

Wisdom Actors, part 2

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In the controversial biblical book of Daniel, mischievous exegesis has limited our view to ?Daniel the prophet and apocalypticist,? ignoring ?Daniel the statesman? and what we can learn from him about the wisdom tradition. It's fascinatingly instructive. Daniel the statesman exhibits many ideas and norms of the wisdom tradition lived maturely in political life during his long and distinguished political career as a devote Yahwist in pagan Babylonia. (See the summary review of the wisdom literature for an introduction to these ideas and norms.) The features covered in this article explore Daniel's education in wisdom, his religious belief, his attitude toward his Chaldean colleagues, his sticking points, and his style of communication to kings and top government officials.

Caveat: I use the words ?the state? and ?politics? in this article in a general and loose sense, simply as a shorthand for the organizing and governing that must take place among a large group of people, even in ancient times, if there is to be domestic order not chaos. In other words, I do not mean the modern inventions of the state and politics that have been with us in the West since fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe.

This article is meant to be used with [The Wisdom Tradition - See With New Eyes](#) and [Wisdom Actors, part 1](#), as well as [Wisdom Words](#).

Daniel the Statesman and Anticipatory Witness

His education, religion, politics, sticking points, and style]

by Charles Strohmer

First things first: placement of the book. Scholars usually place the Book of Daniel among a class of writings known as apocalyptic literature (from the Greek apokalypsis: to uncover; to disclose; bring revelation). This literature is believed by many Christians and Jews to convey revelations about the kingdom of God and the end of the world. The literature abounds with bizarre visions, puzzling symbolism, and supernatural creatures and events, and it includes the New Testament's Book of Revelation as well as long passages in the Old Testament such as Isaiah 24-27. Daniel, the main political actor in the book that bears his name, has therefore typically been identified as an apocalypticist.

In the Christian faith Daniel is also considered a prophet and the book is always found in a section of the Christian Bible called The Prophets, probably because Daniel had insight from God into the apocalyptic revelations. In the Jewish Scriptures, however, the book is placed with The Writings, which include books of wisdom literature, such as Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and books such as Ruth, Esther, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, which include, but are not limited to, many political narratives whose actors were trained in the wisdom tradition.

Neither Daniel the apocalypticist nor Daniel the prophet will be our focus, here. But Daniel the political actor and statesman. When we plumb the depths of this often ignored aspect of his life through the lens of wisdom we can gain much insight about the way of wisdom in the halls of power.

Daniel's political career

Daniel, a Jewish youth taken into exile to Babylon, eventually rose to a highly distinguished political career among elite officials in Babylon, where he served at the highest levels of government throughout a long tenure (successive administrations) and was known as the wisest of the wise. The secret of his renown can be traced to what the text calls his penetrating gifts of wisdom and insight, which were recognized early on by his tutors at the king's college in Babylon, gifts that were recognized by the king himself when Daniel sat finals before the king.

The graduate was proclaimed to be ?ten times better? than the other king's counselors in ?every matter of wisdom and understanding {hokma bina} about which the king questioned them? (Daniel 1:20). (Bina in 1:20 and elsewhere in the book can be translated

?insight.? I prefer the couplet ?wisdom and insight? because ?insight? seems to me to bring out from bina what our contemporary ears need to get a feel for when thinking about the quality of Daniel's wisdom, which is a feature of his political counsel runs through the entire book. For some basic help with Hebrew words, see [Wisdom Words](#) on this site. For some help with the relation of wisdom to insight and several other key ideas in the literature, see [The Historic Wisdom Tradition and Its Literature: A Summary Review](#), under the subhead ?defining wisdom.? [Editor's note: All Hebrew words in this article, such as *hokma*, *bina*, and *maskil* are spelled with their diacritical marks.]

Daniel's wisdom stands out

Daniel stands out to his tutors, to the kings, and to the royal court because he seems to them to possess the quality of something other than even a heightened intuitive capacity for wisdom, such as is implied in Ahithophel's *esa*, council (2 Samuel 16:23; see [Wisdom Actors](#), part 1). And in fact the narrative itself attributes Daniel's wisdom as being from God (1:17), which even the kings, and at least one of their consorts, acknowledge, albeit through their own religious lens. For instance, during an sudden and unexpected political muddle that gets the best of King Belshazzar and his inner circle of wise councilors, the Queen of Babylon suggests to they ought to consider sending for Daniel, for, she says, he is a *maskil* whose wisdom (*hokma*) derives from the ?spirit of the holy gods? (5:11). Her understanding is similar to Nebuchadnezzar's, who recognizes in Daniel ?the spirit of the holy gods? (4:8). Daniel seems to be a political actor in a special elite of *maskil* (or *hakamim*) in the Babylonian government.

Use of the word *maskil* is significant. It is a somewhat technical term to describe a special class of advisors within a larger group. Its meaning in Daniel is a bit cloudy but with a little effort it may be seen. During his Babylonian education Daniel showed ?aptitude for every kind of learning (1:4; ?learning? is *hokma*: ?wisdom?), and by the time he was graduated he had gained ?knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning ? (1:17; ?learning? = *hokma*). The words translated ?aptitude? and ?understanding? in these verses come from the Hebrew root word *skl*, for: understand, see, make wise, act with (or have) insight. The word is similarly word found in 5:11-12 and 14, on the lips of Babylonian queen just mentioned, and in 9:22, it is used by the angel Gabriel: ?Daniel, I have come to give you insight (*skl*).? The word is also translated as ?wise? in 11:33: ?those who are wise will instruct many.? Old Testament scholar William McKane therefore concludes, that ?Daniel? is a *maskil* ?who can give insight? (McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men*, p. 100).

I will have more to say about Daniel as a *maskil*. But first I want to point out the significance of several other key words in the text, especially in 1:4, 17, and 20, for it would leave a big gap in understanding Daniel as a political actor in the wisdom tradition if I were to ignore them completely. These additional words, along with the others already noted (previous paragraph) actually play quite an important role beyond their individual meanings. To show that, here are those words as translated in the King James Bible (KJB), which for this exercise I find a bit more revealing than some of the more recent translations, such as the NIV. So here are those terms from the KJB, including the ones just quoted in the previous paragraph, but which the NIV translates differently. Verse 4: skillful, wisdom, gifted, knowledge, understanding, science, learning, tongue. Verse 17: knowledge, skill, learning, wisdom, understanding. Verse 20: wisdom, understanding.

