

Encouragement to the Faithful Jews

Daniel Examines

The Forces of Nature

The Destiny of Nations

The Care of God's People

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Introduction to the Book of Daniel

The purpose of the book of Daniel is to give a historical account of the faithful Jews who lived in captivity and to show how God is in control of heaven and earth, directing the forces of nature, the destiny of nations, and the care of his people

Daniel wrote this book to the other captives in Babylon and to God's people in about 535 B.C. He recorded events that occurred from about 605—535 B.C.

Daniel had been taken captive and deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. While there, he served in the government for about 60 years during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus.

The key verse is: "He God reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him" (Daniel 2:22).

Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Belshazzar, Darius are the main characters in this book. Key places cover Nebuchadnezzar's palace, the fiery furnace, Belshazzar's banquet, and the den of lions: Daniel's apocalyptic visions (Daniel 8-12) give a glimpse of God's plan for the ages, including a direct prediction of the Messiah.

OVERVIEW

AN EARTHQUAKE shakes the foundation of our security; a tornado blows away a lifetime of treasures; an assassin's bullet changes national history; a drunk driver claims an innocent victim; a divorce shatters a home. International and personal tragedies make our world seem a fearful place, overflowing with evil and seemingly out of control. And the litany of bombings, coups, murders, and natural disasters could cause us to think that God is absent or impotent. "Where is God?" we cry, engulfed by sorrow and despair.

Twenty-five centuries ago, Daniel could have despaired. He and thousands of his countrymen had been deported to a foreign land after Judah was conquered. Daniel found himself facing an egocentric despot and surrounded by idolaters. Instead of giving in or giving up, this courageous young man held fast to his faith in his God. Daniel knew that despite the circumstances, God was sovereign and was working out his plan for nations and individuals. The book of Daniel centers around this profound truth—the sovereignty of God.

After a brief account of Nebuchadnezzar's siege and defeat of Jerusalem, the scene quickly shifts to Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Misha-el, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego). These men held prominent positions within the Babylonian government. Daniel, in particular, held such a position because of his ability to interpret the king's dreams that tell of God's unfolding plan (Daniel 2 and Daniel 4). Sandwiched between the dreams is the fascinating account of Daniel's three friends and the furnace (Daniel 3). Because they refused to bow down to an image of gold, they were

condemned to a fiery death. But God intervened and spared their lives.

Belshazzar ruled Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel 5 tells of his encounter with God's message written on a wall. Daniel, who was summoned to interpret the message, predicted Babylon's fall to the Medes and Persians. This prediction came true that very night, and Darius the Mede conquered the Babylonian kingdom.

Daniel became one of Darius's most trusted advisers. His privileged position angered other administrators, who plotted his death by convincing the king to outlaw prayer. In spite of the law, Daniel continued to pray to his sovereign Lord. As a result, he was condemned to die in a den of hungry lions. Again, God intervened and saved him, shutting the mouths of the lions (Daniel 6).

The book concludes with a series of visions that Daniel had during the reigns of Belshazzar (Daniel 7-8), Darius (Daniel 9), and Cyrus (Daniel 10-12). These dreams dramatically outline God's future plans, beginning with Babylon and continuing to the end of the age. They give a preview of God's redemption and have been called the key to all Biblical prophecy.

God is sovereign. He was in control in Babylon, and he has been moving in history, controlling the destinies of people ever since. And he is here now! Despite news reports or personal stress, we can be confident that God is in control. As you read Daniel, watch God work and find your security in his sovereignty.

THE BLUEPRINT

A. DANIEL'S LIFE (Daniel 1:1-6:28)

Daniel and his three friends chose not to eat the king's food. They did not bow down to the king's image, even under penalty of death. Daniel continued to pray even though he knew he might be noticed and sentenced to death. These men are inspiring examples for us of living a faithful life in a sinful world. When we face trials, we can expect God to remain present with us through our trials. May God grant us the same courage to remain faithful under pressure.

B. DANIEL'S VISIONS (Daniel 7:1-12:13)

These visions gave the captives added confidence that God is in control of history. They were to wait patiently and in faith and not to worship the gods of Babylon or accept their way of life. God still rules over human activities. Evil will be overcome, so we should wait patiently and not give in to the temptations and pressures of the sinful way of life around us.

THEME: God is in Control

God is all-knowing, and he is in charge of world events. God overrules and removes rebellious leaders who defy him. God will overcome evil; no one is exempt. But he will deliver the faithful who follow him.

Although nations vie for world control now, one day Christ's kingdom will replace and surpass the kingdoms of this world. Our faith is sure because our future is secure in Christ. We must have courage and put our faith in God who controls everything.

Daniel and his three friends are examples of dedication and commitment. They determined to serve God regardless of the consequences. They did not give in to pressures from an ungodly society because they had a clear purpose in life.

It is wise to make trusting and obeying God alone our true purpose in life. This will give us direction and peace in spite of the circumstances or consequences. We should disobey anyone who asks us to disobey God. Our first allegiance must be to God.

Daniel served for 70 years in a foreign land that was hostile to God, yet he did not compromise his faith in God. He was truthful, persistent in prayer, and disinterested in power for personal glory.

In order to fulfill your life's purpose, you need staying power. Don't let your Christian distinctives become blurred. Be relentless in your prayers, stay firm in your integrity, and be content to serve God wherever he puts you.

God was faithful in Daniel's life. He delivered him from prison, from a den of lions, and from enemies who hated him. God cares for his people and deals patiently with them. We can trust God to be with us through any trial because he promises to be there. Because he has been faithful to us, we should remain faithful to him.

TIMELINE

Daniel taken captive to Babylon 605
Ezekiel becomes a prophet to exiles 593
Judah falls; Jerusalem is destroyed; Jeremiah's ministry ends
586 Daniel's first vision 553
Babylon overthrown; Daniel thrown to lions
539 First exiles return to Judah 538 Daniel's
ministry ends 536

Daniel

Chapter 1

While Ezekiel was ministering to the captives in Babylon, Daniel was drafted as a counselor to King Nebuchadnezzar. With God's help, Daniel interpreted two of the king's dreams, Daniel's three friends were rescued from certain death in the fiery furnace, and Daniel was rescued from a lions' den. Daniel's life is a picture of the triumph of faith. May God grant us this type of faith so that we may also live courageously each day.

“During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it with his armies. [2] The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon, he took with him some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God and placed them in the treasure-house of his god in the land of Babylonia“.

Born during the middle of Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22-23), Daniel grew up during the king's reforms. During this time, Daniel probably heard Jeremiah, a prophet he quoted in Daniel 9:2. In 609 B.C., Josiah was killed in a battle against Egypt, and within four years, the southern kingdom of Judah had returned to its evil ways. In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylonia. In September of that year, he swept into Palestine and surrounded Jerusalem, making Judah his vassal state. To demonstrate his dominance, Nebuchadnezzar took many of Jerusalem's wisest men and most beautiful women to Babylon as captives. Daniel was among this group.

Nebuchadnezzar, the supreme leader of Babylonia, was feared throughout the world. When he invaded a country, defeat was certain. After a victory, the Babylonians usually took the most talented and useful people back to Babylon and left only the poor behind to take whatever land they wanted and to live peacefully there (2 Kings 24:14). This system fostered great loyalty from conquered lands and ensured a steady supply of wise and talented people for civil service.

At certain times God allows his work to suffer. In this instance, the Babylonians raided the temple of God, and took the worship articles to the temple of a god in Babylon. This god may have been Bel, also called Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonians. Those who loved the Lord must have felt disheartened and discouraged. We feel greatly disappointed when our churches suffer physical damage, split, close down for financial reasons, or are wracked by scandals. We do not know why God allows his church to experience these calamities. But like the people who witnessed the plundering of the temple by the Babylonians, we must trust that God is in control and that he is watching over all who trust in him.

“Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, who was in charge of the palace officials, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking

young men”, he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good sense, and have the poise needed to serve in the royal palace. Teach these young men the language and literature of the Babylonians”.

The common language of Babylonia was Aramaic, while the language of scholarship included the ancient and complicated Babylonian language. The academic program would have included mathematics, astronomy, history, science, and magic. These young men demonstrated not only aptitude, but also discipline. This character trait, combined with integrity, served them well in their new culture.

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The king assigned them a daily ration of the best food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for a three-year period, and then some of them would be made his advisers in the royal court. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. The chief official renamed them with these Babylonian names:

Daniel was called Belteshazzar.

Hananiah was called Shadrach.

Mishael was called Meshach.

Azariah was called Abednego.

Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of Daniel and his friends because he wanted to make them Babylonian—in their own eyes and in the eyes of the Babylonian people. New names would help them assimilate into the culture. Daniel means “God is my Judge” in Hebrew; his name was changed to Belteshazzar meaning “Bel, protect his life!” (Bel, also called Marduk, was the chief Babylonian god). Hananiah means “the LORD shows grace”; his new name, Shadrach, probably means “under the command of Aku” (the moon god). Mishael means, “Who is like God?” his new name, Meshach, probably means, and “who is like Aku?” Azariah means “the LORD helps”; his new name, Abednego, means “servant of Nego/Nebo” (or Nabu, the god of learning and writing). This was how the king attempted to change the religious loyalty of these young men from Judah’s God to Babylonia’s gods.

But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief official for permission to eat other things instead.

