

Daniel Study Sermon Series

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Prophecy – What and Why

2 Peter 1:19 – 2:3

BRIAN: Pastor, there is something I need to tell you right away.

ALAN: Are you sure it can't wait until after the worship service is over?

BRIAN: No. No, this is important.

ALAN: OK, what is it?

BRIAN: Well, God told me that we need to change the color of the church carpet.

ALAN: Oh, really?

BRIAN: Yes, we need to put in canary yellow carpet.

ALAN: Canary yellow?!?

BRIAN: Yes, He said "canary yellow," and we need to do it this week.

ALAN: Well, that is an interesting idea. Maybe we can discuss it later. I'm not sure the Board of Directors will go for canary yellow, and actually, I'm not sure that we need a new carpet.

BRIAN: But, Pastor, this is not something we need to discuss. God told me this is what we need to do. I'm just giving you the message. We'd better do it.

ALAN: What do you mean, God told you we need to put in canary yellow carpet this week?

BRIAN: Just that. God told me. He spoke to me. I am just telling you what He said.

ALAN: Did you hear an audible voice say this?

BRIAN: No.

ALAN: So, how do you know God told you this?

BRIAN: How do I know? Well, I .. well, I just do!

ALAN: But, Brian, there is nothing in the Bible which even remotely talks about carpet color, and frankly, canary yellow just doesn't seem like the color the Lord would recommend.

BRIAN: Are you trying to tell me that God didn't speak to me? Who are you to decide what God can or can't say? I think when someone has a message from the Lord, you'd better listen!

ALAN: Now, Brian, let's not get excited. You know, I think you will be real interested in the sermon today. Why don't you just sit down and we'll talk about the carpet later.

BRIAN: Well, OK. But I sure hope Carpet Corner has a big roll of canary yellow carpet on hand.

I think most of us would agree that it is very unlikely that God would talk to us in the way that Brian described. As Christians, however, we believe that the Lord has spoken to men in the past and can still speak to

us today if he wants to. We are convinced God exists and is not silent. So, how does the Lord communicate with us? We believe it is primarily through the Bible, his Word. We regard the words found in this book as the very words of God. When we read and study the Bible, we believe that the Lord is speaking to us. Paul told Timothy that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16 – 17)

Peter tells us that we have the word of the prophets and that we do well to pay attention to it. So why is it that most people don't like to study prophecy? Surely it isn't because they don't think it is important. So it must be that they find it hard to understand most prophecy. I don't know whether that is a problem for you but it shouldn't be after we finish examining the prophetic writings of the Bible. To begin this study, let's try to answer two questions today — what is prophecy and why study it.

What is prophecy?

Some people believe that prophecy is “speaking forth the Word of God” or, in other words, explaining what the Bible says. But explaining what the Bible says is teaching and Paul told the Ephesians that “[God] gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” (Eph 4:11) Since the offices of prophet and teacher are separate, we can see that teaching is not prophecy.

Most Christians believe that prophecy is a God-given revelation of the future given to a prophet such as Moses, Ezekiel, Isaiah or Daniel. We believe God did this to prepare people for the future, and to show that he is the one true God and that he is all-powerful.

But really a prophecy is not a prediction of the future - it is a promise about the future. For example, God said that the Jews would be forced out of Israel, scattered worldwide, persecuted worldwide, and that they would eventually return to Israel. All of these promises have been fulfilled at least in part.

There are different kinds of prophecies. Some prophecies are about a Messiah, which means "anointed one" or "chosen one." These are called "Messianic" prophecies. Christians believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of these prophecies. There also are "end time" prophecies. These prophecies refer to a time of war, famine and pestilence, after which a Messiah will reign over the world with justice and righteousness. Christians believe that the Messiah of the “end time” prophecies is Jesus.

The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies. Some were fulfilled more than 3000 years ago. Let's look at one example. In Genesis 15:12 – 16, God promised Abram (Abraham) that his descendants would be strangers in a strange land for 400 years, that they would be enslaved and mistreated, but that God would plunder the nation enslaving them and that they would come out with great possessions. The fulfillment came in Exodus 12:35 – 36 when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses told them to ask the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. Why would the Egyptians be willing to give their slaves their riches? Because God made them willing to do it as he had promised their ancestor, Abram. It was God's plan to redistribute his wealth that he had allowed the Egyptians to collect so that the Israelite people would have what was necessary to build him a tabernacle when they arrived in the desert.

Other prophecies have been fulfilled since then. And, by some scholars' count, more than 50 have found fulfillment or partial fulfillment during the past 200 years. Many Bible prophecies have found fulfillment more than once, such as the prophecies that the Jews would have Israel as their own country. The Jews had control over the land of Israel from about 3400 years ago up until about 2700 years ago, and then again beginning in 1948.

So prophecy is God's decision to promise something about the future to people and then show himself to be the one true God and in total control by causing what he promised to happen just as he said it would.

Why study prophecy?

In some sense we have already answered the question of why we should study prophecy. It is God revealing himself to people. That is reason enough to study prophecy. But there are more good reasons.

Amount of Scripture devoted to prophecy

To neglect the study of prophecy we would have to neglect what $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the Bible says. Entire chapters of books are devoted to prophecy - Matt. 24-25; Mk. 13; Luke 21. Entire books of the Bible are devoted entirely to prophecy - Zechariah; Daniel; Revelation. Prophecy about the Return of Jesus is mentioned over 300 times in the NT.

Some questions are answered only by studying prophecy

What is the Resurrection? How many are there? Will everyone be resurrected together or separately? What will heaven be like? Will we know one another in heaven? What are the judgments? Will everyone be judged together? Will nations be judged? Will the lost be judged? Will believers be judged? Can a person be saved after judgment? What is the Rapture? Will there be a period of tribulation? Can a person be saved during the Tribulation? When will the saved be raptured? What is the Battle of Armageddon? Who will fight in it? Where will it take place? When will it take place? Who is the Antichrist? Who is the Beast & False Prophet? Who are the 144,000 spoken of in Revelation? What is 666? What is the Judgment Seat of Christ? What is the Great White Throne Judgment? What is the difference between hell & the lake of fire? What is the Millennial Kingdom? What is New Jerusalem? What is the Battle of Gog & Magog? These and many other questions can be answered only by studying prophecy.

Prophecy played an important part in the life of Jesus

He was born in a time and place where many people had a great awareness of prophecy. **Matt. 1:22-23; 2:5; 14-15; 17; 23** Notice how these verses referred to “prophets.” Peter referred to the prophets in regard to the life of Christ - **Acts 10:43**. Jesus Himself often referred to OT prophecies. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus quoted a Messianic prophecy from Isaiah, applied it to himself and even equated himself with the prophets. (See Luke 4:17 – 30)

Prophecy puts things in perspective

(Read Col 3:1 – 4) The 2nd coming of Jesus helps us keep the correct perspective on things that happen. There are a lot of wrong things happening in the world, but praise God there is a better day coming!

Daniel: A Prophet for All Times

Daniel 1:1-6

The memo had been stamped “Top Secret” and every person sitting in the Oval Office had been given orders to arrive promptly at 7 am. It was important that no one from the press would know that all of the senior leaders of the United States had been called together for this executive meeting so a cover story was released that they were meeting with the president for a breakfast to celebrate the Presidents’ Day holiday.

Sitting behind his desk with this distinguished group sitting around the Oval Office, the president buzzed his secretary and a moment later a door opened and a secret service escorted a man through the door before closing it. The man looked at the gathering of important people and hesitated to enter the room any further. The president pointed to a chair directly in front of his desk and invited the man to sit.

After the man sat down, the president quietly said, “Gentlemen, you are about to hear the future of the world as we know it. Listen carefully, because your very lives are at stake.”

This is obviously a fictional account of a meeting in the Oval Office, but a similar scene did occur in another country at another time and with different people involved. One man, divinely inspired, accurately prophesied the rise and fall of future empires and their rulers. Some scholars have doubted that he could foretell the future and thus have tried to discredit him by claiming that the prophecy which he is said to have given was actually written by some other person after the events occurred. Whether we believe or disbelieve what this man said could change our lives forever.

Who was the man? Daniel. No matter how his critics have tried to discredit him or belittle the book that bears his name, they have failed. We cannot dismiss Daniel as just the man in the lions’ den because to know him is to learn how to live with integrity and to look at the future with confidence.

Daniel on trial

The accusers

Daniel has been on trial ever since 233 AD when a man named Porphyry became a polytheist and tried every way possible to prove that the book of Daniel was written about 165 BC and not around 536 BC. A polytheist is someone who believes and worships many gods. Since the book of Daniel proclaims that there is only one God and he is in control of everything that happens on earth, this disturbed Porphyry. If he could show that the book was written in 165 BC then the events about which Daniel is supposed to have prophesied were actually history. That would mean the writer was not Daniel and the book is really a lie. The arguments of today’s “scholars” who claim that the book of Daniel was not written before the events happened are nothing but Porphyry’s arguments rehashed and rewritten in common language.

The defenders

The prophet Ezekiel was a neighbor of Daniel. Ezekiel was taken into captivity in Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar’s second round of taking captives from Jerusalem in 597 BC. In prophesying judgment against Israel (Judah and Simeon, the southern two tribes) Ezekiel says the Lord told him there was no hope of avoiding the judgment because even if a country had Noah, Daniel, and Job living in it they could only save themselves by their righteousness.

When the first two verses of Daniel say that Nebuchadnezzar took the vessels from the temple at Jerusalem and placed them in the treasury of his god, Daniel’s accusers claim that is an unheard of practice. But archaeologists have discovered an inscription that proves Nebuchadnezzar’s practice was exactly that. The accusers claim that Ashpenaz, master of the eunuchs, was a fictional character made up by the writer of the

book of Daniel. But archaeologists have found a monument from ancient Babylon which is now in the Berlin Museum. The monument says that Ashpenaz was the master of eunuchs in the time of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel's accusers also claim that the Bible contradicts itself in Daniel's story in chapter 5 about Belshazzar being king of Babylon and making Daniel the third highest ruler in the kingdom the very night he died. (Read Dan 5:29 – 31) No one could refute this accusation until Sir Henry Rawlinson, an archaeologist, discovered an inscription on a cylinder he found in the Euphrates River. The inscription showed that Nabonides, the king of Babylon had installed his son, Belshazzar, as co-regent and allowed him to use the royal title. It also shows that Belshazzar was slain defending the city while Nabonidus was allowed to go into exile. So, just as Daniel wrote, he became the third highest ruler in the land.

Jesus, himself, declares that Daniel was a real person who prophesied about the abomination that causes desolation. (Read Matt 24:15) There had already been one abomination that caused desolation of the temple during the time of Judas Maccabeus (167 BC) so Jesus is saying that Daniel's prophecy wasn't fulfilled by the first abomination. That means there will be another abomination and since the temple of Jesus' time was destroyed in 70 AD there will have to be another temple built to be desecrated by the abomination.

With the presentation of these witnesses, the defense of Daniel is complete. Not only was he a real person who lived when and how long his book says he lived, but the events recounted in his book and the prophecies God gave him occurred during his lifetime in Babylon.

Daniel's theme

God doesn't need anyone else to accomplish what he wants done. That is evident by his creation of the universe. But Jesus indicated in his "sermon on the mount" that God wants to work through his children, through those who claim Jesus as Lord and follow him. That's why Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16).

Most of us love praise. That's why we display our trophies and awards on our desks, walls, and sometimes our T-shirts. There is nothing wrong with that. But it reminds me about Corrie ten Boom who found it hard to accept all the tribute paid to her because of the success of her books and the movie about her life. Her way of handling it was to visualize each tribute as a flower and then each night collect them into a bouquet that she gave to Jesus because they belonged to him.

In the same way, Daniel didn't look for personal recognition although he was chief of all the king's advisors (wise men) for five kings. Even though the book reveals much of Daniel's character, its theme is "God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes" (Dan 4:25). If we will listen to Daniel, he will teach us that the kingdoms of this world are passing away and the kingdom of heaven is coming soon. Christians, by that I mean those who believe Jesus is Lord and follow him, should be the calmest people on earth. We have no right to run around worried about what is going to happen. God in heaven rules the kingdoms of men.

Daniel: God's man in high places

Daniel was brought as a captive to Babylon when he was a teenager and stayed until he was more than eighty years old. Within three years after he arrived, Daniel was raised to the high position of ruler over the entire province of Babylon and was put in charge of all the wise men. Later he was made the highest official in the kingdom, third only to the king and his son who were ruling together. As a high official in the kingdom, Daniel could walk the halls of the palaces and watch how God worked in the lives of kings.

Daniel was there to watch the ruthless Nebuchadnezzar at work. The king was a dictator of the first order. His cruelty rivaled that of Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein combined. Daniel says "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” (Dan 5:19). But Daniel did not fear him and watched as God brought Nebuchadnezzar to his knees both figuratively and literally because of his pride.

Daniel observed Belshazzar, who didn’t have the problem of pride, but did “set [himself] up against the Lord of heaven” (Dan 5:23). Belshazzar presumptuously compared himself to God, so God sent him a message one night, written by hand on a wall. Today we still refer to “the handwriting on the wall” as a dreadful message of warning.

Daniel watched as God dealt with Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian. Daniel observed political intrigue and political persecution from the inside. He watched God use Cyrus to return Jewish people to Jerusalem and to begin rebuilding the temple.

Daniel was the man behind the scenes watching how God worked his ways among the leaders of nations. He saw all of the nation’s troubles: insanity of the king, murder of the king’s successors, intrigues, plots, and persecutions. And through all of this, Daniel stood immovable, like a telephone pole made of titanium standing against a Kansas tornado – tall and straight. Daniel could stand in the face of anything because the same God who was in charge of the universe was in charge of his life.

Back to the Oval Office

As Daniel was sitting in the chair in front of the president’s desk, he saw many faces that were openly hostile toward him. Most of the men and women would probably be graduates of some prestigious university. Many of them would have several years of service in the private and public sectors. Some would have experience as strategists in several wars. Others would have been the chief executive officer of a large corporation. They would be sitting there wondering what they could learn from someone who lived in a country that no longer exists. But a few of the people would be sitting on the edge of their chairs, eager to hear and understand what this prophet had to say because they believed his credentials.

Finally the president broke the tension and spoke. “We are here to find out what Daniel has to say about the future of the world. I, for one, have found his book fascinating while at the same time baffling. I propose that we hear what he has to say with open minds.” I propose that we do the same.

Training of a Champion

Daniel 1:1-21

As a young Indian boy, Wa-tho-huck dreamed of being a professional football player. While other boys his age played hide and seek and other such games, he was running and kicking balls. He practiced many long hours trying to develop his strength and skills. Part of his schooling was done at Haskell Institute in Lawrence, KS. Eventually he played football for Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle PA, while Pop Warner was coach there. In one season, he scored 25 touchdowns and 198 points, a record that wasn't broken for many years. He also became a baseball player for the New York Giants and the Boston Braves. He won both the decathlon and pentathlon gold medals in the Olympic Games of 1912. He also excelled in many other sports, including track and field, lacrosse, basketball, ice hockey, swimming, boxing, tennis, and archery. In 1950, he was voted the greatest all-around athlete and football player of the first half of the 20th Century. You probably know him by another name, Jim Thorpe.

Although Jim Thorpe was self-trained during his early years, it is evident that he, like all champions, was equipped by someone who saw his potential and worked to prepare him for competition. God saw Daniel's potential and prepared him for the trials he would face.

When Daniel was born (ca 620 BC) Josiah was king of the southern half of the divided kingdom of Israel. The northern half had been conquered in 728 BC by the Assyrians. Josiah was the first good king to sit on the throne in 57 years. He tore down the idols and shrines where people had been worshiping false gods and refurbished the temple and restored the worship of God. He brought a great revival to the people of the land. Daniel was a member of the royal family so he grew up in Jerusalem under the influence of King Josiah and Jeremiah and Zephaniah, who were prophets to the people of Judah.

Daniel would have been about 12 years old when Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Neco. The people of Judah anointed Jehoahaz and made him king to replace his father. But he did evil by worshiping idols like the kings before Josiah and within three months, Pharaoh Neco captured Jehoahaz. Neco installed Eliakim, also the son of Josiah, as king and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim also did evil by worshiping idols. While all of this was happening, Jeremiah and Zephaniah were warning that Jerusalem would be put under siege and the people of Judah taken captive.

Out of obscurity, the nation of Babylon sprang into prominence overnight and Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and laid siege to Jerusalem. Just after he captured the city, Nebuchadnezzar received word that his father, King Nabopolassar died (15 Aug 605 BC) so he left Jehoiakim in charge and returned to Babylon, taking some of the articles from the temple to prove his god was mightier than their God and taking as hostages some youth from the royal family.

Daniel was among those taken hostage. He had been shown that obedience to God was the right and good way to live.

Criteria for selecting hostages for special duty in the palace

Nebuchadnezzar didn't want just any person as a servant in his palace. So he told the chief of his court personnel to select only certain of the hostages for duty in the palace. He wanted members of the royal family because that should keep the ruling people he left behind from rebelling against him in his absence. He wanted them to be young so they could be indoctrinated (trained) in the Babylonian ways. He wanted them to be without flaws (strong, healthy) so that he could show Babylonian superiority over conquered peoples.

From the Judean captives, only four met the criteria – Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Training for special duty

For three years these four teenagers were to attend what could be called, Babylon University. To be trained in all the learning of the Babylonians would mean they would not only learn the language now called Aramaic, but also would study astronomy, astrology, architecture, religion, Babylonian law, and palace protocol. That would be like taking a high school Freshman and giving him a crash course in the subjects taught at Harvard, MIT, Cal Tech, and Oxford.

Nebuchadnezzar didn't simply want to educate these bright young men so their minds wouldn't go to waste. He wanted to brainwash them into thinking like Babylonians. He wanted them to look like Jews on the outside but be Babylonians on the inside. In this way, when Nebuchadnezzar was ready to place administrators over the captured Jewish lands, he would have officials who were Jewish in appearance but loyal Babylonians in their thinking and lifestyle.

To accomplish this Ashpenaz, who is also called the Master of the Eunuchs, had to change the lifestyle of the four boys as well as educate them. The first change would be that they would be castrated and become eunuchs. Besides never being told that any of the four married and had children, Isaiah had prophesied to King Hezekiah 90 years earlier (712 BC), "some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa 39:7). Becoming a eunuch would make the boys unable to ever again enter the temple of the Lord for eunuchs were prohibited by Deut 23:1 from entering the assembly of the Lord.

