

Encountering Culture in Light of The Book of Daniel¹

Paige Patterson
President, Professor of Theology
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, TX

Introduction

In this reflection, I want to examine how four Hebrew children responded to a culture change that they had no idea was coming. Let us see if we can learn something about how we as followers of Christ should respond to the cultural circumstances in which we find ourselves. In 1951, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote his now famous book, *Christ and Culture*. Toward the end of that book, he said the following:

Our examination of the typical answers Christians have given to their enduring problem is unconcluded and inconclusive. It could be indefinitely extended. The study could be brought more nearly up to date in a consideration of manifold essays on the theme which theologians, historians, poets, and philosophers have published in recent years for the enlightenment and sometimes to the confusion of their fellow citizens and fellow Christians. . . . Yet it must be evident that neither extension nor refinement of study could bring us to the conclusive result that would enable us to say, "This is the Christian answer."²

Niebuhr's lack of confidence that his own conclusions were final and his lack of confidence that any real answers would be determined in the future seem to have been the way of theologians in those days, and yet the present circumstance would suggest that this mindset is still a problem.

Probably my favorite single work on the subject of culture itself is a book entitled *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* by Roger Scruton. In his fascinating study, Scruton says the following in his attempt to answer the question, "What is culture?" He writes,

The concept of culture leapt fully armed from the head of Johann

¹Adapted from an address delivered at the Sola Scriptura or Sola Cultura? Conference held at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, April 14-15, 2011.

²H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 230-31.

Gottfried Herder in the mid-eighteenth century, and has been embroiled in battles ever since. *Kultur*, for Herder, is the life-blood of a people, the flow of moral energy that holds society intact. *Zivilisation*, by contrast, is the veneer of manners, law, and technical know-how. Nations may share a civilization; but they will always be distinct in their culture, since culture defines what they are.³

In another definition, Scruton says, “A culture is defined as something separate—an island of ‘we’ in the ocean of ‘they.’”⁴

Some culture is of course healthy. Other aspects of culture are not healthy. There is a discussion of culture that I could not resist sharing found in a book entitled *Managing Cultural Differences*.⁵ The authors give us a fascinating vignette and a concocted story that conveys something of the weakness of American culture. I found their definition irresistible and only too true. They show that not all aspects of your culture are healthy. They imagine the following scenario:

The Americans and Japanese decided to engage in a competitive boat race. Both teams practiced hard and long to reach their peak performance. On the big day they both felt ready. The Japanese won by a *mile*. Afterward, the American team was discouraged by the loss. Morale sagged. Corporate management decided that the reason for the crushing defeat had to be found, so a consulting firm was hired to investigate the problem and recommend corrective action. The consultant’s findings: The Japanese team had eight people rowing and one person steering; the American team had one person rowing and eight people steering. After a year of study and millions spent analyzing the problem, the consulting firm concluded that too many people were steering and not enough were rowing on the American team. So, as race day neared again the following year, the American team’s management structure was completely reorganized. The new structure: four steering managers, three area steering managers, one staff steering manager, and a new performance review system for the person rowing the boat to provide work incentive. That year the Japanese won by *two miles*. Humiliated, the American corporation laid off the rower for poor performance and gave the managers a bonus for discovering the problem.⁶

³Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2000), 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 3.

⁵Robert T. Moran, Philip R. Harris, and Sarah V. Moran, eds., *Managing Cultural Edition: Leadership Skills and Strategies for Working in a Global World* (Burlington, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2011).

⁶*Ibid.*, 33.

Now it seems to me that this imagined scenario would be enough to tell you that American culture is oftentimes over organized and would be Exhibit A of the fact that sometimes culture is helpful and at other times it is not.

