



The Book of Daniel engages the reader's imagination. We wonder how our ancestors could have been so naive as to believe that an old sage, called Daniel, had described centuries ahead of time all the ups and downs of history at the time of the Maccabees (Dn 11). But it is only an illusion. If we take the book to be historical, everything is unlikely and there are no links among the various chapters, nor any consistency in the person of Daniel, as a child (Dn 13), an adolescent (Dn 1), an adult (Dn 7) or when he is almost a hundred years old (Dn 5). Therefore, we have to find out what the author wanted to say.

### *The Hasidean Period*

The Book of Daniel must have been written around the year 165 B.C. In all likelihood, its author belonged to the Hasidean (or Hasidim) movement, that began twenty or thirty years before. It was going to renew the Jewish faith and the author was its witness.

To begin with, it seems that religion and faith in Israel had become rigid around the year 200 B.C. For two centuries, there had been a theocracy (a social system led by priests) and people lived in the past: the patriarchs, especially Moses, the laws and a religion planned in every detail with the temple and its liturgies at the center. Priests were at the top of the social pyramid. Their only concern was to maintain the established order. What about God's promises and the expectation of a just world? The answer was that these promises had been fulfilled with the return from the Exile: the temple had been rebuilt, the people observed the law and there was nothing else to wait for.

However, the people were crushed by the large landowners who had undertaken to pass on the wealth of the country to the kings of Egypt. Yet, the people did not know how to react. Young people, especially priests, were looking for something new and they were only offered what came from Greek culture: sports, art and culture, international relations and money. Their Israelite heritage seemed passé and uninteresting to them. They became caught up in materialism and when the time of persecution came, they were ready to give up their now useless religious heritage.

It was then that the Hasideans (the pious ones) emigrated spiritually and went to the desert where they devoted themselves to praying and inner searching. They went straight to the prophetic books to discover the secrets of God's work in the present and his plans for the future. Because the priests had forgotten the prophets and, in

their eyes, the Scripture that consecrated their preeminence was totally found in the law, the Canon of the time.

And people were relearning the art of hope. They yearned for revealed wisdom, rather than the wisdom taught in Proverbs and by sages. They cultivated the science of the periods of history. Wasn't the time when God would reclaim the world at hand? They were no longer satisfied, like the prophets, with an era of justice but instead, they wanted another world, the only definitive world. They no longer accepted to disappear and they began to be interested in the fate of human beings, rather than just in the prosperity of Israel whose days have no end. Moreover, since they recalled the debates of the Greeks about the existence of the soul, they began to believe in the resurrection of the dead.

The Book of Daniel bears witness to this experience and it inaugurated the age of apocalyptic literature. Therefore, it contains secrets although they are not where readers are tempted to look for them. The title "Son of Man" the Gospels use for Jesus has its origin from the Book of Daniel.

**1** <sup>1</sup>In the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign as king of Judah, king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>The Lord delivered into his hands king Jehoiakim of Judah, and some of the vessels from the temple of God as well. These he carried off, to the land of Shinar, and placed in the treasure house of his god.

<sup>3</sup>King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his chief eunuch Ashpenaz to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility: <sup>4</sup>young men without physical defect, handsome, intelligent and wise; well-informed, quick to learn and understand; and suitable for service in the king’s palace. They were to be taught the language and literature of the Chaldeans. <sup>5</sup>They were allotted a daily portion of food and wine from the king’s table; and were to be trained for three years, after which, they were to enter the king’s service.

<sup>6</sup>Among these were young men of Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>7</sup>whose names the chief eunuch changed—Daniel to Belteshazzar, Hananiah to Shadrach, Mishael to Meshach, and Azariah to Abednego.

**Daniel refuses to eat unclean food**

• <sup>8</sup>As Daniel was resolved not to make himself unclean with the king’s food or wine, he begged the chief eunuch to spare him this defilement. <sup>9</sup>By the grace of God, the chief eunuch had been sympathetic to Daniel. <sup>10</sup>But he was afraid of the king, so he said, “If the king, who has allotted your food and drink, sees that you look more emaciated than the other young men of your age, he might think ill of me. It will put my life in danger to give in to your wish.”

• **1.8** At times, believers find it hard to observe the law, especially when they are living among those who do not share their faith. Are they no less free than their companions? This text declares that the divine commands are a source of life and strength for those who follow them.

Because of his faithfulness, Daniel will obtain a knowledge of divine things which is beyond human culture, as he will demonstrate; this gift from God is obtained only through faithfulness and sacrifice.

<sup>11</sup>Daniel then turned to the steward whom the chief eunuch had put in charge of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. <sup>12</sup>“Please test your servants for ten days. Give us only vegetables to eat and water to drink, <sup>13</sup>and see how we look in comparison with the young men who eat food from the king’s table. Then treat us in accordance with what you see.”

<sup>14</sup>The steward agreed and tested them for ten days, <sup>15</sup>at the end of which, they looked healthier and better fed than any of the young men who ate the king’s food. <sup>16</sup>So the steward continued to give them vegetables instead of the choice food and wine.

<sup>17</sup>To these four youths God gave wisdom and proficiency in literature, and to Daniel the gift of interpreting visions and dreams.

<sup>18</sup>At the end of the period set by the king for the youths’ training, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup>The king talked with them and found none to equal Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These four became members of the king’s court. <sup>20</sup>In any matter of wisdom and discernment about which the king consulted, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. <sup>21</sup>Daniel remained there until the first year of king Cyrus.

**Nebuchadnezzar’s dream**

**2** • <sup>1</sup>In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, he had a series of troubling dreams which rendered him sleepless. <sup>2</sup>The king summoned

• **2.1** The Chaldean sages mixed science with magic to become prestigious in the eyes of their compatriots, quite given to superstition. To say someone was Chaldean meant he was a sage, a magician or a wizard. Such practices were forbidden to the Jews according to the law of Moses (Dt 18:9).

Here the Chaldean magicians are ridiculed. They claim to discover the future, but they are unable to say what the king’s dream was before he relates it.

2K  
25:29

2Mac  
6:18;  
Jdt 12:2;  
Tb 1:11;  
2Mac  
5:27

Es 29

Rev  
2:10

5:5;  
Gen  
41:12

Gen  
41:8

magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldean diviners to interpret his dreams. When they arrived and stood in his presence, <sup>3</sup>the king said, “I had a terrible dream and I want to know its meaning.”

<sup>4</sup>The Chaldeans answered in Aramaic, “Live forever, O king! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give you its meaning.”

<sup>5</sup>But the king replied, “You have to tell me the dream and interpret it, too. That is my decision. If you won’t do it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses razed to the ground. <sup>6</sup>But if you can tell me the dream and its meaning, I will give you presents and reward you with great honor.”

<sup>7</sup>They insisted, “Let the king tell us his dream and we will explain what it means.”

<sup>8</sup>The king said, “You are only trying to gain time, for you know what I will surely do, <sup>9</sup>that, if you do not tell me my dream, there is only one sentence for you. You have conspired to mislead me with a deceitful interpretation, hoping that times will change. But if you can show me that you have the ability to know what my dream was, I can be sure that you also have the power to understand its meaning.”

<sup>10</sup>The Chaldeans exclaimed, “No one on earth can do what your majesty asks. Never has any king, however great and mighty, asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter or diviner.”

<sup>11</sup>What the king demands is too difficult. No one can tell him that except the gods, who do not live among mortals.”

<sup>12</sup>This made the king so furious that he ordered all the wise men of Babylon executed. <sup>13</sup>Upon issuance of the decree to put the wise men to death, a search was also made for Daniel and his companions to have them killed.

<sup>14</sup>Daniel, however, talked prudently with Arioch, the commander of the king’s guards, who had gone out to kill the wise men. <sup>15</sup>“Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?” Daniel asked, and Arioch explained. <sup>16</sup>Daniel then went to the king and asked for the suspension of the execution to give him time to interpret the dream.

<sup>17</sup>Daniel returned home and informed his companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. <sup>18</sup>He asked them to implore God’s mercy regarding this mystery, so that they would not perish with the rest of Babylon’s wise men. <sup>19</sup>Then, in a night vision, the mystery was revealed to Daniel. He blessed the God of heaven:

<sup>20</sup>Blessed be God’s name forever and ever,

for his are wisdom and power.

<sup>21</sup>He changes times and seasons; he sets up and deposes kings.

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

<sup>22</sup>He reveals things deep and hidden; he knows what lies in darkness; for the light dwells with him.

<sup>23</sup>I give thanks and praise to you, O God of my ancestors.

You have given me wisdom and power; you have shown me what we asked for—you have made known to us the dream of the king.

<sup>24</sup>After this Daniel went to Arioch, the commander appointed by the king to execute the wise men of Babylon. Daniel said to him, “Do not execute the wise men yet. Bring me to the king, and I will interpret his dreams.” <sup>25</sup>At once Arioch took Daniel to the king and said, “Here is a man found among the Judean captives who says he can interpret the king’s dream.”

<sup>26</sup>The king asked Daniel, who had been named Beltheshazzar, “Can you tell me what my dream was and what it means?”

### Daniel interprets the dream

• <sup>27</sup>Daniel answered, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can interpret the king’s dream. <sup>28</sup>But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries,

Ps41:14;  
Ne 9:5;  
Job  
12:13;  
Rev5:12

Acts 1:7;  
Pro 2:6

Job  
12:22;  
Ps  
139:11;  
1Cor 4:5;  
1Tim6:16

Gen  
41:16

1Cor  
2:10;  
Rev 1:1

and he has shown king Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future. I will tell you the dream and visions you had.

<sup>29</sup>As you lay in bed, O king, your thoughts turned to the future, and he who reveals mysteries showed you what is to happen. <sup>30</sup>This mystery has been revealed to me, not because I am wiser than anybody else, but so that you may know what it means and what went on in your mind.

<sup>31</sup>In your vision you saw a statue—very large, very bright; terrible to look at. <sup>32</sup>Its head was of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, <sup>33</sup>its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. <sup>34</sup>As you watched, a rock cut from a mountain, but not by human hands, struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay; smashing them. <sup>35</sup>All at once the iron, clay, bronze, silver and gold crumbled into pieces, as fine as chaff on the threshing floor in summer. The wind swept them off and not a trace was left. But the rock that struck the statue became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

<sup>36</sup>That was the dream. Now the interpretation. <sup>37</sup>You, O king, are king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given dominion, strength, power and glory, <sup>38</sup>and into whose hand he has placed humankind, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, making you ruler over them. You are that head of gold.

