Daniel's Use of ŠBḤ and Its Worship Implication

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Abstract

Different concepts and motifs have been studied from the book of Daniel by expositors and interpreters without much consideration to the Aramaic terms that have worship nuances, undertones, and connotations. Through a contextual study, this paper contends that the Aramaic שׁבח highlights worship and its implication as integral to the book of Daniel. The study argues that שׁבח is an Aramaic worship expression and its contextual use emphasizes the sovereignty of God. The term's usage in Daniel highlights the milieu of worship and uplifting either a deity or gods and the God of heaven. However, when idol worship is amplified, the effect is the pronouncement of judgment on the people carrying out such worship.

Keywords: *שׁבח, worship, praise, book of Daniel, Aramaic*

Introduction

Though groundbreaking work on worship from the perspective of the Book of Daniel has been published during the past thirty years,[1] no adequate paradigm has been developed for understanding the Aramaic terms and expressions that connote worship as it is

[1] Laura K. Morrow, "A Study of the Language Shifts in the Book of Daniel: A Comparative Narrative Analysis of Daniel 1 and 2, 7 and 8" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2022); Andre Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), Paul Petersen, "The Theology and Function of Prayers in the Book of Daniel" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1998); Martin Probstle, "Truth and Terror: A Text-Oriented Analysis of Daniel 8:9-14" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2005); Joe M. Sprinkle, *Daniel*, EBTC (St. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020); Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008); Paul J. Tanner, *Daniel*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020); Theodoret of Cyrus, Commentary on Daniel, trans. Robert C. Hill (Atlanta: SBL, 2006); Amber Warhurst, "The Associative Effects of Daniel in the Writings," in The Shape of the Writings, ed. Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 187-205; Samuel Wells and George Sumner, Esther and Daniel, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2013); Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel—Wisdom to the Wise: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007); G. L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985); S. R. Driver, *The Book of Daniel*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), 37; D. Ford, *Daniel* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1978); A. Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1979); Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996).

represented in biblical and cognate literatures. Nor have scholars investigated the lexical dimensions of Danielic worship in any serious way. Recent scholarship on the book of Daniel and the concept of worship in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel has tended to focus more on understanding the extent and nature of apocalypse,[2] authorship/dating,[3] schools of interpretation,[4] and identification of the little horn[5] than it has on comprehending the Aramaic expressions and terms with nuances of worship.

This study focuses on Daniel's use of שׁבח related to worship in the Aramaic section of the book of Daniel. This is done with much emphasis on the contextual nature of the book. With few sections of the OT jotted down in Aramaic, majority of the portions are in Hebrew.[6] The Aramaic portion of the Scripture is found largely/mainly in the book of Daniel (2:4b-7:28), a section of the book of Ezra (4:8-6:18; 7:12-26), and a phrase in the book of Jeremiah (10:11). However, some Aramaic words appeared in some Hebrew sentences. The Aramaic language became a *lingua franca* then during the time of writing (6th century BC), and Daniel focused his writing not just on the Jews but with the people in and beyond the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires where he administered.

Methodology

The focus of the study is שׁבח. The term is analyzed and discussed using contextual

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[2]John J. Collins, Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015); John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1971), 13; George A. Keough, *Let Daniel Speak* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1986), 12; Albert M. Wolters, review of *Daniel's Spiel: Apocalyptic Literary in the Book of Daniel* by Jin Hee Han, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2009): 609-610; John J. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 20 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 33; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 13.

[3]"Authorship," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (*SDABC*), rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 4:743; William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 12; André LaCocque, *Daniel in His Time,* Studies on Personalities in the Old Testament (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 3; J. Benton White, *Taking the Bible Seriously* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1993), 116; J. Paul Tanner, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 639 (2003): 269; Gerhard F. Hasel, "Establishing a Date for the Book of Daniel," in *Symposium on Daniel*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 2 (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1986), 84-91.

[4]Nathan Moskowitz has pointed out that "many people have scratched their heads proffering wild and colorful interpretations of this book, losing sight of its original historical context." Nathan Moskowitz, "The Book of Daniel, Part 1, A Theological-Political Tractate Addressed to Judean Hasidim Under Seleucid-Greek Rule," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2010): 98. Bracy V. Hill in his view sees Daniel as "a complex book with rich history of Christian interpretation." Bracy V. Hill, "Apocalyptic Lollards? The Conservative Use of the Book of Daniel in the English Wycliffite Sermons," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 1 (2010): 65-87. See also Lehman Strauss, *The Prophesies of Daniel* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1969), 15; Philip R. Davies, *Daniel*, Old Testament Guide (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1985), 7.