Another of my favorite books was written by a Quaker philosopher by the name of Elton Trueblood. He had a couple of books that came out about the same time. One of them is called *The Incendiary Fellowship*, and one of them is called the *Company of the Committed*.⁷ I warmly recommend both of those books to you even though they were written in the late sixties, because they are pregnant with insight. They oftentimes have some conclusions with which I would hope you would *not* be sympathetic, but nevertheless, Trueblood had some marvelous insights. He speaks of some of the problems that the Christian church faces in its dilemma that is imposed on the people of God. Trueblood says in *Incendiary Fellowship*, "For example, there are cities in which the Y.M.C.A. is urged to drop the word 'Christian' from its name, and at least one financial drive has failed because of refusal to do so."⁸ He also says,

It is important to note that the chief pressure has not come from Jews, but from those whose religious expression is a vague goodwill. The resistance is not specifically to Christianity but to anything which has the sharpness of outline. Before Christians succumb to such pressures they are wise to note that there is no cutting edge that is not narrow. There is no likelihood whatever that Christianity could have won in the ancient world as a religion in general. It survived very largely because it accepted a scandal of particularity. It could not have survived had it not been sufficiently definite to be counted worthy of persecution. . . . A tolerant pantheism, which is at the real core of some of the self-styled new theology, will never be persecuted because most people will never oppose anything so vague. What people oppose is the conviction that God really is, that Christ was telling the truth when he said, 'No one comes to the Father, but by me' (Jn 14:6), and that God's purpose involves moral distinctions. People naturally resist the conception of an objective moral order, finding it far more comfortable to suppose that all moral laws have only subjective reference and can therefore be neglected with impunity. We are missing the point terribly if we do not see that a faith which is as definite as the Gospel of Christ is now and

⁷See David Elton Trueblood, *The Incendiary Fellowship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); and David Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

⁸Trueblood, *Incendiary Fellowship*, 24. You can tell how long ago that was written, because nobody knows anymore that the YMCA once had the Christian name associated with it.

always will be a stone of stumbling and an occasion of offense. Because the sharp line is never popular, we are foolish to expect it to be so. Those who try to follow the narrow way must expect to be part of the minority all of their lives.”⁹

Encountering Culture in Light of the Book of Daniel

This is perhaps sufficient to help us understand that we must *encounter* culture and not simply dig a hole and hide. So, I want to take you to the book of Daniel, particularly the first three chapters. The discussion of this biblical book will serve as the exegetical foundation of our study of culture. We will seek to learn from the four Hebrew children how effectively to encounter our culture.

Now let me set the stage for you by stirring up your pure minds by way of remembrance. Things were decaying rapidly in Judah, when in 605 BC King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians made his way across the Fertile Crescent into the area of Judah. On the way, he had a conflict that changed the course of the ages in many ways. So, in 605 BC, the famous battle of Carchemish was fought in which Pharaoh Neco was defeated and sent hurrying back to Egypt. In a very real way that meant the end of the Egyptian empire. It never has risen to greatness from that day until this day. Even in Roman times, still, it was Roman Egypt and not really Egypt. Consequently, that was the end of one great civilization. Judah was rebellious also and so Nebuchadnezzar came and surrounded the city of Jerusalem. The end effect of this was that the king of Jerusalem and Judah wisely decided not to make a fight of it, because he was out-gunned considerably, even if that expression is a bit anachronistic. They succumbed and surrendered, and Nebuchadnezzar took with him to Babylon some of the Hebrew children. Judah rebelled again in 598 BC. Nebuchadnezzar returned and once again there was a capitulation. This time Ezekiel was taken and sat at the river Chebar (a man-made canal connecting the Tigris and Euphrates rivers together). There we have the writing of our book Ezekiel. Judah rebelled again in 586 BC, and Nebuchadnezzar returned this time with a vengeance. This time Jerusalem falls and is razed to the ground. The people are taken away in captivity, leaving behind only our biblical prophet Jeremiah and a few of the jetsam and flotsam of the country, the poorest farmers. These few were so frightened that they decided to go to Egypt. Jeremiah resisted this move but was not given a choice and was taken against his will into Egypt.

