

BABYLON - 539 B.C. In the twilight of his long life, the prophet DANIEL is visited by the angel Gabriel who shows him events happening far into the future. Once again, Daniel sees the all too familiar vision of a man suffering in great agony, nailed to the crossed timbers from which he hangs. The angel ignores Daniel's query to this life-long mystery, telling him instead that his people will soon be set free from their many years of bondage in Babylon. Daniel reflects upon the day the exile began.

FLASHBACK – 604 B.C. Jerusalem is under siege by the armies of NEBUCHADNEZZAR, king of Babylon. To save their city from destruction, the city fathers surrender both tribute and the sons of certain prominent citizens. Satisfied with the booty piled before his feet, the king of Babylon chooses to enter the temple of Solomon out of reverence for the man who had it built long ago during Israel's days of glory. Sensing a powerful and invisible presence suddenly transcending the temple, Nebuchadnezzar leaves the holy edifice inviolate.

Amidst the wailing of bereaved parents, Daniel and his father spend a final moment together before Daniel and the other Judean adolescents are led away as hostages to distant Babylon. On the second day of their long march, one youth attempts to escape but is chased down by horsemen who brutally spear him. As the Judean youth MISHAEL rushes off to comfort his dying brother, several Babylonian warriors take hold of him. Thinking Mishael was attempting to escape, they hastily strip a small tree of its branches before carving the trunk's upper end into a menacing point. Recognizing the warriors' intent to impale Mishael on it, Daniel struggles to save him but is quickly seized by their rabid captors who condemn him to the same fate. Drawn to the commotion, ARIOCH, Nebuchadnezzar's shield bearer, intervenes and takes command. Impressed by Daniel's bravery the young warrior listens as Daniel pleads for their lives, “What cause will our fathers have to obey your king if you kill us all?” Daniel's words take root as the hostility among the Judean captives continues to rise. To avert further bloodshed, Arioch spares Daniel and Mishael then issues a stern warning before leaving.

Upon reaching Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar parades his victorious warriors into the city, and down the main boulevard lined with cheering crowds. The Judean youths, both haggard and timid, follow in the wake of the army. They are herded into the presence of ASHPENAZ, the king's corpulent high minister, the official ultimately responsible for their training as scribes and administrators. Arioch arrives to present Daniel and his friends AZARIAH, HANANIAH, and Mishael to Ashpenaz, while vouching before his former mentor, Ashpenaz, that these four youths, Daniel in particular, exhibit the qualities most desirable for advancement in the king's service: intellect and integrity.

With Nebuchadnezzar's late father having usurped the throne years earlier, a degree of distrust exists between the king, a Chaldean, and certain native elements, particularly the priests serving Babylon's gods. Aware of the priesthood's capacity to influence the masses, or even incite them, Nebuchadnezzar begrudgingly surrenders a share of his spoils to the temple of Marduk, patron god of Babylon. However, when spotting certain chalices taken from Solomon's temple,

Nebuchadnezzar orders his men to remove them from the growing pile of booty laid at the feet of a graven image. LABASUR, designated successor to the high priest, protests, arguing that the king's action will offend the gods and incur their wrath. Emboldened by his recent victories over Egypt and her allies, Nebuchadnezzar refuses to relinquish the chalices. Baring his enmity, the king gives Labasur a long, contemptuous glare, humiliating him before his priestly minions.

While leaving the temple, the king encounters ADDA, the beautiful young concubine he took as his share of the spoils upon capturing the city of Haran several years earlier. She speaks of the passion they once shared, but her infant son having been sired by Nebuchadnezzar, complicates more than just the line of succession. Years before, Nebuchadnezzar took to wed a Median princess to secure an alliance crucial to his father's pursuit of conquest. Should he put love before the affairs of state, he would jeopardize the fragile empire he and his father have forged. He cautions Adda to keep their child a secret then departs. Out of earshot, she makes an oath that the day will come when she sets her son upon the throne of Babylon.

Several weeks pass. On the first day of the New Year celebration, food from the king's table is set before the Judean captives. Ashpenaz has hoped the richer diet will strengthen the Judeans still recovering from the long, exhausting journey from Jerusalem. While overseeing the construction of the Hanging Gardens, Ashpenaz learns that Daniel and his friends are refusing to eat the delicacies set before them. Consumed with worry that such insult will enrage the king, Ashpenaz rushes off to the school. He fails to cajole Daniel and his friends, who have learned that the bounty before them has been dedicated to the gods of Babylon. Daniel suggests their health will improve more quickly from a simple diet of plain vegetables. Impressed by Daniel's faithfulness to his God, Ashpenaz grants him his petition, while sensing opportunity should this small miracle manifest itself.

