

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 56.6%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Daniel 1

Monday: Daniel 2

Tuesday: Daniel 3

Wednesday: Jeremiah 7

Thursday: Jeremiah 8

Friday: Jeremiah 9

Saturday: Jeremiah 10

Current # of email addresses in the group: 624

I hope each of you enjoyed your week of study in God's Holy Word. I want to say how much I greatly appreciate the notes I receive from each of you. Your encouragement is so meaningful, but I am also greatly encouraged by how many of you are so deeply dedicated to learning God's Word and making it a consistent part of your daily lives.

This week we start the book of Daniel, one of my personal favorites. We will cover the first three chapters before pivoting back into Jeremiah for a while. Sadly, we won't return to finish Daniel for many weeks, so this will simply be a taste of more to come.

If anyone stopped reading somewhere along the way, this is a good place to jump back in with us.

Have a great week!

The audio archive information is available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

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3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 87

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 582 – SUNDAY: January 26th

Daniel 1

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Continuing on from the previous section of commentary regarding the Babylonian victory at Carchemish and the southward flight of the Egyptian forces, "the Old Testament suggests

that Nebuchadnezzar followed them as far south as Egypt [pushing them out of Syria and Judah] and that he forced Jerusalem to pay tribute and yield prisoners, including Daniel the prophet. [The kingdom of Judah was thereby taken from Egypt and incorporated into the Babylonian Empire].... All this took place in a matter of a few weeks, for by August 15, 605, Nabopolassar had [unexpectedly] died and Nebuchadnezzar had to return at once to Babylon [to secure his succession]. As the author of Kings indicates, Jehoiakim remained a loyal subject to the Babylonians for the next three years (605-602)" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, pp. 450-451).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus preserved this account regarding Nebuchadnezzar from the Chaldean priest and historian Berosus, who wrote around 290 B.C.: "Meanwhile, as it happened, his father Nabopolassar sickened and died in the city of Babylon, after a reign of twenty-one years. Being informed ere long of his father's death, Nabuchodonosor settled the affairs of Egypt and the other countries. The prisoners—Jews, Phoenicians, Syrians, and those of Egyptian nationality—were consigned to some of his friends, with orders to conduct them to Babylonia, along with the heavy troops and the rest of the spoils; while he himself, with a small escort, pushed across the desert to Babylon. There he found the administration in the hands of the Chaldeans and the throne reserved for him by their chief nobleman. Being now master of his father's entire realm, he gave orders to allot the captives, on their arrival, settlements in the most suitable districts of Babylonia. He then magnificently decorated the temple of Bel and the other temples with the spoils of war" (quoted by Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 1983, pp. 185-186). Here, then, is the time frame for this section of commentary, providing the context for the opening chapter of the book of Daniel.

Introduction to the Book of Daniel

Daniel was a remarkable man. His life and ministry spans the entire duration of Judah's 70-year captivity in Babylon. We will see him rise to high office in the administration of both the Babylonian and Persian Empires and yet maintain his faith and obedience to God despite persecution and trial. The story of Daniel in the lion's den is one known from childhood throughout the Judeo-Christian world.

But Daniel's story begins *here*. Since Nebuchadnezzar's invasion "took place in 605 bc, and Daniel was at that point placed in the category of 'young men' to be educated (Daniel 1:4), he would probably have been 15-20 years old. That would make his date of birth around 625-620 bc during the middle of the reign of the last godly king of Judah, Josiah (640-609 bc; 2 Chronicles 34-35)" ("Daniel," Paul Gardner, ed., *The Complete Who's Who in the Bible*, 1995, p. 122). Indeed, Josiah may have been a great influence on the young Daniel. In fact, [Daniel 1:3](#) says that those who were carried to Babylon to be educated included some of the nobles, even royalty. Josephus states that Daniel and his three famous friends were all members of the royal family (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 10, sec. 1). This is even more reason to suspect Josiah's influence—and perhaps the influence of Josiah's friend, the prophet Jeremiah.

Although Daniel served for around 70 years in the royal palaces of four great gentile kings (compare [Daniel 1:21](#)), we are given little information about his civil duties. The book that bears his name is not a complete chronicle of his life but is actually a short collection of different documents, most of them written by Daniel but one surprisingly authored by Nebuchadnezzar (i.e., [Daniel 4](#)). The only definite details we have about Daniel are the incredible and inspiring stories relating to his spiritual life and messages.

The book of Daniel is well-known for the remarkable prophetic visions and narratives contained within it. Yet, notes *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, "in the Hebrew Bible the book of Daniel is found

in the third division, the 'Writings,' rather than in the second, in which the prophetic books occur. The reason for this is not that Daniel was written later than these prophetic books. In some lists, it may be noted, Daniel was included in the second division of the Canon" (introductory notes on Daniel). The same source suggests that Daniel is classed among the Writings because Daniel himself did not hold the *office* of a prophet—that is, a mediator between God and the nation, declaring God's words as God declared them to him—even though he had the *gift* of prophecy, being spoken of in the New Testament as a "prophet" in that limited sense (see [Matthew 24:15](#)). This, however, does not seem quite right. Daniel does appear to have been a prophet in the true sense of the word even though angels were sometimes used to bring messages to him from God. Indeed, it would seem odd for Christ to refer to him as a prophet if he were not really a prophet.

Why the inclusion with the Writings then? The *style and approach* of the book seems to be more at issue. The prophetic books alternate between warnings of chastisement for disobedience and promises of blessings for obedience. While Daniel contains numerous prophecies, the approach is not one of promises and warnings. It is laid out as a series of inspiring stories and rather detailed prophetic narratives. Then again, perhaps Daniel should be classed among the Prophets as some suggest. Either way, we cover the book here in time order mainly because of the historical perspective it provides on the other biblical books we are currently covering.

But not everyone, it should be mentioned, accepts the validity of the book of Daniel as being contemporary with these other books. "For various reasons," says *The New Open Bible's* introduction to Daniel, "many critics have argued that Daniel is a fraudulent book that was written in the time of the Maccabees in the second century b.c., not the sixth century b.c. as it claims. But their arguments are not compelling:

"(1) *The prophetic argument* holds that Daniel could not have made such accurate predictions; it must be a 'prophecy after the events.' [Daniel 11](#) alone contains over one hundred specific prophecies of historical events that literally came true. The author, the critics say, must have lived at the time of [the Syrian invader of Judea] Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 b.c.) and probably wrote this to strengthen the faith of the Jews. But this argument was developed out of a theological bias that assumes true prophecy cannot take place. It also implies that the work was intentionally deceptive.

