DavarLogos 4.1 (2005): 17-37

THE MEANING OF אַזְדָּא IN DANIEL 2:5, 8 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

Ferdinand O. Regalado
Adventist University of the Philippines, Silang, Cavite, PHILIPPINES
foregalado@aup.edu.ph

Resumen
El estudio se centra en la palabra aramea אַזְדָּא, tratando de determinar si los versículos en Daniel 2:5, 8 afirman de forma explícita que Nabucodonosor olvidó su sueño. Sobre la base de un análisis etimológico y lingüístico de la palabra y, especialmente, de su uso en uno de los papiros arameos de Elefantina, se encuentra que la evidencia desafía la traducción de la KJV "to go away," o "to depart". Un estudio contextual de Daniel 2:5, 8 muestra que el rey habló acerca de la declaración de su decreto y no de un sueño olvidado. Nabucodonosor ocultó su sueño para evitar una tergiversación de la interpretación, porque supuso que habría una conspiración entre sus sabios para derribar su reino.

Abstract
This study focuses on the Aramaic word אַזְדָּא, in order to determine whether or not the verses in Daniel 2:5, 8 clearly claim that Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream. Based on the etymological and linguistic analysis of the word and especially its usage in one of the Elephantine Aramaic papyri, it is found that the evidence challenges the translation of the KJV "to go away," or "to depart." A contextual study of Daniel 2:5, 8 shows that the king spoke of the pronouncement of his decree and that אַזְדָּא did not to the declaration of a forgotten dream. Nebuchadnezzar concealed the dream in order to avoid a twisting of the interpretation because he conjectured that there would be a conspiracy among his wise men to topple his kingdom.

1. INTRODUCTION

The prophet Daniel's unique account of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image has caught the attention and interest of many scholars throughout history. Of particular interest has been the king's surprising statement regarding his seeming lapse of memory of the dream. The text recorded in Daniel 2:5 has posed an interesting semantic problem for translators and scholars. The King James Version (KJV) renders this verse, "The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, 'The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill.'" The phrase, "the thing is gone from me" (Aram. מִלְּתָא מִנִּי אַזְדָּא), is the major issue in this text. From this sentence, some commentators assert that Nebuchadnezzar said that he had forgotten the dream.[1]

[1] Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald, 2000), 25; idem, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Uni-

However, some scholars believe that Nebuchadnezzar did not forget his dream. Louis Hartman and Alexander DiLella, for example, believe that "Nebuchadnezzar had not forgotten the dream. […] He was rather using this device to see how reliable the soothsayers' interpretation would be (v. 9)."[2] These diverse viewpoints regarding the issue of whether or not King Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream focus on the correct understanding of the Aramaic word אַזְדָּא.[3] If אַזְדָּא is understood as "to go away, to depart," then it will sustain the translation, "the thing is gone from me," which supposes that the king himself forgot the dream. On the other hand, some scholars give meanings and equivalents to the word אַזְדָּא other than "to go away, to depart." One of

---

versity Press, 1987), 122, n. 29; William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7: Prophecy as History* (Abundant Life Bible Amplifier; Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1996), 135; John Calvin, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Geneva Series Commentary; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966), 125; Josephus, *Ant.* 10.10.3; Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, n.d.), 623; H. J. Rose and J. M. Fuller, *Daniel* (The Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, reprint 1981), 253; Douglas Bennett, "The Stone Kingdom of Daniel 2," in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 2; Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 345-46; Desmond Ford, *Daniel* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1978), 91; Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Explanatory and Practical*, *Daniel* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1979), 1:131-32.

2 Ernest Lucas, *Daniel* (AOTC 20; Leicester/Downers Grove, Ill.: Apollos/InterVarsity, 2002), 63, 70; Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. DiLella, "Daniel," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 410. See also Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel* (AB 23; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), 144; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; 12 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1985), 7:39; Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1973), 52; Lehman Strauss, *The Prophecies of Daniel* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaus, 1969), 57; Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), 58; J. E. H. Thomson, "Daniel," in *The Pulpit Commentary* (ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph Exell; 23 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, reprint 1977), 13:42; Raymond Hammer, *The Book of Daniel* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 27; Robert A. Anderson, *Signs and Wonders: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ITC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), 12-13; George McCready Price, *The Greatest of the Prophets: A New Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1955), 63.

3 Older sources proposed that אַזְדָּא comes from the root word אֲזַד, which is similar to the word אֲזַל, whose meaning is "to go away, to depart." Compare here Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), s.v. "אֲזַד." Hereafter cited as *GHCL*. If אַזְדָּא is understood as "to go away, to depart," then it will sustain the translation of the KJV, "the thing is gone from me," which supposes that the king himself forgot the dream. However, some scholars do not support the idea that the word אֲזַד is equivalent to אֲזַל. C. F. Keil best describes this position: "The supposition that אֲזַד is equivalent to אֲזַל, to go away, depart, is not tenable. The change of the ל to ד is extremely rare in the Semitic, and is not to be assumed in the word אזל, since Daniel himself uses אֲזַל" (C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [trans. M. G. Easton; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, reprint 1978], 91); see also Otto Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (ed. John Peter Lange; 12 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1960), 7:70; Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 52.

the meanings offered is "publicly known, known as decided."[4] Thus Franz Rosenthal translates Daniel 2:5, "the matter is known (as decided), as far as I am concerned."[5] If this is correct, it will enhance the view that Nebuchadnezzar had not forgotten the dream; instead, he was proclaiming an irrevocable sentence and decision.[6]

The purpose of this study is to establish the proper interpretation of the term אַזְדָּא in Daniel 2:5, 8 within its original context, which may shed light upon the issue of whether or not the text claims that Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten his dream.[7]

2. ETYMOLOGY OF אַזְדָּא

In regard to the root meaning of the term, a standard Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon indicates that the root word אזד is a theoretical form.[8] Thus, theoretically, the root word of the term אַזְדָּא is אזד. This also means that the root word אזד does not occur in the OT. Since אזד does not occur in the OT, some scholars have tried to recover its true meaning by identifying אזד with אזל. They suggest that אזל is equivalent to אזד because they reason that the letter ד can be phonetically exchangeable with the letter ל. One of the evidences offered is the connection of the Hebrew word קלחת to קדח,[9] where ל becomes ד. If that view is correct,[10] then it will support the proposed translation, "the thing is gone from me," which suggests that King Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream.

However, the equation of אזד to אזל cannot stand. The substitution of a ד for a ל is exceedingly rare in Semitic languages,[11] for letters ד and ל are not phonetically related.