<sup>39</sup>After you, another kingdom, infe-

rior to yours, will rise. Then a third kingdom, of bronze, will rule the whole world. <sup>40</sup>Last shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron; and just as iron breaks and crushes everything else, so will it break and smash all the others. <sup>41</sup>The partly-clay and partly-iron feet and toes mean that it will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron, just as you saw iron mixed with clay. <sup>42</sup>And as the toes were partly iron and partly clay, the kingdom will be partly strong and partly weak. <sup>43</sup>Just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, the people will be a mixture but will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

<sup>44</sup>In the time of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom, never to be destroyed or delivered up to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and put an end to them; and it will endure forever. <sup>45</sup>This is the meaning of your vision of a rock cut from a mountain not by human hands; the rock, which struck the statue and broke into pieces the iron, bronze, clay, silver and gold. The great God has shown the king what will happen in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation reliable.”

<sup>46</sup>King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and ordered that oblation and incense be offered to him. <sup>47</sup>The king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God of gods, the Master of kings and the Revealer of mysteries. That is why you were able to reveal this mystery.”

<sup>48</sup>The king gave Daniel a high position

• 27. Several writers of the time thought that history would bring a succession of four empires. Because they were pessimists, they thought that from the beginning of creation things had taken a turn for the worse, and would continue to worsen. They would express this by placing the golden age at the start, and the iron age—the age of weapons—at the end.

In this book the four consecutive kingdoms are those of Nebuchadnezzar, the Medes, the

Persians and that of Alexander of Macedonia, the conqueror (kingdom of iron). From the latter would come the Persian-Syrian rule which would be destroyed by an extraordinary intervention of God.

This is the lesson from the dream: People alone cannot straighten out history; the situation continues to worsen. However, God will intervene and will establish his own universal kingdom.

Gen  
41:16

Is 31:8

Rev  
20:11

Gen  
1:28

2S 7:16;  
Lk 1:33

and showered gifts on him. He made him governor of the entire province of Babylon, and placed him in charge of all its wise men. <sup>49</sup>At Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators of the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the king's court.

### The golden statue

**3** <sup>1</sup>King Nebuchadnezzar had a golden statue, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, erected on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup>Then he summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come for the dedication of the statue. <sup>3</sup>All those summoned came together for the dedication and stood before the statue set up by king Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>4</sup>There a herald proclaimed aloud, "Nations and peoples of every language, you are hereby commanded <sup>5</sup>to fall down and worship the golden statue as soon as you hear the music played on the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all other instruments. <sup>6</sup>Whoever fails to do this will at once be thrown into a burning furnace." <sup>7</sup>At this command, all the peoples of every nation and language who heard the sound of music on the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and other instruments fell down and worshiped the statue set up by king Nebuchadnezzar.

### The Jews: accused and condemned

• <sup>8</sup>It was then that Chaldean diviners came to the king accusing the Jews. <sup>9</sup>They said to king Nebuchad-

nezzar, "Live forever, O king! <sup>10</sup>You issued a decree that, upon hearing the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and other musical instruments, everyone must fall down and worship the golden statue, <sup>11</sup>and whoever failed to do so was to be thrown into a burning furnace. <sup>12</sup>There are some Jews, those whom you appointed administrators of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who gave no heed to your order. They would not serve your gods or worship the golden image you set up."

<sup>13</sup>Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were immediately brought before the king. <sup>14</sup>King Nebuchadnezzar questioned them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden statue I have set up? <sup>15</sup>If you hear now the sound of horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and other instruments, will you fall down and worship the statue I made? If you won't, you know the punishment: you will immediately be thrown into a burning furnace. And then what god can deliver you out of my hands?"

<sup>16</sup>Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we need not defend ourselves before you on this matter. <sup>17</sup>If you order us to be thrown into the furnace, the God we serve will rescue us. <sup>18</sup>But even if he won't, we would like you to know, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden statue you have set up."

<sup>19</sup>Nebuchadnezzar's face reddened

• **3.8** Being in the service of a pagan king involves some risks for a believing Jew. At times kings act in an overpowering and whimsical way and want to impose practices which are condemned by the law of God. In such a case, a believer—even if he occupies a high position—will have to sacrifice his career and even his life, in order to remain faithful to his God.

In verses 8-18 Daniel indicates what should be the believer's attitude: rely on the help of God who can do all things; however, be aware that God is not obligated to work miracles.

The faults of those who do not know the true God are emphasized: they worship dead things. Gold takes the place of a god (a 30-meter statue would have cost a fortune, but is absolutely life-

9:27;  
11:31;  
1Mac  
1:54

Rev 7:9

Rev 13:  
14-15

with fury as he looked at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup>and commanded some of his strongest soldiers to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the burning furnace. <sup>21</sup>At once they were bound and thrown into the furnace, with their hats, shoes and garments on, <sup>22</sup>for the king's order was very urgent. So fierce was the fire in the furnace that it devoured even the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into it. <sup>23</sup>The three, bound fast, fell into the midst of the blazing furnace.

<sup>24</sup>They walked in the midst of the flames, singing to God and praising the Lord. <sup>25</sup>Azariah stood up in the midst of the fire and prayed aloud:

<sup>26</sup>Blessed and worthy of praise are you,  
O Lord God of our fathers!  
your name is glorious forever!

<sup>27</sup>Justice is in all that you do;  
your acts are faultless, your ways are  
right,  
your judgments always true.

• <sup>28</sup>You have indeed given a just sentence in bringing evil upon us and upon Jerusalem, the Holy City of our fathers. You have acted in accordance with truth and justice, as punishment for our sins.

<sup>29</sup>For we have sinned and acted perversely by deserting you. We have sinned gravely in everything and have not listened to your commandments. <sup>30</sup>We have not observed them, and we have not fulfilled everything you commanded us for our good.

<sup>31</sup>All the evils you have brought upon

us, all that you have done to us, you have done according to your just sentence.

<sup>32</sup>You have given us into the hands of <sup>1Mac 1:20</sup>our enemies, lawless people, the worst of the impious, into the hands of an unjust king, the most perverse in all the world.

<sup>33</sup>And today, we cannot even open our mouths; shame and humiliation have overcome those who serve and worship you.

<sup>34</sup>Do not abandon us forever, do not reject your Covenant for your name's <sup>Jer 14:7</sup>sake.

<sup>35</sup>Do not withdraw your mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham, your friend, of Isaac, your servant, of Israel, your holy one, <sup>36</sup>to whom you promised to multiply their race as the stars of heaven and the sand on the shore of the sea.

<sup>37</sup>Lord, see, we have become the least <sup>Jer 42:2</sup>among the nations in all the world, and we are humiliated because of our sins.

<sup>38</sup>At this time, we no longer have a king, <sup>Hos 3:4</sup>or prophet, or leader. We cannot offer you holocausts, sacrifices, offerings, or incense. We have no place to present to you the first fruits of our crops, and so obtain your favor.

<sup>39</sup>But at least when we present ourselves <sup>Mic 6:7; Hos 6:6</sup>with a contrite soul and humbled spirit may we then be acceptable to you, <sup>Ps 22:6</sup><sup>40</sup>more than by offerings of rams and calves as holocausts, and of thousands of fat lambs.

May this sacrifice of ours today obtain for us your favor, for we know that those who trust in you shall never be disappointed.

<sup>41</sup>And now, we serve you with our whole heart, we fear you and we seek your face.

<sup>42</sup>Do not leave us in our humiliation, but <sup>Ps 51:13</sup>treat us according to your kindness and your great mercy. <sup>43</sup>Free us, in keeping with your wonders, and give us the glory of your name, Lord.

<sup>44</sup>Let those who maltreat your servants be confounded, may they be covered with shame and deprived of all their power.

less). These gods are speechless and lifeless, and yet, intelligent people kneel before them. Unlike the living God who hears his faithful people and saves them, idols do not know those who worship them and cannot help them (the flames of the fire kill the Chaldean soldiers).

• 28. Daniel's prayer teaches the persecuted Jews what they must say to God: "Lord, remember your promises and forget our sins. Have compassion on your humiliated people and come to save us."

Even though God works a miracle in this story, history records that many martyrs did not escape death. According to the Letter to the Hebrews 11:39, those martyrs were not granted the gift of seeing the fulfillment of God's promises: God brought them to a better destiny after their death. So, Daniel is a model for believers when, in certain circumstances, they find themselves alone before a hostile crowd or tyrannical power. Daniel refuses to do what God condemns.

Rev  
16:7

Lev  
26:14;  
26:38

Crush their strength,<sup>45</sup> and let them know that you alone are God and Lord, glorious over all the earth.”

<sup>46</sup>The king’s servants who had thrown them into the furnace did not stop kindling the fire with oil, tar, tow and vine shoots,<sup>47</sup> so that the flames rose up to about twenty-five meters above the furnace,<sup>48</sup> and, extending out, burnt the Chaldeans who were standing around.

<sup>49</sup>But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace beside Azariah and his companions; he drove the flames of the fire outside the furnace, and blew upon them,<sup>50</sup> in the middle of the furnace, a coolness, like that of wind and dew, so that the fire did not touch them or cause them pain or trouble them.

<sup>51</sup>Then the three began singing together, glorifying and blessing God within the furnace, and saying;

<sup>52</sup>“Blessed are you, Lord, God of our fathers, be praised and exalted forever.

Blessed is your holy and glorious name, celebrated and exalted forever.

<sup>53</sup>Blessed are you in the temple of your sacred glory; your praises are sung for ever.

<sup>54</sup>Blessed are you, on the throne of your kingdom; honored and glorified for ever.

<sup>55</sup>Blessed are you, who fathom the depths, who are enthroned on the cherubim; praised and exalted for ever.

<sup>56</sup>Blessed are you, in the firmament of heaven; praised and glorified for ever.

<sup>57</sup>All the works of the Lord, bless him, praise him, exalt him for ever.

<sup>58</sup>Angels of the Lord, bless him, praise and glorify him for ever.

<sup>59</sup>Heavens, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>60</sup>All the waters above the heavens, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>61</sup>All the powers of the Lord, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>62</sup>Sun and moon, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>63</sup>Stars of heaven, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>64</sup>Rain and dew, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>65</sup>All winds, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>66</sup>Fire and heat, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>67</sup>Cold and heat, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>68</sup>Dew and frost, praise and exalt him

for ever. <sup>69</sup>Ice and cold, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>70</sup>Frost and snow, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>71</sup>Days and nights, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>72</sup>Light and darkness, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>73</sup>Lightning and clouds, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>74</sup>Earth, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>75</sup>Mountains and hills, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>76</sup>Everything that sprouts on the earth, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>77</sup>Springs of water, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>78</sup>Seas and rivers, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>79</sup>Whales and fishes, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>80</sup>All the birds of heaven, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>81</sup>Animals, wild and tame, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>82</sup>All people on earth, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>83</sup>Israel, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>84</sup>Priests of the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever. <sup>85</sup>Servants of the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>86</sup>Spirits and souls of the just, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>87</sup>Those who are holy and humble of heart, praise and exalt him for ever.