"(2) *The linguistic argument* claims that the book uses a late Aramaic in [chapters] 2-7 and that the Persian and Greek words also point to a late date. But recent discoveries show that Daniel's Aramaic is actually a form of the early Imperial Aramaic. Daniel's use of some Persian words is no argument for a late date since he continued living in the Persian period under Cyrus. The only Greek words are names of musical instruments in chapter 3, and this comes as no surprise since there were Greek mercenaries in the Assyrian and Babylonian armies. Far more Greek words would be expected if the book were written in the second century b.c.

"(3) *The historical argument* asserts that Daniel's historical blunders argue for a late date. But recent evidence has demonstrated the historical accuracy of Daniel. Inscriptions found at Haran show that Belshazzar reigned in Babylon while his father Nabonidus was fighting the invading Persians [a matter we will look at more in our reading of [Daniel 5](#)]. And Darius the Mede ([Daniel 5:31](#); [Daniel 6:1](#)) has been identified as Gubaru, a governor appointed by Cyrus."

In the end we will no doubt conclude as Josephus does regarding Daniel's fulfilled prophecies: "And indeed it so came to pass, that our nation suffered these things under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniel's vision, and what he wrote many years before they came to pass. In the very same manner Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman

government, and that our country should be made desolate by them. All these things did this man leave in writing, as God had showed them to him, insomuch that such as read his prophecies, and see how they have been fulfilled, would wonder at the honor wherewith God honored Daniel" (Book 10, chap. 11, sec. 7).

Training in Babylon

[Daniel 1](#) opens with what appears to be a chronological inconsistency. Jeremiah gave the battle of Carchemish as occurring in the "fourth year of Jehoiakim" ([Jeremiah 46:2](#)). But in [Daniel 1](#), Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah—which definitely came after the battle of Carchemish—is said to have occurred in the "*third* year of the reign of Jehoiakim" (verse 1).

As most commentators agree, the problem is due to a different way of counting years. Some account for the difference this way: In Jeremiah's system, a king's first year was counted as the calendar year he assumed the throne (even if there was only part of a year left) while, in Daniel's, the first year was counted from beginning of the next full calendar year. Others account for the difference this way: Jeremiah used a spring-to-spring reckoning of calendar years while Daniel used a fall-to-fall reckoning. In any case, Jeremiah and Daniel both referred to events that transpired in 605 B.C.—which was Jehoiakim's fourth year by Jeremiah's reckoning and Jehoiakim's third year by Daniel's.

Verse 2 emphasizes the fact that Nebuchadnezzar did not really *take* Judah—but that God "gave" it into his hand. And this was because of God's judgment on His people. The items taken from the temple later appear on the night of Babylon's fall (see [Daniel 5](#)). Eventually, they will be brought back to the Promised Land following Judah's exile (see [Ezra 1:7](#)).

Daniel is also taken from Judah at this time. "Soon after arriving in Babylon Daniel and some of his young comrades were selected by Ashpenaz, a court official, to be trained in the arts and sciences of Babylonia. The apparent goal was to prepare them to be members of the diplomatic corps who could someday represent Babylonia's interests, perhaps in Palestine itself" (Merrill, p. 484). Ashpenaz was chief of the eunuchs ([Daniel 1:3](#)). "In ancient Middle Eastern monarchies, royal harems were typically superintended by men who had been emasculated and were considered reliable to serve in that capacity. A eunuch was often regarded as a privileged official. He enjoyed the personal friendship of the king, and his advice was frequently sought. Some have speculated that Daniel and his friends were eunuchs or at least that they were set apart to advise the king (v. 9), but there is no specific statement in the book to this effect" (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 3). In verse 9, we do see that Daniel and his friends were answerable to the chief eunuch. And in [Isaiah 39](#), the prophet Isaiah had told Hezekiah that some of his descendants would "be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (verses 5-7). But as to whether this included Daniel and his three friends, we can't be sure.

"When Daniel began the three-year program of training for those who would enter King Nebuchadnezzar's service (Daniel 1:5), he (and his Jewish friends, v. 6) was given a Babylonian name, Belteshazzar (v. 7), which means something like 'Bel (a Babylonian god), protect his life' [or perhaps "protector of Asshur"—that is, of *Assyria*—as some scholars reckon "Asshur" (Assyria) to have been a common suffix among the Assyrians and then among the Babylonians who took control of their territory, as is later explained in the Beyond Today Bible Commentay on [Jeremiah 50](#)]. Since the name is not merely the Babylonian form of Daniel ["God Is My Judge"], and it specifically incorporates the name of a Babylonian deity in place of that of the Jewish God (i.e. the 'El' suffix in Daniel), it seems that the renaming was

part of a systematic, comprehensive reorientation of the students to embrace fully all aspects of the dominant Babylonian society" ("Daniel," Gardner, p. 123).

The name of Hananiah ("The Eternal Is Gracious") was changed to Shadrach (perhaps meaning "I Am Fearful of the God" or "Rejoicing in the Way"). The name of Mishael ("Who Is What God Is?") was changed to Meshach (possibly "Shadow of the Prince" or "Guest of the King"). And the name of Azariah ("Helped of the Eternal") was changed to Abed-Nego ("Servant of [the god] Nebo" or "Servant of Splendor [the Sun]").

In Babylon they were all to be taught the language of the Chaldeans. Interestingly, a large part of the book of Daniel is written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. Aramaic was the language of international communication in the empires of Assyria, Babylon and Persia. It's probable that Daniel, likely having grown up in a royal household, would have already spoken Aramaic as well as Hebrew.

"The full nature of the educational process that Daniel went through after arriving in Babylon is not clear, though its rigour and broad outline can be surmised reasonably well. Daniel and his friends were trained among the best and brightest of the empire (Daniel 1:4). By God's enablement ([Daniel 1:17](#)) they proved not only to be far superior to all the other students (v. 19), but also to 'all the magicians and enchanters' (v. 20) in the kingdom. The subject matter is said to have been 'the language and literature of the Babylonians.' However, v. 17 expands the scope to 'all kinds of literature and learning'" (p. 123). "The wisdom of the Chaldeans consisted of sciences current at the time, including the interpretation of omens, communicated through astrology, the examination of livers, kidneys, and other entrails, and the examination of organs and flight patterns of birds" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 17).

Thankfully, Daniel and his friends were well grounded in the truth of God before receiving such an education. This should serve as a model for young people today embarking on a college career. Liberal academia today is rife with an anti-God, anti-biblical, pro-evolution, pro-humanist agenda. But if a strong commitment to God and a proper understanding of His truth are already present—and *remain* present—an education in the world's universities need not be corrupting.