Now, you can breathe easy. I'm not going to explicate these terms, here. That is not necessary for our purposes. What does need saying, however, is that their consociation in Daniel reminds us that the wisdom literature reveals the close, perhaps essential, affinity of wisdom to other core human concerns. What I wrote in the two-part summary review, that perhaps you can't have one without the others, bears repeating here: ?Like love, faith, and other ultimate human concerns, always there seems to be something more going with wisdom than any one or two meanings can denote. This seems clear from the literature, where words for 'wisdom' are in many passages intertwined with the words for 'insight,' 'knowledge,' 'understanding,' and 'skill.' Evidently, it takes a family. As anyone who has played around with the meanings and uses of those words in the Hebrew knows, there is a many-sidedness to wisdom, a multi-dimensionality, the precludes arriving at a neat definition.?

Long story short, and I think this will become clear as we move through this article, from what I understand, Daniel's classification as *maskil* is but another way of explaining that his wisdom-based training and service in government places him squarely in the class of officials and advisors that other books of the Bible call the *hakamim*. Further, from the narrative Daniel seems to be a political actor in a special elite of *maskil* (or *hakamim*) in the Babylonian government. A religious reason for this is given in the text, for his insight, as everyone admits, even Daniel himself, is attributed to God (e.g., 2:28). But there is also a political reason given, which begins with his education and training.

Education and training

After the king of Babylon had captured Jerusalem, Daniel and three of his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, all Israelite youth of noble lineage, were exiled to Babylon to be tutored in the "language and literature of the Babylonians" (1:3-5). Evidently they showed clear promise, being chosen because they showed "aptitude for every kind of learning [hokmâ], [were] well informed, [and] quick to understand" (1:4). As the KJB puts it, they were "skillful in all wisdom, gifted in knowledge, and understanding science." I have written briefly elsewhere about educational aspects of wisdom, but in Daniel 1:3-5, 17, and 20, some information about the curriculum of the four Israelite youth is provided. Of this, McKane writes that it "illustrates well the close connections of old wisdom with the educational discipline prescribed for those who would aspire to positions of responsibility in the state" (Prophets and Wise Men, p. 40).

Why the four seemed to have shown promise is not mentioned, but it is worth noting, given the proliferation of temple schools, both in Israel and the surrounding nations, that Daniel and his friends may have excelled as students in Jerusalem before Ashpenaz, their head tutor in Babylon, singled them out. As members of the Jewish aristocracy, the four youth had probably been well educated in Jerusalem, and many temple schools trained students not only in their nation's cultic tradition but also in what we call subjects of the liberal arts. It probably included the kind of broad-based studies ("aptitude for every kind of learning") that Ashpenaz (a sar who is the king of Babylon's chief court official) recognized as qualifying them for the privileged tutoring requisite for holding high-level positions of political power in the Babylonian royal court.

It is not clear from the text if the four friends carried "college degrees" from Jerusalem or if their education in Babylon began with "college" or "post-grad" studies. It does seem clear that they first had to test for entrance requirements into the program in order "to serve in the king's palace" (1:4). (As far as I know, there is no scholarship that affirms what I am speculating about their training in a Jerusalem temple school, but based upon what I have learned from my research about such schools, it gives us a somewhat believable scenario, rather than, say, the more unlikely one that these four friends were randomly chosen by Ashpenaz.) Ashpenaz has marked Daniel and his three friends as standout scholars, perhaps from "Jerusalem College," and admits them to a specialized course of tutored studies at "King's University" in Babylon.

Wherever they began scholastically in Babylon, and whatever their path to it in Israel, the language of the text suggests broad-based studies. Which entailed, what, exactly? The text is unspecific, but the phrase "the language and literature of the Babylonians," which is Ashpenaz's commission for them from the king himself, provides some clues. Here, again, the KJB is helpful, using the term "Chaldeans" rather than "Babylonians" to translate Daniel 1:4, and elsewhere in the book. Louis Hartman, former professor of Semitics at Catholic University of America, notes that "the Chaldeans" of Daniel 1:4 qualifies the phrase "the language and literature" and therefore does not mean the Babylonian population in general, as it does in Daniel 5:30 and 9:1, with its mixed and conquered peoples. Rather, it is a reference to those who were skilled in what Hartman calls "the well-known omen literature of ancient Mesopotamia" (Louis F. Hartman, "Daniel," The Jerome Biblical Commentary, 1968, p. 449). Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitzsch weigh in with this. The "Chaldeans" in this context is not being used synonymously for the inhabitants of the kingdom of Babylon. It is being used "in a more restricted sense" to describe a class of "Babylonish priests and learned men or magi," and "frequently [for] the whole body of the wise men in Babylon" (Keil and Delitzsch, "Daniel," Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 9, p. 74).

The use of "Chaldean," then, in Daniel 1:4, apparently depicts a special class of officials within Babylonian governance and may help to explain the use of maskil to denote Daniel as among a privileged elite within that class, though on this latter point I am speculating. Whatever the case may be, Ashpenaz has marked Daniel and his three friends as standout scholars, perhaps from "Jerusalem College," and admits them to a specialized course of tutored studies at "King's University" in Babylon. It took three years to complete, included the higher education necessary for holding government office, they were graduated with honors, and the text indicates that the four had divine favor upon their studies (1:17).

Chaldean curriculum

Of the specific course work assigned to Daniel for his education into the wisdom and political ranks of the Chaldeans, we may only approximate. Certainly he studied the Chaldean equivalent to today's political science and international relations, though it would not have been "secular," as it is today, but steeped in Babylonian religious myth. This would have meant going through a course of higher education that no card-carrying Evangelical today would entertain! Daniel would have been required to study what today is

frequently called esoteric, irrational, or occult fields. This is a controversial subject and we cannot spend a lot of time on it, here. But a few words seem appropriate.

It has been argued by some Christians that Daniel, a devout believe in Yahweh, would never have engaged in such studies because Yahweh, in no uncertain terms through Moses and the prophets, had condemned participation in occult practices. On the other hand, it is a fact of that ancient history that astrology, divination, magical customs, and the telling of the future through dream interpretation were professions integral to the functioning of royal courts and kings' governments. Training in the irrational sciences, then, would have been as essential for anyone wishing to qualify for high-level government posts in Babylon as courses in political science and international relations are necessary today for securing university teaching positions.