The second change was to accustom the boys to the good life of living in the palace and eating the best of foods. Once they had lived in this fashion they would not want to their old way of living. In addition, eating of the same food served to the king would put them in a position of obligation to the king and commit them to his lifestyle.

The third change was to change their names. In the ancient world, and even some places today, a person's name spoke about their character or honored the deity that they served. Daniel's name meant "God is my judge." His Babylonian name (Beltshazzar) meant "favored by Bel" (Bel was one of the Babylonian gods). Hananiah meant "God is kind." His new name (Shadrach) meant "at the command of Aku (the moon god)." Mishael meant "who is what God is." His new name (Meshach) meant "who is what Aku is." Azariah meant "God helps." His new name (Abednego) meant "servant of Nego (the fire god)."

What a cunning strategy to get these young men to forget their homeland, their lifestyle, and their godly Jewish heritage. Even though you teach children about God and following him, the world tries to take them hostage and make them forget the lifestyle and heritage they have been taught.

The great decision

Jewish law had no direct prohibition against learning the language and culture of a foreign nation. There was no law against accepting the name a foreign king might give a person. Both of these things happened to Joseph in Egypt. But there was a prohibition against eating food that God had declared unclean or food that had been sacrificed to an idol. To knowingly eat such food meant you were participating in the worship of the idol.

So Daniel and his friends had a great big decision to make. Would they abandon their heritage and become a Babylonian? Or would they do everything in their power to honor God, no matter what the cost?

Daniel and his friends could have thought, "We're just kids. And we're descendants of royalty. Why shouldn't we be entitled to the good life?" They could have looked at all the rest of the people in the king's

training program and said, “Why should just the four of us be denied the king’s meat and wine? After all, everybody else is living it up!”

They could have said, “We’re away from home and separated from the rest of the captives so no one will know what we eat and drink.” Someone has said that the best test of character is what you do when you know that absolutely no one will ever find out what you have done. Daniel surely had heard the stories about what Nebuchadnezzar had done to people who had crossed him in some way. His favorite thing was to throw them into the fire of a furnace or to have them slowly roasted over a fire while people watched.

And here’s the best excuse that Daniel could have. He could have reasoned, “Lord, I know this isn’t exactly right, and I probably shouldn’t do this, but I really want a place of leadership in the kingdom. And I know you could really use me if I were your representative in Nebuchadnezzar’s palace.” That sounds really spiritual doesn’t it? “If I just compromise a little it won’t affect me that much and I can be of much more use to the Lord.”

But Daniel had apparently learned that it is never right to do wrong in order to try to do right. Daniel probably resisted just as every male would when they castrated him and made him into a eunuch. But there wasn’t anything he could do about that. Daniel didn’t complain or make a fuss when the kings changed his name and sent him to Babylon U. But when they tried to feed him the king’s meat he politely asked Ashpenaz for permission not to defile himself in that way.

Even though God had caused him to show favoritism to Daniel, Ashpenaz would not agree to Daniel’s request. He was afraid of the king and what would be done to him if the king should see Daniel looking worse than the other young men in Babylon U. Then Daniel approached the guard that Ashpenaz had assigned to watch Daniel and his friends. He proposed a short test. For ten days they would eat vegetables and drink water instead of anything from the king’s table. At the end of the time, the guard would compare them to the other young men that had eaten the king’s food. If they were not as healthy as the other young men, then the guard could do with them what he pleased. The guard agreed and after ten days he found the four were in even better health than any of the young men who ate the king’s food. So, for the rest of their three-year training, the guard let them eat vegetables and drink water.

God honored Daniel’s decision and his leading of his friends to be obedient to him. So God enabled the men to learn everything that was taught to them better than any of the other trainees. And to Daniel, God gave the special ability to understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

The end of the training

When their three-year cram course at Babylon U was completed, all of the prospective graduates went before King Nebuchadnezzar for their final exam. It was an oral exam. The king questioned and they answered. What Nebuchadnezzar discovered was that none of the prospective graduates were as knowledgeable as Daniel and his friends. In fact, they were ten times better at everything than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. Daniel was God’s champion in Babylon for about 70 years.

Application

Sometimes Christians argue over things where God hasn’t spoken while at the same time allowing what he has said to slip under the rug. There are certain things that God says are wrong. Immorality is wrong, Adultery is wrong. Homosexuality is wrong. Premarital sex is wrong. God draws the line on what our sexuality stimulated society offers to people, young and old, today. If we want the blessing of God upon our lives, we need to learn from the life of Daniel, a champion in the Lord’s army. We will need the courage to stand as Daniel stood and say, “I will not defile myself because God has said no.”

The same God who trained Daniel and gave him the strength to be a tough-minded teenager is ready to train us. The marvelous thing about God is that he will bless a person who is committed to him. Daniel was not a second-rate believer, obeying God when he felt like it or when it was convenient. As a result of Daniel's obedience to his training, God blessed him in some incredible ways. If any of us will follow Daniel's example, God will bless us just as incredibly as he blessed Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar's Nightmare

Daniel 2

If I insisted that you listen to the fascinating dream that I had last night, you might pretend to be interested but you would probably be thinking, "So what?" Dreams really are only significant to the dreamer. Ever since Sigmund Freud had the idea that he could analyze a person through their dreams, the field of psychoanalysis has arisen. Now people go to a psychoanalyst to be told that their dream means they had some kind of traumatic event happen to them in their past or that they hate their mother, or father, or all women, or all men because of some event that happened to them in the past.

In the Bible we find that God spoke to individuals who were following him or going to follow him through dreams and visions. God said, "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams" (Num 12:6). Jacob dreamed about a stairway between earth and heaven with angels walking up and down it. Joseph dreamed about his family and his future and his family got upset with him because he told them the dream and interpreted it for them. God appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him that he could ask for anything he wanted.

God did not limit his speaking through dreams to only his followers. He spoke to two Egyptian prisoners and to Pharaoh in dreams and Joseph interpreted the dreams for them. Of all the dreams recorded in the Bible, the most amazing was not given to some righteous follow of God but to Nebuchadnezzar, the vilest world ruler of that time. It would be like God giving Hitler a dream describing the building and destruction of the Berlin Wall, the rise and fall of the USSR, and Jesus second coming to earth. Nebuchadnezzar was the first king to rule as much of the world as he did. He was ruthless in conquering his enemies and maintained control by cruelly killing those who opposed him. Nebuchadnezzar feared nothing ... except his dreams.

Let's look at this story about Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare like a three-act play. Act 1 is about Nebuchadnezzar and his dream (2:1-13). Act 2 is about God's champion, Daniel, and his response to Nebuchadnezzar's actions (2:14 – 23). Act 3 is the interaction between Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar (2:24 – 49).

Act 1: Nebuchadnezzar

His Dream. Even though Nebuchadnezzar was secure as the king of the most mighty and powerful nation of his time, he suffered from a nightmarish dream that kept him from sleeping. Dreams were considered to be messages from the gods so he considered the nightmare to be some kind of warning

His Determination. Nebuchadnezzar immediately called for his cabinet of advisors – the nation's brain trust – to explain his dream. His advisors consisted of four groups: magicians (those who claim the power to accomplish supernatural feats), enchanters (those who claim power from charms), sorcerers (those who claim to have power from the spiritual realm), and astrologers (those who claim knowledge from the positions of stars). These were the wise men of the Babylonian empire and the individuals that Daniel and his three friends had been ten times better than at answering the king's questions on their final exam from Babylon U (the 3-year training period of ch 1). Daniel and his friends apparently weren't among the individuals called because they were still only considered novices.

His Demand. When the wise men arrived, they asked the king to tell them the dream so they could give him the interpretation.

There is an interesting fact about the book of Daniel that begins right at this point with verse four. Prior to this the book is written in Hebrew, but when it says the wise men asked the king for his dream in Aramaic, the book is written in Aramaic (the language of Babylon) from that point until the end of chapter seven. Then the rest of the book is written in Hebrew again. When we study chapter seven I'll explain a reason for this fact.

A problem also arises for the wise men at this point. We don't know if the king is like most of us and can't remember his dream after he woke up or whether he doesn't trust his wise men. In either case, he tells them that they have to tell him what he dreamed and also interpret it or he will have them cut up and their houses destroyed. But if they can do what he asks, they will receive gifts, rewards, and great honor. If these wise men really had power from incantations, charms, the spiritual realm, and the stars as they claimed, then it should have been no problem for them to tell the king his dream as well as interpret it.

The wise men again ask the king to tell them the dream so they can interpret it. To which the king replies that they are stalling for time so he thinks they are frauds and have been conspiring to tell him misleading things if they don't immediately tell his dream and interpret it. That makes the wise men really scared so they try to explain to the king that what he is asking is impossible. No man on earth can do such a thing. Only the gods could reveal the king's dream to him and they don't live among men.

His Decree. When his wise men tell him no one on earth can tell him his dream and interpret it, Nebuchadnezzar becomes so angry that he immediately decrees the death of all the wise men of Babylon. Now that would include Daniel and his three friends so men were sent to put them to death also.

Act 2: Daniel

His Problem. Arioch, the commander of the king's guard arrives at Daniel's house to carry out the king's decree. Instead of cowering in a corner or trying to defend himself with a sword, Daniel graciously invites Arioch to tell him why the king issued such a harsh decree. Arioch doesn't see any harm in delaying his job long enough to explain the situation to Daniel.

His Poise. Here, Daniel shows by his actions how a great leader handles a crisis. He spoke with wisdom and tact. In the same way that he had won over Ashpenaz and the guard responsible for giving him food during his training, Daniel wins Arioch to his favor. There is no way that Daniel would be able to get a message to the king to request an audience if Arioch didn't allow it.

His Persuasion. Daniel knew God had given him a special ability to understand dreams and visions. So based on his faith in God, Daniel asks Nebuchadnezzar for time to interpret the dream. This must have impressed the king because he granted the time to Daniel.

His Prayer. As soon as Daniel had the temporary stay of execution, he immediately returned home. He explained the situation to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah and urged them to plead with God to reveal the dream and its meaning so that the four of them might not be executed with the rest of the wise men. During the night, God revealed everything to Daniel in a vision.

His Response. So Daniel immediately runs to the king saying "I know the answer!" Right? Wrong!!! Daniel immediately offers a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God. He praises God for his eternal nature, his wisdom, and his power. He acknowledges not only that God is in control of the change of the seasons but also the establishing and disposing of kings. He acknowledges that God is the source of wisdom and knowledge and that God is the revealer of hidden things and knows what is hidden by darkness. Then he finally thanks God for giving him wisdom and power and for revealing the king's dream and its meaning as the four of them had requested. Now there is a prayer that honors God. I only wish Daniel had also recorded how he had worded his prayer of request.

In a crisis situation, God's champion remains calm and continues to act with graciousness to those around him. God's champion doesn't panic but focuses on God and his control of the situation while he asks God to intervene. And God's champion waits upon God to give him an answer.

Act 3: Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel Faces the King. The next morning Daniel goes to Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, and tells him not to execute the wise men because he has the interpretation of the dream for the king. Arioch immediately takes Daniel to the king and takes credit for finding someone among the exiles from Judah who can interpret the king's dream. Instead of correcting what Arioch claims, Daniel waits for the king's question: "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"

Daniel doesn't reply, "Yes, O king, I have prayed hard all night to obtain an answer for you." To do that would be taking glory from God instead of giving it to him. So Daniel, God's champion, is careful to explain that no man can do what the king has demanded but that there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and it is he who has shown the king the future in a dream. And Daniel explains that the mystery has been revealed to himself, not because he is wiser than other men, but so the king can know the interpretation and understand his dream.

The Dream. Daniel tells the king that his dream was about an enormous, dazzling statue. He describes exactly what happened to the statue during the king's dream. And then he gives him the interpretation. He ends by repeating that it is God who has revealed the future to the king and that the interpretation is trustworthy.

Nebuchadnezzar's Response. As ruthless and evil as Nebuchadnezzar was, he was a man of his word. After Daniel reveals his dream and gives him an interpretation, the king honors Daniel by falling prostrate before him. Then he proclaims that Daniel's God is the god of gods, the Lord (master) of kings, and a revealer of mysteries. Nebuchadnezzar makes Daniel the ruler of the entire province of Babylon and places him in charge of all the wise men of the land. That is like being made the chief of staff for the President of the United States.

Daniel's Response. Most of us would accept the great position with which the king wanted to honor Daniel, and then give our friends positions of responsibility under us to reward them for their friendship and prayers. But God's champion doesn't do that. Daniel wants to honor his three friends, so he asks the king to make the three of them the rulers over the province of Babylon. And he asks to remain at the royal court as simply an advisor to the king. This is the position for which God has trained Daniel from his birth. This is the position to which God has brought Daniel through hardship and crisis situations.

Application

From chapters one and two of the book of Daniel, we see the actions of a teenager growing into a man who is a champion of God. He is composed when faced by crises. He is tactful and gracious when dealing with people in charge over him while still seeking to honor God. He is courageous before those who have the power to take his life. He is confident when praying before God and quick to praise God for the answers he receives. He is careful to give God the glory for all his successes and humble to share his rewards with those who helped him along the way.

I think God anxiously waits for someone to follow Daniel's example so he can bless that person as he blessed Daniel. Maybe that someone is you.

Nebuchadnezzar's Statue

Daniel 2:31-45

What would it be like to know the future before it happens? That is the plot of the TV series “Early Edition” where the newspaper a man regularly receives has news reports that are 24 hours before they actually happen.

How terrifying would it be to know 24 hours in advance that your best friend would die in a drive-by shooting? What would you do with the knowledge? Would you tell your friend to stay away from that location? Would you try to convince your friend to go with you to some other location? And what would you do if your friend kept saying he had to go to a store at that location tomorrow and just couldn't go anywhere else?

What if the future you knew was that a meteor was going to hit downtown Kansas City demolishing Bartle Hall during the midst of the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America Skills competition? That is an occasion when thousands of high school and college students and their advisors will be at Bartle Hall. What would you do to try and warn them? How far would you go to try and keep some of them from going to Bartle Hall tomorrow?

See how terrifying it would be to know just one day of the future? No consider what it would be like to know hundreds of years of the future before they happen? While it might be more terrifying, the compulsion to do anything and everything possible to save as many people from being hurt by that future would actually be lessened. It would be lessened because the danger isn't immediate. There would be lots of time before something drastic had to be done to save people and you wouldn't have to be the one to do it so why worry about it today?

That situation is exactly what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He was apparently worried about the future of his rule of his kingdom. So, while he was sleeping, God showed him the future by showing him a dazzling statue. Nebuchadnezzar didn't understand the meaning of the statue so asked his wise men to tell him the dream and the meaning. Since they couldn't do what he ordered, Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree to have all wise men killed. Since Daniel and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had finished their mandatory training to become wise men, that meant they would be killed also. After Daniel received a stay of execution so he could prepare to interpret the dream for Nebuchadnezzar, he and his three friends spent the night in prayer asking God to tell Daniel the dream and the interpretation. God answered their request and Daniel gave the interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar.

Today, we will look at the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare, the interpretation that God gave Daniel, and what we learn that applies to our time.

The Statue

The statue Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream is described as being enormous, dazzling, and awesome in appearance. If you want to get someone's attention, especially someone like the king of the most powerful nation on earth, you have to do things in a big way. Nebuchadnezzar was accustomed to having power so to get his attention the statue had to be shown in a powerful way. So God made it appear enormous and dazzling, with a head made of pure gold, chest and arms made of silver, belly and thighs made of bronze, legs made of iron, and feet made of iron mixed with baked clay. The statue would appear dazzling and awesome because of its upper parts made of gold, silver and bronze — not from the lower portion made of iron and iron mixed with baked clay.

Daniel then tells the king that while he was watching the statue in his dream, a rock that was cut out but not by human hands struck the statue on its feet and smashed them. At the same time, the rest of the statue was

broken into such small pieces that it was like chaff and was swept away by the wind so that no trace remained. Then the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

The Interpretation

Then Daniel gives Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of the statue and what happened to it. The interpretation is not of Daniel's own making. It is what God explained to Daniel.

The head of gold. This represented Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kingdom which began in 606 BC and lasted until 539 BC. It is fitting that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is represented by gold because it was literally saturated with gold. Herodotus, the Greek historian visited Babylon around 435 BC, about 100 years after Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He wrote that he had never seen so much gold nor even imagined that there could be so much. This is why Isaiah wrote (Isa 14:4) "you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has ceased, the golden city ceased."(NKJV) And why Jeremiah wrote (Jer 51:7) "Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord's hand." (NIV)

Nebuchadnezzar was surely pleased that he was the head of the statue and that his kingdom was represented by gold. And I imagine that he was puffed up with pride when Daniel said that the God of heaven has given the king the power to rule over all the people of earth, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air.

Even though Nebuchadnezzar died in Sep 562 BC, his kingdom remained intact and in control of everything while ruled by Amel-Marduk (Oct 562 - Aug 560 BC), Neriglissar (560 - 556 BC), and Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar (556 - 539 BC).

The chest and arms of silver. Daniel tells the king that after him, another kingdom will rise that is inferior. It is represented by silver. We know from a later vision of Daniel and from history that this is the Medo-Persian kingdom that captured Babylon in 539 BC and lasted until 331 BC. The two arms accurately depict the divided nature of the kingdom between the Medes and the Persians. Although the kingdom increased in size, it is considered inferior because of the quality of the kingdom.

The belly and thighs of bronze. From Daniel's later visions and from history we know that this represents the kingdom of Greece which conquered the world under the leadership of Alexander the Great. He began invading Persia in 334 BC and finally captured Babylon in 331 BC. Eight year later, Alexander died at Babylon because of his drunkenness and his four top generals divided the kingdom among themselves. The kingdom is represented by bronze because Alexander's armies went into battle dressed all in bronze — helmets, breastplates, shields, and swords. Although again larger in size, the kingdom is considered inferior to the previous kingdoms. The Greek kingdom diminished in power until it was conquered by Rome in 63 BC.

The legs of iron. Although Daniel's other visions don't indicate this is the Roman kingdom, history shows that it is. The Roman army was known as the iron legions because of their ability to crush all resistance with an iron heel. The Roman kingdom was the largest of all these kingdoms but was still considered inferior. Although there was peace throughout the kingdom and lots of trade along a superb system of roads, the peace was maintained by the cruelty of public crucifixion of those opposing Rome. Rome fell as a kingdom in AD 475 but it continues as the basis of all the nations of the Western world including the United States.