4 Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 77. Stanislav Segert translated the term אַזְדָּא in German as "Kunde, kundgetan" (Stanislav Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik mit Bibliographie, Chrestomathie und Glossar* [Leipzig: Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1990], 525). The meaning "verdict," "decision," is proposed by John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993), 148. Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:70, holds that the translation of אַזְדָּא is "firm". Hartman and DiLella, *The Book of Daniel*, 138, translated the term as "public knowledge, publicly known". Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 52, suggests the meaning "sure". Archer, "Daniel," 7:21, n. 3, and *BDB*, 1079, indicate that אַזְדָּא means "sure," "assured".

5 Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 38.

6 H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949; reprint 1969), 88-89.

7 Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references in this study are from the NIV.

8 William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich./Leiden: Eerdmans/Brill, 1988), 396.

9 Other examples given are דעל and רעד; רוש and לוש; and כחד and כחל. See Edward B. Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Klock & Klock, reprint 1978), 483-84.

10 Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 396; Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet*, 483-84; Gesenius, *GHCL*, s.v. "אַזַד."

11 Keil, *Biblical Commentary*, 91; Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:70; Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 52; Archer, "Daniel," 7:39.

Also, the text in Daniel distinctly and separately uses אֲזַל elsewhere in the book.[12] Thus the view that אַזְדָּא may come from the root verb אֲזַל is not tenable.

Still, in trying to clarify the issue regarding the true meaning of the Aramaic word אַזְדָּא, some scholars have consulted the occurrences of the root אזד in some later Aramaic documents. For example, the root אזד occurs in one phrase of the Talmud: עמיה אזדא פלוני לת ("went after his own opinion"),[13] in which instance אזד is translated as "went". Likewise, in late Jewish Aramaic, there is an occurrence of a similar word, אַזַד, which is translated as "be cut off" or "go apart".[14] So these examples have led some to the meaning "go" or "go apart" in their definition of אַזְדָּא.

One can also notice that these conclusions come from comparing the word אַזְדָּא to the late Aramaic documents. This methodology rests on the assumption that the term אַזְדָּא is of late origin. The assumption of the late origin of the term אַזְדָּא will lead to an assumption of a late date for the origin of the book of Daniel. The reason for this assumption of a later date for the book of Daniel comes from an *a priori* concept that anything in Aramaic in the Bible is late. However, this concept has been repeatedly challenged since the publication of many Aramaic documents like the papyri from Elephantine, Egypt, which date to the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. Thus, the "detailed examination of these Elephantine papyri revealed that the *Aramaic of Daniel stood closer to that of the Elephantine documents* than to the Aramaic of the Targums and dialects."[15] Kenneth Kitchen adds that "there is no warrant nowadays for treating genuine Aramaisms (when they can be proved to exist) as automatically 'late'."[16] Hence, to equate the Aramaic term אַזְדָּא to the later Aramaic documents like the Talmud or Targums is not safe.

The more convincing argument that the Aramaic term under discussion is not of later Jewish Aramaic origin is the consensus of many scholars such as Kenneth A. Kitchen, Gleason Archer Jr., John Collins, Louis Hartman, Alexander DiLella, Joyce Baldwin, Edward Young, H. C. Leupold, and André Lacocque, who consider the word אַזְדָּא as of Persian origin—more specifically as an Old Persian loanword.[17] These

12 See Dan 2:17, 24; 6:19, 20.

13 Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet*, 484.

14 Archer, "Daniel," 7:39. See also Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Title Publication Company, 1943), 37. Hereafter cited as *DT*.

15 Arthur J. Ferch, *Daniel on Solid Ground* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1988), 46-47 [emphasis in the original].

16 Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1966), 146. See also Archer, "Daniel," 7:23, for his evidence that disproves the Maccabean hypothesis on the book of Daniel.

17 Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Aramaic of Daniel," in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (ed. Donald J. Wiseman et al.; London: Tyndale, 1965), 35-44; Archer, "Daniel," 7:21, n. 3; Collins, *Daniel*, 148; Hartman and DiLella, *Book of Daniel*, 138; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*

scholars also dismiss the idea that the meaning of the term אַזְדָּא is "to go" or "to depart". Kenneth Kitchen[18] and Stanislav Segert[19] place the word אַזְדָּא more precisely in the category of Imperial Aramaic.[20]

3. ANALYSIS OF אַזְדָּא

The authors who define אַזְדָּא as "to go" or "to depart" and equate the term with the root אזל, have the impression that אַזְדָּא is a verb.[21] This is why some try to repoint the term into אֲזַדָּא,[22] a participle of the hypothetical verb אֲזַד. The only support for this opinion that אַזְדָּא is a verb like אֲזַל, "to go forth," is the Talmud.[23] Yet as already noted, the Aramaic of the Talmud should not be equated to the Aramaic of Daniel, since the Aramaic of Daniel is much older than the Aramaic of Talmud. Here one can take the word of F. Rundgren who favorably notes, "It is wiser to regard this Talmudic אזד as simply depending on the passages in Daniel, the verb אזד being then due to a false interpretation of this אזדא as אַזְדָּא."[24]

On the other hand, scholars are not in agreement regarding the identification of אַזְדָּא. For Leon Wood, אַזְדָּא is a noun translated as "sure."[25] There is another occur-

---

(TOTC 21; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978), 88; Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, 57-58; Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel*, 89; André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (trans. David Pellauer; Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1979), 34. See also Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 58-59; Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:69-71. Although the term is a Persian loanword, this does not mean that the date of the composition of the book of Daniel is late (Bruce K. Waltke, "The Date of the Book of Daniel," *BSac* 133 [1976]: 323).

18 Kitchen, "Aramaic," 37.

19 Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, 525.

20 Imperial Aramaic is also called in some books as Official Aramaic. So the Biblical Aramaic in Daniel is being classified as Official Aramaic. Joseph Fitzmyer dates the Official Aramaic from 700 to 200 BCE, which is consistent with the idea that the Aramaic portion of Daniel is a much older type than that which was used during the Maccabean era—c. 165 BCE (Edwin M. Yamauchi, "The Archeological Background of Daniel," *BSac* 137 [1980]: 10). See also John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1985), 38.

21 See Rose and Fuller, *Daniel*, 247.

22 James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 147, indicates that Bär is the one responsible for repointing the term אַזְדָּא into אֲזַדָּא and he added that this is "hardly Hebraism for 3rd singular feminine" and "is due to the alleged derivation from a root אזד = אזל, 'go.'" See also J. Levy, *Neuhebräisches und chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (vol. 1; Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1876-89), 50, quoted in Frithiof Rundgren, "Aramaica III: An Iranian Loanword in Daniel," *Orientalia Suecana* 25-26 (1976-1977): 52.