[5]Gerhard F. Hasel, "The 'Little Horn,' the Saints and the Sanctuary in Daniel 8," in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Lesher (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1981), 177.

[6]Scholars have debated the reason for Daniel as a bilingual text. For a full discussion, see Baldwin, *Daniel,* 59-60; Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction*, 33-34; John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 44; LaCocque, *Daniel in His Time*, 11; John A. Cook, *Aramaic Ezra and Daniel* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019).

analysis as a methodology.[7] The analysis of the expression is structured in its order of occurrences in the book. In the analyses of words and expressions, one might be tempted to go by the lexical meaning but that possess a difficulty to understanding the words more fully. In languages such as Hebrew and Aramaic, the root or lexical denotation "can confidently be taken to be part of the actual semantic value of any word or form which can be assigned to an identifiable root."[8] But this assertion cannot be reliably used to determine the actual meaning of a term or expression. The meaning of words, terms, and expressions should be established within the framework in a given paradigm, and the context of passages within where they are found. To this end, the term שׁבח is analyzed within its context.

Discussion
שׁבח in the Old Testament

Etymology and Semantic Range

שׁבח is a Semitic root word. It is attested in several West Semitic cognate languages such as Akkadian, Empire Aramaic, Jewish Aramaic, Palmyrene, Mandaean, Christian Palestine Aramaic, Syriac, Neo-Syriac, Neo-Babylonian, Samaritan Pentateuch, Targum, and DSS.[9] The term is also attested and related are to the Hebrew שׁבח.[10]

In the writings of the Akkadians, *šubbuḫu*, which gives the understanding of praises or praising God, corresponds to the notions of the Neo-Babylonian word *sbh*.[11] These words that are often translated as "praise" originally carried the meaning of "glorification" and "honor," which refer to the act of revering and worshiping God. Thus, in Mesopotamia, Akkadian words *šubbuḫu* from the stem *sbh* means "praise" given only to God.[12] It is noteworthy that within the social context of Akkadian, *šubbuḫu* is primarily used for only God. The term is used only in a worship context.

The root is also used in Empire Aramaic, Jewish Aramaic, and Palmyrene which is Aramaic in derivative or somehow a loanword to describe a personal expression of praise to God. The Neo-Syriac verb *sukha* and Mandaean *ŠBH* mean "praise." The Jewish Aramaic, Christian Palestine Aramaic, Syriac, and DSS verb שׁבח mean "praise".[13] In the

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[7]For discussion of contextual analysis, see Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 35; W. Claassen, ed., Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies, JSOT Supplement 48 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1988); Elisha K. Marfo, "Vessels and Worship: A Contextual Study in Daniel 5," *Sahmyook Theological Review*, 25 (2019): 204-228.

[8]James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1961), 100.

[9]Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT) trans. and ed., M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), s.v. "שׁבח."

[10]Francis Brown, with S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (BDB), based on the lexicon of William Gesenius (1952), s.v. "שׁבח." See also Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT, s.v. "שׁבח."

[11]Ibid. See also William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1988), s.v. "שׁבח."

[12]Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT, s.v. "שׁבח."

[13]Brown, BDB, s.v. "שׁבח."

Samaritan Pentateuch, the adverb שְׁבִיחִת points to the praises of a person given to God as Lord.[14] In the Hebrew, the root שׁבח is also used for praise.

Occurrence and Meaning

The root שׁבח is attested sixteen times in the Hebrew Bible in different forms. In Hebrew, the verb שׁבח is used eleven times while in the Aramaic, it occurs five times.[15] All the occurrences in the Aramaic are in the book of Daniel (cf. 2:23; 4:31, 34; 5:4, 23).

The Aramaic expression *šbḥ* is only attested in the book of Daniel. The term is used only in the *pael* verb stem which notes intensive or causative action.[16] The expression means to praise, or laud a deity, superior or divine being. In its five occurrences in Daniel, it is used in the context of worshiping and uplifting either a deity or gods and the God of heaven. The context of each usage is highlighted in what follows.

