

The Book of Daniel **Heroes of Faith in the Fall of a Nation**

Introduction

Daniel was contemporary with both Ezekiel and Jeremiah. As young men, it is likely that both Daniel and Ezekiel would have heard Jeremiah preach in Jerusalem. Daniel, as he was being put in chains for the long journey to Babylon, probably heard the Lament of Jeremiah, which is our book of Lamentations.

Many of the events of the Babylonian captivity affected each of these men in different ways. Each of them was given a message by God to warn the ungodly, to comfort the faithful, and to confront their enemies.

Each of these books is very relevant to us today as we watch the decline of America, and the judgment of God fall on this once great nation.

Daniel is a logical book to follow our recent study of The Revelation. It will relate to that book by the Apostle John as surely as it relates to those other prophets of the Old Testament.

The book easily divides into two sections: the first is full of vital lessons for believers living under a hostile world power, while the second gives us insight into the future, where our hope rests on the sovereignty and faithfulness of the God of grace.

Outline

I. Servants of God in a Hostile World—History from Human Viewpoint

- A. Standing firm in faith (chapters 1–2)
- B. Standing firm in freedom (chapters 3–4)
- C. Standing firm without fear (chapters 5–6)

II. The Son of Man over the Kingdoms of the World—History from Divine Viewpoint

- A. The Son of Man is the King of kings (chapters 7–8)
- B. The Son of Man is over God's people (chapters 9–10)
- C. The Son of Man and His future kingdom (chapters 11–12)

Note: The first six chapters are historical, the last six chapters are prophetic.

Standing Firm in Faith (chapters 1–2)

In these first two chapters, we see Daniel and his support team confronted with the initial challenges of navigating life as slaves in Babylon. By their faith-filled conduct and God's blessings on their faith, they will begin as slaves, but by the end of chapter two, they will be among the most highly regarded officials under Nebuchadnezzar. These introductory chapters reveal the power of God to protect and promote His servants, even in a godless and idolatrous nation.

CHAPTER ONE

Spirit-led Discernment on When and How to Resist

Daniel 1:1–8

The First Test of Dedication

Imagine that you are a fifteen-year-old son of nobility, and you watch as your nation declines, until it is completely overthrown by a hostile, godless, foreign power. As if this were not enough, now you are taken as a slave, along with a host of other children of the nobility, and carried away captive, never to see your homeland or your family again. Since you are one of the “chosen people,” how do you reconcile this with the promises of a faithful God?

Jeremiah mentions three deportations of captives taken to Babylon (Jer. 52:28–30). Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were in the first (see also 2 Kings 24:14; 25:11 and 2 Chron. 36:20). This would have been the most disheartening and frightening of them all.

Jeremiah’s Final Message to the Captives

I believe, along with many other Bible expositors, that while the captives were being chained neck-to-neck, Jeremiah preached one last message to them. With the smoking ruins of Jerusalem all around them, he gave them hope and encouragement, in preaching what we know today as the book of Lamentations.

“How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces has become a slave! She weeps bitterly in the night. Her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers [false gods] she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. Judah has gone into captivity, under affliction and hard servitude; she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest; all her persecutors overtake her in dire straits.” Lamentations 1:1–3

For decades, Judah had played Babylon against Egypt, turning from one to the other for security and supply, until her treachery had come back on her own head.

America Following Judah’s Example

As we begin this study, we see the final decline of America taking place in real time. America has played the harlot with the nations of the world. There is no “ally” that we have not betrayed, for our own fickle ends. Now, we are being invaded by an alien horde that hates us and has no loyalty to the principles on which our nation was founded. This invasion is being orchestrated by our own government and paid for by taxpayer dollars. We are watching, in living color, the answer to the question long asked, “Why do we not see America in the book of Revelation?” While God in His matchless grace could still deliver this nation, do we deserve deliverance? And if He does not step into our history in a mighty way, well may we find ourselves observing scenes similar to those of Judah in 606–605 B.C.

Jeremiah’s Light in the Darkness

As the captives in chains prepared for their long “death march” to Babylon, the prophet who had warned Judah for forty years of what was coming, gives to the captives the only hope they can carry with them.