23 Jastrow, *DT*, 37.

24 Rundgren, "Aramaica III," 52.

25 Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 52. "In Persian the corresponding word *azanda*, found in the Behistun and Nakhshi-i-Rustám inscriptions, has the meaning of 'knowledge,' and is used as a *substantive*" (Rose and Fuller, *Daniel*, 247).

rence of אזדא in *Baba Me%i 'a* 116b[26] where we find the formula אמר עלייה זו אזדא-אי ד, "if the landlord said, I let you *this* loft (as it is) it is a (divine) decree." In this instance, Marcus Jastrow identified it as substantive feminine with the meaning "decree".[27] By others, the term is considered as an adjective and translated as "sure, assured"[28]—more specifically as an adjective feminine.[29] In a standard Aramaic Lexicon, it is either a noun in determined state or an adjective feminine, translated as "promulgated."[30] To Rosenthal, however, אַזְדָּא is originally an adverb and has the meaning of "publicly known, known (as decided)."[31] This view that the term is originally an adverb "is mainly founded on the equation Old Iranian *azdā* = Old Indian *addhā*."[32] But for Otto Zöckler, it is either an adjective feminine or an adverb with the meaning "firm."[33] Whatever the identification of the term may be, probably one can safely deduce that the verbal sense of the word אַזְדָּא should be dismissed.

4. USE OF אַזְדָּא IN THE ARAMAIC PAPYRI

Since a derivation of the term אַזְדָּא occurs in one of the Aramaic Papyri of the fifth century BCE, one may consider how the word was used in the papyrus and how the papyrus defines its meaning. Knowing the true meaning of the Aramaic term אַזְדָּא in the reliable Aramaic Papyri will give light to the quest regarding the correct meaning of אַזְדָּא.

There are a number of scholars who recognize the occurrence of the term אזד in the Aramaic Papyri. This is why they could not accept the equivalency of אזד to אזל. Scholars who recognize the occurrence of אזד in the Aramaic Papyri include Francis Brown, Ernestus Vogt, James Montgomery, Edward Lipiński, and Frithiof Rundgren.[38] Most of these scholars refer to the Aramaic Papyri published by A. Cowley in 1923. One can notice that since 1923, the term אזד is more correctly analyzed by scholars. Unfortunately, some commentators and authors ignore this occurrence in

26 *Baba Me%i 'a* is one of the divisions of Kelim which contains civil law. See Arnost Zvi Ehrman, "Kelim," *EncJud* 10:899-900; Bathja Bayer, "Talmud," *EncJud* 15:750-55.

27 Jastrow, *DT*, 37; Rundgren, "Aramaica III," 51-52. The italics is in the original.

28 *BDB*, 1079.

29 Ernestus Vogt, ed., *Lexicon Linguae Aramaicae Veteris Testamenti: Documentis Antiquis Illustratum* (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1971), 3. Hereafter cited as *LLAVT*.

30 *HALOT* 5:1808.

31 Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 41, 59.

32 Rundgren, "Aramaica III," 47.

33 Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:70.

38 *BDB*, 1079; *LLAVT*, 3; Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 148; Edward Lipiński, review of André Lacocque *Le Livre de Daniel*, *VT* 28 (1978): 238; Rundgren, "Aramaica III," 51.

the Aramaic Papyri and continue to rely on the translation of the LXX or on the KJV. So it is proper in this study to reemphasize again the occurrence and the meaning of the term אַזְדָּא in the Aramaic Papyri. The published Aramaic Papyri referred to in this study is the one published by Cowley in 1923.[39]

The term אזד is located in document 27 of Cowley, entitled "Petition to Arsames (?)." This particular papyrus is a letter or a draft of a letter complaining about the disagreeable activities of the Egyptian priests in connivance with the governor of that place, whose name was Waidrang. This letter definitely comes from a Jewish military garrison at Elephantine, Egypt. The garrison, according to Edwin Yamauchi, "was probably established during Cambyses' occupation of Egypt."[40] The events of this letter date to the 14th year of Darius II, probably between 411 and 408 BCE.[41]

The term אזד in this document appears in the last part of line 8. But the entire sentence continues to lines 9 and 10. Here is the phrase in Aramaic:

[8]הן אזד [9]יתעבד מן דיניא […] [10]יתי[דע] למראן

The phrase mentioned is translated by Cowley:

> [8]If inquiry [אזד] [9]by the magistrates […] [10]it will be made *known* to your lordship.[42]

Rundgren translates the phrase this way:

> [8]If it be verified [אזד] [9]by the magistrates […] [10]it will be known to our lordship.[43]

Some lexica give only the phrase in Aramaic, הן אזד יתעבד מן, translating it in the following way: "if it is made certain (certified) [אזד] by […]."[44]

It is evident from the above discussion that the term אזד has no verbal meaning, "to go" or "to depart," as some scholars have claimed. Even a meaning related to that sense ("to go") has not been found in the Aramaic Papyri. The Aramaic term is translated in the papyri as "inquiry," "verified," or "certain" (certified).

After enumerating the illegal acts performed by their enemies, they (the senders of the letter) avow that the evidence of these illegal acts can be obtained from the police, officers, and magistrates. Thus they say in the letter, "If inquiry [אזד] be made of the

39 A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), 97-102. Hereafter cited as *CAP*.

40 Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1990), 244-45. Here is the synopsis of the components of the letter: "In the lost beginning the writers must have stated their case. They then affirm their loyalty, and instance other illegal acts committed by their enemies, of which they say evidence can be obtained from the police. In spite of their good behaviour, their enemies have prevented them from offering sacrifices to Ya'u, and have plundered (or destroyed) their temple. They end by petitioning for protection, and that the damage may be made good." *CAP*, 98.

41 *CAP*, 98-99.

42 Ibid., 99-100 [italics are in the original].

43 Rundgren, "Aramaica III," 51.

44 *BDB*, 1079.

magistrates, officers and police […] it will be made known to your lordship in accordance with what we say."[45] In this particular context, אזד may mean "verification," that is, "inquiry." In other words, what the sender of this letter is trying to say is that "if inquiry, certification or verification (אזד) will be done by the magistrates, officers and police themselves, then Arsames (or whoever was addressed in the letter) can verify and confirm their (the senders) claims of their enemies illegal acts." Thus, Cowley himself comments that the term אזד is a Persian word which is the same as אַזְדָּא in Daniel 2:5, 8, "where it is taken as 'statement,' 'information.'"[46]

The above discussion clarifies that the term אזד in the Aramaic Papyri has no verbal meaning and has the meaning of "certified," "verification" or "inquiry."[47] In addition, אזד in the fifth century Aramaic Papyri is the same as אַזְדָּא in the Aramaic portion of Daniel, only the former is in the absolute state (without the definite article) while the latter is in the determined state (with the definite article). Both terms were used as substantives. Therefore, the meaning given to the Aramaic term אַזְדָּא should be related to the meaning in the Aramaic Papyri mentioned above.