שׁבח in Daniel 2

Morpho-Syntactical Analysis of Daniel 2:23

Verse 23 falls within the pericope of vv. 17-24. The verse is divided into four main clauses. The first clause is לָךְ אֱלָהּ אֲבָהָתִי מְהוֹדֵא וּמְשַׁבַּח אֲנָה. The clause starts with the preposition לְ with a second person masculine singular suffix which is translated *to you/thee*. This is the antecedent of לֶאֱלָהּ שְׁמַיָּא in v. 19. The verb מְהוֹדֵא is haphel participle masculine singular absolute verb from the root ידה. The root ידה means to confess, thank, and praise and in all its usage in the Aramaic, the action of confession or praise is directed to God.

The next word וּמְשַׁבַּח is a verb which is in the *pael* participle masculine singular absolute. As analyzed in its etymology and semantic meaning, *šbḥ* is praise and in its usage here is directed to אֱלָהּ.[17] The clause is a complement to the predicate of vv. 19c, 20 syntactically. It is translated as *to thee, God of my fathers, I thank and praise*.

The second clause is דִּי חָכְמְתָא וּגְבוּרְתָא יְהַבְתְּ לִי and the חָכְמְתָא is a noun feminine singular determined with a definite article. חָכְמָה means wisdom and have its source from God. This is followed by another determined feminine singular noun גְּבוּרָה. The noun גְּבוּרָה has the meaning of strength, power, and might.

The verb יְהַבְתְּ is a peal perfect second person masculine singular verb from the root יהב. The Aramaic root יהב connotes "to give." The first half of the clause דִּי חָכְמְתָא

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[14]Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT, s.v. "שׁבח."

[15]Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem, Israel: Sivan, 1983), s.v. "שׁבח."

[16]Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Aramaic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 131.

[17]Both the LXX and the Vulgate follow the translation of the MT. The Vulgate uses the word *laudo* (I praise, glorify, commend) for *šbḥ*. The LXX, on the other hand, uses the Greek αἰνῶ from the root αἰνέω which has the meaning of extolling or praising for *šbḥ*. The critical apparatus of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia has only one critical editorial to this verse. The editors propose יהבת in place of יְהַבְתְּ. This proposed change will help in translating the word as "I give" which the context suggests.

וּגְבוּרְתָא can be seen as parallel to v. 20. The repetition gives a chiastic structure to the pericope. Also, its usage here somehow produces a hendiadys. The clause is syntactically a complement clause and is translated as *you have given to me wisdom and strength*.

The third clause, וּכְעַן הוֹדַעְתַּנִי דִּי־בְעֵינָא מִנָּךְ, has two verbs. The first הוֹדַעְתַּנִי is *haphel* perfect second person masculine singular verb with a first person common singular suffix. It is from the root ידע, which means to know or having knowledge about something. בְעֵינָא is the second verb and is a peal perfect first person common plural verb from the root בעה. The root בעה connotes seeking out eagerly, requesting, which is mostly related to prayers. Syntactically, the clause is a complement.

The final clause of the verb is דִּי־מִלַּת מַלְכָּא הוֹדַעְתֶּנָא. The word מִלַּת is a noun feminine singular used in construct with מַלְכָּא. The noun מִלַּת means word, matter, or affair. However, due to its usage in the context of Dan 2, it can be translated with the constructed word מַלְכָּא as *the dream of the king* or *the king's matter*. Syntactically, it is a complement clause.

Background of Daniel 2

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 2 historically can be dated around 603/602 BC. This happened during the 2nd year reign of king Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:1). The dream seemed important to the king due to the special attention he placed on it. As a pagan worshiper, he taught it was an essential communication from the gods that called for an urgent interpretation.

Contextual Analysis

שבח in Dan 2:23 is used in the prophets' worship and glorification of God. After prayerfully requesting from God Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation, He revealed the mystery to him in a night's vision. Nebuchadnezzar had sought for wisdom from the wise in revealing and interpreting his dream. But his wise people were unable to reveal such wisdom. "Wisdom, which the experts summoned by Nebuchadnezzar are supposed to have, and power, which is presumed to belong to the king, are, in fact, God's to give."[18] In a show of appreciation to the kind gesture, Daniel worshiped, thanked, and praised God. Daniel outlined God's attributes and what He can do in uncertainty. Daniel portrayed God as the One in charge of the changes in time and seasons. He has the power and capability of installing and removing kings in His own time. When wisdom is sought for, He gives it to the wise and discerning while He reveals deep and secret things. This shows that true worshipers extend their worship to God in His revelation of hidden things. Daniel then says to God, "I thank and praise (שבח) you, O God of my father" (2:23) for the wisdom and power bestowed unto me. Like Daniel, Christians are called to worship and praise God for His revelation of mysterious things and the gift to understand His truth in this world. The use of שבח enforces the worship motif presented in the book of Daniel.