The sarcastic polemic against the religious aspect of the 'Chaldean' government of Babylon in Isaiah 47 (KJB), indicates, at the very least, just how crucial the irrational sciences were to the shaping of policies by the central government. What today we call astrologers were in particular key government functionaries in many old-world nations. Their opinions (readings of the stars and then planets) were turned in to their kings as commonly and normally as reports today are received by a President or a Prime Minister from a cabinet secretary. It therefore seems to me that the argument that Daniel never would have participated in such studies cannot be supported, for it is precisely within this context that he rises to a 'high position' (2:48), most probably to what today we would call a cabinet post, which may have enabled him to find appointments for his three friends.

There is an crucial difference, however, between learning the literature and adopting the religious elements and practices mingled with it. From the steadfast Jewish faith of the four friends, which at times put them in jeopardy of the lives (see below), it is clear that they stood aloof from the Babylonian religious practices of their peers and that Daniel's guidance, in particular, came from his deep reliance on 'the God in heaven who reveals mysteries' (2:28). Keil and Delitzsch frame this in the language of wisdom. Daniel, they conclude, 'needed to be deeply versed in the Chaldean wisdom, as formerly Moses was in the wisdom of Egypt (Acts vii. 22), so as to be able to put to shame the wisdom of this world with the hidden wisdom of God' (K & D, 'Daniel,' p. 83).

So as we explore Daniel's political career more comprehensively, we need to begin by being candid about his education and training for public office. Next, we have a number of instructive clues in the text to assist in understanding his attitude and how it was that he was able to serve in this government, and with such along and distinguished career.

Religion and politics

Let's begin with religion and politics. After all, Daniel, we know from the text, was a person holding deep religious convictions as a devote Jew, yet he rose to the highest offices of political influence in Babylon. How is this possible? How may a person serve in a government that not only doesn't square with his or her religious beliefs but has just conquered your land?

Truth be told, this is much more our question today than it would have been in Daniel's time. That is, we read back into his time our questions and assume they were Daniel's. For instance, one of the biggest, if not the biggest, concerns in the White House and in Washington think tanks since 9/11 has been what the relationship of religion and politics should be in U.S. foreign policy, or if there should be any such relationship at all. Religious scholars and professionals at the highest levels of government have written many books about this. we read back into his time our questions and assume they were Daniel's

To offer but one example, former secretary of state Madeleine Albright wears her heart on her sleeve. 'What role, if any, should religious convictions play in the decisions of those responsible for U.S. foreign policy? But perhaps we should begin by asking why we are even thinking about these questions, given America's constitutional separation of church and state. And haven't we long since concluded that is a mistake, in any case, to mix religion and foreign policy? I had certainly thought so.' (Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 2006, p. 6. Also see books on this topic by scholars such as Scott Thomas, Douglas Johnston, and others in the Bibliography.)

Officials in Daniel's time did not need to process a worldview shift in order to consider the relationship between religion and the states as crucial. We today in the West don't have much we can say to them about this. But they have a lot to teach us. Even old-world Israel's constitutional 'king-prophet-priest' separation of powers gave that nation a political structure in which religion played a central role. The basic questions we struggle with today in a 'secular' West about the interplay of religion, the state, and

international relations were not their questions.

As I wrote about Ezra the priest and shuttle diplomat, a question during that time about whether a devoutly religious person could serve in foreign government would seem silly, like today hearing your neighbor ask what electricity is for. In the collective worldview of that time and region, you could not separate or marginalize the state or international relations from religious issues, interests, and actors. It all went together for them like soup and water. So the questions the devout Daniel and his three Jewish colleagues asked, and the questions that their Chaldean colleagues asked, were: 'Where will I draw the line as a religious person serving in government?' And, here, much can be learned from the text.

Sticking point about food

The informative narratives of several religious sticking point issues are instructive in this regard. At great potential cost to their lives, Daniel and his three Jewish colleagues dig their heels in and say: 'This far will we go, but no farther.'

The text indicates that soon after the four friends enter their apprenticeships, 'Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way' (1:8-10). Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah also felt the same way (v. 11) and Daniel becomes the group's spokesperson on the issue. This sticking point probably would have been rooted in their Jewish religious conviction about food intake, but the decision meant a huge risk, both for the four friends and their don, Ashpenaz, who even asks Daniel to consider changing his mind. After all, he explains, I could lose my head over this.

From the use of the word 'defile,' which is a seriously judgmental value-laden word, it is possible to speculate that there might have been quite a heartfelt discussion taking place between tutor and pupil about the contradictions in Daniel's mind between the king's pantry and Jewish dietary laws. If we also assume that Ashpenaz understood that, which seems likely to me, given his education as head tutor, well, I for one, would quite like to have been sitting in on that conversation. And there seems to be some slight hint in the narrative that Ashpenaz won the early rounds of debate. This, too, makes sense to me. After all, even though Daniel held this strong religious conviction, I can imagine that as a young man recently arrived at the king's college, he was no match in this argument with his tutor. Or it may have been that Ashpenaz simply put his foot down and said 'We're not going there! You want to get me killed?'

But something took place between verses ten and eleven to convinced Daniel to shift his focus from argument to experiment and from Ashpenaz to a person the English translators call 'a guard' (v. 11). The original language, however, indicates that he was more of a butler, which makes sense considering that this is the man to whom Daniel is proposes a ten-day dietary test. 'Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink,' Daniel explains. 'Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.' When, 'at the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better than any of the young men who ate the royal food,' Daniel and his three friends are placed on the new diet permanently (1:11-14).

Whether this experiment took place behind the back of Daniel's don, the narrative does not indicate. But it shows a wise piece of negotiations, a vital skill for any budding diplomat. And the outcome is a win-win for all the parties. Daniel was not making demands or threats, nor was he seeking just his own interests but mutual gain for all. When his first attempt leaves the problem unresolved to Daniel's liking, he enlists a responsible third party (the butler) as a mediator, puts forth his proposal, and after objective evidence has been determined he will leave the final decision in the hands of the butler. And when the new diet becomes normative for the four young pupils, it has the added benefit of getting Ashpenaz off the hook with the king. As someone has said, diplomacy is the act of letting the other guy have your way.

Sticking points with names

Other sticking points appear in the text. One seems strange. It concerns a choice the four made that went to the heart of their lives, again while at university, and their decision might make some of us balk. Although the four are adamant about their diet, they permit their names to be changed. No big deal? Well, how about if you were being told that you had to change your name in a way that you considered extremely offensive to you as a Christian or a Muslim?