Of course, it is one thing to merely *learn about* pagan matters. It is another thing to *participate* in wrongdoing. Daniel and his friends would not cross that line. For instance, they would not allow themselves to be defiled with the "king's delicacies" nor with the wine he drank. There were evidently multiple problems here. First, it is likely that the food included animals that God declared to be unclean (see [Leviticus 11](#); [Deuteronomy 14](#)). Even the clean meat may not have been properly drained of blood and trimmed of fat (see [Leviticus 3:17](#); [Leviticus 7:22-27](#)). But what was wrong with the wine? Sometimes animal-based products are used in winemaking as clarifying or fining agents, such as eggs or even blood, to make wine clear (see Caroline Pyevich, "Why Is Wine So Fined?," *Vegetarian Journal*, Jan.-Feb. 1997, online at <https://www.vrg.org/journal/index.php>). It is possible that this was also done in ancient times. It could also be that the king's wine was dedicated in pagan ritual so that drinking it would give the appearance of participating in idolatry on some level (compare [Deuteronomy 32:37-38](#); [1 Corinthians 10:20-33](#)). Probably much of the meat had been similarly dedicated as sacrifices, so that Daniel and his friends could not consume even the clean meat with blood and fat removed. Therefore, a vegetarian diet was the only reasonable option—as vegetables were apparently not offered in sacrifice. This was certainly a much simpler matter than declaring to the Babylonians all the requirements meat had to meet before they could eat it—which likely would have availed nothing anyway.

Notice how Daniel handled the situation. He respectfully approached his supervisor with a request (verse 8). This is always the way to approach such matters—for example, when asking an employer for time off of work to observe God's festivals. If the request is denied, then a stronger approach will need to be taken—but we should always show tact and respect. Daniel presented a way to make their particular situation work out, trusting God to back it up, which God did. Perhaps the vegetables included beans and nuts, providing them with sufficient protein in their diet. Or God could have simply enhanced their physical appearance and well-being while doing the opposite with everyone else. After all, 10 days doesn't seem like much time to make a huge difference by itself. We can't know with certainty exactly what happened. What we do know is that the refusal of Daniel and his friends to disobey God prepared them for future greatness as true witnesses for the one true God in a powerful pagan culture.” [END]

Day 583 – MONDAY: January 27th

Daniel 2

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Daniel 1:18 brings us to the end of the Babylonian court training period for Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (a.k.a. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego). But there appears to be a chronological discrepancy with chapter 2. Chapter 1 says that the boys were to be trained for three years after their capture by Nebuchadnezzar (verse 5). Yet chapter 2 says that Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurred in the second year of his reign, and verse 13 implies that the training was finished since Daniel is considered to be one of the "wise men." How do we resolve this?

In its note on the second year of the king in [Daniel 2:1](#), *The New Bible Commentary* states: "This phrase is thought by some to conflict with the three-year period of training mentioned in ch. 1. But the phrase 'three years' ([Daniel 1:5](#)) need refer only to portions of years." What

this would really mean is that the training was for a time period spanning three calendar years and not three full years. The short time prior to Nebuchadnezzar's first year on the throne would have been year one. The first year of Nebuchadnezzar would have been year two. And the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign would have been year three. It was during this year—in 603 B.C.—that the training period ended.

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary points out: "The very difficulty [in chronology here] is a proof of genuineness; all was clear to the writer and the original readers from *their* knowledge of the circumstances, and so he adds no explanation. A forger would not *introduce* difficulties; the author did not then see any difficulty in the case" (note on [Daniel 2:1](#)).

Remarkably, Daniel and his friends proved far wiser than not only the other students, but than all the wise men of the realm ([Daniel 1:20](#)). Besides the fact that God surely aided their intellectual development, we should consider that these young godly men of Judah's court were surely well studied in Scripture, including the brilliance of the civil law system God gave through Moses as well as the unparalleled wisdom of the book of Proverbs.

In verse 21, we are told that Daniel continued in the service of the Babylonian court until Cyrus of Persia conquered the empire in 539 B.C., 66 years later.

Sometime later in Nebuchadnezzar's second year, he has his famous dream, the subject of chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar was immensely troubled by this vivid dream. He knew it meant something and he felt he had to know what. Perhaps he saw it as a "message from the gods." When he mentions the dream to his spiritual advisers, they respond in Aramaic (verse 4). Starting with their response and continuing to the end of chapter 7, the original language of the book of Daniel is Aramaic,

the common language of the empire. Perhaps Daniel intended a broad gentile readership for this section.

The advisers asked that the king tell them his dream. But to be sure that whoever interpreted the dream was telling the truth, he required that they first tell him what he had dreamt. Any good storyteller could make up an "interpretation" (and perhaps the suspicious Nebuchadnezzar suspected his "wise men" often did just that!), whereas only one with supernatural knowledge could reveal the dream itself. Nebuchadnezzar let his fear turn to hostility and, ever the absolute ruler of his kingdom, goes "over the top" with his very real threats to kill all the "wise" men. Like too many rulers who have absolute power, it seems he was extremely ill-tempered with no care for human life. People were replaceable, even innocent young men who were not even involved in his problem. Among those threatened were Daniel and his three friends—but all of this was ultimately from God for a purpose.

How do we react when others make bad decisions that affect us? Daniel's reaction carries an important lesson for every Christian. We all face bad decisions on the part of others—at work, at home, from the government and even at times in the Church. And this was a bad decision. Daniel's very head was on the line. But he didn't just stand around and complain about the government. Instead he took action—but it was tempered with tact and wisdom (verses 14-16; compare [James 1:5](#)). The word translated "wisdom" in verse 14 is related to the Hebrew word meaning "to taste." In English we talk about a person having "good taste," meaning having a sense of appropriateness. Daniel's "good taste" was spiritual in nature. He had the wisdom (good taste) to know what was appropriate when approaching the rulers of the land. But he took no personal pride in his wisdom. He knew it came from God ([Daniel 2:18](#)).

However, to Daniel, just realizing God's help was not enough. When God answered his need, his next reaction was to go back to God and offer thanks and praise (verses 19-23). Author Sinclair Ferguson correctly remarks on Daniel's example: "We need men and women with that spirit today. We do not need more pomp or noise or triumphalism. In the last analysis, we do not need money in order to establish a witness to God in the highest reaches of our society. We need Christians of complete integrity who know that God's eye is on them. With that we need people who pray. Perhaps more than anything else we need Daniel's spirit of prayer" (*Mastering the Old Testament*, 1988, Vol. 19, p. 59).

With the answer in hand, Daniel goes to the king and reveals the dream and its meaning. The image the king saw may have been frightening, but it had great significance, foretelling a succession of great empires. Even in the first century, the identities of the four gentile kingdoms mentioned were understood, as we can see from the writings of Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 10, sec. 4). The head of gold, as Daniel explained, was the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar. The silver chest with two arms signified the empire of the Medes and Persians, which conquered and supplanted Babylon. The belly and thighs of bronze represented the Greco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, which swallowed up Persia. After Alexander's death, this Hellenistic empire continued in a divided form until its divisions were taken over by the next great kingdom, the Roman Empire, represented by the legs of iron. (The two legs apparently signified the east-west division that characterized the Late Roman Empire). Each succeeding metal is less valuable—perhaps showing the wealth of each succeeding empire being more thinly spread, as each empire was bigger than the previous. But, though less valuable, each succeeding metal is stronger, as each empire was more powerful than the last.

