

## DANIEL

### **Introduction:**

A good question to ask, when beginning the study of a book in the Bible, is what the content of the book adds to the understanding of God's revelation of Himself. How much poorer would we be if Daniel had not found its place into the biblical canon?

The answer is that Daniel provides us with a wealth of detailed information about the time of Israel's captivity in Babylon. With Ezekiel, he was the only prophet we know of who lived through this captivity.

Daniel throws a revealing light on the person and power of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's greatest king, whom he knew personally and intimately.

Many biblical scholars believe Daniel to be the key for understanding much of biblical prophecy. His book is often linked with Revelation in simultaneous study. Jesus gave prominence and endorsement to Daniel by quoting from the book in regard to "the abomination that causes desolation." We read in Matthew's Gospel: "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel- let the reader understand- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."<sup>1</sup> Daniel's visions spell out for us in detail the events that will mark the end of time: the appearance of the "Antichrist" and the great tribulation. The interpretation of some of those details may not be as simple as some students of prophecy want to make us believe, but the details are there.

Without Daniel's visions, we would not know much about the hierarchy of angelic powers, both good and evil, in the heavenly places. Daniel is the only prophet who mentions "the prince of Persia" and "the prince of Greece."<sup>2</sup>

Daniel's prayer of confession was pivotal to the end of the Babylonian captivity and the return of the remnant to Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Exploring the Book* states: "For sheer interest this Book of Daniel surely stands first among the writings of the prophets. It is full of supernatural marvel, both in events which it records and in the visions which it describes. But its interest is eclipsed by its importance; for it preserves to us not only unique links in the chain of history, but also vital keys to the interpretation of prophecy." And: "Now the miracles in this Book of Daniel were a sign from God, both to Israel and the Gentiles. When the earthly sovereignty was transferred from Israel to Nebuchadnezzar, God raised up this notable man, Daniel, to represent Him at the Babylonian courts, so that through his lips, and by these supernatural attestations, He might teach Nebuchadnezzar, and impress upon the Gentile world-empires, through Nebuchadnezzar their head, the delegated nature of their authority, and their accountability to the one true God, even the God of Israel."

Some time during Daniel's life the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the place of God's revelation on earth ceased to exist. Both the book of Ezekiel and Daniel prove to us that God's revelation, ultimately, is not bound to any place on earth. God reveals Himself wherever He will and to whomever He will. In actuality, God's revelation to His prophets in exile was more intimate and in a sense more glorious than the prophets at home ever knew. No one saw more magnificent visions of God's glory than Ezekiel and no one had more overpowering visitations by angels or archangels than Daniel.

*The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* observes: "A new stage in the theocracy begins with the captivity. Hence arose the need for miracles to mark the new era. National miracles in Egypt, the wilderness, and Canaan marked the beginning of the theocracy or outwardly manifested kingdom of God."

Isaac Newton is quoted as saying: "He who denies Daniel's prophecies undermines Christianity, which is founded on Daniel's prophecies concerning Christ."

### **The Person of Daniel:**

The name Daniel means: "God is my judge," or "judge of God." In Babylon, his Hebrew name was changed into Belteshazzar, meaning: "prince of Bel," or "Bel protect the king!" According to *The Eaton's Bible Dictionary*, Daniel "was probably born in Jerusalem about B.C. 623, during the reign of Josiah." He

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 24:15,16

<sup>2</sup> See ch. 10:20

<sup>3</sup> See ch. 9:1-19

was among the first captives made by King Nebuchadnezzar during his first siege of Jerusalem, in about BC 606. This would make Daniel about seventeen years of age at the time of his deportation.

He remained in Babylon for the rest of his life. He survived the capture of the city by the Persian monarch Cyrus and was probably well in his eighties ( $\pm 87$ ) when the captivity ended in BC 536, too old to be able to return to his native land.

During the reign of the Babylonian kings, and also in the years of Darius' reign, Daniel rose to the highest office in the government of the empire, proving his outstanding abilities and unflinching integrity. Daniel was one of God's choice servants and like the apostle John, the object of God's preferential treatment. The archangel Gabriel addresses him with the words: "At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved."<sup>4</sup>

### **Place in the Canon:**

Daniel is nowhere in the book called a prophet. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* observes about this: "Being a 'seer,' having the gift and spirit, not the theocratical office and work, of a prophet, his book stands in the third rank in the Hebrew canon, namely, in the Hagiographa (Kethubim) between Esther and Ezra, the three relating to the captivity. Its position there, not among the prophets as one would expect, shows it was not an interpolation of later times, but deliberately placed where it is by Ezra and the establishers of the Jewish canon. Daniel was 'the politician, chronologer, and historian among the prophets' (Bengel). Similarly, the Psalms, though largely prophetic, are ranked with the Hagiographa, not the prophets."

### **The Language of the Book of Daniel:**

*The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states about the language of Daniel: "The language of Daniel from Dan 2:4 to the end of Dan 7 is Chaldee, the world empire's language, the subject here being about the world at large. The rest is Hebrew generally, as the subject concerns the Jews and their ultimately restored theocratic kingdom."

### **Daniel and "The Apocalyptic Literature":**

Daniel is often considered to be a forerunner of books called: "Apocalyptic Literature," which flourished between 200 BC and 200 AD. *The Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states about this: "Most of the apocalyptic books were written by Jews in reaction to the oppression of their people by foreign powers. Often they wrote to explain why evil seemed to prosper while the righteous suffered. The Christian apocalyptic writings were influenced by these earlier Jewish works. The Book of Revelation in the New Testament uses symbols and images that occur in the Book of Enoch, and the book known as 4 Ezra, written about A.D. 100, seems to parallel the New Testament book of Revelation in several ways. The close similarities between Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature explains why scholars group them into one category and study both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature together."

### **Historical Background:**

The Book of Daniel has been torn apart limb for limb by the discipline that calls itself "Higher Criticism." "Higher Criticism" objects particularly to the date of writing, trying to place it in the Maccabean period ( $\pm 167$  BC).

The scope of our study does not allow us to delve into the problems raised (and satisfactorily answered by conservative scholars), nor do we feel any inclination to take a closer look at those problems. Sir Robert Anderson wrote a book under the appropriate title: *Daniel in the Critic's Den*.

There is no reason for us to consider Daniel to be written during any other period than the Babylonian Captivity, which lasted from  $\pm 597$ -538.

Daniel's experience as a displaced person began with Nebuchadnezzar who mounted the throne  $\pm 604$  B.C. and besieged Jerusalem even before his ascension, taking several hostages into captivity to Babylon.

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<sup>4</sup> Ch. 9:23;10:11 (NKJV)

Daniel's presence in Babylon and his renown during his own lifetime is confirmed by his contemporary Ezekiel, who states: "Even if these three men-Noah, Daniel and Job-were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD."<sup>5</sup>

The world in which Daniel lived and worked was one of brute power and technological advance. The hanging gardens of Babylon were considered to be among the seven wonders of the ancient world. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* comments on this: "Nebuchadnezzar is most celebrated for his buildings: the temple of Bel Merodach at Babylon (the Kasr), built with his Syrian spoils (Josephus, Ant. 10:11, section 1); the fortifications of Babylon, three lines of walls 80 ft. broad, 300 ft. high, enclosing 130 square miles; a new palace near his father's which he finished in 15 days, attached to it were his "hanging gardens," a square 400 ft. on each side and 75 ft. high, supported on arched galleries increasing in height from the base to the summit; in these were chambers, one containing the engines for raising the water to the mound; immense stones imitated the surface of the Median mountain, to remind his wife of her native land. The standard inscription ('I completely made strong the defenses of Babylon, may it last forever ... the city which I have glorified,' etc.) accords with Berosus' statement, and nine-tenths of the bricks in site are stamped with Nebuchadnezzar's name."

### Outline of The Book of Daniel:

*The Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* provides the following outline of the Book of Daniel:

Part One: The Personal History of Daniel	(1:1-21)
I. Daniel Carried Away to Babylon	1:1-7
II. The Faithfulness of Daniel in Babylon	1:8-16
III. Daniel's Reputation in Babylon	1:17-21
Part Two: The Prophetic Plan for the Gentiles	(2:1--7:28)
I. Nebuchadnezzar's First Dream	2
A. Nebuchadnezzar Conceals His Dream	2:1-13
B. God Reveals the Dream	2:14-23
C. Daniel Interprets the Dream	2:24-45
D. Nebuchadnezzar Promotes Daniel	2:46-49
II. Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold	3
A. Nebuchadnezzar's Image is Set Up	3:1-7
B. Daniel's Friends Refuse to Worship	3:8-12
C. Daniel's Friends Trust God	3:13-18
D. Daniel's Friends Are Protected in the Furnace	3:19-25
E. Daniel's Friends Are Promoted	3:26-30
III. Nebuchadnezzar's Vision of a Great Tree	4
A. Nebuchadnezzar's Proclamation	4:1-3
B. Nebuchadnezzar's Vision	4:4-18
C. Daniel's Interpretation of the Vision	4:19-27
D. Nebuchadnezzar's Humiliation	4:28-33
E. Nebuchadnezzar's Restoration	4:34-37
IV. Belshazzar and the Handwriting on the Wall	5
A. Belshazzar Defiles the Temple Vessels	5:1-4
B. Belshazzar Sees the Handwriting	5:5-9
C. Daniel Interprets the Handwriting	5:10-29
D. Belshazzar Is Killed	5:30-31
V. Darius' Foolish Decree	6
A. Daniel Is Promoted	6:1-3
B. Darius Signs the Foolish Decree	6:4-9
C. Daniel Prays Faithfully	6:10-15
D. Daniel in the Lion's Den	6:16-17
E. Daniel Is Saved from the Lions	6:18-24
F. Darius' Wise Decree	6:25-28
VI. Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts	7

<sup>5</sup> Ezek. 14:14 (See also Ezek. 14:20; 28:3)

A.	The Revelation of the Vision	7:1-14	
B.	The Interpretation of the Vision	7:15-28	
Part Three: The Prophetic Plan for Israel (8:1--12:13)			
I.	Daniel's Vision of the Ram and Male Goat		8
A.	The Revelation of the Vision	8:1-12	
B.	The Length of the Vision	8:13-14	
C.	The Interpretation of the Vision	8:15-27	
II.	Daniel's Vision of the Seventy Weeks		9
A.	The Understanding of Daniel	9:1-2	
B.	The Intercession of Daniel	9:3-19	
C.	The Intervention of Gabriel	9:20-23	
D.	The Revelation of the Seventy Weeks	9:24-27	
III.	Daniel's Vision of Israel's Future		10:1--12:13
A.	The Preparation of Daniel	10	
B.	The Revelation of the Sixty-Nine Weeks	11:1-35	
C.	The Revelation of the Seventieth Week	11:36--12:3	
D.	The Conclusion of the Visions of Daniel	12:4-13	

**The Text:****Part One: The Personal History of Daniel (1:1-21)****I Daniel Carried Away to Babylon 1:1-7**

*1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.*

*2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.*

*3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility-*

*4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.*

*5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.*

*6 Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.*

*7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.*

King Josiah of Judah was killed in the battle of Megiddo, when he tried to interfere in the war between Assyria and Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. His son, Jehoahaz, was made to succeed his father on the throne. In this, the people bypassed his older brother, Eliakim. We read in Second Kings: "Josiah's servants brought his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah and anointed him and made him king in place of his father."<sup>6</sup> After a reign of only three months, Pharaoh Neco deposed Jehoahaz and made Eliakim king in his place, whose name he changed to Jehoiakim.

Critics have hotly debated an alleged discrepancy between Daniel's opening statement and some references in Jeremiah regarding the date of Nebuchadnezzar's appearance at the gates of Jerusalem. Daniel states: "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." But in Jeremiah we read: "The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon."<sup>7</sup> Another point of contention is the fact that Nebuchadnezzar is called

<sup>6</sup> II Kings 23:30

<sup>7</sup> Jer. 25:1

“king” whilst in reality he did not become so until the year after the siege of Jerusalem. *The Pulpit Commentary* notes: “Nebuchadnezzar’s first year was B.C. 604, the year of his accession was B.C. 605. If either in this year or the year before ... he conquered Syria, in B.C. 605 or 606, he would receive the submission of Jehoiakim.” At some points in the debate the argument has degraded in personal mud slinging in which one critic accuses the other of unprofessional prejudice. *The Pulpit Commentary* contends regarding Nebuchadnezzar’s royal title that it is not uncommon to refer to a person as “king” in referring to events that happened prior to his coronation. We read: “If we found it stated that the Duke of Wellington was at Eton in 1782, it would be the height of absurdity to declare this prolepsis an error.”

Regarding the discrepancy in date between “the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah,” and Jeremiah’s “in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah,” it has been noted that Jeremiah’s reference is found in the Septuagint but is omitted in the Massoretic text. The war of words is still raging but the scope of our study does not allow us to dig any further into these points. Few critics seem to pay attention to the fact that there was a difference between the Hebrew year and the Babylonian one, which may very well account for the difference in reference between Daniel and Jeremiah, Daniel writing from Babylon and Jeremiah from Jerusalem.

Important for us is the fact that it was when Nebuchadnezzar first laid siege of Jerusalem, Daniel, together with some other youths of nobility, were taken to Babylon as captives. This marked the beginning of the seventy years of captivity. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explains: “Nebuchadnezzar took away the captives as hostages for the submission of the Hebrews. Historical Scripture gives no positive account of this first deportation under Jehoiakim with which the Babylonian captivity-i.e., Judah’s subjection to Babylon for 70 years-begins (Jer 29:10); but 2 Chron 36:6-7 states that Nebuchadnezzar had intended ‘to carry Jehoiakim to Babylon,’ and that he ‘carried off the vessels of the house of the Lord’ there. But Jehoiakim died at Jerusalem before the conqueror’s intention as to him was carried into effect (Jer 22:18-19; 36:30), and his dead body, as was foretold, was dragged out of the gates by the Chaldean besiegers, and left unburied (‘Thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem’). The second deportation under Jehoiachin was eight years later (2 Kings 24:12-16).” Isaiah had prophesied to King Hezekiah: “And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”<sup>8</sup>

Daniel’s text, in fact, does not specify that Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon. The *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explanation, therefore, makes perfect sense. The taking of some of the vessels from the temple, instead of all the treasures, suggests that the king of Babylon merely imposed a fine on Judah, not that he took away booty as proof of his conquest.

Verses 3 and 4 explain the reason for the exile of Daniel and his friends. The reading of these verses in the LXX differs considerably from the Massoretic text. We read there: “And the king spoke to Abiesdri, his own chief eunuch to lead to him from the sons of the nobles of Israel, and from the seed royal, and from the choice ones, four young men, without blemish, of goodly appearance, and understanding in all wisdom, and educated, and prudent, and wise, and strong, so that they may be in the house of the king, and may be taught the letters and tongue of the Chaldees.” The words in our text: “Among these were some from Judah” seem to contradict the LXX statement that there were only four young men chosen for the king’s purpose. The change in name of the Babylonian official is of no consequence. “Ashpenaz” is supposedly a Persian word that may mean “eunuch,” indicating rather a position at the court than a personal name. Some commentators suppose that Daniel and his friends were emasculated at the time of their deportation.

Nebuchadnezzar’s motives for the selection of young princes and noblemen are not given. It could be that the king intended to eventually send them back to their homeland, after making sure that they would be his faithful puppets in administering his rule. Zedekiah’s rebellion ruled this out. The limitation of the search to the circle of princes and nobles would plead in favor of this supposition. It is obvious that physical beauty and talent among the Jewish youth would not necessarily be limited to the upper echelon of society. It is also true, as *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* suggests, that the deportation of some of Judah’s youth would give the king of Babylon a grip on the behavior of the parents at home. The young men were taken: “As hostages for the fidelity of their parents in their own land, who would be concerned to conduct themselves well that their children might have the better treatment.”

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<sup>8</sup> II Kings 20:18

Nothing in the text gives an indication of the boys' ages at the time of their being taken away. The Hebrew word *yeled*, which is rendered "young men" literally means "something born," "a lad," or "boy." But the word is also used in the verse: "That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven *sons* and crossed the ford of the Jabbok."<sup>9</sup> It is generally supposed that Daniel and his friends were teenagers at the time of their deportation.

The names of the four young men have a spiritual meaning in Hebrew. We saw already that Daniel's name means "'God is my judge," or "judge of God." Hananiah means: "The Lord YHWH is gracious." The name Mishael is not frequently used in Scripture and its meaning is uncertain. Some believe it stands for "Who is God?" or "Who is like God?" Azariah is a common name, meaning: "YHWH is Helper." Scholars have hotly debated the meaning of the Babylonian names given to the four youths by the man in charge of their education. They probably all refer to a Babylonian deity. The search for meaning is complicated by some alleged errors in copying by Jewish scribes who may not have understood the meaning of the names.

Their qualifications were to be that they were without any physical defect, handsome, and intelligent. Nebuchadnezzar must have had an eye for physical beauty as well as mental excellence. In a way, the king got more than he had bargained for. These youth were so spiritually and mentally solid that they did not hesitate to oppose his majesty in regard to his sinful behavior. Before an absolute monarch who was fuming with rage, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego fearlessly said: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."<sup>10</sup> And Daniel said to the man, who could have him killed by simply blinking an eye: "Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."<sup>11</sup>

## **II. The Faithfulness of Daniel in Babylon 1:8-16**

***8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.***

***9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel,***

***10 but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."***

***11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.***

***13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see."***

***14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.***

***15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.***

***16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.***

Such moral courage did not come to them overnight; it grew over the years and it began with the making of some simple choices. We read: "Daniel resolved not to defile himself." From the context of this chapter, we understand that the three others eventually followed Daniel in this. It may be that they had to overcome some hesitation and that Daniel's unflinching attitude convicted and convinced them. With Daniel it was a clear-cut choice to eat only kosher food. To those of us outside the influence of Judaism, this may

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 32:22

<sup>10</sup> Dan. 3:16-18

<sup>11</sup> Dan. 4:27

seem to be the running of a needless risk. We live in a dispensation in which God has declared all food kosher. Daniel did not live in our age and abandoning the diet Moses had prescribed would have meant leaving the basis of his faith and giving up his relationship with God. His obedience was ultimately to the command: “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”<sup>12</sup> Would that the young people of our day “resolve not to defile themselves!”

The young men demonstrated with their decision that they recognized that the God they served was not the same as the gods of other nations. Their God was not a local deity, who was bound to Jerusalem and who had not jurisdiction outside His own territory. To them, God was the same abroad as at home. Their decision was not merely a choice of one type of culture for another. They did not merely follow a series of ordinances. They probably would not have risked their lives for that. Following Christ does not simply mean a change of lifestyle, an exchange of one’s native culture for another, as is sometimes seen on certain mission fields where the Gospel is sometimes confused with the advantages of western civilization. Daniel and his friends considered the knowledge of God to be more important than their education, more important even than life itself. They deemed giving up the service of God to be “defilement.” They must have known that they were undefiled before God. Their decision not to defile themselves had been preceded by another decision by which faith in God had become a personal possession, which they had experienced as a being cleansed from sin.

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* quotes Calvin, who commented on Daniel’s choice: “[He] simply determined ... by his very food perpetually to recall the remembrance of his country. He wished so to live in Chaldea as to consider himself an exile and a captive, sprung from the sacred family of Abraham.” Since the text does not detail King Nebuchadnezzar’s menu, we do not know what kind of meat was served at the king’s table. It could be that the meat was from unclean animals, such as pork, or certain kinds of fowl forbidden to Jews. We can be sure, however, that most of the meat, as well as the wine, had first been presented as a sacrifice to idols. That would have made any food unclean for Jewish consumption. That the apostle Paul would later take a different stand on these issues does not make them less pertinent in the context of Daniel’s time. From Ezekiel’s prophecy, we gather that most of the Israelites in captivity yielded to the temptation of eating what was set before them. We read: “The LORD said, ‘In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them.’”<sup>13</sup> One commentator states: “Daniel and his three friends stand out like an oasis in the desert.”

The way in which Daniel proceeded to adhere to his principles indicates an unusual amount of tact and sensitivity to the fate of others. Daniel’s decision to become a vegetarian could have endangered the life of the king’s servant who was in charge of his and his friends’ well being. Daniel’s decision to discuss the matter with his overseer saved the lives of all involved.

Daniel must have made his request almost immediately upon arrival in Babylon. He and the others may have fasted for a few days, but they could not possibly have abstained from all food without drawing the attention of the official. In that short period of time, his behavior had been such that he had already won the respect of his guard. Like Joseph in Egypt, his demeanor, the way he accepted his imprisonment, gave testimony to his relationship with God. He followed Peter’s advice, long before it was given: “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”<sup>14</sup> The groundwork Daniel’s attitude had laid caused the guard to be willing to listen to him and allow this ten-day experiment. The trial was one hundred percent successful and we may assume that Daniel and friends remained vegetarians for the rest of their lives. Daniel’s experience does not prove anything about the virtues of vegetarianism. In the words of the apostle Paul: “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>15</sup> The success of the experimentation must be credited to divine intervention in favor of Daniel. The good looks and apparent health of Daniel and company were the result of their righteousness and fellowship with God. The advantage of a vegetable diet was that vegetables were not part of sacrifices made to idols in pagan societies.

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<sup>12</sup> Lev. 19:2

<sup>13</sup> Ezek. 4:13

<sup>14</sup> I Peter 3:15

<sup>15</sup> Rom. 14:17

Most modern translations use the word “guard” or “steward” in vs. 11. The KJV leaves the Persian word *Melzar* untranslated. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that Melzar may be a proper name and not an official title. Other scholars argue, however, that the use of the article in front of it makes it a title instead of a proper name.

*The Pulpit Commentary* makes the following interesting observation regarding the details of the experiment: “It may be noted, as bearing on this, that in the bas-reliefs portraying a feast from the palace of Assurbanipal, the guests are seated in messes of four round small tables. If, then, as is probable, all these young cadets at the Babylonian court sat in the royal presence, they would have a table to themselves, and thus the peculiarity of their meal would not be patent to the whole company. Had the number of friends been more, they would have been conspicuous: had they been fewer, they would have been observed by those added to make up the number.”

### III. Daniel’s Reputation in Babylon

1:17-21

***17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.***

***18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.***

***19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service.***

***20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.***

***21 And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.***

The four youths distinguished themselves, obviously, in their ability to learn. They possessed, what may be called, a natural gift for learning languages, which was sharpened by their obedience to God. Fellowship with God does not always assure great intellectual achievements, but it hones the talents God bestows on the individual. Daniel’s ability for the understanding of visions and the interpretation of dreams, however, was a supernatural endowment. The former may be classified as natural aptitudes, the latter was a spiritual gift imparted by the Holy Spirit. The mention of Daniel’s gifts is clearly meant as an introduction to the rest of this book, in which these gifts are clearly illustrated. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “God thus made one of the despised covenant-people eclipse the Chaldean sages in the very science on which they most prided themselves.”

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* clarifies: “Instruction in the wisdom of the Chaldeans was, besides, for Daniel and his three friends a test of their faith, since the wisdom of the Chaldeans, from the nature of the case, was closely allied to the Chaldean idolatry and heathen superstition, which the learners of this wisdom might easily be led to adopt. But that Daniel and his friends learned only the Chaldean wisdom without adopting the heathen element which was mingled with it, is evidenced from the steadfastness in the faith with which at a later period, at the danger of their lives (cf. Dan 3:6), they stood aloof from all participation in idolatry, and in regard to Daniel in particular, from the deep glance into the mysteries of the kingdom of God which lies before us in his prophecies, and bears witness of the clear separation between the sacred and the profane. But he needed to be deeply versed in the Chaldean wisdom, as formerly Moses was in the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22), so as to be able to put to shame the wisdom of this world by the hidden wisdom of God.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* adds: “The Massoretic original of the phrase, ‘skill in all learning,’ may be rendered literally, ‘skill in every kind of books.’ This has a special meaning in regard to the Babylonian and Assyrian books, which were clay tablets incised when wet, and burnt into permanence. Rolls of parchment were, as we see from Jeremiah, the common material for books among the Jews. Among the Egyptians, papyrus largely took the place of parchment, so the knowledge ‘of every kind of books’ meant ‘every language.’ It is certain that three languages were to a certain extent in use in Babylon — Aramaic, the ordinary language of business and diplomacy; Assyrian, the court language, the language in which histories and dedications were written; Accadian, the old sacred tongue, in which all the formulae of worship and the forms of incantation had been originally written. From the fact that Rabshakeh could talk Hebrew when conversing with Eliakim and Shebna, it would seem that the accomplishment required from a diplomat

implied the knowledge of the languages of the various nations subject to the Babylonian Empire or conterminous with it.”

The Hebrew word rendered “knowledge” is *madda`*, which means: “intelligence” or “consciousness.” It is what God granted to Solomon. We read: “God said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your heart’s desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and *knowledge* to govern my people over whom I have made you king...’”<sup>16</sup> “Skill” is the rendering of the Hebrew word *sakal*, which means: “to be circumspect,” or “intelligent.” The word is found a verse that speaks about David: “In everything he did he had *great success*, because the LORD was with him.”<sup>17</sup> “Wisdom” is the rendering of the Hebrew word *chokmah*. We find it in the verse: “God gave Solomon *wisdom* and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.”<sup>18</sup>

At the end of their three-year training period, the students were taken into the presence of King Nebuchadnezzar, who took personal charge of their final oral examination. Although this is not specifically stated, we may assume that a larger group than the four mentioned was involved. The fact that these young men outshone all the others suggests that there were others to whom they were compared. It is true, though, that the comparison is made with the established guild of magicians and enchanters.

*The Pulpit Commentary* catches astutely the frame of mind Daniel and his friends must have been in when standing before the most powerful person of their time. We read: “We can scarcely imagine the awe with which those young captives must have looked forward to standing before the terrible conqueror who had swept the army of Egypt before him, and had overthrown all who ventured to oppose him, who had sent home hosts of captives to throng the slave-markets of Babylon. We are not told whether each separately was brought before Nebuchadnezzar, or whether the whole number of the cadets was presented at once. It is the earliest instance of promotion by competitive examination. The clear, sharp eye of the young conqueror was probably worth more than all the questions prepared. While certainly the words used seem to imply that the hostages were called merely to be examined, the occasion may have been the ‘dream’ narrated in the next chapter.”

We may deduct from that fact that the king took personal charge of the final exams is an indication of his own brilliant mind. Nebuchadnezzar was obviously more than a brute conqueror who only possessed muscle power. He may have been a very cruel potentate, but it takes more than physical strength and endurance to rule an empire and lead it to a pinnacle of glory, as this king obviously did.

Some scholars object to the statement in the last verse of this chapter that “Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus,” because the last chapters of this book carry on till well into the reign of that monarch. This statement has been compared to a similar one in the beginning of the Book of Jeremiah, where we read: “The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.”<sup>19</sup> Several chapters in that book report events from a period beyond Zedekiah’s eleventh year. What is obviously meant is that Daniel’s service covered the whole period of Babylonian captivity.

## **I. Nebuchadnezzar’s First Dream 2**

A. Nebuchadnezzar Conceals His Dream 2:1-13

***1 In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.***

***2 So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king,***

***3 he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means."***

<sup>16</sup> II Chr. 1:11

<sup>17</sup> I Sam. 18:14

<sup>18</sup> I Kings 4:29

<sup>19</sup> Jer. 1:2,3

- 4 Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."**
- 5 The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.**
- 6 But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."**
- 7 Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it."**
- 8 Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided:**
- 9 If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."**
- 10 The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer.**
- 11 What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men."**
- 12 This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.**
- 13 So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.**

Expositors have argued extensively about an apparent discrepancy between Daniel's statement that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in the second year of his reign and the report in the opening verses of this book, which states that Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem in the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim. Jeremiah, however, records: "The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon."<sup>20</sup>

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* quotes Dr. Driver on this problem, who writes: "There is not, perhaps, necessarily a contradiction here with the 'three years' of i, 5,18. By Hebrew usage, fractions of time were reckoned as full units. Thus Samaria, which was besieged from the fourth to the sixth year of Hezekiah, is said to have been taken 'at the end' of three years (2 Kin xviii. 9,10) and in Jer xxxiv. 14 'at the end of seven years' means evidently when the seventh year has arrived (see also Mark 8:31, etc.). If, now, the author, following a custom which was certainly sometimes adopted by Jewish writers, and which was general in Assyria and Babylonia, 'post-dated' the regnant years of a king, i.e., counted as his first year not the year of his accession but the first full year afterwards, and if further Nebuchadnezzar gave orders for the education of the Jewish youths in his accession-year, the end of the 'three years' ... might be reckoned as falling within the king's second year."

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. Dreams are not uncommon as vehicles in God's revelation to men. We must admit that very little is known about the way the brain functions during the time a person is asleep. Dreams seem to be part of the process by which the human mind sorts out impressions and emotions that accumulated, sometimes over a period of years. Dreams can take us back into our childhood and make people appear who have long since died or disappeared from our life. In our dreams we tend to mix scenes and persons in a way that defies logic. A common concept about dreams is that they cannot be relied upon and that they are not supposed to make sense. In our western culture dreams are seldom considered to have any concrete value, except perhaps for psychiatrists or psychologists who try to help their patients sort out their warped emotions. I can only remember one dream in my whole life that gave me a preview of an event that occurred one day later in exactly the same manner as the dream had portrayed it.

In other cultures, dreams are often considered to be meaningful and much value is placed upon them. We have heard various stories about Muslims, who saw the person of Jesus Christ in a dream and were told to investigate the claims of Christianity. God, obviously, penetrates in this way barriers that men have put up against the evangelization of certain countries. It cannot be denied that God can enter a person's mind and reveal certain events in a dream or a vision.

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Jer. 25:1

Nebuchadnezzar considered his dream to have importance and when he woke up, we read: “his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.” “His mind was troubled” is a strong expression in Hebrew; it conveys the meaning of hammering on an anvil. This reaction put him in the same company with the king of Egypt in the days of Joseph. We read of him: “In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.”<sup>21</sup> About King Nebuchadnezzar, the Hebrew text reads: *Uwshnaatow nih<sup>y</sup>taah `aalaayw*, which is translated by The Interlinear Transliterated Bible: “and his sleep brake from him.” Calvin reads this as meaning: “His sleep came upon him, i.e., he began again to sleep,” but the NIV renders it: “and he could not sleep.” Scholars have argued whether the king could remember that dream or not. It seems logical to assume that he did not remember, although we do not read that he admitted this to his magicians and astrologers. His inability to remember provides more reason for his subsequent fury and his decision to summarily execute all magicians.

The Hebrew word, translated “magicians” is *hach<sup>r</sup>Tumiym*, which is derived from *chartom* meaning “someone who uses horoscopes.” Their dabbling in the occult brought them in direct contact with the world of evil spirits. God used their inability to satisfy the king’s demands by making it into a confrontation with “the gods of Babylon.” In the same way, He had confronted and embarrassed the gods of Egypt at the time of the exodus. God had said to Moses: “I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt.”<sup>22</sup>

The text does not explain why Daniel and his friends were not summoned in the king’s presence together with the others. It could be that only the Babylonians were sent for and the Hebrews were left out at this point. They were, however, automatically included in the group that was marked for execution.

As our text indicates, the remainder of this chapter is written in Aramaic. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* explains about Aramaic: “The name is given to a form of Semitic speech, most nearly related to Hebrew and Phoenician, but exhibiting marked peculiarities, and subsisting in different dialects. Its original home may have been in Mesopotamia (Aram), but it spread North and West, and, as below shown, became the principal tongue throughout extensive regions. After the return from the Captivity, it displaced Hebrew as the spoken language of the Jews in Palestine. In its eastern form it is known as Syriac. In its occurrence in the Old Testament, it formerly, though incorrectly, generally bore the name Chaldee.”

The expression: “O king, live forever!” was probably part of court etiquette. We do not read that Daniel ever used these words before King Nebuchadnezzar; he addressed King Darius once in that manner when he had survived the night in the lions’ den.<sup>23</sup>

The magicians requested naturally that the king would tell them the dream, so they could interpret it. The KJV gives the king’s answer: “The thing is gone from me.” The NIV renders this: “This is what I have firmly decided.” The KJV’s reading could be interpreted to mean that Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the dream; the NIV’s version of the text does not allow this. For reasons, not explained in the text, the king linked the reliability of the interpretation of the dream to the description of it. As suggested above, this all makes more sense if we assume that the king could in fact not remember himself what he had dreamed. Whatever the case may have been, God used these circumstances to thoroughly embarrass those that exemplified the wisdom of Babylon in order to reveal that the God of Israel is the God of heaven and earth.

It is difficult to deduct from the text the motivation of the king and of the magi in their arguments. We do not know for sure whether the king had forgotten the dream or not. It may be assumed that, even if he had forgotten, the mention of the details of the dream, as Daniel gave it to him, would trigger his majesty’s memory enough to confirm the correctness of their statements. It seems that the occult powers the magi exercised would, at least in some cases, enable them to know certain dreams even without the dreamer telling them. The Holy Spirit, for His own reasons, must have blocked this recourse to these heathen wise men. Apparently, King Nebuchadnezzar suspected his necromancers of treason. We are not told the grounds for this suspicion. It has been suggested that the magicians could have tried to make up a dream in an effort to save their lives. They felt, probably, that if they tried this and were exposed in the process, their chance for a pardon would be completely gone, but they might still have a chance of survival if they were falsely accused of treason and found to be innocent. But King Nebuchadnezzar fell into such a fit of anger that he

<sup>21</sup> Gen. 41:8

<sup>22</sup> Ex. 12:12

<sup>23</sup> See ch. 6:21

ordered their immediate execution. It cannot not be doubted that the king would regret his hasty command, once his fury had worn off and he realized that his favorite advisors, Daniel and his three friends had been killed with the others. Some scholars interpret the Aramaic text to say that the execution of some soothsayers had already been carried out before Arioch came to fetch Daniel and friends. Others believe that all the king's advisors were brought together before the mass execution occurred.

B. God Reveals the Dream

2:14-23

**14** *When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact.*

**15** *He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel.*

**16** *At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.*

**17** *Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.*

**18** *He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*

**19** *During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven*

**20** *and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.*

**21** *He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.*

**22** *He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.*

**23** *I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king."*

The question has been raised why Daniel and his friends had not been summoned in the king's presence together with the other Babylonian magi. It may very well be that, at this point already, it had been established that these Jewish youths received their wisdom from another source than the Babylonians. The magicians themselves must have been aware of the fact that darkness and light do not mix. The rest of the story confirms that they were correct.