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[18]C. L. Seow, *Daniel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 41.

שבח in Daniel 4

Morpho-Syntactical Analysis of Daniel 4:31, 34

Daniel 4:31, 34 fall within the pericope of vv. 26-34. Verse 31 is divided into five main clauses. The first clause is וְלִקְצָת יוֹמַיָּה אֲנָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר עַיְנַי לִשְׁמַיָּא נִטְלֵת וּמַנְדְּעִי עֲלַי יְתוּב. It begins with a temporal phrase וְלִקְצָת יוֹמַיָּה (and at the end of the day). This can be seen as a reference to the דִּי־שִׁבְעָה עִדָּנִין in v. 20. Literally, the phrase is translated as "at the end of the days." Also the phrase עַיְנַי לִשְׁמַיָּא נִטְלֵת (lifted up) indicates not a directional look but rather a realization and coming back into ones' senses.

The word וּמַנְדְּעִי is a noun masculine singular prefixed with a coordinating conjunction and with a first person common singular suffix. The noun מַנְדַּע means an understanding or knowledge. Its usage with the verb יְתוּב gives a clear understanding in this clause. The verb יְתוּב is peal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular verb from the root תוב. From the root, the word is understood as coming back, giving back, or returning.

In the second clause, וּלְעִלָּאָה בָּרְכֵת, the phrase וּלְעִלָּאָה is a conjunction וְ, a preposition לְ, and a determined adjective in the masculine singular with the definite article אָ. The adjective עִלָּי can be translated as superior, highest, or the Most High God. However, Nebuchadnezzar's use of the word in this context suggests the Most High, due to its reference in v. 25. The next word בָּרְכֵת is a *pael* perfect first person common singular verb from the root ברך. It means to bless with the object as God. Thus, the king offers his blessing to the Most High God. Syntactically, the clause is a complement to the action depicted in the first clause.

The third, דִּי שָׁלְטָנֵהּ שָׁלְטָן עָלַם, fourth, וּלְחַי עָלְמָא שַׁבְּחֵת וְהַדְּרֵת, as well as the final, וּמַלְכוּתֵהּ עִם־דָּר וְדָר, clauses of the verse are complements syntactically.[19] They are showing the attributes and praises the king renders to God. The שָׁלְטָנֵהּ and מַלְכוּתֵהּ are an everlasting one augmenting the לְחַי which is also עָלְמָא. The use of the verb שַׁבְּחֵת here is in the *pael* perfect first person common singular from the root שבח. As indicated above, the root means to praise and in this context, praising God.

Verse 34 has five main clauses with the first clause, כְּעַן אֲנָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מְשַׁבַּח וּמְרוֹמֵם וּמְהַדַּר לְמֶלֶךְ שְׁמַיָּא, having noun phrase לְמֶלֶךְ שְׁמַיָּא which is seen as synonymous with לְעִלָּאָה in v. 31. Both expressions refer to the same person—God. The second occurrence of שבח in Dan 4 is found in this clause.[20] Here, שבח is in the *pael* participle masculine

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[19]Verse 31 of the LXX uses the indicative aorist active ἤνεσα from the root αἰνέω in translating שבח. The Vulgate on the other hand translates the term שבח as *laudo*. In both verses, the translation is consistent with the MT. Again, the fragmentum codices Hebraici in geniza Cairensi repertum have נטלת instead of the MT's נִטְלֵת. With regard to the word וּלְעִלָּיָא, the versio Syriaca consensu testium omits following up to עלי. Alsowith the phrase שַׁבְּחֵת וְהַדְּרֵת, the varia lectio secundum has שבחת והדרת with some changes in the vowels.

[20] Also in v. 34, the LXX and the Vulgate follow the translation of the MT. The Vulgate in v. 31 uses the word *laudavi* from the root *laudo*. The meaning of the root is to praise, glorify, and commend[20] in the Aramaic. The LXX on the other hand in v. 31 uses the Greek αἰνῶ from the root αἰνέω which has the meaning of extolling or praising for שבח. See Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 148.

singular absolute. The use in participle form may suggest the emphasis on the truth and understanding that only God should be worshiped and offered praises.