On the tenth and final day of the New Year celebration, Daniel and his friends are permitted to watch the parade initiating the incoming year. Citizens line both sides of the broad boulevard running the length of Babylon, and watch as contingents of priests, warriors, and officials pass in formation, followed by the king and his retinue. The parade progresses down the long avenue a distance before veering into the walled complex of the ziggurat, the massive tiered pyramid jutting three-hundred feet into the sky. Adding to its mysterious aura, smoke plumes of various colors swirl up from braziers positioned on its tiers. Intrigued by the spectacle, Daniel and his friends speculate that it is the tower of legend.

Amidst the pageantry and accompanied by a retinue, the king of Babylon is taken by litter up the ziggurat's main staircase leading to the two hundred foot level where he is greeted by a delegation of priests. They sanctimoniously lead him the rest of the way up to the temple at the apex to partake in an ancient ritual. To demonstrate the king's humility before the gods of Babylon, a priest ceremoniously slaps Nebuchadnezzar. In a fit of rage, the king pummels the cleric to the ground. Confronted by the HIGH PRIEST, Nebuchadnezzar makes no secret of his contempt for their caste and the false gods they serve. He storms out, back into view of the masses gathered below, who greet the conquering warrior king with a thunderous ovation, leaving the priests of Marduk to acknowledge that their enduring hold on the city could be finally waning.

Joined by his advisors at the citadel, Nebuchadnezzar contemplates destroying the priesthood

altogether. Ashpenaz cautions against it, arguing that the masses could be stirred to avenge the priests, and should they rebel against him, the resulting chaos in Babylon could entice other subject states to follow suit. Reminded of his fragile hold on power, Nebuchadnezzar conceives a plan to reduce the power of the priesthood by turning the masses toward Solomon's God. To initiate this scheme, he orders the review of his Judean hostages for the purpose of determining which are the healthiest. When all of Babylon learns these young men have refused food dedicated to Marduk and Ishtar, the people might begin to abandon them for the new God brought from distant Judah.

Seated upon his throne, Nebuchadnezzar studies the one hundred youths bowing before him. As each group is presented, the king eyes the boys briefly before turning his attention back to the playful interaction between Arioch and the king's young lion cub. As if to cue the king, Arioch introduces the cub to Daniel as his group approaches. Nebuchadnezzar engages Daniel in conversation, while recognizing that he and his friends appear much healthier than the other Judean hostages. Impressed with the young man's confidence in himself and in his God, the king takes notice how their exchange serves to vex Labasur and the other priests in attendance.

Leading Daniel to a remote quarter of the throne room, the king talks of the crisis currently plaguing the province of Sippar. The changing course of the river Euphrates threatens to starve the region's irrigation system and continue to devastate its once abundant agriculture. Turning to a large relief map set upon a table, the king explains to Daniel the monumental project the court advisors favor for replenishing the affected area. Concerned about the inevitable hunger many will suffer, Daniel suggests an unconventional method which would shorten the time needed to complete the undertaking by many years. Labasur and the "Architect of the Field" object vehemently to the plan, but are vetoed by the king. Recognizing its merits, Nebuchadnezzar commissions Daniel to build the proposed canal, which will cross the unforgiving marshes of Ditana, and divert water to the fields of Sippar years ahead of the original schedule.

Accompanied by Mishael, Daniel embarks a small ship for Sippar. During their voyage, he becomes acquainted with a fellow traveler, Adda. Hoping to eventually earn enough for passage to her hometown in distant Haran, she entices Daniel to hire her as his domestic helper during his stay in Sippar. Daniel agrees and shortly after, learns of Adda's Judean lineage. Before meeting her, the chances of finding a bride from among his people were small; and now, the prospect for marriage exists. Daniel's affection for Adda will grow over the following months, unaware of her burning ambition and her previous relationship with the king.

With work on the canal progressing faster than expected, Daniel conceptualizes a means for producing immense wealth for the king by greatly increasing the trickle of trade passing through Babylon between the lands surrounding the great sea to the west (Mediterranean), and those adjacent to the great southern sea (Indian Ocean). His proposal is well received in Babylon.

Months pass and construction of the canal continues without event until Adda receives news her sister is alive and well in Haran. The prospects of returning to Haran are much too alluring for Adda, her sister having married a merchant of great wealth many years her senior. Dejected, Daniel pleads with her to return with him to Babylon instead, and be his wife. Adda, sensing his star might still be rising, eases him down gently.

The canal is completed almost a year after its inception. Many marvel that no freeman or slave lost his life during its rapid construction, and that the youthful taskmaster could have even conceived it. On his return to Babylon, Daniel and his friends are promoted to positions within the palace by Ashpenaz over the objections of the priests. The king's high minister cites that, unlike the false gods, the Judean's God commands His faithful to be honest with all men. The priests reel, recognizing their influence within the palace will be in jeopardy especially should the corruption of certain officials be exposed.