Evidently, Daniel and his friends had been completely unaware of what went on at the court. This proves how fragile the string was that connected them to the king's favor. They could have been killed because of something that happened to someone else, simply because the king's whim decided that a certain category of his subjects had to be purged from society. Satan must have been aware of the prominence gained by these four young men and of their lives consecrated to God. To include them into the king's cruel blanket order of execution was, obviously, his doing.

*The Pulpit Commentary* makes the interesting observation: "There seems to have been absolute secrecy as to what had taken place in the royal council-chamber, and how absolute had been the failure of the Chaldean wise men to satisfy the demands of the king. We could imagine the strange turmoil that this would have caused in the college of young cadets of the various guilds of soothsayers and augurs, had it been announced that these great heads of their various orders had failed. News may have come of the wrath of the king, and close behind the angry sentence of extirpation, passed not only on those who had been the immediate occasions of the king's wrath, but on all the guilds of wise men in Babylon. This must have filled those who belonged to the various guilds implicated, not only with terror, but with amazement. It was next brought to them that they, though only in the lower stages of these famous guilds, were doomed to a common destruction with the past masters of the craft. That this was allowed to reach these subalterns proves that popular opinion had not gone with the fiery edict of the king."

We cannot picture the king's headsman to be a person of sensitivity. The Septuagint calls him: "The chief butcher." He may have enjoyed his job of being in charge of the Babylonian "guillotine." To address such a person "with wisdom and tact" as Daniel did shows a great deal of moral courage. The Septuagint reads here: "And he asked him saying, Ruler, 'why is it decreed so bitterly by the king?' And he showed him the warrant." When Daniel hears the reason for the order and asks for a stay of execution, Arioch, the king's executioner, tries to take credit for himself by introducing Daniel to his majesty as the person who could satisfy his desire. But later, when Daniel goes before the king with the contents of the dream and its

explanation, he makes sure to give full credit to the Lord. At this point it must have become clear to this young man that God had things in mind for him and for the Babylonian empire that went well beyond anything any human being could imagine.

Scholars have debated whether Daniel had, in fact, an audience with the king or whether he merely presented a petition at the palace. The different readings of the text in the Septuagint, the Vulgate and other ancient manuscripts present some problems of interpretation. The fact that Arioch personally took Daniel in for an audience, as stated in vs. 25, seems to indicate that Daniel had not seen the king before.

When a stay of execution is secured, Daniel goes to his friends to organize a prayer meeting for the purpose of saving their own lives and the lives of all the others in their guild. The names of Daniel's friends in vs. 17 are given again in Hebrew. Evidently, they kept on using Hebrew with each other when alone. The use of the Hebrew names gives a touch of intimacy to the relationship these young men enjoyed.

Daniel must have been aware at this point of the spiritual gift God had given him, even before he had the opportunity to exercise his gift before King Nebuchadnezzar. We read earlier: "And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds."<sup>24</sup> We do not read, however, that Daniel had had earlier opportunities to exercise his talent. If not, his bold assertion that he would be able to state and interpret the Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a very brave act of faith indeed.

The Lord heard the unanimous prayer of the four young men and the king's dream was revealed to Daniel. Our text states that Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed to Daniel "in a vision." The word used is not Hebrew but Aramaic, *chezev*, which is derived from a word, meaning: "sight." The KJV renders it "vision." There has been a good deal of discussion among theologians about the way Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed to Daniel. Some believe that Daniel dreamed the same dream and that the Lord subsequently revealed the meaning to him; others think that it came to him as a direct revelation.

Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving has been called "a timeless model." Daniel praises God for His intervention, which not only saved his life and that of his friends but also satisfied the king's demand. He addresses God as "'*elah*," which is an Aramaic word, the equivalent of the Hebrew "'*el*." *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains: "In the Book of Daniel, 'elah was used both of heathen 'gods' and the one true 'God' of heaven. The Chaldean priests told Nebuchadnezzar: 'And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh' Dan 2:11. The Chaldeans referred to such 'gods' when reporting that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to participate in idol worship on the plain of Dura Dan 3:12. The 'gods' were enumerated by Daniel when he condemned Nebuchadnezzar's neglect of the worship of Israel's one true 'God' Dan 5:23. In Dan 3:25, the word refers to a divine being or messenger sent to protect the three Hebrews Dan 3:28. In Dan 4:8-9,18; and 5:11, the phrase 'the spirit of the holy gods' appears (KJV, RSV, NEB, NIV). Elsewhere the references to 'elah are to the living 'God' whom Daniel worshiped." Daniel was evidently brought up in the reference for the Name YHWH so that he was not allowed to pronounce or write that Name without breaking the second command of the Ten Commandments.

The Hebrew *min-`aal`maa' w`ad-`aal`maa' diy*, "for ever and ever," can be rendered: "from eternity to eternity." Daniel's words were part of the established temple liturgy. David had ordered Asaph to sing God's praises with the words: "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting."<sup>25</sup> They also form the doxology that concludes the first and fourth book of Psalms: "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen."<sup>26</sup>

It has been objected that "wisdom and power" do not form a natural combination of divine attributes. *The Pulpit Commentary* mentions that "wisdom and understanding" would seem more natural. We do see the same grouping together in Jeremiah's prayer of praise, when he realized that the destruction of his nation did not mean a permanent obliteration. When God commanded him to buy his cousin Hanamel's field in Anathoth, while he was in prison, he took that to be a ray of hope and burst out in praise: "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. Great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all

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<sup>24</sup> Ch. 1:17

<sup>25</sup> I Chr. 16:36

<sup>26</sup> Ps. 41:13; 106:48

the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve.”<sup>27</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* furthermore comments: “What was in the mind of Daniel and his friends was that they were in the hands of a great Monarch, who was practically omnipotent. They now make known their recognition of the glorious truth that not only does the wisdom of the wise belong to God, but also the might of the strong.”

The first and immediate reason for Daniel’s outbreak of praise is, of course, the fact that the vision of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, as God gave it to him, saved his life and that of others. The manifestation of God’s wisdom is placed in opposition to the wisdom of the magicians and soothsayers who failed to reveal Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and explain it. His power is contrasted to the power of this monarch, who was, at that time, considered to be the most powerful man on earth. What Daniel learned as a result of his prayer meeting that night, the king would eventually learn the hard way, namely that his power was delegated and that the glory of his kingdom, however dazzling it may have seemed, was transitory and did not measure up to the glory of God.

Vs. 21 states: “He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them.” The rise and fall of the empires, which is what the dream is about, is compared to the change of seasons of the year. Even some kingdoms that ruled the earth for several centuries are, in God’s eyes, not more than transient seasons. In the words of the apostle Peter: “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”<sup>28</sup> Asaph, who was the king’s cantor during David’s reign, sings in one of his psalms: “No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.”<sup>29</sup> And the virgin Mary, in her Magnificat, expressed what she discovered, knowing to be pregnant with the Messiah: “He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”<sup>30</sup>

Daniel’s mention of light and darkness indicates that he knew the difference between the source of his own knowledge and that of the other members of his guild. Satan may be able to confuse the human mind with manifestations that resemble the power of God, but the person who knows the Lord and is filled with His Spirit knows the difference. And there is a point at which the devil can no longer compete. Moses and Aaron, at Pharaoh’s court, were facing demonic opposition. We read: “So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs.”<sup>31</sup> But the practitioners of occult power reached their limit at the third plague. We read: “But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals. The magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’”<sup>32</sup>

It may be difficult for us to appreciate fully the impact God’s revelation to Daniel may have had upon his young soul. He was a man, who had been brought up with the truth that God revealed Himself uniquely in the temple of Jerusalem, above the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The temple was probably still standing when this first revelation came to Daniel. Later, when he knew the temple had been destroyed and he could only pray in the direction of what had once been, the prospect of fellowship with God must have seemed even bleaker. But during these periods of spiritual death, God gave ample evidence to this young man that He was very much alive and in control of His creation. How this must have lifted his soul! Daniel experienced some of the truth of Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman: “A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. Yet a time is coming and has now come

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<sup>27</sup> Jer 32:17, 19

<sup>28</sup> II Peter 3:8

<sup>29</sup> Ps. 75:6,7

<sup>30</sup> Luke 1:51,52

<sup>31</sup> Ex. 7:10-12

<sup>32</sup> Ex. 8:18,19

when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”<sup>33</sup>

*Barnes' Notes* correctly observes: “The meaning of the phrase ‘God of my fathers’ is, that he had been their protector; had regarded them as his people; had conferred on them great favors. The particular ground of thanksgiving here is, that the same God who had so often revealed himself to the Hebrew people by the prophets in their own land, had now condescended to do the same thing to one of their nation, though a captive in a strange country. The favor thus bestowed had an increased value, from the fact that it showed that the Hebrew people were not forgotten, though far from the land of their birth, and that, though in captivity, they might still hope for the benign interposition of God.”

## C. Daniel Interprets the Dream

2:24-45

*24 Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him."*

*25 Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means."*

*26 The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"*

*27 Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about,*

*28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:*

*29 "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen.*

*30 As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.*

*31 "You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue-an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.*

*32 The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze,*

*33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.*

*34 While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.*

*35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.*

*36 "This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.*

*37 You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory;*

*38 in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.*

*39 "After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth.*

*40 Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron-for iron breaks and smashes everything-and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.*

*41 Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.*

*42 As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle.*

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<sup>33</sup> John 4:21,23,24

**43 And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.**

**44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.**

**45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. "The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy."**

*The Pulpit Commentary* makes much about the fact that Daniel first went to Arioch before going into the king's presence. It speculates that Arioch had been reluctant to carry out the king's command for the mass execution of magicians. But none of this is stated in the text. The obvious reason for Daniel's going to the executioner first was that his own life was in this man's hand and that, if Daniel proved that he could state and interpret the dream, the reason for the slaughter had been removed.

As was stated before, Arioch tried to gain some points for himself by presenting it before the king as if he had found Daniel, whilst in reality Daniel had found him. The fact that he calls Daniel "a man among the exiles from Judah" may be an indication that the young Hebrews were not regarded as being on the same level as the native Babylonian magicians. Some racial prejudice could be detected in the wording.

There is a tone of hopeful expectation in the king's question: "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?" There is a strong suggestion in these words that Nebuchadnezzar was in fact unable to remember what he had dreamed, but he obviously believed that the dream had great importance.

*The Pulpit Commentary* states here: "There is no indication that Nebuchadnezzar remembered anything of the youth who had done well in the examination held in his presence some months before. ... That the king should have forgotten, however, is nothing extraordinary, for the occasions of this kind would be many. Nebuchadnezzar, in the case of the young Hebrew, does not question his willingness to tell him what he wishes, but only his ability. With regard to the wise men, he believed, or professed to believe, in their ability to do what he wished, and reckoned their refusal to answer him as due to obstinacy or treason. It may be that he has moderated somewhat the rancor of his ire, and is willing to recognize their ignorance as to dreams and such light furniture of the mind as not militating against their claim to knowledge in other directions, only for his oath's sake he must demand that the dream be told him by at least some one. It may be that there was a certain emphasis on the pronoun when Nebuchadnezzar demanded of Daniel, 'Is there to thee the power to declare to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?' Is there to thee, mere student of the sacred mysteries as thou art, alien as thou art, a hostage from a city whose king I overthrew easily?' It certainly must have been strange to Nebuchadnezzar that what the soothsayers, astrologers, and magicians of the court, the highest, and reputed to be the most skilful of their respective guilds, could not do, this young Hebrew proclaimed himself able to perform."

In his answer, Daniel, first of all, provides an alibi for the other magicians in claiming that they could not satisfy the king's demand because it fell outside the realm of their expertise. Their claim that "no one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men" had been basically correct. By stating this as an introduction to the revelation of the dream and its meaning, Daniel directs the king's gaze in a most wholesome way to God in heaven to whom the king would eventually have to give account.

We cannot overstate the importance of Daniel's following explanation to this king. He did much more than retelling what King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed and what it meant, he introduced this man, who thought himself to be all powerful, to the One who is the source of all power. Nebuchadnezzar probably believed in something supernatural, otherwise he would not have engaged magicians and soothsayers in his service. But that is different from discovering that there is a Supreme Being and that He is alive. Daniel's explanation of the dream led this king into experiencing God in a way that must have shattered his self-image.

Daniel explains that it was Nebuchadnezzar's desire to know the future that triggered the dream. At the same time, Daniel disclaims superior knowledge for himself; he merely proves that his sources are superior; he serves a superior God, who is called "the revealer of mysteries."

Daniel would later have a vision that revolved basically around the same topic as Nebuchadnezzar's dream. What Nebuchadnezzar saw as parts of an imposing statue appeared to Daniel in the form of four monstrous animals.<sup>34</sup>

The statue King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream represented all the human empires on earth, beginning with the Babylonian and ending with the one ruled by the Antichrist. The latter fades away in the distance of this picture, but in the context of the Book of Daniel as a whole it stands out as an important one. Its form emphasizes the unity of the statue; all the empires are shown as one man, as if one power governs the all. The unity of the statue points to the fact that the source of all world power is the prince of this world, Satan. In C. S. Lewis' series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the author introduces a series of witches of different color. One of the characters remarks that in the different ages of Narnia's history the color of the witches may have differed but their evil center of power was all the same. Daniel introduces us the "the prince of Persia" and "the prince of Greece"<sup>35</sup> but their overlord is the same: God's arch-opponent, Satan.

The unusual feature of this sculpture is that five different kinds of material are used, each subsequent one inferior to the previous: gold, silver, copper, iron, and clay, or ceramic. *The Pulpit Commentary* furthermore observes: "While there is a progressive degradation of the metal, there is also progression in degrees of hardness, silver being harder than gold, copper harder than silver, and iron hardest of all; then suddenly the iron is mingled with clay. There is not a new, softer material added to form a new fifth part; but there is a mingling of 'clay' — clay suitable for the potter, or rather that has already been baked in the kiln, and therefore in the last degree brittle. In fact, there is a progress in frangibility — gold the most ductile of metals, and iron the least so, then clay, when baked, more brittle still. There are many other suggestions that might be followed, which are at least ingenious. The idea suggested by the phrase, 'part of iron and part of clay,' is that there was not a complete mingling, but that portions were seen that were clearly clay, and other portions as clearly still iron; there was therefore the superadded notion of the imperfect union of the parts with the necessary additional weakness which follows."

In his explanation of the meaning of the dream, Daniel identifies the head of the statue with the Babylonian empire under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. It is difficult to compare the different empires and their glory on the basis of archeological evidence. The fact that the head is the most splendid part of the statue does not necessarily imply that Babylon's glory outshone all the subsequent empires in splendor. But excavations have unveiled some extraordinary features of the Babylon King Nebuchadnezzar had created. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* states about it: "Nebuchadnezzar made the city splendid, and the king's own inscriptions are concerned largely with his vast building operations. Babylon was excavated thoroughly by the Deutsche Orientgesellschaft under the direction of Robert Koldewey, 1899 to 1917 ... Nebuchadnezzar's brilliant city included vast fortifications, famous streets such as the Processional, canals, temples, and palaces. The Ishtar Gate led through the double wall of fortifications and was adorned with rows of bulls and dragons in colored enameled brick. Nebuchadnezzar's throne room was likewise adorned with enameled bricks. The tall ziggurat was rebuilt. This, Herodotus said, rose to a height of eight stages. Near at hand was Esagila ('whose housetop is lofty'), the temple of Marduk or Bel, which the king restored. Not far distant were the 'hanging gardens,' which to the Greeks was one of the seven wonders of the world. How well the words of Dan 4:30 fit this ambitious builder: 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' " Some of the beauty of the head may have been in the eyes of the beholder. In looking at the whole picture of ancient world hegemony, the Roman empire probably outshone the Babylonian.

Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar as "the king of kings." The expression is evidently a Hebraism to describe a potentate who has subjected to his power kings of conquered countries. The title is in due course used in the Book of Revelation for the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup> In God's eyes, however, this glorious king Nebuchadnezzar was ultimately one of Satan's puppets. Isaiah identifies him with Lucifer in his taunting prophecy. We read: "You will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended!"<sup>37</sup> That God also called this king: "My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of

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<sup>34</sup> See ch. 7

<sup>35</sup> See ch. 10:13,20

<sup>36</sup> See Rev. 17:14; 19:16

<sup>37</sup> Isa. 14:4

Babylon<sup>38</sup> can only be explained as meaning that at some point God used this man to carry out His plan of punishment for certain sinful nations, including the kingdom of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar was never a humble and surrendered servant of the Almighty.

The Interlinear Transliterated Bible reads vs. 38 as follows: “And wheresoever dwell the children of men, the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made the ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.” The reading of the Septuagint of this verse is even more flowery: “In all the earth inhabited by men, and wild beast, and birds of the heaven, and fish of the sea, he delivered all things into thy hand to rule over all.” *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “This assertion of Daniel must seem exaggerated to us, but we must remember the courtly form of address that was usual in Oriental courts, and that Nebuchadnezzar in all likelihood claimed this breadth of empire; so Daniel, in order to make way for the assertion he had already made of the king’s dependence on One higher, gives him everything he claims.”

Before taking a closer look at the parts that compose the statue, we ask the question for what purpose God allowed this king to have this dream and hear its interpretation? Nebuchadnezzar may have dreamed himself to be like a head of gold, but he was only part of a whole structure that is doomed at one time to crumble and be crushed. The most important features of his dream are the feet of clay and the rock cut out not by human hands. The most powerful lesson the dream conveyed to the king was that his own glory was doomed and superseded, not only by other empires, but by the kingdom of God. However lofty and awesome this structure of world power is portrayed, a small stone will crush it. Above the head of this dazzling statue can be written the words the angel addressed to the prophet Zechariah: “ ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”<sup>39</sup> During Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, we read: “The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ ”<sup>40</sup> But Jesus had seen the feet of clay and Satan knew he was saying this to the “rock that was cut out, but not by human hands.”

The various upper parts of the body of the statue have been unanimously identified as follows: The breast and arms of silver as the kingdom of the Medes and Persians which replaced Babylon in ± 539 B.C. The belly and thighs of bronze, or rather copper, represent the Macedonian empire under Alexander the Great, established in ± 334 B.C. The part of the legs and feet made of iron stand for the Roman empire as it was founded by Julius Caesar in ± 60 BC and ended in the sacking of Rome in 476 AD.

The most controversial part of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is the ten toes of the statue. The interpretation of the meaning of the toes has been applied to various states and kingdoms, including the Common Market of Western Europe when it still existed of 10 nations. Since other countries have been added afterwards, this explanation is difficult to maintain. It would make sense to add the former British empire, Hitler’s Germany, as well as the former Soviet Union to the list. The search is still going on. We do not consider it too important, as it is clear that eventually all worldly power ends up in the hands of the Antichrist at the end of this planet’s history.

King Nebuchadnezzar must have realized the weakness of the statue in that it lacked a solid foundation. Foundations are the most important features of any structure; the greater the construction the more important its base. Any power that is not based on righteousness is doomed in principle. That is why Satan’s power is destined to be destroyed. The discovery that his head of gold lacked a solid foundation must have been alarming to the extreme to this powerful king.

There is a chronological inconsistency in the king’s dream that is worthy of note. The rock that hits the feet of clay destroys the whole statue, although the upper part of the statue had long ceased to exist when the kingdoms, represented by the ten toes appeared on the world scene. What will happen at the end of times influences the present and the past. The Babylonian empire was doomed because of what will eventually happen to the empire of the Antichrist. Or, in other words, what happens in time is governed by what occurs outside of time. The actual destruction of the image of power on earth occurs in heaven, in eternity. This is difficult to grasp for us as time-bound creatures, but no other explanation seems applicable. King Nebuchadnezzar was right in assuming that his dream was of great importance!

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<sup>38</sup> See Jer. 27:6

<sup>39</sup> Zech. 4:6

<sup>40</sup> Matt. 4:8,9

The result of the pulverization of the statue points to the vein of evil that runs through all earthly dominion; chaff is the ultimate image of the worthlessness of evil. The First Psalm states: "Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away."<sup>41</sup> In that psalm righteousness is depicted as a fruit-bearing tree. "Whatever he does prospers."<sup>42</sup> Evil always results in an empty hull.

The actual crushing of this statue took place at Calvary. There Jesus Christ "disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."<sup>43</sup> No victory was ever so paradoxical, so anticlimactic, so absolute!

The kingdom that is portrayed by the huge mountain that fills the whole earth contains more than the Millennium John mentions in Revelation.<sup>44</sup> Even a thousand years come to an end, but the Kingdom of God and of His Christ is eternal. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary the birth of the Son of God, he said: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."<sup>45</sup> It is for this kingdom we pray when we say: "Your kingdom come."<sup>46</sup> The apostle Paul describes how the rock will crush the statue and fill the whole earth. We read in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."<sup>47</sup>

D. Nebuchadnezzar Promotes Daniel                      2:46-49

***46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him.***

***47 The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."***

***48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.***

***49 Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.***

King Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates his greatness in his reaction to Daniel's description and interpretation of the dream. We read that he fell prostrate before Daniel and exclaimed: "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." The fact that the king treated Daniel as a deity and ordered offerings of incense to be made to him has, understandably, raised the eyebrows of Biblical commentators. In the New Testament, the apostles refused to accept this kind of worship. In Peter's encounter with Cornelius, we read: "As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself.'<sup>48</sup> Paul and Barnabas similarly refused this kind of worship in Lystra. We read: "The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he

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<sup>41</sup> Ps. 1:4

<sup>42</sup> Ps. 1:3

<sup>43</sup> See Col. 2:15

<sup>44</sup> See Rev. 20:1-10

<sup>45</sup> Luke 1:32,33

<sup>46</sup> Matt. 6:10

<sup>47</sup> I Cor. 15:24-28

<sup>48</sup> Acts 10:25,26

and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 'Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.' <sup>49</sup> In Revelation, John wanted to worship the angel who had been his guide throughout his visions, but the angel rebuked him. We read: "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!'" <sup>50</sup>

We could, however, excuse King Nebuchadnezzar for worshipping Daniel. First of all, this monarch was not in the habit of falling prostrate before other human beings; the fact that he did so indicates that he saw in Daniel the image of God. We do not read that Daniel refused this worship, but we do not read either that he accepted it. Daniel may have had little choice in the matter. Some translations read vs. 47 as "The king answered Daniel, and said..." <sup>51</sup> The Hebrew, or rather Aramaic word *`anah* is usually translated "to answer," or "to respond." We may assume that only a digest of the conversation between the king and Daniel is given.

It is neither unusual, nor unhealthy for people who are newly introduced to the reality of the existence of God to see God modeled in the person who introduces them and to model themselves after that person in the early stages of their spiritual experience. Most people need a middleman before they learn to enter into a personal fellowship with God. In worshipping Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar confessed: "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings." That is quite a confession for the person who was considered the most powerful man in the world at that time.

The incident propelled Daniel to the highest position in the empire under the king and his friends who had assisted him in his prayer shared in his glory. Daniel recognized that without their backing God would probably not have revealed Himself the way He did. God honors those who honor Him.

**II. Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold 3**  
 A. Nebuchadnezzar's Image is Set Up 3:1-7

***1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.***

***2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.***

***3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.***

***4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language:***

***5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.***

***6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."***

***7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.***

The Septuagint embellishes the Hebrew text considerably with: "In the eighteenth year King Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled cities and countries, and all those dwelling (in them) over the earth from India even to Ethiopia, made a golden image; the height of it was sixty cubits, and the breadth of it six cubits, and set it up in a plain within the boundary of the province of Babylon." *The Pulpit Commentary* objects to the

<sup>49</sup> Acts 14:13-15

<sup>50</sup> Rev. 22:8,9

<sup>51</sup> NKJV

date, the eighteenth year, since Nebuchadnezzar was, supposedly, engaged in the siege of Jerusalem, which was taken in the nineteenth year of his reign.<sup>52</sup> The Hebrew text does not specify any date but we may assume that the event took place after the king had the dream of the statue in the previous chapter, since Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were present in this company of “satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials.” No reason is given for the absence of Daniel. It is assumed that he was away on government business. Some scholars believe that Daniel had already risen to such prominence in the empire that he would be above any accusation by underlings.

No details are provided either regarding the character of the image or what it represented. The measurements are given in the Hebrew text as sixty units by six units. The KJV renders this: “[the] height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits.” The NIV modernizes this with: “ninety feet high and nine feet wide.”

It has been objected that a statue that big could not have been made of solid gold. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: “It is not likely that this image was all of gold; for this would have required more of this precious metal than the whole province of Babylon could produce; for as I suppose the sixty cubits apply to the perpendicular altitude, so I take it for granted that the six cubits intend the diameter. Now a column of gold of this height in diameter, upon the supposition that the pillar was circular, contains five thousand seven hundred and twenty-five and a half cubic feet; and since there are nineteen thousand avoirdupois ounces in a cubic foot, the weight of the whole pillar would be eight million two hundred and sixty-two thousand eight hundred and six pounds ten ounces of gold.” Mr. Clarke must have been an outstanding mathematician!

If the image represented a human figure, as some commentators suppose, these measurements seem indeed out of proportion. Some believe that the six cubits, or nine feet may have been the measurement of the shoulders. If we allow for the pedestal upon which the image was erected, the whole matter of measurements become rather irrelevant. It has been suggested that the image may have been an obelisk representing a phallus, a suggestion that is born out by Ezekiel's reference to such a statue.<sup>53</sup> In that case the given measurements would also fit the description. Archeological finds have confirmed that idol worship in parts of the world often had a strong sexual connotation.

King Nebuchadnezzar's edict to worship the image he had erected reminds us of John's vision in Revelation of the image set up during the reign of the Antichrist to which the inhabitants of the world are required to give worship.<sup>54</sup>

The text beautifully depicts the pompous ambiance that accompanied the ceremony by enumerating, first the long list of dignitaries present (satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials), and then also the detailed description of the orchestra (the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music). These high officials were all afraid of losing their lives; they would rather bow to something as disgusting as the worship of a detestable image and even engage in pornography, than lose their heads. King Nebuchadnezzar had them all dance to his piping, both literally and figuratively.

The names of some of the musical instruments are Greek. Some scholars take this as an indication that Daniel's manuscript dates from a later period than from the time immediately following the events described in it. It rather seems to be proof that the Greek civilization influenced the ancient world much earlier than is generally supposed.

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “The command that all who were assembled at the consecration of the image should all fall down before it and worship it, is to be viewed from the standpoint of the heathen king. It had no reference at all to the oppression of those who worshipped the God of the Jews, nor to a persecution of the Jews on account of their God. It only demanded the recognition of the national god, to whom the king supposed he owed the greatness of his kingdom, as the god of the kingdom, and was a command which the heathen subjects of Nebuchadnezzar could execute without any violence to their consciences. The Jews could not obey it, however, without violating the first precept of their law. But Nebuchadnezzar did not think on that.”

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<sup>52</sup> See II Kings 25:8

<sup>53</sup> See Ezek. 16:17

<sup>54</sup> See Rev. 13:14<sup>b</sup>,15

## B. Daniel's Friends Refuse to Worship 3:8-12

**8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews.**

**9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever!**

**10 You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold,**

**11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.**

**12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon-Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego-who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."**

The astrologers, as the NIV calls them, were not necessarily professional stargazers. The Hebrew word used is *Kasday*, which means "Chaldean." It can only mean "magician" by implication, but the original meaning points to a race, rather than a trade.

The Hebrew word rendered "denounce" is *qerats*, which literally means eat "to the morsels of any one." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, suggests the meaning: "They ate the torn limbs or flesh of the Jews." Whether this means that a sentiment of anti-Semitism ran through the empire, we do not know. If the Jewish captives distinguished themselves by their dietary restrictions and their shunning of idolatry as well as by their superior abilities which had propelled some of them to high government posts, a strong feeling of jealousy may very well have been present. It is difficult to evaluate the racial tensions that may have boiled below the surface of Babylonian civilization at that period. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains that the Chaldeans were not the original inhabitants of the empire. They were intruders, as was Nebuchadnezzar himself. The Commentary states: "It is evident that "Chaldean" is here used in its ethnic sense of the nation, not in its professional sense as of the alleged class. We must remember that 'Chaldean' is not equivalent to "Babylonian." As we have seen, the Chaldeans were intruders in Babylon, and to them Nebuchadnezzar belonged. It was but natural that native-born Chaldeans, who reckoned themselves to be of the same kin as the king, objected to have their rights postponed to a set of Jews. The fact that the three friends are not named, or in any way designated, but the whole Jewish race is referred to, shows that the purpose of these Chaldeans involved the whole Jewish people, and that they singled out Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego simply as test cases. Their elevation to positions of such trust might well have caused jealousy of them."

## C. Daniel's Friends Trust God

3:13-18

**13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,**

**14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?"**

**15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"**

**16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.**

**17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.**

**18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."**

The accusation against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was, first of all, that they paid no attention to the person of Nebuchadnezzar. The way this is stated would, inevitably, kindle the king's wrath immediately, creating the right atmosphere to introduce the seriousness of the offence in not worshipping idols in general and not participating in the worship of this image in particular. It has been suggested that, if the image was dedicated to the god Marduk, a neglect to revere it would be considered an offence against the state and be counted as treason. The accusation has its desired effect: the king flies into a rage. We have seen

him do this in the previous chapter. The king's character and short fuse must have been well known among his subjects.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are summoned to the king's presence and his majesty gives them a second chance. For the fourth time the inventory of the orchestra is itemized, adding divine ridicule to the story.

The answer of the accused stands out in Scripture as one of the most impressive statements of faith. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had surrendered their lives to God. The text of the Septuagint differs from the Hebrew text. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, it reads: "And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, we have no need to answer thee in regard to this command, for our God in the heavens is one Lord, whom we fear, who is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and will deliver us out of thy hands, and then it shall be manifest to thee that we neither serve thy gods, nor the golden image which thou hast set up do we worship."

They knew that their lives were in His hand and that He could do with them according to His pleasure. Fear of death played no part in their conviction. They expressed what Jesus would later formulate in His advice to His disciples: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."<sup>55</sup> The motto of their lives was: "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You."<sup>56</sup> The apostle Paul expressed the same sentiment in his Epistle to the Romans: "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."<sup>57</sup>

We must remember that this conviction began with the lesser choice about the food they should eat. Probably inspired by Daniel's example, they had decided not to defile themselves with food sacrificed to idols, or not covered by the kosher laws of the Pentateuch. Actually, the choice was not about food but obedience. This led them to the choice between life and death. Their decision to rather die than live without God brought them through death into real life. They experienced, what Jesus taught His disciples: "whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for [Jesus' sake] will save it."<sup>58</sup>

Fear of death has caused the death of countless souls. Satan has manipulated human beings throughout the centuries by threatening them with death. The truth that all must die, even those who try to postpone death by compromising or choosing evil, has not kept everyone from making wrong choices. Only those who choose death over life without God have nothing to fear. However impressive and oppressive the circumstances under which these three men stood before this powerful king, they were not afraid. The Book of Proverbs state: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."<sup>59</sup>

The answer of the three made the king lose all self-control that he may have demonstrated up to that point. The Hebrew text reads literally: "the form of his visage was changed." His face was contorted by fury. The strange aspect in this outburst of rage is that Nebuchadnezzar had formerly confessed to Daniel: "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings." The king's frenzy not only changed his facial expressions, it also warped his concept of the truth. He knew in his heart that what these men said to him was true, but he was unwilling to listen.

The king's command to heat the furnace *seven times* had raised some questions among the scholars. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* considers this to be a Hebrew idiom, indicating completeness. The Hebrew word *sheba*, or *shaba`* can also mean "a week," or "an oath." We find the same in God's warning to Israel: "I will punish you for your sins seven times over."<sup>60</sup> And in Peter's question: "'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven

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<sup>55</sup> Matt. 10:28

<sup>56</sup> Ps. 63:3 (NKJV)

<sup>57</sup> Rom. 14:8

<sup>58</sup> Luke 9:24

<sup>59</sup> Prov. 29:25

<sup>60</sup> Lev. 26:18

times, but seventy-seven times.”<sup>61</sup> Scholars have also wondered whether the Babylonians had thermometers that could accurately measure the temperature of a fire.

By ordering the fire to be heated more, the king would actually shorten the suffering of the condemned, and we may assume that this was not his intention.

Another interesting question, that I cannot find asked in any commentary, is what the fire was doing at this ceremony anyhow. It is true that the herald announced: “Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace,” but the king can hardly have anticipated that anyone of his subject would ever consider disobeying his command to bow down before the image. We do not know whether Babylon had any Moloch or Baal-like gods who were worshipped with human sacrifices that were thrown into the mouth of the idol in which a fire was burning. Satan, who stood certainly at the back of this ceremony, may have used this furnace as a symbol of the fires of hell, which he mockingly put on display.

Proof that the fire was extremely hot is found in the fact that the soldiers who were commanded to execute the king’s command perished themselves in the flames; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not survive because the heat was bearable enough.

#### D. Daniel’s Friends Are Protected in the Furnace 3:19-25

***19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual***

***20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.***

***21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.***

***22 The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,***

***23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.***

***24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”***

***They replied, “Certainly, O king.”***

***25 He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”***

Evidently, King Nebuchadnezzar witnessed the execution, probably because he felt he would enjoy the scene that proved his supreme power over the life of his subjects. The king may have possessed a streak of sadism. It was the satisfaction of revenge for a personal insult. It is said that Adolph Hitler ordered the execution of those who had plotted to assassinate him to be filmed and that the Fuehrer enjoyed the viewing of this movie.

In his viewing of the execution, the king has a surprise, to put it mildly. The Hebrew text states that the king “rose up in haste.” The NIV renders this: “leaped to his feet.” TLB reads that he “jumped up.” His question to his advisers seems to be rhetorical: “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” Nebuchadnezzar cannot have had any doubt about this. His question is the equivalent of someone saying in modern times: “Pinch me! Am I really seeing what I see?”