However, extending from the legs are feet and toes of iron mixed with clay—a brittle and unstable mixture because it would not bond well. These are destroyed by a stone from heaven, which reduces the entire image to dust. This stone clearly represents the Messiah, Jesus Christ (see [1 Corinthians 10:4](#); [Psalm 18:2](#); [Matthew 16:18](#); [Romans 9:33](#); [Ephesians 2:20](#); [1 Peter 2:6-8](#)), coming from heaven to smash the governments of this world. The stone then grows into a great mountain that fills the whole earth. As a mountain in Bible prophecy is often symbolic of a kingdom, this signifies the Messiah's Kingdom extending to fill the entire earth after destroying the succession of great empires. And indeed, that is what we see in Daniel's explanation in [Daniel 2:44](#). This fact is important to understand, for it shows that the Kingdom of God is a literal kingdom to be set up on earth—the fifth and final kingdom in succession—and not some ethereal sentiment set up in men's hearts, as many believe the Kingdom of God to be.

While most biblical scholars agree that the stone from heaven refers to the Messiah coming to set up His Kingdom, there are differing views about when it occurs. Some claim that "these kings" mentioned in verse 44 refers to the four preceding kingdoms with the stone representing Jesus Christ's first coming during the days of the first-century Roman Empire. Others view the toes as representing 10 nations extant at the end time in a loose federation (the brittle mixture) as a final resurrection of the Roman Empire (compare [Revelation 17:12-14](#)). The latter is the correct meaning. The Roman Empire has continued intermittently throughout history since its official fall in A.D. 476. The darkest and most ominous revival will exist on the world scene at the time of Christ's return.

To understand, we have to look at all the prophecies concerning the succession of empires and the Kingdom of God, especially those in the book of Revelation. Part of the key is given in [Daniel 2:35](#), which states regarding the kingdoms that "the wind swept them away without

leaving a trace" (NIV), something that did not happen to the Roman Empire while Jesus was on earth—nor has it *ever* really happened. In addition, the description in Revelation makes it very clear that the Kingdom of God is not here yet, but will commence at the return of Jesus Christ. To learn more about this, request or download our free booklets, [*The Book of Revelation Unveiled*](#) and [*You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*](#).

Writing to a Roman audience, Josephus explained the succession of gentile empires. But it is interesting to see what he said to the Romans regarding the stone from heaven. Notice: "Daniel did also declare the meaning of the stone to the king; but I do not think proper to relate it, since I have only undertaken to describe things past or present, but not things that are future; yet if any one be so very desirous of knowing truth, as not to wave such points of curiosity, and cannot curb his inclination for understanding the uncertainties of futurity, and whether they will happen or not, let him be diligent in reading the book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings." In the same space, Josephus could certainly have explained what the stone was, but it is clear that he did not want to provoke the Romans by telling them their empire would eventually be smashed by God.

[Daniel 2](#) ends with another glimpse of Daniel's magnificent character wherein he shows his loyalty to his friends and petitions the king for special favor for them. As will happen numerous times during his long sojourn in Babylon, God rewards Daniel's character and loyalty with wealth and position." [END]

Day 584 – TUESDAY: January 28th

Daniel 3

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Some historians believe that the language used in this chapter shows that the story occurred many years

after the incidents in chapter 2. While this part of the book was written in Aramaic (the international language in use throughout the Neo-Babylonian Empire), the terms used for the various office bearers were Persian, not Babylonian, indicating that Daniel wrote the story many years later, after Babylon's fall to Persia, using Persian equivalents for the various officers to make them understandable to the Jewish readers of that time. We must remember that the early part of the book of Daniel is not a contiguous narrative, but a collection of independent accounts from the life of Daniel. Chapter 3 contains one of these separate accounts.

It seems that Nebuchadnezzar didn't really get the point from Daniel's interpretation of his dream that there is only one true God. As this chapter opens, the king decides to build a huge idolatrous image or statue. There's no indication that the image was of the king himself. It may have been a representation of his patron god Nebo, or Nabu. The people's "prostration before Nebo would amount to a pledge of allegiance to his viceroy, *Nabu-kudurri-usur*, i.e., Nebuchadnezzar" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 1).

The construction was quite large, measuring sixty cubits high and six cubits across. "A cubit in Israel was approximately 18 inches; in Babylon it was about 20 inches. Therefore Nebuchadnezzar's image was 90 to 100 feet tall. The 10:1 ratio of height to width, however, suggests that the image was standing on a high pedestal so that the proportions of the figure itself would be closer to the normal ratio of about 4:1" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 1). That would mean it was perhaps a 40-foot-high statue on a 60-foot-high pedestal--still mammoth and imposing. Alternatively, some have seen the dimensions as suggestive of an obelisk or some other phallic image. Whatever the case, the construction was lavished with wealth, being made of gold, or at least overlaid with gold (the latter seeming more likely, given its great size).

The nature of the image is not relevant to the main focus of the story. If it had been important the account would have been more specific. Whatever the image, most Babylonians were expected to bow down and worship it, including all the Jewish exiles. Just how many Jews refused to worship it is not known since the Bible only records the story of Daniel's three friends. But it seems logical to assume that this was just what the locals were waiting for—a chance to get rid of their Jewish overlords. After all, the Jews were the captives. They were supposed to be *beneath* the Chaldeans, not in positions over them. Whatever the reason for singling out these three, it was to become a major lesson once again for Nebuchadnezzar and, no doubt, the rest of the Jews in Babylon.

Many have wondered why Daniel wasn't accused with his three friends. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* lists six possible reasons:

"1. Since Daniel is not mentioned in this chapter, he may have been absent from Babylon at the time, perhaps on government business in some other part of the kingdom.

"2. He may have been closeted with other members of the king's cabinet, working on legalistic or military plans.

"3. He may have been...too ill to attend the public ceremony; we know from [Daniel 8:27](#) that sickness occasionally interfered with his carrying on with government business (cf. also [Daniel 7:28](#); [Daniel 10:8](#)).

"4. It may simply have been assumed that as the king's vizier (prime minister, for his responsibilities amounted to that status; cf. 2:48), he was not required to make public demonstration of his loyalty by worshipping the image of his god. After all, there is no indication that Nebuchadnezzar himself bowed down to the image. It may have been that he simply sat on his royal dais surveying the scene, with his closest friends and advisers at his side.