The feet of iron mixed with baked clay. There is some disagreement among scholars about what kingdom this part of the image refers. Some say that it was the Roman kingdom of Jesus' time and the Church is the Kingdom of God which replaces it and continues forever. But when compared to Daniel's later visions, it seems clear that it refers to a ten-kingdom confederacy that arises under the Beast of Revelation (the Anti-Christ) during the seven-year Tribulation. That the feet are made of iron mixed with baked clay indicates that this ten-kingdom confederacy is attempting to mix two things that don't mix. What they try to mix is not clear at this time but should become clearer the closer we get to the beginning of the Tribulation.

The Rock. Since the rock is cut out but not by human hands and becomes a mountain that fills the earth, it is clear that it refers to a kingdom created by God. The rock destroys the ten-kingdom confederacy so that refers to the end of the Tribulation when Jesus returns to earth. The mountain that the rock grows into is the Millennial kingdom ruled over by Jesus.

We need to recognize how remarkable this prophecy and interpretation is. When Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about the statue, Persia was nothing but a minor nation under the control of Babylon. The Greeks were a group of cities warring with each other. Rome was just a small village along the Tiber River. There is no way that Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, or any other person could have even guessed that they would one day succeed Babylon as the most powerful kingdoms on earth.

The Application for Today

The deteriorating form of human government. What God showed Nebuchadnezzar was the future of world governments. The Jews had rejected God's plan. They decided to govern according to their own ideas so God sent them into captivity and turned control of world government over to Gentiles. This is what God told Ezekiel to prophesy about Israel:

Prophesy against the land of Israel ... Take off the turban, remove the crown ... It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it. (Ez 21:2, 26-27)

So the statue shows the progress of Gentile world governments that were given dominion for a time in place of Israel.

According to the statue, the progress of governments is downward. The value of the metals forming the statue gets less with each successive government – gold, silver, bronze, iron, clay. The specific gravity of each succeeding material used to represent the governments is decreasing – gold 19.3, silver 10.5, bronze 8.5, iron 7.6, clay 1.9.

The type of rule of each government changes from first to last. The Babylonian government was a monarchy – rule by one man. The Medo-Persian government was an oligarchy – rule by a few men. The Greek government was an aristocracy – rule by aristocrats or nobility. Although the Roman government had a senate and representation, it was imperialistic – rule by the military under Caesar's control.

Democracy is not God's ideal government. Someone might claim that today's form of government, especially in the United States, is not like any of those represented by parts of the statue. That is true although democracy arose from the Roman system but without letting the military be used to control the people. God's ideal government isn't a democracy but a specific type of monarchy – a theocracy – rule by God alone. Our government is established as it is because we need checks and balances to keep one individual or a class of individuals from gaining control and using the military to maintain control over the people by force.

While we were still thirteen colonies and part of the English empire, Professor Alexander Tyler wrote the following:

A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the public treasure. From that moment on the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most money from the public treasury, with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy followed by a dictatorship.

Professor Tyler's words should cause us to ask how close we are to having our government collapse and become a dictatorship. In fact, the final form of government seen in the Tribulation is a dictatorship with Satan being the controlling force.

All that we have learned from the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an awesome statue that God gave Daniel and all that we see from history should tell us that we are close, very close to the time of the last Gentile government – the feet of iron mixed with baked clay. That also means we are also close to Jesus' return to rapture – catch up – those who believe in Jesus and remove them from this earth. That warns us that there is very little time to continue telling people about Jesus and his loving gift of a changed life. So we need to be bolder than we have in the past in telling our family, friends, and neighbors about Jesus or else they will have to endure the Tribulation and may spend eternity separated from the love of God.

If you haven't chosen to accept Jesus as Lord of your life and follow his commands, then I urge you to do it now. Nebuchadnezzar's statue warns us that the time is short and getting shorter.

Fiery Faith

Daniel 3

Man starting fish business – his sign: “Fresh Fish For Sale Today”

Invited friends to visit on opening day. Many came.

Suggested change his sign.

“Why say ‘Today’? It is today.” So he removed the “Today.”

“Why say ‘For Sale?’ That’s the reason for the store.” So he took the words “For Sale” off the sign.

“Why the word ‘Fresh?’ You are a man of integrity so that guarantees your fish to be fresh.” So “Fresh” came off the sign.

Only “Fish” was left. Someone complained “I smelled your fish from two blocks away so don’t need ‘fish.’”

The man should have stood by what he knew would be the best sign to tell people that he was selling fresh fish at his store every day and not compromised to try and please everyone else. The individual who tried to satisfy everybody ends up pleasing nobody.

Background

In Daniel 1 we were introduced not only to Daniel but three young teenage friends of his – Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Like Daniel, they had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar when he captured Jerusalem in 605 BC. And along with Daniel they had been chosen to attend Babylon U, Nebuchadnezzar’s school to indoctrinate bright, handsome, young captives to become loyal Babylonian wise men (magi) who would one day help him rule their own captured lands and peoples. Part of their indoctrination was to receive a new, Babylonian name. Hananiah was named Shadrach. Mishael was named Meshach. And Azariah was named Abednego. When Nebuchadnezzar gave the boys their final, oral examination at the end of Babylon U, he found them ten times better than all of his wise men. We learned that when you faithfully obey God and speak to your opposition with understanding and tact God will provide a way for you.

In Daniel 2, we discovered that Nebuchadnezzar had been given a dream about the future reign of Gentile (non-Jewish) kingdoms over the earth. His wise men were unable to tell him the dream as well as interpret it so Nebuchadnezzar had ordered them all killed. We again saw Daniel speaking with understanding and tact to delay the completion of Nebuchadnezzar’s order for 24 hours so that he could seek to know the dream and interpretation from God. When Daniel was able to tell him both the dream and its interpretation from God, Nebuchadnezzar honored Daniel by placing him in charge of all the wise men and proclaimed that Daniel’s God was the God of gods and the Lord of Kings. Daniel, in turn, honored Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego by asking the king to make them administrators over the province of Babylon. We learned that when you obey God and give him all of the honor that people try to give you, he will unlock the secrets of mysteries to you.

Now in Daniel 3, we are going to learn more about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and their fiery faith. According to the events and prophecies of Jeremiah 27, 28, & 51, it is believed that the events of Daniel 3 occurred at the same time that Zedekiah went to Babylon which was in 593 BC. That would mean 12 years have passed since Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2. Since Daniel and his three friends were probably about 15 when they were captured and spent 3 years in Babylon U, that would mean they are in their early 30s at this time. And they have faithfully administered the affairs of the province of Babylon for twelve years.

The image in the desert

When we last saw Nebuchadnezzar he was praising God and seemed to have acknowledged him as the supreme God. But looks can be deceiving.

Back in the 1960s, a man who had advocated the violent overthrow of the United States government and had been involved in some terrorist activities, fled from America and became an exile in France. While he was there, he claimed to have seen Jesus in the clouds and became a believer. He returned to America prepared to face charges against him but also prepared to tell the media about his conversion. He was asked to speak at some churches and their sanctuaries were packed to capacity. Some time later, it is reported that he became a member of the cult that follows the Korean, Sun Myung Moon. He has since dropped into obscurity and his name is almost unknown.

Nebuchadnezzar was like that man. In Chapter 1 he had loudly praised God, but after twenty-three years of ruling the greatest kingdom on earth he began to believe his own press releases about how great he was. Even God had said he was the head of gold on the statue of his dream. So he decided that a huge, golden statue should be erected to glorify himself. He ordered that it be built 6 cubits wide and 60 cubits high (that's about 9 feet by 90 feet) and erected on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

Some interesting bits of information. There is a mound of bricks about 6 miles SE of Babylon in an area of flat land that would be called a plain. This could possibly be the site where Nebuchadnezzar's statue was erected. Also, for a statue to look realistic, it is built with the approximate ratio of 5 to 1, height to width. But Nebuchadnezzar's statue was 10 to 1, so although it could probably be seen for 15 miles, it would have looked like a skinny, almost stick-like figure.

A cuneiform tablet, called the Babylonian Chronicle, describes how Nebuchadnezzar had to put down a rebellion in his kingdom during 595 BC. So this statue appears to be an attempt to unite his kingdom using religion and setting himself up as its god. That accounts for why he summoned all the leaders from throughout the kingdom to appear before his statue in the plain of Dura and bow down in worship of it. It has been estimated that there could have been as many as 30,000 people gathered on the plain shielding their eyes from the bright reflection of the sun coming from the statue.

James Polk was President of the United States for one term from 1844 to 1848 before he died in 1849. During his term the country acquired land at a rapid rate and gold was discovered in California. It has been said that of all the presidents only George Washington had a stronger record of success in office. Polk's wife (Sarah) was the first (and I suspect only) first lady to serve as her husband's secretary. Polk stood 5 ½ feet tall and when he entered a room full of dignitaries it bothered her that his presence sometimes went unnoticed for several minutes and then whoever saw him would say, "The President is here." To solve this problem of disrespect, Sarah requested that a song be chosen which would be played as he entered the room to announce his presence. The song that was selected was composed by James Sanderson in 1828 and has come to be called "Hail to the Chief." Since that time it has announced the arrival of every US President to any official function.

Nebuchadnezzar established his own "Hail to the Chief" music and had his herald announce that when the people heard the music they were to bow down before the statue in worship of him or immediately be thrown into a fiery furnace that had been set up in the vicinity. Imagine the scene. As the music begins to play, all of the 30,000 leaders from all over the kingdom, including Zedekiah whom Nebuchadnezzar had appointed to rule in Jerusalem, fell down in worship. All that is except three young Jewish men.

Conspiracy and Confrontation

Now the plot thickens. Some of the Wise men (Magi – Astrologers or Chaldeans) went to the king to "rat" on the three young men. They were apparently upset that those three young Jews had been placed in authority over the province of Babylon and over them. So they saw this as a great chance to get rid of these usurpers of their rightful offices. After properly addressing the king, they remind him of his decree that all must bow down in worship or be thrown into the fiery furnace. Then they inform him that the three Jews he set over the affairs of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – are not obeying him. They go on to say that the three do not even serve the kings' gods.

Nebuchadnezzar reacted just like the conspiring wise men expected. He flew into a rage, furious that anyone would disobey him. But even in a fit of rage, Nebuchadnezzar must have remembered how brilliant the three

had been when he gave them their oral graduation exam from Babylon U. And he probably recalled how they have administered the province surrounding his palace for the past 12 years. So he doesn't immediately throw them into the fiery furnace but asks them if it is true that they don't serve his gods or worship the image he has set up. Then he gives them a second chance – something that he is not known for doing. He tells them when they hear the music if they bow down and worship the image he has made they will be forgiven and everything will be OK. But if they don't worship the image they will be thrown into the fiery furnace. He ends by challenging what god will be able to rescue them from his hand.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abenego must have realized when they first heard Nebuchadnezzar's decree that their obedience of God would eventually bring them to this confrontation before the king. God had spoken to the Hebrew people from Mount Sinai and told them, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them." (Ex 20:3-5) So the three young men had to decide whether they would obey God or obey the king.

Idolatry is not just the worship of false gods but also the worship of the one true God in a wrong way. God says he must be worshiped in spirit and truth and not through some thing. Wearing a cross or a "What would Jesus do" tee-shirt will not make a person a Christian, nor is it always honoring to the Lord. One of today's rock stars wears a cross and very little else when she gyrates all over a stage.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't need a second chance to do what they knew was right. They had a word from God, even though it had been given almost 1400 years earlier, so they didn't have to decide what was the right thing to do. All they had to decide was whether they would obey God or Nebuchadnezzar.

One of the greatest statements made by anybody in the Bible is the answer that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego gave King Nebuchadnezzar. They didn't get all worked up and start calling the king's names. They didn't argue with each other, with the king, or with the wise men accusing them. They didn't try to reason that in this situation God wouldn't mind if they bent his command so that they could continue to work effectively for the Jewish people in captivity. No. They simply stood their ground and told the king that they didn't need to defend their actions and that they would not serve his gods or worship his statue. They proclaimed that God was able to protect them in the fire and save them from the king's hand. But even if he didn't choose to do that they still would not disobey God's command.

How many of today us trust God so completely that we would obey his commands even in the face of being burned to death? How many of us believe that even if God allows us to be killed for standing up for him everything will be OK? How many of us have the kind of fiery faith? I'm afraid that not many would stand the fiery test like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Nebuchadnezzar was so angered by their obedience of God rather than him that he ordered the fire in the furnace to be made seven times hotter. He commanded his strongest soldiers to tie up the three young men and throw them in the fire. The soldiers immediately did what Nebuchadnezzar commanded and tied them up still wearing their robes and turbans. The fire was so hot that the soldiers who threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace were killed as they tossed them in.

Three equals four

What happened next amazed the king so much that he asked his advisers to confirm that it was three men that they tied up and threw into the fire. Instead of three men being burned up by the fire, Nebuchadnezzar saw four men walking around in the fire unbound and unharmed. And he said the fourth man had the look of a son of the gods. This was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus.

The king was awed by what he saw so he approached the opening of the furnace and shouted for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come out of the fire. When they walked out, the administrators gathered with Nebuchadnezzar around the three and saw that not only had the fire failed to harm them, their clothes were not burned and didn't even smell of smoke.

Nebuchadnezzar responded by praising the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego for sending his messenger (angel) to rescue them because they defied the king and risked their lives rather than disobey their God. And he proclaimed that anyone who said anything against their God should be cut into pieces and their houses torn down. This doesn't mean Nebuchadnezzar had become a follower of the one true God. He was just pragmatic – don't anger a god who was powerful enough to keep people from being even remotely affected by being thrown into an intensely hot fire.

Why weren't they hurt?

Why does God save some and not others? Why are some people spared troubling times while others have to endure them? I don't have the answers to those questions. No one does. It is part of the nature of God to know everything and to know what is best for any situation. And God is under no compulsion to explain his choices to us. But I think we can learn something from the way Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced their fiery trial that might possibly help us face our own troubles.

They were absolutely committed to God. There was no reason to discuss the situation or what they could do about it. Their course of action was not negotiable. They would obey God.

They had absolute confidence in God. God, the Creator of the universe, had the power to do whatever was necessary to save them. They did not base their obedience upon whether God made things pleasant for them or not. We say something like, "God if you'll just get me out of this mess I'll attend church every Sunday, or I'll give you a tenth of all my income, or whatever else we think might please God. They didn't try to bargain with God.

They had absolute courage because of God. Whenever we are face with doing something difficult for God, like witnessing to somebody or teaching a Bible study class, we can find all sorts of reasons why we shouldn't do it. These three young Hebrews didn't even have their friend Daniel for moral support. The reason he isn't mentioned is probably because he was away on some other business of the king so he was exempted from attending this inaugural event. They knew that with God on their side there was nothing to fear.

They were absolutely conscious of the presence of God. They didn't just become aware of God's presence after they were thrown into the fire. They regularly had fellowship with him through prayer long before this trial arose. They may have even remembered the prophecy that Isaiah had given 150 years earlier: "When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze" (Isa 43:2).

What the flames of the fire did was set the three men free from what bound them. And in the midst of the flames they received the encouragement of meeting God on a more personal level than they had ever experienced before. And that is exactly what our trials can do for us.

Application

Are you facing something today that you fear? Are you worried that you won't be able to make it through whatever is happening? Are you trying to make a bargain with God to get you out of the fire rather than trusting him through it? Then you need the fiery faith that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had.

Would you like to have fiery faith today? You can have it if you accept Jesus as God and the master of your life – that is, the one who has the right to direct every detail of how you live every moment of every day. That is the beginning of faith that can face fire. And that faith only grows stronger as you spend more time getting to know him through Bible study and prayer.

The Gospel according to Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 4

One of the portraits we see of Napoleon Bonaparte shows him standing defiantly with his right hand pushed between his vest buttons. And that is how most people imitate him at costume parties.

He was a proud man, driven by ambition, to conquer Europe. On the morning of the battle of Waterloo, Napoleon described his strategy for the day's campaign saying, "We'll put the infantry here, the cavalry there, and the artillery over there. At the end of the day, England will be at the feet of France, and Wellington will be the prisoner of Napoleon."

One of his officers responded, "But we must not forget that man proposes and God disposes."

Napoleon stood as tall and straight as his 5 foot 2 inch frame could go and arrogantly replied, "I want you to understand, sir, that Napoleon proposes and Napoleon disposes."

The novelist, Victor Hugo wrote, "From that moment, Waterloo was lost, for God sent rain and hail so that the troops of Napoleon could not maneuver as he had planned, and on the night of battle it was Napoleon who was prisoner of Wellington, and France was at the feet of England."

Napoleon was displaying the most basic of all sins – pride. Pride is an exaggerated and dishonest self-evaluation that claims, like Satan claimed, "I will be god." Several verses in the book of Proverbs show how much God hates the sin of pride.

Proverb 6:16 lists seven things that are detestable to God. The list begins with "haughty eyes" or a "proud look." In fact James, the brother of Jesus, summarized all of the Old Testament proverbs by quoting one proverb, 3:34, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Here, in Daniel 4, we see God humbling a proud man. From the events in chapters one and three and Nebuchadnezzar's statements, you might think he had come to believe in one true God. But although he had learned a little about God, he was not ready to bow down in worship and proclaim God as the only God.

The events of chapter three occurred in 593 BC and these events begin approximately 15 years later in 578 BC when Daniel was 42 years old and had been serving King Nebuchadnezzar for 24 years. All of chapter four is the king's personal letter telling about the events that took place over eight years.

The greeting

Nebuchadnezzar addresses his letter "to the peoples, nations and men of every language who live in all the world." That means he was writing this to everyone in his kingdom and that it would be sent by messenger to all cities in the kingdom where it would be read publicly for all the people to hear. So this is not a private matter. The king wanted every person, no matter how noble or low, to hear what he wanted to say. That shows how important Nebuchadnezzar considered his message.

Next Nebuchadnezzar gives a blessing to all his hearers. Then he gives the reason or subject of his letter – and this must have astounded everyone who heard it. The king says he is pleased to tell them about all the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for him. This is the king's personal testimony about the One True God and that God's kingdom is an eternal kingdom. The hearers of this letter would remember that Nebuchadnezzar had erected an enormous gold statue of himself and forced people to worship it or be burned to death in a fiery furnace. And now they hear the king praising not one of the many gods he used to follow but the God of the Hebrew people. And instead of glorifying himself, Nebuchadnezzar is glorifying the Hebrew God.