5. The Evidence of the Septuagint

The phrase in question rendered by the KJV, "the thing is departed from me," was probably influenced by the LXX and Theodotion.[48] In the LXX this phrase reads this way: ὁ λόγος ἀπ' ἐμοῦ ἀπέστη, which may be translated either as "the word has gone from me," or "the matter has departed from me."[49] This rendering of the LXX, which might have influenced the translation of the KJV, is probably the reason why the conventional notion that King Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream still prevails. Doukhan noted that the interpretation that King Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream "has been already suggested by LXX and Theodotion who has translated in v. 5 'the word has gone from me'."[50]

It is notable that the Aramaic term אַזְדָּא was translated by the LXX with the Greek word ἀπέστη, which has a verbal meaning "is gone" or "is going."[51] This translation of the term into a verbal sense, as already observed, is not supported semantically. Also, J. E. H. Thomson believes that "in Alexandria, where the Septuagint version of Daniel

45 *CAP*, 100.

46 Ibid., 102.

47 Vogt identified the Aramaic term אזד in this particular papyrus as a substantive, masculine, in the absolute state. *LLAVT*, 3, translated the phrase הן אזד יתעבד מן דיניא in Latin as "*si cognitio (i.e. inquisitio de accusatione) instituetur a iudicibus*."

48 Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 52.

49 Thomson, "Daniel," 13:43.

50 Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End*, 122, n. 29.

51 *BDB*, 1079.

was made, the meaning of the word was not known and was thought to be equivalent to אזל (ʾazal)."[52] This lack of knowledge regarding the term was due in part to a longer time gap between the author and the translators of the LXX. Through the study of the language of the LXX, scholars are now certain that the translators of the LXX were Alexandrian and not Palestinian Jews.[53] That means that it was "quite possible for them to mistake the meaning of a word, or to confuse words which were written or spoken nearly alike,"[54] since Hebrew or Aramaic was not their spoken language, but rather a matter of study. Although it was a matter of study, "the majority of the translators had probably learnt the sacred language in Egypt from imperfectly instructed teachers, and had few opportunities of making themselves acquainted with the traditional interpretation of obscure words and context which guided the Palestinian Jew."[55]

In addition, the word אַזְדָּא was translated by the Old Greek[56] (combined witnesses of Papyrus 967, Codex 88, and the Syro-Hexaplar) as ἀληθείας, which means "truly."[57] In other words, the phrase "the thing is gone from me" was not, in the original translation, named "Old Greek."[58] Also, some scholars argue that the translation, "the thing is gone from me," "is now generally regarded as wrong."[59]

An overall evaluation by scholars of the LXX translation of the book of Daniel is generally found to be free and unsatisfactory in its translation.[60] One author confirms

52 Thomson, "Daniel," 13:44.

53 W. F. Howard, "The Greek Bible," in *The Bible in Its Ancient and English Versions* (ed. H. Wheeler Robinson; Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), 43; David Ewert, *From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations: A General Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1983), 105; D. R. Ap-Thomas, *A Primer of Old Testament Text Criticism* (2nd rev. ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), 21.

54 Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (4th ed.; New York: Harper, 1939; reprint, 1951), 92.

55 Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (rev. Richard Rusden Ottley; New York: KTAV, 1968), 319.

56 The Old Greek must be distinguished from the Septuagint. The Old Greek is considered an original translation, whereas the Septuagint is considered a collection of sacred Greek writings. Old Greek "is known from two sources: the greater part is included in the collection of sacred Greek writings (LXX) and a smaller segment is reconstructed by modern scholars from various later sources" (Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* [Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992], 135).

57 Collins, *Daniel*, 148. See also Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935), 2:874.

58 R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), quoted in G. M. Price, *The Greatest of the Prophets*, 63.

59 R. H. Charles, *The Book of Daniel* (The Century Bible; Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n.d.), 17.

60 Ira Maurice Price, *The Ancestry of Our English Bible: An Account of Manuscripts, Texts, and Versions of the Bible* (rev. William A. Irwin and Allen P. Wikgren; 3rd ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 53; Bleddyn J. Roberts, *The Old Testament Text and Versions: The Hebrew Text in Transmission and the History of the Ancient Versions* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1951), 187; Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, 318.

this when he attests that "the translator of Daniel indulges at times in a Midrashic paraphrase."[61]

Meanwhile, Jerome translated the phrase in his Vulgate this way: *sermo recessit a me*, "the word from me is gone."[62] There are some possible reasons why Jerome translated the phrase that way. The first reason is perhaps that Jerome got this translation from "a specific Jewish tradition, probably taking אזדא for אֲזַדָּא."[63] The second possibility is that through the influence of a Palestinian Jew, Jerome thought that אזדא is equivalent to אזל.[64] The last probable reason is that Jerome in translating the Prophets, and possibly the book of Daniel, depended heavily on the Septuagint.[65] However, since the observation has already been made that the translation of the LXX is unlikely, and the Vulgate of Jerome got its rendering from the LXX, then the translation of the Vulgate in this case cannot stand, as well.

6. THE IMPORTANCE OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

The dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 was given in the second year of his reign. The second year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign spans from the month of Nisan (March-April) in 603 BCE to Nisan (March-April) in 602 BCE.[66] But for the Jews living in Judah, who reckoned the year differently from the Babylonians,[67] the second year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar would be the king's third year.[68] By this time, the battle of Carchemish, which took place in 605 BCE,[69] was already finished.

61 Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, 316.

62 Jerome, *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (ed. Bonifatio Fischer et al.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983), 1344a.

63 Rundgren, "Aramaica III," 47.

64 Thomson, "Daniel," 13:44.

65 For the view that Jerome depended heavily on the LXX, see, A. Vööbus, "Versions," *ISBE* 4:972; E. F. Sutcliffe, "Jerome," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (ed. G. W. H. Lampe; 3 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 2:99-100; Roberts, *The Old Testament Text and Versions*, 254-55.

66 John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1971), 46; Archer, "Daniel," 7:39.

67 The Jews living in Palestine followed the nonaccession-year method. "The nonaccession-year reckoning, or antedating, was a method of counting the years of a king's reign by starting with his accession year and moving to his *second* year of the next new year" (Gerhard F. Hasel, "Establishing a Date for the Book of Daniel," in *Symposium on Daniel* [ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 2; Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986], 119).

68 So there is no discrepancy as some authors claimed (Hartman and DiLella, *Book of Daniel*, 137-38) between the "three years" training of Daniel (and his friends) in chapter 1 and the second year of the king's reign in chapter 2, because the second year reign of Nebuchadnezzar is the same as the third year of Daniel's training (Walvoord, *Daniel*, 46).