The king’s observation that the men had been tied when thrown into the fire and that they were seen walking around unfettered suggests that their bonds had been non-combustible. They had probably been chained together. The heat of the fire ought to have singed them beyond recognition even before they hit the bottom of the furnace. But here they are, walking around as free men. The most astonishing phenomenon is the presence of a fourth person, whose radiance must have outshone the fire so as to qualify him as “a son of the gods.” The Hebrew, or actually Aramaic words *bar ‘elahn* caused some of the early church fathers to interpret this as meaning that Christ, in His pre-incarnated form had joined the three. But it seems hard to conceive that this king would have sufficient knowledge to recognize the Messiah, even if He was the one seen. From his later statement that God had “sent his angel and rescued his servants” we may conclude that the king had only seen a supernatural being. This does not mean that the Second Person of the Godhead

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<sup>61</sup> Matt. 18:21,22

could not have come personally to the rescue of these three men, but our text does not state this conclusively.

Centuries before the Babylonian Captivity, Isaiah had prophetically announced God's promise: "But now, this is what the LORD says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. *When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.* For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.'"<sup>62</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* gives us the text of the Septuagint, which reads: "And it was when the king heard them singing praises, and stood and saw them living, then was Nebuchadnezzar the king astonished and rose up hastily and said to his friends, Did we not cast three men into the fire bound? and they said to the king, Truly, O king." In the Apocrypha, we find *The Song of the Three Holy Children*, which is supposedly the text of the hymn the Septuagint refers to. Any further reference to the contents of this song falls outside the scope of this study.

E. Daniel's Friends Are Promoted 3:26-30

**26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,**

**27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.**

**28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.**

**29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."**

**30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.**

In calling the three men out of the fire, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged defeat. He had of course little choice in the matter. If this fire could not destroy those who had rebelled against him, nothing could. The execution by fire may have had a deeper spiritual meaning than appears at the surface. We suggested above that the furnace may have been part of Babylonian idol worship. As a matter of fact, fire was considered to be a divine element in the mind of the Babylonians. *The Pulpit Commentary* clarifies: "The Babylonians had conquered the city of Jehovah, had burned his temple, and had done this through the power of Marduk, so they thought; but here Bel-Marduk had been openly defied by three worshippers of Jehovah. They had been hurled into the very element of Iz-bar, the servant and ally of Marduk, yet fire had been unable to harm them or vindicate the honor of Bel-Marduk. What emphasized this was that the fire that spared the servants of Jehovah slew the votaries of Bel-Marduk, who were eager to show their reverence for Marduk by carrying these Jehovah-worshippers to the furnace. Such a miracle, so wrought before all the high dignitaries of the Babylonian Empire, would go far to take the edge off any taunting reference to the weakness of Jehovah's Godhead as demonstrated by the ruins of Jerusalem. Jehovah had shown himself as the supreme Revealer of secrets when he enabled Daniel to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream. He now manifested himself as Master of the most powerful of elements — fire. The Jews could thus maintain their faith unchallenged." Underlying this statement is the assumption that the events of this chapter occurred after Jerusalem had been burned to the ground, although this fact cannot be proven convincingly.

The king's acknowledgment that the God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego served was the Most High God does not imply that he ceased to believe in the gods he worshipped; he merely recognized the supremacy of God over the other ones. His confession is consistent with what he had told Daniel, after the explanation of the dream in the previous chapter: "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings."

<sup>62</sup> Isa. 43:1-3

King Nebuchadnezzar discovered what many potentates found out after him, that the burning of God's children is a hazardous enterprise, which is more harmful to those who burn than to those who are burned. Even in cases when the power of God did not intervene in a physical way, it has been proven that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

As a result of this miracle, the king issued a decree that is again typical of the brutality with which he reigned over his empire. His subjects are not ordered to worship god, but if they say anything that would discredit YHWH or the Jewish faith, they would "be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble."

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes in a concluding remark about this chapter: "Thus a two-fold object was much promoted; first, the curing of the Jews of their past tendency to idolatry; and, secondly, the securing to the captive covenant-people, on the part of the pagan rulers, of that respect and consideration which meanwhile mitigated the severity of their exile, and which ultimately issued in the decree of Cyrus, not only restoring them, but also ascribing, before the whole pagan world, honor to the God of heaven."

Whether the promotion of the three men means that they were given a higher post than they occupied before or that they were exonerated and restored to their previous position is not clear. Some commentators believe that they were promoted to a post that put them in charge of Jewish affairs in the empire.

**III. Nebuchadnezzar's Vision of a Great Tree 4**  
 A. Nebuchadnezzar's Proclamation 4:1-3

***1 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly!***

***2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.***

***3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.***

In the Aramaic text, these three verses are part of the previous chapter. The Septuagint and the Vulgate, follow this division. The general consensus, however, is that they belong, logically, to the following narrative.

The text is obvious an official edict issued by King Nebuchadnezzar to the subjects in his empire. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "The form of this, as well as of the rest of the chapter, indicates that here is a Babylonian state paper, incorporated by Daniel into Holy Scripture. ... Nebuchadnezzar's salutation addressed this document - which no doubt circulated independently before it was placed in Scripture - to his entire realm. It is not too much to hope that some archaeologist may turn it up. Perhaps it already lies unrecognized among some of the thousands of recovered, but still unread, clay tablets." *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "That we have not found the proclamation itself is not extraordinary from the very fragmentary condition in which the annals of Nebuchadnezzar have come down to us."

The greeting "May you prosper greatly!" is the NIV's rendering of the Aramaic *shelam sega*, which literally means, "Peace be multiplied." It corresponds to the Hebrew *shalom*. Although there must have been an overbearing ambition to personal glory in the king's desire to rule, there was also an underlying desire for peace on earth to be established. His "brush with the divine," which is evinced again in this chapter, may have given him a vision of a peace that would supersede all he could ever establish on earth, a peace the angels communicated to the shepherds at the birth of Christ. Even the brutal Roman emperors proclaimed that their aim was to establish the "Pax Romana" in the world of their time.

The hyperbolic expression "who live in all the world" covers, of course, only the world known by the Babylonians at that time. Whether they suspected that there were peoples unknown to them is unknown to us.

"Signs and wonders" is the translation of the Aramaic words *ath* and *temahh*. They are only found in The Book of Daniel. The fact that the king called his personal experience "signs and wonders" indicates that he, correctly, understood them to be of universal significance for the human race as a whole. The topic of the following testimony is human pride and the miraculous change of heart produced by a supernatural intervention. The fact that Nebuchadnezzar's experience is called "a sign" means that a change of heart is an

option for every human being; that it is called “a wonder” shows that only God is able to change the human heart. God’s hatred of human pride is a theme that runs like a thread through all of Scripture.

The fact that Nebuchadnezzar, who was undoubtedly the most powerful man of his time, issued an edict, in which he confesses his pride and arrogance, is in fact a miracle. His recognition that the kingdom of God surpasses his own empire beyond comparison is an act of true humility. It indicates that he had not forgotten the lesson of his previous dream. It also demonstrates that King Nebuchadnezzar was in fact a great man.

B. Nebuchadnezzar’s Vision 4:4-18

*4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.*

*5 I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.*

*6 So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.*

*7 When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me.*

*8 Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)*

*9 I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.*

*10 These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.*

*11 The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth.*

*12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.*

*13 "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven.*

*14 He called in a loud voice: `Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches.*

*15 But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.*

*"`Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth.*

*16 Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.*

*17 "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'*

*18 "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."*

There is similarity between Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream and this one but there are also many differences, the greatest being that, this time, the king remembered what he had dreamed. There is also no suggestion of cruel punishment for those who were unable to explain to the king the meaning of the dream. In both dreams the king sees himself as a glorious person: a head of gold, and a beautiful fruit tree reaching into heaven. This time, however, the view of his own greatness and his subsequent downfall disturbed the king, even before he understood the meaning of what he had seen. King Nebuchadnezzar never suffered of an inferiority complex; the king’s self image is reflected in both dreams that are recorded for us. This does not necessarily mean that God considered him to be the noble and glorious person he saw himself. When later God shows to Daniel what the Babylonian empire looked like to Him, Daniel sees a great lion with the wings of an eagle.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See ch. 7:4

It is true though, that in God's plan of creation, man was meant to be "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither."<sup>64</sup> When the king sees himself as a giant fruit tree, he is not too far from what God would have wanted him to be.

It is interesting to compare the king's dream with Jesus' Parable about the Mustard Seed. We read in Matthew's Gospel: "He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.'"<sup>65</sup> Interpretations of this parable vary. In our opinion, the Lord Jesus wanted to demonstrate with this parable that there was something wrong in the Kingdom, not because of the tree, but because of the birds, which may symbolize sin in this story, in the same way as the yeast represents sin in the following parable about the woman who bakes bread.<sup>66</sup> In Nebuchadnezzar's dream it is the tree that is the bad element.

The dream disturbed King Nebuchadnezzar, probably not because of the initial image, but because of the part in which the tree was ordered to be cut down. About the king's uneasiness, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* wryly comments: "The king had a neurosis! Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. Appeal to his advisors was without avail. This school of pompous quacks should long since have been dismissed."

The NIV simply reads: "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous." The NKJV remains closer to the original Aramaic text, which sounds more like poetry: "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace." The Aramaic word *ra`anan*, which is rendered "flourishing," refers, quite fittingly, to the greenness of trees. Evidently, the great wars had all come to an end and the empire was at peace. The only danger remaining, which was the greatest, was the one from within. The peace of the empire was not built upon the righteousness of God because the heart of the emperor was not stayed upon this righteousness. Nebuchadnezzar may have established peace for his kingdom; he had never found peace for himself.

It is significant that, when Daniel is introduced in the narrative, the king refers to him with his Babylonian name Beltshazzar, with the explanation that he is named after the god Bel. And Nebuchadnezzar still addresses this deity as: "my god." Evidently, although he recognized the supremacy of God, the king still looked to his heathen deities for the management of every day life. Also the statement: "the spirit of the holy gods is in him" does not necessarily mean that the king believed Daniel to be filled with the Holy Spirit, as some interpret this.

The dream made King Nebuchadnezzar afraid. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* profoundly remarks: "What a mercy it is that God has hidden futurity from us! Were he to show every man the lot that is before him, the misery of the human race would be complete."

Trees are among God's masterpieces of creation. The sight of a stately well-developed tree is a source of admiration and joy to man. The giants of the forest that tower over us and provide us with the oxygen of life are meant to be our friends. As such King Nebuchadnezzar saw himself.

Nebuchadnezzar must have seen a parallel between the cutting down of the tree and the rock in his first dream that pulverized the statue; only this time the threat was more personal. From Daniel's interpretation of the first dream this must have spelled no good for his majesty.

The cutting down of a tree is symbolic for the end of life. The Bible uses the image for the fall of the house of David. Jeremiah had prophesied about David's dynasty: "Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants? Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the LORD says: 'Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.'"<sup>67</sup> Consequently, Isaiah speaks of the house of David as "the stump of Jesse,"<sup>68</sup> from which, miraculously a new shoot will grow. In fact, King Nebuchadnezzar had been

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<sup>64</sup> See Ps. 1:3

<sup>65</sup> Matt. 13:31,32

<sup>66</sup> See Matt. 13:33

<sup>67</sup> Jer. 22:28-30

<sup>68</sup> See Isa. 11:1

the axe that felled the tree of Jesse; now it was his turn to be felled. The abrupt change in vs. 16 from tree to man must have been for the king the most frightening part of the dream.

The Aramaic word, rendered "messenger" in the NIV, is *`iyr*, which literally means: "a watcher." The KJV renders it thus. This is the only place in the Bible where this word is found. Jerome thought that the Greek word *iris*, meaning: "rainbow," is derived from this word. In this context, the word, obviously, refers to an angel. In the apocryphical Book of Enoch, *`iyr* is used for an archangel. There is a suggestion of the type of ministry of angels in this term, as God's creatures who are in charge of watching over mankind to help them in times of trouble. David states in one of his psalms: "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."<sup>69</sup> The four living creatures John saw before the throne of God as describes as being "covered with eyes, in front and in back."<sup>70</sup>

Scholars differ about meaning of the "seven times" mentioned; some believe it to mean "seven years," others "seven months." The fact that vs. 33 states that "his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird" causes some to believe that it must mean a prolonged time. The king can hardly have missed the point of the dream, since he repeated to Daniel, and even in his edict, the words of the angel: "so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men." The fact that God considered him to be "the lowliest of men," or at least that he might be replaced by someone he would consider his inferior many times over, must have been a hard pill to swallow for his majesty.

C. Daniel's Interpretation of the Vision 4:19-27

**19** *Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!*

**20** *The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth,*

**21** *with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air-*

**22** *you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.*

**23** *"You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'*

**24** *"This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king:*

**25** *You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.*

**26** *The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.*

**27** *Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."*

Daniel must have understood immediately what the dream meant and he was unable to hide his emotions in the presence of the king. It must have been rather hazardous to lose one's cool during an audience with an absolute monarch like King Nebuchadnezzar. All the king's men were supposed to be composed and serene in the presence of such a person. Several years later, Nehemiah would have a similar

<sup>69</sup> Ps. 34:7

<sup>70</sup> See Rev. 4:6

experience when he appeared before King Artaxerxes with a sad face. That could have cost him his life. The “instant prayer” he sent up to heaven saved his life.<sup>71</sup>

The NIV reads: “Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time.” The KJV states that Daniel “was astonished *for one hour*.” The Aramaic word *sha`ah* literally means: “a look” in the sense of the time it takes to blink one’s eye, “a moment.” It is an expression similar to our saying: “Wait a minute!” The Septuagint embellishes the narrative by stating that Daniel began to tremble.

Nebuchadnezzar reassured Daniel by saying: “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.” We detect a note of tenderness and, maybe, even affection between the king and his courtier. The obvious meaning of the dream was emotionally disturbing to Daniel and Daniel’s emotional reaction in turn affected the king. A truly amazing moment in the setting of the Babylon’s court! Daniel’s answer: “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!” must not be understood to imply that Daniel wished evil upon other people. He must have known that the king did not have many real friends in whom he could confide. The only reason that Daniel could show compassion to such a man and speak to him freely without fear of his life was that he loved and feared God. Those who do can afford to love people and not be afraid. Daniel’s polite answer was also a very astute way to prepare the king for the bad news that was coming.

The fact Nebuchadnezzar was identified with the tree must not have come as a surprise to the king; it was the reason for his alarm. Daniel predicted that the king would become mentally ill to the point that he would no longer be able to function as head of state. This is symbolized in the cutting down of the tree. Throughout the ages people have tried to analyze what actually happened to Nebuchadnezzar. The interpretations reach from the absurd to the scientific. In earlier centuries, serious Bible students believed that a metamorphosis occurred, physically changing Nebuchadnezzar into a wolf-man or some other kind of mythological creature. Others thought that there was a coup d’état in which the king was temporarily exiled. The more modern view is that the king became a hypochondriac maniac, imagining himself to be an animal and behaving accordingly. The latter interpretation is by far the most sensible one and it does not violate the text. The way by which Nebuchadnezzar arrived at the point where he imagined himself to be an animal was by beginning to believe he was God. Now it is true that God created man to become a partaker in His divine nature. The ultimate goal of our salvation is that we will share in His glory. But those who refuse to follow the road of confession and submission end up in the animal kingdom.

There were two points of hope in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that Daniel was quick to grasp. The second one, to begin with, was the fact that the stump of the tree was to be preserved; the king would be given a second chance by acknowledging that the power he possessed was delegated to him by heaven. The first was the fact that the king was given a dream at all. God’s warnings of judgment to come always are an act of grace. The verdict is never unavoidable, there is always a way out through confession and repentance. Jonah’s preaching in Nineveh is a case in point.

Daniel’s advice to King Nebuchadnezzar to renounce his sin and wickedness was a heroic act. Those words could easily have cost him his life. He saw in this most powerful man of his time a lost human soul, which filled him with compassion. Daniel may have known Solomon’s proverb: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, his advice is unheeded. It has been reported that during the Watergate scandal that brought down President Nixon, one of the president’s advisors suggested that Nixon go public with a confession of his wrongdoings and ask the nation for forgiveness. Nixon brushed this aside without any further comment to his own detriment. Nebuchadnezzar could have saved himself by listening to the man who showed him the fate that awaited him. He was given knowledge of the will of God and chose not to obey it.

D. Nebuchadnezzar’s Humiliation 4:28-33

**28 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.**

**29 Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,**

**30 he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"**

<sup>71</sup> See Neh. 2:1-4

<sup>72</sup> Prov. 14:34

**31 The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.**

**32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."**

**33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.**

God, in His grace, gave King Nebuchadnezzar a whole year to repent. Beginning with vs. 28, the narrative changes from the first to the third person singular, the reason obviously being that the king became insane and was unable to recall the details.

The text states that Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his palace, which gave him a panoramic view of the city. Roofs of palaces are dangerous places for kings to walk on. David faced his greatest temptation, which led to his sin with Bathsheba while walking on the roof of his palace.<sup>73</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon must have a beautiful city. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* quotes Josephus who records: "Now in this palace, having built up lofty substructures of stone, and planted them with all kinds of trees, giving an appearance very closely resembling mountains, he wrought out and prepared the famous Hanging Gardens, to gratify his wife, who was fond of a mountainous country, having been brought up in Media." The king's sin did not consist in his efforts to beautify the city but in taking credit for his own greatness. Paupers never blame themselves for their poverty, but the rich tend to believe that they owe their wealth to their own ingenuity. No one creates his own talents! *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* describes the king's attitude as "strutting, and vaunting himself, and adoring his own shadow." Nebuchadnezzar's fatal statement was: "the glory of my majesty." Obviously, he had no idea what glory actually was. The seraphs Isaiah saw surrounding the throne of God equated glory with God's holiness. We read that "they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'" <sup>74</sup> Without holiness there is no glory. The apostle Paul defines "sin" as "falling short of the glory of God."<sup>75</sup> Holiness was a foreign element in Nebuchadnezzar's life. Claiming glory for himself constituted the ultimate act of defiance of God. God says through the prophet Isaiah: "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."<sup>76</sup> Nebuchadnezzar had used his year of grace to work himself up to this point of rebellion against the God who had spoken to him twice and who had shown His power in delivering three of His servants from the king's furnace. Punishment was instantaneous. The king's pronouncement was an act of lunacy and lunacy took over his mind. God simply took away from King Nebuchadnezzar what was not his to begin with: his kingdom and his humanity.

We are not given any details about what happened, except for the coming of a voice from heaven, announcing the verdict that Daniel had foretold. The king was probably allowed a few moments of sanity, enough to recall his dream and Daniel's explanation. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests that: "the king's last conscious, clear-minded experience turned his attention upward to God in heaven. In the next section it is indicated that seven years later, when he returned to sanity, his first action was to respond by looking upward." We are not told whether others heard the voice from heaven or not. We assume that the courtiers who were present observed a change in the king's behavior, alarming enough to warn the cabinet ministers who took measures to protect the state against the king and the king against himself. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* diagnoses the king's malady as "insania zoanthropica." The king's being "driven away" does not necessarily imply that the people serving him at his court cast him out; he fell, most likely, victim of his own inner urge to be with animals instead of humans. The description of his outward appearance as "drenched with the dew of heaven," "his hair ... like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird" suggests that his behavior became so ferocious that nobody could approach him to clean and groom him or attend to his physical needs without personal danger. It was decided that the best thing was

<sup>73</sup> See II Sam. 11:2-4

<sup>74</sup> Isa. 6:3

<sup>75</sup> See Rom. 3:23

<sup>76</sup> Isa. 42:8

to let him be. If in this condition, the king must have been under some divine protection. Nebuchadnezzar must have had numerous enemies who could easily have finished him off at this point. The iron and bronze ring that bound the stump of the tree, at the same time prevented the king's adversaries to plot his death.

At the end of the "seven times," (whether seven years, or months, we do not know), the king's sanity was restored to him. We are not told what happened in the interim period. Someone must have held the reigns of the empire, but we don't know who it was. The Septuagint has an interesting addition to the text of vs. 31, which makes mention of a regent. It reads: "While the word was yet in the mouth of the king — at the end of his speech — he heard a voice out of heaven, To thee it is said, O King Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom of Babylon has been taken from thee, and is being given to another — a man set at naught in thy house: behold, I set him in thy kingdom, and thy power and thy glory and thy delicacy he takes possession of; that thou mayest know that the God of heaven hath dominion over the kingdoms of men, and to whomsoever he willeth he shall give it. To the rising of the sun another king shall rejoice in thy house and shall possess thy glory and thy might and thy dominion."

If this man mismanaged the affairs of the state in Nebuchadnezzar's absence, it would have created a favorite climate for the king's return. No details are given as to why and how the king was received. Nebuchadnezzar must have had a magnetic and commanding personality, which made the center of gravity shift to whatever place he appeared. It has been recorded that Napoleon, upon his escape from Elba, immediately gained the allegiance of the army when he presented himself before his soldiers. King Nebuchadnezzar must have been a natural potentate, whose authority could not be questioned by those who saw him.

E. Nebuchadnezzar's Restoration 4:34-37

***34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.***

***35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"***

***36 At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.***

***37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.***

In accordance with the prophecy regarding the dream, Nebuchadnezzar's lunacy ended as suddenly as it had begun. It brought him back to where he had left off, directing his gaze to heaven from where he had heard the voice when he was still in possession of his faculties. Scholars have tried to analyze without avail what actually happened to the king. In similar cases it has been observed that the person who comes to himself returns to the moment immediately preceding the loss of sanity, picking up where he or she left off. His depraved condition must have come as an absolute shock to the king. His last human words had been "the glory of my majesty" and here, looking at his hair and his nails, he saw himself as the beast he had been and still was. He immediately realized the cause of his madness and confessed his sin by giving God the praise due to Him.

Interestingly, our text does not state that first the king's sanity was restored and, subsequently, he raised his eyes toward heaven. The order is reversed from what we would expect. It was in looking up to heaven that he became sane again. This is another illustration of the intricacies of God's grace in the human soul. The Scriptures declare us to be "dead in transgressions"<sup>77</sup> and yet, we are able to call upon God for mercy. Nebuchadnezzar's healing was the immediate result of his looking up to heaven.

Vs. 34 does not contain words of repentance and confession, but that is obviously implied in the praise the king gives to God. The Septuagint has an addition, which *The Pulpit Commentary* considers to be a paraphrase: "And after seven years I gave my soul to prayer, and besought concerning my sins at the presence of the Lord, the God of heaven, and prayed concerning mine ignorances to the great God of gods."

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<sup>77</sup> See Eph. 2:5

King Nebuchadnezzar's praise of God contains some sound theology. He returned the praise, honor, and glory he had demanded for himself to God. He recognized God for who He is, the Most High, the eternal one. There appears to be in the deepest part of every human heart, the knowledge of a Supreme Being. Being created in His image and likeness, we all respond to Him as soon as we are confronted with His presence. Even centuries of idolatry or atheism cannot erase all traces of recognition from the human mind. Nebuchadnezzar had encountered the Most High in the person of Daniel and his three friends, now he had met him personally in his episode of insanity. We find these traces of knowledge of a Supreme Being in the most primitive cultures on earth.

King Nebuchadnezzar correctly equated insanity with sin and sin with the absence of glory. He also understood that the source of his own power was the eternal power of the Almighty. The king's words echo Isaiah's prophecy, who had stated about two centuries before: "Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales."<sup>78</sup> He understood that that which he had considered most important in his life, absolute dominion over the known world, was merely a shadow of God's omnipotence. The theme of King Nebuchadnezzar's statement of repentance appears again in Mary's Magnificat.<sup>79</sup>

In conceding his lack of worth and low condition, God clothed him with more glory than he possessed before. Humility is man's most glorious feature. In the words of Abraham Kuyper: "The garb of contrition does not deface man."

#### **IV. Belshazzar and the Handwriting on the Wall 5**

##### **A. Belshazzar Defiles the Temple Vessels 5:1-4**

- 1 King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.**
- 2 While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.**
- 3 So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them.**
- 4 As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.**

There is in the annals of history some confusion about the person of King Belshazzar, mainly on account of the fact that Berosus, as quoted in the writing of Josephus, calls the last king of Babylon Nabonedus. Archeological finds in Babylon confirm that Nabonedus, Nabonidus, or Nabunaid, as he is also called, was away on a military campaign during the events described in this chapter, and left his eldest son as coregent in the capital of the empire. *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "The name Belshazzar has been the occasion of much controversy. It was regarded as one of the proofs of the non-historicity of Daniel that this name occurred at all ... We were told that the last King of Babylon was Nabunahid, not Belshazzar. The name, however, has turned up in the Mugheir inscription as the son of Nabunahid, and not only so, but in a connection that implies he was associated in the government."

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains the desperate state of affairs of the nation of Babylon at the moment of Belshazzar's revelry. We read: "Gobryas ... general of Cyrus, was at the gates of Babylon at the very moment of the opening of the king's feast. He had diverted the waters of the Euphrates and was marching his men up the bed of the river into the city, which lay on both its banks. The river gates had been left unguarded. Babylon, stocked with supplies for twenty years, was supposedly secure behind massive walls. Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father, had been worsted in battle by Cyrus' armies, and he was now besieged at Borsippa, not far away. It was no time for alcoholic foolishness!"

The hopeless condition of the capital city of Babylon was equaled by the state of Berlin when the Russian army surrounded it at the end of World War II. Belshazzar's orgy was, evidently, an effort to flee reality.

History does not treat Belshazzar kindly. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: "The pagan Xenophon's description of Belshazzar accords with Daniel's: he calls him 'impious,' and illustrates his cruelty by mentioning that he killed one of his nobles, merely because in hunting the noble

<sup>78</sup> Isa. 40:15

<sup>79</sup> See Luke 1:51,52

struck down the game before him; and unmanned a courtier, Gadates, at a banquet, because one of the king's concubines praised him as handsome."

As Nebuchadnezzar embodies the magnificence of Babylon, so Belshazzar represents its corruption. The two kings stand for the highest and lowest points of the empire. Nebuchadnezzar had pursued glory; he had beautified the capital, but the glory he chased was a glory apart from God. Belshazzar came to the conclusion that the ideal of his grandfather was unattainable. Nebuchadnezzar had believed in what he did; Belshazzar did not believe in anything. He was a nihilist. Nebuchadnezzar had separated the glory of God from the character of God. Belshazzar's error was that, not only he rejected the false model of his grandfather, he also rejected the reality of the standards of God's character. He had no ideals, not even false ones. A man without glory is no man at all; therefore King Belshazzar behaved like an animal.

The Septuagint text states that Belshazzar's feast was a celebration for the dedication of his palace, a feat that makes the party even more unreal in view of the siege of the city by the Persian army. The inhabitants of the city may have thought their fortress to be impregnable. Belshazzar may have known the actual condition of the defenses and tried to escape from reason by drowning his misery in an orgy of alcohol, sex, and sacrilege. This palace dedication must have taken a religious character in that the god Bel was honored. The name Belshazzar means: "Bel, protect the king." The king, therefore, had particular reason to pay his dues to this deity. This fact makes the king's order to bring in the gold and silver goblets that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem into an act of serious defiance and sacrilege to the Name of YHWH.

We do not know how informed Belshazzar was regarding Nebuchadnezzar's edict in the previous chapter. When later, in the present chapter the king's mother enters, she reproaches him his lack of knowledge of history. It is obvious, though, that the king knew about the sacred vessels of the temple in Jerusalem, and his specific order that they be used for the feast cannot be written off as an oversight or mistake. It was done deliberately to desecrate what belonged to the God of the Israelites. Belshazzar wanted to prove that YHWH had been conquered by Bel. The wine may have influenced the king's decision, as *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "when WINE got fully in, WIT went wholly out."

#### B. Belshazzar Sees the Handwriting 5:5-9

***5 Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote.***

***6 His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.***

***7 The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."***

***8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.***

***9 So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.***

The expression "the handwriting on the wall" has made its way into the English language as a proverbial warning of impending doom. This kind of announcement of judgment is unparalleled in the Bible. In all other instances where God warns men of an impending disaster, the message is conveyed by the word of a prophet or a dream. It is also unusual in that, in general, God's prediction of punishment is always an act of grace; it leaves the door open for repentance and escape. King Belshazzar did not have that option. He had passed the point of no return and was heading straight to his doom.

There is no need for us to go into a description of the ambiance of a party of drunken people. We may assume that, as the king lifted up the cup filled with wine, which had been part of the temple ritual, he made irreverent references to the Almighty whose temple had been destroyed in Jerusalem.

The appearance of God's finger writing on the palace wall must have produced the immediate soberness of the revelers. The appearance of the writing finger caused a complete and stunned silence. Some may have thought initially that their senses deceived them and that the wine had caused some delirious state of mind in which one sees things that do not exist. Like Scrooge, in Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, who blamed his vision of Marley's ghost on indigestion, some may have blamed the condition of their bodies for what their eyes were seeing. But there is something in the presence of the Lord that jolts people into a reality that is undeniable. As such the people must have experienced this moment.

The only other time the Bible mentions writing by the finger of God is in connection with the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. We read in Exodus: "When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God."<sup>80</sup>

We cannot reconstruct the conditions in the hall where the party occurred. The light of the lampstand also cast its shadows on the wall. It could be that the finger caught the light and the hand and arm to which it was attached remained in the dark. The effect was dramatic enough to produce terror among the participants. Some scholars suppose that the lampstand above which the writing appeared was the menorah that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem.

It appears that the walls of Babylonian palaces were adorned with all kinds of paintings and writings, celebrating the exploits of the kings. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "It is significant that, on the same wall on which the king was accustomed to read the flattering legends of his own magnificence, he beholds the mysterious inscription which tells his fall."

When Belshazzar sees the handwriting on the wall his nihilistic philosophy collapses. The Indian evangelist, Ravi Zacharias, once stated that if Christianity is wrong, if it turns out that God does not exist, the Christian does not lose anything in the end. But if God exists, the atheist will have lost everything. When Belshazzar sees God's revelation of Himself appear on the wall of his palace, his eyes signal to his brain: "It is true after all!" In a way, Belshazzar's violent physical reaction, his turning pale, his knees knocking together, and his legs giving away, pleads in his favor. Isaac had a similar reaction when he discovered that in blessing the wrong son, he had actually blessed the one God wanted to be blessed. We read: "Isaac trembled violently and said, 'Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him--and indeed he will be blessed!'"<sup>81</sup>

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* introduces a little ditty here, which is worth copying:

`The monarch saw and shook,  
And bade no more rejoice;  
All bloodless wax'd his look,  
And tremulous his voice.'

*The Commentary* adds: "How instantaneously God can make the stoutest sinner to tremble! Nothing more is needed, in order to trouble, agitate, and unnerve him, than that his own thoughts and fears should be let loose upon him. No anguish can exceed that of a self-accusing conscience suddenly awakened, in the midst of carnal mirth, to a realizing sense of the terrors of the Lord."

The inability of the Babylonian astrologers to interpret the writing meant the collapse of the whole religious system of the empire. Nebuchadnezzar had acknowledged that God was superior to the gods of Babylon, but he had not abandoned his native religion. Belshazzar faces the truth that God is the only one and he is looking right at Him.

Scholars have speculated much about the inability of the astrologers to read the writing. Since no details are given in the text, speculation is all that the various theories amount to. We may assume that, if the writing were in letters and words that were familiar, the king would have been able to read them himself. It may be that the king's emotional condition at this point prevented him from reading anything at all. This would explain why he grew more terrified and changed color again when he heard that even his wise men could not read the writing. It is also possible that reading and explaining are words that are simply bundled together as meaning: "tell me what it says."

Also the king's promise to elevate whoever could read and explain the words to the rank of third ruler in the kingdom has led to much conjecture. The explanation that Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, was still alive and that Belshazzar himself was regent in his place seems to be the easiest.

#### C. Daniel Interprets the Handwriting 5:10-29

***10 The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "O king, live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!"***

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<sup>80</sup> Ex. 31:18

<sup>81</sup> Gen. 27:33

11 *There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father-your father the king, I say-appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners.*

12 *This man Daniel, whom the king called Belshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."*

13 *So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?*

14 *I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom.*

15 *The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it.*

16 *Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."*

17 *Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.*

18 *"O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor.*

19 *Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled.*

20 *But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.*

21 *He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.*

22 *"But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.*

23 *Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.*

24 *Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.*

25 *"This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN*

26 *"This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.*

27 *Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.*

28 *Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

29 *Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.*

We suppose that the feast that had been going on had been noisy. But when the handwriting appears, the tumult and screams become so loud that they attract the attention of the queen who decides to enter the hall and find out what is going on. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* believes that this queen was the widow of Nebuchadnezzar, which would make her "Amiyt, daughter of Astyages, sister of Darius the Mede, and aunt of Cyrus." She cannot have been one of the wives of Belshazzar since vs. 3 mentions that his wives and concubines were already present at the feast.

The queen's greeting "O king, live forever!" stands out as a supreme sample of irony in the context of this story. The words constituted merely a polite form of court etiquette, but in view of the fact that King Belshazzar only had a few more hours of life left to him, they strike us as a sample of the sharpest divine sarcasm. The greeting contrasts rather sharply with the disrespectful attitude the queen seems to take toward the present ruler of the empire. Her admonition to stop trembling and not to turn pale must have added to the

embarrassment of the monarch. The queen's suggestion to call in Daniel also sounds rather as a reproach to the king's present state of affairs than as a piece of friendly counsel. Daniel is equated with the glory of the empire under Nebuchadnezzar, a glory that had obviously faded into oblivion under the present monarch.

The fact that Daniel was not called in at first has also led to endless hypotheses. His exclusion may have been intentional, since Daniel was part of the religious system of which the temple treasures from Jerusalem were the symbols. It was this system the king had tried to ridicule when he used the vessels for his drunken carousing. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that since the revolution that brought down Evil-Merodach, the mood of Belshazzar's court had become "anticlerical" because Nabonidus was a usurper, and that, consequently, Daniel, with some of the others, had been removed from the center of power. *Barnes' Notes* mentions a hypothesis by Sir John Chardin, who believed that Daniel had fallen from grace at the death of Nebuchadnezzar. This Chardin basis on the fact that when a Persian king dies, both his astrologers and physicians are driven from court--the former for not having predicted, and the latter for not having prevented, his death. It may, therefore, very well be that Belshazzar was ignorant about Daniel.