<sup>88</sup>Ananiah, Azariah, Mishael, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him for ever.

For he has taken us out from the netherworld, he has saved us from the hands of death, freed us from the furnace of burning flames and rescued us from the midst of the fire.

<sup>89</sup>Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy is everlasting.

<sup>90</sup>All who worship the Lord, bless the God of gods; praise and acknowledge him, for his mercy is everlasting.”

<sup>91</sup>Then king Nebuchadnezzar suddenly rose up in great amazement and asked his counselors, “Did we not throw three men bound into the fire?” They answered, “Certainly.” <sup>92</sup>The king said, “But I can see four men walking about freely through the fire, without suffering any harm; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

<sup>93</sup>Nebuchadnezzar approached the mouth of the blazing furnace and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here.” So they came out from the midst of the fire.

<sup>94</sup>The officials, prefects, governors and

Is 43:2

Ps 148:4



counselors of the king drew near to examine them: the fire had no effect on their bodies; their hair was not singed; their garments were not burned; and they did not even have the smell of smoke.

Gen 14:20 <sup>95</sup>Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who sent his angel to free his servants, who, trusting in him, disobeyed the king’s order; and preferred to give their bodies to the fire rather than serve and worship any other god but their God.

Ezra 6:11 <sup>96</sup>I give this command, therefore: From every race, nation and language, anyone who speaks irreverently of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut into pieces and his house shall be destroyed, for there is no other god who can save like this.”

<sup>97</sup>And the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

#### **Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and insanity**

<sup>98</sup>Nebuchadnezzar, the king: to all peoples, all nations on the earth, whatever be their language: Peace. <sup>99</sup>It pleases me to make known to you the signs and wonders the Most High God has done in me.

<sup>100</sup>How great are his signs,  
how mighty his wonders!  
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
his dominion lasts for all generations.

**4**<sup>1</sup>I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at peace in my house and content in my palace when I had a dream which appalled me. <sup>2</sup>The nightmares I had as I lay in bed, and the visions that passed through my mind tormented me. <sup>3</sup>So I summoned all the wise men of Babylon that they might explain to me what the dream meant.

<sup>4</sup>The wise men, seers and astrologers came, and I recounted the dream to them, but they could not explain it to me. <sup>5</sup>So Daniel came in before me—he was renamed Belteshazzar after the name of my god, for in him dwells the spirit of the holy God. I told him my dream in this way: <sup>6</sup>Belteshazzar, chief of the wise men, I know that you have the spirit of the holy God and that no mystery is ever difficult for you. Examine the dream I have had and explain it to me.

<sup>7</sup>These were my dreams as I lay in bed. There was a tree at the center of the world; it was very tall.

<sup>8</sup>The tree grew; it became big; and reached up to heaven; and its branches could be seen from the ends of the earth.

<sup>9</sup>Its leaves were beautiful, its fruits abundant; there was food for all in it. Animals of the field found refuge in its shade, the birds of heaven nested in its branches and all living things fed on it.

Mt 13: 31-32; Ezk 17:23

<sup>10</sup>I was looking at this interior vision when a watchful one, a holy one, came down from heaven.

<sup>11</sup>He cried in a loud voice: Cut the tree down; cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and throw away its fruits. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds as well. <sup>12</sup>But leave in the earth the stump, and the roots, bound with iron and bronze bands, in the grass of the field.

Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him share the grass of the earth with the animals. <sup>13</sup>Let his heart cease from being human; and let a beast’s heart be given him and pass over him seven times.

<sup>14</sup>This is the sentence given by the watchful ones, the question settled by the holy ones, so that every living thing may know that the Most High is higher than any human authority. He confers power on whom he pleases and raises the most humble of men.

Is 2:8; Lk 1:52

<sup>15</sup>This was the dream I had, I, king Nebuchadnezzar. You, Belteshazzar, explain it to me, since not one of the wise men in my kingdom has been able to interpret it for me. But you can, for the spirit of the holy God dwells in you.

<sup>16</sup>Then Daniel, renamed Belteshazzar, was stunned for a while and looked very much upset. The king said, “Belteshazzar, what is in that dream or in its interpretation that upsets you so?” Belteshazzar answered, <sup>17</sup>“My lord, may this dream be meant for your enemies and its content refer to your foes!”

<sup>18</sup>The tree you saw, which grew big and strong, and reached to heaven and was visible through all the earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, which had food for all, under which animals of the field found refuge and in whose branches the birds of heaven built their nests—<sup>19</sup>this tree is you, O king, whose power has increased, reaching up to heaven; whose empire extends to the ends of the earth.

<sup>20</sup>Now, regarding what the king has seen: a watchful one, a holy one, who

came down from heaven and said: Cut the tree down; destroy it; but leave the stump, and the roots in the ground, with bands of iron and bronze; in the grass of the field, let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and share the lot of the animals of the field, until they have passed over him seven times. <sup>21</sup>Now I shall explain it to you:

This is the decree of the Most High regarding the king, my lord. <sup>22</sup>You shall be driven out from among human society and live with the beasts of the field. You shall eat grass like the oxen, and be drenched by the dew of heaven. Seven times shall pass over you until you acknowledge that the Most High is higher than any human authority, and that he gives the power to whom he pleases.

1Mac  
3:18

<sup>23</sup>The order to leave the stump and the roots means that you shall recover your kingdom when you have acknowledged that all power comes from heaven. <sup>24</sup>May it then please the king to accept my advice: wipe out your sins with works of justice, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; then perhaps you may lengthen your prosperity.”

<sup>25</sup>All this happened to king Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>26</sup>Twelve months later, while walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, <sup>27</sup>the king said, “Is this not the great Babylon I built with the strength of my own power as my royal residence, and for the glory of my majesty?”

Mk 1:11;  
Jn 12:28

<sup>28</sup>These words were still in the mouth of the king when a voice came down from heaven:

“King Nebuchadnezzar, I speak to you: your empire is finished.

<sup>29</sup>You shall be driven from among people, and live with the animals of the field; you shall eat grass like oxen and seven times shall pass over you until you acknowledge that the Most High disposes of the power among mortals and gives it to whom he pleases.”

<sup>30</sup>These words were fulfilled at once. Nebuchadnezzar was driven from among humans, he fed on grass like oxen, his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew, like the feathers of an eagle, and his nails, like the claws of a bird.

<sup>31</sup>At the end of this time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven and my reason returned to me; so I blessed the Most High:

Blessed and glorified is he who lives for ever, whose dominion is everlasting and whose kingdom lasts through all generations.

<sup>32</sup>All the inhabitants of the earth are before him as if they were nothing. He does as he pleases with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. No one can stop his hand or ask him to render an account.

Is 45:9;  
Job  
9:12;  
Rom  
9:20

<sup>33</sup>At that moment, I regained my reason, I recovered my throne and, again, began to govern, for the glory of my kingdom. My counselors and my noblemen acclaimed me; they restored me to my throne and I was given still greater power.

<sup>34</sup>So now, I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and glorify the King of heaven. For all his works are true, and his ways are all just; he knows how to humble those who walk in pride.

Ps  
111:7;  
Lk 1:52

### The banquet of Belshazzar

**5** • <sup>1</sup>King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for his nobles; a thousand of them attended; and he drank wine with them. <sup>2</sup>Under the influence of wine, he ordered that the gold and silver vessels his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought in, so that he and his nobles, his wives and concubines might drink from them. <sup>3</sup>The gold and

• **5.1** This story could be called: punishment for sacrilege. These words indicate the destiny of those who make fun of God:

- there comes an end which they cannot postpone;
- the fact that they did not do anything worthwhile during their lives is made clear;
- they disappear and so do their works with them.

Scripture knows that God reveals himself not

only in events that show his goodness, but also in other events that are obvious signs that there is a God doing justice. Many times, those who mock God are struck with misfortunes which come as an answer to their insolence.

The author of these chapters is not too concerned about historical facts at the time during which these people were living. Cyrus is the one who conquered Babylon where Belshazzar died. He was followed by Darius.

silver vessels taken from God's temple were brought in; and the king and his nobles, his wives and concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup>While they drank wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze and iron, of wood and stone.

<sup>5</sup>Suddenly a man's fingers appeared opposite the lamp stand and wrote on the plastered wall of the king's palace. Watching the hand as it wrote, the king turned pale. <sup>6</sup>So terrified was he that his knees knocked and his legs gave way.

<sup>7</sup>He shouted, calling for his enchanters and Chaldean diviners. "Whoever reads this writing and tells me its meaning," said he to the wise men of Babylon, "will be clothed in purple, wear a gold chain around his neck, and be made the third highest ruler in my kingdom."

<sup>8</sup>All the king's wise men came, but none could read the writing or tell its meaning. <sup>9</sup>King Belshazzar became very frightened and his face grew even more pale. His nobles were likewise terrified and confused.

<sup>10</sup>Hearing the troubled voices of the king and his nobles, the queen entered the banquet hall and said, "Live forever, O king! Do not be alarmed and become pale. <sup>11</sup>In your kingdom is a man who has the spirit of the holy gods. He was found to have discernment and god-like wisdom during your father's lifetime. He was, in fact, appointed chief of the magicians, enchanters and diviners by your father king Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>12</sup>This man, Daniel, whom the king called Beltheshazzar, knew how to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel and he will tell you what the writing means."

<sup>13</sup>Daniel was brought in and questioned by the king, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father brought from Judah? <sup>14</sup>I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods, that you have insight and extraordinary wisdom. <sup>15</sup>Wise men and enchanters were brought here, but none of them could read this writing and tell its meaning. <sup>16</sup>I

have heard that you can interpret dreams and solve problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple, wear a gold chain around your neck, and be appointed third in rank in my kingdom."

<sup>17</sup>Daniel replied, "You may keep your gifts or give them to someone else. Just the same, I will read and interpret the writing for you. <sup>18</sup>God the Most High gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and a great kingdom. <sup>19</sup>Because of the greatness given him by God, he was feared by nations and peoples of every language. He had the power of life and death over everyone. He exalted or humbled whomsoever he wished.

<sup>20</sup>But when he became arrogant and insolent, he was deposed and stripped of his glory. <sup>21</sup>He became an outcast and as senseless as a beast. He lived with wild asses, ate grass like cattle and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that God the Most High rules over the human kingdoms and appoints whom he pleases to govern it. <sup>22</sup>But you, his son, Belshazzar, although you knew all this, have not humbled yourself.