With this greeting and statement of purpose, King Nebuchadnezzar has grabbed the attention of every person who hears his letter.

Another nightmare

Nebuchadnezzar says he had another nightmare that terrified him. So he called in his wise men to interpret it. This time instead of trying to stump the wise men by having them tell him the dream as well as interpret it, he tells them what he dreamed. But that doesn't help them. They don't have any idea what it means.

Finally Daniel arrived. Nebuchadnezzar called him by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, and his title, chief of the magicians (one in charge of the wise men), and then stated that the spirit of the holy gods is in Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar is saying that at the beginning of his story he was scared and still seeking guidance from all the gods that he had followed for many years.

The dream Nebuchadnezzar relates to Daniel is of an enormous tree growing in the middle of his land. The tree grew so large and strong that its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth; it produced food and shelter for all creatures. Then he sees a holy messenger come down from heaven who commands that the tree be cut down but that it be left in the ground and its stump bound with iron and bronze.

Then all of a sudden, the holy messenger changes from commanding what is to be done with the tree and begins saying what is to be done with Nebuchadnezzar. He commands that he be drenched with the dew of heaven, live with animals, and have the mind of an animal for seven years. He proclaims that this decision is made so that all people may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to whomever he wishes.

A reluctant interpretation

When Daniel heard the dream his face must have shown that he was troubled by it. He wasn't troubled because he didn't know the interpretation. God either gave him the interpretation immediately or had revealed the dream and its interpretation to him during the night before. He was perplexed because he didn't know how he was going to explain it to the king. After serving Nebuchadnezzar for 24 years, he must have cared deeply for the king because he said, "if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!" Daniel gives us an excellent pattern for sharing the judgment of God with sinners. Generally, it needs to be done with a broken heart and not with eagerness.

In the mid 1800s a concert was held in London, England to which many notable individuals were invited to attend. One of the guests was the preacher, Caesar Milan. A young lady charmed the guests with her singing that night. After the concert, Milan approached the young lady and very graciously but boldly said, "I thought as I listened to you tonight how tremendously the cause of Christ would be benefited if your talents were dedicated to his cause. You know, young lady, you are a sinner in the sight of God, but I am glad to tell you that the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse you from all sin." The lady was so angry with what Milan said that she stomped her feet and began to walk away. As she did, Milan called after her, "I mean no offense. I will pray that God's Spirit will convict you."

Now that is not my style of witnessing to people. But as Paul Harvey says, "Now, the rest of the story." The young lady went home but couldn't sleep that night. Milan's face kept appearing to her and his words kept ringing in her ears. Finally, around 2 a.m. she got out of bed, sat down at her desk and wrote these words with tears rolling down her cheeks:

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that they blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Shortly after Charlotte Elliott penned the words, William Bradbury set the words to music and it has been sung by choirs throughout the world as a hymn inviting people to accept Jesus as their Lord and Master. Those few words spoken with a broken heart by Caesar Milan has resulted in tens of thousands of people declaring their faith in Jesus.

In the same way, Daniel knew that no matter how much it hurt Nebuchadnezzar, he needed to hear the truth of what God was trying to reveal to him. So he gives the king the sad interpretation that the Most High God has decreed that the king “will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals.” Not only that, but for seven years he will eat grass like the cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven until Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he chooses. Daniel ends with the good news that the stump which is left with its roots in the ground means the kingdom will be restored to Nebuchadnezzar when he acknowledges that Heaven rules. Daniel then pleads with the king to renounce his wicked ways and be kind to the oppressed and do what is right so that God might change his judgment.

The very fact that God gave the king the dream shows his love and mercy toward him. He had revealed his majesty and authority to Nebuchadnezzar twice before and still the king had not believed. Now he was going to bring judgment upon the king so that all people will know that he is in charge and he warns the king so Nebuchadnezzar can accept him as the One True God and avoid the judgment. Nebuchadnezzar may have been scared by the dream and its interpretation but unfortunately he didn't heed the warning. The judgment didn't come upon him for twelve months after Daniel interpreted the dream. When it didn't happen immediately, I'm sure Nebuchadnezzar rationalized that Daniel's god wasn't that powerful after all, or that he had made some changes and that must have been enough to appease God. He apparently didn't expect the judgment to really happen as Daniel had prophesied.

This all occurred during a period of time when Nebuchadnezzar was busy building up the city of Babylon and making it spectacular. The city was a square that was 15 miles on each side. The walls were 387 feet high (almost 1/3 of the Empire State Building) and 85 feet wide – so wide at the top that you could drive four chariots side by side. In fact, one of the sports was chariot racing around the walls. The Euphrates River flowed through the middle of the city which had a population of 2 million. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the famous hanging gardens, was built inside of Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. It was built to look like the mountains of his wife's homeland so she wouldn't be homesick. And it had a system to lift water from its base near the Euphrates to its summit so that all the plants could be watered by running water.

The nightmare fulfilled

A year after the dream, Nebuchadnezzar was walking along the walls of his palace remarking about what he had built by his power and for the glory of his majesty. Suddenly, a voice announced to him from heaven that his authority had been taken from him, he would be driven away to live with the wild animals and eat grass for seven years until he acknowledges that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he pleases. And immediately the dream was fulfilled.

According to the Nabonidus Chronicles, Nebuchadnezzar had an illness that kept him away from people for seven years. And Nebuchadnezzar tells us in this open letter to all peoples that during the seven years his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

Peace with God and restoration

Imagine what it was like not just to live like an animal for seven years but to be an animal for seven years. Remember, the decree was that his mind would be changed to that of an animal for the seven years. Nebuchadnezzar must have been even more terrified by the change that came over him as it happened than all

the terror he felt from both of his nightmares combined. And seven years later, when God again restored his human mind and he looked around, he was evidently awed by the power and mercy of the Most High God.

Nebuchadnezzar ends his letter of testimony with praise to God who lives forever. He acknowledges that God rules over the kingdoms of men and gives those kingdoms to whomever he pleases. He also recognizes that God does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth and no one can question what he has done. The king says that not only did God restore his sanity and his kingdom but that God made it even greater than before.

After falling from the highest that a man can attain to the lowest that a man can fall, Nebuchadnezzar proclaims that he praises and exalts and glorifies “the King of heaven because everything he does is right and all his ways are just.” That is the statement of a man who believes God is the only God and the ruler of the universe. It is the statement of a saved individual. One day, I expect we will get to meet Nebuchadnezzar in heaven.

A closing punch line

But Nebuchadnezzar isn't finished with his letter yet. He has one closing punch line that he wants to get in – one final statement of warning to everyone hearing his testimony. “Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” He says, “Watch out! If you think everything you have is a result of your own accomplishments, you may soon be eating grass!”

Invitation

How about you? Do you think you are the master of your own life? Is everything you have a result of your own doing? Do you think you know better than God how you should live your life? Whether you say it or not, if you live like that, watch out! You may soon be eating grass.

Although Nebuchadnezzar accepted God's rule in his life, he only warned his hearers about the foolishness of thinking they could direct their own lives. He didn't invite them to accept God and ask God to direct their lives. But I'm going to ask you for him. Will you accept God as the One who has the right to direct how you live and acknowledge him as the Most High God before other people? If so, then God will direct you through whatever is troubling you today. But let me give you a warning today. Jesus says, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.” (Matt 10:32-33) So don't think you can claim to accept Jesus as your Savior and then continue to live any way that you want. You must acknowledge him before others before he will acknowledge you before the Father.

Handwriting on the Wall

Daniel 5

Seventy years after the city of Jerusalem was captured and the descendants of Judah taken as captives to Babylon, one of the best-known drunken parties took place. Just as Napoleon met his downfall at Waterloo, the empire of Babylon met its fall that night and brought a crashing end to the party. The story has the intrigue of a modern adventure-thriller, but the end of the story had been exposed about 60 years earlier by the prophet Jeremiah. God told him to foretell “all nations will serve him [Nebuchadnezzar] and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.” (Jer 27:6-7) That is the story you are about to hear.

Soon after Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC, we see the power and authority of his kingdom breaking up. He was succeeded by his son, Amel-Marduk who reigned for two years before he was assassinated by his brother, Neriglissar, who took the throne. After four years of reign, Neriglissar was killed in battle and a man from the rank and file of the military, Labashi-Marduk, attempted to become the king. He only lasted three months before he was captured by the forces of the Medes and Persians and became a prisoner of war. Nabonidus, the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar, then became king. Nabonidus didn't like spending his time in the palace of Babylon. He preferred to be in the field, battling his enemies. So he appointed his son, Belshazzar, to reign with him and had him stay in Babylon to perform the official state functions. Chapter 5 of Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar the father of Belshazzar several times, even though he is really his grandfather. These are not mistakes because there is no Babylonian (Chaldean) word for grandfather.

Where was Daniel during all of this? After Neriglissar murdered his brother, Amel-Marduk, to assume the throne, he relieved all of the wise men of their positions and banned them from the palace. So, for the past 23 years Daniel has not had any influence over the affairs of Babylon. But he was not inactive as far as God was concerned. As we shall see in chapters 7 and 8, God was giving him visions of the future. But for now Daniel tells us how the Babylonian kingdom fell to the Medes and Persians just as God had revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in his statue dream 63 years previously. Since Daniel was 18 when that dream occurred, that makes him 81 years old at this time.

Belshazzar was a very self-centered individual. He used the power of his position to indulge in every excess possible, even ignoring and breaking every tradition of the Babylonian people and their gods. All historical records indicate that he was simply an awful ruler. This feast was just a continuation of his normal pattern of behavior.

The Feast of Belshazzar

There are three things in particular to note about this feast.

Its sensuality. The Greek historian, Xenophon, tells us that this feast traditionally was a solemn occasion to honor their god, Bel. Belshazzar should have been very protective of events honoring Bel because his name means “Bel protect the king.” But Belshazzar ignored tradition and led his friends in drinking toasts to the god. This was something that no Babylonian king had ever done. The king was supposed to sit at a table by himself and set the sober tone of the feast. It was beneath the king's dignity to drink with his noblemen. In fact, women were not allowed at these feasts. But Belshazzar had his nobles bring their wives and concubines (what we might call mistresses today). So after a short while of drinking, what occurred was a drunken orgy.

Its sacrilege. At the height of his evil deeds, Nebuchadnezzar was not as reckless as Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar had been careful not to offend the gods of any of the peoples he overpowered and captured. He especially didn't want to offend the God of the Jewish people. Daniel and his Jewish friends had been very important early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign and later Daniel had given him the interpretation of the dream that eventually led him to believe in and follow the One True God. But in his drunken state, Belshazzar wanted to

show that he was not afraid of any gods, so he instructed his servants to bring in the goblets his grandfather had taken from the Jewish temple in Jerusalem so everyone could drink from them. While they drank from God's sacred vessels, they praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Its stupidity. Not only was the feast itself sensuous and sacrilegious, it was just plain stupid to have it. Cyrus the Persian had already captured Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, and his armies were outside the walls of Babylon at that very moment preparing to storm the city. It is certain that Belshazzar and all his nobles felt safe because there was a moat around the city walls which were 387 feet high and 85 feet thick. In addition, they had enough food and supplies stored within the city to last for twenty years. Although he thought he was safe, Jeremiah had foretold many years earlier that:

1. A northern nation would conquer Babylon (Jer 50:1-3, 9)
2. The conquering nation would be associated with the Medes (Jer 51:11, 28)
3. Babylon is described as in her fortification (Jer 51:53, 58)
4. Babylon would be taken by a trick or snare (Jer 50:24)
5. The capture would have something to do with drying up of water (Jer 51:36)
6. The capture would happen while a great feast was occurring (Jer 51:39)
7. The conquest would occur while Nebuchadnezzar's grandson was in power (Jer 27:6-7)

So while Belshazzar partied, Gobryas, one of Cyrus' generals, diverted Euphrates River which flowed through the middle of the city thus allowing his army to walk into the city unopposed.

The Finger of God

While Belshazzar held his stupid party and thumbed his nose at God, and while Gobryas diverted the Euphrates River to enter the city, God paid a visit to the doomed Babylonian king.

A supernatural sign. As soon as Belshazzar drank from the temple goblets and praised his false gods, suddenly the fingers of a man's hand appeared out of nowhere and began writing on the wall. This immediately sobered the king. No longer was he defiantly opposing God. Now, his face showed the stark fear he felt.

The summons. Belshazzar immediately screamed for his wise men to come and interpret what the writing meant. Of course, these new wise men couldn't interpret God's message any better than the wise men 63 years earlier could interpret God's vision to Nebuchadnezzar. Then the queen came to the banquet hall. This was not Belshazzar's wife but his mother, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. She remembers what Daniel was able to do for her father so she counsels the king to call for him. When Daniel arrives, the king offers to give him gifts and make him the third highest ruler of the kingdom if he can interpret the handwriting on the wall. Daniel turns down the gifts and the position but agrees to interpret the handwriting anyway.

The message

Daniel rebukes the king for his sins. Before giving Belshazzar the interpretation of the handwriting on the wall, Daniel reminds him of his grandfather's foolishness and how God responded to it. Then he gives a brief review of Belshazzar's own conduct. Daniel makes three charges against the king. 1. Belshazzar knew how God had reacted to Nebuchadnezzar's pride so this was premeditated – not an accident but a way of living. 2. Belshazzar had blasphemed God by misusing the articles from the temple. 3. Belshazzar was worshiping pagan gods with the temple articles and thus was mocking God.

Daniel interprets God's words about the future of the king. God gave Belshazzar four words about his kingdom and future. The handwriting on the wall said: "Mene mene tekel parsin." Daniel gives this interpretation. "Mene mene" means God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. The king had laughed at the approach of Cyrus and his army but God declares that night is the king's last. "Tekel" means you have

been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Belshazzr's kingdom was lacking in value and did not meet God's standard. God had already told Nebuchadnezzar that it would fall to a coalition of two kingdoms which Cyrus' kingdom was. "Parsin" is a form of the word "peres" which means "divided." So Daniel says your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

Even though Daniel had just told Belshazzar God was taking his kingdom that night, the king still gives the gifts he promised to Daniel and proclaims him to be the third highest ruler in the land. That means Daniel would rule if Nabonidus and Belshazzar both died.

The fall of Babylon

That very night the army of Cyrus entered Babylon and Belshazzar was killed. Daniel says that Darius the Mede took over at the age of 62. From the Nabonidus Chronicles, we know that it was Gobryas who was put in charge of the province of Babylon for several months until Cyrus arrived and entered to the cheers of the people and took official control of the kingdom of Babylon. Most scholars believe that Darius is another name for Gobryas and that he ancestry was Median. Since Darius was 62 at this time, we know that this is not the same Darius which Ezra refers to in the sixth chapter of his book.

Application

This story should cause each of us to be alert to four applications.

National. Any nation can be judged by God just as Babylon was. America is not immune because she was founded and grew as a Christian nation for much of her history. Unless we turn from our national thumbing of our nose at God and his rule, we may be judged just as severely as Babylon.

Prophetic. Today there is a mad pursuit of worldly pleasure especially in our land – the craze to follow sports, uncontrolled eating and drinking, a false sense of security based on a shaky prosperity. We saw from the statue about which Nebuchadnezzar dreamed that the mighty Babylon of world Gentile kingdoms will be destroyed. That was prophecy from God which was being fulfilled by Cyrus conquering Babylon. And it appears that the final part of that prophecy will occur in our lifetime as the seven-year tribulation occurs and Jesus returns to set up his kingdom.

Spiritual. What was it that brought an end to Belshazzar and the Babylonian kingdom? It wasn't the drunken orgy or the sexuality of the party. It was Belshazzar's desecration of God's vessels. Today, if you are a follower of Jesus, the Bible says your body is the temple of God – that he resides in you. What are you doing with his temple? Are you desecrating it by being involved in immorality or corrupting his temple with drugs, alcohol, or nicotine? If so, then you are inviting God's judgment.

Personal. What is God writing on your heart? How would any of us feel if we were to fall under God's judgment tonight? If just one finger of God can paralyze a man in fear, what will be the result of those who experience the judgment of the living God? Knowles Shaw, the writer of an old hymn, paints this picture:

At the feast of Belshazzar
And a thousand of his lords,
While they drank from golden vessels,
As the Book of Truth records,

In the night, as they reveled
In the royal place hall,
They were seized with consternation —
'Twas the Hand upon the wall!

So our deeds are recorded —
There's a Hand that's writing now;
Sinner give your heart to Jesus,
To his royal mandates bow;

For the day is approaching —
It must come to one and all,
When the sinners' condemnation
Will be written on the wall!

Liars, Laws, and Lions

Daniel 6

I'm sure that at some time you have had someone tell a lie about you. Often, it is some thing that you can just ignore and it will go away. But sometimes, the lie puts you in a bad position with other people and would hinder your work with them. What do you do in that case? If the person telling the lie is a fellow believer, you should use the steps that Jesus gave us in Matthew 18:15-17 – confront the person privately, then if they don't make it right take one or two other believers with you to confront the person, and if they still won't listen take it before the church body. But what if the person isn't a believer? And what if the lie they have told would make it impossible for you to continue worshiping God openly? What should you do – take them to court and sue them for libel? That is a possibility in our free democracy. But what if you lived in a repressive dictatorship? What could you do then? That is the question that we'll try to answer as we look at Daniel 6 in this message entitled, "Liars, Laws, and Lions."

Some of you are familiar with this story of Daniel in the lions' den. You may have seen the story depicted by a drawing of a young man standing before one or two lions. If that is all you know about the story, then you will soon discover that depiction is not very accurate.