69 David Noel Freedman, "The Babylonian Chronicle," in *BARead* (ed. G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman; 2 vols.; Missoula, Mo.: Scholars Press, 1975), 1:117. Nebuchadnezzar was on the

Toward the end of 604 BCE King Nebuchadnezzar issued a disciplining act against one of his subjugated territories, probably Ashkelon. The city of Ashkelon probably refused to pay its annual taxes to the Babylonian empire.[70] So it was reported that "in 603 BCE an extra large army, siege towers and heavy equipment are mentioned, and Babylonian troops were in the field for several months."[71] From this historical milieu, one writer comments on the state of Nebuchadnezzar's mind: "Such a show of prestige hid a fear of inadequacy."[72] This fear of inadequacy was heightened more after his dream. That is why he confessed; "I have had a dream that troubles me" (v. 3).

King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a manlike colossus which was dominating all. But then, an "obscure and insignificant stone"[73] smashed and toppled the great image. Such a dream impressed Nebuchadnezzar's mind, and he was haunted by it. He was haunted because he might have thought this alarming dream had something to do with the fate of his kingdom.[74] He was probably thinking "that his personal well-being and the security of his kingdom were threatened by something beyond his control."[75] It was recorded that after this fearful dream, "his mind was troubled and he could not sleep" (2:1).

Nebuchadnezzar, like any other emperor, was ambitious to "impose upon the minds of his people the idea of his own power over destiny and history. But the statue of a man that Nebuchadnezzar is dreaming of does not seem to fit the idea he entertains of his own history and destiny."[76] Therefore it was narrated after his dream that "his spirit was troubled" (Dan 2:1). He was troubled by the dream, which he had during the early years of his powerful reign. This is probably the reason why Nebuchad-

---

battlefield during the battle of Carchemish. But when he heard that King Nabopolassar, his father, died (on Aug. 16, 605), he "hurried back to Babylon to be crowned king on Sept. 7, 605. […] From then until the following April is designated his 'accession-year.' Then in April, 604, during the *akītu* or New Year's Festival, the official 'first year' of his reign began" (ibid., 118). So, logically, from April 604 to April 603 BCE is King Nebuchadnezzar's first year of reign. Then from April 603 to April 602 BCE is his second year of reign.

70 Baldwin, *Daniel*, 86; Freedman, "The Babylonian Chronicle," 118.

71 Donald J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (625-556 BC) in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1961), 28-29, quoted in Baldwin, *Daniel*, 86.

72 Baldwin, *Daniel*, 86. Philip Newell notes, "Truly, 'uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.' Rumors of rebellion have come to the king from Media and Persia; rumors also of the growth of powerful nations in the far west, as the people of Greece and Rome prepare to take their subsequent places upon the stage of history. Nebuchadnezzar must surely have been keenly aware that his own dominion had been preceded by that of Assyria and of Egypt." Compare Philip R. Newell, *Daniel: The Man Greatly Beloved and His Prophecies* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1962), 28-29.

73 Ford, *Daniel*, 94; Bert Harold Hall, "The Book of Daniel," in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* (ed. Charles W. Carter; 6 vols; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 3:510.

74 Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:69; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1989), 50; Walvoord, *Daniel*, 47.

75 Ronald S. Wallace, *The Lord Is King: The Message of Daniel* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1979), 49.

76 Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End*, 14.

nezzar might have remembered well his own dream. John Whitcomb argues, "The size, splendor, and awesome grandeur of the image […] makes it almost impossible to imagine that Nebuchadnezzar could have forgotten what he saw."[77]

In the discussion above, the reason why Nebuchadnezzar was greatly disturbed by his own dream has been partially discovered. The continuing discussion will further trace why Nebuchadnezzar was greatly troubled by the dream. When he said, "My spirit was troubled to know the dream" (Dan 2:3), did he mean he wanted to recall the dream because he totally forgot it, or did he mean something else? By studying the context of Daniel 2:5 and 2:8, one may possibly answer the questions raised.

7. THE STUDY OF DANIEL 2:5, 8

7.1. Literary Structure

Daniel 2:5, 8 belongs to the section of Daniel 2:2-12.[78] This section is a dialogue between King Nebuchadnezzar and his courtiers. The structure of the dialogue can be schematized in the following way:

A. Introduction (v. 2)
- B. King's statement (v. 3)
- C. Courtiers' request (v. 4)
  - B'. King's response (vv. 5-6)
  - C'. Courtiers' request (v. 7)
- B". King's response (vv. 8-9)
- C". Courtiers' assertion (vv.10-11)

A'. Result (v. 12)

Section A (v. 2) of this plan tells of the king's summon to his wise men. It links with section B (v. 3), where the king stated his problem to the wise men. Then in section C (v. 4) the courtiers requested the king to tell the dream. The king responded with a threat and promise but insisted upon the telling of both the dream and the interpretation in section B' (vv. 5-6). In section C' (v. 7) the wise men repeated their request for the king to describe the dream. In section B" (vv. 8-9) the king accused the courtiers of conspiracy and again declared the impossible demand. In section C" (vv. 10-11) the wise men asserted the impossibility of the demand and said that only the gods could do it. In section A' (v. 12) is the conclusion of the dialogue, where the king became angry and made a decree that the wise men be put to death.[79]

[77] Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 44.

[78] See, G. T. M. Prinsloo, "Two Poems in a Sea of Prose: The Content and Context of Daniel 2:20-23 and 6:27-28," *JSOT* 59 (1993): 93-108.

[79] In this structure, one can see in the introduction that the wise men were *tête-à-tête* with the king with the request, but in conclusion the wise men were *tête-à-tête* with a death decree.

One may notice that the chiastic structure of the dialogue is in a progression. There is an intensification of the progression which resulted in a death decree by the king. The delay of the wise men, through repeated appeals, hastened and intensified the pronunciation of the death sentence. The structure outlined above sets the stage for determining the main thrust of the passage under study.

7.2. The Meaning of מִלְּתָא

Based on the translation of the KJV, "the thing is gone from me," some suppose that King Nebuchadnezzar forgot the dream. This is because the word "the thing" (Aram. מִלְּתָא) may be interpreted as referring to the dream; thus, "the dream is gone from me." The important word here is the Aramaic word מִלְּתָא. If מִלְּתָא refers to the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, then it will support the forgotten dream theory. A number of scholars do not support the view that מִלְּתָא refers to the dream.

The term מִלְּתָא is in the determined state, meaning that it has a definite article, and its absolute state is מִלָּה. Accordingly, מִלָּה is translated "word," "matter," and "affair," but *not* "thing."[80] The root מִלָּה in its different forms is used elsewhere in the book of Daniel to signify an oral or spoken word. In Daniel 2:15, 17, מִלָּה, in the determined state, is translated as "matter" in the NIV, which may also mean a "subject of which there is speech."[81] In Daniel 4:28 (NIV, v. 31) is the phrase, עוֹד מִלְּתָא בְּפֻם מַלְכָּא, "the word still (being) in the mouth of the king,"[82] where מִלְּתָא denotes a spoken word or speech of the king.[83]

Some commentators challenge the idea that מִלְּתָא refers to the dream for the following reason:

The king would scarcely call his dream a "thing." He would have said, "the dream is gone from me" if he had meant that. "Thing" would have referred not to the dream, but to the whole matter connected with the dream.[84]

Some scholars who appeared to accept the translation of the KJV (particularly the term אַזְדָּא as "gone away") admit that the term מִלְּתָא may mean the "edict" which departed from the mouth of King Nebuchadnezzar.[85] It is noteworthy that the Latin

80 Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 197.