Working late in the king's treasury one evening, Daniel and his friends are stricken with grief when learning of Ashpenaz's sudden death. Distraught by the loss of his trusted minister, Nebuchadnezzar fears that the priesthood may have poisoned Ashpenaz and is soon disturbed by a haunting nightmare. Hoping to find the courage to return to sleep, the king takes solace in drink. Emboldened by the wine, he orders the high priest and Labasur brought before him and commands them to tell him what he saw in his dream. They plead with him to tell them the dream so they may offer its interpretation, but he remains adamant knowing he now has the means to expose them as charlatans. Nebuchadnezzar accuses the priests that since their gods have not revealed the king's dream to them, their claims of receiving divine wisdom from the gods must surely be false. Nebuchadnezzar believes his argument will convict the priests in the minds of the masses. Hoping to terminate their caste once and for all, he decrees that all men seeking wisdom from the gods are to be put to death.

In the purge which follows, Daniel is brought before the king, but refuses to deny his God in order to save himself. Furious, Nebuchadnezzar orders Daniel thrown from the heights of the citadel, but just as the king's men attempt to throw him to his death, Daniel begins recounting the details of the king's dream. Awestruck, Nebuchadnezzar grabs his men, forcing them to set Daniel safely down. The king listens intently as Daniel continues describing the details of the dream, finishing with the revelation that the God of Israel has proclaimed Nebuchadnezzar "king of kings". Arioch argues that the Judeans' God is a true God, convincing the king to spare Daniel by lifting the reckless decree. Having just witnessed the power of Daniel's God, and elated that this true God has proclaimed him "king of kings", Nebuchadnezzar appoints Daniel as Ashpenaz's successor. END PART I

Several years pass, and as Daniel has brought greater prosperity to the realm, more subjects turn to his God. Fearing the prospects of their caste's extinction, the priests of Marduk plot to finish Nebuchadnezzar. They subtly fan the issue that his nemesis, Egypt, does not yet bend a knee to the king of kings, anticipating that Nebuchadnezzar's pride will gnaw at him and force him to take the bait. And when he commits to the conquest of Egypt, the priests will send word forewarning Pharaoh, giving him ample time to prepare a trap of his own design.

Joining Nebuchadnezzar during the inauguration of the Hanging Gardens, a number of nobles enjoy the novel sight of water cascading from one tier down to the next. Peacocks strut about the gardens while other exotic birds perch in the midst of the exquisite flora. Built to remind her of the hills of her Median homeland, Queen AMYTIS is unimpressed, spiteful that Nebuchadnezzar will soon take his heir, their thirteen year old son, AVIL-MARDUK, from her side. She goads the "king of kings", reminding him again that his nemesis Egypt remains unconquered. Daniel cautions his king that initiating this endeavor by his own volition will only meet with disaster, and leave his subjects to

suffer the consequences of this tremendous burden he would place upon them. Daniel pleads with his king to wait until God's appointed time. Blinded by his pride, Nebuchadnezzar ignores Daniel's warning.

Months have passed since the king left with his army to invade Egypt. Left to administer the kingdom, Daniel focuses on the receding level of the Euphrates River: the first sign of the impending drought. Anticipating the worst, Daniel decides to purchase all surplus grain throughout the realm and store it in Babylon, then distribute it as needed should famine strike.

(Egypt) - While crossing Sinai, Nebuchadnezzar learns from a captive that certain cities to his rear conspire to rebel against him. Obsessed with conquest, he dismisses this news as disinformation, a desperate ploy hatched by Pharaoh. Marching on, Nebuchadnezzar engages the enemy at Tanis. As Nebuchadnezzar's battle-hardened warriors begin to rout the seemingly ill-prepared Egyptians, a lookout posted high in the palm trees spots a large number of heavily armed Greek infantry on rafts attempting to outflank the Babylonians. Screened by the bulrushes at the river's edge, these mercenary warriors represent solid evidence that Pharaoh knew well in advance of the planned invasion and that the rumored rebellion therefore must be true. It is Arioch who finally convinces Nebuchadnezzar that his army will perish in Egypt unless he retreats immediately.

(Babylon) - Crossing the bridge from the new city on the west bank, a long camel caravan passes behind Daniel and his friends as they survey the receding level of the river. An elegant carriage suddenly pulls out from the caravan before stopping in front of Daniel. Much to his delight, its occupant is Adda. During their subsequent visit in the throne room, she tells him how her sister's husband, a wealthy merchant, has entrusted her to oversee this vast caravan, laden with grain, sent in response to Daniel's decree. Adda tells Daniel she is to remain in Babylon and administer the other caravans and barges from Haran arriving in the near future. She makes little secret of her desire to rekindle their romantic friendship during her lengthy assignment in Babylon.

Late one night, Adda makes a clandestine visit to the temple of Marduk where she attempts to purchase back the young son she sold to the priesthood years before. To her dismay, she is told her son is not for sale. Labasur, now high priest, has learned that Nebuchadnezzar is the boy's father making him a possible contender for the throne. Marduk's priesthood plans to continue cultivating her son and controlling him should they find a way to seat him on the throne. Also aware of her relationship with Daniel, Labasur blackmails Adda into charging an exorbitant fee for her sister's grain, the excess to be laid at Marduk's feet.