"5. It is true that Daniel's office as ruler over the capital province of Babylon ([Daniel 2:48](#)) was not specifically listed in the seven categories of public officials (cf. 3:3, though, of course, the rulers of subordinate provinces were required to be on hand); and none of the "wise men" (*hakkimayya*), over whom Daniel had been made chief, were included in the call for this public ceremony. As a type of accredited clergy serving under the state, they may have been exempted from this act of allegiance; their religious commitment would be presumed to be beyond question. In other words, Daniel did not belong to any of the special groups of jurists, advisors, financial experts, or political leaders included in the terms of the call.

"6. Perhaps Daniel's reputation as a diviner was so formidable that even the jealous Chaldeans did not dare attack him before the king" (note on verses 16-18).

Here we also have another proof of genuineness: "[Commentator] Ford...makes the following observation: 'Had the story been the invention that many have suggested; had it originated in the days of the Maccabees to nerve the faithful against Gentile oppression, it is unlikely that the chief hero would have been omitted. Reality transcends fiction, and the very "incompleteness" of this account testifies to its fidelity.' It is hard to see how the force of this deduction can be successfully evaded. There is no psychological reason for an idealizing romancer to leave Daniel out of this exciting episode. The only way to account for this omission is that in point of fact he was not personally in attendance at this important function" (same note).

Returning to the story, consider the enormity of the spectacle. A towering golden statue looms over the pageantry as a magnificent orchestra starts playing, giving the signal for the worship to commence. The music is powerful enough to signal worship to everyone in Babylon. (Incidentally, leading the orchestra are the six most common instruments of the day as well as "all kinds of music.")

Daniel's three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah--referred to by their Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego--are ready to die for their beliefs. There is no way they will bow down to the image.

Now Judah's enemies in Babylon get their chance. They report the disobedience to the king and he takes immediate action, summoning them to appear before him and explain their disobedience to his edict.

They demonstrate what the apostles were to teach many years later: "We ought to obey God rather than men" ([Acts 5:29](#)). They tell the king that their God is *able* to deliver them from harm, but even if He chooses not to, they were willing to die rather than disobey God by worshiping the image. Job had made a similar statement many years before: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" ([Job 13:15](#)). Like the apostle Paul's sufferings many years later, their example of faith will be a marvelous lesson to all mankind (compare [2 Corinthians 4:2, 12](#); [Hebrews 11:35-37](#)).

"These courageous young men were willing to give their lives, if necessary, to show loyalty to God alone. Appreciating their devotion, God spared their lives in a powerful and miraculous witness to King Nebuchadnezzar (verses 19-30). The faith and faithfulness of these young men remains an enduring example of respect for God. Their example should inspire all of us to honor our Creator with a similar sense of loyalty and dedication" ([Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?](#), p. 22).

"These three young men put their lives on the line when they chose not to bow before King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image.... They did not know whether God would intervene to save their lives or not. They knew God *could*, but they didn't know that He *would*. Regardless of the outcome, their living faith convicted them to put God first--a principle Jesus emphasized during His earthly ministry ([Matthew 6:33](#)).... Godly

belief inevitably leads to *doing*. This is why we read in James that faith without works is dead ([James 2:14-26](#)). Living faith comes by doing what God says is good and right and being willing to accept whatever results may come from our actions. The examples and testimonies of the men and women we read about in [Hebrews 11](#) show us we can believe God. He does not lie ([Titus 1:2](#)), and, as our loving, faithful Father, He delights in providing for us. 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning....' ([James 1:17-18](#))" ([You Can Have Living Faith](#), pp. 18-20).

The Jews' open defiance of Nebuchadnezzar only makes his anger worse, and he gives what seem to be absurd orders concerning their execution. Given that the furnace would have been designed for smelting, it would have already been hot enough to consume the men, but he orders additional bellows under it to make it seven times hotter than usual. To make sure that they will be engulfed in flame and won't escape, he leaves them fully clothed even with their hats on and then binds them before having them thrown into the furnace. The furnace is so hot that even the men who threw them in were killed.

"Apparently there was no door or screen to hide the inside of the furnace from view. Judging from bas-reliefs, it would seem that Mesopotamian smelting furnaces tended to be like an old-fashioned glass milk-bottle in shape, with a large opening for the insertion of the ore to be smelted and a smaller aperture at ground level for the admission of wood and charcoal to furnish the heat. There must have been two or more smaller holes at this same level to permit the insertion of pipes connected with large bellows, when it was desired to raise the temperature beyond what the flue or chimney would produce. Undoubtedly the furnace itself was fashioned of very thick adobe, resistant to intense heat. The large upper door was probably raised above the level of the fire bed so that the metal smelted from

the ore would spill on the ground in case the crucibles were upset. So the text says (v. 23) that the three 'fell down' (*nepalu*) into the fire. Apart from the swirling flames and smoke, then, they were quite visible to an outside observer, though, like the king, he would have to stand at a distance" (*Expositor's*, note on verses 19-23).

Nebuchadnezzar (and no doubt all those with him) are astonished. Not only do they see the three walking around inside the furnace, no longer tied up, but with them is a fourth person whom Nebuchadnezzar says is like a son of gods. The New King James Version translates this as "the Son of God," but this is misleading because it is the king who says this and he doesn't know anything about the real Son of God. The Babylonians believed in multiple gods, and the language of the original Aramaic literally means "like a son of gods." The Bible doesn't tell us what he really saw. It may have been an angel, it may have been the preincarnate Christ or it may have been a divinely created apparition. Whatever Nebuchadnezzar saw, it must not have appeared as a mere ordinary person for him to think it god-like. When the three men come out, this fourth does not--having apparently disappeared.

Once again the king is stopped in his tracks. But although he knows that the Jews have a very powerful God, he still doesn't recognize that the God of the Jews is the *only* God (verses 28-29). That lesson is still to come. At this point, God is the God of the Jews, not the God of Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar is highly impressed and wants to honor their God, while at the same time emphasizing his own authority by issuing another extreme decree (verse 29). And the three Jews are promoted, obviously to the chagrin of their enemies (verse 30). Thus we see God's ironic and poetic justice.

The three men, literally thrown into a refiner's fire, could well have quoted the words of King David, which he meant only figuratively: "For you, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined; You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs; You have

caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but you brought us out to rich fulfillment" ([Psalms 66:10-12](#))."
[END]

Day 585 – WEDNESDAY: January 29th

Jeremiah 7

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "The message here is one of rebuke, warning and exhortation. Delivered in a public place, it is a call for the people to "amend their ways" (verse 3). The people of Jeremiah's day had a *form* of religion—they worshiped in God's temple. But this gave them a false sense of security—indeed, they believed a lie. The temple of the Lord is presented in verse 4 as almost a chant. It was viewed as a superstitious talisman to save them. The same thing often happens today. People may place too much faith in considering themselves part of God's *spiritual* temple—His *Church*—rather than in God Himself. They may think that just because they attend worship services and consider themselves a member of the Church that this will save them—an example of the false reasoning of righteousness by association.