The Septuagint has a more condensed version of the text which reads: "Then the queen reminded him concerning Daniel, who was of the captivity of Judaea, and aid to the king, The man was understanding, wise, and excelling all the wise men of Babylon, and there is a holy spirit in him, and in the days of the king thy father, he showed difficult interpretations to Nebuchadnezzar thy father." The fact that the queen calls Nebuchadnezzar "your father" does not mean that Belshazzar was literally his son or even his grandson. The term is used rather loosely in Scripture as well as in Oriental cultures.

Although the king, supposedly, did not know Daniel, he was obviously familiar with the episode of insanity in Nebuchadnezzar's life. The edict that tells the story must have been in the archives of the empire. Belshazzar could not plead ignorance of the facts, nor of the role the God of the Israelites, the King of Heaven, whose vessels he had desecrated, played in Nebuchadnezzar's restoration.

When Daniel is brought before the king, the king questions him in a rather rhetorical manner that suggests that more information was given to him than the words our text put in the mouth of the queen. She had not mentioned the fact that Daniel was a Jew and that he was one of the exiles. If Belshazzar was familiar with Nebuchadnezzar's edict, he knew Daniel at least by name. He may have supposed that this legendary chief astrologer was no longer alive. In that case his words express his awe and amazement to meet this famous historical person. If, as was supposed, Nabonidus was a usurper, this introduction to Daniel also meant for Belshazzar the crossing of a bridge into a past that would better be forgotten.

Daniel's answer to the king seems rather out of place in the setting of an audience with royalty. A similar frankness in the court of Nebuchadnezzar would probably have cost him his life. The note of compassion and intimacy we noted in the relationship between him and Nebuchadnezzar is totally lacking here. When he entered the banquet hall and realized the kind of carousing that had been going on and seeing the holy objects from the temple in Jerusalem, Daniel must have been deeply shocked. Even a polished and polite person like Daniel found it difficult to show courtesy to someone who had so blatantly insulted the God he worshipped. To accept gifts and honors from this king would have meant condoning the sacrilege. Daniel may also have had a better eye for the danger of the hour. He knew the city of Babylon was under siege and could fall to the Persians at any moment. He had no guarantee that his own life would be spared by the enemy. People who face death can allow themselves to be brutally honest. At the end, Daniel was clothed in purple and a gold chain was put around his neck at the king's command, but he may not have had any choice in the matter.

The clothing of Daniel by this king, when placed next to the stripping and mocking of the King of Glory by the Roman soldiers, provides a picture of the value of the honor Satan bestows upon human beings. We read in Matthew's Gospel: "Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him."<sup>82</sup> Like Moses in Egypt, "He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of [Babylon], because he was looking ahead to his reward."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Matt. 27:27-31

<sup>83</sup> See Heb. 11:26

In Daniel's blistering accusation of king Belshazzar and his blasphemy we hear the voice of God Himself pronouncing the verdict over this man's life. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes, "Such an insulting speech as Daniel addressed to Belshazzar would certainly be visited with punishment. The king had no guarantee that the promised interpretation of the writing on the wall would be true, especially when the interpreter had such an animus against him. Then the fact in the twenty-ninth verse, that Daniel received the gifts he had rejected, makes his conduct here all the more extraordinary." Daniel's bravery is equaled by Stephen, who in his defense before the Sanhedrin forfeited his life when he defied his accusers by saying: "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."<sup>84</sup>

Several theories have been proposed to explain why the Babylonian astrologers were unable to read the words MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. Some suggest that the words were written in old Hebrew script that was unfamiliar to the Babylonians but known to Daniel. Others believe that the characters of the alphabet were reversed, one letter being substituted for another. Still another theory suggests that the Babylonians had been stricken by sudden blindness, like the men of Sodom.<sup>85</sup> Since there is nothing in the text that explains the problem, we have to leave it. One obvious difficulty is the fact that to the common reader the words would make no sense. The English equivalent of the words, according to *The Pulpit Commentary*, would be: "a pound, a pound, an ounce, and quarters." The literal meaning of *mene* is "counted," *tekel* means: "weighed," and *parsin*: "divided." There is also a pun involved in that the words. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: "The three words, Mene, Tekel, and Peres, as they stand, are passive participles, rightly rendered counted, weighed and divided. They are also, when left without vowels, viz., MN, TKL, PRS, the names of three ancient weights that might be paralleled with our terms, a pound, an ounce, half a pound." The same *Commentary* continues: "It is possible that the words interpreted are names of weights or coins as indicated above. If so, then they are a play on words. Maneh (Aram.), a weight of fifty shekels, equivalent to about two pounds (see Ezek 45:12), parallels mene, which means divided. Tekel, a coin or weight, equivalent to the Hebrew shekel, suggests tekel in the sense of weight. Peres (a half maneh) suggests Peres, divided. It also ominously suggested Persia, which appears in verse 28." God's evaluation of King Belshazzar and his kingdom is full of irony. If the Babylonians could have borrowed an expression from the modern American mind, they would have said that their king was worth so many millions. But God writes down on the king's wall how much He thinks Belshazzar is worth. This mode we use of expressing the value of a human soul, however, contrasts sharply with God's actual evaluation. In Jesus' words: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"<sup>86</sup> In God's eye, one human being is worth more than the whole world. If only Belshazzar had acknowledged the One who valued him!

God had written a riddle on the wall of Belshazzar's palace and Daniel solved the puzzle for the king. He must have been familiar with Jeremiah's prophecy about Babylon, which made the explanation of the riddle relatively simple to him. Jeremiah had foretold that attackers from the north would invade Babylon.<sup>87</sup> He had stated that the city would be well stocked with provisions and protected by walls, fortifications, and gates.<sup>88</sup> The city would be taken by trickery<sup>89</sup> and the capture would involve the drying up of certain channels of water.<sup>90</sup> Finally, the city would be taken while a feast was going on in which the

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<sup>84</sup> Acts 7:51-53

<sup>85</sup> See Gen. 19:11

<sup>86</sup> Matt. 16:26

<sup>87</sup> Jer. 50:3,9,41

<sup>88</sup> Jer 51:53,58

<sup>89</sup> Jer. 50:24

<sup>90</sup> Jer. 51:36

leading people of the nation would participate.<sup>91</sup> This knowledge made the interpretation of riddle rather simple for Daniel. Those who know the Word of God know the times and know what has to be done. Daniel was like the men of Issachar, of whom it is said that they “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”<sup>92</sup>

At Belshazzar’s command Daniel is clothed in purple and a gold chain is put around his neck, and for one hour or less he is made the third ruler of the empire. The king’s act is amazing in that he rewards Daniel after the searing condemnation he pronounced on him and his kingdom. His alcohol consumption may have influenced him in this. We may borrow a line from Schiller’s *Ode to Joy*, as expressed in Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*: “All mankind shall be as brothers beneath thy tender wing.” That is the way drunkards often feel about their fellowmen. It may be that the king would have ordered the killing of Daniel if he had been sober. Another remarkable feature in this rewarding is that Belshazzar obviously did not understand the seriousness of his own condition. He must not have believed that his kingdom was finished and that he himself had only one hour or less to live.

According to Herodotus, Darius took the capital by backing up the water of the Euphrates, which streamed through the city. Two thirds of the army then entered the city as the water became shallow. The feast was still going on when a large part of the city was already occupied. It was actually Cyrus who captured Babylon in the name of Darius, his uncle.

D. Belshazzar Is Killed 5:30-31

***30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain,  
31 and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.***

Some scholars doubt that the events occurred as rapidly as this chapter describes. They believe that the feast mentioned here took place some time prior to the capture of the city. This assumption is based on a different reading of the text in the Septuagint. Others, however, hold the view that all happened in one night, that the punishment for Belshazzar’s blasphemy was instantaneous. It was the night when the measure of Babylon’s sin was filled to the brim and God emptied it.

## V. Darius’ Foolish Decree 6

A. Daniel Is Promoted 6:1-3

***1 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom,  
2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss.  
3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.***

This chapter paints a moving picture of Daniel’s behavior during the ultimate test of his faith. This faith was demonstrated in the first chapter of this book in his choice to obey the law of Moses regarding dietary restrictions. Nebuchadnezzar’s order that the candidates be fed from the king’s table had been negotiable; Darius’ edict that prohibited prayer to YHWH was not. The portrayal of court intrigue and jealousy among the high officials of the state shows that human nature has not changed over the centuries. It is also clear that more was involved than human envy alone. Daniel’s shining testimony of his faith in God had obviously attracted the attention of God’s archenemy Satan, who decided to destroy this man. The plot that was to annihilate Daniel would also defeat King Darius. Anyone who claims for himself the honor that belongs to God alone puts himself in danger of losing his chance of eternal salvation. The comfort of this chapter is the demonstration of the power of God to protect His loved ones from the mouth of the lion. God has His own way of feeding Satan’s lions. This is the story of a death and resurrection. Daniel should have

<sup>91</sup> Jer. 51:39,57

<sup>92</sup> I Chron. 12:32

died in the lions' den but he conquered death. In a way this tells the story of King Darius' death and Daniel's resurrection.

Much has been written about the name Darius. The fact that his name does not appear in the annals of secular history has led the proponents of "Higher Criticism" to proclaim that Darius never existed and that the story is therefore spurious. For reasons unknown Herodotus makes no mention of Darius as king of Babylon. Some scholars identify him with Astyages, whom Herodotus mentions, others with "Gubaru, or Ugbaru, the governor of Gutium, who is said in the Nabunaid-Cyrus Chronicle to have been appointed by Cyrus as his governor of Babylon after its capture from the Chaldaeans."<sup>93</sup> Some believe that "Darius" is a royal title and not the name of a person, like "Pharaoh" for the kings of Egypt.

Darius reorganized the empire upon his ascension to the throne by dividing it up in 120 provinces with a governor at the head of each province. These 120 were in turn accountable to 3 administrators who were answerable to the king. The purpose of this is expressed well in the words: "that the king might not suffer loss." Evidently, Darius ruled primarily for his own benefit and not for the good of the people. The text of the Septuagint differs considerably from the Massoretic text on which our Bible translations are based. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, it reads: "And he set up a hundred and twenty and seven satraps over all his kingdom. And over them he set three men as presidents, and Daniel was one of the three men [and had authority over all men in the kingdom. And Daniel was clothed in purple, and was great and honorable before Darius the king, because he was honorable and understanding and prudent, and there was a holy spirit in him, and he prospered in the affairs of the kingdom which he did]. Then the king thought to place Daniel over all his kingdom [(and the two men who stood with him and the hundred and twenty-seven satraps) when the king thought to place Daniel over his whole kingdom]."

We are not told how and why Daniel rose to the top and how long it took for this to happen. Daniel's ascension was, obviously, the Lord's doing. Darius may have prioritized himself; God had other priorities for the Persian Empire and the world for which Daniel was the chosen tool. That Daniel executed God's plan by going through death is not uncommon for the way God acts in this world.

God could use Daniel because he was totally dedicated to Him and to the Kingdom of Heaven. His fellowship with God gave him a testimony of integrity that set him apart from everyone else in government circles and ultimately endangered his life.

#### B. Darius Signs the Foolish Decree 6:4-9

**4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.**

**5 Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."**

**6 So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: "O King Darius, live forever!"**

**7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den.**

**8 Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered-in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."**

**9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.**

King Darius planned to promote Daniel and give him a position that would make him superior to the all other administrators and satraps. The reason for this was Daniel's exceptional qualities and accomplishments. Fellowship with God brings out the best in a person; it enhances character and increases intelligence. Modern philosophy of business has discovered that spirituality stimulates performance. Daniel's fellowship with God put him under obligation to promote His glory in everything God asked him to do. Daniel followed the advice of the apostle Paul: "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all

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<sup>93</sup> See *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*

for the glory of God.”<sup>94</sup> And “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”<sup>95</sup> Daniel’s perfect track record can only be attributed to his committing all his ways to the Lord. Solomon stated in the Book of Proverbs: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”<sup>96</sup>

As a Jew, Daniel cannot have loved life at the Babylonian or Persian court. His heart was in Jerusalem. But he understood that his being led into captivity had been an act of God. Instead of pouting over the injustice done to him and blaming God for his fate, he accepted God’s will for his life and decided to glorify God in his circumstances. This made the light of God shine through him in the darkness of these pagan palaces. It was this light that had attracted the attention of the king and the hatred of his colleagues.

Whether Daniel’s promotion had already taken effect at the beginning of this chapter or whether the king had only stated his plan, we do not know. As in the case of an appointment of any cabinet minister, Daniel’s life became the object of intense scrutiny. His peers decided to go over Daniel’s life and work with a fine toothcomb with the intent to find discrepancies that would disqualify him for his new office. They came up with a perfect record in performance and business ethics. So they turned to his private life and decided to use his religion against him. What a testimony!

At this time, Daniel must have been almost 90 years of age. He had been among the first to be taken into a captivity that was to last 70 years. According to the statement in ch. 9 of this book, the end was in sight. Daniel’s reputation, combined with his age, must have made him a very difficult target for the opposition.

The course of action decided upon by Daniel’s adversaries seems rather ridiculous to us. Obviously, there are details about the political and religious climate in the Persian Empire that are withheld from us. The proposition brought by the satraps must have been presented in the guise of a measure to find a solution for the religious tensions that were plaguing the nation at that time. *The Pulpit Commentary* gives us a possible reason for Darius’ reason to accept this proposal. We read: “To understand the point of this decree, that seems to us so absurd, and comprehend how any one with sufficient mental vigor left to be placed by Cyrus as governor in Babylon could be led to yield to confirm it, we must recognize the state of matters in Babylon. During the reign of Nabunahid there had been many religious changes. The seclusion of the monarch had led to the neglect of many of the regular rites of the gods of Babel. The policy he pursued of bringing the gods of various provinces to Babylon tended, as did the similar policy in Rome, to draw off from the importance of the national religion by forming rival cults. One of the first acts of Cyrus’s reign was to order the replacing of these deities in their ancient shrines. This would necessarily be most distasteful to the worshippers of these imported deities. There would be much murmuring among the huge heterogeneous population; and there would be thus a well-grounded fear of a religious riot. A bold soldier as Gobryas (Darius) was, he probably was but a timid ruler, and nothing would he dread more than a religious riot. Would it not be a plausible way of meeting this difficulty to order for one month all worship to cease?”

It was not until the proposition had been signed into law, that Darius understood that the purpose of it was not to ease the religious climate of the empire but to remove Daniel from office.

It is difficult to comprehend how all this could have happened without Daniel’s knowledge and presence. It is obvious that when the administrators and satraps went to the king with their motion, they did so behind Daniel’s back. They may have chosen a moment in which Daniel was absent from the court. It seems unlikely that all the 120 satraps appeared in this audience. Possibly the two governors pretended to represent everyone, including Daniel and the satraps. If the whole government apparatus came to the king, and they were all involved in the plot against Daniel, King Darius would have fed all 122 of them, plus their wives and children, to the lions, thus completely depleting his government. The delegation must have claimed to represent a wide array of government offices. Vs.7 mentions royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors. This gives the impression of a universal agreement among all who were involved in the government of the empire. The way the proposal was presented suggested to the king that there existed a state of emergency in which quick acting by the king was required in order to prevent a

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<sup>94</sup> I Cor. 10:31

<sup>95</sup> Col. 3:23,24

<sup>96</sup> Prov. 3:5,6

general breakdown of the nation's stability. The law would give the king the emergency powers needed to stabilize the nation.

Although the proposal seems outrageous to us, we must understand that it was not unusual for potentates in ancient times to claim divinity. Many rulers of antiquity were considered to be sons of local deities. The Pharaohs of Egypt were and in more recent times we have the example of the emperor of Japan.

There is in all this a hidden compliment to Daniel's testimony and his character. The governors correctly assumed that Daniel was bound to transgress the law and that he would continue in his practice of praying to YHWH.

There are several points to be observed in the way the concept of the law was presented to the king. First of all, there is the time factor of thirty days. If the law were made perpetual, it would mean the elimination of all other deities, which would, undoubtedly, create severe unrest in the nation. The people would put up with a restriction of their religious life for one month, especially if the law was presented as a means of meeting a state of emergencies. The NIV reads that they appeared before the king "as a group." The Aramaic word used is *regash*, which means literally: "to gather tumultuously."

The proposal was, of course, flattering to the person of Darius. He must have felt that his administrators wanted to express their genuine admiration for him. The idea of being "god" for one month must have had some attraction to his majesty. The ease with which Darius seems to have consented to the proposal shows that he had little notion who God is. One of God's attributes is eternity and all His attributes are inseparable. If one of them would be removed, God would cease to be God. Being "god" for one month is an impossibility.

It may be that the wording of the proposal was done in such a way that it would be considered rhetorical. The words "pray to any god or man" could be interpreted as putting all exercise of religion on hold. The king may have been induced not to take the wording literally. But when Daniel was caught in the act of praying to the God of Israel, the governors insisted on a literal interpretation.

We are not told how much discussion took place between the king and his advisors before Darius decided to sign the proposal into law. The king may not have realized that the law would tie his own hands in that he would not be able to look for guidance to his own deities either for one month. For any decision he was required to make in the next 30 days he would be forced to exclusively lean on his own understanding. He could not even ask his advisors for counsel. Instead of becoming a god he would become less human!

The expression "a law of Medes and Persians" has become proverbial in English as anything that is unalterable. There are indications in Scripture as well as in archeology that the Medes and Persians did in fact believe in the immutability of their laws. When King Xerxes in the Book of Esther changed his mind about the law, which he had signed, that ordered the extermination of the Jews, he could not revoke that law. Instead he permitted Esther to issue another edict that allowed the Jews to defend themselves.<sup>97</sup> Traces of this kind of immutability of ordinances are also found in Islam.

### C. Daniel Prays Faithfully

6:10-15

***10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.***

***11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.***

***12 So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?"***

***The king answered, "The decree stands in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."***

***13 Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day."***

***14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.***

***15 Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."***

<sup>97</sup> See Esther ch. 8

Thus Daniel is brought to the ultimate test of his life: face death by continuing to pray to God, or stay alive by suspending the ritual of prayer for thirty days. We must observe that Daniel had the choice of becoming “a closet Christian.” The Jewish prayer is a prescribed ritual consisting of decking oneself with a prayer shawl and head cover and performing certain motions. Daniel could have continued his spiritual fellowship with God without any outward demonstrations of piety. He decided not to yield one inch of his spiritual life to the enemy of his soul. As a young man he had chosen not to defile himself ritually; this had set the course of his life which brought him to the logical conclusion that he could not do anything different at this point. He exemplified the advice Jesus would later give to His disciples: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”<sup>98</sup> Those disciples later stated before the Sanhedrin: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.”<sup>99</sup> When a person has no values that are worth dying for, he has nothing that is worth living for either.

The description of Daniel’s prayer habits indicates that he had a consistent routine. We sometimes equate routine with a lifeless going through motions. Some routines, however, are a lifeline that is worth cultivating and preserving. Daniel’s prayer before an open window that pointed in the direction of Jerusalem suggests that he had his quarters arranged in such a way that he could pray, facing Jerusalem. For a man of Daniel’s rank it must have been easy to have a custom-designed house. The principle of praying in the direction of Jerusalem, the place where God had revealed Himself, the place where the altar had stood and the sins of men had been atoned for, was based upon the prayer King Solomon had pronounced at the dedication of the temple. We read in Second Chronicles: “When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to a land far away or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity and say, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly’; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity where they were taken, and pray toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and toward the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you.”<sup>100</sup>

The temple Solomon had dedicated had been filled with the glory of God. In the days Daniel knelt before his open window, that temple did no longer exist. The glory of God had left the temple, as Ezekiel had witnessed in some of the visions God had given to him.<sup>101</sup> After the glory of God departed, all that was left was an empty hull. When the Spirit left, the temple died. The building King Nebuchadnezzar sacked was merely a structure of stone, wood, and precious metals. Daniel’s prayer in the direction of Jerusalem was like the prayer at the tombstone of a departed loved one. In a way, Daniel’s prayer was also a statement of faith; it expressed the hope of the resurrection. Daniel knew that God was not dead, even though the place in which He had lived had returned to ashes. Daniel had experienced God during the years of his captivity.

We would have expected that Daniel, when he heard of the decree, would have prayed in panic that the Lord would protect him from the lions’ den. Instead we read that he prayed and gave thanks. This reminds me of the missionary I knew, who when taken away during World War II to a Japanese concentration camp, knelt down on the deck of the ship and prayed: “Lord, here am I. Send me!” Daniel’s willingness to give his life to the Lord and give it with thanksgiving was his best protection against Darius’ evil decree. It was his thanksgiving that “shut the mouths of lions.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Matt. 10:28

<sup>99</sup> Acts 4:19

<sup>100</sup> II Chr. 6:36-39

<sup>101</sup> See Ezek. 9:3;10:4,18,19;11:22,23

<sup>102</sup> See Heb. 11:33

His habit of praying three times a day may have been inspired by one of David's Psalms in which the poet states: "Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice."<sup>103</sup> Evening is mentioned first because that was the beginning of the Jewish day. This is based on the Genesis record of creation: "And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day."<sup>104</sup> The evening and morning prayer had probably corresponded with the bringing of the evening and morning sacrifices in the temple. And the evening sacrifice coincided with the time Christ died on the cross.

Daniel's adversaries must have taken their time to observe his habits closely. They either did not rush into his living quarters the first time Daniel went on his knees to pray, or if they did, they must have studied his routine before they presented their proposition to the king.

When Daniel's enemies rushed into his private chambers, they found him praying. For the second time in this chapter we find the word *regash* in the text, which the NIV translates: "as a group," but which also has the meaning "gathering tumultuously." The same word is used again when they rush to ask for an audience with the king. Had these men known that they had less than 24 hours to live, they would have exhibited less enthusiasm for their cause.

Poor King Darius did not have a chance. He discovered on the first day of his being "a god" that his hands were tied and that he could not exercise his free will. The Almighty is at liberty to change His mind, as we read several times in Scripture. At one point in world history God expressed that He was sorry He ever created man.<sup>105</sup> When Moses stood between the Lord and the people of Israel to plead for their salvation, God changed His mind.<sup>106</sup> At Amos' intercession, God changed His plans of judgment over Israel several times.<sup>107</sup> King Darius was not "god" enough to save Daniel's life.

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* draws the conclusion: "Darius found himself bound and gagged by his own law. In this manner he showed that his authority was quite inferior in nature to that of Nebuchadnezzar, whose person was above the law. The government of Darius came nearer to the democratic ideal, but it was less absolute than that of the Chaldeans. In that sense it was inferior, and so fulfilled what had been predicted of it by the silver portion of the image prophecy of chapter 2."

The accusation against Daniel is presented in a very clever way. The wording "who is one of the exiles from Judah" makes Daniel, who was after all the highest ranking officer in the empire, a mere captive of a conquered nation. His transgression is also presented as an insult to the person of the king. Their suggestion was that the king could not overlook Daniel's behavior without losing face, which would seriously damage his political image. It seems never to have penetrated to King Darius that his being victim of the system was more insulting to his person than Daniel's prayer to the Almighty. Darius was not even at liberty to pardon whoever he wanted.

#### D. Daniel in the Lion's Den

6:16-17

***16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"***

***17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.***

Against his will and own better judgment, King Darius orders Daniel's execution by having him thrown to the lions. Evidently, the law also required the king to be present, thus adding injury to the insult of his person.

Daniel's stay in the lions' den foreshadows the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is rather amazing that this comparison never comes to the surface in the New Testament. Daniel's experience

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<sup>103</sup> Ps. 55:17

<sup>104</sup> Gen. 1:5

<sup>105</sup> See Gen 6:5-7

<sup>106</sup> See Ex. 32:9-14

<sup>107</sup> See Amos 7:1-6

seems to depict that of Jesus more graphically than Jonah's in the belly of the fish.<sup>108</sup> Even the mention of the royal seal that was put on the stone that covered Daniel's grave corresponds to the way Jesus was buried. We read that when Jesus was laid in the grave, Pilate said: " 'Take a guard... Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard."<sup>109</sup> In addition to the royal seal, the nobles feel obliged to add theirs. This demonstrates clearly how much divine authority King Darius possessed. There was obviously an ambiance of mutual distrust between the king and his advisors. We wonder what drove these men to take such precautions. Did they not trust the lions to do their job properly, or were they afraid that Daniel's God would interfere after all?

The NIV's rendering of the king's wish: "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" does not seem to be the literal translation of the Aramaic text. The NKJV states more positively: "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." We can, however, hardly interpret this as Darius' statement of faith. His subsequent emotional turmoil does not bear this out either. However, Darius gives proof in this that Daniel's readiness to die for his God had made a profound impression on him.

#### E. Daniel Is Saved from the Lions

6:18-24

**18 Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.**

**19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den.**

**20 When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"**

**21 Daniel answered, "O king, live forever!**

**22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."**

**23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.**

**24 At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.**

King Darius' sleepless night is the greatest compliment the Scriptures give to this man. Part of being "god" is that no sleep is needed. We read in the Psalms: "He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."<sup>110</sup> We may assume that this was part of divinity that the king would rather have forfeited. Darius' sleepless night constituted a profound emotional crisis in which he came to grips with the foolishness which had enticed him into the trap that his advisors had set for him and for Daniel. When morning breaks upon him, Darius is a changed man, who assumes his full authority of being the head of the empire.

The king's rushing to the lions' den is also an indication of his faith in the God of Daniel. We may assume that no one ever survived this mode of execution. King Darius, actually, set a better example than the disciples who had heard Jesus' prophecy about His own resurrection. He had clearly warned them at least three times that He would be raised from the dead on the third day,<sup>111</sup> but they never paid attention. They were not standing outside the tomb to welcome their risen Lord. Darius may have had his doubts but, at least, he left open the possibility of a miracle. It was a miracle he needed for himself as well as for his favorite government official. He was not disappointed.

It is remarkable that the king went personally to the lions' den to check on Daniel's condition. It indicates how deeply he felt himself involved in this. He realized that he had been used as a pawn by his advisors for the destruction of his beloved servant.

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<sup>108</sup> See Matt. 12:39-41

<sup>109</sup> Matt. 27:65,66

<sup>110</sup> Ps. 121:3,4

<sup>111</sup> See Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19

Darius' use of the words "servant of the living God" is also unusual. This constitutes a confession that God is the source of all life and the Supreme Being over all other deities. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "The king's Zoroastrian faith was the nearest that paganism ever came to Jewish ethical monotheism. This statement reads almost as if he had 'come across.' God was glorified by the destruction of His enemies, by the king's confession, and by His servant's reward." *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* adds to this: "If he rightly understood himself when he called him the living God, he could not doubt of his ability to keep Daniel alive, for he that has life in himself quickens whom he will; but has he thought fit in this case to exert his power? What he doubted of we are sure of, that the servants of the living God have a Master who is well able to protect them and bear them out in his service."

As we noted before, this is the first time in this book that Daniel addressed a king with: "O king, live forever!" It was customary court courtesy, but we do not read that Daniel ever used it. *Barnes' Notes* observes that this civility is "prevalent still, as in the phrases, 'Long live the king!'" Maybe Daniel's greeting here is more meant as a blessing than a greeting. Having gone through death and resurrection, he imparted God's blessing of eternal life upon the man whose heart was open for this revelation. The living God is also the God of the living, as Jesus states in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>112</sup> It might be a good thing if, as Christians, we would greet and bless each other with the words: "O king (queen), live forever!"

Daniel does not give us any details about the angel that spent the night with him and kept the lions at bay. Unlike King Darius, Daniel may even have enjoyed a good night's sleep. Since Daniel had made God his priority, God made Daniel His main concern. Daniel had experienced that "the angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."<sup>113</sup>

Darius' command that Daniel's accusers be thrown to the lions shows the radical change that took place in the king's heart and attitude. We question the justice of the command that the wives and children were also implicated. The Mosaic law clearly forbade such cruelty. We read: "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin."<sup>114</sup> The only known instance in which such a thing was done among the Israelites was at the execution of Achan.<sup>115</sup> But in that case the whole family may have shared in the guilt. Apparently, Darius' act of vengeance was not unusual among the Persians. The king may have been afraid that the offspring of those condemned to death would later plot to take revenge upon the king. Wiping out the whole family would take care of that threat.

*Barnes' Notes* comments on this: "The same thing substantially occurs in the course of Providence, or the administration of justice now. Nothing is more common than that the wife and children of a guilty man should suffer on account of the sin of the husband and father. Who can recount the woes that come upon a family through the intemperance of a father? And in cases where a man is condemned for crime, the consequences are not confined to himself. In shame and mortification, and disgrace; in the anguish experienced when he dies on a gibbet; in the sad remembrance of that disgraceful death; in the loss of one who might have provided for their wants, and been their protector and counselor, the wife and children always suffer; and, though this took another form in ancient times, and when adopted as a principle of punishment is not in accordance with our sense of justice in administering laws, yet it is a principle which pervades the world-for the effects of crime cannot and do not terminate on the guilty individual himself."

#### F. Darius' Wise Decree

6:25-28

***25 Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: "May you prosper greatly!"***

***26 "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.***

***27 He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."***

<sup>112</sup> See Matt. 22:31,32

<sup>113</sup> Ps. 34:7

<sup>114</sup> Deut. 24:16

<sup>115</sup> See Josh. 7:24

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

Darius' decree shows similarity with the edicts of Nebuchadnezzar after the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fire, and after his own episode of insanity.<sup>116</sup> The testimony of Daniel's deliverance by the power of God thus reached far beyond his immediate surrounding. This proclamation does not imply the disappearance of idols throughout the empire. We may assume that all local deity continued to be worshipped but they were subjected to the supremacy of the God of heaven and earth. The amazing conclusion we may draw from all this is that captivity, imprisonment, and even death can still bring glory to God. That which often seems to us an ultimate disaster can be transformed into a monument of praise. In spite of the horror of her experiences in the Nazi concentration camp, Corrie ten Boom could thank the Lord for that which made her a world evangelist. Joni Erickson-Tada thanks God for her wheelchair. The most painful happenings in our life often become the most precious ones.

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See ch. 3:28,29; 4:1-37

**VI. Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts**

7

**A. The Revelation of the Vision** 7:1-14

*1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.*

*2 Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea.*

*3 Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.*

*4 "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it.*

*5 "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'*

*6 "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.*

*7 "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast-terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.*

*8 "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.*

*9 "As I looked,*

*"thrones were set in place,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.  
His clothing was as white as snow;  
the hair of his head was white like wool.*

*His throne was flaming with fire,  
and its wheels were all ablaze.*

*10 A river of fire was flowing,  
coming out from before him.*

*Thousands upon thousands attended him;  
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.*

*The court was seated,  
and the books were opened.*

*11 "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.*

*12 (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)*

*13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.*

*14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

We enter into the second part of the Book of Daniel with fear and trepidation. These six chapters that are before us are, probably, among the most difficult to interpret of all the chapters in the whole Bible. For reasons unknown, this chapter is the only one of the prophetic section of the book that is written in Aramaic, as are the six preceding chapters. As such it can be counted as belonging to the first section of the book. But as far as content is concerned, it belongs obviously to the second part.

The general consensus among scholars is that Daniel's dream covers the same ground as the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, which is the subject of chapter two. There are four kingdoms succeeding each

other that are ultimately overtaken by the Kingdom of God. The head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar's statue corresponds to the winged lion; the bear matches the chest and arms of silver, the leopard the belly and thighs of bronze, and the fourth beast with the ten horns tallies with the iron legs and feet consisting of a mixture of iron and clay. As the rock smashed the statue, so the Son of Man destroys the four beasts. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The rise and fall of Empires is not the confused whirl of uncontrolled atoms, but all tending towards an end — the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth."

The two dreams bring out two different perspectives on world events. What appeared to King Nebuchadnezzar as an imposing statue, with himself at the head—a head of gold—was to God a display of wild beasts, too horrible to approach. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "In the second chapter, the images are taken from the inanimate sphere; in the seventh chapter they are taken from the animate. Nebuchadnezzar saw superficially the world-power as a splendid human figure, and the kingdom of God as a mere stone at the first. Daniel sees the world-kingsdoms in their inner essence as of an animal nature lower than human, being estranged from God; and that only in the kingdom of God ('the Son of man,' the representative-man) is the true dignity of man realized. So, as contrasted with Nebuchadnezzar's vision, the kingdom of God appears to Daniel, from the very first, superior to the world-kingsdom. For though in physical force the beasts excel man, man has essentially spiritual powers. Nebuchadnezzar's colossal image represents mankind in its own strength, but only the outward man. Daniel sees man spiritually degraded to the beast level, led by blind impulses, through his alienation from God. It is only from above that the perfect Son of man comes, and in His kingdom man attains his true destiny. It is in His kingdom on earth that man first regains the lordship which he lost by the fall."

It has been debated whether "the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" refers to the time of Belshazzar's actual reign or to the period in which he reigned as caretaker in his father's absence. In either case Daniel's dream occurred when the Babylonian Empire had already begun its decline.

The scene of the dream is set at the beach of "the great sea," which probably refers to the Mediterranean. But the picture goes beyond a physical location on earth to a scene of spiritual turbulence of cosmic proportions. Four winds blowing simultaneously, churning up the waters of an ocean would be a physical impossibility on earth. A tornado might come close to it, but that does not fit the image here either. Isaiah compares the uproar of the nations of the world to the raging of the sea. We read: "Oh, the raging of many nations--they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples--they roar like the roaring of great waters!"<sup>117</sup> David also captures the meaning of this in the Second Psalm: "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One."<sup>118</sup>

We find "the four winds of the earth" again in Revelation in a context that seems to refer to the onset of the Great Tribulation. We read John's vision there: "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.'"<sup>119</sup> The Aramaic word translated "wind" is *ruwach*, which also has the meaning of "spirit." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The double meaning of the word *ruach* made the transition easy. We see the same double meaning in ... Zechariah 6:5. The sea, then, is to be regarded as the great mass of Gentile nations, and the winds are, therefore, the spiritual agencies by which God carries on the history of the world. As there are four winds, there are also four Empires. There are angelic princes of at least two of these Empires referred to later. May we not argue that these Empires had, according to the thought of Daniel, each an angelic head?"

The storm at sea can also be seen as a picture of the wars in which the nations of the world continuously clash with one another. World peace has been a very elusive dream of mankind ever since sin entered the world. From Cain's murder of Abel to the last world war and into the reign of terror of the Antichrist, human beings have slain and will slay each other in the most ferocious manner. The only peace among men occurs when peace is made with God.