In the story, each of their birth, or Hebrew, names are in various ways associated with characteristics of Yahweh, the God of Israel, but upon entering university their names are formally changed to denote various pagan gods (1:6-7). For instance, Azariah,

whose name in Hebrew means 'the Lord helps,' receives the name Abednego, 'slave of Nego,' as the English translators have it. But many scholars see 'Abednego' as a distortion of 'Arad-nab,' meaning 'servant of Nab,' (a principle god of the Babylonians, thought to have been Nebuchadnezzar's personal god). how about if you were being told that you had to change your name in a way that you considered extremely offensive to you as a Christian or a Muslim?

Daniel, whose name in Hebrew means 'judge of God' (other sources have 'God is my judge,' or 'God will judge'), is given the name 'Belteschazzar,' which was formed from 'Bel,' a word ultimately associated with Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonians. The name is similar to that of Belshazzar, the king of Babylon in Daniel 5. It is unclear what 'Belteschazzar' actually meant, but in common speech it meant 'lord' or 'master,' similar to the way the name of the Canaanite god Baal was used by the Canaanites. 'Bel' was a Babylonian word for 'master' or 'lord.' It is possible that 'Belteschazzar' meant something like 'Bel is my prince.' In Isaiah 46:1, Bel (Marduk) is paired with Nebo (Nab) and both are departing helplessly from Babylon into exile. (Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, 2000, p. 162.)

You have to imagine what this would have been like, to have been asked 'you a pious Jew' to submit to having to walk around with that kind of name. Yet Daniel carried it in the government, where he had to respond to it all the time. Whenever he was asked, 'What's your name, sir?', this devout Jew had to reply, 'Bel is my prince' is my name.' Just think what that meant to his soul as a pious Jew. It would have been a sticking point for many godly Israelites of the time, for whom any association with a foreign god was a religious bugaboo. Antipathy toward other gods was deeply inbred in the collective unconscious of the people. Yet Daniel, who is certainly aware of this powerful historic connotation and its religious implications, makes not a peep of protest. It does not seem to be a sticking point for him.

The change of names, however, was not only a personal religious compromise. It was politics by another name. It meant, at least symbolically to the royal court, a changed national allegiance. Their Hebrew names went to the heart of their Israelite identity and national allegiance, a fundamental point whose implications would have been clear to their tutors and to every other Chaldean official. If Daniel wanted to be a subject of the king of Babylon and an official in the royal court, no way would he be permitted to answer the question 'What's your name?' with 'Judge of God!' The changed names therefore served an important political purpose. If these four budding Jewish scholars were to be fully integrated into Chaldean officialdom, lingering allegiance to Israelite nationalism would have to go away, at least symbolically. The new names served that purpose, and were probably were part of an official ceremony in which the four swore allegiance to Babylon as kind of naturalized citizens (K & D, 'Daniel,' vol. 9, p. 79).

Sticking point about Chaldean esoterica

Returning to Daniel's Babylonian education, the text does not indicate how this devote Jew kept a clear conscience about some of the subjects he was required to take, yet he went through the course work, took it on the nose, and at the end was graduated summa cum laude. No doubt other devout Jews would have said, 'I'd rather die than go through that education.' And that for them would have been a matter of conscience, their sticking point. Daniel, however, whatever his reasons, does not seem fussed about it. He will not only go through it but he will ace it and get on a fast track into a career at the highest levels of government.

Quite unlike his Chaldean colleagues, however, Daniel does have a sticking point about the practice Chaldean esoterica. He will not rely on astrology or on any other esoteric practice of the Babylonian royal court for guidance. Daniel will rely on inspiration from God. As scholars of religious apologetics will say, there is a marked difference between studying astrology to practice it and studying astrology to learn what you're up against.

Concerning dream interpretation, Daniel does not oppose it, but he refuses to rely on Chaldean religious practice to interpret dreams, visions, and other bizarre occurrences, such as 'the writing on the wall.' He is always open to interpreting the kings' dreams and visions; after all, it is part of his job description, but in doing so he will rely on the 'God in heaven who reveals mysteries' (2:28; see also 1:17). This is another of those old-world linkages between religion and politics that seems as puzzling to us in the West today as our disbelief on the matter would have seemed to Daniel. Nevertheless, Daniel's overt reliance on God's guidance at turning point moments in his political career earned him favor with the heads of the successive government in which he served. But most pointedly, it marked his 'methodology' off from those of the Chaldean esotericists and stood in judgment over theirs. Their sticking points are essential to sustaining their freedom of conscience in political life and government service.

We see, then, that their sticking points are essential to sustaining their freedom of conscience in political life and government service. And as John Peck and I wrote about Daniel, in *Uncommon Sense*: "Here's a person who could go along with the heathen world he was in, at least over education and the sort of name he would carry, but not about food... This is not just fascinating. It's meant to be instructive for us today in our pluralist situations, where time and time again, what for one person is a godly compromise, for another may not be possible" (p. 81). More than that, however, the Book of Daniel leaves open the possibility that even close political colleagues who are members of the same temple or church or mosque, for that matter people whom you might assume would hold similar convictions about the same issues, events, and decisions may not. Two really strange narratives (I find them so, anyway) concerning sticking points that meant risking life and limb indicate this.

Different sticking points among colleagues

Even among close colleagues of the same temple working in the in same government, sticking points may differ, even on life-threatening issues. Although Daniel and his three friends agreed on issues of food, names, and curriculum), Daniel may have had quite a different conscience than his three friends regarding a pretty straightforward matter of Jewish religious allegiance.

The story is set within a controversial policy that gets scant attention in the form of what in our time is known as the famous childhood Sunday school Tale of the Fiery Furnace. In brief, Daniel 3 recounts the religious dedication of an immense image of gold made by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who then summoned every conceivable government official (3:2-3) to the plain of Dura to worship the image. Anyone who did not worship the image, the policy shockingly stipulated, was to be bound hand and foot and thrown alive into a blazing furnace.

Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah) seem to have been trying to make themselves scarce, who can blame them, but eventually they are dragged to the plain, brought into the pagan worship service, and commanded to bow before the huge image. The king known for his fits of hubris is enraged when the three refuse. They are given a final chance, say No!, and are then tied up and thrown alive into a blazing furnace. The miracle is that they are rescued by a fourth man, who appears in the flames with them, and who looks like a son of the gods, according to Nebuchadnezzar, who has witnessed the whole scene (3:25).