But God demands heartfelt obedience. Incredibly, part of the lie the people believe is that God's law somehow no longer applies—that, in a twisted view of God's grace, they are "delivered to do all these abominations" (verse 10). Yet God decries this for the outrage that it is, stating that His temple has become to them a "den of thieves" (verse 11). "The 'den' of robbers was the refuge where they hid out in search of their next victim. The analogy is devastating. How could God's people steal, murder, commit adultery and perjury, and worship other gods (v. 9), and then assume 'we are safe' because of God's house?" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verse 11). Jesus would later quote verse 11 when He chased the moneychangers out of the temple of His day ([Matthew 21:13](#)).

God brings up an example from Israel's history to make His point. In the time of the judges, Shiloh, in the land of Ephraim ([Joshua 18:1](#)), was the site of the tabernacle of God with the Ark of the Covenant—just as Jerusalem was later the site of the temple. Back then, "leaders in the family of Eli had abused their priestly position for personal gain, and idolatry was rampant in the land. When the Israelites attempted to use the ark as a victory-giving talisman, the ark was captured (see [1 Sam. 4](#)) and the sanctuary was destroyed by the Philistines" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Jeremiah 7:12](#)). Shiloh was later destroyed and abandoned, and today, as in Jeremiah's day, one can go to Shiloh and see nothing but desolation and a few scattered ruins. The lesson is striking. Clearly, Judah's confidence in the temple is misplaced. So is placing such confidence in any church or organization. Such thinking carried many into apostasy at the end of the first century—and the pattern has been sadly repeated throughout the centuries. What is vital is that we be firmly grounded with a personal relationship with God, rather than unquestioningly following a church or organization and trusting in loyalty to that organization to ensure our salvation.

In verse 16, the people had descended so far into depravity that God actually forbade Jeremiah from interceding for them.

God then strongly rebukes Israel for worshiping "the queen of heaven" (verses 17-18). This goddess, also mentioned in [Jeremiah 44:15-30](#), is elsewhere referred to as Ashtoreth—known to other Middle Eastern cultures as Ishtar or Astarte—from which the modern name *Easter* derives. As *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* reports: "The term 'Easter' is not of Christian origin. It is another form of *Astarte*, one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess, the queen of heaven. The festival of Pasch [Passover] in post apostolic times was a continuation of the Jewish feast.... From this Pasch the pagan festival of 'Easter' was quite distinct and was introduced into the

apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity" ("Easter," New Testament section, 1985).

Ishtar was a fertility goddess. And today rabbits and eggs are the symbols of sexual fertility and procreation used to celebrate the holiday named after her. Indeed, the special "cakes for the queen of heaven" (verse 18) may be the origin of the popular Easter custom of hot cross buns. It is also interesting to note that many of those who worship Mary as the "Mother of God" today also refer to her as the "Queen of Heaven."

Because of their rebellion, terrible punishment was coming on the Jews of Jeremiah's day (verse 20)—and will likewise come upon all Israel of the *latter* days, as many other prophecies confirm.

Again, God says there is too much emphasis on *form* of religion and not enough on right *substance*. He tells them to go ahead and make all the sacrifices they want but that it won't do them any good (verse 21). God did not command such sacrifices when He first delivered Israel from Egypt. The first thing He commanded was obedience (verses 22-23). Consider that some people today may give offerings or do a few good deeds believing that's enough to satisfy God. Others may do far more—being legalistically meticulous over the smallest details of obedience—and yet ignore the weightier matters of the law, as was the case with the Pharisees whom Christ denounced in His day (see [Matthew 23:23](#); [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#)).

Through the centuries, the Israelites had failed to obey ([Jeremiah 7:24](#))—and this despite the fact that God had sent so many prophets. In [Mark 12:1-12](#), Christ related a parable that expressed the efforts God had made in this regard—all to no avail. God tells Jeremiah that his situation will be no different—the people will not listen to him either ([Jeremiah 7:27](#)). And even now, with Jeremiah's words nearly everywhere in modern Israel (being part of the Bible), they still don't.

Because of the people's refusal to obey, God has Jeremiah tell them to cut off their hair—an apparently figurative reference. "The Heb[rew] feminine form tells us that it's Jerusalem [rather than Jeremiah] who is to cut her hair. The reference is to a person who made a Nazarite vow and was set aside as holy [as all Israel was supposed to be in a sense]. If defiled, one had to cut off his or her hair to symbolize pollution [see [Numbers 6:1-21](#)]" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on [Jeremiah 7:29](#)).

The Jews had gone so far as to set up abominations—idols and pagan altars—in the temple of God (this having occurred a few decades earlier during the reign of Manasseh). And they went further still, sacrificing their children at Tophet: "In the valley of Hinnom, a gruesome place throughout the history of Judah, King Manasseh had built an altar to the pagan god, Molech. There the children of worshippers were burned on a fiery altar as sacrifices to the pagan god. 'Topheth' means 'fireplace' or 'furnace' and was probably the name of a pit dug in the ground for this abominable ritual" (Russell Dilday, *Mastering the Old Testament*, 1987, Vol. 9, p. 484).

Of this ghastly practice, God says, "...which I did *not* command, nor did it [even] come into My heart" ([Jeremiah 7:31](#))—seeming to imply that they believed God *had* commanded it. Why would they have thought such a thing? Because their worship was syncretistic—blending paganism into the true religion. The Hebrew word for "Lord" was *Baal*, a name that also denoted the false sun god. And God was their King, the Hebrew word for which was *Melek* or *Molech*, another name denoting a pagan deity. Many thus believed that the Lord and King—in their mind the true God—had commanded their traditional religious practices, when these practices had actually come from paganism. God would not accept such worship even if people believed they were properly serving Him through it (see [Deuteronomy 12:29-32](#)).

God says the Valley of Hinnom (*Gai Hinnom* or, in the Greek New Testament, *Gehenna*) will be renamed the Valley of Slaughter—"so named because of the great slaughter of the Jews about to take place at Jerusalem: a just retribution of their sin in slaying their children to Moloch in Tophet" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on [Jeremiah 7:32](#)). However, it is likely that this is also representative of the terrible punishment to come on Judah and Israel in the end time. It may also be typical of the final judgment on all rebellion since the New Testament 12 times uses Gehenna as a designation for the place of final punishment, where the incorrigibly wicked will be burned up—called the "lake of fire" in the book of Revelation." [END]

Day 586 – THURSDAY: January 30th

Jeremiah 8

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "In chapter 8, we see the propensity of conquering nations to dishonor the dead. In ancient times, they would often dig up the graves—usually tombs and ossuaries—for anything of value to plunder (verses 1-2). This was, of course, looked upon as a horrible desecration. The point is that death and destruction are not the full measure of punishment. The people are also to suffer national ignominy and shame. The ones who aren't dead will *wish* they were dead—being dragged away as slaves (verse 3).