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<sup>117</sup> Isa. 17:12

<sup>118</sup> Ps. 2:1,2

<sup>119</sup> Rev. 7:1-3

The Empires emerge from the churning waters of human rebellion against God. The ambition of each of them is absolute power and world hegemony. In God's plan of creation, man was originally not meant to rule over fellowmen; he was to be lord of the animal world and over all of nature. In David's words: "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas."<sup>120</sup> Only after sin had come into the world, we read that God said to Eve: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."<sup>121</sup> In their desire of world dominion, the emperors push the effects of sin to its limits.

Apart from the second animal, the bear, the beasts are not portrayed as we know them from nature. Lions and leopards do not have wings and animals with ten horns can only exist in mythology. The first picture, which obviously refers to Babylon, combines the king of the beasts with the king of the birds. The Babylonian Empire was like a lion with the wings of an eagle; it was based on superior strength and it conquered the world with amazing rapidity. But in Daniel's vision the lion's wings are torn off. We assume that this makes the beast fall to the ground from which it is lifted up and "the heart of a man was given to it." Some scholars see in this the gradual decline of the Empire after the death of King Nebuchadnezzar; others think that it refers to this king's experience of temporary madness and subsequent healing, as described in chapter four. When Daniel dreamed this dream, the lion had already become too weak to defend itself and the growling of the Persian bear could already be heard.

Vs. 5 contains three points that have caused much controversy among Bible scholars and historians. First the image of the bear, then the raising itself up on one side, and thirdly the three ribs in its mouth. The bear may have been the national animal representing Persia, as the winged lion was of other nations. Nations still identify themselves with members of the animal world; thus the American Eagle, the Lion of the Netherlands, etc. One suggestion is that the bear coming out of the mountains better represents the Median Persian Empire than the lion of the plains. The kingdom became notorious for its ferocity. *Barnes' Notes* quotes Jerome who in a comment on Hosea 13:8 stated: "It is said by those who have studied the nature of wild beasts, that none among them is more ferocious than the bear when deprived of its young, or when hungry."

In a way bears are inferior to lions. A bear may be ferocious but it lacks the swiftness and regal bearing of "the king of the animals." This corresponds to the chest of silver in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, of which Daniel said: "After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours."<sup>122</sup>

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on the phrase "It was raised up on one of its sides," by stating that some manuscripts show a difference of one letter, change the Hebrew word *besar* (side) into *bishayr* (dominion). The sentence would then read: "It raised up one dominion." *The Commentary* explains: "The Medes, an ancient people, and the Persians, a modern tribe, formed one united sovereignty, in contrast to the third and fourth kingdoms, each of which was originally one, but was afterward divided. ... The idea then would be, 'it lay on one of its forefeet, and stood on the other:' a figure still to be seen on one of the stones of Babylon ... denoting a kingdom that had been at rest, but is now rousing itself for conquest. Media is the lower side, passiveness; Persia the upper, active element."

The three ribs in the bear's mouth constitute another problem of interpretation. Some scholars take this to be an image of the conquest of Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt; others believe the number to be only symbolic. *The Pulpit Commentary* concludes: "It seems better ... to regard the number three as not important, but a general term for a few, though, at the same time, we can make approximation to the number when we look not at the Medes, but at Cyrus. Moreover, had we a better knowledge of early apocalyptic, it is at least a possible thing that we might find that 'three' was the designating number of Lydia or Armenia, as 'two' was of Medo-Persia, 'four' of Greece, 'five' of Egypt, and 'ten' of Rome."

It is also difficult to determine who gives the command to the bear: "Get up and eat your fill of flesh!" We may interpret this as coming from God, although we cannot state that world powers act out the will of God in their aspirations to conquer the world. There is a correlation between this scene and the one in Revelation when the Lamb opens the seals of the scroll and the appearance of the Antichrist and those who follow is preceded by the call from one of the four living creatures before the throne of God, calling out:

<sup>120</sup> Ps. 8:6-8

<sup>121</sup> Gen. 3:16<sup>b</sup>

<sup>122</sup> See ch. 2:39

“Come.”<sup>123</sup> Although the Empires follow their own evil desires in their pursuit of world hegemony, God is very much in control. He says about Cyrus, who ruled at that time: “He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, ‘Let it be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Let its foundations be laid.’”<sup>124</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes about the third animal in Daniel’s vision, the leopard: “The traditional interpretation is that the Hellenic Empire — that of Alexander the Great and his successors — is intended here. In defense of this we have the fact that four, as we have just said, is the numerical sign of the Greek power. In the following chapter we have the goat, with its one notable horn, which, on being broken off, is replaced by four. In the eleventh chapter we are told that Alexander’s Empire is to be divided to the four winds of heaven. But ‘wings’ are not prophetically so much the symbol of extensive dominion, as of rapidity of movement. If Nebuchadnezzar ... (Ezekiel 17:3) is a great eagle with long wings, it is because of the rapidity of his conquests. Jeremiah says of his horses, they are ‘swifter than eagles.’ Again in Lamentations, ‘Our persecutors are swifter than eagles.’<sup>125</sup> Wings, then, symbolize swiftness of motion. If we turn to the next chapter, the swiftness of Alexander’s conquests is the point that most impresses the seer.”

The conquests of Alexander the Great are dated around 331 BC. This means that Daniel’s vision allowed him at this point to look ahead 200 years.

*The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* suggests that the spots of the leopard could refer to the personality of Alexander: “sometimes mild, at others cruel; sober and drunken; continent and lecherous; having a great power of self-government, and at other times being a slave to his passions.”

The leopard, as a feline, is quite different from the lion. It is a smaller animal, but faster and smoother in his ways. It lacks the regal bearing of the lion but it belongs to the same family of ferocious wild animals.

Some commentators see a parallel between the leopard’s four wings and its four heads. Others think there is no relationship. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* states about this: “At the same time the beast has four heads, not two only, as one might have expected with four wings. The number four thus shows that the heads have an independent signification, and do not stand in relation to the four wings, symbolizing the spreading out of the kingdom into the four quarters of the heavens ... As little do the four wings correspond with the four heads in such a way that by both there is represented only the dividing of the kingdom into four other kingdoms ... Wings are everywhere an emblem of rapid motion; heads, on the contrary, where the beast signifies a kingdom, are the heads of the kingdom, i.e., the kings or rulers: hence it follows that the four heads of the panther are the four successive Persian kings whom alone Daniel knows (Dan 11:2). Without regard to the false interpretations of Dan 11:2 on which this opinion rests, it is to be noticed that the four heads do not rise up one after another, but that they all exist contemporaneously on the body of the beast, and therefore can only represent four contemporary kings, or signify that this kingdom is divided into four kingdoms. That the four wings are mentioned before the four heads, signifies that the kingdom spreads itself over the earth with the speed of a bird’s flight, and then becomes a fourfold-kingdom, or divides itself into four kingdoms, as is distinctly shown in Dan 8:5ff.-The last statement, and dominion was given to it, corresponds with that in Dan 2:39, it shall bear rule over all the earth, i.e., shall found an actual and strong world-Empire.” Not all commentators share the absolute certainty of interpretation that this one evinces at this point.

The fourth animal in Daniel’s vision defies classification. Daniel himself does not try to compare it to any species known to man. It obviously corresponds to the legs and feet of iron and clay in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The consensus is that it refers to the Roman Empire, or at least to a phase of world dominion that was introduced by the appearance of the power of Rome. The ten horns equal the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, but the appearance of the little horn for which three existing horns are uprooted finds no parallel in the dream about the statue. Speculations as to the interpretation of the ten toes have kept Bible scholars occupied up to the present time.

The fact that the prophecy contained in this vision has not yet been completely fulfilled in world history signifies that this beast cannot be identified exclusively with the Roman Empire. The appearance of the little horn speaks, no doubt, about the coming of the Antichrist. It cannot be denied that this final act of

<sup>123</sup> See Rev. 6:1,2ff.

<sup>124</sup> Isa. 44:28

<sup>125</sup> Lam. 4:19

world history has not yet come upon us. It seems, therefore, safe to say that the fourth animal represents a system of government, different from anything that preceded it, rather than one particular kingdom. The three previous world powers were all kingdoms, but Rome was a republic. The fourth animal introduces democracy. Of the four forms of government this world has known, theocracy, monarchy, dictatorship, and democracy, the last one is usually most valued. Here it is represented as the most evil ones. As the basis for the statue King Nebuchadnezzar saw, it is the most undesirable foundation of any structure that is built upon it. It can be said about all these forms of government that they would all work well if they ruled over only good people. Mankind never accepted a theocracy because the sinful nature does not submit to God. The problem of a democracy, as well as with all the other forms of government is the problem of sin in the human heart. It seems ironic that the democracy of a republic, which is supposed to assure liberty and enhance human dignity, receives the lowest mark in God's book.

This fourth beast, which Daniel calls "terrifying and frightening and very powerful," has iron teeth, which it uses to crush and devours its victims. This unusual feature of artificial teeth, in a way corresponds to the ten horns it sprouts, although horns can be seen as part of the animal's nature. The iron teeth could be seen as an image of industrialization, which was unknown in Daniel's time. In the Book of Proverbs, Agur speaks about a generation of people that could well be applied to the Roman Empire: "There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers; those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth; those whose eyes are ever so haughty, whose glances are so disdainful; those whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are set with knives to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from among mankind."<sup>126</sup>

While Daniel is looking on, he sees a transformation taking place on the head of the beast. Among the ten horns appears another smaller one that overshadows all the others and that seems to acquire an existence of its own, separate from the beast on which it grows. Interpretations of this phenomenon have varied from century to century. Some have identified the ten horns with magistrates within the Roman Empire. *The Adam Clarke Commentary* refers to the Protestant tendency to identify the Antichrist with the pope as head of the Roman Catholic Church. Most modern Protestants would consider this interpretation outdated. Even the tendency to apply the ten horns to the West European Common Market can no longer be maintained, since its memberships exceeds ten at the present time. The apostle John speaks of ten horns in a picture that, obviously, refers to the Roman Empire. We read in Revelation: "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings-and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."<sup>127</sup>

The appearance of the fourth beast fascinated Daniel to the point that he asked the angel for particular information about this part of the vision in verses 19-25. The expression "a time, times, and half a time" occurs again in ch. 12:7. This is generally understood to refer to the Great Tribulation. It confirms the interpretation of the little horn as referring to the Antichrist.

Throughout the Scriptures, the horn is used as a symbol of strength, both in the bad as in the good sense. If the context of Daniel's vision, as well as in the general use of the word in the context of human power, it stands for rebellion against God and the force that crushes human beings and nations. But the horn also represents the power of God. Zechariah prophesied at the birth of John, the Baptist: "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,"<sup>128</sup> referring to the Messiah. In Revelation, John sees Jesus appearing as the Lamb of God and His power to save represented by seven horns. We read: "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into

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<sup>126</sup> Prov. 30:11-14

<sup>127</sup> Rev. 17:12-14

<sup>128</sup> Luke 1:69

all the earth.”<sup>129</sup> Both altars, the burnt offering altar and the golden altar for offering incense, in the tabernacle and the temple, had horns projecting from them.<sup>130</sup>

So, in all instances in Daniel’s vision of the fourth beast, we see evil power represented by the horn, culminating in the power of the Antichrist.

*Barnes’ Notes* presents the following interesting observation about this horn: “In the growth of that ‘horn,’ three of the others were plucked up by the roots. The proper meaning of the word used to express this ‘et’/qaaraaw is, that they were rooted out-as a tree is overturned by the roots, or the roots are turned out from the earth. The process by which this was done seems to have been by growth. The gradual increase of the horn so crowded on the others that a portion of them was forced out, and fell. What is fairly indicated by this was not any act of violence, or any sudden convulsion or revolution, but such a gradual growth of power that a portion of the original power was removed, and this new power occupied its place. There was no revolution, properly so-called; no change of the whole dynasty, for a large portion of the horns remained, but the gradual rise of a new power that would wield a portion of that formerly wielded by others, and that would now wield the power in its place. The number three would either indicate that three parts out of the ten were absorbed in this way, or that a considerable, though an indefinite portion, was thus absorbed.”

“The little horn” is generally believed to be a picture of the Antichrist. The first partial fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy occurred in the appearance of one of the kings of the Graeco-Macedonian kingdom, known as Antiochus Epiphanes. *The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* refers to this king’s persecution of the Jews who: “prohibited circumcision, and substituted the worship of Jupiter Olympius, with whom he identified himself as if God, instead of that of Jehovah, in the temple at Jerusalem.” This Antiochus was obviously not the Antichrist of the end times but he foreshadowed him by demonstrating most of the features that will ultimately identify the Antichrist who is to precede the return of Christ. In the same way as Antiochus Epiphanes appears in Daniel’s prophecy as a type, John uses the emperor Nero as a paradigm on which he bases his description of the Antichrist in Revelation.

As Daniel is absorbing this vision of evil, he is given a vision of the Day of Judgment. In the most magnificent terms Daniel describes the appearance of God, the Father, whom he calls “the Ancient of Days.” According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, “One ancient of days” would be a better rendering. This description of God is an effort to put into human terms what it means to be eternal. In our languages we have no terms that does justice to any description of eternity that has neither end nor beginning. Time-bound creatures as we are, we can only conceive of day following day. God is not an old man in our terms; He is the Eternal, always young, always old. George Bernard Shaw once flippantly observed that youth is a wonderful thing; too bad it is wasted on young people! Shaw’s joke would do full justice to the person of God. It is wonderful to realize that in the various stages of our human existence we are given the privilege of expressing some of the features of this side of the character of God, without all the flaws that human flesh is heir to.

Daniel’s brief portrayal of the appearance of God is even more impressive than Ezekiel’s. John’s description of his encounter with the risen Christ in Revelation borrows some of Daniel’s language here. John saw Jesus “dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow.”<sup>131</sup> Daniel’s vision of the throne of God is like the eruption of a volcano. The lava of God’s holiness streams out of the throne like a mighty river. Elsewhere in Scripture, fire is shown to be an image of God’s wrath, which is one of the elements of justice and judgment emphasized here. The psalmist describes the appearance of God as: “Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles.”<sup>132</sup> And Isaiah announces God’s coming judgment: “See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD.”<sup>133</sup> Nahum

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<sup>129</sup> Rev. 5:6

<sup>130</sup> See Ex. 27:1,2; 30:1,2

<sup>131</sup> Rev. 1:13,14

<sup>132</sup> Ps. 97:3,4

<sup>133</sup> Isa. 66:15,16

prophesied: "The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him." John describes the reaction to God's revelation of judgment: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them."<sup>134</sup>

Apparently, when judgment is passed, the river of fire turns into a river of water of life. After our present planet has faded into history, John describes for us the new heavens and the new earth, stating: "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb."<sup>135</sup>

One of the amazing features of the throne on which God presides over judgment is that it has wheels, which are also ablaze. We tend to equate dignity such as it comes to us here with static immobility. God judges from His chariot of fire.

*Barnes' Notes* quotes a section from Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

"Forth rush'd with whirlwind sound  
The chariot of Paternal Deity,  
Flashing thick flames, wheel within wheel undrawn,  
Itself instinct with spirit, but convoyed  
By four cherubic shapes; four faces each  
Had wondrous; as with stars their bodies all,  
And wings were set with eyes; with eyes the wheels  
Of beryl, and careering fires between."

The opening of the books introduces us to God's administration of His creation. The language is, of course, symbolic. Writing is a wonderful thing but it is a testimony to man's limitations. We write lest we would forget. An old Chinese proverb states: "The weakest ink is stronger than the strongest memory." The omniscient God does not need to record anything in books. There are no literal books in which the acts of mankind are recorded and there is no Book of Life in that sense of the word. The record is the mind of God. The images are given for our benefit.

*The Pulpit Commentary* states about the opening of the books: "It ought to be noted that the word here used for 'books' is derived from a root primarily meaning 'engrave.' The Babylonian books, as they have come down to us, are clay tablets 'engraved' or 'impressed' with letters. We have all manner of legal documents in this form. The piles of tiles and cylinders which contain the deeds of those before the judgment-seat stand before the Judge. One by one they are displayed before him. The scene presented is one of unspeakable grandeur, and all put before us with a few masterly strokes. We see the great fiery throne; the Judge, awful with the dignity of unnumbered ages, attended by a million of angels who are ready to do his will; and a hundred million watching and listening spectators. We find that this description of the judgment in the first Apocalypse reappears, modified and made yet more solemn, in the last Apocalypse. We are, however, not to regard this as the final judgment. Daniel is rather admitted into the presence of God in the heavens, and sees his judgment continually being prepared against the wicked."

I do not know why this commentary, together with some others, insists that what Daniel saw does not refer to God's judgment on the Last Day. In this vision the beast on which the little horn had sprouted is slain, which also means the end of the Antichrist. In John's vision in Revelation, the Millennium occurs between the defeat of the Antichrist and the damnation of Satan.<sup>136</sup> The beast, obviously, represents more than the Roman Empire alone. It exemplifies the power that also inspired the preceding empires, which is Satan himself. The picture Daniel paints is two-dimensional. The time factor seems to be omitted, since the various empires are shown as existing simultaneously, whilst in reality they formed a sequence, spanning several centuries.

This absence of the time factor seems to be typical for the final judgment. Jesus places the cities of His time next to Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom on the day of judgment. We read in Matthew's Gospel: "Then Jesus

<sup>134</sup> Rev. 20:11

<sup>135</sup> Rev. 22:1

<sup>136</sup> See Rev. 19:19,20; 20:7-10

began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.' <sup>137</sup>

A dramatic change occurs in Daniel's version when he observes the appearance of a person, whom he calls: "one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven."

The expression "son of man" occurs several times in the Old Testament, as well as in the New. In the New Testament, Jesus adopts it for Himself; in Matthew's Gospel alone 30 times. The words in Daniel are in Aramaic *bar 'enash*. The Hebrew equivalent is *ben 'adam*, which means basically the same, but only occurs as a reference to a mortal person. In Ezekiel, the term is found more than 90 times to designate the prophet. TLB renders it consistently "son of dust" in that context. In Daniel's vision there is nothing that suggests an application of this title to a mortal. This is an obvious reference to the Messiah. Daniel himself is addressed as "son of man" in the next chapter, <sup>138</sup> but the words used there are *ben 'adam*. Jesus' adoption of this title for Himself was more than an indication that He was one hundred percent a human being, a descendant of David. It was a direct reference to His divine office as Messiah. At His trial, He purposely quoted Daniel's Scripture. We read in Matthew's Gospel: "The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' <sup>139</sup> The titles "Son of God" and "Son of Man" are used interchangeably in these verses. In John's Gospel, Jesus also uses the terms as equivalents. We read: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." <sup>140</sup>

In terms of biblical theology, this verse in Daniel's vision may be considered to be one of the most important ones in all of Scripture. The Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to death decided not to take into consideration Jesus' appeal to Scripture as a claim to legitimacy. They were, of course, very familiar with Daniel's prophecy but they chose to ignore it for their own reasons.

The appearance of the Messiah at this place in Daniel's dream corresponds to the "rock was cut out, but not by human hands" that crushed the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. <sup>141</sup> This is the Gospel of the Book of Daniel.

*The Pulpit Commentary* makes some interesting observation about these verses but then also warns against "applying mere logic to apocalyptic." We read: "It is agreed that, as the previous kingdoms were represented by a beast, a man would be necessary symmetrically to represent at once the fact that it is an empire as those were, but unlike them in being of a higher class, as man is higher than the beasts." In the warning regarding applying logic, *The Commentary* refers to the fact that the first beast was given "the heart of a man" <sup>142</sup> and considers this to mean a weakening of the beast's power. That point is debatable. *The Commentary* further emphasizes the fact that the beasts all come out of the sea, whilst the Son of Man descends with the clouds of heaven. "This indicates the Divine origin of the Messiah." The coming of the Messiah with the clouds of heaven rings in His eternal reign. This is the moment of which the apostle Paul writes that: "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess

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<sup>137</sup> Matt. 11:20-24

<sup>138</sup> See ch. 8:17

<sup>139</sup> Matt. 26:63,64

<sup>140</sup> John 5:25-27

<sup>141</sup> ch. 2:34

<sup>142</sup> See vs. 4

that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>143</sup> The eschatology that comes to us in much more detail in the New Testament appears in Daniel in very condensed form.

B. The Interpretation of the Vision 7:15-28

**15** *"I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me.*  
**16** *I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things:*  
**17** *'The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.*  
**18** *But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever-yes, for ever and ever.'*  
**19** *"Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws-the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.*  
**20** *I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell-the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully.*  
**21** *As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them,*  
**22** *until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.*  
**23** *"He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.*  
**24** *The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings.*  
**25** *He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.*  
**26** *"But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.*  
**27** *Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'*  
**28** *"This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself."*

The vision left Daniel shaken and troubled. Still in his dream, he approaches one of the characters who is part of his vision and asks for an explanation. Daniel's dream differs greatly in this respect from most dreams people dream. It is not uncommon that what we dream makes little or no sense to us, as in a way, this dream did to Daniel. But very rarely, we will receive a clarification from inside the dream itself, as Daniel did here. Daniel's dream was also a vision in the sense that it was not a product of his own brain activity. We are not told who the person is that enlightens Daniel at this point; we may assume he is one of the angels or archangels.

The first thing that strikes us in the answer given to Daniel's question is the identification of the "Son of Man" with "the saints." There is no distinction between the Messiah and those who belong to Him. They share in His glory and His power. Some scholars believe that this fact alters the interpretation of the meaning of the appearance of the "Son of Man." Instead of applying this to the Person of the Messiah, they see it as a collective body, as if Israel would ultimately subdue all the powers of the world.

We strongly believe, however, that the vision speaks of more than a mere political struggle in which the physical nation of Israel will ultimately obtain the upper hand. The promise that the earth will ultimately be the property of God's children alone, and that righteousness will triumph over unrighteousness, runs as a golden thread through all of Scripture. David, in Psalm Thirty-Seven, states five times that the meek will inherit the land.<sup>144</sup> One of the Beatitudes states: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."<sup>145</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Phil. 2:9-11

<sup>144</sup> See Ps. 37:9,11,22,29,34

Paul argues in his Epistle to the Romans: "It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."<sup>146</sup> And to the church in Corinth, he wrote: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we will judge angels?"<sup>147</sup>

In his answer to Daniel, the angel draws a line between time and eternity. The four beasts operate in time; they come and go; their power is only operative for a limited time. The reign of the saints of God is forever. The statement is very emphatic. The original Aramaic reads: "forever and forever, ever." The NIV renders this: "forever-yes, for ever and ever." This agrees with the statement of the apostle John: "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."<sup>148</sup>

Daniel was especially puzzled by the appearance of the fourth beast, which was the most terrifying of all. The most frightening feature of this part of the vision was the appearance and activities of "the little horn" and the fact that "the saints" were delivered into his power for a limited time. In vs. 19 "bronze claws" are added in the description of the beast; they were lacking in the picture of vs. 7.

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments: "While no more is intimated than that the children of men make war with one another, and prevail against one another, the prophet does not show himself so much concerned (let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth, and be dashed in pieces one against another); but when they make war with the saints, when the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, are broken as earthen pitchers, it is time to ask, 'What is the meaning of this? Will the Lord cast off his people? Will he suffer their enemies to trample upon them and triumph over them? What is this same horn that shall prevail so far against the saints?' "

It is generally understood that the fourth beast depicts the Roman Empire, which existed from ± 60 BC through 476 AD and which covered most of Europe, part of North Africa and West Asia. But even this time span of more than 500 years of human history is not completely covered by the image of this beast. Antiochus Epiphanes undoubtedly fulfilled part of the prophecy concerning the Antichrist, but he was no more than a forerunner of the ultimate man of evil. There have been great tribulations in the world, but the one of which Jesus said that it would be "unequaled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again"<sup>149</sup> will not occur until the end of time, prior to our Lord's return.

Scholars have been greatly divided over the interpretation of the details in this vision and the application to world history past and future. A detailed study of opinions, which are more numerous than the horns on the beast's head, would require volumes. Such an endeavor would be far beyond the scope of our study. Suffice to state that all that is implied in the vision of the fourth beast has not yet been fully fulfilled. There have been episodes in world history in which kings, emperors, and dictators have given a partial fulfillment, but the worst is still to come. We cannot deduct with certainty from Daniel's prophecy whether the church will go through the Great Tribulation or not.

The most important feature, the one that puzzled Daniel the most was the fact that there would be a time when God would apparently withdraw His hand of protection from His children and allow them to be crushed and trampled down. This is what shocked Daniel the most, as it still does us. For Daniel, who had seen the deliverance from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace of his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and who would experience himself God's protection in the lions' den of King Darius a few years later, this upset everything he knew and believed about God. After enumerating a long list of divine interventions, the author of Hebrews states: "Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."<sup>150</sup> This inexplicable seeming lack of compassion

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<sup>145</sup> Matt. 5:5

<sup>146</sup> Rom. 4:13

<sup>147</sup> I Cor. 6:2,3

<sup>148</sup> I John 2:17

<sup>149</sup> Matt. 24:21

<sup>150</sup> Heb. 11:35-38

from the side of God is what frustrated Daniel the most. To sound the depth of this mystery and to understand the principle that made God Himself not spare His own Son<sup>151</sup> is more than most of us can penetrate.

One of the features that will be characteristic of the reign of the Antichrist is that he will “try to change the set times and the laws.” There may also be a reference in this to man’s efforts to synchronize the calendar with the earth actual orbit around the sun. Evidently, things were rather confused when Julius Caesar came to power; he created order in the confusion. *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* explains: “To bring the calendar into correspondence with the seasons, the year 46 B.C. was lengthened so as to consist of fifteen months, or 445 days, and the calendar known as the Julian was introduced January 1, 45 B.C. The use of the lunar year and the intercalary month was abolished, and the civil year was regulated entirely by the sun. Caesar fixed this year to 365 1/4 days, which is correct within a few minutes. After this the ordinary year consisted of 365 days, divided into twelve months, with the names still in use.” If the Roman Empire, at least partially, fits the image of the fourth beast, this makes sense, although the adjustment of the calendar cannot be seen as a complete fulfillment of this prophecy either. The mention of the change of law may also refer to the institution of Roman law upon which the administration of the government was based. This law is still the basis of most constitutions of civilized nations in the world.

Vs. 25 mentions this in connection with the Antichrist’s speaking against the Most High and the persecution of the saints. The Aramaic word for “time” is *zeman*, which has the connotation of a set time. The same word is used in the second chapter of this book in King Nebuchadnezzar’s account of his dream. We read: “He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them.” In that context, it refers to God’s sovereign acts. The suggestion is that the Antichrist will try to imitate God’s sovereignty.

In the consummation of world history the power of the nations will revert to God from whom it came and He will reign through His saints. This fact puts Jesus’ statement: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”<sup>152</sup> in a different light. It is usually assumed that Jesus’ words constituted a proclamation of His divinity; they may be better understood as the revelation of His humanity. As the first of all the saints, He will rule this universe and we will rule with Him. Knowing this, how utterly ridiculous does this make Satan’s offer to Jesus during the temptation in the desert, when he “showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor,” and said, “All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.”<sup>153</sup>

The interpretation the angel gives to Daniel of the image of the fourth beast seems to hide as much as it reveals. Students of prophecy over the ages have tried to apply the picture to the time in which they lived and the attempts have not ceased in the present. The period of three and a half years, which seems to be the meaning of “a time, times and half a time,” is usually taken to be the period of the Great Tribulation. We find the same “code” used in the last chapter of this book,<sup>154</sup> where the fog that covers the mystery is even denser, which makes any effort to interpretation even more difficult. We may assume that when the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy has come, the application will be abundantly clear. The purpose for which this and similar prophecies are given is not for us to cut out the stickers and apply them to situations and events we observe, but to create in our hearts a sense of watchful anticipation.

Jesus’ teaching abounds with warnings to stay awake spiritually. We read: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”<sup>155</sup> And: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”<sup>156</sup> He says: “Watch out that no one deceives you.”<sup>157</sup> And: “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back-whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you

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<sup>151</sup> See Rom. 8:32

<sup>152</sup> Matt. 28:18

<sup>153</sup> Matt. 4:8,9

<sup>154</sup> See ch. 12:7

<sup>155</sup> Matt. 24:42

<sup>156</sup> Matt. 25:13

<sup>157</sup> Mark 13:5

sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”<sup>158</sup> In Luke’s Gospel we read: “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.”<sup>159</sup> And again: “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”<sup>160</sup>

Our eagerness to understand and interpret prophecy can easily degenerate into a carnal desire to know the future and to manipulate it. The expectation of fulfillment of prophecy is called “hope,” about which the apostle John states: “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”<sup>161</sup>

In wrapping up this chapter, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* concludes: “With all the outward pomp of the world-kings, when they are regarded in their inner essence, they are seen to be, in a spiritual point of view, brutish: physically, indeed, they are, like the larger wild beasts, superior to man in strength; but really they are fallen from the true dignity of man, which consists in spiritual union and communion with God. Severed from God, the world-powers are degraded to the level of the beasts, the creatures of blind impulse and passion. Willing subjection to the blessed God is what truly ennoble man. The moment that man tries to be independent of God, he falls to the level of the beast, with eye and head turned down earthward. It is only from above that the kingdom can come, which is at once perfectly human and perfectly divine: it is only in the coming kingdom of the Son of man, which is to descend from heaven upon earth, and to supplant the world-kings, that the true ideal and destiny of man shall be realized. Then shall the lower creatures, too, which in part have suffered by the fall, share in man’s blessedness; and the cherubic four living creatures (Rev 4:6) of which man is the noblest part, the redeemed elect at the head of creation, shall take that rightful authority under Christ which the four beasts have usurped and abused.”

Some scholars put the words: “This is the end of the matter” in the mouth of the angel, others believe that these are Daniel’s. The Aramaic reads: “Hitherto is the end of the matter.” The word “matter” is the translation of *millah*, which can mean: “a word, command, discourse, or subject.” The NASU renders it: “At this point the revelation ended”; TLB: “That was the end of the dream.”

The vision affected Daniel both emotionally and physically as some of the following would later on. Daniel was, after all as all of humanity, a person with a sinful nature. A brush with holiness has inevitably a devastating effect upon our “flesh.” The content of what he had seen in his dream made him understand that mankind was not heading for a better future but for a much bleaker one. This must have been a terrible discovery for him. When the present condition of this world causes us to groan, what will our reaction be to a future such as Daniel saw depicted? We may consider it to be the grace of God when the future is hidden from us.

Yet the apostle Paul speaks positively about this in the Epistle to the Romans. We read: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.”<sup>162</sup> And in the midst of such horrors, Jesus exhorts us: “On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. *When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Mark 13:35-37

<sup>159</sup> Luke 12:35-38

<sup>160</sup> Luke 21:36

<sup>161</sup> I John 3:3

<sup>162</sup> Rom. 8:22-24

<sup>163</sup> Luke 21:25-28

The NIV's rendering "but I kept the matter to myself" is more prosaic than the original. The KJV: "but I kept the matter in my heart" is a literal translation. Evidently, the prophet felt himself unable to talk about it for a long time. He must finally have written it down and in this way the message has come through to us. Mary, Jesus' mother had a similar experience, although hers was a positive and glorious one. At Jesus' birth, when Mary was informed about the supernatural events that had accompanied the coming of her Son, we read: "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."<sup>164</sup> Some thoughts and emotions are too deep to be put in words.

### **Part Three: The Prophetic Plan for Israel (8:1--12:13)**

#### **I Daniel's Vision of the Ram and Male Goat 8**

##### **A. The Revelation of the Vision 8:1-12**

*1 In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me.*

*2 In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal.*

*3 I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later.*

*4 I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.*

*5 As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.*

*6 He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at him in great rage.*

*7 I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him; the goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power.*

*8 The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.*

*9 Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land.*

*10 It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.*

*11 It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low.*

*12 Because of rebellion, the host [of the saints] and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.*

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* gives the following introduction to this third section of the Book of Daniel: "This Part contains three revelations which Daniel received during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian, regarding the development of the kingdom of God. After describing in the First Part the development of the world-power and its relation to the people and kingdom of God from the days of Nebuchadnezzar, its founder, down to the time of its final destruction by the perfected kingdom of God, in this Second Part it is revealed to the prophet how the kingdom of God, in war against the power and enmity of the rulers of the world, and amid severe oppressions, is carried forward to final victory and is perfected. The first vision, ch. 8, represents what will happen to the people of God during the developments of the second and third world-kingdoms. The second revelation, ch. 9, gives to the prophet, in answer to his penitential prayer for the restoration of the ruined holy city and the desolated sanctuary, disclosures regarding the whole development of the kingdom of God, from the close of the Babylonish exile to the final accomplishment of God's plan of salvation. In the last vision, in the third year of Cyrus, ch. 10-12, he received yet further and more special revelations regarding the severe persecutions which await the people of

<sup>164</sup> Luke 2:19

God for their purification, in the nearer future under Antiochus Epiphanes, and in the time of the end under the last foe, the Antichrist.”

The explanation the archangel Gabriel gives to Daniel in the last part of this chapter only partly clarifies the meaning of this vision. The two animals that appear are identified as the Median-Persian Empire and the Macedonian Empire. The important role these two animals play is actually carried out by their horns. We find a great similarity between this chapter and the preceding one. One of the main differences, which cannot be noticed in the translations that are available to us, is that this chapter marks the changeover from Aramaic to Hebrew. This would suggest a change of time and environment, or a translation of a text that was originally written in Aramaic. One of the reasons for the use of Hebrew here may be that the content of the vision particularly pertains to the Jewish people in their relationship with the Antichrist.

A period of two years elapsed between this vision and the one recorded in ch. 7. We do not know whether Daniel ever visited Susa and saw the Ulai Canal while he served at the Babylonian court. We may assume he did, for it would be very strange if he were able to identify the place he saw in his vision if he had never seen it before with his physical eyes. We do not know either if the palace in Susa already existed in Daniel’s time as it later appears in the books of Esther and Nehemiah.

The ram with the two horns represents, according to the explanation given by the archangel Gabriel in vs. 20, the Median-Persian Empire. The second horn, which did not grow on the ram’s head together with the first, but grew up later and became larger, symbolizes the development of the empire. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: “Two books of Herodotus’ Histories describe the events summarized here. The Persian Empire suffered no serious setback until 490, when a determined little army of Athenians at Marathon defeated the forces of Darius (father of Xerxes, the Ahashuerus of Esther). A second defeat, this time in a naval battle in the Gulf of Aegina (above Athens), came to Xerxes ten years later. But the ram indeed became great with a magnificence still remembered and imitated today.”