81 Joseph S. Exell, *Daniel* (BI; 23 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1973), 10:56. Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 40, indicates that "the matter" in Daniel 2:15 "obviously refers" to Nebuchadnezzar's "decree, not his dream."

82 The translation is taken from Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 40.

83 This and other examples of the usages of מִלָּה which can be found in Daniel 5:10; 7:11, 25 denote an oral speech.

84 Exell, *Daniel*, 10:56-57. "He [Nebuchadnezzar] was not referring to the dream but to the demand that the diviners give him an interpretation" (Hall, "The Book of Daniel," 3:511).

85 Calvin, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 125.

Vulgate translated מִלְּתָא as *sermo*, "a spoken word."[86] Thus, Daniel 2:5, 8 may mean "the word or decree (Aram. מִלְּתָא) is gone forth from me."[87]

In consulting the context of this passage, it can be seen that מִלְּתָא is not referring to King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Rather, it is referring to the "word" or "decree" that has been pronounced firmly and decidedly. Joseph Exell best describes this position:

> The sequences in both the fifth and eighth verses are not relevant with reference to "dream," but are relevant with reference to "word" or "decree." In the fifth verse there is no nexus between "the dream is gone from me" and "if ye will not make known unto me the dream," etc. We should have expected a "therefore." In the eighth verse the seeking to gain time would be a natural result of the terrible decree, but not a result of the dream being gone from the monarch.[88]

7.3. An Equivalent Phrase in Daniel 2:5, 8

The view that the Aramaic expression מִלְּתָא מִנִּי אַזְדָּא (NIV, "I have firmly decided") in Daniel 2:5, 8 is a pronouncement of a decision or decree and not a statement of a forgotten dream can be sustained through the presence of an equivalent expression. Rundgren found a similar expression in Daniel 6:13 (NIV, v. 12), מִלְּתָא יַצִּיבָא, which has "almost the same meaning as מִלְּתָא מִנִּי אַזְדָּא in Daniel 2:5, 8."[89] The phrase מִלְּתָא יַצִּיבָא in Daniel 6:13 (NIV, v. 12) is translated as "reliable word" or "well-established word."[90] Other translations, including NIV, render the phrase, "the decree stands" (v. 12). In the context of Daniel 6:13 (NIV, v. 12), King Darius is saying that the decree is well-established, stands as it is, and cannot be changed. So this particular happening occurs in the context of the pronouncement of a decree which is also in the same sense as in Daniel 2:5, 8.

86 That is where the English word "sermon" probably came from. See Jerome, *Biblia Sacra*, 1344.

87 Exell, *Daniel*, 10:57.

88 Ibid. Likewise, C. F. Keil states in his commentary that based on the context, מִלְּתָא can never refer to the dream, and that the king's dream did not flee from him: "No acknowledgment of the dream's having escaped from him is made; for such a statement would contradict what was said of ver. 3, and would not altogether agree with the statement of ver. 8. מִלְּתָא is not the dream." Keil, *Biblical Commentary*, 91. See also Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:70.

89 Rundgren, "Aramaica III," 53, mentions that the word יַצִּיבָא may contribute to the understanding of the Aramaic word אַזְדָּא since יַצִּיב was translated as "standing upright, firm," and "understood as *álēthinos*, *akribēs*, *sarrûr*, *verus*, etc." The word יַצִּיב was probably "an old administrative *terminus technicus*, which occurred in the Aramaic Papyrus of the year 402 B.C. from Elephantine": `znh spr' zy 'nh 'nny ktbt lky hw yšb` ("This document which I, Anani, wrote to thee is valid [*yšb*]"). See also Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 145. However, Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:70, indicates another similar expression which is found in Daniel 3:29; 4:3, which goes like this: מִנִּי שִׂים טְעֵם.

90 Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 408.

Even those authors who equal the word אֲזָדָא to אזל agree to the same tenor of the phrase. For example, one author indicates that the translation of Daniel 2:5, 8 is "the decree is gone forth from me," that is, "the decree has been pronounced irrevocably."[91] Another similar expression in Hebrew is יָצָא דָבָר, "the commandment came forth," which occurs in Daniel 9:23.[92] Here it is also in the context of issuing a decree or the giving of a commandment. Therefore, the expression in Daniel 2:5, 8 refers to the pronouncement of a decree and not a statement of a forgotten dream. This point of view is clarified further in Table 1, which parallels the phraseology of the king's decree as it occurs in three texts in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 2:5-6	Daniel 2:8-9	Daniel 3:15
1. Pronouncement of Decree	**1. Pronouncement of Decree**	**1. Pronouncement of Decree**
"This is what I have firmly decided"	"…this is what I have firmly decided"	*Not applicable*
2. Condition	**2. Condition**	**2. Condition**
"If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it"	"If you do not tell me the dream"	"… if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made"
3. Result	**3. Result**	**3. Result**
"I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble"	"there is just one penalty for you"	"very good"
4. Condition	**4. Condition**	**4. Condition**
"But if you tell me the dream and explain it"	*Not applicable*	"But if you do not worship it"
5. Result	**5. Result**	**5. Result**
"you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor"	*Not applicable*	"you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace"

Table 1: Similar Phraseology of King Nebuchadnezzar's Decree in Three Texts from the NIV

The comparison of the three texts in Table 1 is significant not only because these phrases came from the mouth of King Nebuchadnezzar himself, but also because these three passages were written in Aramaic.

From the diagram one may observe that there seems to be a distinct style for King Nebuchadnezzar's decree. It is divided into five sections: Pronouncement of Decree, Condition, Result, Condition, Result. In the three texts that are being delineated here, only Daniel 2:5, 6 is complete with all five sections mentioned. A careful comparison of the three verses in the diagram renders a significant conclusion: that all of the three texts cited attest to the phraseology of a decree of King Nebuchadnezzar. There is no hint that Daniel 2:5 is referring to a forgotten dream. Thus it is unsafe to use Daniel 2:5 (even Dan 2:8) as a proof text that Nebuchadnezzar said he had forgotten the dream.

[91] A. R. Fausset, "Jeremiah-Malachi," in *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments* (ed. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown; 6 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1948), 4:387.

[92] See Exell, *Daniel*, 10:57.