(Jerusalem) - During the long march homeward, Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem a second time. To discourage any further insurrection, he enslaves 10,000 of its inhabitants, before driving them back to Babylon like cattle.

(Babylon) - Daniel receives the devastating news of Nebuchadnezzar's forced withdrawal from Egypt and Jerusalem's treachery. As hostages, he and his friends are well aware of the fate which now awaits them upon Nebuchadnezzar's return. Adda urges him to flee with her to Haran where insurgents might protect him and his friends. Daniel declines, choosing to trust God, knowing the increased wrath the king would inflict on the other Judean hostages should he take flight. After a

tearful parting, Adda returns to Haran believing that she will never see Daniel again.

Upon his return to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar spares his Judean hostages from death, but only because they might be useful in facilitating his new plans for the conquest of Egypt. Daniel argues profusely that the king's priorities will undo the considerable effort already expended for minimizing the devastation the present drought will bring. Nebuchadnezzar rejects his counsel. Daniel's mere presence serves as a constant reminder that he had warned the king against invading Egypt and so Nebuchadnezzar sends him as an envoy to the Medes on the pretense of shoring up their alliance.

Watching Daniel depart from Babylon, the king contrives to create a new god, one he will compel his subjects to worship. He will use the offerings rendered to this deity to help underwrite a new campaign into Egypt.

On his journey to Ecbatana, Daniel alters his route to rendezvous with the returning army and the ten thousand Judeans taken captive from Jerusalem. Finding his old neighbor EPHRAIM among them, Daniel is heartened to learn his parents fled the city before it fell. Ephraim begins to weep uncontrollably as he recounts the atrocities the Babylonians inflicted on their countrymen at Jerusalem and during their long trek eastward. Several captives chime in, begging Daniel to petition for their freedom, declaring their unfaltering allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. Angered by their denial and wanton apostasy, Daniel scolds them, telling them they have been exiled to Babylon, not for rebelling against its king, but for rebelling against the God of Abraham.

In Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar has commanded a host of dignitaries and officials to assemble before a colossal graven image, newly constructed on the plains outside the city. Made in the king's likeness, the idol represents his new god. At the signal, all are commanded to prostrate themselves before it. Refusing to kneel before the graven image, Azariah, Hananiah, and Mishael are brought into the presence of the king. He commands them to bow before his idol, or they will perish. Remaining true to their faith, the Judeans refuse. Enraged, the king commands that they be thrown alive into the furnace of the large brick kiln he points to off in the distance. As they are led off to their death, Nebuchadnezzar begins to feel the same, strange presence he felt years before, when standing in the temple of Solomon. He struggles at the prospects of having angered the Judean God before following his victims to the distant brickyard. There, he stirs his men working the giant bellows to stoke a hotter fire, convinced it will consume his victims' ashes and assuage his worry. The king watches the hellish white smoke spew violently from the stack for several minutes before commanding the workers to swing open the iron door covering the furnace opening. Peering inside, he sees within the midst of the flames, an angel of God protecting the three Judeans from harm. Awestruck and fearing the worst, Nebuchadnezzar calls for the Judeans to exit the furnace. The many workers look on, astonished at the sight of the unscathed Judeans. Knowing news of this miracle will quickly spread, the king is forced to feign allegiance to the God he has once again defied. His lust for glory, however, still remains unabated, and so Nebuchadnezzar suffers another terrifying dream.

Daniel's time in Ecbatana has not been wasted, his efforts of the past few months benefiting both kingdoms. Summoned to return to Babylon, Daniel's departure is made even more difficult having endeared himself to the royal family. During his long journey home Daniel encounters the full weight of famine now gripping Nebuchadnezzar's realm. Reaching Babylon, Daniel interprets

Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare, telling him that his extravagance has caused his subjects much suffering, and that for this defiance, the God of Israel has decreed that the king of Babylon will suffer insanity. When King Nebuchadnezzar is struck with madness, Arioch and the army make Daniel regent, enabling the kingdom to prosper once again.

Several years have passed while the king's insanity continues to plague him. Stirred by the ever plotting priesthood and his own ambition, the crown prince Avil-Marduk is able to incite his mad father into believing that the destruction of Solomon's temple will lift his curse. The conspirators believe that in the heat of battle for Jerusalem, the reckless king will make an easy mark for an assassin's arrow.

Daniel watches in disbelief as the armies of Babylon march off again, this time to destroy the city of his youth. The warriors of Babylon are led by Arioch whose recent faith in God has begun to wane, as it gives way to an older loyalty—that to his king who, during his brief lapses into sanity, has called for this incursion.