The directions of the ram’s charging, west, north, and south, indicate the expansion of the Median-Persian Empire. The same figure of speech reoccurs in vs. 9 where the power of the horn that developed last expands to the south and the east and “the Beautiful Land.” “The Beautiful Land” is the translation of the Hebrew word *tsebiy*, which means: “prominence,” or “splendor.” The same word also means: “a gazelle.” The word “land” is not in the original. The meaning is obviously, the Promised Land in the sense of Israel, but it can also signify the spiritual fulfillment of all God’s promises. In David’s lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan, it is used for the slain heroes. We read: “Your *glory*, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen!”<sup>165</sup> And Isaiah applies it to the Messiah: “In that day the Branch of the LORD will be *beautiful*<sup>166</sup> and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.”<sup>167</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* explains about the “prominent horn” between the goat’s eyes: “A notable horn; ‘a horn of sight;’ a horn that no one could fail to remark upon. No symbol could express in a more graphic way the rapidity of the conquests of Alexander the Great than this of the goat that flew over the ground. One can parallel with this the four wings of the leopard in ch. 7.” According to a fable that existed at that time, Alexander the Great was the son of Jupiter Ammon, who was thought to be a horned ram. Some scholars have wondered why he is represented in this vision by a goat rather than a ram.

*The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states about the goat: “This was Alexander the Great; and a goat was a very proper symbol of the Grecian or Macedonian people ... Two hundred years before the time of Daniel, they were called *Ægeadae*, the goats’ people; the origin of which name is said to be as follows: Caranus, their first king, going with a multitude of Greeks to seek a new habitation in Macedonia, was advised by an oracle to take the goats for his guides; and afterward, seeing a herd of goats flying from a violent storm, he followed them to Edessa, and there fixed the seat of his empire, and made the goats his ensigns or standards; and called the place *Æge* or *Ægea*, the goats’ town; and the people *Ægeadae*, the goats’ people; names which are derived from *aix*, *aigos*, a goat. The city *Æge* or *Ægea*, was the usual burying-place of the Macedonian kings; and, in reference to this origin, Alexander called his son by Roxana, Alexander *Ægus*, Alexander the goat. All this shows the very great propriety of the symbol here used.”

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<sup>165</sup> II Sam. 1:19

<sup>166</sup> In both cases the italics are mine

<sup>167</sup> Isa. 4:2

Daniel sees the ram flying toward the ram. The words “without touching the ground” are omitted in some of the manuscripts. The picture stands for the amazing speed of Alexander’s conquest, which foreshadowed the “blitz” of Adolph Hitler’s army during the Second World War.

One interesting feature in this vision, as *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes, is the fact that the two empires, which in the previous chapter were represented under the figure of a bear and a leopard, are depicted here as rather mild domestic animals. *The Commentary* suggests that this reflects their rather tolerant attitude toward Israel. They were only vicious in their dealing with one another.

The breaking off of the large horn “at the height of his power” and the growing up of four horns in its place refers to the untimely death of Alexander the Great. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: “Alexander died in the thirty-third year of his age, of fever and alcohol, at Babylon. In the subsequent twenty years, his winnings were divided into four parts among four of his military successors. Two of the resultant divisions -Egypt under the Ptolemies (the last of whom was the famous Cleopatra) and Syria under the Seleucids, the historic kings of the South and the North, respectively-are of importance as neighbors of the Jews. They figure prominently in chapter 11.”

The little horn that evolved from the others is generally understood to represent Antiochus IV who called himself “Epiphanes,” meaning “magnificent.” His enemies nicknamed him “Epimanes” – “madman.” The author of the First Book of Maccabees mentions him: “And there came out of them a wicked root, Antiochus, surnamed Epiphanes, son of Antiochus the king, who had been a hostage at Rome, and he reigned in the hundred and thirty and seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.”<sup>168</sup> *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “Antiochus had an extraordinary love of art, which expressed itself in grand temples. He wished to substitute Zeus Olympius for Yahweh at Jerusalem. Thus, first, pagan civilization from below and revealed religion from above came into collision. Identifying himself with Jupiter, his aim was to make his own worship universal.” The same *Commentary* continues: “None of the previous world-rulers, Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:31-34), Darius (Dan 6:27-28), Cyrus (Ezra 1:2-4), Artaxerxes Longimanus (Ezra 7:12), had systematically opposed the Jews’ religious worship. Nebuchadnezzar’s and Darius’ decrees had not been aimed against the three Jewish youths and Daniel respectively, but had incidentally involved them in penalties for their religion. In the end both monarchs did honor to the God of Israel; as did their successors Cyrus and Artaxerxes. Hence, the need of prophecy to prepare them for Antiochus. The struggle of the Maccabees was a fruit of Daniel’s prophecy (1 Macc. 2:59-61. Thus Mattathias, the father, stimulated his sons to religious steadfastness, saying, ‘Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, by believing, were saved out of the flame. Daniel for his innocence was delivered from the mouth of lions. And thus consider ye throughout all ages, that none that put their trust in Him shall be overcome’).”

Although Antiochus Epiphanes instituted a reign of terror in Israel, forbidding circumcision and defiling the temple by sacrificing swine on the altar, he does not completely measure up to the little horn that in Daniel’s prophecy reached the host of the heavens and throws down to the earth “some of the starry host” and tramples on them. This, obviously, points to a cosmic event that involves more than any acts by humans could account for.

Not all the texts from which we get our translations speak of “a little horn.” The Hebrew uses *mitstse` iyrah*, which is derived from *mits` ar*, meaning “little one,” or “little.” The NIV speaks of “another horn.” *The Pulpit Commentary*, looking at some Greek translations, states: “The Greek versions here differ considerably from the Massoretic text. The LXX. is as follows: ‘And out of one there sprang a strong horn, and it prevailed and smote toward the south, toward the south-west ... and toward the east, and toward the north.’ Theodotion renders, ‘>From one of them went forth a strong horn, and was magnified exceedingly to the south and to the power.’ ”

Vs. 10 depicts the growth of Antiochus’ horn as reaching to the host of the heavens and throwing some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. The Septuagint reads instead: “And it was exalted to the stars of heaven, and it was shattered to the earth by the stars, and by them trampled down.” The latter actually seems to fit better in the overall picture of the spiritual battle that is being fought in the heavenly places. As forerunner and type of the Antichrist, Antiochus must have imagined himself to be endowed with spiritual power and thus he entered into a pact with the powers of darkness.

In other prophetic sections of Scripture we see how Isaiah sings a “taunt against the king of Babylon” in which he identifies this king with Satan himself to the point that it is difficult to separate in the

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<sup>168</sup> I Macc. 1:10

text what applies to a human and what relates to Lucifer.<sup>169</sup> God prompted Ezekiel to compose a lament on the King of Tyre in which this man becomes the embodiment of Lucifer and acts out the fall of God's foremost archangel and his expulsion from Paradise.<sup>170</sup>

The order to cease the daily sacrifices in the temple will be accompanied by the erection of a horrible idol statue. In two places, Daniel calls this elsewhere: "an abomination that causes desolation."<sup>171</sup> Jesus refers to this in His prophecy about the Great Tribulation: "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel-let the reader understand-then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."<sup>172</sup> Jesus' reference proves that what Antiochus Epiphanes did was not the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy. Otherwise, Jesus could not have quoted Daniel's words in this manner and applied them to a future event.

Verses 12 and 13 throw an interesting light on the relationship between what occurs in the heavenly places and the events that take place on earth. In vs. 10 we see how the Antichrist "threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them."

*The Pulpit Commentary* states that "The reading of the LXX is very different after the first clause, 'And it was exalted to the stars of heaven, and it was shattered to the earth by the stars, and by them trampled down.' " The *Commentary* proceeds to explain that most commentators interpret "the starry host" to be Israel. It seems, however, more logical to us to lean to a more esoteric meaning of the words.

In the verses that are before us now, we see the effect of this fall upon the daily sacrifice and the fellowship with God.

The sacrifices in the temple foreshadowed the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, which provided atonement for the sins of the world. It is on the basis of this ultimate sacrifice that hearts are cleansed and fellowship with God is entered upon. The cessation of these sacrifices, whether this refers to a physical event or a spiritual one, will interrupt communion of man with God. In our present dispensation, no animals are killed for the atonement of man's sin, as was customary in the Old Testament. But this is not the cessation Daniel's prophecy refers to. Atonement for sin by Jesus' sacrifice of Himself has become more efficient and absolute than it ever was in a previous dispensation. Whether the adherents of Judaism will eventually return to the Old Testament rituals of bloody sacrifices, I do not know. Even if they do, it will not mean a return to a previous dispensation that has been superseded by the present one. I, therefore, believe that the cessation of the daily sacrifice and the erection of an abomination will be primarily a spiritual event instead of a physical one. Fellowship with God will be made impossible because the object of man's worship will be forcefully replaced by something else, a non-God.

As the Antichrist has had and will have numerous precursors before his ultimate appearance, so will the principle of annulment of atonement and the direction of worship be visible in all kinds of shapes and forms before this ultimate event arrives. As a matter of fact, we see its shadows all over the place at present.

The character of the rule of the Antichrist over this world is expressed clearly in the statement: "truth was thrown to the ground." The Hebrew word is '*emet*, which, in most cases means "truth." It sometimes carries the meaning of "right" or "faithful." The word "amen" is derived from it. It is used to describe one of the most fundamental attributes of God. When Moses asked to see the glory of God, we read: "And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and *truth*.'" <sup>173</sup> David states in one of his psalms: "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and *truth*."<sup>174</sup> The throwing down to the ground of truth means the abolition of the most vital point of reference of all human action. When a society is no longer founded on the principle of truth, it cannot survive. All judicial systems operate on this foundation. Testimonies in court are given "under oath," that is by invoking the Name of God.

<sup>169</sup> See Isa. 14:4-20

<sup>170</sup> See Ezek. 28:11-29

<sup>171</sup> See ch. 9:27; 12:11

<sup>172</sup> Matt. 24:15,16

<sup>173</sup> Ex. 34:6 (NKJV)

<sup>174</sup> Ps. 25:10 (NKJV)

What then is truth? Many volumes of philosophy could be written in answer to this question. During Jesus' trial, our Lord said to the Roman governor Pilate: " 'For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.' " To which Pilate answered: "What is truth?"<sup>175</sup> Thus the Roman governor indicated that Roman justice was not based on truth.

The opposite of truth is a lie. Truth is everything that relates to the character of God. Inasmuch as man is created in the image of God, truth is part of that image. In defining truth, we also define sin as its opposite. The reign of the Antichrist will be marked by having a lie at its foundation. The apostle John speaks about this in his First Epistle, when he says: "[This is] the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."<sup>176</sup> Hitler's Nazi Germany provides a clear illustration of what it means to throw truth to the ground. The minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebels, was one of the Antichrist's most vocal prophets.

#### B. The Length of the Vision

8:13-14

***13 Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?"***

***14 He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."***

These verses are, obviously, still part of Daniel's vision. He overhears a conversation between two angels who discuss the meaning of what he had just seen. The exchange is made for Daniel's benefit, because the answer to the question how long the rebellion will last is actually given directly to the prophet. Some manuscripts, however, have "unto him," instead of "unto me."

The angelic discussion is interesting to us, because it indicates that the fate of man is a topic of interest among the inhabitants of heaven. This seems to be generally true. We read elsewhere that angels rejoice at the salvation of a human being. Jesus states: "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." And: "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."<sup>177</sup> Peter, on the other hand, explains that there are matters that pertain to our salvation that can only be understood by human beings. We read: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."<sup>178</sup>

The above does not bring us any closer to the interpretation of Daniel's vision, particularly to the duration of "the rebellion that causes desolation." Scholars have offered varied, and often contradictory, explanations of this text. Some interpret the 2300 evenings and mornings to represent 1150 days; others believe them to stand for so many years. *Adam Clarke*, who wrote his *Commentary* in 1825, begins his calculation in 334 BC, the year Alexander the Great invaded Asia, and arrives at a fulfillment date of 1966 AD! The learned scholar illustrates to us how futile such calculations can be.

The time mentioned by the angel during which the sanctity of the temple is violated is "2,300 evenings and mornings." According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, "the Hebrew phrase for this clause is an unnatural one — it might be rendered, 'And holiness ... shall be justified.' " Opinions differ, to put it mildly, about the length of time intended here. Some scholars take 2,300 evenings and mornings to mean 1150 days.

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<sup>175</sup> John 18:37,38

<sup>176</sup> I John 4:3

<sup>177</sup> Luke 15: 7,10

<sup>178</sup> I Peter 1:10-12

Others believe that it stands for 2,300 days based on the reckoning in the Genesis account of creation. We read there: "And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day."<sup>179</sup>

One of the problems in the study of the Book of Daniel is that there are several mentions of time. In the previous chapter, we read: "He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time."<sup>180</sup> In the last chapter, there is a mention of 1290 days. We read there: ">From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days."<sup>181</sup> If "a time, times and half a time" pertains to 3½ years and the year is figured on 360 days, we come to a total of 1260 days. *Barnes' Notes* states: "The time mentioned by Josephus is three years exactly from the time when 'their Divine worship was fallen off, and was reduced to a profane and common use.' " The same *Commentary* continues: "On the assumption ... that those passages refer to Antiochus, and that the accounts in Josephus above referred to are correct-though he mentions different times, and though different periods are referred to by Daniel, the variety may be accounted for by the supposition that separate epochs are referred to at the starting point in the calculation... The truth was, there were several decisive acts in the history of Antiochus that led to the ultimate desolation of Jerusalem, and at one time a writer may have contemplated one, and at another time another." In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John seems to be more consistent in mentioning a period of 42 months, 1260, and "a time, times, and half a time."<sup>182</sup>

Another problem is that, according to the explanation given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel, the fulfillment of this prophecy "concerns the time of the end." Trying to reconcile the figure on the basis of events pertaining to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes seems, therefore, to be pointless. The intent of the mention of a time of limited duration rather appears to be to emphasize the fact that the desolation will be relatively short. This reminds us of Jesus' words: "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."<sup>183</sup>

#### C. The Interpretation of the Vision 8:15-27

**15** *While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man.*

**16** *And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision."*

**17** *As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end."*

**18** *While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet.*

**19** *He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end."*

**20** *The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia.*

**21** *The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king.*

**22** *The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power.*

**23** *"In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise.*

**24** *He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people.*

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<sup>179</sup> Gen. 1:5

<sup>180</sup> ch. 7:25

<sup>181</sup> ch. 12:11,12

<sup>182</sup> See Rev. 11:2,3;12:14

<sup>183</sup> Matt. 24:22

**25 He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.**

**26 "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."**

**27 I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.**

The first thing that strikes us in this section is Daniel's reaction to the approach of the angel Gabriel: he faints. Regarding the angel Gabriel, there is a slight play-on-words in the Hebrew that is lost in our translations. The Hebrew word rendered "man" is *geber* and the name Gabriel is a combination of the Hebrew *geber* and *el* – "man of God." Any intercourse of a mortal human being with a supernatural one is shocking for the physical frame. Our fallen condition makes us basically unfit for such an encounter. That is the reason that, in most cases, the first words from an angel's lips are usually: "Do not fear!" The virgin Mary had the mildest reaction of any person in Scripture, although we read that she also "was greatly troubled."<sup>184</sup>

Gabriel explains that the vision pertains to "the time of wrath" and "the appointed time of the end." The KJV reads this: "the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be." The Hebrew word rendered "wrath," or "indignation" is *za'am*, which literally means "to foam at the mouth," or "to be furious." In most instances it refers to the wrath of God, but that is not necessarily the case in this instance. It could refer to the state of mind that inspired Antiochus Epiphanes to commit his dastardly acts and to the spirit of the Antichrist.

The question is whether "the time of wrath" and "the time of the end" are the same periods. We often find a telescopic view of events in history, which give an optical illusion as if events that are separated by centuries appear as a single occurrence. It seems most likely that Gabriel issues a warning about the upcoming persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes in the immediate future and that at the same time he makes reference to the ultimate Great Tribulation instigated by the Antichrist in the last chapter of world history. The references to the empires of Media-Persia and Greece are clear enough. The description of "a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue," who will "take his stand against the Prince of princes," in verses 23-25, may refer to both Antiochus Epiphanes and his antitype, the Antichrist.

The immediate purpose of the explanation was to arm the people of Israel that, after their return to the Promised Land, there would be a time of intense persecution. The warning could serve as an encouragement for them to persevere. As it turned out, the people who eventually returned would buckle even before the fires of persecution became too hot. In the days of Haggai and Zechariah, those who had set to the task of rebuilding the temple, cowered and ceased their labor at the faintest threat of violence.

This warning reminds us of Peter's words: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."<sup>185</sup>

Scholars have been baffled by the words of vs. 24: "He will become very strong, but not by his own power." Most of them limit their application to the person of Antiochus Epiphanes and then take various views about the way he ascended the throne. Some see in the wording an explanation of the fact that Antiochus became king with the help of others; others believe that the "power" is the power of God who used the wicked king for His own purposes. None, however, explore the possibility that demonic power may be meant here; yet this seems to be the most logical explanation. Only a few centuries separated Daniel from "the fullness of time" when God would send His Son into the world. Satan, who knew the prophecies, must have realized the importance of corrupting the Jewish religion before that moment arrived. Antiochus Epiphanes was his man. In the same way, the Antichrist will receive his power directly from Satan. We read in Revelation: "Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast."<sup>186</sup>

The appearance of the Antichrist and his forerunner may be a manifestation of the powers of darkness, but their destruction will be through another power, the power of God. We read: "Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power." Gabriel characterizes the reign of both as a reign of absolute terror.

<sup>184</sup> Luke 1:29

<sup>185</sup> I Peter 4:12

<sup>186</sup> Rev. 13:4

“He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “Certainly Epiphanes was to the Jews a portent of destruction; there had not been his like — not Nebuchadnezzar, who burned the temple, was to be compared to him who endeavored to blot out the worship of Jehovah altogether; not any other of the Greek monarchs. He was unique in his enmity against God and his worship.” John, in Revelation, makes the same statement about the Antichrist: “He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.”<sup>187</sup>

Regarding Gabriel’s closing remarks about the sealing up of the vision, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “In Rev 13:10 it is said, ‘Seal not the vision, for the time is at hand.’ What in Daniel’s time was hidden, was more fully explained in Revelation, and as the time draws nearer it will be clearer still.” Although it is true that the vision would be partially fulfilled during the period of Antiochus’ reign of terror, the ultimate fulfillment will be at the end of times, when the Antichrist will appear.

The vision left Daniel completely exhausted and sick. He spent a number of days in bed, trying to get his strength back. His advanced age at this time will not have helped him for a speedy recovery. He needed healing for both his body and his spirit. Both had been severely impacted by his entering into the realities of heaven. As soon as his strength returned sufficiently, he set himself again to the task of serving the king of Babylon in the position in which God had placed him. Daniel had seen the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man. He had been ushered into their presence. No one on earth had been closer to heaven than this man Daniel. Yet, when he returned to earth, he went back to his daily earthly duties. His heavenly experiences did not make him unfit for earth. As a matter of fact, the perspective he had gained with the experience made him the best and most faithful of the king’s subjects on earth. Our visions of heaven ought to have the effect on us that, whatever we do on earth, we do as unto the Lord. That makes us better citizens.

II.	Daniel’s Vision of the Seventy Weeks	9
A.	The Understanding of Daniel	9:1-2

***1 In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom-***

***2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.***

This chapter, which involves the appearance of the Messiah, stands between two chapters that concern the revelation of the Antichrist. Daniel’s immediate concern is the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning the end of the Jewish captivity in Babylon. But the prophecy goes well beyond that to the time of the completion of God’s greatest promise of redemption that runs through the whole Bible. This makes this chapter, with its setting of time-frames, to one of the most unique ones in the Scriptures.

The first year of the reign of Darius is 538 BC, which is approximately the 69<sup>th</sup> year of Daniel’s own captivity. The mention of Darius as ruler over Babylon has caused much controversy among scholars. Many hold the view, which is probably the correct one, that Cyrus appointed Darius to rule over the Babylonian part of the Medo-Persian Empire until the death of the latter, after which Cyrus himself assumed the reign and issued the edict for the return of the Jews to their homeland.

There are two instances in Jeremiah’s prophecy that mention a period of seventy years for the duration of the captivity. In chapter 25, we read: “ ‘This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will make it desolate forever.’ ”<sup>188</sup> Daniel may have had access to this prophecy, but that is not certain. He obviously knew about the letter Jeremiah had sent to the captives, and probably possessed a copy of it. In it Jeremiah corrects the view of some false prophets who predicted the immediate return of the captives. He told them to settle for an imprisonment that would cover several generations. He advised to build houses, get married and have children and grandchildren, and to work for the prosperity of their abductors.<sup>189</sup> He

<sup>187</sup> Rev. 13:7

<sup>188</sup> Jer. 25:11,12

<sup>189</sup> Jer. 29:4-7

told them: "This is what the LORD says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.'"<sup>190</sup> It is on that part of the letter that Daniel focuses his attention in this chapter.

B. The Intercession of Daniel

9:3-19

**3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.**

**4 I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands,**

**5 we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.**

**6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.**

**7 "Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame-the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.**

**8 O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.**

**9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;**

**10 we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.**

**11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.**

**"Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.**

**12 You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.**

**13 Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.**

**14 The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.**

**15 "Now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong.**

**16 O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.**

**17 "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.**

**18 Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.**

**19 O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."**

Daniel's understanding of the prophetic Word brings him to his knees. Ever since the birth of the church, Christians have studied Biblical prophecy. For some this has grown into a hobby. I have seen ads in magazines advertising books or conferences on prophecy, appealing specifically to "prophecy lovers." There are preachers who specialize in the topic. It seems to appeal to people's curiosity as it suggests the possibility of knowing the future and calculating dates at which specific events will come to pass. There is a way in which prophecy can appeal to our carnal nature.

That was not the attitude Daniel demonstrated toward prophecy. Being a prophet himself, he had experienced in his body the effects of receiving divine revelations. Whenever God had drawn aside the veil to allow him to look in the future, it had overwhelmed him and made him physically ill. Daniel, therefore,

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<sup>190</sup> Jer. 29:10

approached prophecy with great caution. He understood something of the principle of prophecy, of the way it operates, and of the responsibility of the person who is confronted with it.

Daniel comprehended that God wants us, as human beings, to actively participate in the fulfillment of prophecy. We can say that some prophecy will never be fulfilled unless we cooperate. The Kingdom of Heaven will not come, unless we persistently pray: “Your kingdom come!”<sup>191</sup> If we really want our Lord Jesus Christ to come back to earth, we must pray: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”<sup>192</sup> And the apostle John advises: “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”<sup>193</sup>

Daniel knew that the reason for the Babylonian captivity had been the sin of the people of Israel; they had defiled the Promised Land. He was aware of God’s warning, given through Moses: “If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.”<sup>194</sup> If God’s people were to return to their land, the sin that had caused their eviction must be dealt with. This is the reason Daniel sought God in prayer. This attitude made Daniel “highly esteemed,” or “greatly beloved” in God’s eyes.

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* makes the following excellent observations about Daniel’s prayer: “In the appreciation of a poem, play, or painting, the greatest value is to be received by simply taking the creation as a whole. Just so Daniel’s prayer should be studied as a whole. The prayer was a providential means of accomplishing what was already determined.

The names of Deity employed are significant. Daniel reminds God that both Jerusalem (v. 18)<sup>195</sup> and the Jews (v. 19) are called by thy name. He addresses the Lord as Lord God (*ʿadonay ʿelohim*), (v. 3) and LORD God (Yahweh *ʿelohim*, v. 4). ... Daniel’s conception of God shows balance between the great and dreadful God (v. 4...) and a God of mercies and forgiveness (v. 9...).

The problems of interpretation here are not difficult. Note what light this chapter casts on prayer ... Observe: (1) Daniel’s prayer was a persistent, undespairing interest (6:1-10; cf. 9:1-3). In sixty-eight years of waiting, the prophet had not lost hope. (2) He had determination (v. 3...). (3) He was importunate (v. 3...). (4) He showed humility. Note how he associated himself with his people in their sins... (5) He made confession (esp. vs. 4,5...). (6) He displayed submission (v. 14) and engaged in (7) petition and (8) intercession. Like Moses, ... Daniel as intercessor carried on argument with the Almighty, on several grounds: (1) God’s people were a reproach among the heathen (v. 16). (2) God was known to be merciful (v. 18). (3) God’s reputation was at stake (v. 19).”

Daniel’s prayer had a Biblical basis. He knew that what had happened to Israel was the fulfillment of a warning God had given them through Moses. He also knew God’s promise. We read in Leviticus that God had said: “You will perish among the nations; the land of your enemies will devour you. Those of you who are left will waste away in the lands of their enemies because of their sins; also because of their fathers’ sins they will waste away. But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers--their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies--then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.”<sup>196</sup>

We can easily distinguish two parts in this prayer: confession of sin – verses 4-14, and a plea for mercy – verses 15-19. This prayer was not for any personal favors Daniel sought from God. When he prayed for the fulfillment of God’s promise to end the captivity after seventy years, he did not envision the possibility to return himself to the Promised Land. Daniel prayed for his nation and his people as a member of the nation and the people. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* pertinently observes: “When we seek to God for national mercies we ought to humble ourselves before him for national sins.”

<sup>191</sup> Matt. 6:10

<sup>192</sup> Rev. 22:20

<sup>193</sup> I John 3:3

<sup>194</sup> Lev. 18:28

<sup>195</sup> I made some editorial changes for consistency sake

<sup>196</sup> Lev. 26:38-42

Daniel's reference to God's covenant has a profound significance. The Hebrew word for covenant is *beriyth*. It literally means: "to cut into pieces," and it refers to the way a compact was made by passing between pieces of the flesh of a killed animal. This is illustrated in the way God made His covenant with Abraham. We read: "So the LORD said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.' Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram..."<sup>197</sup> The killing of the animal signified that the covenant was a covenant of blood. Both parties indicated that they identified themselves with the slain animal to the point that they would agree to being cut into pieces if they broke the agreement. In God's covenant with Abraham, only God passed between the pieces. The ultimate meaning of this clause was beyond the horizon of Daniel's field of vision. This man of God could not have foreseen how seriously God took His obligation in the deal. He did not know that God would ultimately identify Himself with the slain and cut-up animal in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Nor could he know that "the God of peace [would], through the blood of the eternal covenant [bring] back from the dead our Lord Jesus,"<sup>198</sup> of which Israel's return from captivity would be a shadow. It is not inadvertent that this chapter finishes with a covert reference to the death of the Messiah; but this also Daniel cannot have understood. For us who do understand, the opening words of Daniel's prayer: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love," acquire a depth of meaning that is beyond words.

It is God's love and faithfulness, the way He took upon Himself the consequences of the broken covenant in the humility and brokenness of Jesus Christ, that makes Him such a great and awesome God.

Daniel uses four different Hebrew words to identify Israel's sins: *chata'*, which means: "to miss," referring to the act of sinning. We find the same word in the verse: "Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss."<sup>199</sup> The word *avah*, translated "done wrong," means: "to make crooked." It refers to the sinful nature of the human soul. It carries the meaning of perversion, as in: "I sinned, and perverted what was right."<sup>200</sup> *Rasha'* implies a violation of the law which leads to condemnation. And *marad* stands for "rebellion." The word is used about Zedekiah: "He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name."<sup>201</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: "There is a climax here from simple sin to rebellion." The author of the *Commentary* suggests that the heaping up of terms so nearly synonymous seems to be more liturgical than literary, and that these words may have been used in the synagogue service in Babylon. There is, however, no proof that Daniel would have used any language of prayer that would not be his own. Modern critics of the Book of Daniel insist that Daniel's prayer is modeled upon the prayers of Nehemiah and Ezra<sup>202</sup>; thus insinuating that the date given to this book is spurious. This insinuation could, however, be easily reversed by suggesting that the prayers of Nehemiah and Ezra borrow words from Daniel's original confession of sin. The thought that the person and writings of Daniel would have left an indelible mark, especially upon those who had the vision to return from captivity to the land of their fathers, seems to be the more logical one.

The development from sin as merely missing the mark to open rebellion manifested itself particularly in the attitude of Israel towards their prophets. The Books of I and II Kings are written from the point of view of the kings' attitude toward God's prophets. The captivity was ultimately the fruit of rebellion against God's revelation of Himself exemplified in Israel's consistent refusal to pay attention to the prophetic word. Even in the last days of Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah warned the king of Judah. We

<sup>197</sup> See Gen. 15:9,10, 17,18

<sup>198</sup> See Heb. 13:20

<sup>199</sup> Judg. 20:16

<sup>200</sup> Job 33:27

<sup>201</sup> II Chron. 36:13

<sup>202</sup> See Neh. 9; Ezra 9

read: "Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, 'This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live. But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from their hands.' "203 Thus Jerusalem gained the reputation of the city that killed its prophets. In the words of Jesus: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you..."204

From Daniel's confession we learn that the rebellion against God had not been limited to only one or two strata of Israel; from the kings to the common people, everyone had stubbornly turned away from God in willful opposition.

Daniel had never personally committed any of the sins that led to the captivity of the nation of which he was a part, yet he identified himself with the sins of his people. In matters of reconciliation, this is the attitude one should take. In the movement toward racial reconciliation in the United States some of the Caucasian members of the nation have made confessions of the sin of social injustice committed toward Afro-Americans in the matter of slavery. As a Dutchman, I realize that I belong to a nation that is guilty in a part of slavery in that Dutch sea captains were among those who transported slaves across the ocean. Actually, in the overall picture of human injustice, the African slave traders, who caught and sold their own people, should be figured in also. The latter, however, is seldom done.

In confessing the sins of the nation as his personal sins, Daniel contrasts God's righteousness to man's unrighteousness. The Hebrew word he uses is *tsedaqah*, which refers not merely to a condition or an attribute but to acts of righteousness. The psalmist brings this out in the verse: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor."205 In the context of the Bible as a whole, righteousness is gradually equated with the giving of alms. This is clearest in Jesus' use of the word: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."206 Compared to God's acts of righteousness, man's acts amount to criminal neglect or worse. The words "covered with shame" are the rendering of the Hebrew *bosheth paniym*, which literally means: "shame faced."

The mention of shame recurs in Daniel's prayer. Most human beings have the awareness of not being what they are supposed or meant to be. Our efforts for self-realization and self-fulfillment are proof of this. Almost everybody has a vague sense of inadequacy. Shame comes in when we realize that our inability to measure up to God's glory is in fact rebellion. The essence of sin, in the definition the apostle Paul gives, is to "fall short of the glory of God."207 We all will be more than ashamed when we compare our own lives with the glory of God and we will realize how much we have deviated from the image of God in which we were created. We are no longer the bearer of God's image; we have become His caricatures.

In vs. 7, Daniel speaks not only in behalf of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, but also of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The people of the Northern Kingdom had been led into captivity to Assyria some two hundred years before. Daniel stands here in the gap of all of Jacob's descendants. Yet, Jerusalem and its inhabitants seem to occupy the center of Daniel's thought, not only because it was the capital, but because it was the place of God's revelation on earth.

Being himself a member of the royal family, Daniel speaks particularly of the sins of the kings and princes, of those who ought to have led the people in the paths of righteousness.

Vs. 9 reads in the NIV: "The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, *even though* we have rebelled against him." The RSV, however, reads: "To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness; *because* we have rebelled against him." The Hebrew word that accounts for this difference in translation is *kiy*, which can be rendered "forasmuch," but also "yet," or "yea." The question is not, does God forgive us in spite of our sins, or because we are sinners. If we had not sinned, forgiveness would not even be in order. The correct question is, should God punish us or should He forgive. God's righteousness demands punishment, but

<sup>203</sup> Jer. 38:17,18

<sup>204</sup> Matt. 23:37

<sup>205</sup> Ps. 112:9

<sup>206</sup> Matt. 6:1

<sup>207</sup> See Rom. 3:23

God's love grants forgiveness. C. S. Lewis once stated that the one word that makes the difference between Christianity and all the other religions of the world is "grace." That should answer the question. We merit punishment but we receive pardon. If Daniel had not known this, he would not even have begun to pray.

Daniel recognized that Israel's captivity and destruction was the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy, given in the Book of Deuteronomy.<sup>208</sup> The ruin of Israel as a nation can be traced back to their neglect of the Word of God's revelation. Before entering the Promised Land, the people were told to divide over the two mountains of Gerizim and Ebal and invoke upon themselves twelve curses in case they would break their covenant with God.<sup>209</sup>

All corruption can be traced back to the neglect of God's written Word. As Solomon states in the Book of Proverbs: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law."<sup>210</sup> When the Bible no longer permeates a society, the standards of the Bible fade into oblivion. The kings of Israel, particularly, had set the example in this negligence. God had told Moses in regard to the future kings of Israel: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel."<sup>211</sup> There is no record of any of Israel's kings who ever obeyed this command. The only king who showed any interest in the Book of the Law was King Josiah during whose reign the book was rediscovered while the temple was repaired.<sup>212</sup> The very fact that a copy of the Book of the Law had to be rediscovered proves how much the written Word had been ignored.

Evidently, Daniel was an exception among his people. He showed that he was very familiar with the requirements of the law. He must have had access to some of the Old Testament documents and he may have possessed copies of some of the books.

In the last five verses of his prayer, Daniel appeals to God's power, His righteousness, His glory, and His compassion. In referring to the exodus from Egypt, Daniel may have had in mind another prophecy God had given to Jeremiah: " 'So then, the days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when people will no longer say, ' 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' ' but they will say, ' 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' ' Then they will live in their own land.' "<sup>213</sup> There is no reason to believe that Daniel could not have been familiar with this prophecy.

The reference to Israel's birth as a nation, which is what the exodus was, contains an allusion to God's covenant with Abraham. It provided Daniel with a strong basis for his argument in prayer. The difference between the exodus from Egypt and the return from Babylonian captivity is in the fact that the captivity had been a punishment for Israel's sin. This could not be said about their sojourn in Egypt. But then, Daniel's prayer was a prayer of confession.