“This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, says my soul, therefore, I hope in Him. The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.” Lamentations 3:21–27

The Foundation of Faith for the Captives

Many of the captives took to heart the final words of “the weeping prophet” Jeremiah. His challenge became the daily meditation of the unknown author of Psalm 119. It was the message of Jeremiah that became the song of the captives on the lonely nights of the journey, as recorded in Psalm 137:

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it ... How shall we sing the LORD’S song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! ... if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

As the author of Psalm 119 learned to say,

“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word ... It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.” (vv. 67, 71).

A Workout for the Soul

Try to put yourself in the place of Daniel and his three friends, and ask yourself, honestly, if you would have the spiritual poise, discernment, and courage that they displayed from the beginning. It’s very possible that this could be a “dry run” for what our future holds!

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” Daniel 1:8

Historical Review: Elements of National Collapse

1. In 721 B.C., the Northern Kingdom (Israel/Samaria) was overthrown by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:1–18). An estimated 80% of the population was carried away into captivity.
2. Later, in 701 B.C., when the armies of Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem, God miraculously delivered the city due to the prayers of Hezekiah and the prophecy of Isaiah (2 Kings 18–19).
3. Due to the foolishness of Hezekiah in showing the wealth of his treasury to an envoy from Babylon, Isaiah then (first) prophesied the coming captivity of Judah (2 Kings 20:12–21, see esp. v. 18). This prophecy was given in 698 B.C.
4. Jeremiah began to prophesy the fall of Jerusalem in 627 B.C. (Jeremiah 2–6). His message of warning continued for 40 years until the prophecy was fulfilled in 586 B.C. with the fall of Jerusalem, and the third and final captivity.
5. The end for Judah began with the death of the good king, Josiah, who was killed by Pharaoh Necho at the battle of Megiddo, in 609 B.C. Necho was on his way to the battle of Carchemish when Josiah went out to face him and was killed (2 Kings 23:28–30; 2 Chron. 35:20–25). He was lamented by Jeremiah and all of Judah.

6. At the following battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.), Egypt allied with her old nemesis, Assyria, against the brilliant, upstart commander Nebuchadnezzar (son of king Nabopolassar) of the new kingdom of Babylon, with whom were allied the Medo-Persians and the Scythians. The Assyrian coalition was defeated, and Assyria ceased to exist, so devastating was the defeat.
7. It was after the Battle of Carchemish that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem for the first time, and Daniel and about 50 to 70 captives of the royal family were taken captive, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 39:3–6).
8. Daniel’s spiritual maturity was legendary, even back in Jerusalem, where the prophet/priest Ezekiel was ministering before he was also taken into captivity (Read Ezek. 12:1–3).

Principles of Bible Study to Remember

Never forget that every Bible teacher is fallible. We who are older may quote something we read forty years ago and get a number or an author wrong. We paraphrase, even as New Testament authors do. Don’t fail to check up on us—especially verify our use of Scripture: Go to the source!

1. God has invested His power in His Word (Psalm 138:2; Isa. 40:6–8; 55:11; John 1:1–4, 14; Heb. 4:12).
2. There are critical elements that pertain to all truth:
 - a. Truth must be coherent.
 - b. Truth must be consistent (the law of non-contradiction).
 - c. Truth must correlate to life and the world as we know it.
3. Accuracy in Bible study demands adherence to the science of hermeneutics.
 - a. Historical background (Isagogics)—history, culture, language.
 - b. Categorical assimilation—the full picture of any truth/doctrine must be built on all passages concerning that truth correlated.
 - c. Exegetical evidence—the Bible must be interpreted and understood as the original recipients would have comprehended its language.

When Bible terms are interpreted in light of their modern meaning, we do violence to the text and introduce teachings that are contrary to their inspired usage.

The Five Cycles of National Discipline (Leviticus 26)

In Deuteronomy 11:26; 27–28 and 30:15, God made it clear to Israel that their obedience or disobedience to the covenant would bring either blessing or cursing. God had warned, in Leviticus 26, of five cycles of increasing discipline that the nation would experience if they continued in unfaithfulness:

1. Cycle One: vv. 14–17.
2. Cycle Two: vv. 18–20.
3. Cycle Three: vv. 21–22.
4. Cycle Four: vv. 23–26.
5. Cycle Five: vv. 27–39.