7.4. The Study of Daniel 2:8-9

Understanding the true meaning of the passage at hand is significant, because the expression found in Daniel 2:5 is the same expression found in Daniel 2:8-9. Both passages are a response of King Nebuchadnezzar to his wise men. Likewise, understanding the true import of Daniel 2:8-9 will clarify the issue of whether Nebuchadnezzar said that he had forgotten his dream. Those commentators who claim that Nebuchadnezzar said he forgot his dream in Daniel 2:5, when they confront Daniel 2:8-9, are in doubt if he is truly saying that he forgot the dream. One may perceive from the foregoing discussion that King Nebuchadnezzar did not say he forgot the dream, but rather he was declaring a command or decree.

In the analysis of Daniel 2:5 and Daniel 2:8-9, both passages contain parallel expressions which mutually explain each other. The comparison of expressions from the two passages may be observed in the following outline:

Daniel 2:5		**Daniel 2:8-9[a]**	
1.	This is what I have firmly decided	1.	[…] this is what I have firmly decided
2.	If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it,	2.	If you do not tell me the dream,
3.	I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.	3.	there is just one penalty for you.

Table 2: Synopsis of Parallel Expressions in Daniel 2:5 and 2:8-9

From this outline, one may categorize each number according to its main thought: part 1 is a pronouncement of decision; part 2 is a pronouncement of condition; and part 3 is a pronouncement of penalty. The expression in Daniel 2:8-9 is shorter than Daniel 2:5, except for the expression in part 1. The possible reason for being shorter is that King Nebuchadnezzar was probably irritated by the wise men's assiduous repetition of the request to tell the dream, so he made his decree short and direct to make it cogent.

Part 1 is clearly a pronouncement of decision and not a pronouncement of a forgotten dream. Granted that the expression in part 1 is "the dream is departed from me," this would not fit with the following phrases in part 2 and part 3. The expression would result in an illogical and inconsistent pattern in Nebuchadnezzar's pronouncement.

In vv. 8-9 is the king's response to the request of the wise men in v. 7, who for the second time asked the king to tell them the dream (v. 7). But the response of the king (in vv. 8-9) suggests a suspicion that the wise men were just delaying the time.[93] This suspicion of the king was possibly grounded.[94] He could read what was in their minds.

[93] Archer, "Daniel," 7:41; Hall, "The Book of Daniel," 3:511.

[94] "The Thing Is Gone from Me" [Dan 2:5], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (ed. Francis D. Nichol; 7 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 4:768. Hereafter cited as *SDABC*.

A question may then be asked: Why, then, did the wise men try to postpone and delay the time? A good reason for the delay is given in v. 5: they knew the pronouncement of the decision had been firmly decided already by the king.[95] What the king had said in v. 5 could never be changed.[96] So repeating the request to tell the dream in v. 7 was a way of delaying and postponing the unchangeable decree of the king.[97] The words of Nebuchadnezzar in v. 8 may be paraphrased in this way: "I know that you are postponing the time because[98] you are aware that the unchangeable decree has been pronounced (that is pronounced already in v. 5)."

Because of the strictness of the command of King Nebuchadnezzar, the wise men were trapped in a situation with no other choice. They could either delay the implementation of the decree by pretending to persuade the king to tell the dream (which they did based on v. 7), or finally admit that they could not do what the king demanded (which they did based on their words in vv. 10-11).

The words of Nebuchadnezzar in v. 9 read this way: "For you have agreed together [Aram. הַזְמִנְתּוּן] to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed" (NASB). The verb הַזְמִנְתּוּן, the hafel form of זמן,[99] "expresses the sense of 'conspiring.'"[100] From these words of Nebuchadnezzar, scholars conclude that Nebuchadnezzar is accusing his wise men of conspiracy.[101] The accusation of conspiracy was made probably because of the attempt to evade and delay by the wise men:

Their [the wise men's] hesitancy to comply immediately with his [King Nebuchadnezzar's] request may at first have aroused his suspicion that they had conspired together to take advantage of him.[102]

95 Walvoord, *Daniel*, 51.

96 This is indicated by the NASB translation: "The command from me is firm" (v. 5). "The king knew that he asked them to do a hard thing, but he could not change what he said" (R. E. Harlow, *The Prophet Daniel* [Scarborough, Oreg.: Everyday Publications, 1989], 14).

97 Calvin, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 129; Keil, *Biblical Commentary*, 93-94. "It would seem that the king first merely states the fact that the Chaldeans are trying to gain time, then indicates that the reason for this attempt is the strictness of his command." See Jan-Wim Wesselius, "Language and Style in Biblical Aramaic: Observations on the Unity of Daniel ii-vi," *VT* 38.2 (1988): 197-98.

98 The word "because" (Aram. כָּל־קֳבֵל דִּי) according to Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:71, is a correct translation, and the suggestion of Hitzig, "despite that" has no support from the context. "The king evidently aims to point out the motive for the artful temporizing and delay of the magicians, namely, the menace with which he has intimidated and frightened them" (ibid.).

99 Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 404.

100 Zöckler, "The Book of the Prophet Daniel," 7:71.

101 Hall, "The Book of Daniel," 3:511; Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel*, 91; Wallace, *The Message of Daniel*, 50.

102 "The Thing Is Gone from Me," *SDABC* 4:768.

Or, probably, the accusation of collusion was made because of the disturbing dream.[103] So King Nebuchadnezzar commanded them at once to tell him the dream, not because he totally forgot it,[104] but to test them.[105]

King Nebuchadnezzar likely suspected his wise men to be accomplices in plotting to overthrow his government.[106] He supposed there would be a sort of *coup d'état*. So he deliberately concealed the dream[107] because he suspected that if he told them the dream, the wise men would try to manipulate the interpretation.[108] That is the reason why he declared, "Tell me the dream that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation" (Dan 2:9, NASB).

8. The Reason for Nebuchadnezzar's Refusal to Tell the Dream

Some commentators indicate that the passage of Daniel 2:5, 8 in reference to "whether the king had really forgotten the dream, or whether he was merely withholding the dream itself,"[109] is not clear. However, one commentator remarks that Nebuchadnezzar did not forget the dream and that he "refused to describe the dream, for he apparently retained a sufficient recollection of it so that he could later certify the correctness of Daniel's reconstruction of it."[110] In other words, if King Nebuchadnezzar remembered well his dream, why did he refuse to tell the dream? This question may be approached from a survey of the context.

A contextual study reveals that the demand of Nebuchadnezzar in v. 5 is based on "a deliberate concealment of the dream," and in vv. 7-9 "the deliberate concealment is restated."[111] King Nebuchadnezzar may have deliberately concealed the dream be-

[103] The disturbing dream as a possible cause of King Nebuchadnezzar's suspicion of conspiracy will be dealt with fully in the next section of the paper.