Daniel resolved not to eat this food, either because the meat was some food forbidden by Jewish law, like pork (see Leviticus 11), or because accepting the king’s food and drink was the first step toward depending on his gifts and favors. Although Daniel was in a culture that did not honor God, he still obeyed God’s laws.

Resolve is a strong word that means to be devoted to principle and to be committed to a course of action. When Daniel resolved not to defile himself, he was being true to a lifelong determination to do what was right and not to give in to the pressures around him. We too are often assaulted by pressures to compromise our standards and live more like the world around us. Merely wanting or preferring God's will and way is not enough to stand against the onslaught of temptation. Like Daniel, we must resolve to obey God.

It is easier to resist temptation if you have thought through your convictions well before the temptation arrives. Daniel and his friends made their decision to be faithful to the laws of God before they were faced with the king's delicacies, so they did not hesitate to stick with their convictions. We will get into trouble if we have not previously decided where to draw the line. Before such situations arise, decide on your commitments. Then when temptation comes, you will be ready to say no.

"Now God had given the chief official great respect for Daniel. But he was alarmed by Daniel's suggestion. "My lord the king has ordered that you eat this food and wine," he said. "If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded for neglecting my duties."

Anything short of complete obedience meant execution for the officials who served Nebuchadnezzar. Even in such a small matter as this, the official feared for his life

Daniel talked it over with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief official to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. "Test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water," Daniel said".

The Babylonians were trying to change the thinking of these Jews by giving them a Babylonian education, their loyalty by changing their names, and their life-style by changing their diet. Without compromising, Daniel found a way to live by God's standards in a culture that did not honor God. Wisely choosing to negotiate rather than to rebel, Daniel suggested an experimental ten-day diet of vegetables and water, instead of the royal foods and wine the king offered. Without compromising, Daniel quickly thought of a practical, creative solution that saved his life and the lives of his companions. As God's people, we may adjust to our culture as long as we do not compromise God's laws.

"At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's rich food. Then you can decide whether or not to let us continue eating our diet." So the attendant agreed to Daniel's suggestion and tested them for ten days.

At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the rich foods and wines. God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for learning the literature and science of the time. And God gave Daniel special ability in understanding the meanings of visions and dreams.

Daniel and his friends learned all they could about their new culture so they could do their work with excellence. However, while they learned, they maintained steadfast allegiance to God, and God gave them skill and wisdom. Culture need not be God's enemy. If it does not violate his commands, it can aid in accomplishing his purpose. We who follow God are free to be competent leaders in our culture, but we are required to pledge our allegiance to God first.

“When the three-year training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief official brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. [19] The king talked with each of them, and none of them impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they were appointed to his regular staff of advisers. [20] In all matters requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, the king found the advice of these young men to be ten times better than that of all the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.”

Nebuchadnezzar put Daniel and his friends on his staff of advisers. This staff included many “magicians and enchanters.” These were astrologers who claimed to be able to tell the future through occult practices. They were masters at communicating their message so that it sounded authoritative—as though it came directly from their gods. In addition to knowledge, Daniel and his three friends had wisdom and understanding, given to them by God. Thus the king was far more pleased with them than with his magicians and enchanters. As we serve others, we must not merely pretend to have God's wisdom. Our wisdom will be genuine when we are rightly related to God.

How did the captives survive in a foreign culture? They learned about the culture, achieved excellence in their work, served the people, prayed for God's help, and maintained their integrity. We may feel like foreigners whenever we experience change. Alien cultures come in many forms: a new job, a new school, a new neighborhood. We can use the same principles to help us adapt to our new surroundings without abandoning God

“Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus's reign.”

Daniel was one of the first captives taken to Babylon, and he lived to see the first exiles return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. Throughout this time Daniel honored God, and God honored him. While serving as an adviser to the kings of Babylon, Daniel was God's spokesman to the Babylonian empire. Babylon was a wicked nation, but it would have been much worse without Daniel's influence.

Daniel Chapter 2

“And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.”

Dreams were considered to be messages from the gods, and the wise men were expected to interpret them. Usually the wise men could give some sort of interpretation as long as they knew what the dream was about. This time, however, Nebuchadnezzar demanded to be told the dream also. God sent a series of dreams to Nebuchadnezzar with prophetic messages that could be revealed and understood only by a servant of God. People from other time periods who received dreams from God include Jacob (Genesis 28:10-15), Joseph (Genesis 37:5-11), Pharaoh’s cupbearer and his baker (Genesis 40), Pharaoh (Genesis 41), Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-15), and Joseph (Matthew 1:20-24).

“Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. [3] And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.”

Daniel 2 is a vision of the great metallic image. In it, we have the prophetic future of the world from Daniel's day into the eternal future when God will reign forever. It concerns the latter days in particular (Daniel 2:28,44-45). There are four parts to Daniel 2:

All the king could tell the wise men of his dream was that he had had one and that it greatly disturbed his spirit (Daniel 2:1-3). Except for Daniel and his companions, his wise men had made claims of power to reveal secrets and future events. Now, when the king needed them they could not live up to the claims of their supernatural powers. All branches of fortune telling and insight into the future by demons or by stars are limited. When God is involved in a case, as here, such other powers are absolutely helpless to operate even though under normal circumstances there may be a limited operation of those powers.

“Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation. 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. But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof. They answered again and said, let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it. The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, until the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof. The Chaldeans

answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

“The astrologers told the king that “not a man on earth” could know the dreams of another person. What the king asked was humanly impossible. But Daniel could tell what the king had dreamed, and he could also give the interpretation because God was working through him. In daily life, we face many apparently impossible situations that would be hopeless if we had to handle them with our limited strength. But God specializes in working through us to achieve the impossible“.

The astrologers were unable to persuade the king with any amount of logic or rational argument. The king asked for something impossible and didn't want anyone to change his mind. When power goes to a leader's head, whether at work, at home, or in the church, that leader can sometimes begin demanding the impossible from subordinates. At times, this may be the challenge needed to motivate workers to achieve more than they thought they could. At other times, it may be the rantings and ravings of someone deluded with power. Just as Daniel dealt wisely in the situation, we can ask God to give us wisdom to know how to deal with unreasonable bosses.

“The astrologers said that the gods “do not live among men.” Of course their gods didn't—they didn't even exist! This exposed the limitations of the astrologers. They could invent interpretations of dreams but could not tell Nebuchadnezzar what he had dreamed. Although his request was unreasonable, Nebuchadnezzar was furious when his advisers couldn't fulfill it. It was not unusual in these times for astrologers to be in conflict with the king. They sometimes used their craft to gain political power.”

By answering that the gods “do not live among men,” the astrologers betrayed their concept of the gods. Theirs was a hollow religion, a religion of convenience. They believed in the gods, but that belief made no difference in their conduct. Today, many people profess to believe in God, but it is also a hollow belief. In essence, they are practical atheists because they don't listen to him or do what he says. Do you believe in God? He does live among people, and he wants to change your life.

“For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.”

Daniel was at a crisis point. Imagine going to see the powerful, temperamental king who had just angrily ordered your death! Daniel did not shrink back in fear, however, but confidently believed God would tell him all the king wanted to know. When the king gave Daniel time to find the answer, Daniel found his three friends and they prayed. When you find yourself in a tight spot, share your needs with trusted friends who also believe in God's power. Prayer is more effective than panic. Panic confirms your hopelessness; prayer confirms your hope in God. Daniel's trust in God saved himself, his

three friends, and all the other wise men of Babylon.

“And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain. Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon: He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation.”

This verse not only shows that Daniel went to the king personally, but that he had absolute faith in God as to the revelation and interpretation of the dream. He promised the king both if he would only grant him time to pray to his God in the heavens—the One ruling all things

“Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”

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The dream revealed (Daniel 2:19-35)

“Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.”

After Daniel asked God to reveal Nebuchadnezzar's dream to him, he saw a vision of the dream. Daniel's prayer was answered. Before rushing to Arioch with the news, Daniel took time to give God credit for all wisdom and power, thanking God for answering his request. How do you feel when your prayers are answered? Excited, surprised, relieved? There are times when we seek God in prayer and, after having been answered, dash off in our excitement, forgetting to give God credit for the answer. Match your persistence in prayer with gratitude when your requests are answered.

If you ever think that you have much to learn in life, and if you ever wish that you knew more about how to handle people, then look to God for wisdom. While educational institutions provide diplomas at great expense, God gives wisdom freely to all who ask.

When we see evil leaders who live long and good leaders who die young, we may wonder if God controls world events. Daniel saw evil rulers with almost limitless power, but Daniel knew and proclaimed that God “sets up kings and deposes them,” that he controls everything that happens. God governs the world according to his purposes. You may be dismayed when you see evil people prosper, but God is in control. Let this knowledge give you confidence and peace no matter what happens

“Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation.”

Daniel did not use his success to promote his own self-interest. He thought of others. When striving to succeed or survive, remember the needs of others.

THE FULFILLMENT OF DANIEL’S INTERPRETATION

The large statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Daniel 2:24-45) represented the four kingdoms that would dominate as world powers. We recognize these as the Babylonian empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Grecian empire, and the Roman Empire. All of these will be crushed and brought to an end by the kingdom of God, which will continue forever.