It is worth asking, where was Daniel? What was he doing? If he was present on the plain of Dura, why was he not thrown into the fiery furnace? Did he bow before the idol? Perhaps he was lucky and was out of the country on a diplomatic mission. If so, when he was back in-country, we have no indication in the text that the policy had been rescinded. It may have been. But if it was still in effect, Daniel as a government official was required by law to worship the idol. What did he do? Was he present? Did he bow? The answer is left completely open in the text. Maybe this was not a sticking point issue for him.

Apparently, his three friends returned the favor, in an episode that also hearkens back to another famous childhood Sunday school lesson, Daniel in the Lions' Den. King Darius had decreed that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to {Darius}, shall be thrown into the lions' den? (6:7). The new policy was irrevocable, seemingly straightforward, and effected the entire citizenry, but behind the scenes it had been a carefully planned and well-executed trap set specifically for Daniel by his political enemies.

Darius had organized his sprawling kingdom around the rulership of 120 satraps, which were various sorts of high officials who exercised civil, military, and political authority within their districts and provinces (satrapies). Within this national structure, the satraps reported to three presidents (cârêk, Chaldean; administrators, NIV), one of whom was Daniel. As a member of the ruling triumvir, Daniel had distinguished himself by his exceptional qualities and the king sought to promote him over the whole kingdom, a position that would make the other presidents subordinate to him (6:3).

The royal prayer edict that threatened Daniel's life had been instigated in a fit of envy by the other presidents and some high officials who bristled over Daniel's pending appointment to the highest political office in the land by the king. The edict appears to have been a last resort for these officials, who had placed him under surveillance to try to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs? (6:4). Unable to find any legal way of impeachment, even after sifting through Babylonian law with a fine tooth comb, his political enemies decide on a religious initiative. We will never find any basis for charges against this man, they conclude, unless it has something to do with the law of his God? (6:5).

It does not appear from the text that these officials were motivated by religious animus but by pure political envy. With true Machiavellian overtones, they were simply seeking to get Daniel out of the way. By hook or by crook, they would have Daniel's nomination to the highest office in the land withdrawn, or worse. Eventually they find a religious way, contrive a law they know cannot be overruled, and present it under false pretenses to the king for his signature. Although couched in a concern for a religious interest, it's an act of sheer political expediency: "Anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den" (6:7). Daniel's political enemies know that he holds a deep public religious conviction about praying to Yahweh, and they correctly assume that he cannot possibly obey this law. Where are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Why are they not also being fed to hungry lions?

What is this Babylonian president, a devout Jew, to do? He could make a religious compromise. After all, his life was suddenly at stake. Having been promised the top government position, Daniel might have thought: if I'm dead I won't be of any use to anyone. Or he might have said: I can do a thirty day fast from public prayer to Yahweh and just pray privately; I'll just ask God to wink at it during the month when I pray to the king (compare 2 Kings 5:18). On a cynical note, he might have thought: I won't be able to use my inspired wisdom for the greater good of the people if I'm dead, so I'll do what's necessary to get this top job and have that much wider influence; and won't that fool my political enemies when I pray to the king! For many devout believers any of these options might have been taken in the face of imminent death.

But not for Daniel. The officials appear as a united front before the king, lay out the policy (without mentioning Daniel), the law passes, and Daniel decides he is willing to die. He even goes out of his way to ensure that he is seen in public prayer to God. He is then arrested and sentenced to die in the lions' den.

Question. Where are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Why are they not also being fed to hungry lions? What were they doing? Nowhere are they mentioned in this narrative. Were they out of the country? Perhaps they engaged in private prayer to God. Even so, they still would have been required by the new law to pray publicly to the king for thirty days. Did they?

Style of communication

So far, then, we can safely conclude that these four devout Israelites have some pretty serious religious sticking points about policy, and that they reveal, at least to us in our time, some pretty curious ways in which they exercise freedom of conscience. In this regard, these narratives remind me, on the one hand, of principles for obeying one's conscience, and on the other hand, of allowing others freedom of conscience on negotiable issues, as spelled out in the New Testament Epistle to the Romans, chapter 14.

Let's now move from how the four devout Jews handled delicate religious and political interests to the issue of the aesthetics, or style, of communication. This is not an area that most people give any thought to, but it is essential in the field of international relations, foreign policy, and diplomacy. Further, in areas such as diplomacy, negotiations, international mediation, and suchlike, I have become convinced that the agency of wisdom insists on a particular manner of expression.

"Style matters in foreign policy," writes seasoned foreign policy advisor Dennis Ross (Statecraft: And How to Restore America's Standing in the World, 2007, p. 6). Ross has had vast foreign policy experience in the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, and he now serves as a high-level advisor to President Obama on Middle East policy. In Statecraft, he offers several examples of the importance of style in diplomacy and international relations, contrasting the marked differences in foreign policy style between President George W. Bush and that of his father, President George H. W. Bush, and the implications the difference had on U.S. relations overseas. "Style is part of an approach to foreign policy," Ross concludes. "Style gets at how we shape the instruments at our disposal for promoting the substance of policies (p. 11).

The significance of diplomatic style, of course, is often most noticed in verbal language and in the way words are used, especially between great contrasts, such as when American and British leaders speak about the "special relationship" between the U.S. and Britain, or when the George W. Bush administration paced North Korea, Iraq, and Iran in an "axis of evil." But there are many other issues essential to diplomatic style, such as body language, right down to the ways in which ambassadors, for instance, dress for official meetings. the agency of wisdom insists on a particular manner of expression

Is a foreign minister from an Arab country appearing at the White House dressed in a suit and tie or in a traditional white cotton

dishdashah and three-piece head covering? What lapel pin is a U.S. Secretary of State wearing? You may chuckle, but Albright has written an entire book about it (Read My Pins). Style and symbolism, and much more besides, will evoke meanings beyond use of words that will be clear to the elite, and they may influence the direction of talks, the corners turned, the outcomes possible for a given situation. Right down to the lapel pin.

A caveat. I recognize that the field of the aesthetics of communication is itself mystifying, and that this is just an article, not a book, you're reading, so we're limited, here, in how much can be said. Further still, the aesthetics of wisdom communication may be unfamiliar territory, indeed. But perhaps we can make a beginning. Mind you, I'm merely offering some of my own findings and (tentative) conclusions, but I think that in Daniel the statesman and diplomat we have some good clues about manner and tone of communication consistent with the international aspect of the wisdom tradition. It underlines Ross's point that style matters.