God laments that His people are perpetual backsliders (verse 5). He heard their past cries for relief and rescued them many times—but they just won't turn their lives around (verse 6). In verse 7 God points out that while birds know when it is time to take major action in migrating, responding to promptings God has put within them, human beings seem oblivious to God's promptings to obey Him—the increasing calamities intended as warnings.

In verses 8-9, the educated people who are supposed to be preserving and teaching God's Word have actually rejected it—and proclaim falsehood instead. As the apostle Paul later remarked of pagan philosophers, "Professing to be wise, they became fools" ([Romans 1:22](#)).

Warning of judgment then, God repeats the reason He gave for it in [Jeremiah 6:10-15](#) (8:10-12). God tells Jeremiah that punishment is coming (verse 13), whereupon the prophet relates the sentiments the people will express when judgment falls (verses 14-16). Forces of enemy invasion are described in the past tense to demonstrate the certainty of their coming—and, terrifyingly, they are declared to be *God's* forces (verse 16)—carrying out His will—and likened to the plague of serpents He sent among the ancient Israelites when they rebelled in the wilderness (verse 17; see [Numbers 21:6](#)).

As we read through these sections, it is evident that a dialogue is transpiring, wherein sometimes Jeremiah speaks and sometimes God speaks directly—and sometimes one of them relates the words, or *future* words, of the people. Verse 18 begins a lament of Jeremiah. In verse 19, he quotes the future words of the people, "wondering that God should have delivered them up to the enemy, seeing that He is Zion's king, dwelling in her" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on verse 19). Of course, they shouldn't have placed so much stock in this—just as they shouldn't have relied too much on the temple in chapter 7. God interjects at the end of [Jeremiah 8:19](#) to explain that the people have brought the situation on themselves. Verse 20 then has the people speaking a proverb about the harvest being past and the summer being ended. "Meaning: One season of hope after another has passed, but the looked-for deliverance never came, and now all hope is gone" (note on verse 20).

This is all too much for Jeremiah. He says he is deeply hurt over what is going to happen to his people—the NIV has "crushed," the Hebrew

here meaning "broken" or "shattered" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 20-22). "Rather than gloat at the vindication of his ministry, Jeremiah is heartbroken at the suffering of his fellow countrymen. Love for God and love for others sometimes are in tension. But loving God doesn't mean we must stop caring for others, even when their tragedies are a consequence of their own sins" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verse 21). Indeed, God Himself actually cares for these others even more than we do. And He looks for people who will love as He loves—who are willing to "stand in the gap" for mankind (compare [Ezekiel 22:30](#)). This quality abounds in Scripture among the leaders God chose—such as Abraham ([Genesis 18:24](#)), Job and Noah ([Ezekiel 14:14, 20](#)), Moses ([Psalm 106:23](#)), the apostle Paul ([Romans 11:1](#)), and of course Jesus Christ ([John 3:17](#); [Hebrews 7:25](#)). We must exhibit this quality too ([1 Timothy 2:1](#)).

Jeremiah asks, "Is there no balm in Gilead...?"—that is, to heal the people. "The region of Gilead was known for its balsam ointment (see [Gen. 37:25](#)). There is no healing, physical or spiritual, for a people intent on rebelling against God" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Jeremiah 8:20-22](#)). " [END]

Day 587 – FRIDAY: January 31st

Jeremiah 9

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "The prophet's lament continues into verse 2. Yet it appears that the last sentence of this verse begins another interjection by God, an interjection made clearer in verse 3, wherein He identifies blatant sins of the people—that they are not "valiant for the truth" but, instead, "proceed from evil to evil." In the same verse He says, "They do not know Me." Nor, as we previously read, did they understand His judgment (8:7). "Like his northern counterpart Hosea (see [Hosea 4:6](#)), Jeremiah identified the people's

major deficiency as their lack of knowledge of the Lord and His judgment" (note on [Jeremiah 8:7](#)). And yet they were supposed to be Israelites—of God's own nation. Sadly, in one negative respect they did take after their father Israel—or, rather, Jacob as he was named before his conversion. God says, "Every brother will utterly supplant" or, literally, "trip up by the heel" (*JFB Commentary*, note on verse 4). This is the root meaning of the name Jacob, who was deceitful in supplanting His brother Esau before he changed and turned his life around.

In verse 9, God repeats His question regarding punishment from chapter 5 (verses 9, 29). It is almost as if He is convincing Himself that this action needs to take place. He is loath to completely remove His people and allow destruction to come. But He must—for their sake and for *everyone's* sake. All people must know where forsaking God's law leads (compare verses 12-16).

In verses 17-22, God speaks of a resultant time of great sorrow. "This brief poem has been called the most brilliant elegy in the O[ld] T[estament]. The weeping women are professional mourners hired to wail loudly at funerals. The prophet calls for them to quickly train their daughters, for there will not be enough of such women to put to rest all the slain. When death, like a robber, climbs in through the windows [verse 21], every household will be affected. We can lock our doors against disaster. But there is always some window through which calamity can creep unexpectedly. For security we must rely on the Lord (v. 23)" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verses 17-22).

Indeed, verse 23 shows that the only way we as human beings should legitimately feel good about ourselves is through the acceptance we have in God through knowing Him, understanding His character and—as the clear implication is—exhibiting His character traits in our own lives. Yet this is not truly glorying in ourselves, as we know that all of this comes only through God's grace. That's why Paul paraphrased the

verse this way: "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD" ([1 Corinthians 1:31](#); see verses 29-30).

To truly live by God's character requires a spiritual change within us—a circumcision of the heart and not just of the flesh (see [Deuteronomy 10:16](#); [Jeremiah 4:4](#)). In fact, Paul later states that mere circumcision of the flesh is counted as *uncircumcision* if it is not accompanied by obedience to God (see [Romans 2:23-29](#)). In [Jeremiah 9:25-26](#), God says He will punish Judah along with its uncircumcised national neighbors. In an end-time context, it is of interest to know that the Muslims practice circumcision. Thus most of the men of Egypt, Edom, Ammon and Moab today are circumcised as a matter of their religion. But God looks on them all, including Judah, as uncircumcised because they are uncircumcised in heart. Interestingly, Judah here "is listed as just another nation. In fact, it is not even at the head of the list. The point of this text is similar to the concept of temple inviolability (ch. 7). Just as God would destroy even the temple (7:12-14), so He would ignore even circumcision when it was merely an outward symbol (see [Deuteronomy 10:12-22](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Jeremiah 9:25-26](#))." [END]

Day 588 – SATURDAY: February 1st

Jeremiah 10

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "In this chapter, God makes it very clear: "Learn not the way of the heathen...for the customs of the peoples are vain" (verses 2-3, KJV), stressing His total rejection of practices adopted from other religions even if they are intended to honor Him. For God is never honored by disobedience. We can read [Deuteronomy 12:29-32](#) and [2 Corinthians 6:14](#) along with these verses.