<sup>23</sup>You have defied the Lord of heaven. You had the vessels from his temple brought to you, and, together with your nobles, your wives and concubines, you drank wine from them. You praised the idols made of silver and gold, of bronze, iron and stones, which neither see, nor hear, nor understand; but you never glorified God who has power over your life and all your fortunes. <sup>24</sup>So he sent the hand that wrote the inscription <sup>25</sup>which read MENE, TEKEL, PHARSIN. And these words mean: <sup>26</sup>MENE, God has numbered the days of your reign and put an end to it; <sup>27</sup>TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; <sup>28</sup>PHARSIN, your kingdom

Is 40:19;  
Jer 10:3;  
Ps 115:4;  
Rev 9:20

2:48;  
4:6

1K 10:1

Dt 8:14;  
Ezk  
31:10  
4:30

has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.”

<sup>29</sup>On Belshazzar’s order, Daniel was clothed in purple, given a gold chain to wear around his neck, and proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. <sup>30</sup>That very night, however, the Chaldean king Belshazzar was slain.

**6** <sup>1</sup>Darius the Mede, at the age of sixty-two, took over the kingdom.

### Daniel is thrown into the lion’s den

<sup>2</sup>Darius appointed one hundred and twenty satraps throughout the whole kingdom. They were made accountable to three administrators, one of whom was Daniel. This was to ensure that no loss or harm should come to the king. <sup>3</sup>Because of the extraordinary spirit residing in him, Daniel excelled above all the other administrators and satraps, so that the king planned to give him authority over the entire kingdom. <sup>4</sup>This provoked envy among the administrators and satraps, who tried to find grounds for filing charges against Daniel regarding his performance of official duties. But he was so trustworthy that neither corruption nor negligence could be found in him. <sup>5</sup>Finally the men decided: “We will never find any grounds for charges against this man Daniel except in something that has to do with the law of his God.”

<sup>6</sup>These administrators and satraps, therefore, went as a group to the king and said to him, “Live forever, O king Darius! <sup>7</sup>The administrators of the kingdom, the prefects, satraps, counselors and governors are all agreed that the king should issue and enforce a decree, that anyone who prays and makes petition to any god or man within the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. <sup>8</sup>And now, O king, put the decree in writing and have it signed at once, so that it cannot be altered or annulled, in accordance with Medo-Persian laws. <sup>9</sup>King Darius put in writing and signed the prohibition, thus making it a law.

<sup>10</sup>Daniel heard about the new law, but just as usual, he returned home and prayed three times a day, giving thanks to his God, in his room upstairs, with the windows

opened towards Jerusalem. <sup>11</sup>There, the men spying on him found Daniel kneeling in prayer and asking God for help. <sup>12</sup>So they went to the king and reminded him about the prohibition, “O king, did you not publish a decree that anyone who prays or makes petition to any god or man except to you would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “Yes, and the decree stands, in accordance with Medo-Persian laws which cannot be altered or annulled.”

<sup>13</sup>Then they said, “But the Jewish exile Daniel pays no attention to you and to your decree. Three times a day he still prays to some god other than you.”

<sup>14</sup>Greatly aggrieved at what he heard, the king decided to help Daniel. He made every effort till sundown to save him.

<sup>15</sup>But the men kept coming to him and insisting, “Remember, O king, that under the Medo-Persian laws every decree or prohibition issued by the king is irrevocable.”

<sup>16</sup>The king, therefore, could not help giving the order that Daniel be brought and thrown into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve faithfully, save you.”

<sup>17</sup>A stone was placed at the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with that of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might remain unchanged. <sup>18</sup>Then the king returned to his palace and spent a sleepless night, refusing food and entertainment. <sup>19</sup>Very early next morning, he rose and hurried to the lions’ den. <sup>20</sup>As he came near, he called in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, did your God, whom you serve faithfully, save you from the lions?”

<sup>21</sup>Daniel answered, “Live forever, O king! <sup>22</sup>My God sent his angel, who closed the lions’ mouths, so that they did not hurt me. God did that because I am innocent in his sight. Neither have I wronged you, O king.”

<sup>23</sup>The king felt very glad and ordered Daniel released from the lions’ den. No wound was found on him, for he had trusted in his God. <sup>24</sup>At the king’s order, the men who had accused Daniel were thrown into the lions’ den, together with their wives and children. No sooner had they reached the floor of the den than the lions lunged at them and tore them to pieces.

<sup>25</sup>King Darius wrote to the nations, to peoples of every language, “Peace to you

Ps55:18

Es 8:8

1Mac 2:60

Jdt 3 8

all! <sup>26</sup>I decree that throughout my kingdom people should reverence and fear the God of Daniel.

“For he is the living God,  
and forever he endures;  
his kingdom will not be crushed,  
his dominion will never cease.

<sup>27</sup>He rescues and he delivers;  
he performs signs and wonders  
both in heaven and on earth.  
And he came to Daniel’s rescue  
saving him from the lions’ tooth and  
claw.”

<sup>28</sup>Daniel greatly prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

### Vision of the four empires

Rev 13:  
1-18

**7** <sup>1</sup>In the first year of the reign of king Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions in his mind, as he was sleeping. When he woke up, he wrote down the dream. This is how the narrative began:

Zec 6:5

<sup>2</sup>Daniel said, “I saw the following in my vision: the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea, <sup>3</sup>and four great beasts, each one different from the other, came out of the sea.

Rev 13:  
13:1

<sup>4</sup>The first was like a lion with eagle’s wings. As I looked at it, its wings were torn off. It was lifted up from the ground, stood up on its feet like a man, and was given a human heart. <sup>5</sup>The second was a beast like a bear; it was raised up on one side and

had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told: Go and devour much flesh. <sup>6</sup>I went on looking and saw another beast like a leopard with four wings on its back; it had four heads and dominion was given to it.

<sup>7</sup>I continued seeing my visions of the night and saw a terrible fourth beast. It was fearful and extraordinarily strong; it had great iron teeth; it ate, tore into pieces, and crushed underfoot whatever remained. It was different from the previous beasts and had ten horns. <sup>8</sup>I was looking at the horns, when another small horn sprang among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots to make way for the new. It had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that uttered insolent words.

Rev  
13:5

### The son of man

• <sup>9</sup>I looked and saw the following:

Some thrones were set in place and One of Great Age took his seat. His robe was white, as snow, his hair, white as washed wool. His throne was flames of fire with wheels of blazing fire. <sup>10</sup>A river of fire sprang forth and flowed before him. Thousands upon thousands served him and a countless multitude stood before him.

Rev  
20:4;  
1:13;  
Mt 17:2;  
28:3;  
Rev  
1:14;  
Ezk 1

Those in the tribunal took their seats and opened the book. <sup>11</sup>But as

Rev  
5:11;  
Jn 5:22

Rev  
19:20

• **7.9** The following detailed vision has the same content and the same meaning as the vision of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue (Chap. 2).

The four empires which dominated the Jewish nation until the time of the great persecution are symbolized by beasts. Verses 23-25 specify that the fourth beast is the Syrian empire and the horn that insults God, is king Antiochus Epiphanes. Just as in 2:34 and 2:44, an intervention by God is foretold: it will put an end to the power of the persecutor and establish God’s kingdom. Here in verses 11 and 26 the judgment on the persecutor is announced. In 2:34 the stone suggests God’s power. Here, in verse 13, the *son of man* (*the Human One*) represents the people of Israel, he is the servant of God, present in God’s plans from the beginning

of the world and receives power over all the nations: verse 27, in due time.

It would be a mistake to look for the events of Jesus’ time in this paragraph, as some people do. It is even less applicable to our time as if we were the center of everything. The author, who writes during the worst moment of the persecution of the Maccabees’ time, announces the end of the persecution of Antiochus (1 Mac 6:55-59) as well as the coming of the kingdom of God. This way of combining in the same description a recent event or great liberation, and the ultimate liberation, which will take place at the end of our history, is often typical of the prophetic books. Jesus does likewise in speaking about the end of Jerusalem (Mk 13).

I remembered the haughty words of the horn with human eyes and mouth, which I had seen before, this animal was killed before my eyes; and its body destroyed and cast into the fire.<sup>12</sup> Dominion was taken from the other animals, though they were allowed to stay alive for a time, until the fixed time.

<sup>13</sup>I continued watching the nocturnal vision:

One like a son of man came on the clouds of heaven. He faced the One of Great Age and was brought into his presence.

<sup>14</sup>Dominion, honor and kingship were given him, and all the peoples and nations of every language served him. His dominion is eternal and shall never pass away; his kingdom will never be destroyed.

<sup>15</sup>I, Daniel, was deeply troubled, since these visions terrified me. <sup>16</sup>I approached one of those who were standing there, and asked him to tell me what all this meant. He answered me and gave me the interpretation of these things:

<sup>17</sup>‘These four beasts are four kings who will rise from the earth. <sup>18</sup>But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, to possess it eternally, forever and ever.’

<sup>19</sup>Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, different from the others, extraordinarily terrifying, with iron

teeth and bronze claws; that ate, tore into pieces and crushed underfoot whatever remained. <sup>20</sup>I also wanted to know about the ten horns it had on its head, and about the other horn which had sprung up, and the three first horns that fell, and about this horn with eyes and a mouth that spoke with arrogance, and that looked greater than the other horns.

<sup>21</sup>As I looked, this horn waged war against the holy ones and was subduing them <sup>22</sup>until the One of Great Age came, to do justice for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came for the holy ones to take possession of the kingdom.

<sup>23</sup>Then I was told:

• ‘The fourth animal shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, different from all the kingdoms. It will devour the earth, crush it and destroy it.

<sup>24</sup>The ten horns are ten kings who shall rise from this kingdom. Another one will rise up after them and destroy three kings.

<sup>25</sup>This king shall insult the Most High and persecute the holy ones of the Most High. He shall try to change the feasts and the laws. The holy ones shall be handed over to his power for a time, two times, and half a time.

<sup>26</sup>But judgment will come and dominion will be taken from him; he shall be destroyed and utterly wiped out. <sup>27</sup>The kingship, dominion and leadership of all the kingdoms of the world shall be given to the people of the holy ones of God Most High: his kingdom will be without end. All the kingdoms shall serve him and be subject to him.’

*On the clouds of heaven* (v. 13): the cloud is the sign of the divine presence.

*The One of Great Age*: this refers to God, and the white hair is a sign of his majesty. Let us not forget that, in fact, God is ageless and is in a unique moment, an ever present now.

*A son of man, namely, a human* (v. 13): at first, this mysterious person referred to the whole people of God (v. 27). If God wanted to give his kingdom to people, he would, in fact, give it in a personal way to the one who is the model, the savior and the head of everyone and of all humankind. Jesus is the Man (Jn 19:5), or, to follow the Jewish way of speaking, *the son of man*.

The son of man comes from the divine clouds, and so Jesus applied the prophecy to himself to point to his divine origin when his accusers were seeing him in the weakness of the human condition (Mt 26:64).

• 23. The Jews of the years 170–160 B.C. could not be mistaken about this hidden reference to king Antiochus, the king who *will destroy three kings, insult the Most High and persecute the holy ones*.