Traditional prophetic style

I have chosen to do this by way of contrast. It seems pretty clear to me that the Bible presents us with different styles of communication, depending on who is speaking, what the subject is, and what is being said about that subject. To now narrow the focus, it seems clear from my research into the wisdom literature that the style of the prophets stands apart from the style of ?the wise? when either are addressing politics, governments, international relations, and foreign policies. That is, they way officials who are among the maskil, the hakamim, the soperim, or the sarim talked among themselves or to their counterparts in other nations is quite unlike the way the prophets of Israel spoke their messages. I believe this marked differentiation indicates two kinds of communication, each having their own style consistent with the purpose and function of each tradition. One is consistent with the Old Testament prophetic calling, the other with government officials.

To generalize for a minute about the style of the prophetic tradition, it is, for one thing, confrontative in ways that the style of the wisdom tradition is not. To put it crudely, the traditional prophetic style, as we see it expressed in the Old Testament, is free to go for the juggler, which it frequently does. A long passage in Isaiah 47, for instance, drips with sarcasm. Although you need to read the entire chapter to get a good feel for this, I note a few lines here: ?Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne... Take millstones and grind flour... Sit in silence, go into darkness... Now then, listen, you wanton creature...?we can hardly imagine Daniel, the epitome of the old-world hakamim, ever using such a style of communication

That the indictment, itself, never mind its style of language, is directed at policymakers is important but is not our subject, here, though it is worth mentioning that they have enacted such unjust domestic laws and international policies that the policymakers and their nation, Babylon, will be severely judged. Prophetic indictments in the Old Testament are in fact usually addressed to such policymakers, whether kings or their officials, whether in Israel or in other nations. In this regard, Isaiah 46-47 give us a biting polemic against the Chaldean hakamim and soperim in Babylon's wayward government.

Consider, too, the inflammatory rhetoric against an Assyrian king for the hubris he has about his foreign policy decisions (Isaiah 10). The prophet taunts and thunders: ?Woe to the Assyrian... [The] Lord, the Lord Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame.? Here's the situation. The first half of Isaiah 10 depicts the superpower Assyria as a club in the hand of Yahweh being used against ?a godless nation.? The king of Assyria, however, with his mighty military have overstepped the bounds of what today might be called a just war. The king and his officials are drunk with colossal self-confidence, the ever-present danger of any superpower.

In the wine of self-intoxication, the King of Assyria ends up priding himself as the maker of world history. As Ze'ev Weisman writes in his Political Satire in the Bible, the prophecy is a biting satirical comment on that hubris. ?The prophet places in the mouth of the king of Assyria, who is the object of his criticism, the very words that make him liable to God's judgment... ?By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom I have understood...' is meant to pour scorn on his delusion that the source of his mastery in the world arena is his strength and his wisdom as a ruler, while in fact he is a tool in the hands of God, the true master of world history? (1998, p. 89).

Of the monstrous hubris of the ruler of Tyre, who claims to be ruling as God, prophetic language declares that a ?ruthless nation? will bring ?you down to the pit, and you will die a violent death? (Ezekiel 28:2, 7-8). All sorts of other examples of inflammatory rhetoric are found in the Old Testament prophetic literature. The sarim of Pharaoh give ?idiotic advice? (McKane, Prophets and

Wise Men, translating Isa. 19:11). The wisdom (hokma) and political counsel (esa) of Edom turn that small nation into ?an object of horror..., as Sodom and Gomorrah? (Jeremiah 49:7, 17-18). ?A sword against the Babylonians!? the prophet yells (Isaiah 50:35) to its officials (sarim) and wise men (hakamim).

These several illustrations are enough to show a normative style of communication in the prophetic tradition. (The style seems reminiscent of the language of Psalm 2:4, which depicts God himself, his forbearance at an end, deriding the hubris of kings.) The prophets felt free to go for the juggler and to employ a style of language befitting that. Now we can hardly imagine Daniel, the epitome of the old-world hakamim, ever using such a style of communication.

Daniel's style

Daniel's manner of expression among his peers and in the royal court contrasts to that of traditional prophetic communication as depicted in the Old Testament. I suppose some could accuse Daniel of waffling, or of ungodly compromise, or of playing both ends against the middle, or of being a Casper milk toast. But none of those arguments fly. After all, as we have seen, the text clearly indicates that Daniel has been willing to die for his beliefs.

Others might suggest that he was a quiet soul, or that perhaps he lacked the skill to engage his political colleagues in a worldview debate over the ultimate dissimilarities between Babylonian and Hebrew worldviews. But neither of those ideas hold water. We know from his education that Daniel had to have been well-versed in the Babylonian worldview, and from that we can assume he would have been on equal footing in any theological or religious debate with his political colleagues. And it is clear from a close reading of the book that he could be bold at times, albeit in his own way, even if we accept that he was usually a quiet fellow. In other words, none of these reasons prevent us from reaching the conclusion that Daniel could have launched bitter polemics or biting sarcasm any time he wanted to. Yet that style of communication from Daniel is nowhere seen in the text. My conclusion is that he did not use that style because he was a trained professional in the wisdom tradition.

Daniel's tone of his communication is different, I believe, because it must be. Like carefully tuned strings on a fine instrument, tone and tradition must agree. The maskil, hakamim, soperim, and the sarim of the old-world Middle East (as far I can discover none were prophets) were appointed by kings to serve as officials in various positions of government to keep the realm and its international relations running as smoothly as possible. (This is, of course, similar today, for professionals and specialists such as cabinet members, ambassadors, diplomats, foreign ministers, negotiators, and others are appointed by presidents or prime ministers to serve in domestic or international politics and governance.) Now, as everyone knows, in order for things to run as smoothly as possible, general agreements among people, and peoples, who are different must be reached for the common good of all concerned.

Such a calling requires its spokespersons to have a manner of communication consistent with reaching such goals. If that normative style of the calling is abused or broken, as would happen if the officials engaged in bitter polemics or biting sarcasm across the table from each other, relations would worsen or completely break down. Daniel's manner of expression among his peers in the royal court is the complete opposite of that. Like carefully tuned strings on a fine instrument, tone and tradition must agree.

As I wrote in the two part summary of the wisdom literature, whether we call it ?common ground, or common good, or human mutuality: the shared concerns of everyday life and the decisions people will make in them as they live and work together is a central interest of the wisdom tradition.? This is the theater in which Daniel the statesman serves and his manner of communication must suit that calling or he is out of a job. A particular style of communication therefore, whether oral or written, seems to be essential to those who were trained professionals in the wisdom tradition. (We can assume that this was part of what Daniel learned under Ashpenaz.)