Now, in the meantime, the Hebrew children that were taken into Babylon found themselves pressed into service to the King of Babylon. We read this story in chapters 1-3 of Daniel, and to some degree even to chapter 6. What happened to these Hebrew children is that they were pressed into a regimen of learning all that the Babylonians needed to learn in order to be-

⁹Ibid., 24-25.

come skillful leaders among the high ranking people of the empire.

The question arises, “How exactly did Daniel and his friends respond to this?” Several things apparently happen to them. First of all, they are removed from a land where they are familiar with all things and where they have their own cultural understandings and placed into a very strange place and a very unusual country in a land that is not sympathetic at all to all that they had held to be holy and true. As if that were not enough, you recall that their names are changed. Every one of their names is changed when they are pressed into service of the Babylonians: “To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego” (Dan 1:7-8).¹⁰ All four of the Hebrew children have the name of the Hebrew God in their name: Daniel, “God is my Judge,” or Azariah, the “ah” being the first syllable of the personal name of God, Yahweh, and so forth. We are unsure of the exact translation into the tongue of the Chaldeans, but apparently what happened is that the name of their God is taken out of their names and substituted with the names of Babylonian deities. Part of the brainwashing effort is to get them to think Babylonian deities rather than what were considered to be the localized deities of the land of Canaan. As if that was not enough, they were likely made eunuchs upon being pressed into the service of Babylon.¹¹

Now it is difficult to imagine how things could be any worse than this in the transfer from one culture to another. Apparently there is every effort to make matters as difficult as possible for them to transfer their whole way of thinking and their whole life of commitment to the true God of Israel and to his morality. How are they going to respond? I want you to notice in the text four things that they did that I believe will help us respond to our own culture today.

Appropriate the Wisdom of the Host Culture

First, these four Hebrews appropriated the wisdom of the host culture. Sometimes we might be surprised by that when we tend to be totally negative toward our culture or any other culture, but in fact, they did appropriate the wisdom of that culture. In Dan 1:4, they are to take “young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.” The language and the literature of the Chaldeans would

¹⁰Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New King James Version (NKJV).

¹¹Scholars are divided over this issue, but my pastor, Dr. Criswell, for many years at First Baptist Church Dallas was never divided in his mind about it; as far as he was concerned and many scholars also, Daniel and his companions were made eunuchs during their captivity. There is some evidence for this conclusion: First of all, there is no mention ever of any families for Daniel, Hananiah, or Mishael. Second, you will notice that they are placed in the keeping of the chief of the eunuchs, and he is in charge of all that is going to happen. Thus, it appears probable that they were made to be eunuchs upon this pressing into the service of Babylon.

not essentially be immoral. It would be the language and the literature of a people, so there was no harm in doing that. We pick up this element again and the same thing seems to be declared in 1:17, where it says, “And these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all the literature and the wisdom; and Daniel also had understanding in visions and dreams.” That last statement in the verse is critical to giving him persuasive powers in a particular culture that might have been less important in Israel or in Judah but became of paramount importance as we shall see as the chapters go by in Daniel.

So the first thing that Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael do, by whatever name, is they become excellent students of the wisdom and the culture of the Chaldean empire. We must do the same. We cannot afford the posture that says we are going to stand at arm’s length from anything that is cultural and we are not going to have anything to do with it. Too many times, that is exactly what we are doing in church today. For example, very few in the church make themselves aware of the fine arts, or continue to study the value of good music, and instead, we have substituted in the church of God that which comes from the popular rather than that which comes from a permanent and valuable part of culture. That is not a mistake that the Hebrew children make. Rather, they appropriate the wisdom of the host culture.