During the Passover feast, Daniel is presented with a scroll containing the ancient writings of the prophet Isaiah. Its words remind Daniel and his friends of the purpose to which God has called their people and of the coming Messiah. Only by salvaging the sacred texts written by Israel's prophets can they hope to turn their exiled countrymen back to God in preparation for their inevitable return to the Promised Land and their divine calling.

Mishael cajoles Daniel late one night to follow him to the Hanging Gardens, not telling him Adda waits for him there. The years of absence makes the enchantment of her beauty even more alluring. She entices Daniel to take her as his wife before nudging forward her true agenda by encouraging him to seize the throne, and naming her own son as his heir. Daniel's disdain for her ambition is overpowered by the thought of her having relations with another man, and when learning the boy's father is Nebuchadnezzar, his jealousy rages even more. Disillusioned with the woman for whom his passion has burned so long, Daniel learns an even darker side of her past, when she reveals she had sold her son to the priests of Marduk years before. That she would betray the God of her people, and her own son—by condemning him to a life of servitude to the false gods—devastates Daniel. He promises her that he will free her son from Marduk's priests, and return him to her. Her spark of hope is quickly dashed when he banishes her from Babylon and from his heart.

The Babylonians capture Jerusalem for a third and final time, turning it to rubble. Arioch confronts the prophet Jeremiah who dispels the young general's innermost fears, telling him that his mission of destruction is sanctioned by God Almighty. His faith restored Arioch sets fire to the temple amid the protests from the Judean collaborators wanting it spared so they might use it for political gain. As Nebuchadnezzar watches the spreading fire, one of the quislings approaches him to appeal but is mortally wounded by an assassin's arrow intended for the king. In a frenzy, the warriors of Babylon cut down the assassin, destroying the link which could have tied the crown prince and Labasur to the crime.

Nebuchadnezzar is greeted in the palace upon his return to Babylon. Oblivious to the presence of courtiers and the fawning of his insidious son, he senses Daniel's approach which causes his affliction

to worsen. As Daniel enters the throne room, those in attendance scurry to clear a channel between him and the king. Nebuchadnezzar boasts of how he has destroyed the God of Israel, His city and His temple. Incited by his heir and Labasur, the king brandishes a sword, then charges at Daniel. Knocking him violently to the floor, the king hovers over Daniel who closes his eyes to wait for death. At the sound of clashing iron, he looks up to see Arioch deflecting the king's sword with his own. Amid the cries of "treason", Nebuchadnezzar hacks furiously at the young general, who blocks each blow in self-defense. Slowly, the king tires before stopping altogether. Dropping his sword, Nebuchadnezzar sits down to watch Daniel crawl to his side. With emotion, he cries out that the curse has been lifted. He attests that the God of Creation has answered his petition, saving both him and Daniel from his madness, while forgiving him for his pride. With heartfelt sincerity, King Nebuchadnezzar proclaims that the God of Israel will be honored above all. END PART II

FLASH FORWARD (continue opening scene Part I) - Daniel baits Gabriel to remove the mystery shrouding his recurring visions, but instead, the angel recounts how King Nebuchadnezzar entrusted Daniel with the task of ushering Babylon into a golden age.

FLASH BACK - In a VOICE OVER Gabriel NARRATES as the viewer watches a series of events occurring during the golden age and those which followed leading to the demise of Babylon: Daniel presides over a council of elders who consolidate the sacred writings of Israel. Obedient to God, Nebuchadnezzar is at last given victory over Egypt, and a long and prosperous reign before he is finally laid to rest.

Nebuchadnezzar is succeeded by his lecherous son, Avil-Marduk. The new king remains under the influence of his spiteful mother, Queen Amytis, a willing collaborator of Marduk's priesthood. His corrupt reign creates much strife. In desperation, Arioch deposes him and seizes the throne for himself. Stability is restored throughout most of the realm, but chaos still grips the eastern province of Elam, and so Daniel is sent there to help restore order.

Enabled by her sister's wealth, Adda slowly gathers influence and power during her years in Haran. When discovering that the priests of Marduk conspire to assassinate King Arioch, she hatches her own plot, and prepares her revenge. Adda waits until the optimum hour to produce the evidence proving Labasur had acknowledged years earlier that Nebuchadnezzar was indeed the father of her son. Forced to abandon his ploy to place a puppet on the throne, the high priest is further humiliated when swearing fealty to her son, NEBUNAID, the new king of Babylon. To strengthen her hold on power, she introduces the patron deity of Haran, the moon god, Nanna-Sin to the masses of Babylon. Drawing their support with silver, gold, and favors provided by the cult's temple prostitutes, she would rule from behind the throne upon which she set her son.

Having restored stability to the city of Susa, Daniel remains cautious for a time before seeking to return to Babylon. His petition denied, he is instead commanded to continue as provincial governor of Elam. Unbeknownst to Daniel, the new king's mother is Adda and that it is she who keeps him far from Babylon. END VOICE OVER.