Beyond tolerance to respect

We have more clues in the Book of Daniel, more than in any other piece of known ancient wisdom literature, as far as I am aware, about the style of wisdom-based communication by high-level government officials in pluralist situations. The book can be divided into two main sections, chapters 1-6 and 7-12. In the latter, Daniel receives several stunning supernatural visitations, apocalyptic revelations, and their interpretations, but none of these are germane to any of the kings or the royal courts in which he is an official. In other words, they are personal to Daniel in the sense that, after receiving these revelations, Daniel is not seen interacting with any of the rulers or any of the wise in any of these administrations. With nary a mention of Daniel having engaged with any royal courts about the revelations and visitations, for all we know none of those kings or officials knew Daniel had them.

It is in the first half of the book where we find Daniel and his three friends interacting with rulers and officials. Their conversations may be about personal issues, such as diet or prayer, or it may be about interpreting dreams or visions, or it may be about dramatic disclosures or personal threats. So it is in the first half of the book that we must look for clues to what I'm calling Daniel's wisdom-based style of communication.

To begin, a small but significant point is the little phrase, "O King, live forever!" It appears many times in the text, used by various figures, as a formal assertion of respect, not unlike today when someone says "Mr. President..." This little tidbit of information is really quite important, especially today, when the word "respect" rarely is used in the media and in society; and when heard in politics, well, everyone knows it means something else.

The word that is bandied about today, almost as a substitute for respect, is "tolerance." But tolerance and respect are not synonyms. To have someone respect you is quite different than merely being tolerated. The latter attitude is a kind of passive endurance taken toward a person one has to put up with but can't do much about. It's not far from condescend, or patronize. Respect, however, engages with the other attentively and courteously, which is harder to work at than merely tolerating the other. Today, however, we are frequently commanded by our betters in politics and elsewhere that we must show tolerance toward the other. I don't want to seem ungrateful for that commandment. Our obedience to it would certainly take us a few good steps back from blowing each other up; but it is a far cry from the respect of others that is needed if we are to work together for common good. tolerance and respect are not synonyms

Christ Seiple, president of the Institute for Global Engagement, has done a lot of thinking about respect. IGE practices relational diplomacy around the world in some pretty hairy situations and has had a number of stunning successes in international negotiations and mediation by helping the parties move in their thinking beyond tolerance of each other to respect. Seiple writes: "If my neighbor ... is created in the image of God just like me, then I need to find a way to respect and love my neighbor as I would myself. Finding the language, logic, and actions that speak to that neighbor can be difficult, but we cannot shirk from the task.... When you get right down to it ... [if] we don't have time to respect our neighbor and to understand and work across our deepest differences, then intolerance, hate, and violence are not far behind." (Dr. Chris Seiple, "IGE: Your Global Neighborhood Weather Station," Web article.) It is easy to forget that people are made in the image of God. This is not something to be tolerated, but respected.

Daniel does respect

Respect for the other is normative in the spirit and tone of Daniel's communication, even when he is delivering the strongest possible medicine, as he does in the narrative depicting "the writing on the wall" at the end of Belshazzar's reign. Having been brought in to interpret the strange writing and having understood its meaning, Daniel suddenly faces a terrible dilemma. The writing on the wall is the king's obituary.

How does this diplomat, then, go about predicting to Belshazzar his own death? The scene in the text is quite detailed (5:13-31), and Daniel is prudent, discreet, and respectful. He even took it upon himself to remind Belshazzar of his father's repentance (his father was Nebuchadnezzar). It seems to me from the text that Daniel not only desired Belshazzar's repentance but was trying to nudge him toward it. The text is silent as to what effect that had on the king, but before he dies, something quite remarkable has transpired in the banquet hall. The king could have had Daniel's head on a platter for predicting his death. Instead, the king clothes Daniel in royal purple, puts a gold chain around his neck, and proclaims him third highest ruler in the kingdom!

We might want to imagine how one of the prophets might have spoken to the king, given the same situation! Some might argue, well, what did you expect, this was the king and so Daniel was just looking out for himself. I don't think so. We have indications that Daniel's style of public communication was consistent.

Of political astrologers and political enemies

During one tense political period in the royal court, Daniel intervenes to save the political astrologers from a death sentence handed down by the king (2:1-47). This is not the attitude of someone who had been merely tolerating this colleagues. Granted, the narrative explains that Daniel's life, too, was on the line (as a member of the wise, not as an astrologer). I could imagine, however, that if he were merely tolerating the astrologers, the king's edict would have given Daniel a perfect opportunity to deconstruct their religious beliefs, and even offer personal testimony that he never relied on astrology for advice.

Such an approach would, I think, have afforded Daniel at least some criterion for trying to talk King Nebuchadnezzar out of the executing him with the astrologers. But Daniel doesn't go there. Instead, he and his three Jewish friends pray for a way out, including for the astrologers (2:18, 24). That act of prayer took a strong faith, because, as everyone in the story has rightly remarked, the king is asking for the kind of insight that is literally impossible for any human being to ever have. God, however, gives Daniel insight, the king is astounded, and he makes Daniel ruler over the entire province of Babylon and over all the wise men (2:48). Somewhat like Jesus before Pilate before his death, Daniel remains silent.

Of that story, we might say Daniel only took that approach because the astrologers were not, in principle, his political enemies (nothing in the book indicates they were). The deceitful policy of the envious officials to trap Daniel into being executed (the story of the lion's den), however, is clearly the work of his political enemies. It's a curious narrative (6:1-23), not only because in the end the tables get turned and it is Daniel's political enemies who can't survive the hungry lions. We do not know if he asked the king to spare their lives. Perhaps he did.

At any rate, the text suggests that the decision about his political enemies was taken completely out of Daniel's hands by the king, who rather abruptly orders their execution. We might want to conclude that Daniel asked the king to put them to death. I don't think so. There is nothing in the entire book even to suggest that Daniel may have copped that attitude, even in an exceptional moment, as this one certainly was. Further, the text does not even denote the most obvious defense. Daniel does not explain to the king ? the one who will execute the judgment on him ? why the law was deceitfully developed and aimed at him (Daniel) personally. Instead, when Daniel learns of the law, he prays (6:10). Somewhat like Jesus before Pilate before his death, Daniel remains silent.

Esprit de corps

Although it is true from the text, and more than implied, that Daniel was gifted by God, trusted in God to the nth degree, and was saved by God, that does not detract from the fact that those who were trained professionals in the wisdom tradition to serve the royal court had an esprit de corps amongst themselves, which Daniel, as a career insider, quite naturally participated in. It would be equivalent to the insider solidarity enjoyed by the equivalent of high-level officials and advisors today, such as those serving in the White House or those who are fellows of political think tanks and so on.