An appeal to God's righteousness could not be made without an understanding of the principles of atonement. Righteousness without atonement equals punishment and ruin. Daniel must have understood that the reason for Israel's captivity had not been the fact that they had sinned, but that they had neglected the atonement. The profound meaning of the covenant, as we saw above, was that an animal died and was cut up in pieces. Identification with the victim meant not only that both parties accepted the consequences of breaking of the terms of the covenant, but also an acceptance of the principle of substitution. Another creature took the place in punishment for the offender. In their rebellion, Israel had withdrawn themselves

<sup>208</sup> See Deut. 28:15-68

<sup>209</sup> See Deut. 27:11-26

<sup>210</sup> Prov. 29:18

<sup>211</sup> Deut. 17:18-20

<sup>212</sup> See Deut. 34:11-32

<sup>213</sup> Jer. 23:7,8

from under this protecting umbrella and thus they had become the direct target of God's wrath. In his prayer, Daniel brings himself and his people back under the protection that God's covenant provides.

As in the exodus, so with the return to the Promised Land, it would be for God's sake, not for the sake of the people. The Psalmist recorded this also when he wrote: "When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known. He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert. He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived. Then they believed his promises and sang his praise."<sup>214</sup>

The final appeal is to God's compassion. The Hebrew word rendered "mercy" is *racham*, which literally means: "the womb." It refers to the love of a mother for her unborn baby. The same word is used in the story of the two prostitutes who came to King Solomon with their two babies, one dead and one alive. When Solomon ordered the live baby to be cut in two, we read: "The woman whose son was alive was filled with *compassion* for her son and said to the king, 'Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!'"<sup>215</sup> Looking down upon the ruins of Jerusalem and upon the suffering of the people, God was moved with compassion. Daniel may have thought of God's words to Moses: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians."<sup>216</sup> It is the same feeling Jesus demonstrated as a reaction to the human suffering He saw. We read: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."<sup>217</sup> And Luke records: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes.'"<sup>218</sup> Daniel must have had a profound insight into the character of God to be able to make such an appeal. He understood that God was deeply involved in the suffering of His people.

The prayer ends with the emotional outburst: "O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name." Daniel's cry was not an effort to move God to compassion; it was proof of the fact that God had moved Daniel's heart with His compassion. That is what intercessory prayer is all about. Daniel's prayer did not move God to end the captivity; God moved Daniel to pray, so He could end the captivity. As stated before, without this prayer it could not have been ended.

#### C. The Intervention of Gabriel

9:20-23

**20 While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill-**

**21 while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice.**

**22 He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.**

23 As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision:

Daniel was still praying when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. The text states that Daniel directed his prayer to God's "holy hill." This may mean that his face pointed in the direction of Jerusalem. We saw before that it was his habit to pray in front of a window that opened toward Jerusalem.<sup>219</sup> Earlier in this

<sup>214</sup> Ps. 106:7-12

<sup>215</sup> I Kings 3:26

<sup>216</sup> Ex. 3:7,8

<sup>217</sup> Matt. 9:36

<sup>218</sup> Luke 19:41,42

<sup>219</sup> See ch. 6:10

chapter, he referred to Jerusalem as “your city, your holy hill.” It can also mean that Daniel understood that the actual Mount Zion was not on earth but in heaven.

Gabriel appeared around the ninth hour, which is three o’clock in the afternoon, which was the time of the evening sacrifice. There had, of course, been no sacrifice since the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. But Daniel had, obviously, never abandoned the schedule. This was, incidentally, the hour Jesus died on the cross.<sup>220</sup> Daniel recognized Gabriel as the one who had appeared to him in the vision he recorded in the previous chapter. In the New Testament, Gabriel was in charge of bringing the announcements of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and of Jesus to Mary.<sup>221</sup>

Gabriel came “in swift flight,” which is the way most versions render it. The NAS and NASU read: “in *my* extreme weariness,” applying it to Daniel. The Hebrew reads: “*ya`aph ye`aph*, which is basically a repetition of the same word, and could be translated: “very tired.” It also means: “to cause to fly,” or simply: “to fly.” Isaiah uses the word in the verse: “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall.”<sup>222</sup> The point to be made is, obviously, that of great speed. We could probably read that Gabriel came “out of breath.”

Gabriel’s speed and the immediate answer to prayer stands in sharp contrast to the long delay in the next chapter. There, the answer was not given until three weeks of fasting had elapsed. We could ask here why there was such a hurry in this case. Daniel had probably been in prayer no longer than nine hours. One reason may be the fact that Daniel had humbled himself so deeply before God in confessing the sins of his people as his own sins. We can imagine Daniel in sackcloth and ashes crying out to God with his face in the dust. He must have seen himself, in David’s words, “a worm and not a man.”<sup>223</sup> Yet, God considers him “highly esteemed.” The Hebrew word is *chamad*, which means: “to delight in,” or “greatly beloved.” The girl in The Song of Solomon uses the word about her lover: “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is *sweet* to my taste.”<sup>224</sup> God was, so to speak, in a hurry to lift Daniel up from the ground and tell him how much He loved him. Daniel experienced the truth of James’ words: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”<sup>225</sup> The apostle John came to understand God’s affection toward him to the point where he called himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”<sup>226</sup>

Gabriel’s task was also to give Daniel insight into the meaning of the vision he was being given. The word used here is *sakal*, which is the word used consistently in The Book of Proverbs for “wise.” It is the insight that comes from the fear of the Lord. While, in connection with other visions, Daniel seems to have been left in the dark as concerns to meaning, here God gives him understanding.

#### D. The Revelation of the Seventy Weeks 9:24-27

**24 "Seventy `sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.**

**25 "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven `sevens,' and sixty-two `sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.**

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<sup>220</sup> See Matt. 27:46,50; Mark 15:34,37

<sup>221</sup> See Luke 1:19,26

<sup>222</sup> Isa. 40:30

<sup>223</sup> Ps. 22:6

<sup>224</sup> Song 2:3

<sup>225</sup> James 4:10

<sup>226</sup> See John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2;21:7,20

**26 After the sixty-two `sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.**

**27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one `seven.' In the middle of the `seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."**

The NIV is the only version that uses here the words "seventy sevens" as a translation of the Hebrew *shib'iyim shabuwa`*; most versions content themselves with the rendering "seventy weeks." TLB reads: "490 years." The NIV's tendency to be less specific is indicative of the problem of interpretation we face.

One of the questions to be determined is whether Gabriel spoke of a period of 490 days or 490 years. The general consensus of Biblical scholars is that "years" are intended. The graver problem, as *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* points out, "is to find out the time from which these seventy weeks should be dated." The best argument for the interpretation of "seventy sevens" as seventy times seven years is found in The Book of Second Chronicles, where seventy years is equated with a "sabbath rest."<sup>227</sup>

Daniel's prayer had been focused upon the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that the captivity would end after seventy years. The answer to his prayer goes well beyond that period to a multiple of seventies in which a greater fulfillment to end a greater captivity is announced. For New Testament Christians there can be little doubt that Gabriel announces here the coming of the Messiah and His untimely demise. We can hardly expect that Daniel could have understood the meaning of this. Peter's words can certainly be applied here: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."<sup>228</sup> According to Peter, Daniel must have at least understood that in this he was not serving himself but future generations of believers.

The first conclusion we may draw from this strange and unexpected answer to Daniel's prayer is that there is a correlative between the captivity and the sufferings of Christ. The destruction of the temple foreshadowed the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the report about the cleansing of the temple in John's Gospel we find the following conversation between Jesus and the Jews: "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body."<sup>229</sup> As the death of the temple foretold the death of our Savior, so the return from captivity and the rebuilding of the temple foreshadows the resurrection. In fact, the Hebrew word, found in "to anoint the most holy" is *qodesh*, which means primarily: "a sacred place or thing." It is used, for instance in the verse: "Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place."<sup>230</sup>

The next deduction that can be made is that, since Daniel confessed his sin and the sins of his people for the purpose of receiving pardon, there must be a reference to forgiveness in the answer to his prayer. Gabriel announces in fact the end of transgression and sin, the atonement of wickedness, and the setting up of eternal righteousness. *The Pulpit Commentary* confidently concludes: "These two, 'atonement for sin' and 'the everlasting righteousness,' are found in Christ – his atoning death and the righteousness which he brings into the world."

Gabriel's announcement of a period of 490 years, divided into two sections of 434 and 56 years, has given rise to extensive calculations to determine the exact time of the beginning and the end. To enter into the details of such a complicated analysis would fall well beyond the scope of our study. As stated

<sup>227</sup> See II Chr. 36:21

<sup>228</sup> I Peter 1:10-12

<sup>229</sup> John 2:19-21

<sup>230</sup> Ex. 26:33

above, one of the problems is to determine the beginning of the period mentioned. Some commentators try to go to the time of the fulfillment, that is to the appearance of the Messiah, and figure back. This does not seem to be the most scientific way of approaching this problem, or any problem.

The question is to which “decree” does Gabriel refer. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: “The preferred view is that ... this refers to the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus (465-423? B.C.) made in 445/444 B.C. (Neh 2). The language of Daniel fits this better than it fits the decree of Cyrus.” The same *Commentary* continues: “As a matter of fact, 7 plus 62 equals 69; 69 x 7 = 483. From 444 B.C. to about 30 A.D., the general period of Christ’s ministry is 470 plus years-so close to the specified 483 that without further refinement the correspondence is quite convincing-and as precise in proportion as the 70 years of Jeremiah’s prophecy, really only about 68 years. Inasmuch as Christ presented himself officially as ‘Messiah-Prince’ only once (Zech 9:9; cf. Matt 21:5. Contrast Matt 16:20; Luke 9:20-21) at the beginning of his last week, those interpreters who favor the Triumphal Entry for the close of the 69 weeks appear to be on the right track.” Some of the problems of calculation may also be related to a difference between the solar year of 365¼ days and the “biblical” year of 360 days.

It also looks as if Gabriel fuses two fulfillments of prophecy into one. As stated above, Daniel’s prayer focused upon the conclusion of the captivity, which according to Jeremiah’s prophecy, was at the end of seventy years. Depending on the interpretation of the word “seven” here, the words: “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression” may apply to the return of the captives and the rebuilding of the city. But we can hardly maintain that those events alone would be sufficient “to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness.” There is a strong suggestion that the return of the captives and the rebuilding of Jerusalem compose a picture of a much greater event, embodied in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We could even say that this picture is a rather faded one also. The death and resurrection of the temple in Jerusalem depict in fact the death and resurrection of God’s real temple, the body of God’s Son. But even that great event in world history leads up to the ultimate renewal of all things. That will happen when “He who was seated on the throne [says], ‘I am making everything new!’”<sup>231</sup>

The message centers upon the anointing of “the most holy.” The Hebrew word used is *mashiyach*, which may be translated: “Messiah.” Some versions insert the word “place,” making it a reference to the Holy of Holies in the temple, but the word “place” is not in the Hebrew text and the context does not require it. Even if one maintains that the restoration of the temple is meant here, the meaning of the atonement made yearly in the Holy of Holies on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant also points to Jesus’ death on the cross for the sins of the world. In his Epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul states about Jesus Christ: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”<sup>232</sup> The words “a sacrifice of atonement” are the rendering of the one Greek word *hilasterion*, which is also found in the verse in Hebrews: “Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover.”<sup>233</sup> The “atonement cover,” or “mercy seat” as the KJV renders it, is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a lot of confusion about vs. 25, not only as far as interpretation of the text is concerned, but also in the reading of the original Hebrew text. The manuscripts that are at the scholars’ disposal at present seem to be wrought with textual problems, words that are misread or omitted, etc. For instance, *The Pulpit Commentary* states that the Septuagint reads: “And thou shalt know and shalt understand and shalt discover that the commandments are determined, and thou shalt build Jerusalem a city of the Lord.” The same *Commentary* continues: “The rendering of the Vetus, as preserved to us in Tertullian, runs thus, ‘And thou shalt know and perceive and understand from the going forth of the speech ... for the restoring and rebuilding of Jerusalem, even to Christ the Leader, are sixty-two weeks and a half; and he shall return and build in joy, and the wall ... and times shall be renewed.’ Jerome’s<sup>234</sup> rendering is, ‘Know and understand from the going forth of the word that Jerusalem should be again built, even to Christ the Leader, shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, and the squares shall be again built and the walls in hard times.’ ”

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<sup>231</sup> Rev. 21:5

<sup>232</sup> Rom. 3:25

<sup>233</sup> Heb. 9:5

<sup>234</sup> The Vulgate, translation of the Bible in Latin

The question most scholars ask about the command mentioned here is: “Which command?” and “Issued by whom?” Regarding the latter, *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “So far as the ‘language’ is concerned, it would apply equally well to a command issued by God, or by the Persian king, and nothing but the circumstances can determine which is referred to... But the more natural and obvious meaning is, to understand it of the command actually issued by the Persian monarch to restore and build the city of Jerusalem.” The problem, however, is that there are several decrees that could be used as the starting point of the seventy weeks. There were at least two decrees that can be considered. Cyrus issued the decree for the rebuilding of the temple, but that did not grant permission for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Cyrus ascended the throne around 559 BC. Artaxerxes Longimanus was the king who consented to the rebuilding of Jerusalem, for which he allowed Nehemiah to travel to Jerusalem. This decree dates from, approximately, 445 BC. A period of well over a century separates the two kings and the two decrees from one another.

Although it seems obvious that the prophecy speaks about the appearance of Christ, the Hebrew text does not demand this interpretation. The Hebrew word *mashiyach*, “anointed,” could apply to anyone consecrated and anointed for an office ordained by God. Or, as we saw earlier, it could even refer to a place. History, however, seems to bear out the strong plausibility of applying this to Jesus Christ.

If we assume that the prophecy predicts the coming of Christ, the next question to ask would be whether the time reference applies to His birth or to His ordination as the Messiah. *Barnes’ Notes* states: “The language would apply to either, though it would perhaps more properly refer to the latter-to the time when he should appear as such-or should be anointed, crowned, or set apart to the office, and be fully instituted in it.”

Then we must look at the puzzle of the “seven sevens” and the “sixty-two sevens,” referring to, probably, a period of respectively 49 and 434 years. No specific time frame is given in which to fit the rebuilding of Jerusalem “with streets and a trench.” Daniel had been particularly concerned about this and the message must have given him some measure of comfort, although the addition: “but in times of trouble” was not very reassuring. The Biblical record, as it comes to us in the books of Nehemiah, Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah,” confirms that the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple met indeed with much opposition, both inwardly and outwardly.

The Hebrew words for “streets and trench” are *r/howb* and *charuwts*. The word *r/howb* means: “a wide street,” suggesting spaciousness. The word *charuwts*, “trench,” can also mean that something is firmly determined. There is a strong suggestion in the words that Jerusalem would not only be restored completely, but that God determined it would be so. Some ancient versions, however, render the words merely as “streets and walls.” Another meaning of *charuwts* is “gold.” We find the word in the proverb: “Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold.”<sup>235</sup> The double meaning of that word evokes visions of another Jerusalem, of which we read: “The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.”<sup>236</sup> God must have had much more in mind than the rebuilding of a city that lay in ruin on earth. If the old Jerusalem foreshadows the New, then “rebuilding” means more than repairing the damage done by King Nebuchadnezzar. It also points to the time of which God said: “I am making everything new!”<sup>237</sup>

Taking a date for the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem of about 455 BC. and adding the “seventy weeks” to it brings us to about 35 AD. Which is the approximate date of Jesus’ death and resurrection, give or take two years. Some scholars begin their calculation at 449 BC. and end up with 31 AD. We will leave our efforts to pinpoint exactly the dates at this point.

Vs. 26 seems to be a clear prediction of Jesus’ rejection by the Jewish leaders, leading to His crucifixion. The words: “and will have nothing” are the rendering of the Hebrew words: *‘ayin le*, meaning: “in order to be nothing.” One Dutch translation reads: “Whilst there is nothing against Him.”<sup>238</sup> According to *Barnes’ Notes*, The Latin Vulgate renders this: “and they shall not be his people who shall deny him.” The Septuagint reads: “and there is no crime in him.” The same *Commentary* explains: “It seems probable to me that this is the fair interpretation. The Messiah would come as a ‘Prince.’ It might be expected that he would

<sup>235</sup> Prov. 8:10

<sup>236</sup> Rev. 21:21<sup>b</sup>

<sup>237</sup> Rev. 21:5

<sup>238</sup> Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap

come to rule-to set up a kingdom. But he would be suddenly cut off by a violent death. The anticipated dominion over the people as a prince would not be set up. It would not pertain to him. Thus suddenly cut off, the expectations of such a rule would be disappointed and blasted. He would in fact set up no such dominion as might naturally be expected of an anointed prince; he would have no successor; the dynasty would not remain in his hands or his family, and soon the people of a foreign prince would come and would sweep all away. This interpretation does not suppose that the real object of his coming would be thwarted, or that he would not set up a kingdom in accordance with the prediction properly explained, but that such a kingdom as would be expected by the people would not be set up.” This thought is also borne out by remarks the two disciples on their way to Emmaus made to Christ, whom they did not recognize: “But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”<sup>239</sup>

The last three verses of this chapter are telescopic to the extreme. Thousands of years are compacted into a short span of time. The death of our Lord, predicted in vs. 26, is followed by another destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. For us, twenty-first century people, this is already two thousand year old history. The end that comes like a flood, characterized by continuous warfare, has not yet come upon us. The prophecy in the last verse, obviously, refers to the coming of the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation. Some of the features of this prediction were fulfilled when Antiochus Epiphanes exercised his rule of terror and forced the Jews to cease the temple rituals. The fact that Jesus refers to “the abomination that causes desolation”<sup>240</sup> as a point of reference in the end times proves that the prediction was not totally fulfilled in Antiochus’ dastardly acts. The words “abomination that causes desolation” are found three times in the last chapters of this book.<sup>241</sup>

Most evangelical Bible scholars see in these verses a gap between the destruction of Jerusalem and the appearance of the “abomination.” They base this on the meaning of the Hebrew word *‘achar*, which means: “after,” or “subsequent.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “The Hebrew word does not mean ‘then’ or ‘at that time,’ as do certain other words (cf. Dan 12:1). Nor does the prophecy at all place the next event in the seventieth week. It places it after the sixty-ninth. It is agreed by almost all evangelical interpreters that these two events, the cutting off of the Messiah (Anointed One) and the destruction of the sanctuary refer to the crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. These two events were separated by a period of nearly forty years (29-70 A.D.). Yet, in the literary order of the passage, they are both after the sixty-ninth week and before the final ‘one week’ mentioned in the next verse. Thus the very syntax, grammar, and word-meaning indicate a gap in the succession of the seventy weeks.”

The church, the body of Christ on earth, supposedly fills this “gap.” The apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, speaks of this as “the mystery of Christ.” He states that it “was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”<sup>242</sup>

The confusion in interpretation of this verse can be partly blamed on the transmission of the Hebrew text. Some errors of copying may have slipped in, which darken the meaning considerably. Another problem is that some scholars have tried too hard to give the words a meaning that is consistent with New Testament truth. This may explain the way the Vulgate translates this verse. Jerome, obviously, read the Hebrew words through Christian spectacles. We read: “And after sixty-two weeks Christ shall be slain, and his people who will deny him will not be. And his people with a leader about to come, will destroy the city and sanctuary, its end wasting, and after the end of the war desolation determined.”

The school of “Higher Criticism” opines that this is not a prophecy about the crucifixion of Christ, but a reference to the murder of the high priest Onias III at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the story of which is reported in II Macc. 4:39. Since those critics place the Book of Daniel in that epoch, there would be no question of any supernatural prediction of a future event.

The reading of vs. 27 also abounds with confusion, both in the original text as in the ancient translations. The Septuagint is almost unintelligible. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, the Vulgate

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<sup>239</sup> Luke 24:21

<sup>240</sup> See Matt. 24:15

<sup>241</sup> See also ch. 11:31;12:11

<sup>242</sup> See Eph. 3:4-6

rendering is: "One week also shall confirm the covenant to many, and in the middle of the week sacrifice and offering shall cease and in the temple shall be the abomination of desolation and even to the consummation and end shall the desolation continue."

The interpretation of the verse also is wrought with confusion. In the sentence: "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven' " the main question revolves around the words "He" and "covenant." Who is the one who confirms the covenant? That would answer also what covenant is meant. Most of the older commentaries interpret this as meaning that Christ will renew His relationship with the people of Israel. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "What covenant is this? The new Messianic covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (8:8) quotes this passage as Messianic, and as proving that sacrifice and offering had ceased with Christ's sacrifice of himself." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, however, notes: "Evidently the covenant is to be made between Antichrist and Israel when the Jews are back in their homeland in the last days. The exact nature of the covenant is unknown. The evil and destructive events described in the remainder of this verse should be interpreted as summary information concerning the final 'time of Jacob's trouble' (Jer 30:7 and context) set forth rather more fully in Dan 12:1 ff; 2 Thess 2:1 ff; Rev 13; 14; and other passages."

The latter interpretation, which refers the period of three-and-a-half years to the Great Tribulation, seems to be more consistent with the latter part of this verse, which speaks of "an abomination that causes desolation," as the landmark of that period. The Hebrew text reads literally: "He shall cause to cease the sacrifice and the oblation and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate." Making Christ the one who confirms the covenant, would also make Him the author of the abomination, if there is any consistency in interpretation. What this abomination is cannot be ascertained with any certainty. Although Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple and thus qualifies at least partly as a perpetrator, the fact that Jesus mentions this phenomenon again in regards to the end of times,<sup>243</sup> indicates that the ultimate fulfillment is still to come. Some scholars believe that the abomination occurred when the Roman erected the Roman Eagle in the temple. It seems more consistent with the whole of biblical prophecy to which Paul refers when he described the Antichrist as "the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction, [who] will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God."<sup>244</sup>

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary* inserts a translation of the last four verses that is worth copying. *The Commentary* states: "Of the whole passage Houbigant gives the following translation:

'Ver.24. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and the city of thy sanctuary: That sin may be restrained, and transgressions have an end; That iniquity may be expiated, and an everlasting righteousness brought in; That visions and prophecies may be sealed up, and the Holy of holies anointed.

Ver.25. Know therefore and understand: From the edict which shall be promulgated, to return and rebuild Jerusalem, there shall be seven weeks. Then it shall be fully rebuilt, with anxiety, in difficult times. Thence, to the Prince Messiah, there shall be sixty-two weeks.

Ver.26. And after sixty-two weeks the Messiah shall be slain, and have no justice. Afterward he shall waste the city and the sanctuary, by the prince that is to come. And his end shall be in straits; and to the end of the war desolation is appointed.

Ver.27. And for one week he shall confirm a covenant with many; And in the middle of the week he shall abrogate sacrifice and offering; And in the temple there shall be the abomination of desolation, Until the ruin which is decreed rush on after the desolation.'

Two observations must be made before we move into the next chapter. We believe that Jesus Christ, as a human being, saturated Himself with the Old Testament prophecies, which gave to His human mind a clear understanding of His calling and ministry as Messiah. This chapter of the Book of Daniel must have been particularly valuable to Him. It clarified His own future to Him. He could, therefore, rightfully reproach His contemporaries their lack of understanding the time in which they lived. He said to them: "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."<sup>245</sup> Daniel's prediction of the seventy times seven and sixty-two

<sup>243</sup> See Matt. 24:15

<sup>244</sup> II Thess. 2:3,4

<sup>245</sup> Matt. 16:2,3

times seven must have made perfect sense to Him. Looking at His use of Daniel's prophecy in the Gospels must give us a key to our own understanding of these dark predictions.

The second reflection pertains to the question why God allowed Daniel to look into the mysteries of the future. The answers given to him were so much greater than the questions asked in his prayer. The discovery of God's perspective and the comparison with his own perspective must have given Daniel a sense of his own puny condition and, at the same time, of the awesome greatness of being human. Jesus stated that those to whom the Word of God comes are called "gods."<sup>246</sup> Daniel may only have understood a fraction of the truths Gabriel communicated to him in this chapter and in the following ones. But the very fact that God even bothered to tell him these made him greater than the boundaries of his own life. That is what happens to the person to whom God speaks!

### **III. Daniel's Vision of Israel's Future 10:1--12:13**

#### **A. The Preparation of Daniel 10:1-21**

*1 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.*

*2 At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks.*

*3 I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.*

*4 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris,*

*5 I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist.*

*6 His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.*

*7 I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves.*

*8 So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.*

*9 Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.*

*10 A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.*

*11 He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.*

*12 Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.*

*13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.*

*14 Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."*

*15 While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless.*

*16 Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless.*

*17 How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."*

*18 Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength.*

*19 "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."*

*20 So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come;*

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<sup>246</sup> See John 10:35

***21 but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.)***

This whole chapter is an introduction to the two following ones, which form one unit with it. We read in this chapter Daniel's reaction upon meeting the angel who shows him the vision.

There has been some discussion among scholars about the date given: "the third year of Cyrus king of the Persians." The Septuagint reads: "In the first year of Cyrus King of the Persians." It is, of course, impossible to determine which reading is correct. If Daniel had this vision in the third year, the construction of the temple in Jerusalem had already begun; if the first year is meant, Cyrus' decree had not yet been issued. That being the case, it would give Daniel a more urgent reason for his extended time of fasting and prayer. If "the first year" is the correct reading, not much time would separate this vision from the one in the previous chapter. According to *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, Cyrus' third year answers to Darius' first year.

The mention of the first month is an indication that Daniel may have made a vow at the beginning of the New Year. His decision to fast and pray would be a New Year's resolution.

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* quotes from a study in Daniel by Auberlen, who compares this last revelation to Daniel with the previous ones described in this book. The author observes: "First Nebuchadnezzar dreams, and Daniel simply interprets (ch. 2 and 4); afterwards Daniel himself has a dream, but as yet it is only as a vision in a dream of the night (Dan 7:1-2); then follows a vision in a waking state (ch. 8:1-3); and finally, in the last two revelations (ch. 9 and 10-12), when Daniel, now a feeble, trembling (?) old man (Dan 10:8ff.), is already almost transplanted out of this world-now the ecstatic state seems to be no longer necessary for him. Now in his usual state he sees and hears angels speak like men, while his companions do not see the appearances from the higher world, and are only overwhelmed with terror, like those who accompanied Paul to Damascus."

Verse 1 is, obviously, an introduction by an editor to notes left by Daniel. Daniel may have kept a diary of his spiritual experiences, which was discovered after his death. The same can be said about the dream and vision recorded in chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 even states: "He wrote down the substance of his dream."<sup>247</sup> C. S. Lewis once argued that keeping a diary was a waste of time. The Book of Daniel could be used in an argument against him.

Daniel's fast was not a complete one but more an abstinence of the things that make life pleasurable. This is a very commendable discipline, which enhances gratitude for the blessings the Lord gives us in daily life. Daniel's abstinence suggests that he enjoyed life and that he had enough control over his habits to keep the right perspective. As long as we keep our priorities straight and realize that God is the source of all our blessings, we can allow ourselves to enjoy them. What Paul said about our attitude toward the Lord's Supper can be applied to life as a whole: "If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."<sup>248</sup> Sometimes God has to take the discipline of our lives in His own hand, as He did with the people of Israel to whom Moses said: "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."<sup>249</sup>

The words: "it concerned a great war" are the translation of a concept expressed in the one Hebrew word *tsaba*, which literally means "a regiment organized for war." We find the same word in the verse: "You and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army."<sup>250</sup> It also occurs in Job: "Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man?"<sup>251</sup> The KJV reads here: "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?" The word *tsaba* says, evidently, more than can be expressed

<sup>247</sup> ch. 7:1

<sup>248</sup> I Cor. 11:31,32

<sup>249</sup> Deut. 8:3

<sup>250</sup> Num. 1:3

<sup>251</sup> Job 7:1

in one English word. Yet the different shades of meaning can be applied to the content of Daniel's vision in the last chapters of his book. There is the spiritual warfare in the heavenly places, described in chapter 11 and the time element in chapter 12. The hardship of the struggle in the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth is like the groaning of a woman in labor.

Daniel receives his vision on the twenty-fourth day, which is three days after he had ended his fast. The first month of the Jewish year is the month of Nisan. The period of his fast coincided with the celebration of the Passover. His fasting during this particular time suggests that he did not observe the celebration, or at least did not participate in it. Whether the Passover feast was kept at all during the captivity is not known. Although the specific reason for the fast is not mentioned, we may construe from the time in which it occurred that the commemoration of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the birth of a nation, combined with the return from captivity had something to do with it. In the previous chapter, Daniel's confession of sin and contrition had prepared the way for the issuing of Cyrus' edict; here the fast complements the execution of the edict. As we shall see in the following chapters, the answer to the prophet's prayer would far surpass anything he asked for.

No reason is given for Daniel's being at the bank of the River Tigris, which was about forty miles east of his place of residence. He may have been on government business, which would explain the company in which he traveled. These details given indicate that Daniel was physically present at the place mentioned; he was not transferred spiritually to it as seems to have been the case in the vision at the side of the Ulai canal in chapter eight.

The person Daniel saw was, evidently, an archangel since he states to be associated with Michael. He was not the pre-incarnate Christ, although he evinced most of the features of Christ as John saw Him in the heavenly glory of His resurrection.<sup>252</sup> He may have been Gabriel, whom Daniel had seen in earlier visions, but then we would assume that Daniel would have recognized him as such. The person who appeared here to him seems to have been a stranger to the prophet.

The archangel appeared dressed in the garment of a priest. The NIV states that his belt was made "of the finest gold." The Hebrew text reads literally: "fine gold of Uphaz"; Uphaz probably being a place of renown for its gold. Chrysolite is the rendering of the Hebrew *tarshiysh*, which is usually translated: "beryl." The reference to gems in the description of a person seems to be an effort to express the divine character. The apostle John, trying to convey his impressions of God, the Father, sitting on the throne of heaven, states: "And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian."<sup>253</sup>

The voice of the archangel is said to be "like the sound of a multitude." "Multitude" is the usual translation of the Hebrew word *hamown*. Occasionally it is rendered: "tumult," as in the verse: "While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more."<sup>254</sup> In the context of our text it, obviously, intends to convey the idea of "forte fortissimo." One ancient version reads: "His mouth was like the sea." John's description of the risen Savior probably conveys the idea best with: "His voice was like the sound of rushing waters."<sup>255</sup>

Interestingly, Daniel's companions were unable to see the apparition of the archangel, although they experienced the terror of the charged ambiance of the vision. Daniel was the only person who was "tuned in" sufficiently to observe this spiritual reality. His fellowship with God had been developed to the point that he was able to hear the voice of God when he was spoken to. Our ability to observe reality depends on the health of our spirit. David stated in one of his psalms: "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."<sup>256</sup> Most people, however, are unable to see the angel of the LORD. When the king of Aram tried to capture the prophet Elisha in the city of Dothan, Elisha's servant panicked when he saw the city surrounded by foreign troops. Elisha saw what his servant could not see. We read: " 'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.' Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked

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<sup>252</sup> See Rev. 1:12-16

<sup>253</sup> Rev. 4:3

<sup>254</sup> I Sam. 14:19

<sup>255</sup> Rev. 1:15

<sup>256</sup> Ps. 34:7

and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”<sup>257</sup> The same happened at Paul’s encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. We read: “The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.”

The vision affected Daniel to the point that he fainted. His spirit may have been attuned to this spiritual reality; his body was not. Daniel’s reaction is a demonstration of the ravages sin has done to the human race. Adam and Eve had free and unimpeded fellowship with God before they fell into sin. But after their fall, they hid themselves when they “heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”<sup>258</sup> Sin has continued to corrupt humanity to the point where no one can see God and survive the experience. God said to Moses: “No one may see me and live.”<sup>259</sup> Even the apostle John, who knew Christ intimately on earth, felt he would die when he had his encounter with Jesus in His heavenly glory. He states: “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”<sup>260</sup>

The NIV describes Daniel’s reaction: “My face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.” The KJV states more graphically: “My comeliness was turned in me into corruption.”

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* issues the warning: “The effect of this sight on Daniel should make men cautious about seeking or praying for unusual supernatural experiences of the presence of God beyond those experiences ordinarily granted to sincere believers.” We ought not to dismiss lightly the condition of our bodies that prevents us from physically experiencing fellowship with God. The apostle Paul emphasizes the fact that our salvation will not be complete until our bodies are restored to a state in which this fellowship is possible. He wrote to the Romans: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.”<sup>261</sup>

Even the divine touch is not sufficient to restore Daniel immediately to a condition in which he stopped trembling. The archangel had to touch him three times before he was able to stand up and take in what was being said to him. Daniel’s age would account, up to a point, for his slow recovery. But the main reason given for his reaction is fear. A certain measure of fear in divine encounters is healthy. Calvin states: “God wishes our fears to restrain us like a bridle.” But fear and intimacy are incompatible. In John’s words: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”<sup>262</sup> But then, who is perfect in love? Even John himself fainted during his encounter with Jesus!

As in the previous vision, the archangel addresses Daniel as “highly esteemed,” or “greatly beloved.” The content of those words seem to have a stronger effect upon Daniel’s physical condition than the touch. Daniel’s physical strength increased when he heard that God loved him. We should never underestimate the importance of emotional healing in the restoration of our bodies. King Solomon knew that: “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”<sup>263</sup>

Verses 12 and 13 open for us a window upon the reality of spiritual warfare of which most people are not aware. These verses are unique in the Bible. Nowhere else do we find an explanation of factors that may enhance or delay the answer to our prayers. As mortals, we have usually no idea what goes on behind the scenes. We dismiss the notion, offered in *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, that “the prince of Persia” is nobody else but King Cyrus. There is no compelling reason to read this text in any other way than at face value. If the archangel who speaks to Daniel and Michael are spiritual beings, why would we think that their opponent is a mere mortal? It may be that the spirit of enlightenment of Dr. Clarke’s age darkened his mind at this point.