Avoid Theological, Moral, and Spiritual Compromise

Second, in the process of appropriating this cultural wisdom, they vigorously avoid theological, moral, and spiritual compromise. Look at Dan 1:8: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine that he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” I love that expression. Daniel “purposed in his heart” to resist the compromises that are a part of any culture that are not godly, wholesome, nor healthy. It will require a purpose of heart to follow the ways that we have learned of the Lord; to be faithful to his biblical revelation and to the lordship of Christ. So, while they appropriated the *wisdom* of the host culture, they *avoided* theological, moral, and spiritual compromise.

Acknowledge Your Need of God’s Intervention

Third, they acknowledged their need of the intervention of God. Here they are, learning the host culture. They have a purpose in their heart that they will not defile themselves with that part of it that is unwholesome, unhealthy, and ungodly, but they do recognize that they are helpless to do this within their own power. They realize that they must seek the Lord for themselves. Look at Dan 2:17-18: “Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek the mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish the rest of the wise men of Babylon.” Now you recall what has happened. Nebuchadnezzar is suspi-

cious of the wisdom of his academy. He suspects that his wise men might not be so wise, so he says, “Look, I’ve had a dream. Tell me what it means.” No problem, Oh King. What was the dream? No, explain the dream itself, and then tell me what it means. Well, nobody in all of history has been asked to do a thing like that! How could we possibly know what you’ve dreamed? Well, you’re supposed to be *wise* men.

It is interesting to study what these wise men are called. In Dan 2:2, “the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.” When you read that in our present context, you might immediately think of “suspicion,” and some sort of “Hocus Pocus,” and all kinds of things that were probably not a part of those original words. These are the words in the Hebrew text: *קִדְמָיִם* (“magicians”), *אֲשָׁפִים* (“astrologers”), *כַּשְׁפִּים* (“sorcerers”), and *כַּשְׁדִּים* (“Chaldeans”). We do not know the exact definition of these terms, and they are perhaps properly translated as “magicians,” “astrologers,” “sorcerers,” and “Chaldeans.” Nevertheless, one author has suggested that they are actually levels of academic achievement in the Babylonian empire. It would be too much to press this, but it might be that you would see the magicians as the high school graduates, the astrologers as the bachelor degree graduates, the sorcerers as the master degree graduates, and the Chaldeans, unquestionably the highest of educational attainment, would be the PhD graduates. You should not necessarily press these definitions, because there is no question that a certain amount of mysticism, fortune telling, star-gazing, sorcery, and astrology was definitely involved in what they were doing. But it is also true that this represents the intelligentsia of the Chaldean empire, and that is what Daniel and his friends were being trained to be a part of; to be a part of the intelligentsia of the Babylonian empire.

Now, “You’re supposed to be so intelligent,” the King says, “just tell me the dream and then give me its interpretation; and if you don’t do it, it will be your final act; and I will see to it that you no longer deceive people.” Daniel quickly realizes that this is a serious situation. The four Hebrew children are now included in that group, and they too will lose their lives. Here, therefore, as in every other situation, they must have the intervention of God. Daniel does a wise thing. He tells Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael what has happened so that “they might seek the mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret” (Dan 2:18). We are not always going to know in every situation presented to us by culture exactly what is good and what is not. We often have to make decisions about that which is not quite clear. These decisions will be neither black nor white but will be in the gray zone. The central thing that we need to understand in responding to these situations as the church of God is that we dare not proceed on our own recognizance. We must seek the face of God, and the four wisest men in all of Babylon do exactly that. They come before God.

Accentuate the Superiority of God's Ways

Finally, not only did they appropriate the wisdom of the host culture, avoid theological, moral, and spiritual compromise, and acknowledge their need of God, but they then accentuated the superiority of God's ways; and they did it openly and to anybody who might hear them. Listen to Dan 2:19-23:

Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness and light dwells with Him. I Thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand.