Whether that esprit de corps would have nourished a wisdom-based style of communication or whether the wisdom tradition nourished the esprit de corps is hard to say. One hand probably washed the other. It seems safe to conclude, however, that the esprit de corps that existed among these political officials accounts in some degree for Daniel's style of communication with them.

Given that Daniel was being trained to enter government service alongside all sorts of non-Israelite political officials and ecclesiastical figures, it stands to reason that he would be entering into the established esprit de corps and having to find his own style of expression in it, at least if he were to hoping to enjoy any long-term success. Perhaps it would be similar to a freshman Senator today, or the new member of a Prime Minister's cabinet, finding his or her sea legs.

I also believe that it played a significant role in affording the officials in this close network of pluralistic political relationships an ethos for working together toward common good at the highest levels of state, including international relations, despite their different religious identities. In this we see wisdom's forbearance toward religion (see *The Historic Wisdom Tradition and Its Literature*).

Converting the pagans?

Daniel's career, or at least the text itself, also shows the lack of an approach to other officials that religious people who work outside government might find puzzling. We have no indication from the text that Daniel ever tried to convert the ?pagan? officials to his religion. I believe it would be contradictory to the purpose of the book itself if it were otherwise. For it is a basic fact of life under God that government service is not about making religious converts but about governing society. This is an ancient principle and one that Daniel certainly knew.

The narratives themselves imply this, as we have already seen, when depicting Daniel's approaches toward colleagues who were of faiths other than his. In other words, Daniel in his political career was serving and obeying God's laws and norms for political life. That was his calling. And it did not include making religious conversions, for that is not a function of government service. Of

course, Daniel may have hoped and prayed for conversions privately. He may have even talked to certain Babylonians about it, but that is a different matter and does not concern the Book of Daniel.

The wisdom style

When I read Daniel, then, I see a style of communication much more consistent with the wisdom tradition than the prophetic tradition. I assume this is so because each tradition serves a different purpose. And let me be clear. I mean a different purpose under God. The purpose of the wisdom tradition in government and international relations, as I understand it from its literature, and to very brief and general, is to assist people, and peoples, who are different to work together toward common good, and perhaps even toward human flourishing at times. There must then be a style of communication, whether oral or written, to suit such a teleology. And we in America, I just add but way of editorializing, are not seeing nearly enough of it today!

The normative style of wisdom, then, in government and international relations, does not seek to fuel contentious disputes or even to cross swords over differences in ultimate allegiances (though the wise certainly are aware of them). To think again of contrasts, and perhaps be a bit too general, whereas the job of the Old Testament prophet is to make as wide as possible the gulf of dissimilarities, the job of a statesman like Daniel is to bring diverse parties together on common ground for common good. And I would briefly add that this is equally true for wisdom-based ways of engaging most pluralist situations, including interfaith and multi-faith initiatives. Daniel is being a faithful presence in his political career to a future he anticipates seeing of human flourishing among people who are different.

An aesthetics of communication is essential to the style of any tradition. If we think again of ambassadors, diplomats, international negotiators, or mediators, we can get a feel for what is behind their professional styles. For instance, they must exercise boundless sensitivity to the parties' problems and employ great tact and pacing when working toward an agreement of mutual benefit. To get the parties to Yes, they must demonstrate an objectivity that submerges their own interests to the good of the negotiating parties. They must show themselves evenhanded, gaining the confidence of all sides, while helping the parties see reality as it really is and adjust to it. They must help negotiations to reach midpoints that both sides can accept, often by challenging what Ross calls their comfortable myths. And they must be able to show empathy for the suffering and needs of the parties, helping each side get the other's grievances. In short, they must be diplomatic.

Style matters. In this, today's *hakamim*, and *sopherim* may be likened more to dialecticians than to apologists or polemicists. Imagine the disastrous outcome if foreign ministers met in crises only to vent polemics or engage in apologetics. Imagine the negative downhill spiral into which the world would quickly tumble if today's international negotiators persisted at thundering (or even whispering) polemics against each other across the table. Where would such *diplomatic* initiatives lead? How would officials of diverse governments ever agree on cooperative multilateral policies, treaties, and suchlike? Whereas rulers may want to take their nations to war against each other, their wise advisors will be seeking to find ways to ease tensions and maintain the peace (Prov. 3:17; 16:32; Eccles. 9:13-18). Judicious speech therefore is a style of communication that behooves the wise (*hokm*; Prov. 16:23).

Conclusion

Concentrated in the Book of Daniel, more than in another other book of the Old Testament, or of the wisdom literature (that I am aware of), Daniel, at the very least, offers insight on the general style, behavior, and attitude that seems to have been normative for old-world political and religious actors trained in the wisdom tradition. But there is much more than that occurring.

It is not just that Daniel is an exceptional statesman of his time serving through several administrations. It is not just that Daniel eschews tolerance for respect of the other. It is not just his consistently reconciliatory tone of communication and approach to situations, even to those who were prone to move in quite a different spirit. It is not just that he seeks common good among people who are different. There are any number of officials and advisors who project this kind of image.

Rather, it is that Daniel stands out within the wisdom tradition as a government official and advisor who is known among his peers and the kings to trust God and to rely on God for wisdom. It is on that ground that Daniel lives and moves and speaks and participates within pluralist situations to work toward common good. Daniel has a different starting point than his Chaldean colleagues.

Daniel, then, is a witness in crises of and to the wisdom of God that not only makes the wisdom of the world seem foolish by

comparison but creates new worlds with and for the other, worlds of peaceably cooperative relations out of crises for whosoever will have them. That is the hidden, untapped, lost potential of the wisdom tradition, and we see it in the narratives.

To put it theologically, Daniel is being what I think James Hunter would call a "faithful presence" in his political career to a future of human flourishing that he anticipates among people who are different. That anticipatory witness identifies God in the crisis, sees the One who created and sustains the world by wisdom somehow offering not just the hope of a certain future (in which human beings of all sorts will live peaceably, cooperatively, and collectively), but offering possibilities of some experience of that future created, in miniature, in the here and now, albeit imperfectly, even in Babylon.

I believe this kind of anticipatory witness is central to the purpose and function of the wisdom way under God, today. Where are the research projects to develop this and get it on offer in our international relations and foreign policy?

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