[104] Keil, *Biblical Commentary*, 89; Strauss, *The Prophecies of Daniel*, 57; Walvoord, *Daniel*, 51; Hammer, *The Book of Daniel*, 27.

[105] Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 53; Hartman and DiLella, *Book of Daniel*, 144; Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, 58; Walvoord, *Daniel*, 50.

[106] Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament. Vol. 2 Isaiah-Malachi* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1981), 1614; A. R. Fausset, *Jeremiah-Malachi*, 387.

[107] Rousas John Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Np: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 12.

[108] Wesselius, "Language and Style in Biblical Aramaic," 198.

[109] G. M. Price, *The Greatest of the Prophets*, 62. See also David Alexander and Pat Alexander, eds., *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), 431, who mentioned that "Nebuchadnezzar had either genuinely forgotten his dream, or he was deliberately making things difficult"; Ford, *Daniel*, 91; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 46; Harlow, *The Prophet Daniel*, 14.

[110] Archer, "Daniel," 7:39.

[111] See Rushdoony, *Studies in Daniel and Revelation*, 12.

cause he suspected that if he told them the dream the wise men would try to tamper with the interpretation. He probably believed that his wise men were part of the conspiracy to overthrow his empire (2:8, 9). If he told them the dream, they would naturally manipulate the interpretation to cover up the real interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar might have made his own interpretation of the dream. His interpretation might have envisioned a sort of *coup d'état* to topple his kingdom.

Thus, Nebuchadnezzar refused to tell the dream, not because he totally forgot it, but because "he already announced (2:5, 8)" that these wise men should "give the interpretation of the dream by telling him the dream" first (2:8, 9).[112] In Thomson's words, "he has committed himself to that course; he is a king, and he may not change."[113] Thus Nebuchadnezzar said, "I have firmly decided" (2:5, 8). In sum, in order to avoid the manipulation of the interpretation of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar refused to tell the dream.[114]

Furthermore, God purposely allowed Nebuchadnezzar to conceal the dream in order to show His sovereignty over King Nebuchadnezzar.[115] God revealed the meaning of the dream through the prophet Daniel in order to disclose the deeper import of the dream: that it did not refer merely to the destiny of King Nebuchadnezzar's empire (which the king was worried about) but also to the destiny of the world until the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. God did this in order to bring home a message to King Nebuchadnezzar and if possible to win his haughty heart.[116] This purpose of God was achieved when King Nebuchadnezzar confessed publicly, "Truly your God is God of gods and the Lord of kings and revealer of mysteries (2:47)."[117] This view is in keeping with the main theme of the whole chapter of Daniel 2.

9. Conclusions

The main problem addressed in this study centers on the meaning of אֲזַדָּא and its bearing on Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2:5, 8. The focus of the study may be expressed in a specific question: Do the verses in Daniel 2:5, 8 clearly claim that Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream?

112 Thomson, "Daniel," 13:44.

113 Ibid.

114 See Wesselius, "Language and Style in Biblical Aramaic," 198.

115 Unger, *Unger's Commentary*, 1613.

116 "The Thing Is Gone from Me," *SDABC* 4:767. Oliver B. Greene, *Daniel: Verse by Verse* (Greenville, S.C.: The Gospel Hour, 1964), 56, confirms this: "Since the king was filled with pride and puffed up because of his greatness in Babylon, it seems proper that he should have had a dream which could have (and *should have*) enlightened him and made known to him that his greatness was not because of his own ability nor because of his own power—but GOD had made him great [emphasis in the original]."

117 Translation from Collins, *Daniel*, 152.

The popular notion that King Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream is based on the KJV translation of Daniel 2:5, 8, "the thing is gone from me," and is also supported by the LXX and the Vulgate of Jerome. The study reveals that this popular viewpoint presents considerable problems when confronted by the following evidence.

❶ The discussions regarding both the forgotten dream and the not-forgotten dream of King Nebuchadnezzar focus on the correct meaning of the Aramaic word אַזְדָּא. Older sources proposed that אַזְדָּא is similar to the word אֲזַל which means "to go away," "to depart." However, many scholars today admit that אַזְדָּא is not comparable to אֲזַל, because the substitution of the letter ד for ל is exceedingly rare in Semitic languages, and since letters ד and ל are not phonetically related. This forced comparison of אַזְדָּא to אֲזַל is due to the rare occurrences of the word אַזְדָּא, which only occurs twice in the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Thanks to the discovery and the publications of the Aramaic Papyri, which dated closer to the Aramaic of Daniel, the correct meaning of אַזְדָּא is clarified and defined as "certain," "certified," or "verified," and *not* "to go" or "to depart." Thus, the translation of Daniel 2:5, 8, "the thing is gone from me," has no support based on the linguistic and semantic study of the word.

❷ Translations which seem to support the "forgotten dream theory" are the ancient translation of the Vulgate of Jerome and the LXX, which translated the word אַזְדָּא as *recessit*, "gone," and ἀπέστη, "gone," respectively. But, based on the study of the Old Greek, which is an older text than the LXX, the problematic word is translated as ἀληθείας, which means "truly." Moreover, when the Alexandrian Jews (translators of the LXX) translated the book of Daniel, the meaning of that word was not known to them; therefore, it was a matter of guesswork on their part to equate the term to אֲזַל. The Vulgate of Jerome, on the other hand, merely got its translation from the LXX, so the translation of the Vulgate in this case cannot be defended either.

❸ The translation of the KJV, "the thing is gone from me," seems to suggest that King Nebuchadnezzar forgot the dream. This idea interprets the crucial words "the thing" (Aram. מִלְּתָא) as referring to the dream; thus, "the dream is gone from me." However, the usage of that important word מִלְּתָא, in the book of Daniel itself, refers to an oral or spoken word and *not* to the dream.

❹ A contextual study of Daniel 2:8-9, when put in parallel with Daniel 2:5, shows that the king spoke about the pronouncement of his decree and *not* a declaration that his dream was forgotten. Thus, it is better to translate Daniel 2:5, 8 in any of these ways: "this is my firm decision," "this is what I have firmly decided," "the word is certified (or verified), as far as I am concerned," or "the matter is publicly known (as decided), as far as I am concerned."

This contextual evidence, with the witness of the modern translations and the Aramaic Papyri, clarify that it is unsafe to use Daniel 2:5, 8 as a basis for the viewpoint that Nebuchadnezzar said he had forgotten the dream. A careful contextual study of the passage in the modern translations will rather confirm that the king was speaking about the pronouncement of his decree.

Although the conclusion of this study is not exhaustive or absolute, its results have raised questions about certain arguments regarding the "forgotten dream theory." The evidence for the "forgotten dream theory" is neutralized in the presence of manifest opposing evidence that King Nebuchadnezzar was actually speaking of a decree.