In the second, דִּי כָל־מַעֲבָדוֹהִי קְשֹׁט, and third, וְאָרְחָתֵהּ דִּין, clauses, the expressions קְשֹׁט (truth) and דִּין (just, judgment) are used attributively to describe the מַעֲבָד (work) and אֲרַח (dealing, way) of God. In the fourth clause וְדִי מַהְלְכִין בְּגֵוָה, the expression מַהְלְכִין is verbal participle from the root הלךְ. It denotes walking, trekking, or going round. Its usage in the *aphel* form indicates a way of life that a person leads/lives. And from the fifth clause of the verse יָכִל לְהַשְׁפָּלָה, such a person is humbled.

Background of Daniel 4

The chapter can probably be dated around the ending of Nebuchadnezzar's 40 years (605-565 BC) reign.[21] This chapter deals with the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar, after the elapse of time between the narratives of chaps. 3 and 4. From internal evidences, this was a time of political stability (v. 4). This is due to the completion of some building projects indicated in v. 30.[22]

Contextual Analysis

In chap. 4, the author presents the personal conversion experience of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The content of the chapter depicts what sounds like a royal writing by Nebuchadnezzar himself. The letter shows how he testifies of what the God of heaven has done for him and his life (vv. 1-3). Daniel includes this personal event of the king to show that biblical inspiration is dynamic. God used the writing of a pagan king to testify of his power and inspired Daniel to include it in his book.

The king tells of the remarkable experience that happened to him probably closer to the end of his life. While parading himself arrogantly as above every other person and in charge of everything, God the true Ruler of this world relates to the king his right status is on earth. A cuneiform inscription from the reign period of Nebuchadnezzar shows that he boastfully presents himself as a builder.

> I have made Babylon, the holy city, the glory of the great gods, more prominent than before, and have promoted its rebuilding. I have caused the sanctuaries of gods and goddesses to lighten up like the day. No king among all the kings has ever created, no earlier king has ever built, what I have magnificently built for Marduk. I have furthered to the utmost the equipment of Esagila (the great temple of Marduk), and the renovation of Babylon more than had ever been done before. All my valuable works, the beautification of the sanctuaries of the great gods, which I undertook more

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[21]Donald J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, The Schweich Lectures 1983 (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1985), 113. See also William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7: Prophecy as History,* The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 72. Generally, several scholars argue for dates around this time. Mervyn C. Maxwell dates this chapter in the year 569 BC but gives no reason for doing so. See Mervyn C. Maxwell, *God Cares,* vol. 1. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1981), 59. Gleason L. Archer also dates the chapter in the year 583 BC, dating the 7 years of the mental illness of Nebuchadnezzar from 582 to 575 BC. See Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel and the Minor Prophets," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 7:60.

[22]See "A City of Temples and Palaces," *SDABC*, 4:799.

than my royal ancestors, I wrote in a document and put it down for coming generation.[23]

He was praising (שׁבח) and glorifying himself for the achievements he had choked over the years. He went through humiliation that lasted for 7 whole years. This experience served a good purpose by letting him know that he is nothing on this earth and before God. He recognized that indeed God was the Most High and all worship must be directed to Him. He came to the conclusion and declared wholeheartedly that God's dominion was "an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation" (v. 34). He further reiterated his honor and praise (שׁבח) to Him in v. 37 that he praised and glorified the King of heaven. White pointed out the conversion experience of Nebuchadnezzar as

> the once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king. He who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven, now acknowledged the power of the Most High, and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. Under the rebuke of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Nebuchadnezzar had learned at last the lesson which all rulers need to learn, that true greatness consists in true goodness. . . . God's purpose that the greatest kingdom in the world should show forth His praise, was now fulfilled. This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history.[24]

It can be seen that Nebuchadnezzar grew in his understanding of worship. From one who requested and persecuted others to worship him and his gods (chap. 3) to an individual who worshiped the eternal God (chap. 4). Due to this worship, his relationship with God was greatly affected from a distant relation to a more personal one that acknowledged God's justice. He proclaimed, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise (שׁבח) and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble" (v. 37). Nebuchadnezzar was transformed from an arrogant king to a king who worshiped and honored God. He glorified and worshiped the God of heaven. The usage of שׁבח twice in this chapter are in perfect and participle forms. The perfect form emphasizes the fact that Nebuchadnezzar worshiped God as the only God who humbles the proud while the participle form emphasizes the truth of God's worthiness of worship and that God exalts and honors humble people who truly worships Him.

