What sort of application did Paul have in mind? Having answered these questions, we can interpret Daniel in a manner similar to Paul with every confidence that we are on firm biblical ground in doing so.

As regards the first question, I submit that Paul had Dan 11:37 consciously in mind as he wrote 2 Thess 2:3-4, with related comments in vss. 5-12. Paul was applying what Daniel wrote

either on the strength of Daniel's inspiration or his own. I cannot say which. But it is unreasonable to suppose that the two passages would be so similar by accident.

As regards the second question, there is at least one point on which we can be entirely clear, and it is crucial: Paul was not writing about Antiochus Epiphanes. We can debate whether Daniel was, but Paul was not. His villain did not live in the past. Nor was Paul writing about a contemporary such as Nero. Nero might well have thought he deserved service from his subjects that was tantamount to worship, but he never said so from within a Christian church (2 Thess 2:4), nor did he ever molest the temple in Jerusalem. Paul was describing events still future at the time when he wrote about them. And the events he warns of would not be seen "until the rebellion occurs" (vs. 3), i.e., until there had been sufficient time for a general apostasy to have its effect on the church.

This is not all. The villain Paul has in view "opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (vs. 4). These are the same characteristics as those found in Dan 11:36, which says: "He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods." Paul is not saying here that the largely Gentile church he is writing to in Macedonia would be deluded by a Jewish pretender who sets himself up in the Jerusalem temple during the eighteen or so years remaining before it would be destroyed by the Romans. In any event they were not deluded in this manner. He is writing to the church about the church. His villain arises from within that body and is chiefly criticized for the influence he would have upon it. This is not the only place where he says so. Consider Paul's final charge to the believers in Ephesus:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. (30) Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. (31) So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. (Acts 20:29-31)

Both in Acts 20 and in 2 Thess 2 Paul was warning Christians about a danger that would arise from within the Christian church. Both he and Daniel had in mind an apostasy among God's people that would occur on an immense scale after Paul's lifetime. This does not mean that it is still future now. With benefit of hindsight we can verify as history what both Daniel and Paul foresaw as prophecy. The events have occurred just as the Holy Spirit said they would.

*Revelation.* In the book of Revelation we have a different figure but it portrays the same historical realities and has the same things to say about them. Instead of a king of the North we are shown the queen of Babylon.

(3) Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. (4) The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. (5) This title was written on her forehead:

MYSTERY  
BABYLON THE GREAT  
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES  
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

(6) I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. (Rev 17:3-6)

John is not surprised merely to see a fallen woman. Every day on the streets of Ephesus he would have seen many such women. Instead he is surprised to see this particular woman in such a condition. And the reason why is that he has seen her before under widely different circumstances.<sup>46</sup> In chap. 12 he describes

. . . a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. . . . (6) The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. (Rev 12:1, 6)

Now he is taken back to the same desert and sees the woman riding upon the beast who had once pursued her. What happened in the interim the angel calls a "mystery" ("I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns" [Rev 17:7b]). John can hardly believe what he sees. The angel's question ("Why are you astonished?" [vs. 7a]) is perhaps a reminder that Paul, long years before, had predicted that this very thing would happen. And yet John is still not ready for it when the reality confronts him.

The history of the "1,260 days" (Rev 12:6), or "time, times and half a time" (Rev 12:14), did not treat all parties equally. Not all Christians submitted to the authority of John's mystic Babylonian queen (Daniel's king of the North in Dan 11:29-35 and 36-39). Those who did not submit had good reason to fear. And yet, addressing precisely these individuals, Christ says, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). Those who resisted did so at their peril (Dan 7:7; 11:33-35; Rev 6:9-11; 17:6). Others followed the queen out of a sincere belief that they were doing the right thing. We can be glad that God is the righteous Judge. Things are seldom as they appear. People make promises they cannot keep. Some claim to be followers of Christ who are not, while others are despised for not following Him who really do.

The church has always had a diverse membership and yet there cannot be as many symbols for it as there are people to symbolize. One is enough in Rev 12 and one is enough in Rev 17. The contrast between the woman in these two passages shows a development over time in which circumstances already beginning to take shape in Paul's day had reached their full development. We can now look back on these things and see what Paul, Daniel, and other biblical writers were talking about. If one must have faith to believe that their prophecies have been fulfilled, what must he have to believe that they have not been? The record over a 1300 year period from about 500 to 1800 is clear without aid of sectarian bias and can be documented from any public library.

## Conclusion

I have applied Dan 11:36-39 to the Christian church in medieval Europe and have argued that the king in these verses is a figure representing the leadership of that church. It is not any single individual. No person lives 1300 years.

Let me attempt to put my remarks in perspective. There is a breach of symmetry in the popular assumption that God was right to reprove Israel but that nothing in a similar vein should be said to the church. Actually, however, the parallel is quite close.<sup>47</sup> Speaking to the believers in Rome Paul says,

If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, (18) do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. (19) You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' (20) Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. (21) For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. (Rom 11:17-21)

There is a contrast here, but my point is that the two types of branches are comparable. They are analogous to each other. If they are not, on what basis does Paul develop his argument? This comparison forces us to ask whether we as Christians are really any better than our spiritual ancestors. The Jews were led astray by their kings, their foreign neighbors, and their own inclinations and thus needed prophets to bring them back to a pure faith. And if the prophets' messages were often startlingly direct, we acknowledge that this is all as it should be because the Jews were clearly wrong and such directness was justified. After the cross there would be no more apostasy. That is not what Paul says. "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:29-31). "Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction" (2 Thess 2:3). There might be a difference of opinion as to how to apply these warnings, but it is clear that they were given. And if they mean anything at all, one part of their meaning must be that the church has never been above danger.

So now, when we reach that part of Dan 11 where it is impossible to avoid the implications of such warning and reproof, I merely point out that there is nothing innovative in this. What we demonstrate by saying these things is that God deals with all His children evenhandedly, i.e., that His chosen people in New Testament times are not exempt from the same kinds of reproof and discipline that His chosen people in Old Testament times needed to receive. Otherwise, what does Christ mean when He says, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev 3:19)? And what does the author of Hebrews mean when he writes to his contemporaries and to us in the following words?

(7) Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? (8) If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. (9) Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our

spirits and live! (10) Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. (11) No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

(12) Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. (13) "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. (Heb 12:7-13)

**If God is speaking to us, let us listen to Him. If He speaks with candor, let us thank Him for doing so. But at all costs we must not "refuse him who speaks" (Heb 12:25). His appeal is both simple and reasonable:**

"Only acknowledge your guilt-  
you have rebelled against the Lord your God,  
you have scattered your favors to foreign gods  
under every spreading tree,  
and have not obeyed me,"  
declares the Lord. (Jer 3:13)

One of Israel's most devastating errors was the conviction that they had no need to return to God, since they had never displeased Him in the first place (see Mal 3:7). Let the similarity end here. Let the prophet's message not be lost on us as it was on them.