God first points out here that pagans were "dismayed at the signs of heaven" ([Jeremiah 10:2](#)). As believers in astrology, they considered their lives to be controlled by celestial events. Today, it is no different

among the huge number of people who make daily decisions based on their horoscopes. This practice is utterly condemned by God. Even if astrological forces existed—which they do not—the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the universe would have power over them.

Worse still, the sun, moon, planets and stars were actually *worshiped* by ancient nations—and their movements were used to determine times for worship. Again, this was all based on fear and superstition. For instance, the winter solstice was observed because the sun reached its lowest zenith on that day, the shortest day of the year. It was believed that worship, fires and sacrifices were needed to encourage and boost the sun god back to his higher station. Afterward, the people celebrated the rebirth of the sun.

Indeed, the sun god was understood to have been born of his mother goddess around the time of the winter solstice—in fact, by the reckoning of various ancient cultures, on December 25. Evergreen plants and trees were used in this particular worship because they seemed to retain life through the winter months. These customs have continued down to our day in the form of the Christmas tree and decorations of holly and mistletoe.

Continuing then in [Jeremiah 10](#), at least in the King James, New King James or Jewish Publication Society translations, the Christmas tree must surely come to mind. However, many mainstream Christian scholars, and other Bible versions, identify the objects addressed in this section as wooden poles or idols. That is certainly possible. In fact, it may even be likely if the word translated "workman" in verse 3 can only mean a skilled craftsman and if the word translated "ax" here can mean a carving tool, as some have rendered it. The exact meaning of the verse remains unclear.

Interestingly, it should be noted that the Hebrew word translated "wooden idol" in verse 8, *ets*, is normally translated "tree" in the Bible.

Notice God's instruction back in [Deuteronomy 16:21](#): "You shall not plant for yourself any tree [*ets*], as a wooden image [*asherah*], near the altar which you build for yourself to the LORD your God."

There are a number of references in Scripture to Asherah—understood to be an idol representation of the goddess Ashtoreth or Astarte, the mother goddess referred to in Scripture as the "queen of heaven" (mentioned in the highlights on [Jeremiah 7:1-27](#)). "From the Biblical references, it appears that Asherah is referred to in three manifestations: (1) as an image, probably a statue or figurine representing the goddess herself; (2) as a tree; and (3) as a tree trunk. The latter two are, in effect, symbols of the goddess" (Ruth Hestrin, "Understanding Asherah: Exploring Semitic Iconography," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Sept.-Oct. 1991, p. 50). Indeed, the phrase "under every green tree" ([Deuteronomy 12:2](#)), is used a number of times in Scripture to denote a pagan sacred place—that is, not just trees but *evergreen* trees.

[Jeremiah 10](#) is indeed talking about the setting up of idols. But what many fail to realize in reading through the chapter is that sometimes trees themselves were set up by ancient pagans as idols. Depending on the exact meaning of the words translated workman and ax in the chapter, a carved idol or an actual tree could be meant. Both were cut from the forest, with stands fashioned to keep them fixed and upright but still able to be moved and set up anywhere (compare verses 3-5). Both, in the ancient world, were decorated with silver and gold and draped with costly fabrics (compare verses 4, 9). With tree idols, idolatrous metal ornaments were sometimes fashioned and hung from the branches—which verse 9 could be describing. Yet the verse could alternatively be a reference to metal adornments for a carved idol.

In direct disobedience to God, the Jews under Manasseh actually set up an *asherah* in honor of Baal, the son and husband of Ashtoreth (see [2 Kings 21:3](#)). Indeed, such was used in surrounding cultures to honor the

sun-god Baal and his mother on the *birthday* of the sun, December 25—which is when this abomination of Manasseh may have taken place, in imitation of neighboring societies. Even if that's not exactly what Manasseh did, it is rather likely that such decorated trees in winter would have been part of the Jews' worship of Baal, as in other cultures.

More amazing to consider is the fact that in the syncretistic blending of religions, Baal ("Lord") was identified with the *true* Lord. Thus, the apostate Jews, in copying pagan worship customs, may well have set up decorated evergreen trees to worship the birthday of the true Lord—the One who later came to earth as Jesus Christ! And the Lord called their adoption of such customs to honor Him an abomination. Indeed, He still does.

While people today do not *worship* trees when they set up Christmas trees or other evergreen decorations such as holly and mistletoe, they are nevertheless using accoutrements of past idolatry to supposedly honor God. Yet the true God will have none of it. He sees it as disobedience and rebellion—and idolatrously clinging to tradition over His direct commandments. For anything that comes before the true God is an idol, whether we literally bow down to it or not. Indeed, it is even possible that *modern* Christmas trees are intended by Jeremiah's words—particularly when we consider that this may be, as it seems to be on some level, an end-time prophecy to the "house of Israel" that speaks of God's coming wrath on the nations and the destruction of all idolatry (compare verses 1, 10-11, 15). For in the end time, the Israelite nations are not setting up wooden Asherah poles. But every winter, there are millions and millions of Christmas trees. And even if Christmas trees are not directly intended by the prophecy, the principle is the same.

Eventually, all false gods will be utterly destroyed—not only through the obliteration of physical idols but through removing falsehood from

the minds of all people. Verses 12-13 tell of God who created all the things that people worship. The latter part of verse 13 is also found in [Psalm 135:7](#)—it is not clear which was written down first. [Jeremiah 10:14-15](#) goes on to reveal the folly of idolatrous worship (compare [Isaiah 44:14-18](#); [Romans 1:22-31](#)). And verse 16 of [Jeremiah 10](#) focuses again on the true and living God—the Maker of all things. He is here referred to as the "Portion" or "share" of His people—as He supplies our every need and will one day share His very power and glory with all who will submit to Him and His righteous ways. (Verses 12-16 are repeated in [Jeremiah 51:15-19](#).)

But the time of the exaltation of Israel is yet future. For the time being, God pronounces His judgment on the people of the land (verses 17-18, 21-22). Jeremiah is again distraught, personally identifying with the hurt of the people (verses 19-20). He pleads with God, stating that it is not possible for mankind to find the right way—rather, the people need God to direct their steps (verse 23). Standing in the place of Judah, Jeremiah does not ask God to avert punishment—as God had told him not to (see [Jeremiah 7:16](#)). Rather, He asks that God's correction be according to His sense of righteous judgment and fair justice (10:24)—and that it rightly be poured out as well on the nations who have been enemies of God and His people (verse 25).” [END]