<div align="center">

שׁבח **in Daniel 5**

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Morpho-Syntactical Analysis of Daniel 5:4, 23

Daniel 5:4 falls within the pericope of vv. 1-7, while the v. 23 falls within the

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[23]"A City of Temples and Palaces," *SDABC*, 4:799. History confirms that Nebuchadnezzar is a builder. He rebuilt Babylon that was destroyed in 689 BC by the Assyrian king Sennacherib. During his 43-year reign, he built three palaces. The southern palace contained among other structures, the famous garden that was hanging, known as an examples of "the Seven Wonders of the World." It is believed that he probably built it for his Median wife as a replacement of the woody hills of her birth place. One of the city's most colorful structures was the famous Ishtar Gate through which passed the Procession Street, leading from the various palaces to the temple Esagila.

[24]Ellen G. White, *Prophet and Kings* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), 521.

pericope of vv. 17-30. Verse 4 is divided into two main clauses. The first clause is אִשְׁתִּיו חַמְרָא. It starts with the expression אִשְׁתִּיו, which is a verb. It is in the *peal* perfect third person masculine plural verb from the root שׁתה. The meaning of the root שׁתה is to drink. Syntactically, the verb functions as the predicate with the subject (they) implied. The subject *they* reference back to בֵּלְשַׁאצַּר מַלְכָּא and רַבְרְבָנוֹהִי אֶלֶף in v. 1. The next word חַמְרָא is a determined noun masculine singular with the definite article אָ. The meaning of the noun חֲמַר is wine and syntactically functions as the direct object of the clause.

The second clause is וְשַׁבַּחוּ לֵאלָהֵי דַּהֲבָא וְכַסְפָּא נְחָשָׁא פַרְזְלָא אָעָא וְאַבְנָא. It begins with the expression under study in this section, שׁבח. וְשַׁבַּחוּ here is made up of the *pael* perfect third person masculine plural verb from the root שׁבח prefixed with a coordinating conjunction וְ.[25] Syntactically, it serves as the predicate of the clause with the subject (they) implied just as in the first clause. Here too the subject *they* is referring to בֵּלְשַׁאצַּר מַלְכָּא and רַבְרְבָנוֹהִי אֶלֶף in v. 1. The next expression is set in construct with several noun expressions acting as a qualification of the nature or thing they are made of. Syntactically, the noun phrase לֵאלָהֵי דַּהֲבָא וְכַסְפָּא נְחָשָׁא פַרְזְלָא אָעָא וְאַבְנָא functions as the object of the clause.

From verse 23, it can be seen that the noun phrase וְלֵאלָהֵי כַסְפָּא־וְדַהֲבָא נְחָשָׁא פַרְזְלָא אָעָא וְאַבְנָא is a repetition of v. 4. This noun phrase is contrasted with another noun phrase מָרֵא־שְׁמַיָּא in the start of the verse. The direction of the שַׁבַּחְתָּ which is due מָרֵא־שְׁמַיָּא is rather given to וְלֵאלָהֵי כַסְפָּא־וְדַהֲבָא נְחָשָׁא פַרְזְלָא אָעָא וְאַבְנָא.[26] In the verse, נִשְׁמָה (breadth of life) and אֹרְחָתָךְ (way) are reserved in the hand of מָרֵא־שְׁמַיָּא. Syntactically, the verse is a complement to the subject (Daniel) and predicate (answered) in v. 17 at the start of the pericope.

Background of Daniel 5

The historical background of Dan 5 adds to understanding the context in the expression שׁבח, which is used twice in the chapter. Ten years after the demise of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 BC, Babylon sees four different kings ascending to the highest seat in swift sequence. These rulers are Amel-Marduk (562-560 BC), Nergalshar-usur (560-556

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[25]The Vulgate in v. 4 uses the term *laudabant* from the Latin root *laudo* to translate שׁבח. On the other hand, the LXX uses the indicative aorist active ἤνεσας from the root αἰνέω in translating שׁבח. In both verses, the translation is consistent with the MT. In v. 23, while the LXX follows the translation of the MT, the Vulgate slightly differs from the translation of the MT. It does not use any word for the Aramaic שׁבח. The translation of שׁבח is thus implied from the context. The LXX on the other hand in v. 23 uses the Greek ἤνεσας which is verb indicative aorist active second person singular from the root αἰνέω. The root connotes the meaning of extolling or praising for שׁבח. The critical apparatus of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia has one critical comment in v. 4. It indicates that the fragmentum codices Hebraici in geniza Cairensi repertum has a vowel change of בַּ instead of וְשַׁבַּחוּ as found in the MT. This vowel change does not convey a different meaning to the word but rather how it is pronounced in the clause.