Before we dive into the story, let's look at some background from the first five chapters of Daniel. Daniel was part of the royal house of Judah and taken captive from Jerusalem in 605 BC when Nebuchadnezzar conquered the city just before returning to Babylon to assume the throne after his father's death. Daniel, along with three of his friends, all about the age of 15, were selected to attend Babylon University – Nebuchadnezzar's training (indoctrination) school for captives selected to serve in his palace. Through their faithfulness to God during their three years at Babylon U, Nebuchadnezzar discovered at the oral examination which he gave Daniel and his three friends, that they were far wiser than all of the wise men (magi) of the kingdom. So He appointed Daniel as the chief of all the wise men and made his friends administrators over the province of Babylon. That is quite an honor and a high position for an 18 year old to assume. Over the next 43 years, Daniel serves Nebuchadnezzar and distinguishes himself not only as skilled administrator but also as the only one who can interpret the visions from God that the king receives in his dreams. Through Daniel's faithful witness to God, it appears that Nebuchadnezzar becomes a believer and follower of the One True God before the end of his life. At that point Daniel is put in retirement for the next 23 years by Nebuchadnezzar's successors. Then, on the very night that the Babylon kingdom falls to Cyrus the Persian, Daniel, at the age of 81, is called upon to interpret God's handwriting on the wall for King Belshazzar. After capturing the Babylonian kingdom, Cyrus appoints one of his generals to rule as a king over the Babylonian part of his empire. The general's Babylonian name was Gobryas or Gubaru. Since he was a descendant of the Medes, he also had a Median name – Darius (Dar'-i-us or Da-ri'-us). It is at this point where we pick up the story in Daniel 6.

Liars

Darius appointed 120 administrators (called satraps) to rule over the 127 provinces of the Babylonian kingdom. And over those satraps, he appointed 3 individuals to administer them. Daniel was appointed as one of the 3 chief administrators. During the next two years, Daniel again distinguished himself so that Darius decided to appoint him as second in command to rule over the entire kingdom. Daniel's morality in never accepting a bribe or doing anything wrong displeased the other administrators, but when they learned Darius was going to make them accountable to Daniel it made them quake in fear. There is nothing so feared by politicians and public officials as a totally honest politician or public official. So these administrators set out to find some way to undermine Daniel's appointment. They couldn't find anything in his work because he was totally honest. They couldn't find anything in the way he lived because he was a godly, moral individual. So they decided to attack him through his religion.

Daniel's habit was to pray to God three times a day. And he did that by going into one of his rooms where there were windows facing Jerusalem, and there, kneel while he prayed to God. Right after Darius was appointed

king, Daniel began studying the writing of the prophet Jeremiah and discovered that God had said his people would be captive for 70 years before they returned to Jerusalem. Since it was almost 70 years since Daniel had been taken captive, he had begun confessing his people's sin and seeking the Lord's fulfillment of his promise to allow the people to return.

The other administrators and some of the satraps went to King Darius with a plan to flatter him that would also cause him to have Daniel killed. They flattered the king by suggesting that he alone should be worshiped as god for one month. They probably suggested that this would help unify the kingdom and wouldn't make anyone upset because they could return to worshiping their different gods after that month. But, in flattering the king, they told a lie about Daniel without even saying his name. They said that all the royal administrators, satraps and other government officials had agreed that the king should issue an edict in writing (that is, a law) which said that anyone who prayed to a god other than the king for the next month should be thrown in the lions' den – that was a sentence of death. Since the king thought all the officials were in agreement, he was pleased and put the law in writing.

Laws

When Daniel heard that the law had been published, he knew that for him to continue to pray according to his daily schedule would mean he was violating the king's law and that if discovered, it would mean his death by becoming dinner for a bunch of starving lions. What a dilemma for Daniel? He could have just prayed to God secretly for the next month and thus tried to avoid being caught disobeying Darius' edict. But that would have given the outward appearance that he was obeying the law and saying that Darius was god. Daniel couldn't do that. He couldn't obey God and obey the king's unlawful decree so he chose to obey God, the higher authority, and accept whatever consequences came. At his appointed time, probably noon, he went to his usual place and kneeled in front of the open windows where he could be seen as he normally was and prayed in defiance of the edict but in obedience to God. Of course he was seen and his disobedience immediately made known to the king. Not only that, but they reminded the king that the punishment for disobedience was to be thrown into the lions' den. This news distressed Darius and for the rest of the afternoon he tried to find some way out of his dilemma.

Now you need to understand something about the laws of the Medes and Persians. Their belief was that the king was infallible, like a god, and couldn't make a mistake. When the king issued a written decree, it could not be undone or overturned. Even if the king wanted to overturn a law he had written he couldn't because that would be an admission that he had made a mistake and that wasn't possible. The king was trapped by the law he issued. He couldn't do anything to protect Daniel.

Lions

Finally he had to have Daniel thrown into the lions' den. As Daniel was lowered into the pit where the lions were, Darius said to him, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" Now this wasn't an acknowledgment of the superiority of God over all the other gods, nor was it a prayer to God. If it had been a prayer, he would have been guilty of disobeying his own decree! It was simply Darius' hope that Daniel's God would prove powerful enough to somehow rescue him during the night and thus bring a happy end to the dilemma that the king had put himself in because of his prideful arrogance.

What was Daniel facing as he was lowered into the lions den? Actually, the den was a pit that was divided into two sections with a gate or door separating them. The keeper of the lions used the gate to keep the lions in one side of the pit while he cleaned the other side. He did this by throwing a small amount of food into one side of the pit and when the starving lions ran to get it he closed the gate. Then he could climb down into the side without the lions and clean it. The lions were never given much food so they would always be hungry and ready to eat whoever was on the other side of the gate when it was opened. After Daniel was lowered into one side of the pit a stone was placed over the opening so that he couldn't find some way of climbing out and so no

one could come during the night and pull him out. Of course, the administrators and satraps weren't really worried about that, because as soon as the gate was opened they expected the starving lions to make Daniel their dinner.

All night long the king was in misery. He didn't eat. He didn't allow any entertainment to try and take his mind from Daniel and the lions. In fact, he didn't even sleep. Early in the morning, just as the first light appeared in the sky, Darius hurried to the lions' den and without even waiting for the stone to be removed from the opening, he called out to Daniel with the hope that he was still alive. Daniel responded to the king's call but he didn't gloat over what God had done nor did he say anything against those who had lied about him. In fact, Daniel never says anything about what the other administrators and satraps said. His reply to Darius gives God the credit for protecting him by sending an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. And he proclaims that God did this because he was innocent in God's sight and because he has never done anything wrong before the king.

Now don't feel sorry for the lions that they didn't get fed. After Daniel was pulled out of the pit and found to be unharmed, Darius had the ones who had lied and accused Daniel thrown into the pit along with their wives and children. Thus, the ones who sought to kill Daniel were caught in their own trap and became the lions' breakfast. It seems a little harsh that the wives and children were also killed. But that was common in those days and can still be seen in happenings around the world today. The idea is that if you are eliminating someone, you need to also eliminate their family so that there won't be any children to grow up and try to take revenge on you for their father's death.

After that Darius issued another decree that everyone must fear and honor the God of Daniel. Notice that he still has not accepted God as the only god and he hasn't forbid people from worshiping their individual gods. He simply tells people to honor God because he was powerful enough to rescue Daniel from the mouths of the hungry lions.

Lessons Learned

The first lesson we should learn is the answer to the question I posed at the beginning. What should you do if someone has lied about you and that lie would keep you from openly worshiping God? By his example, Daniel tells us to obey God, openly worship him and take whatever consequences come from that. I have to warn you that God doesn't always shut the mouths of the lions. All of the original apostles except John and many of the first century believers were murdered, eaten by lions, or burned as a torch for openly worshiping God. Even today, in some areas of the world, believers and sometimes their entire family are killed for openly worshiping God.

The second lesson is that God has established a law of compensation for this universe that is just as absolute as the law of gravity. Proverb 10:16 says, "The wages of the righteous bring them life but the income of the wicked brings them punishment." Paul said it this way to the Galatian believers, "A man reaps what he sows." (Gal 6:7) Sometimes it doesn't seem like God is enforcing his law because the wicked seem to prosper and those who obey God seem to receive trouble and even death. But when God's final accounting comes, those who have obeyed him even if it brought pain, suffering, or death will inherit the Kingdom of God and live for eternity in peace and prosperity. But those who have rejected him and disobeyed him will reap the reward of living for eternity in a universe that is separated from God, a universe that is filled with Satan, his demons, and a host of people who have committed all kinds of atrocious acts.

The choice of where you will spend eternity is completely in your own hands. No one can choose for you – not your parents, your spouse, your children, or any other individual. You must choose and the basis of your choice is Jesus. In John 14:6 he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The process of choosing Jesus is a simple one. First, you recognize that you are a sinner. That means you admit that you have been rejecting God's right to rule your life and have been trying to be god for yourself and direct what is right or wrong for your life. Second, you recognize that Jesus is God and that he

gave his life as a perfect sacrifice so you could be restored to a right relationship with God. Third, you ask him to come into your life and promise to let him tell you how to live. When you have done those three things, Jesus promises he will send the Holy Spirit to live in you, to guide you into living as Jesus commanded, and to teach you what you need to know from the Bible.

The question is, "Have you chosen Jesus?" If you haven't done the three steps I just outlined then you haven't chosen Jesus. What you have done is chosen to reject Jesus. If you haven't chosen Jesus, then I invite you to do it today so you can have assurance that you will have a right relationship with God and will spend eternity in heaven with him.

Parade of Kingdoms

Daniel 7

I'm sure all of you have seen at least one parade – the Thanksgiving Day Macy's parade, the Parade of Roses on New Year's Day or the St. Patrick's Day parade here in KC. If you haven't seen them in person you've probably seen them on TV. Most people would agree with the songwriter who wrote, "I Love a Parade." I think the fascination of a parade is wondering what float or band or group will be featured next and what they will look or sound like. As we look at Daniel 7 today, what we will see is a parade, a parade like no other, but still a parade where we wonder what is coming next.

Setting the Stage

Daniel says this vision of the parade came to him during the first year of Belshazzar, King of Babylon. That would put the date around 553 BC, about eight years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar and when Daniel was about 67 years old. Previously, we have seen Daniel giving people the interpretation of dreams / visions that God had given them. Beginning with this chapter, Daniel describes four visions he received and the interpretations of them that God gave him.

Daniel's Vision of a Parade

Daniel's parade begins with the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. A smooth sea depicts calmness but a sea that is churned up depicts uneasiness and unrest. There are four seas generally mentioned in the Bible: the Galilean Sea, the Red Sea, the Dead Sea, and the Great Sea or Mediterranean Sea. But there is also a figurative meaning to sea and that is the "sea of humanity." Most parades have a theme that is seen in the progression of floats which each depict some characteristic of that theme. The theme of Daniel's parade is the unrest of humanity. As Daniel watches the parade, he sees a succession of four beasts, each different from the previous, come up out of the churning sea.

A Lion. The first beast is like a lion but it has the wings of an eagle. As he watches, its wings are torn off and it is lifted from the ground so that it stands on two feet like a man, and a heart of a man is give to it.

A Bear. The second beast looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides and had three ribs in its mouth. And the bear was told to get up and eat it fill of flesh.

A Leopard. The third beast was like a leopard but on its back were four wings like that of a bird. And the beast had four heads and was given authority to rule.

An Unknown Creature. The fourth beast is a terrifying, frightening, and very powerful but unknown creature. It was not like any known beast. It had large iron teeth with which it crushed and devoured its victims and then trampled on whatever remained. It had ten horns, but as Daniel watched another little horn came up among the ten and uprooted three of the ten horns. This little horn had eyes like that of a man and a mouth which spoke boastfully.

The Ancient of Days. Next in the parade comes the Ancient of Days with his white clothes and hair, sitting on a throne blazing with fire, and with a river of fire flowing out from it. Thousands attended him and thousands stood before him. Everyone was seated and books were opened. As Daniel watched, the little horn on the fourth beast continued to speak boastfully until finally the beast was killed and its body was destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.

The Son of Man. Then one like a son of man appeared with the clouds of heaven and was lead into the presence of the Ancient of Days. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. The kingdom over which he rules will never be destroyed.

The parade troubles not only Daniel's mind but also his spirit. So he approaches one of those standing before the Ancient of Days and asks the meaning of the parade that he has seen.

The Meaning of the Parade

Four kingdoms. The beasts are four kingdoms that rise from the earth. God had given Nebuchadnezzar a vision of the future kingdoms of the world beginning with his in 603 BC. That vision was a statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. Now, 50 years after that vision and 14 years before the end of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom represented by the head of gold, God is giving Daniel another vision of those kingdoms. This time they are represented by beasts and not precious metals in a statue. A beast not only was but still is a common way of representing a kingdom. Great Britain is represented by a lion and the United States is represented by an eagle.

A winged lion was the national symbol of the Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian kingdom. It combines the strength and majesty of a lion with the strength and swift power of an eagle. It accurately represented Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom which was swift to conquer and ruled with cruelty. The wings being plucked indicates Nebuchadnezzar being humbled to live like a beast for seven years. And the beast standing up and being given the heart of a man indicates Nebuchadnezzar's return to power but this time as a believer and follower of the One True God, the Creator of the Universe, the God who called the Hebrew people his people.

The bear with three ribs in his mouth symbolizes the kingdom of the Medes and Persians that was represented by the chest and arms of silver in the statue. The bear being raised up on one side depicts the truth that the Persians were stronger than the Medes and really had more control of the kingdom. The symbol of the three ribs is not clear but may represent the kingdoms of Lydia, Egypt and Babylon which were essentially devoured or eaten up by the new kingdom. The lumbering power of a bear correctly represents the large armies (as many as 2 ½ million soldiers) with which Persia fought and conquered the world.

The leopard with four wings represents Greece under Alexander the Great just as the belly and thighs of bronze did in the statue. A leopard with four wings represents the swiftness without a great power of Alexander's armies. They started out from Greece in 336 BC under the command of four generals led by Alexander and conquered all of the land of the Medes and Persians by 332 BC. The four heads of the leopard are generally thought to represent the four parts into which the kingdom was divided after Alexander died. The four parts of the kingdom were each ruled by one of Alexander's generals. Palestine and Egypt were ruled by Ptolemy I; Syria was ruled by Seleucus I; Thrace and Asia Minor were ruled by Lysimachus; and Macedon and Greece were ruled by Cassander.

The unknown creature with the teeth of iron corresponds to the statue's legs of iron and represents the Roman Empire. The Roman armies had endurance like iron and swept over their enemies like a beast on the rampage. Rome was known for the cruel way that it maintained peace throughout its kingdom. It was Rome who used crucifixion as punishment and tortured the early Christians by using them as human torches to light Nero's gardens. The feet of the statue being made of iron mixed with clay represents the end of the Roman Empire as a world kingdom in 476 AD. From then until now, the influence of the Roman Empire continues in the nations of the Western World where their form of government is mixed with other ways of thinking and acting. Thus we see the iron mixed with clay. Notice also that the other beasts (kingdoms), although stripped of their power, continue to live on. Greece obviously lives on in its artistic work and the works of its philosophers (like Plato and Aristotle). The kingdom of the Medes and Persians continues to live on in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. And Babylonia continues to live on in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Even though the kingdoms were removed as world powers, they continued on in the areas of their origins and continue to influence those areas of today's world.

The ten horns of the beast correspond to the ten toes of the statue's feet and indicate that the final days of the Roman Empire will be as a coalition of ten leaders or perhaps ten nations. The little horn that arises from

among the ten and uproots three of the ten indicates that a final ruler will arise to control the kingdom by eliminating three of the leaders. This little horn will speak boastfully and oppose the Most High God. He will oppress the saints (believers) of his time and try to change the laws which God has established. God will allow the boastful leader to toot his own horn and oppress the saint for a time, times and half a time (3 ½ years).

God's Courtroom

In God's vision to Nebuchadnezzar, the statue representing the succession of Gentile nations ruling over the world is broken up by a rock that is not made by human hands that lands on the ten toes and feet. And the rock becomes a huge mountain that fills the whole earth. Since the rock is not made by human hands, it is obvious that it is God bringing an end to man's earthly kingdoms and setting up his own kingdom in place of them.

In Daniel's vision, God convenes his heavenly court and passes judgment not only on the boastful little horn but also all of the kingdoms represented by the beasts.

The Final Kingdom

In his vision, Daniel sees the Ancient of Days, the Most High God, give all authority, glory, and sovereign power to one like a son of man. And this person rules the new kingdom that God establishes and receives worship from all people, nations, and people of all languages. But in the interpretation of the vision, Daniel is told that the sovereignty, power and greatness of all of those kingdoms are handed over to the saints, those believers who worship and follow the Most High God.

How are we to reconcile Daniel's vision with the interpretation? Jesus is the "one like a son of man" to whom the kingdom is given. God gives him all authority, glory, and sovereign power in this kingdom. But the interpretation indicates Jesus shares everything but the glory with his followers. That means we shall rule over parts of the earth as Jesus' representatives. Does Jesus need his followers all over the world to be able to know what is happening or to speak for him. Of course not. Jesus is God and because he is he has the power to be everywhere in the universe. But Jesus wants to let his people have an active part in administering his kingdom. So we will have the privilege of ruling over some part of the earth and speaking the truth of Jesus to people.

Daniel's Trouble

Daniel doesn't tell us that he had been seeking any information from God. But he had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a statue that represented the succession of world kingdoms and it was now eight years after Nebuchadnezzar had died. So he must have been wondering why he hadn't seen the rise of the next kingdom. So God gives Daniel this vision of the future. Even though it is similar to the future as shown to Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is troubled so much by the interpretation that his face pales. We don't know what it is that concerns Daniel so much. It could be that he doesn't see the Jewish people, his people, having any part in the future. It could be the terrifying fourth beast and all that happens under the reign of that kingdom. It could be he just doesn't understand all the significance of the little horn and can't believe God would allow the little horn to rule so long and oppress God's people as he does. Maybe he wonders if this is all going to happen while he and his people are in captivity. May his trouble is a combination of all of these. But whatever the cause, Daniel is still troubled after he is given the interpretation.

Application

Why should we be concerned about a vision that God gave Daniel 2556 years ago? First, it is a view of the future, not only from Daniel's perspective, but also from ours. The Roman Empire that fell in 476 AD was the first view of the fourth beast. But the ten heads with a little one coming up among them and eliminating three obviously has not happened yet. That means the Ancient of Days convening court to judge the world's kingdoms inadequate and establishing the final kingdom is still in our future. Are you ready?

The Little Horn

Daniel 7:19-26

A man who rents houses tells this story about a woman to whom he was renting. She called him one evening, frantic and shrieking so loudly that he could barely understand her. What he could understand was that she wanted him to come over to the house immediately. He heard her repeatedly say, “They’re swarming all over the place! It’s horrible, just horrible!”

When the man arrived at the house, he found the woman sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor surrounded by food in grocery bags and some on the floor. Some of the cabinet doors were open so he assumed she was putting away groceries she had just purchased. She was near hysteria and kept pointing at the base of the cabinets and sobbing, “There were millions of them, swarming all over my groceries. When I turned on the light they disappeared.” The man immediately called an exterminator to rid the house of cockroaches.