Take note that each new cycle begins with words to the effect, “*And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins*” (vv. 18, 21, 23, 27). By the end of the fifth and final cycle, the nation is overrun by enemies and the people are scattered and desolate.

By the time of Daniel and Ezekiel, the nation was entering into the fifth cycle of discipline, and by 586 B.C., had ceased to exist.

Major Lessons to Learn

1. When a nation enlightened with the true knowledge of God turns away to apostasy and degeneracy, God will reject that nation and withdraw His protection and blessings (read Dan. 1:1–2), *“The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.”*
2. When a nation rejects humble submission to God, they will be placed into forced subjection to those whose gods they worship (Dan. 1:2b). *“And he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.”* Because the worship of the false gods of the Gentiles had dominated Israel, God gave them over into the hands of those gods.

“The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?” 1 Corinthians 10:20–22)

3. Even in a time of national collapse, God is able to deliver those who remain faithful to Him (Dan. 1:3–6). It is estimated that in this first deportation, between 50 to 70 young men were taken. Of that number, only four of them were outstanding for their faithfulness.
4. Where evil prevails over righteousness, and darkness obscures the light, there will always be an attempt (subtle or forceful) at mind control and psychological re-orientation (Dan. 1:7).

Note: Different sources give various meanings of the following names:

- a. *“Daniel”* = “God is my Judge.” This name indicates that God is the judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25; Psalm 50:4; Isa. 3:13; Matt. 25:31–32; Heb. 12:23). He also, in His matchless grace, judged His own Son on behalf of sinful mankind (John 3:16–19; 2 Cor. 5:21). Daniel’s name was changed to *“Belteshazzar,”* meaning either “Bel’s prince” (an Akkadian god) or, “Lady, protect the king” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck). This is probably a reference to Ishtar, the fertility goddess of Babylon.
 - b. *“Hananiah”* = “The Lord is gracious,” and was changed to *“Shadrach,”* which is, “illuminated by the sun god.”
 - c. *“Mishael”* = “Who and what is the Lord?” We know that *“God is light”* (1 John 1:5–6), and *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8, 16). No god of the heathen ever has these qualities. The name change to *“Meshach”* means “who is like Ishtar” or “the god whom I fear.”
 - d. *“Azariah”* = “The Lord is my help,” became *“Abednego,”* “servant of Nebo,” the Akkadian god of wisdom.
5. There is a time to feast and a time to fast (Dan. 1:8). The problem here was neither a question of meat nor wine, both of which were common in Israel. Daniel and his friends were not advocating vegetarianism! Rather, the food of the king’s table was first sacrificed or poured out in offering to their gods. This made it defiled according to the dietary laws

of Israel (Leviticus 11). These restrictions are not binding, but a matter of conscience, to Church Age believers (Mark 7:19; Acts 15:29; Rom. 14:2–4, 14–17; 1 Cor. 8:4; 10:28).

In Mark 2:18–20, the issue was made that the disciples of John fasted, yet the disciples of Jesus were always feasting. Jesus declared that the friends of the Bridegroom are not going to fast at the wedding. While He was present with them, it was a time for joyous celebration.

“But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast in those days.” Mark 2:20

6. Daniel’s decision, which was then joined by the other three, was to control what they could in maintaining faithfulness to the covenant obligations of Israel. They maintained a focus on revealed truth and were blessed by God for their dedication.
7. In their first conflict with a non-believing, heathen power, Daniel and company were able to appeal for leniency and proved that it did not hinder, but rather enhanced, their fitness to serve in the administration of Nebuchadnezzar.