Daniel

Chapter 3

“King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet tall and nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then he sent messages to the princes, prefects, governors, advisers, counselors, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up. When all these officials had arrived and were standing before the image King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, a herald shouted out, "People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king's command! When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other instruments, bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's gold statue. Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

“So at the sound of the musical instruments, all the people, whatever their race or nation or language, bowed to the ground and worshiped the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

“But some of the astrologers went to the king and informed on the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Long live the king! You issued a decree requiring all the people to bow down and worship the gold statue when they hear the sound of the musical instruments. That decree also states that those who refuse to obey must be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They have defied Your Majesty by refusing to serve your gods or to worship the gold statue you have set up.”

We don't know if other Jews refused to fall down and worship the image, but these three were singled out as public examples. Why didn't the three men just bow to the image and tell God that they didn't mean it? They had determined never to worship another god, and they courageously took their stand. As a result, they were condemned and led away to be executed. The men did not know whether they would be delivered from the fire; all they knew was that they would not fall down and worship an idol. Are you ready to take a stand for God no matter what? When you stand for God, you will stand out. It may be painful, and it may not always have a happy ending. Be prepared to say, “If he rescues me, or if he doesn't, I will serve only God.”

“Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be brought before him. When they were brought in, Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? I will give you one more chance. If you bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments, all will be well. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. What god will be able to rescue you from my power then?”

Nebuchadnezzar had lost control. How could anyone dare to disobey his commands? As the supreme ruler of Babylonia, he expected absolute obedience. But his pride had caused

him to go beyond his own authority. His demands were unjust and his reactions extreme. If you find yourself angered when people don't follow your directions, ask yourself, "Why am I reacting?" Your ego may be overly involved with your authority.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. [18] But even if he doesn't, Your Majesty can be sure that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

The three men were given one more chance. Here are eight excuses they could have used to bow to the image and save their lives: (1) We will fall down but not actually worship the idol. (2) We won't become idol worshipers, but will worship it this one time, and then ask God for forgiveness. (3) The king has absolute power, and we must obey him. God will understand. (4) The king appointed us—we owe this to him. (5) This is a foreign land, so God will excuse us for following the customs of the land. (6) Our ancestors set up idols in God's temple! This isn't half as bad! (7) We're not hurting anybody. (8) If we get ourselves killed and some pagans take our high positions, they won't help our people in exile!

Although all these excuses sound sensible at first, they are dangerous rationalizations. To fall down and worship the image would violate God's command in Exodus 20:3, "You shall have no other gods before me." It would also erase their testimony for God forever. Never again could they talk about the power of their God above all other gods. What excuses do you use for not standing up for him?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were pressured to deny God, but they chose to be faithful to him no matter what happened! They trusted God to deliver them, but they were determined to be faithful regardless of the consequences. If God always rescued those who were true to him, Christians would not need faith. Their religion would be a great insurance policy, and there would be lines of selfish people ready to sign up. We should be faithful to serve God whether he intervenes on our behalf or not. Our eternal reward is worth any suffering we may have to endure first.

"Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual.

"His attitude toward them changed." When we do something that offends non-Christians, their attitude toward us often changes because they are basically selfish. Christians should be different; they should still love those who offend them

"Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully clothed and because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames leaped out and killed the soldiers as they threw the

three men in! So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell down into the roaring flames. But suddenly, as he was watching, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?" "Yes," they said, "we did indeed, Your Majesty." "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire. They aren't even hurt by the flames! And the fourth looks like a divine being!"

It was obvious to those watching that this fourth person was supernatural. We cannot be certain who the fourth man was. It could have been an angel or a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. In either case, God sent a heavenly visitor to accompany these faithful men during their time of great trial.

God's deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was a great victory of faith for the Jews in captivity. They were protected from harm, they were comforted in trial, God was glorified, and they were rewarded. Let us determine to be true to God no matter how difficult the pressure or punishment. God's protection transcends anything we could imagine.

Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. Then the princes, prefects, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke! Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be crushed into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!" Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.

These young men had been completely untouched by the fire and heat. Only the rope that bound them had been burned. No human can bind us if God wants us to be free. The power available to us is the same that delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and raised Christ from the dead (Eph. 1:18-20). Trust God in every situation. There are eternal reasons for temporary trials; so be thankful that your destiny is in God's hands, not in human hands.

Nebuchadnezzar was not making a commitment here to serve the Hebrews' God alone. Instead, he was acknowledging that God is powerful, and he commanded his people not to speak against God. Nebuchadnezzar did not tell the people to throw away all the other gods, but to add this one to the list.

Where was Daniel in this story? The Bible does not say, but there are several

possibilities. (1) He may have been on official business in another part of the kingdom. (2) He may have been present, but because he was a ruler, the officials did not accuse him of not falling down and worshiping the image. (3) He may have been in the capital city handling the administration while Nebuchadnezzar was away. (4) He may have been considered exempt from bowing down to the image because of his reputation for interpreting dreams through his God. Whether Daniel was there or not, we can be sure that he would not have worshiped the image.

Daniel

Chapter 4

Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! And how mighty are his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

Although Nebuchadnezzar praised Daniel's God, he still did not believe in him completely or submit to him alone (Daniel 4:8). Many people attend church and use spiritual language, but they really don't believe in God or obey him. Profession doesn't always mean possession. How do your beliefs match with your obedience?

"I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof. But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof. Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."

One of the most difficult lessons to learn is that God is sovereign. He is above all of those who are above us. He limits the power and authority of all the government, business, and religious leaders in the world. Those who live in freedom and with a relatively high

degree of autonomy find this difficult to understand. While we may feel as though we are free to do what we please, God is sovereign over all of our plans and desire

“This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee. Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astounded for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, my lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.”

When Daniel understood Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he was stunned, and he wondered how to break the news. He told the king he wished what the dream foreshadowed would happen to the king’s enemies and not to Nebuchadnezzar. How could Daniel be so deeply grieved at the fate of Nebuchadnezzar—the king who was responsible for the destruction of Daniel’s home and nation? Daniel had forgiven Nebuchadnezzar, and so God was able to use Daniel. Very often, when someone has wronged us, we find it difficult to forget the past. We may even be glad when that person suffers. Forgiveness means putting the past behind us. Can you love someone who has hurt you? Can you serve someone who mistreated you? Ask God to help you forgive, forget, and love. God may use you in an extraordinary way in that person’s life!

The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him;

Although much of the world thought that Nebuchadnezzar was a mighty (even divine) king, God demonstrated that Nebuchadnezzar was an ordinary man. The king would go insane and become like an animal for a set period of time (“seven times”). God humiliated Nebuchadnezzar to show that almighty God, not Nebuchadnezzar, was Lord of the nations. No matter how powerful a person may become, self-centered pride will push God from his or her life. Pride may be one of the most dangerous temptations you will face. Do not let your accomplishments cause you to forget God.

This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king: That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

Moreover, whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility.

“All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.”

Daniel pleaded with Nebuchadnezzar to change his ways, and God gave Nebuchadnezzar 12 months to do it. Unfortunately, there was no repentance in the heart of this proud king, and so the dream was fulfilled.

“And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:”

Ancient kings tried to avoid mentioning their weaknesses or defeats in their monuments and official records. From Nebuchadnezzar's records, however, we can infer that for a time during his 43-year reign he did not rule. The Bible, however, explains Nebuchadnezzar's pride and punishment.

“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.”

Nebuchadnezzar's pilgrimage with God is one of the themes of this book. In Daniel 2:47, he acknowledged that God revealed mysteries to Daniel. In Daniel 3:28-29 he praised the God who rescued the three Hebrews. Despite Nebuchadnezzar's recognition that God exists and works great miracles, in Daniel 4:30 we see that he still did not acknowledge God as his Lord. We may recognize that God exists and does wonderful miracles, but God is not going to change us until we acknowledge him as Lord.

“Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

Daniel

Chapter 5

“A number of years later, King Belshazzar gave a great feast for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.”

Sixty-six years have elapsed since Daniel 1, which tells of Nebuchadnezzar’s strike against Jerusalem in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. after a reign of 43 years. His son, Evil-Merodach, ruled from 562-560 B.C.; his brother-in-law Neriglissar reigned four years from 560-556 B.C. After a two-month reign by Labashi-Marduk in 556 B.C., the Babylonian empire continued from 556-539 B.C. under the command of Nabonidus. Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus. He co-reigned with his father from 553-539 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar’s “father.” The term could also mean “ancestor.”

Archaeologists have recently discovered Belshazzar’s name on several documents. He ruled with his father, Nabonidus, staying home to administer the affairs of the kingdom while his father tried to reopen trade routes taken over by Cyrus and the Persians. Belshazzar was in charge of the city of Babylon when it was captured.

“While Belshazzar was drinking, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, so that he and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought these gold cups taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank toasts from them to honor their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. At that very moment they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king’s palace, near the lamp stand. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, and his face turned pale with fear. Such terror gripped him that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way beneath him. The king shouted for the enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him. He said to these wise men of Babylon, “Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will wear a gold chain around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!”

Belshazzar served as co-regent with his father Nabonidus. Thus, Nabonidus was the first ruler and his son Belshazzar, the second. The person who could read the writing would be given third place, which was the highest position and honor that Belshazzar could offer.

“But when all the king’s wise men came in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant.”

Although the writing on the wall contained only three words in Aramaic, a language understood by Babylonians (see Daniel 2:4), the people could not determine its prophetic significance. God gave Daniel alone the ability to interpret the message of doom to Babylon. The wise men of the kingdom were ignorant of God’s wisdom, no matter how great the reward. Daniel did not rush into the banquet hall with the others.

His loyalty was to God, not money.

