

Daniel 3:25—“the Son of God,” or “a son of the gods”?

The King James Version, in Daniel 3:25, reads:

He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like **the Son of God**.

The large majority of modern Bible versions render the verse as follows:

He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they were not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like **a son of the gods**.” (ESV)

The New King James Version reads “the Son of God,” but includes a marginal note reading, “or, *a son of the gods*.”

Is the Authorized Version correct, or the modern versions? The KJV translation is definitely the correct one, and the modern versions are in error, for the following reasons.

First, the phrase **בֶּרֶךְ-אֱלֹהִים** in Daniel 3:25 is properly translated “**the Son of God**,” not “**a son of the gods**.” First, the definiteness of the absolute noun **אֱלֹהִים**, although nonarticular, makes the construct noun **בֶּרֶךְ** definite likewise—it is “the Son,” not “a son,” as in Daniel 4:9, 15; 5:11, 14 the nonarticular **רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים** “the spirit,” not “a spirit,” of the gods/God, and in Daniel 5:11 **חֵכְמַת-אֱלֹהִים** is “the wisdom of the gods,” not “a wisdom of gods.”

Second, in Daniel 3:25 the translation “God” for **אֱלֹהִים**, rather than “gods,” is superior. It is true that **אֱלֹהִים** is a plural form, and it is likewise true that, unless one renders **רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים** (Daniel 4:9, 15; 5:11, 14) as “the Spirit of God” rather than “the spirit of the gods,” in the other instances where the plural **אֱלֹהִים** is found in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:11, 47; 3:12, 14, 18; 4:5–6, 15; 5:4, 11, 14, 23), the translation “gods” is proper, while the singular **אֱלֹהִים** is employed of the true God of Israel or of a particular but singular false god (Daniel 2:18–20, 23, 28, 37, 44–45, 47; 3:12, 15, 17, 26, 28–29, 32; 4:5; 5:3, 18, 21, 23, 26; 6:6, 8, 11–13, 17, 21, 23–24, 27; Ezra 4:24–5:2; 5:5, 8, 11–17; 6:3, 5, 7–10, 12, 14, 16–18; 7:12, 14–21, 23–26). While these facts certainly merit consideration, they do not prove that Daniel 3:25 refers to “gods” for the following