Conclusion: Victorious Faith over Disastrous Circumstance

Jesus told His disciples:

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

Many years later, the apostle John remembered these words and wrote:

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” 1 John 5:4–5

And even again, looking far into the future of the Tribulation saints, he wrote:

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” Revelation 12:11

These verses are simply the New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament promises. In this section, Daniel and friends proved the truth of Isaiah 40:31,

*“But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew [exchange] their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.”*

This verse is the promise of supernatural strength, which is displayed in the lives of those who “*wait on the Lord.*” The word in Hebrew for “wait” is *Chavah*—the strongest word for faith in Hebrew. It is a word that means “to bind together by twisting, to make a rope.” The idea is the bringing together of promises, principles, and doctrines (note the progression), over a long period of time. It suggests the

process of spiritual growth leading to a level of maturity. It is going “*from strength to strength*” (Psalm 84:7).

Daniel 1:9–16 **Divine Favor and the Power of Appeal**

In this section, we tend to look at events, without considering that we are being given the consequences of previous decisions.

“But Daniel purposed in his heart ...” Daniel 1:8

Just like Ezra (Ezra 7:10), Daniel’s victories began in the determination of the inner man—the heart. This process is clearly laid out in Scripture.

The Stair-steps of Spiritual Destiny

Results (Heb. 6:7–8, blessing or cursing)

Actions (Heb. 5:14, good or evil)

Decisions (Eph. 5:15, wise or foolish)

Priorities/values (1 Cor. 3:1, spiritual or carnal/worldly)

Attitude (1 Pet. 5:5–6, humble or arrogant)

Most, if not all the promises of God, come with conditions. These conditions require volitional response on the part of the believer. It is not a matter of one decision, but of consistent attitudes and actions based on the Word of God. It is a Spirit-led, Word-oriented lifestyle, called the Christian way of life!

Daniel’s Appeal

Daniel’s appeal was to a lower official than Ashpenaz (vv. 3, 8). He is called a “*steward*” (*Melzar*—Persian derivative, “butler,” cf. Gen. 40:1, 5). Often a lesser, or “local,” official will be more sympathetic and flexible than the higher officials. There is a book entitled *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates* by Matthew J. Trehwella that deals with the historical use of local magistrates to thwart higher tyrannical authority. One example in America would be county sheriffs standing against the overreach of both Federal and State violations of the Constitution.

The word translated “*vegetables*” in vv. 12 and 16 is not accurate. “*The word used here generally refers to the seeds used for animal feed ... cereal grains ... cooked in water to produce a porridge.*” (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Walton, Matthews, Chavalas).

Note: God blessed these four young men for their faithfulness and obedience, by granting them wisdom, skill, and understanding in all their training. Daniel, the obvious leader, was granted even greater spiritual insight into visions and dreams—this will be a skill he uses throughout the book.

Daniel’s Discernment

“If any of you lacks wisdom [who doesn’t?], let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5

1. Daniel had discernment regarding historical events (vv. 1–4). He had learned the lessons taught by the prophet Jeremiah.
2. He had discernment regarding faithful conduct in a hostile environment (vv. 5–9). He knew where to draw the line—what he could affect, and what he couldn't.
3. He had discernment in discovering the means to accomplish his goal of faithful obedience, (vv. 10–13). This was a very reasonable request, which would not endanger the “*steward*” in any way.
4. Daniel had discernment in the ways of God (vv. 14–21). See Psalm 103:7 and Hebrews 3:10 for contrast. While Israel only saw God's works, Moses understood His ways.
5. All of this has the providence of God behind it. God gave him “*favor*” (v. 9), “*wisdom*” (v. 17), and success (vv. 19–20). Daniel outlived all the other three friends, living to see the captives return after the 70 years captivity (books of Ezra, Nehemiah).
6. Daniel also exercised linguistic discernment. The Book of Daniel, written late in his life (c. 530 B.C.), is in both Hebrew (Daniel 1, 8–12) and Aramaic (Daniel 2–7, Chaldee/Syriac). “The Aramaic portions in Daniel deal with matters pertaining to all the citizens of the Babylonian and Persian empires, whereas the Hebrew sections describe predominantly Jewish concerns and God's plans for Israel. Probably Daniel wrote the Aramaic sections for the benefit of his Gentile neighbors, and he wrote the whole book for the Jews, who could read both languages.” (*Notes on Daniel, 2023 edition*, Dr. Thomas L. Constable).

God Blesses His Word Wherever it is Found!