*A time, two times and half a time* (v. 25) means three and a half. In those days, this was a figurative way to indicate times of evil (three and a half is half seven, which is the perfect number).

*The holy ones* (v. 25) are those chosen by God to be his people. Ever since Moses, the Jewish people were conscious of being a holy people because they were consecrated to the holy God.

From the time of Daniel on, “the holy ones” comes to designate the new people of God starting with the Messiah. The first Christians were conscious of being this new people of God, and called themselves “the holy ones” (see Acts 9:32).

Mt  
24:30;  
26:64;  
Rev 1:7;  
14:14

Rev  
5:13;  
Lk 1:33

Acts  
9:13

Rev  
11:7;  
13:7

Rev  
20:4

Rev  
17:12

Rev  
12:14

Rev  
5:10

<sup>28</sup>Here ends the narrative. I, Daniel, was greatly disturbed in my thoughts, I grew pale and I kept these things in my heart.”

#### Another vision about king Antiochus

Es 1:2;  
Ne 1:1

**8**<sup>1</sup>In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar, I, Daniel, had another vision. <sup>2</sup>In the vision, I saw myself in Susa, the fortified city in the province of Elam; I noticed that I was by the river Ulai.

<sup>3</sup>I raised my eyes and saw a ram standing before the river. It had two long horns, but one was longer than the other. <sup>4</sup>I saw the ram charging westward, northward and southward. No animal could resist it, none could escape its power. It did as it pleased and so became great.

<sup>5</sup>As I was thinking, a he-goat came from the west, as if flying above the entire earth, without touching the ground; it had a great horn between its eyes. <sup>6</sup>It approached the ram with the two horns which I had seen by the river, and it ran towards the ram with all the fury of its strength. <sup>7</sup>I saw how it reached the ram and directed itself against it; it charged the ram and broke its two horns, and the ram was unable to resist. It cast it down to the ground and crushed it. No one could free the ram from its power.

<sup>8</sup>The he-goat became very great, but when it was powerful, the great horn snapped; and in its place sprang four great horns facing the four winds of heaven. <sup>9</sup>From one of these, the small one, sprang a horn which grew big towards the south and east, and towards the Beautiful Land.

Ezk  
20:6;  
20:15

Rev  
12:4

<sup>10</sup>It grew up to the army of heaven and flung part of the stars to the ground, and crushed them underfoot. <sup>11</sup>It even came to the Commander of the army, deprived him of the perpetual sacrifice and made useless his temple <sup>12</sup>and the army. It put Abomination in place of the sacrifice and flung Truth to the ground. And whatever it undertook, succeeded.

Rev  
6:10

<sup>13</sup>Then I heard a holy one speaking and another who asked him in return, “When shall the vision be fulfilled? What about the perpetual offering, the Abomination of the devastator, the Sanctuary handed over

and the army trampled underfoot?” <sup>14</sup>He answered, “Until two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings have gone by, then the temple shall be restored.”

<sup>15</sup>As I, Daniel, looked at this vision and tried to understand it, I suddenly saw before me someone like a man, <sup>16</sup>and I heard a human voice over the river Ulai that cried out to him: “Gabriel, explain the vision to this man.”

Lk 1:19;  
1:26

<sup>17</sup>He approached the place where I was. When he came, I was terrified and fell on my face. He said to me, “Son of man, understand: this vision refers to the end-time.” <sup>18</sup>As he spoke, I lost consciousness and fell face down on the ground. He touched me and raised me to my feet. <sup>19</sup>Then he said, “See, I will reveal to you what is going to happen, when the wrath comes to an end, for the end is set.

Rev  
1:17

<sup>20</sup>The ram you have seen, with its two horns, stands for the two kings of the Medes and the Persians. <sup>21</sup>The hairy he-goat is the king of Greece; the great horn between its eyes is the first of its kings; this horn snapped, <sup>22</sup>and the four horns that sprang up in its place are the four kingdoms that will rise from his nation, but will not overpower him.

Mt 3:7;  
Hb 2:3

<sup>23</sup>At the end of their reign, when the sinners have reached their full number, a king will arise, insolent; and wise in cunning. <sup>24</sup>His strength will increase, so that he shall plot things unheard of before.

1Mac  
1:10

Whatever he undertakes shall prosper, he shall destroy the powerful, and the very people of the holy ones. <sup>25</sup>He shall carry out his deceits, will be believed in by many and, in the fullness of peace, shall destroy many. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes, but he shall be destroyed, without the intervention of any human hand.

1Mac  
1:25;  
Rev  
17:14;  
19:16

<sup>26</sup>What I said of the vision of the mornings and evenings is true, but keep the vision secret, for it will be fulfilled only in the remote future.”

Rev  
21:5;  
22:6

<sup>27</sup>I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for several days. Then I got up to attend to the king's affairs. I remained frightened because of the vision and did not understand it.

• **8.1** The same message is repeated in the following chapters. God's salvation will come at the most critical moment of the persecution. More details are added to assure the Jews that

all the events they are witnessing are already known to God ahead of time: while the events are taking place, God has already appointed the time when he will come to save.

### The prayer of Daniel

Bar  
1:—2;  
Ne 1:  
5-11;  
9:6-37

**9** • <sup>1</sup>In the first year of the reign of Darius, son of Ahasuerus, of the Median race, who was king of Chaldea, the following happened:

Jer 25:  
11-12;  
29:10

<sup>2</sup>I, Daniel, thought about the number of years, according to the scriptures, before Jerusalem should be left in ruins. Yahweh spoke of seventy years to the prophet Jeremiah. <sup>3</sup>I turned to the Lord God and begged him. I pleaded with prayers and fasting. I did penance, I put on sackcloth and sat on an ash pile.

Es 4:1

3:25-45

<sup>4</sup>I prayed to Yahweh, my God, and made this confession: “Lord God, great and to be feared, you keep your Covenant and love for those who love you and observe your commandments. <sup>5</sup>We have sinned; we have not been just; we have been rebels, and have turned away from your commandments and laws. <sup>6</sup>We have not listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, leaders, fathers and to all the people of the land.

Ezra 9:6

2K 17:7

<sup>7</sup>Lord, justice is yours; but ours is a face full of shame, as it is to this day—we, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the whole of Israel, near and far away, in all the lands where you have dispersed us because of the infidelity we have committed against you. <sup>8</sup>Ours is the shame, O Lord, for we, our kings, princes and fathers, have sinned against you. <sup>9</sup>We hope for pardon and mercy from the Lord, our God, because we have rebelled against him. <sup>10</sup>We have not listened to the voice of Yahweh, our God, or followed the laws which he has given us through his servants, the prophets.

<sup>11</sup>All Israel has broken your law and has turned away from it, rather than listen to your voice. Therefore, the curse and the threats written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have come upon us. Because we have sinned against him, <sup>12</sup>He has car-

ried out the threats he pronounced against us; and against those who governed us. He brought a terrible calamity upon us. No, never could there be anything worse than what has come upon Jerusalem.

<sup>13</sup>All these disasters have struck us with dread, as it was written in the law of Moses; but we have not tried to calm the anger of Yahweh, our God. We have not turned away from our sins, and learned to listen to your truth. <sup>14</sup>Yahweh made true his threat and brought this calamity upon us; for Yahweh, our God, is just in all his works, while we have not obeyed his voice.

<sup>15</sup>And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt by your powerful hand and gained renown to this day; we have sinned; we have been unfaithful.

<sup>16</sup>Lord, in keeping with your kindness, turn away your anger and wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the wickedness of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people are the laughingstock of all around us.

Ezk 25:3

<sup>17</sup>So now, our God, listen to the prayer and pleading of your servant and, for your own sake, let your face shine upon your desolate Sanctuary. <sup>18</sup>My God, incline your ear and listen. Open your eyes and see, how the city lies in ruins, the city upon which your name has been pronounced. We do not rely on our good works, but we pour out our plea before you, trusting in your great mercy.

Ps 74:3

<sup>19</sup>Listen, Lord! Lord, forgive! Pay attention to us, Lord! Act, my God, and do not delay, for your own sake, since your city and your people are called by your name.”

Ezk  
36:22

### The prophecy of the seventy weeks

• <sup>20</sup>At the hour of the evening sacrifice, I was still speaking, confessing my sins and those of Israel, my people, begging Yahweh my God, on behalf of his holy mountain.

Num  
28:4;  
1K  
18:36

<sup>21</sup>At that moment, Gabriel, whom I had seen at the beginning of the

8:16;  
Lk 1:19;  
1:26

• **9.1** Daniel is reflecting on Jeremiah's prophecy (25:1) about the seventy years of exile of the Jews in Babylon. The angel Gabriel gives him another message referring to seventy weeks. This message is one of the most famous prophecies in the Book of Daniel.

• **20.** Gabriel begins by saying enigmatic things (v. 24) and then, he explains.

*To put an end to transgression, to put sin under lock, to wipe out the offense, and to bring everlasting justice (v. 24).* So, the coming of the kingdom of God is clearly announced.



vision, came to me, flying, <sup>22</sup> and he said to me, “Daniel, I have come now, to make you understand. <sup>23</sup> As you were praying, a word was uttered, and I have come to teach it to you because God loves you. Pay attention to this word and understand the vision:

<sup>24</sup> Seventy weeks are set, for your people and your Holy City, to put an end to transgression, to put sin under lock, to wipe out the offense, and to bring everlasting justice, so that the visions and the prophecies will be fulfilled and the Holy of Holies be anointed.

<sup>25</sup> Understand this, then:

From the time the order to rebuild Jerusalem was given, until an anointed leader comes, there shall be seven weeks.

Then, in sixty-two weeks, squares and walls will be rebuilt; but in a difficult time.

<sup>26</sup> After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one will be cut off; the city and the temple shall be destroyed, by the people of a king who will come. They will be carried along, as by a flood. Until the end, there will be wars and disasters which God has decreed.

<sup>27</sup> He will impose his law on a great part of the people for a week. By mid-week, he will put a stop to the sacrifices and offerings. The devastator shall place the abominable idol in the temple until the ruin decreed by God comes upon the devastator.”

#### History of the time of the Maccabees: a symbolic narrative

**10** • <sup>1</sup> In the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, God gave a message to Daniel, renamed Belteshazzar. This message spoke of fidelity and great anguish. Daniel paid attention to these words and to the following vision:

A most Holy One will be anointed: this refers to the most holy place, namely, the temple. After being profaned by the pagan conquerors, it will be renewed to become the definitive dwelling place of God in the midst of his people.

Now Gabriel himself provides an explanation: all this will happen soon. The seventy weeks are a symbolic number of weeks of years, and cannot be taken literally except for the first seven weeks: these refer perhaps to the time between the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 587 B.C. and the decree of liberation by Cyrus (called the Anointed of God in Is 45) in the year 538 B.C.