Satan is like the cockroaches. He doesn’t like his activities to be revealed. Whenever someone turns a light on him, revealing him and what he is doing, he takes cover fast. But he also attacks those who reveal his tactics and motives. Even Daniel, who closely walked with God, was distressed when he was shown Satan’s activities in a vision and had it interpreted for him by an angel. What disturbed him was the fourth beast or fourth kingdom and particularly the little horn that arose from it, opposed God, and persecuted the saints.

Previously, we identified the fourth kingdom as the Roman Empire as it overpowered the Greek kingdom that was broken into four pieces after the death of Alexander the Great. It was that kingdom which crucified Jesus and persecuted the early believers. Rome ceased to wield power as a nation when it fell in 476 AD but its influence as a kingdom has continued even until today.

Now let’s look closer at the time period when the little horn arises.

Who is the little horn?

A popular thing for people who study the Bible to do is try to figure out who the little horn is. Daniel, of course, knew nothing about “saints” as those who believe Jesus is God and trust his work as the suffering Messiah to save them from the penalty that awaits everyone who disobeys God. He would have understood “saints” to be God’s chosen people, the Hebrews. He didn’t understand at the time he received this vision what God’s future plan was for the Hebrew people. God would reveal that to Daniel in future visions. But, at this time, he would readily recognize that the little horn was someone opposing God and persecuting God’s people. From the revelation that Jesus gave to John, we understand that the little horn is one who places himself in direct opposition to Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. Thus he is given the title “Antichrist.”

Over the years since John wrote in his revelation that the number of the Antichrist is 666, people have been trying different schemes to identify this person. Over the years, many people including Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant Reformation in Germany; and William Tyndale, English reformer and Bible translator have pointed their finger at the Catholic Pope of their time and said he was the Antichrist. Even some Catholic Church members such as Frederick II, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire in the 13th Century, have accused the Pope of being the Antichrist. From Judas Iscariot to John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan to George Bush, people are still saying this or that individual is the Antichrist. I don’t know who is going to be identified as the Antichrist but I do know how God has described him in the Bible.

Many names

From Daniel’s vision to John’s revelation, God has used several names to describe the individual who will lead the ultimate opposition against God’s authority to rule the universe he created. In this chapter of Daniel, he is called the “little horn,” a phrase describing the power and authority he tries to have. In Daniel 8 he is called “a

stern-faced king” and “a master of intrigue.” This describes his ability to manipulate words and situations to get people to follow him and his fierce anger at those who don’t follow.

Characteristics

A charismatic leader. Daniel says he will speak boastfully (7:8, 11, 20) and that he will be more imposing than other leaders (7:20). He is a master of intrigue (8:23). He will lead the world to make a seven-year covenant with Israel (9:27). He will succeed in whatever he does (9:24).

When this individual walks into a room, everyone’s attention will shift and be focused on him. He will have a magnetism that will draw people to him. He will be the master politician of all times, the greatest diplomat who ever lived, able to bring what appears to be peace to the world. He will solve the world’s problems with superhuman wisdom. He will cleverly manipulate people into doing what he wants them to do. He will become the greatest leader of all times.

Supernaturally empowered. Daniel says he will become strong but not by his own power (8:24) and will have the help of a foreign god (11:39). The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians (2 Thes 2:9) that his rising to power will be by the power of Satan and that he will perform counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders. John writes that Satan gives him his power, throne, and great authority (Rev 13:2, 4). He will have a fatal wound apparently healed (Rev 13:3, 12). He will cause fire to come down out of heaven and cause a statue to speak (Rev 13:13)

This individual will have power beyond all mortal men. He will be empowered from the spiritual realm by Satan. He will perform supernatural acts, calling fire from the sky, causing a statue to speak and seeming to arise from death.

Anti-Christian and anti-God. Daniel says he will speak against God and oppose the saints (7:25); that he will destroy the holy people and stand against Jesus, the Prince of princes (8:24 – 25). Paul writes that he will proclaim to be God and set himself up in God’s temple (2 Thes 2:4). John writes that he will slander God will be given power to make war against the saints and conquer them (Rev 13:6 - 7). All the people who do not follow Jesus will worship him as god (Rev 13:8). The saints will be handed over to him for “a time, times and half a time” (Dan 7:25).

This individual will show in his life all the hatred Satan has for God and God’s people. He will set himself up as god and demand and receive worship from everyone who does not follow Jesus. He will persecute and kill those who decide to follow Jesus rather than worship him for 3 ½ years.

Deceived as to his own future. He will be killed and his body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire (7:11). He will be destroyed but not by human hands (8:25). He will come to his end and no one will help him (11:45). He is allowed to exercise his authority for 42 months (3 ½ years). Jesus will overcome him (Rev 17:14). He is thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev 19:20) and be tormented day and night forever (Rev 20:10).

Although this individual appears to be in control of everything around him and thinks his future is to rule the world, he is deceived by Satan who is empowering him. His future is not to rule as god but to be imprisoned for eternity in a fiery lake with Satan, the fallen angels, and everyone who does not follow Jesus.

The little horn and us

What difference does knowing about this little horn make to us? Why should we even be concerned about him? The answer is because the stage is being set for the little horn to make his appearance. The Middle East continues to be at the center of world news and leaders of different nations are trying to bring about a peace agreement between Israel and the other nations of the region.

Earlier this month the U. S. State Department made public a document called A Road Map for Peace in the Middle East. It is a plan set forth by the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations to bring about peace between Israel and the rest of the Middle Eastern nations within three years. As I understand it, the plan calls for Israel to stop building settlements in Palestinian claimed territory for Jews emigrating from around the world, to give up control of the eastern half of Jerusalem which includes the temple mount which currently has a Muslim mosque that refuses to allow Jews enter the area or pray there, and to agree to the formation of a Palestinian nation that would control many areas currently controlled by Israel. They are expected to agree to all of this with the hope of attaining peace with their Arab neighbors. If the plan were changed from a three-year to a seven-year plan, it could easily become the covenant that starts to rise to power of the little horn.

The people and nations of the world continue to cry out for peace in the Middle East. And almost everyone expects the United States to put pressure upon Israel to give in and give up so that peace can happen. But God's vision to Daniel and his revelation to John show that real peace in the Middle East and throughout the world will not happen until Jesus returns to overthrow the kingdoms of this world and establish his kingdom in place of them.

Before Jesus comes to establish peace, the little horn will rise to power and will persecute and kill believers during a time called The Tribulation. If you don't believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, which is Jesus returning not to earth but in the sky to remove all his believers, then you are accepting the belief that believers today will go into the time of that seven-year covenant and be persecuted and kill by the little horn. If you believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, then you believe that the believers who are persecuted and killed by the little horn are those who decide to believe in and follow Jesus after the seven-year covenant begins.

I hope and pray that the pre-tribulation rapture is God's plan. But if it isn't there is still hope for all the believers around the world today and after the seven-year covenant is signed. God showed Daniel that "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." (Dan 7:27)

We discovered during our year-long, Wednesday evening Bible study of Revelation that before believers are given the kingdoms of the world, a great multitude of them will be killed for telling other people about Jesus. Although this seems unjust and senseless, what we must understand is that continuing to live our life is not as important as witnessing for Jesus and leading others to follow him so they will live with him and us for all of eternity.

Invitation

The time that the little horn will rise to power seems closer now than ever before. It could happen any day. That means the time to believe in Jesus and give him control of your life so you avoid having to endure the Tribulation is getting shorter every day. If you have not believed in Jesus and given him control of your life, then I urge you to do it today. Don't delay. There will be no warning before the rapture occurs and all the current believers are taken away and you don't want to be left behind to face what will happen during the Tribulation.

If you have believed in Jesus, are you really giving him control of your life every day? If you have then you must be concerned about all of the people who haven't believed in Jesus and given him control of their lives. Jesus is concerned because he told believers to make disciples and you can't begin to make people into disciples until they have heard about Jesus and been given the opportunity to accept his control of their lives. So whom have you told about Jesus this past week? If your answer is "nobody," then why? Do you not know any people who haven't believed? Or are you just so centered on your own life and what you want to do and what makes you feel good that you won't go out of your comfort zone to talk with someone who doesn't believe in Jesus? I urge you to look for those who don't know Jesus and risk talking with them. It could mean an eternity of difference for them and you.

How the West Won

Daniel 8

If you recall the 3-hour movie entitled “How the West was Won,” you may think that Sharon made a typographical error and left out a word in the bulletin. She didn’t. I meant for the message title to read just as you see it. Let me explain by reminding you about the plot of the movie that has such a similar name. It described how people in the earlier days of our country traveled from the eastern states into the wild, West territory to tame the wilderness and make it their home. Unlike winning over the wild West, what Daniel 8 describes is how the West won power from the East and changed the course of history. During the period of history covered in this chapter, the center of global power moved from the Middle and Near East to what was then, and is still now, considered the West.

Focus of the vision

As we begin to look at the text of Daniel 8, we need to note that if we were reading it in the original languages, we would find a language change at this point. From chapter 2 verse 4 until the end of chapter 7, the text has been written in Aramaic. Prior to chapter 2 verse 4, the text was in Hebrew. Now, at the beginning of chapter 8, and to the end of the book, the text is once again written in Hebrew. The question that should enter our mind when something like this occurs is “why.” Why did Daniel begin writing in Hebrew, change to Aramaic, and then change back to Hebrew again? The answer is in what Daniel is writing about in each section. At the beginning he was writing about what had happened to the Hebrew people, God’s chosen people, and specifically about what had happened to himself that caused him to be in the position in which he was so that he had the opportunity to be involved in and observe the events about which he was writing. So he wrote that in his native language of Hebrew. When he began to tell about the Gentile kingdoms that would successively be the superpower ruling the world, he wrote in the language of that first ruling Gentile nation. The Aramaic language used throughout the Middle and Near East countries today is a direct descendant of the Aramaic or Chaldean language spoken in Babylon. Therefore, when he switches back to Hebrew in chapter 8, we expect and find that he is writing about what will happen to God’s chosen people in the future.

Date and place of the vision

Daniel says he received this vision in the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign. Since Belshazzar began a co-regency with his father, Nabonidus, in 550 BC, that means the vision from God came to Daniel in 547 BC when he was 73 years old. In the vision, Daniel finds himself in the citadel or palace located in the city of Susa that is in the province of Elam in the modern day country of Iran. And he is standing beside the Ulai Canal that flows by Susa. Susa was not a city in the Babylonian Kingdom. It was just east of the Babylonian border in the kingdom of Media at the base of the Zagros mountain range. The Ulai Canal is now called the Karkheh River and there is evidence that at one time it divided 20 miles north of Susa and flowed on both sides of the city. Today, on the east side is the Dez River which may be the remainder of the eastern branch of the Ulai Canal.

The ram

The first mention of Gabriel in the Bible is here when he is told by God to give Daniel the interpretation of this vision. The ram that Daniel saw with two horns, one longer than the other and newer, represents the unified kingdom of the Medes and Persians. That kingdom was formed just eleven years earlier in 558 BC when Cyrus the Persian defeated the Medians and incorporated their territory into his kingdom. It was not a threat to the Babylonian kingdom at this time and would not conquer Babylon until 539 BC (another 19 years). The horn that is longer (stronger) and newer is the Persian kingdom under Cyrus. The combined Medo-Persian kingdom under Cyrus’ rule does charge west, north and south capturing everything in its path, but it does not attempt to capture anything east of the Indus River in present day India.

During the reign of Cyrus and his successors (Cambyses; Daruis I, II, & III; Xerxes I [Ahasuerus], & II; Artaxerxes I, II, & III; and Arses) are the following biblical events: Cyrus' decree that the Jews could return to their land and rebuild the temple, the return of the Jews under the leadership of Ezra and then Nehemiah, the delay in rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem which were finally completed under the leadership of Nehemiah, the story of Esther becoming Xerxes' (Ahasuerus') queen, and the prophetic ministries of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Although the Jews were back in the land of promise, they did not have control of it. During their captivity in Babylon and because of their inability to worship in the temple, the Jews developed the idea of synagogues where they would worship and teach Hebrew and the Law. When they returned they brought that practice back with them and continued it even after the temple was rebuilt.

The goat

Daniel is told that the goat with one prominent horn between his eyes and that comes from the west, crossing over the ground without touching it, represents the kingdom of Greece. The vision shows that Greece would rapidly come against the Medo-Persian kingdom and soundly defeat it. After that defeat, the large horn is broken and replaced by four other horns. Out of one of those horns grew another horn that starts small but grows until it tries to be like the Prince of the host (God).

There are two main characters in this real life drama of the goat. The first is the young king, Alexander, who succeeded to the throne of Greece when his father, Philip, died in 336 BC.

When he was a young boy, Alexander was afraid that there would be nothing of the world left to conquer when his father died and thus he would not be able to make a name for himself. So when his father died without conquering the world, Alexander, at age 20, set out to complete what his father had started and make a name for himself by forming the largest empire ever known. Beginning at the Mediterranean Sea along the coast of present day Turkey in 333 BC, he quickly captured Asia Minor, then pushed east through Syria and south through Israel until he had captured everything through Egypt. Then he turned east and by 331 BC had captured all of the ancient Babylonian kingdom and more than half of the Persian kingdom. He finished capturing the northern and central parts of the Persian kingdom all the way to the Indus River in present day India. At the Indus River, Alexander turned southwest and captured the rest of the kingdom as he traveled through Susa back to Babylon. In 323 BC, Alexander died at the age of 33 after conquering all of the Middle and Near East and establishing the greatest, most extensive kingdom that had existed to that time.

Never since the fall of the Persian kingdom to Alexander has a power east of the Mediterranean Sea ruled the world. Even during medieval times when the Byzantine Empire ruled most of that area, the seat of government of that kingdom was in Constantinople, just across from Greece in western Turkey and well west of the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

The second main character in this drama of the goat is a king who rose to power in one of the four kingdoms into which Alexander's kingdom was divided after his death. That king is Antiochus Epiphanes who gained control of the kingdom by "flatteries" (bribery) in 175 BC when his brother was murdered.

When Alexander's kingdom was divided by his four generals, Ptolomy ruled Egypt and Seluecus ruled Syria. The land of Israel lay in between and was successively controlled by Syria, then Egypt, and then Syria until Rome conquered all the area. During the last rule of Israel by Syria beginning in 198 BC, there arose a Selucid king, Antiochus IV who hated the Jews and their worship. He had the title, Epiphanes, added after his name. Epiphanes means "God manifest." He was determined to substitute Greek worship for the Jews' worship of God so he not only slaughtered thousands of Jewish people but he set up on the temple grounds the playing of Greek games, which was done while naked, and forced the priests to participate. His final insult to the Jews occurred when he slaughtered a pig, considered an unclean animal, on the altar outside the temple and then took the blood into the sacred places inside the temple and sprayed it all over everything, including the walls. This is referred to as "the abomination of desolation. As a result of this Judas Maccabeus led a revolt of the Jewish

people against Antiochus and eventually won a short-lived independence for the Jewish people. During that independence, in 144 BC, the Jews cleansed the temple and reestablished their temple worship. The history of the Maccabean revolt and the cleansing of the temple is explained in books known as 1, 2, 3, 4, Macabbees. It is from this rededication of the temple that the Jewish festival of Channukah originated. The 2,300 evenings and mornings that Daniel was told would be the time until the temple was reconsecrated may be the time between its desecration by Antiochus and its rededication.

In Gabriel's interpretation of the vision, he tells Daniel that the one who considers himself superior to God and takes his stand against him will be destroyed but not by human power. Then Daniel is told to seal up the vision because it concerns the distant future. Since Antiochus died of a fever and not in battle, this can be seen as the fulfillment of Daniel's vision. But, when you compare this with the rest of what Daniel writes and the revelation Jesus gave to John on the Island of Patmos, it becomes clear that Antiochus' actions and his death are only a partial fulfillment of the vision. The final fulfillment will come during at the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation when the Antichrist declares himself to be god and desecrates the holy places of a reconstructed temple by putting his image in it. The Antichrist will be destroyed by Jesus upon his return to earth and the 2,300 days will may then refer to the time from that desecration of the temple until it is rededicated.

Daniel's response

After seeing the vision and hearing the interpretation, Daniel is so exhausted that he can only lay ill for several days. When he finally recovers his strength and returns to doing the king's business, Daniel continues to be horrified by the vision because it was beyond his understanding.

Our response

What is your response to the vision and interpretation God gave Daniel? You could scoff at it and say it is just ancient legend and therefore doesn't have any meaning for today. Like many scholars, you could say it was completely fulfilled by history and the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes so therefore it doesn't have any meaning for today. You could say that it was mostly fulfilled in history but has its complete fulfillment during the Tribulation when you as a present-day believer and follower of Jesus intend to be in heaven with him and therefore it doesn't concern you. Or you could say that it describes a terrible time in the future through which you don't want your family, friends and neighbors to have to live, so you will make every effort to tell them about Jesus' death and how it can restore them to a right relationship with God, the Father, so they won't have to experience it. The choice is yours. But if you love people like Jesus loves people and you want the best for them like he does, then you will want to follow the last choice.

There is one final response you could have. You could understand that the end of the vision describes a terrible time in the future through which you will have to live because you have never accepted Jesus as God and decided to become his disciple and therefore don't have any hope of being taken to heaven before the events occur. If that is your situation, then I urge you to respond by accepting Jesus as God and deciding to become his disciple. If you want to make that decision, come down and talk with me as we sing a song and give people time to respond to what God has said to them today. If you really want to live the rest of your life as a disciple of Jesus, we promise to help you learn how to live that way. We don't promise it will be easy or that you won't have any further hardships in your life. But we do promise, upon God's Word, that it will be the best life that you could ever live. But I warn you to decide quickly before Jesus returns and then you will have no choice but to experience the events.

Seventy “Sevens”

Daniel 9:1-4a, 20-27

Leopold Cohn was a Jewish rabbi living in Europe in 1890. When he studied the passage that we are going to look at today, he was led to the conclusion that the Messiah had already come. He asked his fellow rabbis where the Messiah might be. One of them suggested, “Go to New York, and you will find the Messiah.” Not the most likely place for someone to search for the Messiah, but that’s what he did. He arrived in New York in 1892 and wandered the streets looking for the Messiah. One day, while passing a building, he heard people singing inside. He went in and soon heard a clear presentation about Jesus being the Messiah. That night he accepted Jesus as his Messiah. Shortly after that, rabbi Cohn bought a stable, swept it out, set up some chairs, and began holding meetings to tell other Jews about the Messiah. That was the beginning of what was called the American Board of Missions to the Jews and now is called the Chosen People Ministries.