Therefore, the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned ashen white. His nobles, too, were shaken. However, when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, "Long live the king! Don't be so pale and afraid about this.

This queen was either Nabonidus's wife or the wife of one of his predecessors, possibly even of Nebuchadnezzar. She was not Belshazzar's wife, because his wives were with him in the banquet hall.

There is a man in your kingdom that has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom as though he himself were a god. Your predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar, made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. This man Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar, has a sharp mind and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

"So Daniel was brought in before the king". The king asked him, "Are you Daniel, who was exiled from Judah by my predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar? I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods within you and that you are filled with insight, understanding, and wisdom. [15] My wise men and enchanters have tried to read this writing on the wall, but they cannot. [16] I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will wear a gold chain around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom. Daniel answered the king, "Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means."

The king offered Daniel beautiful gifts and great power if he would explain the writing, but Daniel turned him down. Daniel was not motivated by material rewards. His entire life had been characterized by doing right. Daniel was not showing disrespect in refusing the gifts, but he was growing older himself and knew the gifts would do him little good. Daniel wanted to show that he was giving an unbiased interpretation to the king. Doing right should be our first priority, not gaining power or rewards. Do you love God enough to do what is right, even if it means giving up personal rewards?

"Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. He made him so great that people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace. But when his heart and mind were hardened with pride, he was brought down from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven from human society. He was given the mind of an animal, and he lived among the wild donkeys. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God rules the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone he

desires to rule over them. "You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself. For you have defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny!"

Belshazzar knew Babylonian history, and so he knew how God had humbled Nebuchadnezzar. Nevertheless, Belshazzar's banquet was a rebellious challenge to God's authority as he took the sacred goblets from God's temple and drank from them. No one who understands that God is the Creator of the universe should be foolish enough to challenge him.

Often kings would kill the bearer of bad news. Nevertheless, Daniel was not afraid to tell the truth to the king even though it was not what he wanted to hear. We should be just as courageous in telling the truth under pressure.

"So God has sent this hand to write a message."

Belshazzar used the goblets from the temple for his party, and God condemned him for this act. We must not use for sinful purposes what has been dedicated to God. Today this would include church buildings, financial donations, and anything else that has been set apart for serving God. Be careful how you use what is God's

"This is the message that was written: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. [26] This is what these words mean."

Mene means 'numbered'—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end. Tekel means 'weighed'—you have been weighed on the balances and have failed the test.'

The writing on the wall was a message for all those who defy God. Although Belshazzar had power and wealth, his kingdom was totally corrupt, and he could not withstand the judgment of God. God's time of judgment comes for all people. If you have forgotten God and slipped into a sinful way of life, turn away from your sin now before he removes any opportunities to repent. Ask God to forgive you, and begin to live by his standards of justice.

"Parsin means 'divided'—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

The Medes and Persians joined forces to overthrow Babylon. This event was predicted in the second phase of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2—the silver chest and arms

"Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was

hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. [30] That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. [31] And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.”

Darius and his soldiers entered Babylon by diverting the river that ran through the city, then walking in on the dry riverbed.

This Darius is not to be confused with Darius I, mentioned in Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah, or Darius II (the Persian), mentioned in Nehemiah. Darius the Mede is named only in the book of Daniel. Other records name no king between Belshazzar and Cyrus. Thus, Darius may have been (1) appointed by Cyrus to rule over Babylon as a province of Persia, (2) another name for Cyrus himself or for his son, Cambyses, or (3) a descendant of Xerxes I.

Daniel

Chapter 6

At this time, Daniel was over 80 years old and one of Darius's top three administrators. Daniel was working with those who did not believe in his God, but he worked more efficiently and capably than all the rest. Thus, he attracted the attention of the pagan king and earned a place of respect. One of the best ways to influence non-Christian employers is to work diligently and responsibly. How well do you represent God to your employer?

Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a prince to rule over each province. [2] The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the princes and to watch out for the king's interests. [3] Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and princes. Because of his great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.

[4] Then the other administrators and princes began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling his affairs, but they could not find anything to criticize. He was faithful and honest and always responsible.

Daniel made enemies at work by doing a good job. Perhaps you have had a similar experience. When you begin to excel, you will find that coworkers may look for ways to hold you back and tear you down. How should you deal with those who would cheer at your downfall and even try to hasten it? Conduct your whole life above reproach. Then you will have nothing to hide, and your enemies will have a difficult time finding legitimate charges against you. Of course, this will not always save you from attacks, and, like Daniel, you will have to rely on God for protection.

“So they concluded, “Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the requirements of his religion.”

The jealous officials could not find anything about Daniel's life to criticize, so they attacked his religion. If you face jealous critics because of your faith, be glad they're criticizing that part of your life—perhaps they had to focus on your religion as a last resort! Respond by continuing to believe and live as you should. Then remember that God is in control, fighting this battle for you.

“So the administrators and princes went to the king and said, “Long live King Darius! We administrators, prefects, princes, advisers, and other officials have unanimously agreed that Your Majesty should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days anyone who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to Your Majesty—will be thrown to the lions. [8] And let Your Majesty issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, a law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” So King Darius signed the law.”

In Babylon, the king's word was the law. In the Medo-Persian empire, however, when a law was made, even the king couldn't change it. Darius was an effective government

administrator, but he had a fatal flaw—pride. By appealing to his vanity, the men talked Darius into signing a law effectively making himself a god for 30 days. This law could not be broken—not even by an important official like Daniel. Another example of the irrevocable nature of the laws of the Medes and Persians appears in Esther 8:8.

“But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.

Daniel stood alone. Although he knew about the law against praying to anyone except the king, he continued to pray three times a day as he always had. Daniel had a disciplined prayer life. Our prayers are usually interrupted not by threats, but simply by the pressure of our schedules. Do not let threats or pressures cut into your prayer time. Pray regularly, no matter what, for prayer is your lifeline to God.”

Daniel did not attempt to hide his daily prayer routine from his enemies in government, even though he knew he would be disobeying the new law. Hiding his daily prayers would have been futile because surely the conspirators would have caught him at something else during the month. In addition, hiding would have demonstrated that he was afraid of the other government officials. Daniel continued to pray because he could not look to the king for the guidance and strength that he needed during this difficult time. Only God could provide what he really needed.

“The officials went together to Daniel's house and found him praying and asking for God's help. So they went back to the king and reminded him about his law. "Did you not sign a law that for the next thirty days anyone who prays to anyone, divine or human— except to Your Majesty—will be thrown to the lions?" "Yes," the king replied, "that decision stands; it is a law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they told the king, "That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is paying no attention to you or your law. He still prays to his God three times a day." Hearing this, the king was very angry with himself for signing the law, and he tried to find a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament. In the evening the men went together to the king and said, "Your Majesty knows that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, no law that the king signs can be changed." So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, "May your God, whom you worship continually, rescue you."

Lions roamed the countryside and forests in Mesopotamia, and the people feared them and greatly respected their power. Some kings hunted lions for sport. The Persians captured lions, keeping them in large parks where they were fed and attended. Lions were also used for executing people. However, God has ways of delivering his people (Daniel 6:22) that none of us can imagine. It is always premature to give up and give in to the pressure of unbelievers, because God has power they know nothing about. God can even shut the lions' mouths.

Even unbelievers witnessed to Daniel's consistency. By his continual service, Daniel had demonstrated his faithful devotion to God. What can unbelievers determine about your life?

"A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel from the lions. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. He refused his usual entertainment and couldn't sleep at all that night. Very early the next morning, the king hurried out to the lions' den. When he got there, he called out in anguish, "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you worship continually, able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "Long live the king! My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty." The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him because he had trusted in his God.

The man or woman who trusts in God and obeys his will is untouchable until God takes him or her. To trust God is to have immeasurable peace. God, who delivered Daniel, will deliver you. Do you trust him with your life?

Then the king gave orders to arrest the men who had maliciously accused Daniel. He had them thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. The lions leaped on them and tore them apart before they even hit the floor of the den.

In accordance with Persian custom, this cruel punishment was transferred to those who had conspired against the king by provoking him into an unjust action (see also Esther 7:9-10). The king's great anger resulted in the execution of the evil officials and their families. Evil deeds often backfire on those who plan cruelty.

"Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world:

"Peace and prosperity to you!

"I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel.

For he is the living God, and
he will endure forever.
His kingdom will never be destroyed,
and his rule will never end.
He rescues and saves his people; he
performs miraculous signs and wonders
in the heavens and on earth.
He has rescued Daniel from
the power of the lions."

Nebuchadnezzar had come to believe that Israel's God was real because of the faithfulness of Daniel and his friends. Here Darius was also convinced of God's power because Daniel was faithful and God rescued him. Although Daniel was captive in a strange land, his devotion to God was a testimony to powerful rulers. If you find yourself in new surroundings, take the opportunity to testify about God's power in your life. Be faithful to God so he can use you to make an impact on others

“So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel Chapter 7

DANIEL'S VISIONS

Daniel had many dreams and visions he did not understand. He dreamed of four beasts, which represented four kingdoms of the world, and of a ram and goat, which depicted two of those kingdoms in greater detail. Daniel's visions reveal that the Messiah will be the ruler of a spiritual kingdom that will overpower and overshadow all other earthly kingdoms. These visions help us see that we should interpret all of history in light of God's eternal kingdom.