Then comes an indefinite period represented by sixty-two weeks (of years) bringing us to the beginning of Antiochus' persecution in the year 171 B.C. That year the high priest, Onias, was murdered: *an anointed one will be cut off* (v. 26; see 2 Mac 4:34). After that, the persecutor put an end to worship in the Jerusalem temple and even built an altar dedicated to Baal Shamem on the altar of holocausts: this is the *abominable idol* (v. 27) of the devastator. This happened during the week of persecution, when the prophecy was written; a victorious intervention of God is announced for the end of the week.

The divine intervention revealed itself in the unexpected peace which the Jews obtained at that time (1 Mac 6:55). However, this was not the coming of God's kingdom, but only a sign of it. What was announced about *everlasting justice* will only be fulfilled fully in Christ.

In any case the numbers presented by the author refer to the era of the Maccabees. If the end of history did not take place then, it is useless to manipulate the numbers to figure out when it will take place: God did not wish to reveal it (Mk 13:32).

At the end of the nineteenth century the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses built up his whole interpretation of the Scripture on this prophecy of Daniel. His extravagant figuring was meant to prove that the kingdom of God in Israel, with David and Solomon, concluded in Daniel's days and, after this, the new kingdom of God began that would end in 1914 with the end of the world. When that did not happen, they had to correct their figures.

This is not the place to argue about these theories. It is enough to note that for them the two key dates of salvation were the destruction of Jerusalem in the sixth century before Christ and the year 1914. For them the coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection, were not important for the coming of the kingdom of God. This shows the error of those who rely on difficult biblical texts to question the surest truths, instead of starting with the most solid foundations of faith to attempt to clarify confusing texts.

• **10.1** All the events mentioned in Chapters 10–11 were past events for the author: the same events which are related in the second Book of Maccabees. Here, however, they are related as if a certain Daniel had announced them four centuries earlier. This is nothing more than a

Is 40:2;  
Zec 4:14;  
Mal 3:20;  
Lk 24:44;  
Acts  
10:38

Ezra  
3:1-3;  
4:4

2Mac  
4:34

1Mac  
1:45;  
1:54;  
Mt 24:15

<sup>2</sup>At that time, I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. <sup>3</sup>I ate no rich food, took no meat or wine, and did not perfume myself for three weeks.

<sup>4</sup>On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I stood on the bank of the river Tigris, <sup>5</sup>I raised my eyes and saw this: a man clothed in linen with a belt of pure gold round his waist. <sup>6</sup>His body was like chrysolite, his face had the brilliance of lightning, his eyes were like blazing torches, and the sound of his words was like the noise of a crowd.

<sup>7</sup>I, Daniel, alone saw this vision; the men who were with me did not see it, but they were seized with great fear and they fled to hide. <sup>8</sup>So I was left alone gazing on this vision. I was powerless. The appearance of my face changed fearfully, and I retained absolutely no strength. <sup>9</sup>I heard the sound of his words, and when I heard it, I fainted face down to the ground. <sup>10</sup>Then a hand touched me, and set me trembling on my hands and knees.

<sup>11</sup>He said to me, "Daniel, man loved by God, pay attention to the words I shall say to you and stand up, for I have been sent to you now." When I heard these words I stood up trembling.

<sup>12</sup>Then he said to me, "Daniel, do not be afraid, for from that first day, when you resolved to acquire understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your supplications were heard, and it is precisely because of this that I have come.

<sup>13</sup>The prince of the Persian kingdom has resisted me for twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the leading angels, has come to my assistance. I left him there with the kings of Persia, <sup>14</sup>and I have come, to tell you what will happen to your people in the days to come. For this new vision, too, refers to those days."

<sup>15</sup>When he had said these words to me, I bowed my head and kept silent; but someone like a man touched my lips. <sup>16</sup>Then I opened my mouth to speak; and said to him who was before me, "My lord, anguish overcomes me at this vision, and I have no strength. <sup>17</sup>How can I speak to my lord when my strength fails me and I cannot breathe?"

<sup>18</sup>The one who looked like a man touched me again, and he strengthened me. <sup>19</sup>He said to me, "Man chosen by God, do not fear. Peace be with you. Have courage and be strong." <sup>20</sup>And as he spoke, I felt strengthened, and I said, "Speak, my lord, now that I feel strong."

Then he said to me, "Do you know why I have come to you? <sup>21</sup>I shall reveal to you what is written in the book of truth. After that, I have to return, to fight against the angel of Persia; then, the angel of Greece will come. No one lends me support in all this, except Michael, your angel.

**11** <sup>1</sup>He helps and strengthens me in the same way that I have helped him in the first year of Darius, the Mede. <sup>2</sup>But now, I shall tell you the truth.

There shall be three more kings in Persia; and the fourth shall have more riches than all the others. And when he has grown strong with his riches, he will stir up everything against the kingdom of Greece.

<sup>3</sup>A powerful king will rise and reign over a vast empire and do as he pleases. <sup>4</sup>But as soon as he has secured his reign, his empire will be broken up, and divided out to the four winds of heaven, though not among his descendants. It will not be the same dynasty, but his kingdom shall be taken from them and passed on to others.

<sup>5</sup>The king of the South will grow powerful; but one of his leaders will grow more powerful still, and will have an empire greater than his. <sup>6</sup>Some years later, they will be allies; and the daughter of the king of the South shall come to the king of the North, to conclude the alliance. But she will not endure; for she will be put to death with those who brought her, and her son and husband as well. <sup>7</sup>Then, a bud from her roots will sprout in her place, and will cross the land of "the army" and enter the fortress of the king of the North. <sup>8</sup>He will be victorious in wars; and will appropriate to himself their gods, statues and objects of silver and gold: all this plunder will be brought into Egypt. For some years, he shall remain far away from the king of the North.

<sup>9</sup>The king of the North will invade the

stylistic device. In fact, all that matters for the author is the conclusion of the story which we explain in 12:3. The author wants to teach his persecuted contemporaries, who have just gone

through these events, that their hardships were leading to the coming of the kingdom of God soon and to the day of the resurrection.

kingdom of the South, and then return to his own country. <sup>10</sup>His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great multitude of troops. One of them will come, like an overflowing river; he will break through and then withdraw, after having fought right up to his fortress. <sup>11</sup>Then the king of the South, enraged, will set out to fight against the king of the North. He will mobilize a great army, and the multitude will fall into his hands <sup>12</sup>and perish. Then he will become proud and crush tens of thousands of men, but his strength will not last.

<sup>13</sup>The king of the North will attack after mobilizing a greater army than the first. And after several years, he will come with a large army and abundant provisions and supplies. <sup>14</sup>Then many will rise against the king of the South, and the violent among your people will rise against him, trusting in a vision, but they will throw up siege works and will capture the fortified city. <sup>15</sup>The king of the South will not be able to resist, he and the picked troops of his people.

<sup>16</sup>He who marches against him will do as he pleases, and none can resist him; and he will settle in the Beautiful Land, bringing destruction. <sup>17</sup>He shall plan to reign over his whole kingdom, and will conclude an agreement with him, giving him one of his daughters, in order to destroy the kingdom. But he will not succeed, so it will not happen.

<sup>18</sup>Then he will turn against the islands and seize a good number of them; but a commander will humble him; and he will not be able to avenge himself. <sup>19</sup>So he will turn against the fortresses of his own land; but he will stumble, fall and never rise again.

<sup>20</sup>In his place will rise another, who will send a tax collector to despoil the glory of his kingdom; but he will be overthrown within a few days, though neither with arms nor in battle.

<sup>21</sup>In his place, a contemptible man will rise, to whom royal dignity has not been given; but he will intervene unexpectedly and will gain possession of the kingdom by intrigue. <sup>22</sup>The enemy forces will be completely routed and utterly destroyed by him, and the Prince of the Covenant, too. <sup>23</sup>He will act with cunning, making good use of the pacts concluded with him, and with a few men, he will grow strong.

<sup>24</sup>He will invade the richest provinces and will do what his predecessors had not done. He will divide the plunder, the booty and the riches among his friends. He will devise plans against fortresses, but up to a certain period only.

<sup>25</sup>He will direct his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will go to war with a great and powerful army, but will not be able to resist, for conspiracies have been plotted against him. <sup>26</sup>Those who ate from his table will ruin him; his army will be disbanded and many will fall dead by the sword.

<sup>27</sup>The two kings will not think of anything but to do harm and to deceive each other while sitting at the same table. But they will not accomplish anything, since there is still time before the appointed moment.

<sup>28</sup>The king of the North will return to his land with great riches and will devise plans against the holy Covenant. He will act against it; then he will return to his land. <sup>29</sup>In due time, he will return again to the South, but in this second time, things will not be as before.

<sup>30</sup>The ships of Kittim will come against him and he will have to abandon his plan; but he will vent his anger against the holy Covenant, and will again favor those who have turned away from the holy Covenant.

<sup>31</sup>He will send some of his forces to profane the Citadel Sanctuary, to suppress the perpetual sacrifice; and, there, to set up the Abominable Idol of the devastator.

<sup>32</sup>He will corrupt, with flattery, those who violate the Covenant; but the people who know their God will stand firm.

<sup>33</sup>The most intelligent among the people will teach many; but they will fall by the sword or be burned or exiled, or plundered of their goods for some time. <sup>34</sup>And when they fall, they will receive little help; but many will join them, in deceit. <sup>35</sup>Some among the learned will stumble, but this will be so as to prove them, to purify and cleanse them until the end, which is to come at its appointed time.

<sup>36</sup>The king will act according to his whims, becoming conceited; and, exalting himself above all the gods, he will speak outrageous blasphemies against the God of gods. He will prosper, until the wrath is filled to overflowing, for what has been decreed will be fulfilled. <sup>37</sup>He will pay no

1Mac  
1:201Mac  
1:531Mac  
1:45;  
8:11;  
9:27;  
2Mac  
6:2;  
Mt24:151Mac  
1:502Thes  
2:4

heed to his fathers' gods, will not mind the favorite god of the women, or any other god, but will exalt only himself, as greater than them all. <sup>38</sup>In their place, he will worship the god of fortresses, a god unknown to his ancestors, and will honor him with gold, silver and precious stones and jewels. <sup>39</sup>Trusting in a foreign god, he will attack the fortresses. Those who adore him will be given great honor; they will have authority to divide the land as a reward.

<sup>40</sup>When the end-time comes, the king of the South will confront him. The king of the North will attack him with chariot cavalry and many ships. He will enter his lands, invade them and pass through them.