Gabriel appears before Daniel for the very first time, apprising him that the ambitious crown prince of Babylon has provoked war with the Medes and the Persians. The angel tells Daniel that Babylon's

days are numbered, and instructs him to return there to proclaim that foreboding message to its ruler.

Reaching Babylon by small ship, Daniel learns that the Medes and the Persians are now encamped just outside of the new city, having scattered King Nebunaid's army two weeks earlier in an engagement one hundred miles north of Babylon. Arriving at Azariah's house, Daniel and his old friend tearfully rejoice after twenty years of separation. They spend several hours sharing memories of days long past before finally discussing more pressing matters. Daniel learns that the crown prince BEL-SHAZZAR persecutes the remnant still faithful to the God of Abraham. Driven by a sense of urgency, Daniel embarks for the palace to admonish and give final warning to Bel-Shazzar. En-route, he sees the decadence now pervading the city; it having crept in during his long absence. Reaching the palace, Daniel explains the pressing nature of his visit. It is the high priest BELUTUSU who steps out from the shadows to abruptly refuse him audience with the crown prince. Daniel stares at Belutusu, sensing their pasts, or even their futures might somehow be tied together.

Later that night, while resting at Azariah's house, Daniel is visited by a servant girl. Sent by her mistress to summon him, he follows her back to the Hanging Gardens where Adda is waiting. She confides to Daniel how she succeeded in putting her son, Nebunaid, on the throne, alluding that her beauty and sexual prowess helped in her quest for power. Hearing how she ruled from behind the throne, Daniel rebukes her for allowing decadence to take root in Babylon, warning her of God's judgment. In defiance, she pulls back her veil causing Daniel to recoil at the hideous disfigurement of her once beautiful face. She recounts to him the plague which swept over the city many years earlier, and the pox which stole her beauty, believing it to be God's wrathful vengeance. It was her vanity which subsequently drove her into seclusion, clearing the way for the priests of Marduk to reassert their domineering influence over her son, the king. Her only reason for living was her young grandson, Bel-Shazzar, left motherless by the same plague. Having raised Bel-Shazzar as her own child, Adda exhibits her maternal instincts as she pleads with Daniel to intervene to God on her grandson's behalf, explaining that when he was in his tenth year the priests of Marduk took him from her. It was Belutusu, son of Daniel's old nemesis, Labasur, who turned her grandson, Bel-Shazzar, into the monster he has become and incited him to make war on the Medes and the Persians.

Miles north of Babylon, the Medes and Persians work feverishly to divert the waters of the Euphrates. Unable to breech the high walls of Babylon, CYRUS, the Persian king, plans to wait for nightfall, when the water level downstream at Babylon will be low enough for his warriors to ford the river, and pass under the water gate at the entrance of the city's main canal.

Celebrating the New Year, Prince Bel-Shazzar and a dozen nobles watch the spectacle in the small arena (lion pit) below, as hungry lions maul three victims to death. Returning to the throne room, Bel-Shazzar rejoins his other guests: the multitude of nobles who fled the northern provinces after Cyrus' recent victory over King Nebunaid of Babylon. The high priest Belutusu proclaims Bel-Shazzar the new king of Babylon, and to celebrate the coronation, uses the chalices Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Solomon's temple years before. As they make libation to the gods of Babylon, Bel-Shazzar casts his gaze outside the giant portal to notice a blue star glistening in the heavens. Thinking it heralds his ascension to the throne, he and his guests watch in awe as it seems to gradually grow in size. Their fascination is soon displaced by abject fear when they realize the blue light is actually fast approaching the throne room. One by one, the fires lighting the throne room

flicker before blowing out as a frigid breeze overwhelms the gathering. Several revelers drop to the floor while the others, frozen in fear, watch as the mysterious blue fireball enters the throne room to fly overhead before crashing into oblivion against the back wall. An eerie darkness continues to pervade the throne room, until all at once, fires flair up from the braziers bringing light to the throne room again. Rising from the floor, Belutusu proclaims the blue orb as a favorable sign, and begins leading the libation to the gods of Babylon. A chorus of screams is heard when the revelers see the back wall ripple and waiver ever so slightly while curious etchings begin pushing out from the wall, as if scribed by a finger from an unseen hand within the brickwork.

Having sent for Marduk's astrologers, Bel-Shazzar grows impatient as their lingering efforts fail to decipher the strange and cryptic markings. When the high priest attempts to contrive their meaning, Adda traps him in his lie, prodding him to explain the meaning of each character, as she points to them one at a time. She tells her grandson, Bel-Shazzar, that there is one among the Judean captives in whom abides the power to divine such a message.