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<sup>257</sup> II Kings 6:16,17

<sup>258</sup> See Gen. 3:8

<sup>259</sup> Ex. 33:20

<sup>260</sup> Rev. 1:17

<sup>261</sup> Rom. 8:22-24<sup>a</sup>

<sup>262</sup> I John 4:18

<sup>263</sup> Prov. 17:22

The very fact that prayer influences events on earth proves that decisions are made on a heavenly level. This is clearly demonstrated in what happened when the Amalekites attacked Israel in the desert. Joshua did not win the victory but Moses. We read: "So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up--one on one side, one on the other--so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword."<sup>264</sup> We find the strongest corroboration of this fact in the words of the apostle Paul: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."<sup>265</sup>

When Daniel decided to give himself to prayer and fasting for three weeks, he cannot have had any idea what his prayer would accomplish. He may not even have understood the urge to prayer the Holy Spirit put in his heart. But if he had not followed the nudging of the Spirit, or if he had ended his prayer prematurely, world history would have taken a different turn. Why God, in His infinite wisdom, chooses to use human beings, who have little or no idea what they are doing, to accomplish His plans, is beyond our comprehension.

Daniel's prayer opened a window upon the revelation of a spiritual reality that had thus far been closed in Scripture. This shows that the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple was not really a step backward in God's plan of salvation. God never takes any steps back. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The angelology of one age is not that of another; and the angelology of the Jews in one country is not that of the Jews in another. The Jews themselves understood that the Babylonian captivity did a great deal to develop the doctrine of the angels; the Jewish tradition was that they brought back from Babylon the names of the angels. Not only had their residence in Babylon defined the Jewish ideas as to the names of the angels, they began to have clearer ideas of their functions. They reached the idea that every race had its guardian angel."

The anguish Daniel experienced in his conversation with the archangel foreshadowed also the agony of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke records for us: "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."<sup>266</sup> In Jesus' prayer, however, the Prince of Peace, as a man, confronted the prince of this world. Daniel felt in his own body some of the labor pains our Lord experienced when peace was born in this world through Him. Labor pains are a part of the package of sin our mother Eve brought into the world. After she had sinned, God said to her: "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children."<sup>267</sup>

The last two verses of this chapter show us a strange mixture of time and eternity. As time bound creature, we have no insight into the relationship of those two. If we had, much of our theological puzzles would be solved. We learn from these verses that there is in God's library a book called: The Book of Truth. We know of at least two other books; there is the scroll on which the events of the end time are recorded, which the Lamb takes from the hand of God, the Father,<sup>268</sup> and there is The Book of Life<sup>269</sup> in which the names of those who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation are written. Somehow, these books are played out on earth, chapter by chapter in the lives of God's creatures. We are all players in God's play. Shakespeare was right when he said: "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances..."<sup>270</sup> What confuses us is that, in a way, we also write our own script as we play the role God has assigned to us.

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<sup>264</sup> Ex. 17:10-13

<sup>265</sup> Eph. 6:12

<sup>266</sup> Luke 22:43,44

<sup>267</sup> Gen. 3:16

<sup>268</sup> See Rev. 5:1,7

<sup>269</sup> See Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27

<sup>270</sup> *As You Like It*

We must not interpret the archangel's remark that only Michael, Israel's protecting angel, supported him in the struggle against the territorial spirits of Persia and Greece, as a complaint directed to the heavenly hierarchy. We cannot suppose that the heavenly house would be divided against itself and that the angels would be tied up into strife and competition. The statement merely indicates that the nation of Israel, God's chosen people, plays a dominant part in the fulfillment of God's plan for our planet.

Incidentally, the way the text of the last verse of this chapter flows into the first verse of the next indicates how artificially some chapters in the Bible are divided.

## B. The Revelation of the Sixty-Nine Weeks 11:1-35

*1 And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him.)*

*2 "Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will appear in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece.*

*3 Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases.*

*4 After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.*

*5 "The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power.*

*6 After some years, they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her power, and he and his power will not last. In those days she will be handed over, together with her royal escort and her father and the one who supported her.*

*7 "One from her family line will arise to take her place. He will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortress; he will fight against them and be victorious.*

*8 He will also seize their gods, their metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt. For some years he will leave the king of the North alone.*

*9 Then the king of the North will invade the realm of the king of the South but will retreat to his own country.*

*10 His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great army, which will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress.*

*11 "Then the king of the South will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North, who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated.*

*12 When the army is carried off, the king of the South will be filled with pride and will slaughter many thousands, yet he will not remain triumphant.*

*13 For the king of the North will muster another army, larger than the first; and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped.*

*14 "In those times many will rise against the king of the South. The violent men among your own people will rebel in fulfillment of the vision, but without success.*

*15 Then the king of the North will come and build up siege ramps and will capture a fortified city. The forces of the South will be powerless to resist; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand.*

*16 The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and will have the power to destroy it.*

*17 He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make an alliance with the king of the South. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans will not succeed or help him.*

*18 Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put an end to his insolence and will turn his insolence back upon him.*

*19 After this, he will turn back toward the fortresses of his own country but will stumble and fall, to be seen no more.*

*20 "His successor will send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor. In a few years, however, he will be destroyed, yet not in anger or in battle.*

*21 "He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue.*

*22 Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed.*

*23 After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power.*

*24 When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses-but only for a time.*

**25 "With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him.**

**26 Those who eat from the king's provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle.**

**27 The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time.**

**28 The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country.**

**29 "At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before.**

**30 Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant.**

**31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.**

**32 With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.**

**33 "Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered.**

**34 When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them.**

**35 Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.**

Before entering into the details of these last two chapters, we must ask the question concerning what the purpose is of this revelation to Daniel and to his people. We can hardly assume that the archangel only gave a futuristic history lesson to Daniel. There are three schools of interpretation of this section of the Book of Daniel. The first interprets these chapters as basically foretelling the future. The liberal school, that postdates the book to the time of the Maccabees, sees in it an apocalyptic treatment of the past. The third school understands this prophecy to be a picture of the moral development of the human mind without any direct reference to any political events.

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* gives a lengthy introduction to these last two chapters of which we copy the following: "This chapter contains neither mere individualizing paintings of general prophetic thoughts, nor predictions of historical dates inconsistent with the nature of prophecy, but prophetic descriptions of the development of the heathen world-power from the days of Cyrus to the fall of the Javanic world-kingdom, as well as of the position which the two kingdoms (arising out of this kingdom) of the north and south, between which the holy land lay, assumed toward each other and toward the theocracy; for by the war of these two kingdoms for the sovereignty, not merely were the covenant land and the covenant people brought in general into a sorrowful condition, but they also were the special object of a war which typically characterizes and portrays the relation of the world-kingdom to the kingdom of God. This war arose under the Seleucid Antiochus Epiphanes to such a height, that it formed a prelude of the war of the time of the end. The undertaking of this king to root out the worship of the living God and destroy the Jewish religion, shows in type the great war which the world-power in the last phases of its development shall undertake against the kingdom of God, by exalting itself above every god, to hasten on its own destruction and the consummation of the kingdom of God."

The same *Commentary* continues: "Accordingly the revelation has this as its object, to show how the heathen world-kingdoms shall not attain to an enduring stability, and by their persecution of the people of God shall only accomplish their purification, and bring on the end, in which, through their destruction, the people of God shall be delivered from all oppression and be transfigured. In order to reveal this to him (that it must be carried forward to completion by severe tribulation), it was not necessary that he should receive a complete account of the different events which shall take place in the heathen world-power in the course of time, nor have it especially made prominent that their enmity shall first come to a completed manifestation under the last king who should arise out of the fourth world-kingdom. ... After these preceding revelations, the announcement of the great tribulation that would come upon the people of God from these two enemies could be presented in one comprehensive painting, wherein the assault made by the prefigurative enemy

against the covenant people shall form the foreground of the picture for a representation of the daring of the antitypical enemy, proceeding even to the extent of abolishing all divine and human ordinances, who shall bring the last and severest tribulation on the church of God, at the end of the days, for its purification and preparation for eternity.”

In simpler language, we should approach this chapter with the thought that the Holy Spirit, besides revealing future events to Daniel, uses historical happenings to prepare God’s children for what will happen at the end of time at the appearance of the Antichrist, when Satan plays his final act on earth. God always warns His children, who live in fellowship with Him, of the trials and sufferings that lie ahead. He does not want any of us to be taken by surprise and off guard. Peter warns us: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.” And he adds: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”<sup>271</sup>

We may also interpret this chapter and the following as a commentary on the revelations received earlier, such as in the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar about the gold statue in chapter two and Daniel’s vision of the ferocious animals in chapter eight.

“The first year of Darius, the Mede” is generally understood as the year in which the edict was issued that permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, Septuagint reads “Cyrus” instead of “Darius.” Commentators differ about the meaning of the words “I took my stand to support and protect him.” Some believe this to refer to Darius, others to Michael. Since, obviously, the support of this archangel resulted in the issuing of the edict, it does not make any difference to whom it refers. Both Michael and Darius were involved in the decree.

Regarding the three kings and the fourth one to appear in Persia, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: “The three kings in Persia appear to have been: first, Cambyses, Cyrus’ son (accession 529 B.C.); second, Pseudo-Smerdis, an impostor ... and third, Darius I, or Hystaspes, also called, the Great, (522-486 B.C.); a truly great monarch. The fourth, far greater than they all was, then, Xerxes, known in Esther as Ahasuerus (486-464 B.C.). The wars of Darius and of Xerxes, by which the Persians infuriated all of Greece, are well known to students of classical antiquity and standard ancient history.” The ancient historian Herodotus, who was a contemporary of Xerxes, corroborates these points.

The wealth of the fourth king, Xerxes or Ahasuerus, may have been derived from the accumulation of the riches of the three previous ones. Cyrus had conquered Croesus, the proverbially rich king of Armenia, thus fulfilling Isaiah’s prediction regarding him: “I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.”<sup>272</sup> His successors increased this wealth by their pillaging of the temples and palaces of the countries they subjected.

There appears to be a gap between the three kings of Persia and the one who is called “a mighty king,” who is generally taken to be Alexander the Great, who was the ruler of the Macedonian Empire. Alexander in turn invaded Persia in revenge of the Persian invasion of his homeland in the century preceding his appearance. A letter Alexander wrote to justify his invasion sent to the Darius who ruled Persia at that time has been preserved. According to *Barnes’ Notes*, it reads: “Your ancestors entered into Macedonia, and the other parts of Greece, and did us damage, when they had received no affront from us as the cause of it; and now I, created general of the Grecians, provoked by you, and desirous of avenging the injury done by the Persians, have passed over into Asia.”

The archangel predicts the breaking up of the Macedonian Empire by stating: “After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.” *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The description here given of the empire of Alexander the Great is strictly accurate; his empire did not go to his posterity, nor did any of his successors possess a dominion as extensive as his.”

In the next forty verses, the archangel gives Daniel and the Jewish people a preview of history to come. Only those details are provided that are important to them, particularly as they lead up to the

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<sup>271</sup> I Peter 4:12;1:6-7

<sup>272</sup> Isa. 45:3

appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes, the type of the coming Antichrist. Most of these details are confirmed by secular history.

The interpretation of this part of The Book of Daniel is complicated by the fact that the transmitted Massoretic text is muddled and differs in many instances considerably from other ancient manuscripts and translations, such as the Septuagint and the Vulgate.

The Kingdom of the South and the Kingdom of the North are respectively Egypt and Syria. The statement about the daughter of the king of the South who goes to the king of the North to make an alliance, evidently, refers to the marriage of Cleopatra, daughter of Antiochus, to Ptolemy, the king of Egypt. In connection with this, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* speaks of: "The fruitless attempt to unite these two kingdoms as iron and clay in Nebuchadnezzar's image."

*Barnes' Notes* explains: "There were frequent and almost constant wars between these two kingdoms. Yet the reference here is to Ptolemy Philopator, who succeeded Ptolemy Euergetes in Egypt, and who was exasperated at the conduct of Antiochus in invading Syria and Palestine. He assembled an army, and marched with it to Raphia, where he met Antiochus, and a battle was fought." This put the land of the Jews, called here "the Beautiful Land," in the middle of the conflicts. It seems that the Jew's sympathy went to the side of Syria in all of this. The same *Commentary* quotes Josephus, who recorded: "The Jews, of their own accord, went over to him, and received him into the city (Jerusalem), and gave plentiful provision to his army, and to his elephants, and readily assisted him when he besieged the garrison which was in the citadel of Jerusalem." *Barnes' Notes* continues: "On this occasion, Josephus says that Antiochus bestowed many favors on the Jews; wrote letters to the generals of his armies commending their conduct; published a decree respecting the piety of the Jewish people, and sent an epistle to Ptolemy, stating what he had done for them, and what he desired should be further done ... The following language of Josephus respecting the effect of these wars will justify and explain what is here said by the angel: 'Now it happened that, in the reign of Antiochus the Great, who ruled over all Asia, the Jews, as well as the inhabitants of Coelo-Syria, suffered greatly, and their land was sorely harassed, for while he was at war with Ptolemy Philopater, and with his son who was called 'Epiphanes,' it fell out that these nations were equally sufferers, both when he was beaten, and when he beat the others; so that they were like to a ship in a storm, which is tossed by the waves on both sides; and just thus were they in their situation in the middle between Antiochus' prosperity and its change to adversity.'"

The daughter in vs. 17 is Antiochus' daughter Cleopatra. It appears that, at one point, Antiochus felt the need to come to an agreement with Egypt so he could concentrate his energy toward Rome with which he entered into a conflict. This alliance between the two world powers has been immortalized in secular literature in *Anthony and Cleopatra*. *Barnes' Notes*, again, explains: The historical facts in the case ... are these: After Antiochus had subdued Coelo-Syria and Palestine, he became involved in wars with the Romans in Asia Minor, in order to extend the kingdom of Syria to the limits which it had in the time of Seleucus Nicator. In order to carry on his designs in that quarter, however, it became necessary to secure the neutrality or the cooperation of Egypt, for Ptolemy would naturally, in such circumstances, favor the Romans in their wars with Antiochus. Antiochus, therefore, negotiated a marriage between his daughter Cleopatra and Ptolemy Epiphanes, the son of Ptolemy Philopater, then thirteen years of age. The valuable consideration in the view of Ptolemy in this marriage was, that, as a dowry, Coelo-Syria, Samaria, Judea, and Phoenicia were given to her." (These facts are corroborated by Josephus.) "This agreement or contract of marriage was entered into immediately after the defeat of Scopas, 197 B.C. The contract was, that the marriage should take place as soon as the parties were of suitable age, and that Coelo-Syria and Palestine should be given as a dowry. The marriage took place 193 B.C., when Antiochus was making preparation for his wars with the Romans... In this way the neutrality of the king of Egypt was secured, while Antiochus prosecuted his work against the Romans." Finally, *Barnes' Notes* quotes Jerome who comments on this passage: "Antiochus, desirous not only of possessing Syria, Cilicia, and Lycia, and the other provinces which belonged to Ptolemy, but of extending also his own scepter over Egypt itself, betrothed his own daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy, and promised to give as a dowry Coelo-Syria and Judea. But he could not obtain possession of Egypt in this way, because Ptolemy Epiphanes, perceiving his design, acted with caution, and because Cleopatra favored the purposes of her husband rather than those of her father." All this is interesting, but not of vital importance in the context of our study.

The tax collector, mentioned in vs. 20, was sent out by the successor of Antiochus. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* explains: "Seleucus Philopater succeeded his father Antiochus. He sent his treasurer Heliodorus to seize the money deposited in the temple of Jerusalem, which is here called the glory of the kingdom, see 2 Macc. 9:23. He was so cramped to pay the annual tax to the Romans, that he was obliged to

burden his subjects with continual taxes.” At this point the dark clouds of the Roman Empire, that would dominate for centuries the world in which our Savior was to be born, began gathering on the horizon.

Evidently, the text here poses severe problems for textual criticism, which has made Biblical scholars differ greatly about the meaning of the text.

The section in verses 21-32 predicts the appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes as a type of the Antichrist who will appear at the end of world history. Everything that preceded in this chapter leads up to this point. These are the events for which God wanted His people to be prepared and for which He wants them to watch and pray.

Some scholars find difficulty in reconciling the predictions about Antiochus Epiphanes with the known facts of secular history, but since, as *The Pulpit Commentary* admits, not all the facts are known, the Biblical evidence cannot be disproved. The appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes in this chapter corresponds to the growth of small horn on the head of the goat in chapter nine.<sup>273</sup>

The archangel describes Antiochus’s character as “contemptible.” Other versions call him “vile,” or “evil.” He was a master of flattery and intrigue, which he used to secure the throne to which he was not entitled. We will forego the historical details about his appearance. We mentioned earlier the fact that his contemporaries called him “Epimanes” (madman) instead of “Epiphanes” (illustrious).

### C. The Revelation of the Seventieth Week 11:36--12:3

**36** *"The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place.*

**37** *He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all.*

**38** *Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts.*

**39** *He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price.*

**40** *"At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood.*

**41** *He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand.*

**42** *He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape.*

**43** *He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission.*

**44** *But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many.*

**45** *He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.*

**12:1** *"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.*

**2** *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*

**3** *Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*

The remainder of chapter eleven, actually verses 21-45, probably describes some of the details of the war between Antiochus Epiphanes and Egypt. *The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* observes: “The prominence given to Antiochus in Daniel is because it was the turning point in Jewish history, deciding

<sup>273</sup> See ch. 9:8

whether Greek worldly refinements were to stifle Israel's true faith. Persecution was God's appointed way to save His people from seductions which had well nigh made them compromise their witness for His truth. Antiochus was the unconscious instrument."

In the context of our study, there is no need to trace the fulfillment of these prophetic details. Suffice these explanations by *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: "His [Antiochus Epiphanes] primary aim-to unify his empire by spreading Greek civilization and culture-brought him into direct conflict with the Jews. This conflict broke into open rebellion in 167 B.C. Accounts of these conflicts are found in the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees. The revolt began with Antiochus' edict that sought to unite all the peoples of his kingdom in religion, law, and custom. The Jews were the only people who would not adhere to this edict. Antiochus issued regulations against observing the Sabbath, practicing circumcision, and keeping all food laws. These regulations were followed by the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (Dan 11:31)-the erection of the altar of the Greek god Zeus over the altar of the burnt offering in the Temple. Jews were forced to participate in heathen festivities and were put to death if they were caught with the Book of the Law in their possession. As the revolt, led by Judas Maccabeus, gained momentum, the people of Israel united to overthrow Seleucid domination of their land. The Syrians were routed and the Temple was cleansed on the 25th of Chislev, 165 B.C. This cleansing is now observed by the Jews as the Feast of Lights (Hanukkah), around December 25. According to ancient writers, Antiochus IV withdrew into the East following his defeat. He died in Persia a madman."

The persecution of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes was the cruelest and severest God's chosen people had ever experienced in their history as a nation. Only Hitler's "Final Solution" in which the "Holocaust" claimed six million victims superseded it. The author of Hebrews seems to have borrowed some of his illustrations from that period of history in his statement: "Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."<sup>274</sup>

Inasmuch as this prophecy has not seen its final fulfillment yet, we can safely and mournfully say that the worst is still to come. On the other hand, we have the comfort of Jesus' Words: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."<sup>275</sup>

Some scholars want to limit the fulfillment of the prophecy contained in the first two verses of chapter twelve to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. Undoubtedly, some of the fulfillments occurred during the terror regime of that period, but the reoccurrence of the same type of language in the New Testament suggests that the ultimate fulfillment is still to come. Jesus spoke about the future Great Tribulation when He said: "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again."<sup>276</sup> We agree with the comment of *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* on these verses: "Thus are put together in one summary view the two great periods of distress-the typical period of Antiochus, and the antitypical one of Antichrist. The political resurrection of the Jews under the Maccabees is the starting-point of transition to the literal resurrection about to follow the destruction of Antichrist by Christ's coming in glory. The language passes here from the nearer to the more remote event, to which alone it is fully applicable."

Actually, there have been other fulfillments of this prediction of the great tribulation after the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. Some of Jesus' predictions pertained to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. Hitler's "Holocaust" and the "Pogroms" in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union would qualify, at least, as partial fulfillments. And there may still be other ones to come between the present and the end of times. Fulfillment of prophecy has been compared to the throwing of a stone in a lake: the ripple effect spreads out from the place of impact to the shore.

John's reference in Revelation to this prophecy suggests that more is involved than the exercise of a repressive regime on earth. Behind the persecution of God's children there are cosmic events that throw their shadow on earth. We read in Revelation: "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought

<sup>274</sup> Heb. 11:35-38

<sup>275</sup> Luke 21:28

<sup>276</sup> Matt. 24:21

against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him ... But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”<sup>277</sup>

One would expect that the standing up of Michael in behalf of the nation of Israel would mean their deliverance from oppression. The opposite turns out to be true; the distress of that period is said to be unequalled in previous history. It is, however, not necessary to read that persecution is what follows the appearance of Michael. We rather interpret these words as meaning that Michael appears upon the scene because of the extreme pressure to which the people are exposed. Although deliverance does not seem to come immediately, it does come, and in such a way that God is justified. I believe that Michael stood up at the time of Hitler’s “Final Solution” for the Jews. The eventual result was the founding of the state of Israel. We must also bear in mind that the real “Final Solution” is not the one that kills human bodies but human souls. We are reminded of Jesus’ words: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”<sup>278</sup> Michael’s standing up was related to the latter, more than to the former. It is possible, even desirable, to die physically and be saved spiritually.

The immediate application, as we have seen, pertains, undoubtedly, to the persecution of Israel under Antiochus Epiphanes. Michael’s intervention and support during that period ensured the survival of Israel as God’s chosen people to whom God’s revelation on earth had been entrusted. Their endurance assured the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The archangel does not elaborate on the meaning of “the book.” The word is often used generically in Scripture as an image that assures us of God’s special attention to specific problems. When, for instance, the Philistines had captured David, he found relief for his anxiety by stating: “Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?”<sup>279</sup> “The Book of Life” is first referred to for the first time negatively in the Psalms in connection with some of David’s enemies. We read: “May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.”<sup>280</sup> The meaning there is evidently that David does not want his enemies to be forgiven. Jesus assured His disciples of their salvation by saying: “Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”<sup>281</sup> Paul uses the expression in the same way when he refers to his “fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”<sup>282</sup> In Revelation the term acquires its most specific meaning. John states: “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” And: “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”<sup>283</sup>

The question is whether “the Book” referred to here pertains to spiritual salvation. *Barnes’ Notes* states: “The language here does not refer to the book of eternal life or salvation, nor is it implied that they who would thus be preserved would necessarily be saved, but to their preservation from death and persecution, as if their names were recorded in a book, or were enrolled. We frequently meet with similar ideas in the Scriptures. The idea is, of course, poetical, but it expresses with sufficient clearness the thought that there was a Divine purpose in regard to them, and that there was a definite number whom God designed to keep alive, and that these would be delivered from those troubles, while many others would be cut off.” Those who hold to the view that eternal salvation is referred to here may see in these words a prophecy about the rapture of the church before the appearance of the Antichrist.

<sup>277</sup> Rev. 12:7-9,12

<sup>278</sup> Matt. 10:28

<sup>279</sup> Ps. 56:8

<sup>280</sup> Ps. 69:28

<sup>281</sup> Luke 10:20

<sup>282</sup> Phil. 4:3

<sup>283</sup> Rev. 20:15; 21:27

In the following verse the archangel definitely refers to eternal salvation and condemnation. There is also a strong suggestion that the primary fulfillment of this prophecy relates, not to the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, but to the end of times. It is true that the approximately three centuries that separated the people in Daniel's time from the appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes can be considered a long time span, but the reference to the resurrection of the dead, definitely points to "the last day."

The phrase "sleep in the dust of the earth will awake," apparently, is unique in Scripture. "Sleep" speaks of being dead and "the dust of the earth" suggests burial in the ground, which was not always the usual mode of burial among Jews; often the dead were placed in caves. The words indicate that there was among the Jewish people a clear concept of resurrection. Even as far back as the days of Job that hope existed already. His words: "And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes-I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" are usually interpreted as a confession of faith in the bodily resurrection of the dead. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed: "But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead."<sup>284</sup>

The words "wise" and "righteousness" in vs. 3 are the translation of the Hebrew words *sakal* and *tsadaq*. *Sakal* is used to describe the qualities of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We read that, in the eyes of Eve the tree was "a tree to be desired to make one wise."<sup>285</sup> It conveys the idea of guidance. We find it in the text that describes Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Jacob purposely guided his hands so that his right hand was on the head of Ephraim, although he was the younger of the two.<sup>286</sup> *Tsadaq* means basically "to be right," or "to make right." The wisdom referred to here is "the fear of the LORD [which] is the beginning of knowledge."<sup>287</sup> It implies not merely understanding but also the fruit of it as expressed in acts of righteousness.

In the context of the archangel's words, the brilliance of shining stars refers to the future glory of the righteous. The apostle Paul uses the picture for the testimony of the believers in the present darkness of this world. In his Epistle to the Philippians, he writes: "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life..."<sup>288</sup> It is true that the stars only become visible at night. To emphasize the importance of darkness in the image, however, may be pushing the principle of interpretation too far. The words of the archangel stress the brilliance of moral perfection not the night sky that is visible from the planet on which we live. It is true, though, that the starry sky at night, more than rising or setting of the sun, reveals to us of the greatness of the universe in which we live. On the other hand, the Book of Proverbs states: "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day."<sup>289</sup> In the revelation of Christ's incomparable glory in and through us the difference between day and night will be absorbed.

#### D. The Conclusion of the Visions of Daniel 12:4-13

***4 But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."***

***5 Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank.***

***6 One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?"***

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<sup>284</sup> Isa. 26:19

<sup>285</sup> Gen. 3:6

<sup>286</sup> See Gen. 48:13,14

<sup>287</sup> Prov. 1:7

<sup>288</sup> Phil. 2:14-16

<sup>289</sup> Prov. 4:18

**7** *The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."*

**8** *I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"*

**9** *He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end."*

**10** *Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.*

**11** *"From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days."*

**12** *Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.*

**13** *"As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."*

If the purpose of this vision of Daniel were to arm the Jews beforehand for the hardship to come, the sealing of the book would not make much sense. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The sealing had metaphorical meaning — a book sealed, though it was visible to the eye, and was not hidden away — could not be read. If the key by which to interpret it is not granted, a book in cipher cannot be read . . . Prophecy was delivered frequently in enigmatic language, and the meaning of it could only be grasped when circumstance supplied the key." Enigmatic it is! Daniel himself did not grasp the meaning of the words he had to write.

This brings us to the last scene of this vision and the conclusion of the book. It is generally understood that the river mentioned is the Tigris. The "two others" are also angels or archangels. Since no names or further details are given, we cannot be specific. There appears to be a third person who is above the water of the river. Some interpreters see in him Christ before His incarnation. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The fact that the 'man clothed in linen' thus 'swears' implies that in some way he is the source of the determination of the period. This notion is involved in the whole spiritual scenery of the Book of Daniel; the angels of the nations are the agents under God for carrying out the decrees of providence."

He is definitely the most authoritative person on the scene. He is probably the same person John sees in Revelation, and the oath he swears there is quite similar to the one spoken here. We read John's account: "Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.' Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, 'There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.'"<sup>290</sup>

*Barnes' Notes* observes about the person standing above the water of the Tigris: "The occasion; the manner; the posture of the angel; the appeal to the Eternal One—all give great sublimity to this transaction, and all imply that the answer was to be one of great consequence in regard to future times."

One of the angelic figures asks Him when the events will take place. Both in the Septuagint and in the Vulgate it is Daniel, not one of the archangels, who asks the question. The question reads literally in the Hebrew text: "How long the end of these wonders?" The Hebrew word used is *pele*, which means: "a miracle." We find it in some of the Psalms: "You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples."<sup>291</sup> The question does not seem to ask when the predicted catastrophes will take place but rather when God will intervene and give deliverance. We can hardly call "the abomination that causes desolation" a miracle. The answer expected would not be meant to satisfy man's curiosity regarding the future but it would stimulate hope during the time of tribulation. The answer is both encouraging and

<sup>290</sup> Rev. 10:1-7

<sup>291</sup> Ps. 77:14

discouraging. The 3½ years stand for a rather limited time. The promise corresponds to Jesus' comments to His disciples on the same subject: "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."<sup>292</sup> But the second part of the reply is far from encouraging: "When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." On the time factor, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "That last one-half week of years is an important consideration in prophecy, because in it take place the chief events of consummation."

The Hebrew word rendered "broken" is *naphats*, which also means: "to scatter." Some commentators see in it a reference to the end of the Diaspora of the Jewish people. *Barnes' Notes* states: "The language is so couched, indeed, that it would express the fact in regard to the duration of the troubles under Antiochus; but it was also of such a nature that in its higher signification it would describe the duration of more momentous transactions, and would designate a period when the true religion would begin its universal reign; when the evils of a vast Anti-Christian power would come to an end, and when the kingdom of the saints would be set up in the world."

We do not learn whether the angel who asked the question was satisfied. Evidently, the words did not reassure Daniel's anxiety. All he could see from his human perspective was darkness. The subsequent conversation with the other archangel did nothing to assuage this.

Daniel, obviously, failed to understand the reference to the "a time, times, and half a time." John, in Revelation uses the corresponding units of "42 months," "1260 days," or "a time, times, and half a time."<sup>293</sup> *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* makes the interesting observation: "Daniel was still no expert on prophetic interpretation. There will be no expert until prophecy becomes history." *The Commentary* then refers to John 2:22 – "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken." Most of us do not fare any better than Daniel in these matters. Apart from question about the meaning of "days" in this context, there is the problem of the comparison between the "time, times, and half a time" and the number of days mentioned subsequently. In John's figuration the 42 months and 1260 days add up to 3½ years of 360 days. But what do we do with 1290 and 1335 days the archangel mentions to Daniel?

Adam Clarke wrote his commentary on Daniel in 1825. He alleges that "the abomination that causes desolation" could be Islam. Taking the 1290 days as so many years, he proposes that the false prophet's religion would cease to prevail in the world by 1902! No comment is needed here.

*Barnes' Notes* sounds more levelheaded in stating: "The language here is applicable to either of two events: to the act of Antiochus, causing the daily sacrifice to cease in Jerusalem (Dan 8:11; 11:31), or to the final closing of those sacrifices by the death of the Messiah as the great offering to whom they referred, and the destruction of the temple and the altar by the Romans, Dan 9:27. The view taken in the interpretation of this passage will depend on the question to which of these there is allusion here by the angel, or whether there is an allusion to both. The language evidently is applicable to both, and might be employed with reference to either." *The Pulpit Commentary* profoundly comments: "If we regard the days as literal days, there is one period that nearly coincides with the twelve hundred and ninety days — our Lord's ministry upon the earth. It is difficult to understand how our Lord's commencing his ministry was the removing of the daily sacrifice. Yet in the 'heavenlies' it might be so. Further, we sometimes reckon 'from' a period to come, as we can say, 'We are yet — weeks from harvest, midsummer, or Christmas.' So the Crucifixion as the fulfillment of all the sacrifices of the Law may be regarded as their removal. Certainly in his crucifixion was the real abomination which maketh desolate set up."

The suggestion that "the abomination that causes desolation" would refer to the cross comes to me as a surprising ray of new light upon the subject. It is obvious that the erection of the cross can in no way be compared to the placing of the statue of Jupiter in the Holy of Holies of the temple. If the words are applied to both events it stretches the meaning of them to both extremes. But it cannot be denied that the cross is an abomination in the fullest sense of the word. The fact that it was also the altar on which the atonement of the sins of the world was made does not change the horror of it. On the cross, God's holiness was at once desecrated and vindicated. The paradox of sin is solved in the paradox of the cross.

To apply one prophecy to two or more events that are at extreme opposites of each other is not incompatible to fulfillment of prophecy in general. The ripple effect of the stone thrown in the water goes in all opposite directions.

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<sup>292</sup> Matt. 24:22

<sup>293</sup> See Rev. 11:2; 12:6,14; 13:5

It is difficult, though, to see the relationship between this application of the prophecy and Jesus' use of Daniel's words in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>294</sup> Jesus seems to refer rather to the Great Tribulation at the end of time at the appearance of the Antichrist. But, there again, the prophetic eye may have taken in the panorama of the immediate future in which the cross came only a few days after these words were spoken, together with the remote distance when this world will come to its last day. Jesus' words do not leave us less puzzled than Daniel's.

One gets the impression that the 1335 days mark a happy event toward which the believer may look forward with joyful anticipation. Nothing indicates what the extra 45 days, the ones that separate the 1290 from the 1335 stands for. We may have to wait for heaven before these divine mathematics will become clear to us.

To Daniel's question: "What will the outcome of all this be?" the archangel answers that the tribulation will serve the purpose to clearly draw the line between the saints and the sinners and that the characteristics of both categories will become more clearly marked. We find the same thought expressed in Revelation, where the angel tells John: "Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."<sup>295</sup> There, however, John is told not to seal the words, whereas Daniel is given to understand that the time for the fulfillment of the prophecy that was revealed to him lay in the distant future.

Twice in these last verses, the archangel says to Daniel: "Go your way." The Hebrew words *yalak qets* may be rendered: "walk to the end." Daniel had been one of God's beloved watchmen, one that had stood in the gap. God had said to Ezekiel: "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none."<sup>296</sup> In a way Daniel had been that man. He had understood the times and had opened the door for the Holy Spirit to work through his prayers of intercession. The archangel's words could be understood to mean that Daniel's task was finished and that he could rest. We can also read in them to mean that he was to continue to walk on this path to the end of his life on earth.

The words "your allotted inheritance" is the rendering of the Hebrew *gowral*, which can mean: "a portion determined by lot." We find the word used in the Book of Numbers in connection with the division of the promised land. "Be sure that the land is distributed by lot. What each group inherits will be according to the names for its ancestral tribe."<sup>297</sup>

David captured the mood of the archangel's words in the psalm in which he elevated life in the Promised Land to a spiritual level. We read: "Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."<sup>298</sup> And the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews continues this thought by stating: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."<sup>299</sup>

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary* provides a worthy conclusion to our study of the Book of Daniel: "As in the Promised Land there was a lot for each of God's people, so in heaven there is a lot for thee. Do not lose it, do not sell it, do not let thy enemy rob thee of it. Be determined to stand in thy own lot

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<sup>294</sup> See Matt. 24:15-25

<sup>295</sup> Rev. 22:11

<sup>296</sup> Ezek. 22:30

<sup>297</sup> Num. 26:55

<sup>298</sup> Ps. 37:1-6

<sup>299</sup> Heb. 4:9-11

at the end of the days. See that thou keep the faith; die in the Lord Jesus, that thou mayest rise and reign with him to all eternity. Amen.”