<sup>41</sup>He will come to the Beautiful Land, where many will fall; only the people of Edom, Moab and the best of the Ammonites will escape. <sup>42</sup>He will stretch out his hand to many countries, including Egypt. <sup>43</sup>He will seize the treasures of gold and silver and all precious objects of Egypt. Libyans and Ethiopians will join him.

<sup>44</sup>But reports coming from the East and the North will worry him; and he will set out in a rage, determined to utterly wipe out and destroy many.

<sup>45</sup>He will set up the tent of his military camp between the sea and the holy moun-

tain of the beautiful land. Then he will come to his end; and no one will come to his aid.

### Those who sleep will awake to everlasting life

**12** • <sup>1</sup>At that time, Michael will rise, the Great Commander who defends your people. It shall be a time of anguish as never before, since the nations first existed until this very day.

Then, all those, whose names are written in the book, will be saved. <sup>2</sup>Many of those who sleep in the Region of the Dust will awake, some to everlasting life but others to eternal horror and shame. <sup>3</sup>Those who acquired knowledge will shine, like the brilliance of the firmament; those who taught people to be just will shine, like the stars, for all eternity.

<sup>4</sup>And you, Daniel, keep these words secret and have the book sealed, until the appointed time of the end. Many will wander, looking here and there. Wickedness will go on increasing.”

Mt  
24:21;  
Rev 3:5;  
Ps 69:29;  
Rev  
20:12

Mt  
25:46;  
Jn 5:29

11:33;  
Wis 3:7;  
Mt 13:43

Rev  
10:4

1Mac 6;  
2Mac 9

• **12.1** This is a very important text: the first mention of the resurrection.

In centuries before, the Israelites believed that, after death, they would have diminished life under the earth. They held no hope of a resurrection or a reward for the individual, but only for their nation. If they were righteous, God would bless or uplift their nation (See Ezk 37).

The persecutions during the days of the Maccabees and their reflection on the destiny of the martyrs led them to the conviction that those who had died would have their share of happiness in the kingdom of God: they had to be raised up. We find the same hope in the second Book of Maccabees (7:9 and 12:43). We read about it also in Chapters 2-5 of the Book of Wisdom. These texts, fruits of the faith and the trials the Jewish people had undergone in the last two centuries before Jesus, prepared for what he was going to teach about the resurrection (Mk 12:18).

Michael, your angel (of the Jewish people) 10:13 and 10:21. The Book of Daniel is filled with many visions, some of them quite complex: this is typical of the apocalyptic books which were written by the Jews between the years 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. (See the Introduction of this book.)

In 9:1 the angel Gabriel explains the vision.

Here we have another angel, Michael. History is described as if the events were predetermined and written in God's book. In heaven there are occasional struggles between angels representing one nation or another. So, Michael fights for the Jewish people. In 10:13 we have another angel called "prince of the Persian kingdom."

At the end of Chapter 12 we have another series of symbolic numbers. They do not express anything more than the previous ones: the persecution which has continued from the time worship was interrupted, must stop, and soon after, the end will come.

### WHY DID THEY ANNOUNCE THE RULE OF GOD AS IMMINENT WHEN IT CAME MUCH LATER?

Various oracles in the Book of Daniel predict both the end of the persecution by Antiochus and the definitive coming of God with his universal rule. Christ came more than a hundred years later. We can apply here what was said concerning the prophets' announcements (see Is 9).

When a man starts on a long walk with his son and the son begins to get tired, the father does not tell him how much longer he still has to walk. He simply points to the next goal: let us go as far as that tree we see in the distance. Then he tells him: let us go to this house, to the

• <sup>5</sup>I, Daniel, looked and saw two others standing, one on either side of the river. <sup>6</sup>One said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, “When will these wonderful things take place?”

Rev 10: 5-7 <sup>7</sup>And I heard the answer of the man in linen who was upstream. He raised his hands to heaven and swore by the One who lives eternally: “Everything will be fulfilled within a time, two times and a half a time. When the holy people is completely crushed, and without any strength, then these things will be fulfilled.”

Mt 24:3 <sup>8</sup>I heard but did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what will be the outcome

of these things?” <sup>9</sup>He said, “Go, Daniel, for these words are secret and sealed, until the appointed time of the end. <sup>10</sup>Many will be purified, cleansed and proved. The impious will go on doing evil; none of them will understand anything; only the learned will understand. Rev 22:11

<sup>11</sup>From the time the perpetual sacrifice is suppressed and the Abominable Idol of the devastator is installed, there shall be a thousand two hundred ninety days. <sup>12</sup>Fortunate is the one who waits, and reaches a thousand three hundred thirty-five days. <sup>13</sup>And you, go your way until your end. You shall rest; and then rise, to receive your reward, at the end of time.”

top of this hill... and so, he nourishes the son's hope through a series of stages. Thus, in sacred history every time God invites his people to take a step, he presents the happy future which he has in store for humanity with bright colors, as if it were within their grasp. There is always something gained, but the best is still ahead, and people will live by hope until their last days.

God does not speak to satisfy our curiosity, but to call us to action. When, in the year 165 B.C., a teacher of the law was writing this book to encourage his persecuted compatriots and to announce the liberation which he thought would be the final one, God did not reveal the date of the end of the world to him. For the Jews of his time, the unexpected end of the persecution by Antiochus and the peace achieved must have been quite a clear sign of God's rule over history.

## • 5. THE ANGELS

In the previous pages we explained that all these visions and these angels are no more than literary images: it is a way of writing apocalyptic books. See also the note on Genesis 16. However we should not swiftly conclude that there is no room for angels in the biblical message and that there is no word of God about them. What can we believe regarding this point?

During the past centuries angels were presented to believers as invisible companions. The wings they had in the images made people understand that they mastered distance and weightlessness. Each of us, they said, had been entrusted by God to a guardian angel who was to protect us from danger and temptations. Some were more important in this heavenly host; these were the archangels. Others were consigned as the managers of the universe: we should call them cosmic powers. Still others, according to spiritual authors, would be closer to God and did not look at anything except God: these were the seraphims.

Many people consider this as pious imagina-

tion, outdated but touching. Many others, when experiencing very special heavenly protection, prefer to think that it comes directly from God: why would we look for intermediaries?

In the Scriptures we find various texts written in different times which show that people had faith in intermediaries. This belief was actually consonant with a higher and better grasp of God's mystery. It was not difficult for them to believe in angels because they were not paralyzed by a materialistic vision of the universe. So they affirmed that God shares power with good and evil spirits. Some texts, like the Book of Tobit, present the guardian angel as an instrument of God's careful presence. Others, as does the Book of Daniel, tell us of the nation's protective angels who taught them at the beginning about the principles of their own culture and religion. They are the managers of human history and they do their task quite freely, though they must abide at the end with God's sovereign decisions. We must confess that, that concept of human history is alien to many of us today, although it is duly rooted in biblical texts (Dt 32:8; Jdg 11:24; Is 63:9; Dn 10:21).

New Testament authors welcome these different shades of angels' missions without giving preference to any of them. Stephen and Paul know the angels of nations: see Acts 7:38; Galatians 3:19; Ephesians 1:21. And the commentaries and John's Revelation designate the angels in heavenly liturgies, the very part which was proper for priests in the temple of Jerusalem (8:3). They are likewise considered as instruments of God's judgment, and they carry the disasters through by which sinful humanity becomes aware of its sins (15:5). The Gospels speak the same language and it adds as its own that the angels of the little ones are the very angels already sharing the full brightness of God (Mt 18:10).

So it is that Scripture speaks of angels. However it is not easy to answer immediately the questions many may ask: Are the angels but a way of speaking of God's actuation in the

## THREE STORIES ADDED TO THE BOOK OF DANIEL

## The story of Susanna

**13** • <sup>1</sup> There lived in Babylon a man named Joakim, <sup>2</sup> who was married to a very beautiful, God-fearing woman, Susanna, Hilkiah's daughter, <sup>3</sup> whose pious parents had trained her in the law of Moses. <sup>4</sup> A very rich man and greatly respected by all the Jews, Joakim was frequently visited by the Jews in his house adjoining a garden.

<sup>5</sup> That year, two elders of the people were appointed judges, in whom this word of the Lord became true, "Wickedness has come forth from Babylon, through the elders appointed judges, who were supposed to govern the people." <sup>6</sup> These men frequented Joakim's house, and all who had legal disputes used to come to them.

<sup>7</sup> After the people had left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband's garden for a walk. <sup>8</sup> The two old men began to lust for her as they watched her enter the garden every day. <sup>9</sup> Forgetting the demands of justice and

virtue, their lust grew all the more, as they made no effort to turn their eyes to heaven. <sup>10</sup> Although both were possessed of the same passion for her, they concealed that from each other, <sup>11</sup> for they were ashamed to reveal their lustful desire. <sup>12</sup> But they continued watching her, day after day.

<sup>13</sup> One day, before lunch, they parted, saying to each other, "Let us go home for it is meal time. So off they went, in different directions. <sup>14</sup> But both turned back; and coming face to face again, each was obliged to explain his action and admit his lust. They agreed to wait for an opportunity to meet her alone.

<sup>15</sup> One day, as they were waiting for an opportune time, Susanna entered the garden, as usual, with only two maids. She decided to bathe, for it was a hot day. <sup>16</sup> Nobody else was there, except the two elders watching her, from where they had hidden themselves.

<sup>17</sup> She said to the maids, "Bring me

world? Are they only sides of God's kind and worldwide care for the good of those loved, or are they rather real beings and spiritual powers distinct of God?

There is no clear and definitive answer to such questions. Actually the tradition has always held the faith in God "the Creator of seen and unseen creatures." A "materialist" God would have forged the universe as craftsmen are used to making a clock. Instead, a God who is spirit and in whom Spirit is nothing less than God should be the Creator of a universe in which all and any of the created beings are like reflections and irradiations of God's own richness whose light does not exhaust in a first reflection: spirit splashes back and is transmitted to other inferior levels. If the Word of God chose to come among us and to share our flesh, it is probably because we are living in the lower department of creation and the Creator wanted to reach the poorest. This does not allow us to take ourselves as the masters of the estate.

As the Church extended through the world, it met people who lived their relation to cosmic powers differently. Thus has its language evolved, as already happened with the authors

of sacred books. The door was always open for new experiences. It was enough for it to remind us that all those intermediaries were submitted to Christ when he was raised and glorified. He alone holds the keys of history and of our individual destinies.

• **13.1** The stories we read in Chapters 13–14 were added to the Book of Daniel in the Greek Bible. They are a part of the Deuterocanonical books (see the text on p. 000).

The first story, about Susanna, intends to show how God defends the helpless innocent, and severely denounces the corruption of the judges. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 5:28: *The one who looks at a woman too lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart.*

The second, to ridicule the priests with their idols.

The third, to show how God helps his witnesses (just as we saw in Chapters 3 and 6).