So, as you face the eccentricities of the cultural circumstances, some of you will face those continually here. Others of you will be on a mission field somewhere, and like the Hebrew children you will find yourself in the midst of a strange culture. Appropriate every bit of its wisdom including the language, the *lingua franca* of the area. Having appropriated that knowledge and wisdom, avoid the theological, moral, and spiritual compromises that will be there, acknowledge your need of the intervention of God, and then accentuate the superiority of God's ways.

The Active Response of the Hebrew Children

Well, how exactly did this play itself out? What actions can we see from these Hebrew children as all of this develops?

They Interceded for Their Captors

First of all, they demonstrated mercy toward those that were deceived by interceding for them. Look in Dan 2:24: "Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: 'Four of us know the secret, *butcher the rest of them*, and we'll live.'" Thank goodness that they were not Irish Texans. That is what I would likely have done. I would have said, "Now they got smoked out in the open, they had it coming." But, you know, that would not be godly would it? They did the godly thing. Look what they do. Daniel said to Arioch, "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation" (Dan 2:24). The first thing he does is to intercede for the very people who have been involved in the deception. Do you know that above all else, *that* is the obligation we have to the cultures in which we

find ourselves? Intercession on their behalf. After all, every member of every culture is a man or a woman for whom Christ died. However much deceived they may be, even if they are an active part of the deception themselves, it behooves us to do exactly and precisely what Daniel and his friends did, and that is to intercede on behalf of those who have been deceived.

They Assessed the Limitations of the Culture

Not only did they intercede, but they also candidly assessed the limitations of that culture. In Dan 2:27, we are told, “Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, ‘The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king.’” There are grave limitations in any culture no matter what it may be. There is a glass ceiling for the comprehension of any culture minus the revelation of God.

In Scruton’s book, he has a fascinating chapter entitled “Yoofanasia” that deals with youth and culture. Scruton says, “It must by now be apparent that high culture in our time cannot be understood if we ignore the popular culture which roars all around it. This popular culture is pre-eminently a culture of youth. There is an important reason for this, and my purpose in this chapter is to bring this reason to light—to show why it is that youth and the culture of youth have become so visible, in the world after faith.”¹² He continues, “Among youth, as we know it from our modern cities, a new human type is emerging. It has its own language, its own customs, its own territory and its own self-contained economy. It also has its own culture—a culture which is largely indifferent to traditional boundaries, and traditional loyalties, and traditional forms of learning. Youth culture is a global force, propagated through media which acknowledges neither locality nor sovereignty in their easy-going capture of the airways: ‘one world, one music,’ in the slogan adopted by MTV, a channel which assembles the words, images, and sounds that are the *lingua franca* of modern adolescents.”¹³ He goes on,

Pop culture is the spontaneous response to this situation—an attempt to provide easy-going forms of social cohesion, without the costly rites of passage that bring moral and emotional knowledge. It is a culture which has demoted the aesthetic object, and elevated the advert in its place; it has replaced imagination with fantasy and feeling by kitsch; and it has destroyed the old forms of music and dancing, so as to replace them with a repetitious noise, whose invariant harmonic and rhythmic textures sound all about us, replacing the dialect of tribe with the grammarless murmur of the species, and drowning out the unconfident stutters of the fathers as they trudge away toward extinction.¹⁴

¹²Scruton, *Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture*, 105.

¹³Ibid., 105.

¹⁴Ibid., 121.

Needless to say, Scruton does not have a real high view of modern youth culture and is perhaps a bit overboard, but not too much in his ultimate assessment. Now, Daniel and his friends did not hesitate to say that there are serious limitations. The present situation in which they cannot determine the dream of the king nor interpret it only bears ample testimony to the limitations of the Babylonian culture.