“Earlier, during the first year of King Belshazzar's reign in Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay in his bed. He wrote the dream down, and this is what he saw.

Chronologically, this chapter takes place before chapter five. At this time, Belshazzar had just been given a position of authority (553 B.C.), and Daniel was probably in his late sixties. The first six chapters of Daniel present history; the last six chapters are visions relating mainly to the future.

Daniel had a vision of four great beasts, each representing a world empire. This was similar to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two. Nebuchadnezzar's dream covered the political aspects of the empires; Daniel's dream depicted their moral characteristics. These nations, which would reign over Israel, were evil and cruel; but Daniel also saw God's everlasting, indestructible kingdom arrive and conquer them all.

In my vision that night, I, Daniel, saw a great storm churning the surface of a great sea, with strong winds blowing from every direction. Then four huge beasts came up out of the water, each different from the others. The first beast was like a lion with eagles' wings. As I watched, its wings were pulled off, and it was left standing with its two hind feet on the ground, like a human being. Moreover, a human mind was given to it. Then I saw a second beast, and it looked like a bear. It was rearing up on one side, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And I heard a voice saying to it, "Get up! Devour many people!" Then the third of these strange beasts appeared, and it looked like a leopard. It had four wings like birds' wings on its back, and it had four heads. Great authority was given to this beast. Then in my vision that night, I saw a fourth beast, terrifying, dreadful, and very strong. It devoured and crushed its victims with huge iron teeth and trampled what was left beneath its feet. It was different from any of the other beasts, and it had ten horns. As I was looking at the horns, suddenly another small horn appeared among them. Three of the first horns were wrenched out, roots and all, to make room for it. This little horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly.”

The lion with an eagle's wings represents Babylon with her swift conquests (statues of winged lions have been recovered from Babylon's ruins). The bear that ravaged the lion

is Medo-Persia. The three ribs in its mouth represent the conquests of three major enemies. The leopard is Greece. Its wings show the swiftness of Alexander the Great's campaign as he conquered much of the civilized world in four years (334-330 B.C.). The leopard's four heads are the four divisions of the Greek empire after Alexander's death. The fourth beast points to both Rome and the end times. Many Bible scholars believe that the horns correspond to ten kings who will reign shortly before God sets up his everlasting kingdom. These ten kings had still not come to power at the time of John's vision recorded in the book of Revelation (Rev. 17:12). The little horn is a future human ruler or the antichrist (see also 2 Thess. 2:3-4). God is illustrating the final end of all worldly kingdoms in contrast to his eternal kingdom

“I watched as thrones were put in place and the Ancient One sat down to judge. His clothing was as white as snow, his hair like whitest wool. He sat on a fiery throne with wheels of blazing fire,”

Here the prophecy shifts to the end times. This judgment scene is similar to one that was seen by the apostle John (Rev. 1:14-15). The Ancient of Days is almighty God, who assigns power to kingdoms and who will himself judge those kingdoms in the end and a river of fire flowed from his presence. Millions of angels ministered to him, and a hundred million stood to attend him. Then the court began its session, and the books were opened.”

Daniel saw God judging millions of people as they stood before him. We all must stand before almighty God and give an account of our lives. If God judged your life today, what would he say about it? How would he measure it against his will for us? We should live each day with the full awareness that we must appear before God to give account for how we used our lives. How will your life measure up?

“I continued to watch because I could hear the little horn's boastful speech. I kept watching until the fourth beast was killed and its body was destroyed by fire. [12] As for the other three beasts, their authority was taken from them, but they were allowed to live for a while longer.”

The slaying of the beast represents the fall of Rome. While this beast was destroyed, the other beasts were allowed to live for a period of time. The kingdoms (or their cultures) continued to be recognizable in some form; history did not end when God intervened with his judgment.

“As my vision continued that night, I saw someone who looked like a man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. [14] He was given authority, honor, and royal power over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.”

This “one like a son of man” is the Messiah. Jesus used this verse to refer to himself (Matthew 26:64; Luke 21:27; John 1:51). The clouds of heaven portray the Son of Man

as divine; throughout the Bible clouds represent his majesty and awesome presence. God's glory appeared in a cloud in Exodus 16:10 and Exodus 19:9 at the giving of the law at Sinai

"I, Daniel, was troubled by all I had seen, and my visions terrified me. So I approached one of those standing beside the throne and asked him what it all meant. He explained it to me like this: "These four huge beasts represent four kingdoms that will arise from the earth. But in the end, the holy people of the Most High will be given the kingdom, and they will rule forever and ever."

The "saints of the Most High" are the true Israel, the people ruled by the Messiah. Jesus Christ gave the kingdom to the new Israel, his church, made up of all faithful believers. His coming ushered in the kingdom of God, and all believers are its citizens (see also Daniel 7:22, 27). Although God may allow persecution to continue for a while, the destiny of his followers is to possess the kingdom and be with him forever.

"Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, the one so different from the others and so terrifying. It devoured and crushed its victims with iron teeth and bronze claws, and it trampled what was left beneath its feet. I also asked about the ten horns on the fourth beast's head and the little horn that came up afterward and destroyed three of the other horns. This was the horn that seemed greater than the others and had human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly. As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and was defeating them, until the Ancient One came and judged in favor of the holy people of the Most High. Then the time arrived for the holy people to take over the kingdom."

"Then he said to me, "This fourth beast is the fourth world power that will rule the earth. It will be different from all the others. It will devour the whole world, trampling everything in its path. Its ten horns are ten kings that will rule that empire. Then another king will arise, different from the other ten, who will subdue three of them."

The ten horns, or ten kings, are also mentioned in Rev. 17:12. There were also ten toes in Nebuchadnezzar's vision (Daniel 2:41-42). While all do not agree concerning the identity of these ten kings, we are reminded in Rev. 17:12-14 that these kings will make war against Christ, but, as the King of kings, he will conquer them. The other king mentioned here in Daniel 7:24 is the future antichrist of II Thess. 2:3-4.

"He will defy the Most High and wear down the holy people of the Most High. He will try to change their sacred festivals and laws, and they will be placed under his control for a time, times, and half a time."

While the exact meaning of this "time, times and half a time" is debated, we do know that God told Daniel that persecution would continue only a relatively short time. God has promised to give his kingdom to his saints.

"But then the court will pass judgment, and all his power will be taken away and

completely destroyed. Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High. They will rule forever, and all rulers will serve and obey them." That was the end of the vision. I, Daniel, was terrified by my thoughts and my face was pale with fear, but I kept these things to myself."

Daniel

Chapter 8

As with Daniel 7, this chapter precedes Daniel 5 chronologically; the dream probably occurred in 551 B.C. when Daniel was about 70 years old. Daniel 7-8 corresponds to the first and third years of Belshazzar and belong chronologically between Daniel 4-5. Daniel 9 took place at approximately the same time as Daniel 6. It gives us more details about the Medo-Persian and Greek empires, the two world powers that ruled after Babylonia.

“During the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, saw another vision, following the one that had already appeared to me. This time I was at the fortress of Susa, in the province of Elam, standing beside the Ulai River.

Susa was one of the capitals of the Babylonian empire. Located in what is now Iran, Susa was a well-developed city. It was the winter capital of the Persian Empire and a mighty fortress (citadel). In his vision, Daniel saw himself in this important location. The earliest known code of law, the Code of Hammurapi, was found there. Susa rivaled Babylon itself in cultural sophistication.

“As I looked up, I saw in front of me a ram with two long horns standing beside the river. One of the horns was longer than the other, even though it had begun to grow later than the shorter one.

The two horns were the kings of Media and Persia (Daniel 8:20). The longer horn represented the growing dominance of Persia in the Medo-Persian Empire.

The ram butted everything out of its way to the west, to the north, and to the south, and no one could stand against it or help its victims. It did as it pleased and became very great. While I was watching, suddenly a male goat appeared from the west, crossing the land so swiftly that it didn't even touch the ground. This goat, which had one very large horn between its eyes, headed toward the two-horned ram that I had seen standing beside the river. The goat charged furiously at the ram and struck it, breaking off both its horns. Now the ram was helpless, and the goat knocked it down and trampled it. There was no one who could rescue the ram from the goat's power.

The goat represented Greece, and its large horn, Alexander the Great (Daniel 8:21). This is an amazing prediction because Greece was not yet considered a world power when this prophecy was given. Alexander the Great conquered the world with great speed and military strategy, indicated by the goat's rapid movement. Shattering both horns symbolized Alexander breaking both parts of the Medo-Persian Empire.

The goat became very powerful. But at the height of its power, its large horn was broken off. In the large horn's place grew four prominent horns pointing in the four directions of the earth.”

Alexander the Great died in his thirties at the height of his power. His kingdom was split into four parts under four generals: Ptolemy I of Egypt and Palestine; Seleucus of Babylonia and Syria; Lysimachus of Asia Minor; and Antipater of Macedon and Greece.

“From one of the prominent horns came a small horn whose power grew very great. It extended toward the south and the east and toward the glorious land of Israel.”

Israel (“the Beautiful Land”) was attacked by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (the small horn) in the second century B.C. He was the eighth ruler of the Seleucid Empire (Babylonia and Syria). He overthrew the high priest, looted the temple, and replaced worship of God with a Greek form of worship. A further fulfillment of this prophecy of a powerful horn will occur in the future with the coming of the antichrist (see Daniel 8:17, 19, 23; Daniel 11:36; II Thess. 2:4).