I remember, back in the 80's, reading the story of a Vietnam prisoner of war. This prisoner was so defiant of his captors that he was kept isolated from all the other prisoners, for fear that his defiance would spread. No amount of privation or torture could break him.

He was kept in isolation and given the job of cleaning out the pit-latrines at the end of each day. He was told to get down into the pit with a bucket and scoop out the offal of all the other prisoners, carry it away, and dump it away from the camp.

One day while doing this disgusting duty, he found in the mess a small piece of paper someone had used for toilet paper. He was able to secretly hide this in his filthy clothing without the guard seeing. Later that night, he scraped the paper clean, and found the first pages of the Gospel of John, from a small pocket Bible. He read the Word of God for the first time with great interest, having had no conversation or reading material for a long time.

The next day, he found another page, and managed to “liberate” it as well. By the third day, he came upon the page from which he read these words:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

That night, that courageous, defiant U.S. warrior trusted Jesus Christ for the gracious gift of eternal life!

Sometime later, by what means I don't recall after these 40 years, he was able to relate, by tap code, this story to a fellow prisoner. This prisoner was later released and related his story. The name of the brave soldier has been lost, and he died in captivity, but his amazing story lives on!

Three Great Lessons Emerge from this Courageous Man's Story:

1. God blesses His Word wherever it is found.
2. The spiritually hungry soul does not care what vessel God uses to reach them.
3. No soul is so isolated that God cannot get His Gospel to receptive ears.

Conclusion

1. Heroes are forged in the furnace of adversity! Hard times make strong men.
2. Daniel had historical impact and became legendary in his own generation, simply by his total dedication to God's Word, and refusal to conform to false ideologies or practices.
3. Of the estimated 70 captives of the first stage of the exile, only he and the three others stand out in Scripture.
4. We, like Daniel and friends, are living in a time of great worldwide, historical crisis. Now is the time for Spirit-led decisions to be made.
5. This generation will produce some great spiritual heroes. Let us strive to be among their ranks!

“Faith is not believing in spite of evidence—that is superstition, but rather in obeying in spite of the circumstances.” – Warren W. Wiersbe

Note: Christians love canned quotes like this, but seldom take the time or effort to analyze them. The above quote is good in relation to the believer, but not for the one who is just coming to Christ. Faith in Christ does consider the biblical evidence, the resurrection, history, Scripture, conviction by the Spirit of God, etc. However, the issue at the point of salvation is not obeying, in the sense of doing something, but rather, obedience is in the act of believing without doing anything (Rom. 1:5; 4:3–5; Eph. 2:8–9). Once one is saved, faith becomes *“the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb. 11:1), because *“by it the elders [heroes of faith] obtained a good testimony”* (Heb. 11:2). Faith at the moment of salvation is “without works.” Faith after salvation is *“working together with works”* (James 2:22), because *“faith works through love”* (Gal. 5:6).

Daniel 1:17–21

Divine Blessing Penetrates the Cosmic System

“Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness, says the LORD God.” Ezekiel 14:14, 20

When Ezekiel wrote these words he was still in Jerusalem, prior to his own exile in 597 B.C. If Daniel and company were carried away in the first captivity, 605 B.C., this means that in no more than ten years, Daniel had become a legendary figure, known from Babylon to Jerusalem!

The Spiritual Mathematics in Daniel

Divine providence + faith/obedience = historical impact for Christ

1. Divine providence involves God's eternal plan, undisturbed by earthly events, working toward the glorification of God and the salvation of men. The providence of God is at work at all times and in all events!
2. The spiritual hunger of the unbeliever, and the faith/faithfulness of believers is always a magnet for the providence/grace of God.

"And you shall seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."
Jeremiah 29:13

"Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near."
Isaiah 55:6

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23–24

3. Faithfulness in times of affliction gives great honor and glory to God, for it is a declaration to the entire fallen realm that God is in control, and that we believe in spite of, not because of, circumstances (Wiersbe's quote above).
4. The unknown/unnamed Vietnam vet mentioned earlier demonstrates that God, who knows the hearts of men, can get His Word to the receptive soul through all the forces of the devil.
5. Men like Daniel and company, and this prisoner of war, will always have historical impact through all generations, because **God blesses His Word wherever it is found!**

The Cosmic System Cannot Stop Divine Blessing

This present world is under the immediate dominion of Satan because Adam handed that dominion to him when he fell to the devil's temptation.