They Boldly Affirmed the Adequacy of God

They did one more thing: They boldly affirm the adequacy of God in a courage borne of faith. Though the Babylonians had failed, Daniel says, “But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these” (Dan 2:28). Daniel then outlines the dream and gives the interpretation thereof. Notice what he says there, “There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets.” This statement makes an absolute claim for revelation. God opens what cannot be known to man by simple investigation, and through divine revelation, he makes himself known.¹⁵ Those kinds of things are repeated in Dan 3:16-17, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are about to encounter a fearful heat wave. They are called to give an account to Nebuchadnezzar, and they say to him, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (3:16-17). Their words and actions exhibit a holy boldness in that culture. Yes, they appropriated all that could be known in the culture, but they were not afraid to stand against that which was unholy and ungodly.

¹⁵One of my favorite stories of history concerns a people that many of you will not have heard about. They were called the Karaite Jews. The Karaite Jews still exist today. There are not many of them, about 5,000 worldwide, and most of them live in the Holy Land. At one time during the middle ages, the Karaite Jews represented about forty percent of all Judaism, and were especially prominent in Spain. I like the Karaite Jews because they were famous for their rejection of the Rabbinate. They did not believe that the work of the Rabbis carried the same weight as Holy Scripture. They accepted the concept later formulated as *Sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone in faith and practice. Just this year a new book has been issued by the Karaite Judaistic society in New York. In describing their position, they say, “A central tenet of our religion is the belief that Yahweh is concerned about creation. Yahweh was not content to establish creation, stand back and observe it from afar. He is intimately involved with and concerned about the world he has invested so much of himself in. The Torah is the ultimate expression of Yahweh’s concern for his creation. Through it, Yahweh has reached out to us from beyond the gap of our incomprehension to communicate his will in a concrete and unambiguous manner.” One thing I would do is to add the New Testament to this statement, but the fact is that in their commitment to God’s revelation in the Torah, the Karaite Jews have it right. Cf. Paige Patterson, review of *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding*, by Fred Astren, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 241-42.

A Concluding Challenge

In the book of Daniel, we see how the Hebrew children reacted and responded to their culture. What we actually have is testimony after testimony in the book to the recognized superiority of those who worship the God of Israel. The community looks at them and cannot help but acknowledge their superiority. In Dan 5:11ff, we find this conclusion. Belshazzar's feast is underway in chapter five, and no one can read the writing that has been written on the wall.¹⁶ Here, once again, the wisdom of the host culture plays out. But, the queen has a memory, and she says, "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation" (Dan 5:11-12). By that time, the culture had raged on, but everybody knew that in a desperate situation, you had better call Daniel. He was the one who had the obvious wisdom and anointing of God.

In his *Company of the Committed*, Trueblood recounts, "When the great Timothy Dwight took over the presidency of Yale college not one student would admit publicly faith in Christ. When Dwight ended his presidency twenty-two years later, in 1817, the entire intellectual climate of the college had changed: it changed because Dwight did something about it."¹⁷ I conclude by challenging you neither to sit back in constant criticism of the culture nor to imbibe it uncritically, but rather, to commit yourself as Timothy Dwight did, to change the culture on behalf of the Lord God, and to make it different forever.

¹⁶For many years among scholars, the figure of Belshazzar was thought to be a part of Hebrew mythology, because he did not occur in any of the Babylonian records. In any university in the world today, if a matter is mentioned only in Scripture, then it can't be true, it must be Hebrew mythology. That's almost a given. That was still the case until some nosy archeologists began to uncover ancient Babylon, and when they did, they found inscriptions in the wall of Babylon, and Belshazzar showed up. In fact, this discovery clarified some things, because as it turns out, Belshazzar was never actually the King. You see, there is a wonderful expression here, when Daniel is told that if he can read the "handwriting on the wall," Belshazzar says that he would make him "third ruler in the land." Now, Daniel, don't buy it. If you're going to read it, it has to be number two, not number three. Belshazzar could not give him number two, because he was number two. It works out that Nabonidus was the actual King, but he was a scholar King and he was particularly an archeologist and he was off digging in an archeological ruin at that very time when Belshazzar's feast occurred and the fall of Babylon to Cyrus.

¹⁷Trueblood, *Company of the Committed*, 6.