Summoned to the throne room, Daniel is commanded to read and decipher the encryption. After gazing upon the enigma, he turns to chaste Bel-Shazzar, telling him his kingdom is destined to fall to the Medes and the Persians entrenched outside his city. Bolstered by the high priest, Bel-Shazzar boasts how his greatness will endure and how his new army forming in the south will destroy the forces led by Cyrus the Persian. Humiliated before the nobles, Daniel leaves the throne room and the debauchery within it.

Under the cover of darkness, a band of Persian warriors wade across the now shallow river, and enter the city by ducking under the gate no longer able to bar entrance to the main canal. The few revelers still celebrating the New Year are too drunk to notice the intruders, who scurry toward the distant Ishtar Gate. Reaching the main entrance to the city, they throw open the giant doors for their comrades now approaching in great numbers from across the river.

The invaders attempting to enter the palace are met with fierce resistance offered by a small band of palace guards led by their commander ZARADAN. His face mutilated in the skirmish, he retreats to the throne room. Stumbling over passed-out nobles, he races to wake the high priest. Arising to the sounds of battle, Belutusu goes to Bel-Shazzar but fails to wake the young king. Seeing Medes and Persians now battling their way into the adjacent courtyard, Belutusu and Zaradan abandon the inebriated Bel-Shazzar and his sleeping guests to the mercy of the invaders. They escape through the back portal and are soon followed by the ambitious satrap SHALAMANASUR. Finally rising from his stupor, Bel-Shazzar staggers as enemy warriors gather around him. Angered by their jeers, he swings his dagger wildly several times before they hack him to death.

Reaching the safety of Marduk's temple, Belutusu plots to retake control of Babylon, sending his priests throughout the city to torch its vast stores of food. He reasons that the army forming in the south can recapture Babylon, but only if her people rise up in concert and so rumors are spread to blame the Medes and Persians for the resulting food shortage in the effort to create unrest. He sends Zaradan upriver to show his hideous facial wounds to all those he meets, and fabricate tales of atrocities committed by the Medes and the Persians, hoping to dissuade the river merchants from bringing food to the city.

Taking half his army to assert his lordship over the western regions, Cyrus leaves his general, DARIUS the Mede, to govern Babylon. As a ruse, Belututsu prompts Shalamanasur and the scribe DALAMAAD to go before Darius and offer assistance in restoring order to a city now facing chaos and wide-spread hunger. Darius receives Shalamanasur and Dalamaad, and finds their offer encouraging. Acting on their advice he decrees a general amnesty hoping to bring the scribes and officials back to the palace. As a reward, he grants their petition giving them authority over those who return. With spies now imbedded in the palace, the high priest Belutusu is determined to learn of Cyrus' whereabouts. Armed with this information, he will coordinate the attack by the southern army accordingly.

Formally surrendering the province of Elam to Babylon's new ruler, Daniel is embraced by Darius, who recalls from the days of his early childhood the highly esteemed Judean emissary sent from Babylon to the court of the Medes. Daniel counsels Darius, telling him that to end the famine, the myths and rumors of his warriors' incessant brutality must be dispelled before the river merchants will feel it safe again to transport food into Babylon. Daniel argues vehemently that he alone is best suited for the task until at last, Darius reluctantly agrees to let him voyage north.

Sailing upriver, Daniel initially fails to end the distrust of the merchants he meets along the way. At Sippar, it is his fame which finally bursts the distrust and fear harbored by the merchants there, as his legendary canal serves as a reminder of the famine which had gripped the region many years before. As the first boats laden with food begin their journey south, Daniel continues north to expedite the relief of the starving city.

Several days pass before the first boats reach Babylon with food. His plans for insurrection thwarted, Belutusu conspires to control Babylon through Shalamanasur. To clear the way, he must eliminate Daniel, but in a way to avoid suspicion falling on his surrogates. He sends his priests to the temple of Nanna-Sin to murder the devotees of the moon-god during their rituals. As planned, the massacre ignites a bloody, sectarian war in Babylon. Fearing that the hostile army regrouping in the south might attack during this instability, Darius finds himself forced to sign a harsh decree designed to end the bloodshed by banishing all religious rites within the city. Shalamanasur convinces Darius that for his decree to be effective, he must send all violators to the lion pit. With desecration of the body being so extreme, fears of retaining that disheveled state forever make the prospects of this most gruesome deterrent that much more effective in curbing the zealots' fervor.

Weeks pass before Daniel finally returns to Babylon, where he is greeted by a grateful and recently pacified populace. Given leave by Darius, Daniel continues on to Azariah's house. Within the privacy of the roof top veranda, Daniel offers thanksgiving to God for his recent successes. The angel Gabriel appears before Daniel, (starting point of story, Part I) and shows him a series of events, from his day until the time of the end. Spellbound, Daniel continues to listen as the angel begins to unveil the mystery of the man nailed to the crossed timbers, finally revealing that He is the long awaited Messiah promised by God. Apprised of the Messiah's scheduled earthly appearance (Daniel 9:25,26), Daniel sees a vision of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His betrayal, and then His crucifixion.