[26]In v. 23, the difference in the *qere* and *kethib* are pointed out in the critical comments of the BHS. These has to do with the pronominal suffixes which do not generally affect the translation neither the understanding of the verse. Also the word לֵהּ can be seen as probably connecting with the following as compared with the Theodotian. Thus, the reading of the MT is preferred here.

BC), Labashi-Marduk (556 BC for 2 months), and Nabonidus (556-539 BC). Nabonidus, who is the fourth king and prince from Haran, has earlier served King Nebuchadnezzar as a diplomatic officer. He has also married Nitocris, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.[27]

While Nabonidus was battling in eastern Palestine around 550 BC, he became sick and sought for recuperation in Lebanon. In order to safeguard the throne and kingship, he entrusted the kingship of Babylon to his son Belshazzar. This made Belshazzar co-regent to the throne. After Nabonidus's recovery from sickness in Lebanon, he moved northwestern Arabia where he defeated and conquered the oasis of Tema. For 10 years, he made the place his residence and constructed several palaces there until 540 BC. This historical fact was attested in the Nabonidus Chronicles which was found in 1861 and translated in 1882. The Nabonidus Chronicles indicated that Belshazzar lived in Babylon, while his father Nabonidus resided in Tema for several years.[28]

Contextual Analysis

The use of שׁבח twice in Dan 5 is in the context of a blasphemous act of Belshazzar against the God of heaven and His articles used for His service. Belshazzar together with thousands of his officials, wives, and concubines organize a banquet. The purpose for the party has not been fully established. However, four main reasons can be said to have called for such a banquet. These are (a) the banquet probably is marking the tenth anniversary of Belshazzar's reign as the king of Babylon; (b) The coronation of Belshazzar as king is celebrated; (c) The consecration of the royal palace; and (d) from the interpretation of the Midrash, Belshazzar had miscalculated the prophecy of prophet Jeremiah concerning the people of Judah serving 70 years of exile in Babylon. This in a way called for his decision to use the Temple vessels desecratively.

While at the gathering and enjoying themselves with the wine, they started to glorify the handmade gods. "They praised (שׁבח) the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone" (Dan 5:4). In their desecration of God's valuable items, they worshiped pagan gods in a way of mocking the true God. This resulted in God's judgment upon them and the city as whole. A finger without a hand became visible from nowhere and wrote the verdict of Belshazzar on the wall of the banquet hall. The arrogance and desecration of the king towards the sacred things of God and God Himself coupled with the praising and worship of the Babylonian's gods and idols could be said to be Belshazzar's sin in this regard. From the context of Dan 4, Nebuchadnezzar realized that pride and arrogance lead to the downfall of man, so he praised (שׁבח) and glorified God for His sovereignty. Belshazzar, on the other hand, in the context of Dan 5 arrogantly downplayed on the importance of God's items and praised (שׁבח) pagan gods. He did not learn anything from his grandfather's experience of worship and way of life.

The second usage of שׁבח was in Daniel's rebuke of Belshazzar when he was called to read and interpret the writings on the wall of the banquet. After relating to Belshazzar the things which he was an eye witness to, and knowing the experience of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4, the prophet condemned Belshazzar for not humbling himself before the Lord. He had set himself up against the God of heaven. Daniel also revealed to him and the gathering

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[27]Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise*, 179.
[28]Ibid.

of their act of praising (שׁבח) the Babylonian gods of stone, wood, iron, bronze, and gold that lacked vision and understanding (v. 23).

The usage of the expression in the context of Dan 5 can be seen as worship in praising gods rather than the true God. When this kind of idol worship is done, the effect is the pronouncement of judgment on the people carrying out such worship. Due to the act of Belshazzar and his people, the kingdom of Babylon is handed over to the Medes and Persians (v. 28). From v. 30, Belshazzar's life is taken from him that night. This is a clear indication that God is against the worship of idols and the desecration of His holy things.

Implications of Daniel's Use of שׁבח

Several theological issues can be drawn from the use of שׁבח from the larger context of Daniel. However, only the emphasis of the ones which are directly related to worship are highlighted. The worship experience of Israel and the characters in the book of Daniel help to elucidate the principles and theology of true worship. The way human beings ascribe God's divine nature is a very important issue in worship. These show that Daniel calls on his readers to join him in the worship and praise of God for His might and wisdom and to understand the significance that it carries. The worship of God brings transformation and purification into His likeness to those who follow Him daily while those who keep wickedness in their hearts remains impious. This act of wickedness leads to destruction.