"So God created man in His own image ... then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over ... every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Genesis 1:27–28

But when Adam fell to the temptation of the devil, he became the slave of the devil, and handed over that dominion to him.

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:12

"Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." John 8:34

"Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and all their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish ...'" Luke 4:5–6

However, the devil and all his forces cannot keep God from sending down His blessing on those who are faithful to Him.

Categories of Blessing Illustrated (vv. 1:15–21)

We will reach back in the chapter a little to show continuity in blessings given:

1. God’s blessing begins with love of, and obedience to, His Word (v. 8).

“Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice ... for He is your life and the length of days...” (Deut. 30:19–20)

2. God can give the blessing of favor from those in positions of power (vv. 9, 14).

“The LORD was with Joseph ... and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper ... Then he made him [Joseph] overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.” (Gen. 39:2–4)

“Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison ... But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and he gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners... The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.” (Gen. 39:21–23)

3. This includes physical blessings contrary to the laws of nature (vv. 15–16).

“I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.” (Job 23:12)

“So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan [the Camp of Dan].” (Judges 13:24–25)

“Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, ‘Arise and eat.’ ... So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.” (1 Kings 19:5–8)

4. Intellectual blessings (wisdom) beyond normal personal capacity (v. 17)

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.” (Prov. 2:6–8)

“But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.” (Matt. 10:19–20; see Luke 21:14)

“He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.”
(Luke 1:53)

“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God had chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.”(1 Cor. 1:27–29)

5. The blessing of promotion beyond one’s peers (v. 20).

“‘Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth’ ... ‘Behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land ... They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.’” (Jer. 1:6, 18–19)

“So, he [Gideon] said to Him, O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house. And the LORD said to him, Surely, I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.” (Judg. 6:15–16)

6. The blessing of longevity of life (v. 21; see Dan. 6:28).

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1–3)

“[If you] do evil in the sight of the LORD your God to provoke Him to anger ... you will not prolong your days ... but will be utterly destroyed.” (Deut. 4:25–26)

“You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the LORD your God is giving you ...” (Deut. 4:40)

7. Believers living in the Church Age enter into union with Christ as the recipients of *“every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”* (Eph. 1:3).

Consider the blessings catalogued in one single passage alone—Colossians 1:9–14:

- a. The power of effective, prevailing prayer (v. 9a; James 5:16; 2 Cor. 10:4).
- b. The capacity for wisdom and the understanding of God’s will (v. 9b; Matt. 11:25; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:18).
- c. The inherent power (from the indwelling of the Spirit) to live dynamic lives that increasingly reflect the life of Jesus Christ: worthy, acceptable, and effective (v. 10; Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 1:19–21; Col. 1:6–7).
- d. Supernatural enablement to overcome suffering, sorrow, and affliction with victorious endurance and joy (v. 11; Rom. 8:37).
- e. Perpetual gratitude for our enrollment in the eternal inheritance of the children of God, (v. 12; Eph. 1:11–14; Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 3:8–9, 16, 29; 1 Pet. 1:4–5).
- f. We are liberated from Satan’s kingdom and have been transferred into Christ’s kingdom of eternal love (v. 13; Luke 22:29–30; 1 Thess. 2:12).

- g. Our redemption by means of the cross of Christ includes all these things plus the forgiveness of all sins: past, present, and future (v. 14; Eph. 1:7; Rom. 4:7; Psalm 103:3; 1 John 2:2, 12).

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter was actually introduced by a brief comment in chapter one:

“And Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.” Daniel 1:17b

The provisions of these “spiritual gifts” in the Old Testament were limited and often temporary and were not given to every believer, unlike the New Testament spiritual gifts (compare Exod. 31:1–6; Judg. 13:24–25; 15:14–16; 16:17). Still, there are vital lessons in this story for each of us in our service to God.