Background

Before we begin examining the scripture passage, let’s review some background so that everyone is prepared to understand what Daniel is writing. Under the leadership of Solomon, the nation of Israel rose to its peak in size, power, and glory. Solomon’s great accomplishments, including the building of God’s magnificent temple in Jerusalem, brought him world-wide fame and respect. People still talk about the wisdom of Solomon and the splendor of his kingdom. But Solomon’s zeal for God diminished and his heart was divided in his later years because of his many foreign wives and the pagan religious practices he allowed them to follow. When Solomon died in 931 BC, his divided heart left behind a kingdom divided into a northern branch consisting of 10 tribes and a southern branch with the remaining two tribes.

The Northern Kingdom had a succession of 19 kings who led the people to disobey God and worship pagan idols. God’s prophets tried to warn the people to turn from their evil ways and return to obeying God but the people refused to listen. As a result, the northern kingdom was captured by Assyria in 722 BC and integrated into their society so that the 10 tribes lost their individual identity.

The Southern Kingdom had a succession of 19 kings. Some of them tried to keep the nation following God but others led the people to worship pagan idols. God’s prophets warned the people to return to obeying God and at times they listened. But after a few years they would return to their disobedience. The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed to the people God’s judgment that they would go into captivity and the land would be desolate for 70 years. In 605 BC, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to capture and occupy most of the nation except Jerusalem and take many of the people captive. Those captives included Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, who were 15 years old. After that initial group went into captivity and during the reign of the last two kings, Jeremiah continued to proclaim the nearness of God’s judgment to the people but they refused to listen. In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar returned to capture and destroy Jerusalem and the temple of Solomon. He took more people to Babylon and along with them the gold, silver, and bronze items from the temple.

At the beginning of his captivity, Daniel became an important person in the Babylonian Kingdom when God enabled him to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s nightmare about a giant statue of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. Daniel was placed in charge over all the wise men in the kingdom and was the king’s personal advisor. When the Babylonian Kingdom fell to the kingdom of the Medes and Persians in Oct 539 BC, Daniel, at age 81, was there to interpret the handwriting on the wall that announced God’s judgment on Babylon. As a reward for interpreting the handwriting, Daniel was made the highest official in the kingdom except for the king and his father. So when Cyrus, the ruler of the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, took control of the Babylonian kingdom and appointed Darius to rule it, Daniel was still in a position of importance.

Now let’s examine the ninth chapter of Daniel’s writing.

Daniel's petition

The first year of Darius' reign would have been from Oct 539 to Oct 538 BC. This is also the time period during which Daniel was thrown into the lions den for continuing to pray to God three times each day. Daniel has a copy of Jeremiah's writing that proclaims the people would go into captivity and that Jerusalem would be desolate for seventy years. He also has a letter Jeremiah sent to the captives in 599 BC proclaiming that after seventy years God would bring the captives back to Jerusalem because he has a plan for their future. Now Daniel can do the same math that you and I can. Seventy years after he was taken captive in 605 BC would be 535 BC. Since it is 538 BC, Daniel decides it is time to earnestly plead with God to fulfill his promise to return the captives to Jerusalem. So, on behalf of all the people, Daniel declares the righteousness of God in bringing judgment upon them, confesses their sin, and pleads with God not to delay in fulfilling his promise.

God's answer – Seventy 'sevens'

In his prayer, Daniel wasn't asking God to reveal the future to him. He understood God had a future for the nation and people of Israel and all he requested was for God not to delay in fulfilling his promise to continue with his plans for their future. But God surprised this great saint by revealing to him the plan for the future of the Jewish people. While Daniel was still praying, confessing his own sin and the sin of the people and making his request for Jerusalem, the angel Gabriel came to give him insight and understanding.

God decreed that there would be seventy 'sevens' for the Jewish people and for Jerusalem to accomplish six things. 1. To finish or restrain transgression means to put an end to man's rebellion against God. 2. To put an end to sin means to stop all disobedience of God's will. 3. To atone for wickedness means to make payment for all the disobedience of God's will. 4. To bring in everlasting righteousness means to establish the right relationship between God and man similar to that which existed for a while in the Garden of Eden. 5. To seal up vision and prophecy means to put an end to the need for God to give visions and prophecies to mankind about their future. 6. To anoint the most holy means to openly establish the kingship of the one God has appointed will rule over his creation. When these six things have been accomplished, mankind will be living as God originally planned.

Then Gabriel gives Daniel more information about the seventy 'sevens.'

God's Timeline

What are the seventy 'sevens'? It obviously is an indication of a length of time. The Hebrew indicates it is seventy units of seven. That means it could be seventy units of seven seconds, seven minutes, seven days, seven weeks, seven months, or seven years. Nothing but seventy units of seven years each will give the length of time necessary for what God says will happen.

God says there will be a decree to have Jerusalem restored and rebuilt. As soon as Cyrus defeated Babylon, he decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and start worshipping God again, but he said nothing about rebuilding the city. According to Nehemiah 2, the decree to rebuild the city occurred during the 20th year of Artaxerxes which was 445 BC. From that time God said there would be seven 'sevens' and then another sixty-two 'sevens' until the Anointed One, the ruler, would come.

Why did God break that sixty-nine 'sevens' into two periods? The first period of seven 'sevens' would be 49 years ($7 \times 7 = 49$) and the second period would be 434 years ($62 \times 7 = 434$). Since God continues to say that the rebuilding of the city would be during times of trouble, it may be he was indicating something about the rebuilding of the city would take 49 years to complete. We know from Nehemiah 4 and 6 that there was opposition to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem but that it was accomplished in 52 days during 445 BC. What we don't know from history is what happened during the remainder of the 49 years. We may speculate

that although it only took 52 days to rebuild the walls of the city, it took the rest of the 49 years to finish rebuilding the entire city within the walls.

God says the next 62 'sevens' or 434 years would be the time until the Anointed One will be cut off and have nothing. We know from looking back on history that this is a reference to Jesus' death on the cross that cut him off and had nothing of his own, not even a tomb. Some scholars have even calculated the 49 years and the 434 years from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and determined that Jesus' death occurred on or just after Apr 6, 32 AD.

The 70th week

This all shows that by the time of Jesus' death, 69 of the 70 weeks had occurred. So where is the 70th week? Apparently, it didn't happen right after the 69th week or else rebellion against God would have ended within seven years after Jesus' death. We know from our own days that this has not happened. In this passage God indicates there will be a break in his plan for the future of Israel. Gabriel tells Daniel that after the 69th week, "The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." Again, from history, we know that the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. Daniel is then told that "The end will come like a flood: war will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed."

God indicates that the beginning of the 70th week will happen when the ruler of the people to come confirms a covenant of peace (a peace treaty) with many people for one 'seven' – the 70th week. From the revelation Jesus gave to John on the Isle of Patmos, we understand that the one who makes the seven-year covenant of peace with many will be an individual who eventually sets himself up against Jesus or the Antichrist. But in the middle of that seven year period (3½ years), this Antichrist will put an end to sacrifice and offering and will place abominations on a wing of the temple. For the Antichrist to do those things means a new temple will have to be built and Levites will have to start the daily and special sacrifices again. From a study of the Revelation Jesus gave John, we understand that Daniel's 70th week will be a time of great tribulation, suffering, persecution, and death for most of the population of the world. It will be a time when God allows wicked people to show their true beliefs and their rebellion against him. It will be a time when people finally have to make a decision whether they will believe and follow Jesus or follow the deception of the Antichrist and his master, Satan. It will be a time of purifying for the nation of Israel as the Jews finally have to accept or continue to reject Jesus as their Messiah.

Application

What does all of the ninth chapter of Daniel mean to us? 1. God knew long before Jesus came to earth as a baby that he would die to atone or make payment for wickedness. 2. God has a plan for the nation of Israel as well as individual Jewish people. 3. God's plan took a break after the 69th week so people could accept Jesus' death on the cross as payment for their disobedience of God's will and become followers of Jesus and children of God. 4. God is not finished with the Jewish people or the nation of Israel. 5. Every person must decide whether to believe and follow Jesus or reject him and follow Satan.

Jesus said he is the only way to the Father and that truth will become clearly evident during Daniel's 70th week. Everyone who is living during that week (seven years) will either discover the literal truthfulness of the Bible and believe it or else they will become so deceived by their own twisted thinking that they will believe good is evil and evil is good. If you want to get some idea of what Daniel's 70th week will be like, read the *Left Behind* series of books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. The series is fiction but they do a good job of describing the conditions and what will happen during that time.

The question that should be on your mind is "Will I have to experience the tribulation of Daniel's 70th week?" The short answer is "no." I believe Jesus and Paul made it clear in the New Testament that everyone who

accepts Jesus as God and follows the way he taught to live and worship God, the Father, will be snatched out of the world (raptured) just before Daniel's 70th week begins.

So, if you have not accepted Jesus and been baptized to announce that fact to the world, then you are being deceived by Satan. And that means you will enter the Tribulation and have to struggle to live through it. What is your decision? Will you accept Jesus and become a child of God or will you continue to reject Jesus and continue to be a follower of Satan?

Demon Power

Daniel 10:1 – 11:1

A story is told about a mother who wanted to expand her young son's musical interests so she took him to a concert that was to be given by the famous pianist, Paderewski. After being seated, the woman saw a friend seated in another section and remembered that she needed to talk with her. As she got up to leave, she told her son to stay in his seat until she returned. As you guess, the boy quickly became restless, left his seat, and began to explore the concert hall. He soon found his way backstage where he saw a piano setting in a large room with floor to ceiling curtains on the sides. The boy thought it would be fun to play the piano so he went to the bench, sat down, and put his hands out to play the only song he knew.

While this was happening, the house lights of the auditorium dimmed to warn everyone to take their seats because the performance was about to begin. When the mother got to her seat she found her son was gone. She hoped he had just made a quick trip to the bathroom so didn't immediately panic but sat down. Then suddenly, the house lights went out and the curtain rose. Everyone began to clap anticipating the entrance of Paderewski but, to their surprise and to the mother's horror, there was her son sitting at a big grand piano. And at just that moment the boy started to play his song, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

In an instant, Paderewski entered from the wings of the stage and walked quickly across to just behind the boy. Leaning over the boy he said, "Keep playing. Don't stop. You're doing just fine." Then with his left hand he reached around the boy and added some bass chords while he reached around with his right hand and added some runs up and down the scales. Together the great pianist and the little boy made beautiful music out of a simple tune. When they finished, Paderewski had the boy step out in front of the piano seat with him and take a bow. The audience stood, applauding the delightful opening song, while the mother blushed, not only because her son had interrupted the performance but because he had played a duet with Paderewski.

That is what life is like when God is allowed to reach around and make our simple tune into a beautiful work of art. That is exactly what Daniel had done with his life when he was taken captive at age 15.

According to the beginning of Daniel 10, these events happened in the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia. We should not take that to mean the third year that he reigned as king of Persia because that would have been in 556 BC. Instead, we should understand that Daniel means the third year that Cyrus has reigned as king over the Babylonian kingdom. That would be 536 BC, just two years after God had given Daniel the understanding that there would be seventy 'sevens' for the future of the Jewish people. It was also two years after Cyrus had decreed that the Jewish captives could return to their homeland, rebuild the temple and restart the worship of God in that place. At this time, Daniel is 84 years old and has lived most of his life in a foreign land surrounded by people worshipping all kinds of things other than the Almighty Creator of the universe.

Conflict in the heart

Daniel tells us that God revealed a message to him but that the understanding of it came through the vision that he is about to describe. Even though Daniel didn't understand the message, it troubled his heart. It troubled him so much that he mourned and began to pray for understanding. In his mourning, Daniel didn't stop eating food in a total fast, but he fasted by not eating any choice food such as meat or wine. What we might say is "no steak and milk shakes – only bread and water." Daniel says this continued for a period of three weeks before the vision occurred.

Sometime in your life you may have had something trouble you to the point that you couldn't eat normally. When that happened, the food that you normally eat just doesn't taste good and doesn't set well in your stomach. All you could eat to get some nourishment was a little bread and water. You probably couldn't sleep well either because whatever was troubling you was keeping you awake. This is the situation Daniel finds himself experiencing because of what God has revealed to him.

A special messenger

Daniel was standing on the banks of the Tigris River when suddenly before him stood what looked like a man dressed in linen with a belt made from the finest gold. His body was like chrysolite, so it was a light yellow green. His face was like lightning, so it was bright yellow white. His eyes were like flaming torches, so they were reddish yellow. His arms and legs were like the gleam of burnished bronze, so they were yellow brown. His voice was like the wound of a multitude, so it was loud and commanding. This is the description of an angel.

Some scholars think this is an appearance of Jesus before his first coming to earth as a baby. But, as we will see in a few minutes, this can't possibly be Jesus.

There were other people with Daniel but he was the only one who actually saw the vision. The others probably only saw a bright glow where the angel stood but they were overwhelmed with terror by the sight, fled and hid themselves. Only Daniel was left gazing at the angel and the sight was so awesome that his face turned pale and all of his strength left his body so that he was weak and helpless. As he heard the angel start to speak, Daniel fell to the ground like someone who was in a deep asleep. Daniel's reaction is much like that of Paul when Jesus appears to him on the road to Damascus and, I expect, what our reaction would be – falling down like being struck dead.

The angel touches Daniel and gets him up on his hands and knees where he is still trembling from weakness. The angel tells Daniel that he is highly esteemed which means God is pleased with the way Daniel is living, allowing God to make something beautiful out of his simple existence (like Paderewski and the boy). The angel tells Daniel to carefully consider the words he is about to speak and to stand up while he is talking to him. Daniel does stand up but he continues trembling in fear of the awesome creature before him. As he continues to speak, the angel tells Daniel not to be afraid because he has been sent in response to Daniel's prayers.

Conflict in the heavens

While Daniel was having conflict internally, the angel tells Daniel that a conflict was happening in heaven. Starting from the first time Daniel prayed, God dispatched the angel with an answer. But the angel didn't arrive for three weeks. He explains to Daniel that he was delayed because the prince of the Persian kingdom had resisted him or, in other words, had interfered with his travel.

The prince of the Persian kingdom shouldn't be thought of as the son of human royalty, like Prince Andrew or Prince William. No human could interfere or delay an angel from doing anything. This is an indication of demonic warfare. A demon is an angel who sided with Satan when he rebelled against God's leadership. All of those fallen angels, or demons, were expelled from heaven because of their rebellion. They are forced to live either in an abyss that is sealed until a certain time during the seven-year period of tribulation that is the last of the seventy 'sevens' Daniel was told about in his last vision. Or they are forced to live in the atmosphere surrounding the earth. So the angel was hindered in his travels by one of these demons living in the atmosphere of the earth. And we are told that his special assignment is the kingdom of Persia. Later we will see that there are other demons assigned to the other kingdoms of the earth.

We need to understand that, ever since Adam and Eve fell from their original state of grace in the Garden of Eden by disobeying God, this world has been effectively under the rule of Satan and his fallen angels (demons). That's why Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "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" (Eph 6:12)

Satan was created so he doesn't have the ability to be everywhere at the same time. He doesn't exist outside of the time and space of this universe like God does. But he can move rapidly through the universe and be visible or invisible as he desires. Satan was the first or highest of the angels, so all angels and demons have the ability to move rapidly throughout the universe, appear or disappear at will, and cause supernatural things to happen.

Since Satan can't be everywhere at once, he has assigned his demons to attend to his business of interfering with humans recognizing Jesus as God and accepting his free gift of a restored relationship with the Father. Today, we are surrounded by demons in this community, whose sole purpose is to provide people with whatever will keep them from accepting Jesus and having a restored relationship with the Father. There is an old song that says, "Excuses. Excuses. You'll find them every day. The Devil will provide them if from church you'll stay away."

There is a battle, or a conflict, that is going on constantly just outside of our sight. If God would for some reason open our eyes today to be able to see the spiritual realm, we would see a fierce battle being fought right around us between angels and demons. And it might even appear that the demons were winning. That's what happened to the angel who was speaking to Daniel. As he tried to deliver God's message to Daniel, he fought a battle with the demon assigned to the kingdom of Persia for 21 days. Finally, Michael, the angel assigned to the Hebrew people, had to come and assist him in the battle so he could get to Daniel with God's answer.

After he appears and Daniel collapses in fear because of his awesome features, the angel strengthens and encourages Daniel. He tells Daniel that he will soon leave to return to fighting against the prince of Persia and then the prince of Greece. But before he goes, the angel says he will tell Daniel what is written in the Book of Truth – that would be God's Word, the Bible, which was not complete at that time and would not be completed until after Jesus came and died and then gave John a more detailed revelation of what would happen during the last week of the seventy 'sevens.'

In future sermons we will examine what the angel told Daniel.

Application

So, what does this passage mean to us today? What can we learn from Daniel's experience?

1. When something is troubling us, the most effective thing we can do is pray. James, the half brother of Jesus, wrote, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Daniel lived a life devoted to following God's will. He praised God and sought to know God's will three times a day in prayer from the time he was 15 years old. In his time, he was probably the most righteous man alive.
2. When it seems like God is not listening to your prayers, it may be that demons are hindering the answer from getting through to you. The world belongs to God because he created it but ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God by following Satan's plan, the world has been under the apparent control of Satan. Just because God allows Satan to have temporary control doesn't mean we should despair. The time will come when God will once again exercise his control over the world and put Satan and his rebellious angels in their place – a place that he has created especially for them – the lake of fiery sulfur.
3. One of the most important things we can do in prayer is to seek God's opposition of Satan's deception of people. Not only did Paul say that our struggle is against demons, the spiritual forces of evil, but he told us God's plan for us to oppose them. He said to "put on the full armor of God" (Eph 6:13). After describing the parts of the armor, Paul says to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions" (Eph 6:18). The idea is that the battle against the demons bringing Satan's deception is fought through prayer.

Something we need to remember is the fate of the seven sons of Sceva who attempted to oppose demons using the name of Jesus without having a relationship with him. The demons empowered one man to give the seven

of them such a beating that they ran away bleeding and naked. (Acts 19:13-16) Don't try to command demons without first accepting Jesus as God and letting him have control of your life. Once you have accepted Jesus as the master of your life, you have the ability to overpower demons. But don't forget what Jesus told his disciples when they asked why they couldn't drive a demon out of a little boy. He said, "Because you have so little faith. ... if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt 17:20-21). And he also told them "This kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:14).