The struggle seen in the book over who should be worshipped is one that requires thoughtful consideration. Are human beings to worship God or gods, the Most High or the little horn, YHWH or man? How does true worship address the problem of syncretism, especially in the end time? The study in Daniel observes that in true worship, worshippers express total loyalty to God that leads to the gift of an everlasting life in the presence and kingdom of God Himself. Total allegiance is to be given to God only. Daniel's worship is accepted by God due to his commitment to Him and his reliance on His providence above all other things. Daniel and the Hebrew men do not reduce their worship to please men, to deny the genuineness of worship that emanated from their hearts. Thus, worship should be strongly God-centered. In this case, true worship should be executed only according to the commandments of God, not based on human creativity or preference. This is especially true when the latter contradicts the former.

The role of true and genuine worship is an answer to the revelation of the God of heaven. True worship is a recognition and demonstration of God's greatness and one's own nothingness. When faced with a death threat and persecution, true followers and believers need to consult God for His revealing grace to know things for the present time and future, and to stand firmly for God. Without sincere worship in prayer, revelation as the book of Daniel portrays will be difficult to be experienced. Thus, revelation is a result of earnestly seeking the Lord in prayer and worship. As depicted in the lives of the Hebrew men unadulterated worship is not an erstwhile event. Genuinely worshiping God in the past is not a guarantee for the present or the future if the practice is not strictly adhered to. Israel who denies their Lord by worshipping idols result in their exile to a foreign land, later they realize that bowing down before God and worshipping Him alone would bring liberation and effect their return to the beautiful land, Jerusalem.

Also Nebuchadnezzar who leads all the people of Babylon including the exiled Jews to idol worship at the plain of Dura later recognizes that all people need to "praise, exalt,

and glorify the King of heaven" (Dan 4:37) in worship. This show that true and sincere worship praises God for His mighty and wonderful works. These progressions in the lives of both Nebuchadnezzar and the Jews show how God leads people to appreciate and worship Him freely and willingly. The book of Daniel, thus, epitomizes gradual appreciation of the worship of God which emanates from the heart of the people. This serves as a point of reference for people who want to have a worship relationship with the God of heaven. Upon a conversion into a right way of worship, the true worship of God becomes continuous and unending. There is no stopping when the way to worshipping God is found by the erring worshipper.

The role of true worship puts a person in a position to adhere to the words of God which is accompanied by a spirit of submission and a willing heart to serve the Lord from the individual. This leads the individual in faithful decision making. In this way, true worship inspire the worshiper to act in faith. When all the people of Babylon are commanded to bow down in worship before the image of gold and Nebuchadnezzar, filled with courage and trust in God, the Hebrew men stand firm to the command of God not to worship any image. They stand, amidst all the dangers to their lives, to be counted as faithful worshippers of a true God. In this case true worship that is rendered to God in bowing down before Him and not to idols or images is a response to His salvific intervention. This indicates that God's plan of salvation is completely set into a setting of worship prescribed to glorify and honor Him above all others. When the Hebrew men understand this beyond all the reasonable doubt that God will save His people, they decided wholeheartedly not to bow down to the king and his image. Rather they served as witness for God to demonstrate to all and sundry that worship is to be rendered before God and Him only.

Conclusion

In Dan 2, שבח is used in the poetic passage to emphasize the sovereignty of God. Within the context of Daniel, God deserves to be praised both by His people and by all the nations. He is worthy and deserves worship because He is the only Revealer of the hidden things and the only living God. He is the only One who knows both the past and the future and portrays the future to man in dreams and visions due to His relationship with man.

In Daniel 5, the prophets uses of שבח in his rebuke of Belshazzar for giving praise (שבח) to creature made of stone, wood, iron, bronze, and gold that lacked vision and understanding. The prophet's rebuke stems from the fact that שבח should be directed towards the creator God, and not His creation. Again, God's judgment comes upon all who direct His שבח (praise) to other creatures.

שבח in its usage in the context of Daniel gives the understanding of the milieu of worship and uplifting either a deity or gods and the God of heaven. In the usage in Dan 2, the expression emphasizes the worship of God—the only God who humbles the proud. It emphasizes the truth of God's worthiness of worship and that God exalts and honors humble people who truly worship Him. The usage of the term in Dan 2 is contrasted with its usage in Dan 5 where the expression can be seen as worship in praising gods rather than the true God. However, when idol worship is amplified, the effect is the pronouncement of judgment on the people carrying out such worship.

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