“His power reached to the heavens where it attacked the heavenly armies, throwing some of the heavenly beings and stars to the ground and trampling them. He even challenged the Commander of heaven's armies by canceling the daily sacrifices offered to him and by destroying his Temple.”

The “Prince of the host” here refers to a heavenly authority, perhaps an angel or even God himself. (See also Joshua 5:13-15.)

“But the army of heaven was restrained from destroying him for this sin. As a result, sacrilege was committed against the Temple ceremonies, and truth was overthrown. The horn succeeded in everything it did. Then I heard two of the holy ones talking to each other. One of them said, “How long will the events of this vision last? How long will the rebellion that causes desecration stop the daily sacrifices? How long will the Temple and heaven's armies be trampled on?” The other replied, “It will take twenty-three hundred evenings and mornings; then the Temple will be restored.”

The phrase “evenings and mornings” means evening and morning sacrifices, and refers to the time from the desecration of the altar in the temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes to the restoration of temple worship under Judas Maccabeus in 165 B.C.

“As I, Daniel, was trying to understand the meaning of this vision, someone who looked like a man suddenly stood in front of me. And I heard a human voice calling out from the Ulai River, “Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of his vision”.

Gabriel is an angel, the heavenly messenger God used to explain Daniel’s visions (Daniel 9:21). He also announced the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:11) and the Messiah (Luke 1:26).

“As Gabriel approached the place where I was standing, I became so terrified that I fell to the ground.” Son of man,” he said, “you must understand that the events you have seen in your vision relate to the time of the end”.

The “time of the end,” in this case, refers to the whole period from the end of the exile until the second coming of Christ. Many of the events that would happen under Antiochus IV Epiphanes will be repeated on a broader scale just before Christ’s second coming. During these times, God deals with Israel in a radically different way, with divine discipline coming through Gentile nations. This period is sometimes referred to as the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24).

“While he was speaking, I fainted and lay there with my face to the ground. But Gabriel roused me with a touch and helped me to my feet. [19] Then he said, "I am here to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath. What you have seen pertains to the very end of time. The two-horned ram represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy male goat represents the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes represents the first king of the Greek Empire. The four prominent horns that replaced the one large horn show that the Greek Empire will break into four sections with four kings, none of them as great as the first. At the end of their rule, when their sin is at its height, a fierce king, a master of intrigue, will rise to power.”

This stern-faced king describes both Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the antichrist at the end of human history

“He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause a shocking amount of destruction and succeed in everything he does. He will destroy powerful leaders and devastate the holy people. He will be a master of deception, defeating many by catching them off guard. Without warning, he will destroy them. He will even take on the Prince of princes in battle, but he will be broken, though not by human power.”

This Prince of princes is God himself. No human power could defeat the king whom Daniel saw in his vision, but God would bring him down. Antiochus IV Epiphanes reportedly went insane and died in Persia in 164 B.C. God’s power and justice will prevail, so we should never give up our faith or lose hope, no matter how powerful God’s enemies may seem. “This vision about the twenty-three hundred evenings and mornings is true. But none of these things will happen for a long time, so do not tell anyone about them yet.”

“Then I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for several days. Afterward I got up and performed my duties for the king, but I was greatly troubled by the vision and could not understand it.”

Daniel

Chapter 9

The vision in Daniel 9 was given to Daniel during the same time period of Daniel 6. This Darius is the person mentioned in Daniel 6. The Xerxes (or Ahasuerus) mentioned here is not Esther's husband. The events described in the book of Esther happened about 50 years later

It was the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede, the son of Ahasuerus, who became king of the Babylonians. During the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, was studying the writings of the prophets. I learned from the word of the Lord, as recorded by Jeremiah the prophet, that Jerusalem must lie desolate for seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I wore rough sackcloth and sprinkled myself with ashes.

Daniel pleaded with God to bring about the promised return of his people to their land. The prophet Jeremiah had written that God would not allow the captives to return to their land for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12; Jeremiah 29:10). Daniel knew of this prophecy and realized that this 70-year period was coming to an end.

In Daniel's prayer for the nation he confessed his own sin, using the pronoun "we" throughout. In times of adversity, it's easy to blame others and excuse our own actions. If any Israelite was righteous, it was Daniel; and yet he confessed his sinfulness and need for God's forgiveness. Instead of looking for others to blame, first look inside and confess your own sins to God.

I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and keep your commands. [5] But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. [6] We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke your messages to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land.'

Daniel knew how to pray. As he prayed, he fasted, confessed his sins, and pleaded that God would reveal his will. He prayed with complete surrender to God and with complete openness to what God was saying to him. When you pray, do you speak openly to God? Examine your attitude. Talk to God with openness, vulnerability, and honesty, and be ready for God's reply.

The captives from Judah had rebelled against God. Their sins had led to their captivity. But God is merciful even to rebels, if they confess their sins and return to him. Don't let your past disobedience keep you from returning to God. He is waiting for you and wants you to return to him.

God had sent many prophets to speak to his people through the years, but their messages had been ignored. The truth was too painful to hear. God still speaks clearly and accurately through the Bible, and he also speaks through preachers, teachers, and concerned friends. Sometimes the truth hurts, and we would rather hear words that soothe, even if they are false. If you are unwilling to accept God's message, maybe you are trying to avoid making a painful change. Don't settle for a soothing lie that will bring harsh judgment. Accepting the truth even if it is painful can only help you.

"Lord, you are in the right; but our faces are covered with shame, just as you see us now. This is true of us all, including the people of Judah and Jerusalem and all Israel, scattered near and far, wherever you have driven us because of our disloyalty to you. O Lord, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him. We have not obeyed the Lord our God, for we have not followed the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has disobeyed your law and turned away, refusing to listen to your voice.

"So now the solemn curses and judgments written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out against us because of our sin. You have done exactly what you warned you would do against us and our rulers. Never in all history has there been a disaster like the one that happened in Jerusalem. Every curse written against us in the law of Moses has come true. All the troubles he predicted have taken place. But we have refused to seek mercy from the Lord our God by turning from our sins and recognizing his truth.

Daniel mentioned the curses outlined in Deut. 28. God had given the people of Israel a choice: obey me and receive blessings, or disobey me and face curses. The affliction was meant to turn the people to God. When we face difficult circumstances, we should ask ourselves if God has reason to send judgment. If we think so, we must urgently seek his forgiveness. Then we can ask him to help us through our troubles.

'The Lord has brought against us the disaster he prepared, for we did not obey him, and the Lord our God is just in everything he does.'

Daniel spoke about how God continually tried to bring Israel back to himself. Yet even after disaster struck them, they refused to obey him. God still uses circumstances, other people, and, most important his Word to bring his people back to him. What would it take for God to get your attention?

"O Lord our God, you brought lasting honor to your name by rescuing your people from Egypt in a great display of power. But we have sinned and are full of wickedness. In view of all your faithful mercies, Lord, please turn your furious anger away from your city of Jerusalem, your holy mountain. All the neighboring nations mock Jerusalem and your people because of our sins and the sins of our ancestors. "O our God, hear your servant's prayer! Listen as I plead. For your own sake, Lord, smile again on your desolate sanctuary. "O my God, listen to me and hear my request. Open your eyes and see our

wretchedness. See how your city lies in ruins—for everyone knows that it is yours. We do not ask because we deserve help, but because you are so merciful. "O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, O my God, do not delay, for your people and your city bear your name."

It would be a mistake to read the Bible as dry history and miss the deep personal feelings. In this section, Daniel was crying out to the Lord. He had a deep concern for his nation and his people. So often our prayers are without passion and true compassion for others. Are you willing to pray by pouring out your deep feelings to God?

Daniel begged for mercy, not for help, because he knew that his people deserved God's wrath and punishment. God sends his help, not because we deserve it, but because he wants to show great mercy. If God would refuse to help us because of our sin, how could we complain? But when he sends mercy when we deserve punishment, how can we withhold our praise and thanksgiving?

"I went on praying and confessing my sin and the sins of my people, pleading with the Lord my God for Jerusalem, his holy mountain. As I was praying, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the earlier vision, came swiftly to me at the time of the evening sacrifice. He explained to me, "Daniel, I have come here to give you insight and understanding. The moment you began praying, a command was given. I am here to tell you what it was, for God loves you very much. Now listen, so you can understand the meaning of your vision."

Just as God answered Daniel's prayer, so we can have confidence that God hears and answers our prayers.

"A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to put down rebellion, to bring an end to sin, to atone for guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. [25] Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times.'

Each day of these 70 weeks ("seventy 'sevens' ") may represent one year. The Bible often uses round numbers to make a point, not to give an exact count. For example, Jesus said we are to forgive others "seventy-seven" times (Matthew 18:22). He did not mean a literal 77 times only, but that we should be abundantly forgiving. Similarly, some scholars see this figure of 70 weeks as a figurative time period. Others, however, interpret this time period as a literal 70 weeks or 490 years, observing that Christ's death came at the end of the 69 weeks (i.e., 483 years later). One interpretation places the 70th week as the seven years of the great tribulation, still in the future. Consequently the number would symbolize both the first and second comings of Christ.

A "trench" can mean a moat or a conduit for water. This shows that Jerusalem will be rebuilt as a complete, fully functioning city

"After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end. He will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven, but after half this time, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. Then as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the end that has been decreed is poured out on this defiler."

The Messiah, the Anointed One, will be rejected and killed by his own people. His perfect eternal kingdom will come later.