The following day, a man stands before Darius, claiming to have witnessed his neighbor violate the

draconian decree. Upon learning it is Daniel who stands accused, Darius scrambles in desperation to vindicate his Judean advisor. Shalamanasur and Dalamaad argue fervently that such favoritism will only re-ignite the unrest and anarchy Darius has worked so hard to stamp out. By holding fast to the legal code of the Medes and the Persians, they are finally able to force Darius to execute the law.

Having learned of Daniel's death sentence, Adda meets him as he is escorted from the citadel to the lion pit. Before reaching the steps leading down to the pit, she tells him he is her only hope for living. He shares his own hope in the future Messiah, telling her, "It is not the end I go to...but a beginning to which there is no end. I will pray that on the last day, I may greet you there." After placing Daniel in the entrance of the tunnel joining the small arena to the lions' den, the Persians roll into place the large stone disc designed to cover it.

Under the cover of darkness, Belutusu leads his cohorts down to the lion pit to confirm that Daniel is dead. Their plan is preempted upon discovering a wax seal affixing the stone disk to the tunnel entrance. Stamped with Darius' signet ring they leave both the seal and the stone disk undisturbed. As they exit the lion pit their plans continue to deteriorate with Darius and his men suddenly appearing from the adjacent palatial courtyard. The first rays of sunlight peer over the high walls, prompting Darius to hurry his men to roll back the stone disk covering the entrance to the tunnel. Seeing Daniel waking in the midst of sleeping lions, Darius proclaims the Judean's absolution, his having spent sunset to sunrise in the company of hungry lions satisfying the dictates of the decree.

While Shalamanasur and Dalamaad continue to argue for his death, Adda rushes into the courtyard, and embraces Daniel. Her joy ends abruptly when she suddenly takes notice of Belutusu lurking in the background. His masquerade as a lowly scribe fails to fool Adda, who begins ranting hysterically, accusing the high priest of his diabolical deeds before Darius. Fearing their lives depend on their cohort's ruse, Shalamanasur and Dalamaad rush to argue that she is confusing him for another, and that the palace scribes will testify the man in question is nothing more than a lowly scribe, just as Belutusu pretends to be. Adda seethes knowing the officials of the palace will never incriminate Belutusu, as they live in the shadow of a vengeful priesthood. With Darius remaining irresolute, the conspirators begin to make a slow departure, knowing they will be safe and the matter closed once they reach Marduk's temple. Just as they approach the threshold of the portal leading to their freedom, Daniel offers to Darius the definitive means with which to establish the suspect's true identity. The nobles of the northern provinces—those taking refuge in Babylon before its fall, and recently freed by Darius—will have nothing to fear from the priesthood. His fate sealed, Belutusu knows that while detained in the citadel, his cohorts, to protect themselves, will find a way to silence him. The thought of Shalamanasur and Dalamaad escaping death at his expense, spurs him to implicate them in the plots to effect strife, starvation, and insurrection. Both Shalamanasur and Dalamaad panic, and in a rush of self-preservation, each proclaims his own innocence, while incriminating the other two conspirators. Adding to their trouble, Darius denies them a fast and easy death as befitting their station, but instead sentences all three men to die in the lion pit. Horror stricken, the conspirators rabidly boast of the vicious retributions their children will commit upon Darius, unaware that, by the law of the Medes and the Persians, their blood oaths of vengeance have condemned their offspring to follow them into death in the lion pit.

Daniel grabs Adda and quickly escorts her from the fifth courtyard, as screams of agony and terror are

heard coming from the lion pit. Reaching the steps leading up to the throne room, they sit down to rest. Daniel recounts to Adda the vision he saw hours earlier while in the company of lions. The audience sees the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ before seeing a spectacular rendition of the fullness of heaven\* (ref. Daniel 7:9-14). Coming into view, Jesus Christ is seen in all His glory as He approaches the throne of God Almighty (His face indiscernible to the viewer). In a voice-over, Daniel explains to Adda that the Messiah's death will cleanse the sins of all humanity, allowing those who believe in Him to live in the presence of God for all eternity.

Consumed with guilt, Adda remains doubtful. Fearing she will be recompensed for the evil her ambition has caused, she asks, "Why would God have His Son suffer death for me?"

"You have felt the answer stirring in your own heart, Adda,...in the love you had for a small child." Daniel's words of love and hope bring a tear to Adda's eye. Now understanding the very nature of God and His burning desire to forgive, the premise for the Messiah's atoning death becomes clear. Feeling the weight of her guilt vanish, she asks, "And what will I see when I look upon His glory, Daniel?" The audience suddenly sees Daniel and Adda as they looked in the days of their youth. Gazing into her eyes, he answers, "All that is great...all that is beautiful...all that is love."

\*In this particular scene, we are attempting to produce the greatest rendition of heaven that can be conceptualized by the human imagination.