reasons. First, the equivalent Hebrew plural to the Aramaic אֱלֹהֵי of Daniel 3:25 is אֱלֹהִים, the plural noun regularly and overwhelmingly used for the singular true God, Jehovah. If the Hebrew plural אֱלֹהִים, the overwhelming majority of the time, “God” rather than “gods,” one must at least allow for the possibility that the Aramaic plural אֱלֹהֵי refers to “God,” rather than “gods,” in Daniel 3:25, when spoken of with reference to the true Deity revealed in Scripture. This possibility is strengthened by the use of plural titles interchangeably with singular ones for the one true God in the book of Daniel itself. Thus, the title עֲלִיּוֹנִין, “the most High,” within the book always is always plural, but refers in every instance to the one true God, not to exalted pagan gods (Daniel 7:18, 22, 25, 27). The plural עֲלִיּוֹנִין is employed interchangeably with the singular אֱלֹהִים (Daniel 3:26, 32; 4:14, 21–22, 29, 31; 5:18, 21; 7:25) in Daniel 7:25—the singular and plural words are designations of the true God in successive clauses. Second, while the other instances of the Aramaic plural אֱלֹהֵי in the Old Testament refer to “gods,” rather than to “God” (again, on the assumption that רִיחַ אֱלֹהִים is “the spirit of the gods” rather than “the Spirit of God,”—yet see Genesis 41:38—the רִיחַ אֱלֹהִים is the πνεῦμα θεοῦ of the LXX, “the Spirit of God” mentioned on the lips of a pagan) in every other case the plural אֱלֹהֵי refers, at least in the mind of the speaker, to false gods, rather than the true God. When the Hebrew plural אֱלֹהִים refers to false gods, it is also properly rendered in the plural as “gods,” but such a fact does not alter the use of the plural אֱלֹהִים for the single true God also. As the use of the Hebrew plural אֱלֹהִים for a plurality of false gods does not eliminate its use for the singular true God also, the use of the plural אֱלֹהֵי for a plurality of false gods does not mean that the Aramaic plural cannot also refer to the singular true God. Third, Aramaic usage of the plural of forms of words for “God” in reference to solely the one true God of the Bible is abundant. The plural of אֱלֹהֵי is employed 17 times in the Targums of Onkelos, Jonathan, and the Writings of the one true God, and only twice employed of “gods” (Genesis 31:53; Jeremiah 5:14; 15:16; 35:17; 38:17; 44:7; Hosea 12:6; Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:14–16, 27; 6:8, 14; Psalm 51:16; 147:12, the true God; Psalm 135:5; 136:2, to “gods.”) The Targum Neofiti twice employs the same plural for the one true God (Exodus 18:11; Deuteronomy 1:11). The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan does the same in Exodus 18:11. Thus, the phenomenon of employing a plural form for the one true God of Israel is not restricted to Hebrew, but appears in Aramaic also. Fourth, the standard Koehler/Baumgartner Hebrew lexicon states that the word אֱלֹהִים, “God/gods” in Daniel 3:25, can be used in the plural of the one God of Israel (אֱלֹהִים, 2bδ). Fifth, ancient translational evidence supports the rendering “the Son of God.” The LXX translated Daniel 3:25 with the singular ὁ ἀγγέλου θεοῦ, understanding the reference to be to “God” with the genitive singular, rather than the genitive plural, form of θεός—the

LXX supports a reference to “God,” not to the “gods.” Theodotian and Aquila likewise read υἱὸ θεοῦ, “the Son of God,” not a reference to “gods.” The Vulgate similarly supports a reference in Daniel 3:25 to the singular “Son of God,” rather than “the son of the gods,” through its rendering with the singular *filio Dei*. Furthermore, “in Akkadian the equivalent plural [to the Aramaic אֱלֹהִים] is used for a single deity” (*Word Biblical Commentary* on Daniel 5:5). The Authorized Version follows very strong evidence in ancient translations in its reference to “the Son of God” in Daniel 3:25. Sixth, the context supports a reference to “the Son of God” rather than “a/the son of the gods.” First, the heathen gods had many sons, so Nebuchadnezzar would not speak of “the son of the gods,” but the translation “a son of the gods” has been shown to be inferior above. Second, Nebuchadnezzar immediately refers to “the most high God” (אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיָּא) after his statement of v. 25. After seeing “the Son of God,” Nebuchadnezzar would naturally conclude that the three Hebrew children were “servants of the most high God,” but seeing “a son of the gods” would have no obvious connection to “the most high God.” Nebuchadnezzar would have known of the Son of God from Daniel and his three friends, as the Son of God had been proclaimed the Object of faith for the heathen nations for hundreds of years at a minimum already (cf. Psalm 2:12, where king David exhorts the heathen to trust in God’s “Son,” the Aramaic word בֶּר being employed by David, as it is in Daniel 3:25). Seventh, “the Son of God” is identified with the Angel of the LORD in Daniel 3:28; 6:22, the preincarnate Second Person of the Trinity, who promised, “when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned” (Isaiah 43:2).

For all of these reasons, Daniel 3:25 is properly referred to “the Son of God,” not “a/the son of the gods.” Daniel 3:25, 28 both proves the preexistence of the Son of God (cf. Proverbs 30:4; Psalm 2) and makes a connection between the Son of God and the Angel or Messenger of Jehovah, the preincarnate Messiah. The Son of God delivered His beloved saints out of the midst of the fiery furnace. Furthermore, the Authorized Version is again vindicated in its rendering, while the modern Bible versions are shown to be inferior and corrupt.