There has been much discussion on the numbers, times, and events in these verses, and there are three basic views: (1) the prophecy was fulfilled in the past at the desecration of the temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 168-167 B.C. (see Daniel 11:31); (2) it was fulfilled in the past at the destruction of the temple by the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70 when one million Jews were killed; or (3) it is still to be fulfilled in the future under the antichrist (see Matthew 24:15).

Daniel

Chapter 10

This is Daniel's final vision (536 B.C.). In it, he was given further insight into the great spiritual battle between God's people and those who want to destroy them. There is also more detailed information on the future, specifically the struggles between the Ptolemies (kings of the South) and the Seleucids (kings of the North).

Prior to this vision, Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, but Daniel stayed in Babylonia. Why didn't Daniel return to Jerusalem? He may have been too old to make the long, hazardous journey (he was over 80); his government duties could have prevented him; or God may have told him to stay behind to complete the work he was called to do.

"In the third year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) had another vision. It concerned events certain to happen in the future— times of war and great hardship—and Daniel understood what the vision meant. When this vision came to me, I, Daniel, had been in mourning for three weeks. [3] All that time I had eaten no rich food or meat, had drunk no wine, and had used no fragrant oils.

Daniel refrained from eating choice foods and using lotions because these were signs of feasting and rejoicing.

On April 23, as I was standing beside the great Tigris River, I looked up and saw a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a dazzling gem. From his face came flashes like lightning, and his eyes were like flaming torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice was like the roaring of a vast multitude of people.

The man seen by Daniel was a heavenly being. Some commentators believe that this was an appearance of Christ (see Rev. 1:13-15), while others think it was an angel (because he required Michael's help— Daniel 10:13). In either case, Daniel caught a glimpse of the battle between good and evil supernatural powers.

Chrysolite is a translucent, semi-precious stone.

"I, Daniel, am the only one who saw this vision. The men with me saw nothing, but they were suddenly terrified and ran away to hide. So I was left there all alone to watch this amazing vision. My strength left me, my face grew deathly pale, and I felt very weak. When I heard him speak, I fainted and lay there with my face to the ground. Just then a hand touched me and lifted me, still trembling, to my hands and knees. And the man said to me, "O Daniel, greatly loved of God, listen carefully to what I have to say to you. Stand up, for I have been sent to you." When he said this to me, I stood up, still trembling with fear. Then he said, "Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in

heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer. But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia. [14] Now I am here to explain what will happen to your people in the future, for this vision concerns a time yet to come."

While he was speaking to me, I looked down at the ground, unable to say a word. Then the one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing in front of me, "I am terrified by the vision I have seen, my lord, and I am very weak. How can someone like me, your servant, talk to you, my lord? My strength is gone, and I can hardly breathe." Then the one who looked like a man touched me again, and I felt my strength returning. "Don't be afraid," he said, "for you are deeply loved by God. Be at peace; take heart and be strong!"

Daniel was frightened by this vision, but the messenger reassured him. Daniel lost his speech, but the messenger's touch restored it. Daniel felt weak and helpless, but the messenger's words strengthened him. God can bring us healing when we are hurt, peace when we are troubled, and strength when we are weak. Trust God to minister to you as he did to Daniel.

Although God sent a messenger to Daniel, a powerful spiritual being ("prince of the Persian kingdom") detained the messenger for three weeks. Daniel faithfully continued praying and fasting, and God's messenger eventually arrived, assisted by Michael, the archangel. Answers to our prayers may be hindered by unseen obstacles. Don't expect God's answers to come too easily or too quickly. Prayer may be challenged by evil forces, so pray fervently and pray earnestly. Then expect God to answer at the right time.

As he spoke these words, I suddenly felt stronger and said to him, "Now you may speak, my lord, for you have strengthened me." He replied, "Do you know why I have come? Soon I must return to fight against the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia, and then against the spirit prince of the kingdom of Greece. However, before I do that, I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (There is no one to help me against these spirit princes except Michael, your spirit prince.

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Daniel

Chapter 11

“I have been standing beside Michael as his support and defense since the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede.) Now then, I will reveal the truth to you. Three more Persian kings will reign, to be succeeded by a fourth, far richer than the others. Using his wealth for political advantage, he will stir up everyone to war against the kingdom of Greece.”

The angelic messenger was revealing Israel’s future (see Daniel 10:20-21). Only God can reveal future events so clearly. God’s work not only deals with the sweeping panorama of history, but also focuses on the intricate details of people’s lives. Moreover, his plans— whether for nations or individuals—are unshakable.

The fourth Persian king may have been Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.), who launched an all-out effort against Greece in 480 (Esther 1:1).

Babylonia was defeated by Medo-Persia. Medo-Persia was defeated by Greece under Alexander the Great, who conquered most of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern lands. After Alexander’s death, the empire was divided into four parts. The Ptolemies gained control of the southern section of Palestine, and the Seleucids took the northern part. Daniel 11:1-20 shows the conflict between the Ptolemies and Seleucids over control of Palestine in 300-200 B.C. Daniel 11:21-35 describe the persecution of Israel under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In Daniel 11:36-45 the prophecy shifts to the end times. Antiochus IV fades from view and the antichrist of the last days becomes the center of attention.

“Then a mighty king will rise to power who will rule a vast kingdom and accomplish everything he sets out to do.”

This mighty king of Greece was Alexander the Great, who conquered Medo-Persia and built a huge empire in only four years

“But at the height of his power, his kingdom will be broken apart and divided into four parts. It will not be ruled by the king's descendants, nor will the kingdom hold the authority it once had. For his empire will be uprooted and given to others. "The king of the south will increase in power, but one of this king's own officials will become more powerful than he and will rule his kingdom with great strength.”

Eventually Alexander the Great’s empire was divided into four nations. These four weaker nations were comprised of the following regions: (1) Egypt, (2) Babylonia and Syria, (3) Asia Minor, and (4) Macedon and Greece. The king of Egypt (“the king of the South”) was Ptolemy I or perhaps a reference to the Ptolemaic dynasty in general.

“Some years later, an alliance will be formed between the king of the north and the king of the south. The daughter of the king of the south will be given in marriage to the king of

the north to secure the alliance, but she will lose her influence over him, and so will her father. She will be given up along with her supporters. [7] But when one of her relatives becomes king of the south, he will raise an army and enter the fortress of the king of the north and defeat him.”

These prophecies seem to have been fulfilled many years later in the Seleucid wars between Egypt and Syria. In 252 B.C., Ptolemy II of Egypt (“the South”) gave his daughter Berenice in marriage to Antiochus II of Syria (“the North”) to finalize a peace treaty between their two lands. But Berenice was murdered in Antioch by Antiochus II’S former wife, Laodice. Berenice’s brother, Ptolemy III, ascended the Egyptian throne and declared war against the Seleucids to avenge his sister’s murder

“When he returns again to Egypt, he will carry back their idols with him, along with priceless gold and silver dishes. For some years afterward he will leave the king of the north alone. "Later the king of the north will invade the realm of the king of the south but will soon return to his own land. However, the sons of the king of the north will assemble a mighty army that will advance like a flood and carry the battle as far as the enemy's fortress. Then the king of the south, in great anger, will rally against the vast forces assembled by the king of the north and will defeat them.”

The king of Syria (“the North”) was Seleucus II, and the king of Egypt (“the South”) was Ptolemy IV

“After the enemy army is swept away, the king of the south will be filled with pride and will have many thousands of his enemies killed. But his success will be short lived. A few years later, the king of the north will return with a fully equipped army far greater than the one he lost.”

This king of the north may have been Antiochus III (the Great). He defeated many Egyptian cities (Daniel 11:15) and established himself in Israel (“the Beautiful Land,” Daniel 11:16). He was later defeated by the Romans at Magnesia (Daniel 11:18)

“At that time there will be a general uprising against the king of the south. Lawless ones among your own people will join them in order to fulfill the vision, but they will not succeed. Then the king of the north will come, lay siege to a fortified city, and capture it. The best troops of the south will not be able to stand in the face of the onslaught. "The king of the north will march onward unopposed; none will be able to stop him. He will pause in the glorious land of Israel, intent on destroying it. [17] He will make plans to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will form an alliance with the king of the south. He will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom from within, but his plan will fail.”

The invader, Antiochus III, tried to bring peace between Egypt and Syria by having his daughter marry Ptolemy V Epiphanes of Egypt, but the plan failed.

“After this, he will turn his attention to the coastal cities and conquer many. But a commander from another land will put an end to his insolence and will cause him to retreat in shame. He will take refuge in his own fortresses but will stumble and fall and he will be seen no more. His successor will be remembered as the king who sent a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor, but after a very brief reign, he will die, though neither in battle nor open conflict.”

The successor to Antiochus III was Seleucus IV. He sent Heliodorus to collect money from the temple treasury in Jerusalem.

"The next to come to power will be a despicable man who is not directly in line for royal succession. But he will slip in when least expected and take over the kingdom by flattery and intrigue.”

Seleucus IV was succeeded by his brother, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who found favor with the Romans.

[22] Before him great armies will be swept away, including a covenant prince.

The “overwhelming army” refers to the way all opposition against Antiochus IV will be broken. The prince of the covenant may be the high priest Onias III, who was assassinated by Menelaus in 170 B.C.