The Message Angels Fought to Deliver

Daniel 11:2-45

Pastor David Jeremiah tells the story of a professor at a theological seminary. The professor started a lecture on the book of Daniel this way. “Now I want you to understand that Daniel was written during the Maccabean period in the second century B.C., not by the historic Daniel who lived in the sixth century B.C. The facts were written, as all history is, after the events took place.”

One young man in the class raised his hand and asked the professor, “How can that be, sir, when Christ said in Matthew 24:16 that it was written by Daniel?”

The professor paused a moment, looked the student in the eyes and said, “Young man, I know more about the book of Daniel than Jesus did.” You may be shocked to hear that a seminary professor would make a statement like that, but I’m not. There are a number of seminaries whose professors have written papers that I have read which make statements indicating they think they know more than God. And the students those seminary professors teach are or will be soon leading churches throughout this nation.

Just like Satan’s fallen angel who had charge over Persia battled with God’s angel for 21 days to try and keep him from delivering God’s message to Daniel, there are battles being fought every day to keep people from hearing the message God has for them. Remember that Daniel didn’t get discouraged and quit praying when he didn’t immediately receive God’s answer to his prayer. He continued not eating any choice foods or using any lotions to make himself feel better and continued praying three times a day expecting God would answer. He didn’t know if he was having to wait for God’s perfect timing to receive his answer or what the problem was. He didn’t know about the spiritual battle being waged to try and keep him from receiving his answer. He only knew he hadn’t received an answer so he continued to pray. If we expect God’s angels to get through to people in this area with God’s message for them, we must continue to pray, asking God to do whatever is necessary in their lives to get his message to them.

God’s important message

What was so important about the message the angel had for Daniel that Satan wanted to keep him from hearing it? That’s the question we’ll try to answer as we look at this passage.

What has been the focus of all the visions Daniel has been describing since chapter 8 when he changed from writing in Aramaic to writing in Hebrew? Even though the visions were spread over eleven years from 547 BC to 536 BC, all of them showed something about the future of the Hebrew people. The first part of the message that the angels fought to deliver to Daniel covers the time from 536 BC to 165 BC.

Four kings of Persia

God tells Daniel that after the next three kings of Persia, the fourth king will be far richer and will stir up the people against Greece. Secular and Bible history identifies these kings. The first was Cambyses who ruled from 530 to 521 BC. He is called Ahasuerus in Ezra 4. The second is Pseudo Smerdis who ruled only during the year 521 BC. He is called Artaxerxes in Ezra 4. The third is Darius the Great who ruled from 521 to 486 BC. He is mentioned in Ezra 5-6. It was in the sixth year of Darius’ reign that the captives who returned to Jerusalem finished rebuilding the temple. The fourth is Xerxes who ruled from 486 to 465 BC. He is called Ahasuerus in Esther. Ahasuerus was very wealthy and attempted to capture the kingdom of Greece but was beaten back. From that time until 330 BC, the six kings who followed him all fought battles to capture or recapture Greek cities.

The mighty king

God says that after the fourth king a great king will appear who will rule with great power and do as he pleases but his kingdom will be broken up after his death and parceled toward the four winds instead of going to his descendants. History identifies this king as Alexander the Great, the king of Greece, who conquered the Persian empire in 330 BC and ruled it until his death in 323 BC. For 11 years after Alexander's death, two men tried to assume control of his empire, but it was finally divided into four parts by his four top generals in 312 BC and ruled by them and their descendants until Rome captures all four areas by 64 BC.

The kings of the north and south

God then says there will be battles between the king of the south and the king of the north for many years and that the battles will be fought in the territory he had given to the Israeli people as their Promised Land. The first king of the north was General Seleucus and he controlled the area of Syria and Israel. The first king of the south was Ptolemy and he controlled the area of Egypt. If you read the next 147 years of history for both areas you will find exactly what God said would happen in verses 5 through 28. The territory of Israel was controlled first by Syria from 312 to 301 BC, then Egypt from 301 to 198 BC, then Syria again. Everything that God said would happen, all of the intrigue and battles occurred exactly in every detail. There are some events that God didn't reveal but the significant details are all present.

Starting in verse 28, God tells about a significant event in the life of the Jews. He tells about a king of the north who will stop the daily sacrifices to God and desecrate the temple by setting up an abomination that desecrates it. He says that the king will corrupt many of the Jews with flattery but that those who know their God will firmly resist him. All of that prophecy of the future happened in 168 BC when the Syrian king, Antiochus IV who was also called Epiphanes, set up a statue of Zeus in the temple and demanded the Jews bow to it in worship. He also killed a pig, one of the animals identified as unclean, at the base of the altar in front of the temple, fed some of it to the priests, splattered its blood all over the interior of the sanctuary – the holy place – and then burned it as a sacrifice on the altar. That was the event that started the Jewish revolt led by Judas Maccabee. Many of the wise, faithful Jews died in the revolt but by 164 BC they gained control of Jerusalem and set about to cleanse the temple and restart worship services. This process is the basis for the current Jewish celebration known as Hanukkah. God concludes this section of his revelation of the future of the Jews with the statement that “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.” This is an indication that there is a gap in the time from the actions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes until a time that God has set for the end of all such rebellious activity.

The king who exalts himself

God then tells Daniel about another king who will exalt himself above the gods of all peoples. He will honor those who acknowledge him by making them rulers over many people. God describes other things this king will do. We know God isn't describing Antiochus IV Epiphanes because he never did any of the things God says this king will do. And no king since the time of Antiochus has done those things. So this is a part of the revealed future still to occur. God describes how, at the time of the end, the king of the south will engage this king in battle. As a result, the king will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will capture Egypt but reports from the east and north will alarm him so he will set out in a great rage to destroy many. He will pitch his tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. That is a description of Jerusalem. But regardless of what he does, he will come to his end and no one will help him. This is the time that Jesus returns to earth riding on a white horse and defeats this final ruler who sets himself up in rebellion to God.

There is another part to the vision God gave Daniel but we won't examine it until next Sunday. What we need to do now is look at the importance of this message the angels fought to bring to Daniel.

The importance of this message

First, what was the importance of the message to Daniel? Remember that this vision came to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus' reign as king over Babylon. That would be in 536 BC. Remember also that in 539 BC Cyrus had granted the Jews the freedom to return to their homeland, rebuild the temple and worship of God there. Daniel had been fervently praying, asking God about the future of his people since he has had two previous visions about the future of his people.

The first vision was given in 547 BC, when Daniel was 73 and the temple was in ruins. That vision described a battle that would bring the capture of the Babylonian kingdom; that the daily sacrifice would be stopped and the sanctuary brought low. The second vision was given in 538 BC, when Daniel was 82. It was the first year after Cyrus captured Babylon and around the time he decreed the Jews could return and rebuild the temple. That vision described a time of seventy 'sevens' for the future of the Jews, the coming and death of the Messiah, and the desecration of the temple with an abomination.

Now, two years later, Daniel has received a revelation about a great war and is so upset for the future of his people and the temple that he has been avoiding the "good" life and seeking an understanding from God concerning the meaning of that battle. The answer he receives is both good news and bad news. Part of the bad news is that, even though the people have returned to the Promised Land, their lives will still be filled with death from battles taking place in their land and in which they don't even have a part. Some more bad news is that a king of the north in the not too distant future (about 370 years) will stop the daily sacrifices, desecrate the temple, and capture many lands including Egypt and the Promised Land (which is called the Beautiful Land). Some good news is that those who are wise and know God will resist this king. But with the good news is the bad news that they will receive little help, that many who are not sincere will join them, and that many of the wise will stumble so they may be refined, purified and made spotless. The best of the good news is that the end will come, God will triumph, and the rebellious king will come to his end with no one to help him.

God is telling Daniel that although the future will look bleak, both from his look forward on it and from the midst of it, the end will come when God will make everything right. So God is saying, "Trust me, Daniel. I have the situation under control."

Application

Second, what is the significance of this vision for us? The events that are described happened in the long distant past – over 2000 years ago. So there is no significance in this part of the vision for us – nothing for us to learn. Right? Wrong! The fact that things happened just as God said it would is very significant for us today. First, because it shows that God knows everything that is going to happen before it happens. It shows that he is not bound by time – he exists outside of the passage of time.

Every decision I make affects my future – some decisions more than others – but every decision makes a difference. There are an infinite number of possible futures for my life based on the different decisions I make every day. The same is true for every individual living right now, for every individual that lived in the past, and for every individual that will be born. Decision I make don't just affect my future, they also affect the future of other people. A decision I make now may affect you directly but it may also affect people many generations after I have lived and died. When you consider all the possible decisions that people make and how they could affect the futures of thousands of people, it become mind-boggling. Let me illustrate this to make it a little clearer.

Picture time as a wire that is fixed at one point, representing the beginning of time, and free to vibrate in any direct at the other end, representing the future. We'll represent the present with my fingers at some point along the wire. Moving my fingers along the wire away from the past and toward the future will represent the passage of time. As my fingers move, the wire becomes fixed and rigid in the direction of the past, but in the direction

of the future it vibrates all over the place, indicating multiple futures that are possible. That's what time looks like to us as we travel along the wire. But to God who exists outside of time, the wire is fixed at both ends and is rigid from one end to the other – it never vibrates – it is fixed. Therefore, nothing that happens is a surprise to God.

Why does God choose to intervene in some events and seemingly affect the future as we see it and at other times choose not to intervene and let the events to continue in an apparent random nature? That is a mystery to us because we don't exist outside of time and can't see the fixed nature of the future. But since God has chosen in the past to tell us about the future and we have seen it come to pass as he foretold, we know that God does exist outside of time and that we can trust everything he says about the future to happen just as he says it will.

Second, since some of the things God said about the king who exalts himself did not happen to the last king of the north that he described nor have they happened to any other king since then, that means those events are still in our future. And since God see the future as fixed, not flexible, we know that those things will happen just as he has described them. And since God has said there is an end coming, we can trust that no matter how bad the present seems to be, our present troubles will someday cease. That doesn't mean things won't seem to get worse in the near future. But God knows the end and has said that those who believe Jesus is the only way and follow him will spend the timeless eternity of a new, perfect universe always in his loving presence and with every need always met in the fullest and most excellent fashion.

That is good news for every person! No matter how bad things seem to be or how bad they get to be, the final future is going to be a great, exciting, excellent place to be for everyone who trusts and follows Jesus. But I can't stop with only telling you part of the fixed future that God has revealed to us. In Revelation 20:11 – 15, God has said that for those who don't trust and follow Jesus, the future is not a great place. It will be a place of torment and torture – not caused by God but caused by what you chose instead of God – caused by your recognition of what you could have had and don't.

The only question to ask is whether you have trusted Jesus and are following him or not. The choice of your final future is totally your decision – whether you will spend it in the loving presence of God or completely separated from him.

The End

Daniel 12

Paul Harvey made his trademark with radio listeners by telling them a news-like story that would bring them to a suspenseful point just before a commercial break. He would come back after the break and say, “Now for the rest of the story.” Then he would give you the startling climax of his story which usually had some twist to it.

That is about what Daniel does as he brings his telling of this last vision to a close. He started telling about this vision back in Chapter 10. It was the third year of Cyrus’ reign – 536 BC. He had been avoiding the “good life” and praying for three weeks that God would give him an understanding of the revelation he had received about a big battle. The vision of an angel that brought his answer came while he was standing on the bank of the Euphrates River. The angel told him about the future as it affected Daniel’s people, the Hebrews. He was told about four more Persian kings, a king which we know to be Alexander the Great, then several kings ruling Syria and Egypt – north and south of the Promised Land – who would battle each other several times in the Promised Land, and finally he was told of a Syrian king who would desecrate the temple with an abomination. We know from history that king was Antiochus IV, Epiphanes. Then the angel indicates a break in the time sequence and describes a king like Antiochus Epiphanes who does things that Antiochus didn’t do. Finally, like Paul Harvey, we get the rest of the story.

“At that time”

When is “that time?” It is the time when the last king who exalts himself above God sets up his headquarters in Jerusalem. We know from Jesus’ revelation to John and from what the angel tells Daniel in verse 7 that it is the mid-point of the seven-year time of Tribulation – the last of the seventy ‘sevens’ which were revealed to Daniel in Chapter 9. The angel says there will be a time of distress like has never happened from the beginning of time until that day. This time of distress is what Jeremiah calls “a time of trouble for Jacob.” Jeremiah says, “How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.” (Jer 30:7) Remember that Daniel had Jeremiah’s writings so he knows what God told Jeremiah to write. That this is a time like no other in history is the same image Jesus uses when he tells the disciples about the end of the age when he would return. He says, “For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now — and never to be equaled again.” (Matt 24:21)

When Daniel is told that Michael, the angel who protects the Hebrew people will arise, it is indicating the Jews will be protected while Satan is trying to destroy them. Jesus says, “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.” (Matt 24:22)

When Daniel asks how long that time will last, he is told “a time, times and half a time” or 3 ½ years. That means the last half of the Tribulation will be a time of great distress for the Jewish people. Jeremiah says it will not only be a time of great distress but a time of purifying. “I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished. ... The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel.” (Jer 30:11b; 31:2)

Deliverance and Resurrection

At the end of the time of Jacob’s trouble – that purifying time of great distress, God tells Daniel, “your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered.” (Dan 12:1b) This is what Paul was referring to when he wrote the Roman believers “that Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.” (Rom 11:25b – 26a) God is telling Daniel that no matter how terrible it seems to be for the Hebrew people, he has a plan that will bring them back as a nation to him as they are purified during the last half of the Tribulation and recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

When God tells Daniel that “multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake,” he is speaking about the

Hebrew people of the Old Testament who have died. It will be the time of resurrection for the Old Testament saints – the followers of God. This is the time that Daniel will be resurrected and given the inheritance verse 13 says he will receive at the end of the days.

And now ... the rest of the story

When the angel tells Daniel to “close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end,” it is an indication that God’s answer to Daniel’s prayers is completed. Now we get the rest of the story. The answer to his prayer is complete but his vision of the angel is not. When he blinks and looks again, he sees not one but three beings – one on each bank of the river and the first angel hovering above the water. One of these two new angels asks the first angel the question that must have been on Daniel’s mind – “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?” The angel lifts both his hands toward heaven and swears by God that it will be for 3 ½ years.

It would have been great if the angel had stopped with that statement. It would clearly answer the question of how long. But the angel doesn’t stop there. He continues and says, “when the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.” Now that statement just confuses the answer. First of all, who are the holy people and second, what does it mean for them to have their power broken?

If you think you are confused, you are not alone. Daniel says that he heard but didn’t understand so he asks what the outcome of all he has been told will be. The angel tells him to “go your way,” or in other words, “don’t bother asking because you don’t need to know.” The angel continues to tell him that the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.

In verse 4 when the angel tells Daniel to close up and seal the words of the scroll, it was an indication that his answer was completed and that he should complete his writing and preserve it for future generations. At this point, when the angel says the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end, it is an indication that the full understanding of what has been said will not occur until the time that was being described occurs. That means the best understanding we can have, even though we are so much closer to the time of the end, will still be incomplete. So why bother to attempt to understand what Daniel has been told? Because the angel says “those who are wise will understand.” That means the closer we come to the time of the end the better understanding the followers of God will have. Our complete understanding will not come until after the events have happened and Jesus has returned to set up his kingdom on earth for 1,000 years. As the hymn says, “we’ll understand it better by and by.” But let’s see what we can understand of the rest of the end of this story.

The holy people and their broken power

Who are the holy people whose power is broken? Many scholars think this is a reference to the Jewish people of the end time who accept God’s will and acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. They refer to passages like Zechariah 12 and 13 which describes God’s dealing with the Jews in the end times. There God tells Zechariah, “In the whole land ... two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’” (Zech 13:8-9) But these people can hardly be called “holy” until after they are broken from the power that claims they can choose to be their own god.

In many places of the New Testament, believers are called holy as in 2 Thessalonians 1:10 where Paul writes, “on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you have believed our testimony to you.” Jesus said to his followers, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” (Acts 1:8) Paul writes, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” (Eph 3:20) The Holy Spirit living within believers is a force that restrains Satan from having complete control in the

world. That power will be broken when the holy ones – believers – are removed from the world just before the beginning of the 70th week of the seventy ‘sevens’ God revealed to Daniel.

Timing of the “end time” events

So how long will it be, as the angel asked, before the events revealed to Daniel happen? When the power of the holy ones – believers – has been broken – when they are removed from the world – then all the events revealed to Daniel, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Isaiah, Joel, Malachi, and by Jesus to his disciples will happen.

Since believers will be removed before the end time events occur, there are many of those events that we will never understand. Two of those are revealed in verses 11 and 12. The angel tells Daniel about a period of 1,290 days – 3 years 7 months – and another period of 1,335 days – 3 years 8 ½ months from the mid-point of the Tribulation. But he doesn’t say what is to happen at those times and he doesn’t say why those who live to the end of it are blessed. We can make a guess about what might happen but that would be all it was and not worth much study. For instance, I think it might be the time of restoring the earth after all the events of the Tribulation have almost made it unable to sustain life. And I think that during those time periods, the city of Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt for Jesus’ use during his 1000 year reign before the end of time and the Great White Throne judgment. But that is just a guess and I haven’t found a significant scriptural reference to back it up.

Application

So what does the “rest of the story” mean for us? What difference should knowing it mean for our daily living?

First, we can know that God has a detailed plan that includes fulfilling his promise that the Hebrew people will be his people. The plan means the Jewish people who have not accepted Jesus is the Messiah prior to the removal of all believers will have to endure a great time of testing designed to bring them to recognize Jesus as Messiah. That means if we care about what happens to the Jewish people we will try as much as we are able to help them recognize Jesus as the Messiah before he returns to remove believers.

Second, we can recognize that the Holy Spirit living within us is a power that affects the world by restraining Satan’s power. That power is so great that it can cast demons out of other human being; it can heal illnesses; it can restore life to an individual who has died; and it can perform other miracles. Since we have that power within us, there is nothing that God asks us to do that we can’t do.

Third, since God has everything under control, we can be peaceful no matter how difficult things become. We can trust God for the power we need to be salt and light for the community around us until Jesus comes to remove us from the world. That should help us live each day with enthusiasm.