We should not look down on these stories thinking they are for children. Just like the parables of Jesus, they contain lessons and invite us to reflect on our behavior.

Jer  
29:21

1Mac  
3:18

oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors while I bathe.”<sup>18</sup> Unaware of the elders hidden inside the garden, the two maids did as ordered, shutting the doors and leaving by the side entrance to the house, to fetch what she had asked for.

<sup>19</sup>When the maids had left, the two elders hurried to her and said, <sup>20</sup>“Look, the garden doors are shut and no one sees us. We desire to possess you. <sup>21</sup>If you refuse to give in, we will testify that you sent your maids away, for there was a young man here with you.”

Jn 8:4

<sup>22</sup>Susanna moaned, “Whatever I do, I am trapped. If I give in to your desire, it will be death for me; if I refuse, I won’t escape your persecution. <sup>23</sup>I would rather be persecuted than sin in the eyes of the Lord.”

<sup>24</sup>Susanna shrieked, but the old men shouted, putting the blame on her. <sup>25</sup>One of them ran and opened the garden doors. <sup>26</sup>Hearing the noise in the garden, the household servants rushed in by the side entrance, to see what was happening. <sup>27</sup>They were taken aback when they heard the elders’ accusation, for never had anything like this been said of Susanna.

<sup>28</sup>The next day, a meeting was held at Joakim’s house. The two elders arrived, vindictively determined to have Susanna sentenced to death. <sup>29</sup>They ordered, before all the people, “Send for Susanna, Hilkiah’s daughter and Joakim’s wife.” <sup>30</sup>They sent for her, and she came with her parents, children and all her relatives.

<sup>31</sup>Susanna was a very refined and beautiful woman. <sup>32</sup>She had her veil on, but the wicked elders ordered her to uncover her face, for them to feast on her beauty. <sup>33</sup>Her family and friends, and all who saw her, wept.

<sup>34</sup>The two elders stood up and laid their hands upon her head. <sup>35</sup>Com-

pletely trusting in the Lord, she raised her tearful eyes to heaven.

<sup>36</sup>The elders started making their accusation, “We were taking a walk in the garden when this woman came in with two maids. She ordered them to shut the garden doors and dismissed them. <sup>37</sup>Then a young man came out of hiding and lay with her. <sup>38</sup>We were in a corner of the garden, and we saw this crime from there. We ran to them, <sup>39</sup>and caught them in the act of embracing. We were unable to take hold of the man. He was too strong for us. He made a dash for the door, opened it and ran off. <sup>40</sup>But we were able to seize this woman. We asked her who the young man was, <sup>41</sup>but she refused to tell us. This is our statement, and we testify to its truth.”

The assembly took their word, since they were elders and judges of the people. Susanna was condemned to death. <sup>42</sup>She cried aloud, “Eternal God, nothing is hidden from you; you know all things before they come to be. <sup>43</sup>You know that these men have testified falsely against me. Would you let me die, though I am not guilty of all their malicious charges?”

Pro  
15:11;  
Heb  
4:13

<sup>44</sup>The Lord heard her, <sup>45</sup>and as she was being led to her execution, God aroused the holy spirit residing in a young lad named Daniel. <sup>46</sup>He shouted, “I will have no part in the death of this woman!”

Mt 27:24

<sup>47</sup>Those present turned to him, “What did you say?” they all asked.

<sup>48</sup>Standing in their midst, he said to them, “Have you become fools, you Israelites, to condemn a daughter of Israel without due process and in the absence of clear evidence? <sup>49</sup>Return to court, for those men have testified falsely against her.”

<sup>50</sup>Hurriedly they returned, and the elders said to Daniel, “Come and sit

Wis 4:8

with us, for you also possess the gifts bestowed by God upon the elders.”

<sup>51</sup>Daniel said to the people, “Separate these two from one another and I will examine each of them.”

<sup>52</sup>When the two elders were separated from each other, Daniel called one of them and said, “How wicked you have grown with age. Your sins of earlier days have piled up against you, and now is the time of reckoning. <sup>53</sup>Remember how you have passed unjust sentences, condemning the innocent and freeing the guilty, although the Lord has said ‘The innocent and the just should not be put to death.’ <sup>54</sup>Now, if you really witnessed the crime, under what tree did you see them do it?”

<sup>55</sup>The elder answered, “Under a mastic tree.”

Daniel said, “Your lie will cost you your head. You will be cut in two, as soon as the Lord’s angel receives your sentence from God.”

<sup>56</sup>Putting the first one aside, Daniel called the other elder and said to him, “You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, you have long allowed yourself to be perverted by lust. <sup>57</sup>This is how you have dealt with the daughters of Israel, who, out of fear, have yielded to you. But here is a daughter of Judah who would not tolerate your wickedness. <sup>58</sup>Tell me then, under what tree did you catch them committing the crime?”

The answer came, “Under an oak.”

<sup>59</sup>“Your lie has also cost you your head,” Daniel said. “God’s angel waits to cut you both in two.”

<sup>60</sup>The whole assembly shouted and blessed God, for helping those who hope in him. <sup>61</sup>They turned against the two elders who, through Daniel’s efforts, had been convicted by

their own mouths. In accordance with Moses’ law, the penalty the two elders had intended to impose upon their neighbor was inflicted upon them. <sup>62</sup>They were sentenced to death. Thus was the life of an innocent woman spared that day.

<sup>63</sup>Hilkiah and his wife praised God, for the justice given Susanna, and so did Joakim, her husband, and all her relatives, for she was not found guilty of any shameful deed. <sup>64</sup>Daniel was greatly esteemed by the people from that day onward.

#### Daniel and the priests of Bel

**14** <sup>1</sup>When king Astyages died, Cyrus, the Persian, ascended the throne. <sup>2</sup>Daniel was very close to the king, who held him in higher esteem than any of his other friends.

<sup>3</sup>The Babylonians had an idol called Bel, to which twelve bushels of fine flour, forty sheep, and six measures of wine were offered daily. <sup>4</sup>The king took part in this cult and worshiped the idol every day. Daniel, on the other hand, worshiped only his own God. <sup>5</sup>And the king asked him, “Why don’t you worship Bel?”

Daniel answered, “I worship no man-made idols, but only the living God, who made heaven and earth, and rules over all peoples.” <sup>6</sup>The king asked, “Don’t you think Bel is a living god? Don’t you see how much he eats and drinks every day?”

<sup>7</sup>Daniel laughed. “Do not be deceived, O king. This is only clay inside and bronze outside. It never ate or drank anything.”

<sup>8</sup>Enraged, the king called his priests and said to them, “If you will not tell me who consumes all these offerings, you will all die. <sup>9</sup>But if you can show that Bel consumes them, it is Daniel who will die, for blaspheming.” Daniel said to the king, “Let it be as you say.”

<sup>10</sup>There were seventy priests of Bel, besides their wives and children; together, with Daniel, the king went to Bel’s temple.

<sup>11</sup>The priests said to the king, “See, we are going outside. We will leave you here inside, O king, to set out the food and prepare the wine. Then you can leave them, shut the door and seal it with your ring.

<sup>12</sup>You will return in the morning, and if you



find that Bel has not eaten the food and drunk the wine, we are ready to be executed. But if the reverse happens, Daniel must die for telling lies and slandering us.”

<sup>13</sup>They were confident, for they had made a secret entrance under the table, through which they used to come in, to consume the food and wine offerings. <sup>14</sup>When the priests had left, the king set the food before Bel, while Daniel ordered his servants to scatter ashes all over the temple floor. Then they left after shutting the door and sealing it with the king’s ring. <sup>15</sup>That night the priests and their wives and children came and, as usual, ate and drank the offerings.

<sup>16</sup>Early the next morning, the king returned to the temple with Daniel. <sup>17</sup>“Are the seals unbroken, Daniel?” the king asked. Daniel answered, “They are unbroken, O king.” <sup>18</sup>Opening the door, the king looked at the table, then exclaimed, “You are indeed great, O Bel. There is no deception in you.”

<sup>19</sup>Daniel laughed, and, restraining the king from entering, he said, “But look at the floor and see whose footprints these are.” <sup>20</sup>The king said, “I see footprints of men, women and children.”

<sup>21</sup>Enraged, the king ordered the priests and their wives and children to be seized. They were compelled to show him the secret door through which they used to enter to consume the offerings on the table. <sup>22</sup>They were put to death on orders of the king. And Bel was handed over to Daniel, who destroyed the idol and its temple.

### **Daniel and the dragon**

<sup>23</sup>In Babylon there was a big dragon which was also worshiped. <sup>24</sup>“Look,” said the king to Daniel, “this is alive, not made of bronze. Would you deny that this is a living god? Worship it.”

<sup>25</sup>Daniel replied, “I will worship no one but the Lord my God, for he alone is the living God. With your permission, O king, I will slay this dragon without sword or club.” <sup>26</sup>The king answered, “You have my permission.”

<sup>27</sup>Then Daniel took some pitch, fat and hair, and boiled them together. He made them into cakes which he fed to the dragon. And the dragon burst after eating them. Daniel said to the king, “Now look at what happened to the thing you worship.”

<sup>28</sup>The Babylonians became angry upon hearing of this. “Our king has become a Jew,” they said. “He destroyed Bel, killed the dragon and put the priests to death.” <sup>29</sup>They went to the king and said, “Hand Daniel over to us or we will kill you and your family!” <sup>30</sup>The king was forced to hand Daniel over to the people.

<sup>31</sup>Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den, where he stayed for six days. <sup>32</sup>In the den were seven lions, which were fed daily with two human bodies and two sheep. This food was withheld from them, to make sure that they would devour Daniel.

<sup>33</sup>Now in Judea was a prophet named Habakkuk. He had put some bread and stew in a basket, and was about to take them to the reapers in the field <sup>34</sup>when an angel of the Lord appeared and said to him, “Take that lunch to Daniel, in the lion’s den at Babylon.”

<sup>35</sup>Habakkuk said, “Sir, I have never been to Babylon nor have I seen the lions’ den.” <sup>36</sup>The angel then took him by the crown of his head, carried him by his hair; and soon, they were alighting above the lion’s den in Babylon. <sup>37</sup>“Daniel, Daniel,” cried, Habakkuk, “take this lunch God has sent you.”

<sup>38</sup>Daniel gave thanks to God, saying, “You have remembered me, O God, and have not forsaken those who love you.” <sup>39</sup>Daniel ate, and the Lord’s angel returned Habakkuk to his own place.

<sup>40</sup>On the seventh day, the king came to the lions’ den to mourn for Daniel. He looked inside and saw Daniel sitting there. <sup>41</sup>The king cried aloud, “How great you are, O Lord God of Daniel! Surely there is no other God but you!” <sup>42</sup>He took Daniel out and threw into the den those who tried to destroy him. They were at once devoured before his eyes.

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