“By making deceitful promises, he will make various alliances. With a mere handful of followers, he will become strong. Without warning he will enter the richest areas of the land and do something that none of his predecessors ever did—distribute among his followers the plunder and wealth of the rich. He will plot the overthrow of strongholds, but this will last for only a short while.”

"Then he will stir up his courage and raise a great army against the king of the south. The king of the south will go to battle with a mighty army, but to no avail, for plots against him will succeed. Those of his own household will bring his downfall. His army will be swept away, and many will be killed. Seeking nothing but each other's harm, these kings will plot against each other at the conference table, attempting to deceive each other. But it will make no difference, for an end will still come at the appointed time.”

“These two treacherous kings were probably Antiochus IV of Syria and Ptolemy VI of Egypt. Treachery and deceit are a power broker’s way to position himself over someone else. When two power brokers try to gain the upper hand, it is a mutually weakening and self-destructive process. It is also futile because God ultimately holds all power in his hands.”

““The king of the north will then return home with great riches. On the way he will set himself against the people of the holy covenant, doing much damage before continuing his journey.”

“Then at the appointed time he will once again invade the south, but this time the result will be different. For warships from western coastlands will scare him off, and he will withdraw and return home. But he will vent his anger against the people of the holy covenant and reward those who forsake the covenant. His army will take over the Temple fortress, polluting the sanctuary, putting a stop to the daily sacrifices, and setting up the sacrilegious object that causes desecration.”

Antiochus IV would again invade “the South,” but enemy ships would cause him to retreat. On his way back, he plundered Jerusalem, desecrated the temple, and stopped the Jews’ daily sacrifices. The temple was desecrated when he sacrificed pigs on an altar erected in honor of Zeus. According to Jewish law, pigs were unclean and were not to be touched or eaten. To sacrifice a pig in the temple was the worst kind of insult an enemy could level against the Jews. This happened in 168-167 B.C.

“He will flatter those who have violated the covenant and win them over to his side. But the people who know their God will be strong and will resist him.”

This reference to those who have violated the covenant may include Menelaus, the high priest, who was won over by Antiochus and who conspired with him against the Jews who were loyal to God. The “people who know their God” may refer to the Maccabees and their sympathizers, but a further fulfillment may lie in the future.

“Those who are wise will give instruction to many. But for a time many of these teachers will die by fire and sword, or they will be jailed and robbed. [34] While all these persecutions are going on, a little help will arrive, though many who join them will not be sincere.”

Those who are wise will teach many, but they will also face great persecution. Difficult times remind us of our weaknesses and our inability to cope. We want answers, leadership, and clear direction. During these times, God’s Word begins to interest even those who would never look at it. We should be ready to use our opportunities to share God’s Word in needy times. We must also be prepared to face persecution and rejection as we teach and preach.

“And some who are wise will fall victim to persecution. In this way, they will be refined and cleansed and made pure until the time of the end, for the appointed time is still to come.”

God’s messenger described a time of trial when even wise believers may stumble. This could mean (1) falling into sin, (2) being fearful and losing faith, (3) mistakenly following wrong teaching, or (4) experiencing severe suffering and martyrdom. If we persevere in our faith, any such experience will only refine us and make us stronger. Are you facing trials? Recognize them as opportunities to strengthen your faith. If we remain steadfast in these experiences, we will be stronger in our faith and closer to God.

“The king will do as he pleases, exalting himself and claiming to be greater than every

god there is, even blaspheming the God of gods. He will succeed—until the time of wrath is completed. For what has been determined will surely take place. He will have no regard for the gods of his ancestors, or for the god beloved of women, or for any other god, for he will boast that he is greater than them all. Instead of these, he will worship the god of fortresses—a god his ancestors never knew—and lavish on him gold, silver, precious stones, and costly gifts.”

These verses could refer to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Titus (the Roman general), or the antichrist. Some of these events may have been fulfilled in the past, and some have yet to be fulfilled.

The “one desired by women” may refer to Tammuz, a Babylonian fertility god. Tammuz is also mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14. In other words, this person will not recognize any deity or religions at all, not even pagan ones. Instead, he will proclaim himself to be divine and the ultimate power.

The “god of fortresses” is believed by some to be Jupiter or Zeus. The implication is that this king will make war his god. More than all his predecessors, he will wage war and glorify its horrors.

“Claiming this foreign god's help, he will attack the strongest fortresses. He will honor those who submit to him, appointing them to positions of authority and dividing the land among them as their reward. "Then at the time of the end, the king of the south will attack him, and the king of the north will storm out against him with chariots, cavalry, and a vast navy. He will invade various lands and sweep through them like a flood.

The antichrist of the last days becomes the center of attention from this point through the rest of the book of Daniel.

“He will enter the glorious land of Israel, and many nations will fall, but Moab, Edom, and the best part of Ammon will escape. He will conquer many countries, and Egypt will not escape. He will gain control over the gold, silver, and treasures of Egypt, and the Libyans and Ethiopians will be his servants. "But then news from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in great anger to destroy many as he goes. He will halt between the glorious holy mountain and the sea and will pitch his royal tents there, but while he is there, his time will suddenly run out, and there will be no one to help him.

“The beautiful holy mountain” is Mount Zion or the city of Jerusalem.

Daniel Chapter 12

Great suffering is in store for God's people throughout the years ahead. This way of describing the future is also used by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 30:7) and Jesus (Matthew 24:21ff). Yet the great suffering is tempered by a great promise of hope for true believers.

"At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued. Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

This is a clear reference to the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, although the eternal fates of each will be quite different. Up to this point in time, teaching about the resurrection was not common, although every Israelite believed that one day he or she would be included in the restoration of the new kingdom. This reference to a bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost was a sharp departure from common belief. (See also Job 19:25-26; Psalm 16:10; and Isaiah 26:19 for other Old Testament references to the resurrection.)

"Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who turn many to righteousness will shine like stars forever."

Many people try to be stars in the world of entertainment, only to find their stardom temporary. God tells us how we can be eternal "stars"—by being wise and leading many to God's righteousness. If we share our Lord with others, we can be true stars—radiantly beautiful in God's sight!

"But you, Daniel, keep this prophecy a secret; seal up the book until the time of the end. Many will rush here and there, and knowledge will increase."

Closing up and sealing the words of the scroll meant that it was to be kept safe and preserved. This was to be done so that believers of all times could look back on God's work in history and find hope. Daniel did not understand the exact meaning of the times and events in his vision. We can see events as they unfold, for we are in the end times. The whole book will not be understood until the climax of earth's history.

"Then I, Daniel, looked and saw two others standing on opposite banks of the river. One of them asked the man dressed in linen, who was now standing above the river, "How long will it be until these shocking events happen?" The man dressed in linen, who was standing above the river, raised both his hands toward heaven and took this solemn oath by the one who lives forever: "It will go on for a time, times, and half a time. When the shattering of the holy people has finally come to an end, all these things will have happened."

“Time, times and half a time” may add up to 3 1/2 years and may be taken as either literal or figurative.

“The power of the holy people” seems to be crushed again and again throughout history. God’s recurring purpose in this is to break the pride and self-sufficiency of his rebellious people and to bring them to accept him as their Lord.”

“I heard what he said, but I did not understand what he meant. So I asked, "How will all this finally end, my lord?" But he said, "Go now, Daniel, for what I have said is for the time of the end. Many will be purified, cleansed, and refined by these trials. But the wicked will continue in their wickedness, and none of them will understand. Only those who are wise will know what it means.”

Trials and persecutions make very little sense to us when we experience them. But they can purify us if we are willing to learn from them. After you survive a difficult time, seek to learn from it so that it can help you in the future. See Romans 5:3-5 for more on God’s purpose in our sufferings.

“From the time the daily sacrifice is taken away and the sacrilegious object that causes desecration is set up to be worshiped, there will be 1,290 days. [12] And blessed are those who wait and remain until the end of the 1,335 days!”

“The abomination” set up in the temple refers to the altar of Zeus, where Antiochus IV Epiphanes sacrificed a pig. Some think it will have another fulfillment in the antichrist and one of his horrible acts of evil (Matthew 24:15). However, this and the predictions at the early part of the chapter may refer specifically to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and the rest of the prophecy may refer to the end times.

Either these are further calculations relating to the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, or they refer to the end times. The abolishing of the daily sacrifices means the removal of worship of the true God, as well as oppression of believers. There is much speculation about these numbers in Daniel 12:11-12. The point is that this time of persecution has an end; God is in control of it, and he will be victorious over evil.

“As for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you.”

The promise of resurrection was reaffirmed to Daniel. He would one day see the fulfillment of his words, but he was not to spend the rest of his life wondering what his visions might mean. Instead, he was to rest in the comfort of God’s sovereignty and look forward to the time when he would rise to receive and share eternal life with God.

God does not reveal everything to us in this life. We must be content with the partial picture until he wants us to see more. He will tell us all we need to know.

Daniel stands tall in the gallery of God's remarkable servants. Born of royal heritage, yet taken into captivity when only a teenager, Daniel determined to remain faithful to God in the land of his captivity. Even at great personal cost, Daniel spent his entire lifetime advising his captors with unusual wisdom. God chose him as his servant to record some of the events of the captivity and some significant events concerning the future. As an old man, having been faithful to God throughout his years, Daniel was assured by God that he would rise from the dead and receive his portion in God's eternal kingdom. Faithfulness to God has a rich reward, not necessarily in this life, but most certainly in the life to come.

Acknowledgements:

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