Note: This chapter gives an overview of “*the times of the Gentiles*” (Luke 21:24). This time frame includes all time from Babylon to the Second Coming of Jesus to this earth. These we must distinguish from “*the fullness of the Gentiles*” (Rom. 11:25), which speaks of the Rapture of the Church.

Daniel 2:1–13 **The Unknown God Begins to Reveal Himself to a Heathen King**

God is working at all times to reveal Himself to every member of the human race (Exod. 14:4; Rom. 9:17; John 12:32). Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is the beginning of his introduction to the one true God. As we will see, God used the fall of Judah to bring saving truth to millions of people.

The Dream and the Decree

We’ll only cover the main points of this section, which are three in number.

1. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar was supernatural in nature (v. 1). It was God’s way of reaching Nebuchadnezzar since, as an unbeliever, he was not yet able to receive the revelation from Scripture (1 Cor. 2:14). The ancient world believed in dreams, omens, and their interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar, however, was wise enough to know that many of the claims of the wise men were empty pretense. His reasoning seems to be that if they can interpret a dream, so as to know the future, they should also be able to declare the dream that occurred in the past. The four classes named here comprised what were known as the “wise men” of the ancient East.
2. The decree demanded supernatural power, which the wise men did not have (vv. 2–9). By putting the “wise men” to the test, Nebuchadnezzar proved their claims to power to be false. This is true of all fortune tellers, so-called “prophets,” astrologers, etc. They are attempting to deal with spiritual realities from the spiritual vacuum of unbelief.
3. Any attempt to meet supernatural demands with human capabilities can only lead to death (vv. 10–13). These so-called “*wise men*” make two statements that turn the focus from man to the true God: “*There is not a man on earth who can tell the kings matter ... there is no other who can tell ... except the gods, whose dwelling is not with [men]*” (vv. 10–11).

They have at last recognized human limitations in spiritual matters, and unknowingly point to the need for God to become a man, in the Person of Jesus Christ, to bridge the chasm between God and mankind.

Note: Daniel and company apparently were not consulted, not yet having risen to sufficient prominence in the realm. God uses this dream to change that condition.

Daniel 2:14–23

Divine Intervention in Human Dilemmas

Times of earthly crisis remind us of our human limitations and urge us to turn to the God of Heaven, who alone can deliver us in perilous times.

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” Psalm 50:15

“They will call on My name, and I will answer [deliver] them. I will say, ‘This is My people,’ and each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’” Zechariah 13:9b

In this section, there are, again, three main points of instruction for us.

1. The wisdom and counsel of Daniel (vv. 14–16).

The wisdom Daniel possessed was the result of his knowledge of God and His Word. We can conclude that he had been a faithful student of Jeremiah and had grown under his ministry. The counsel he now gives to Arioch (the executioner, vv.13, 15), and ultimately to Nebuchadnezzar., is the expression of all those years of faithful learning of God’s Word.

Principle: We can never know when the hour of crisis will come. Every day till then is a gift—an opportunity to prepare, so that, when the trial comes, we will meet it—not with human resources, but with divine, supernatural strength and wisdom.

2. The prayer meeting of Daniel and company (vv. 17–18).

It is worth pointing out that, although God had already gifted Daniel with the power of interpretation (1:17), its exercise still required prayer and total dependence on God.

Point: Every believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9–11). Every believer is given at least one spiritual gift (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:7). Those gifts cannot function apart from the filling ministry of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and humble reliance on His guidance and enablement (Zech. 4:6; 2 Cor. 10:3–5).

3. The revelation of God to Daniel, followed by Daniel’s praise (vv. 19–23).

When God answered their prayers and gave the revelation to Daniel, he responded with a hymn of praise. Consider how the contents of this hymn show us what Daniel knew about God.

8 Great truths about God:

- a. God will be “blessed,” or praised, forever (v. 20a).
(Isa. 6:3; Rev. 5:9–14; Eph. 2:7).
- b. He is the source of all wisdom and power (v. 20b).
(1 Cor. 1:18–25; Eph. 3:10–12).

- c. He alone has the power to change times and seasons (v. 21a).
 In Acts 1:6–8, the disciples naturally thought it was time to inaugurate the kingdom. Jesus told them, “*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority*” (Acts 1:7). This was because the great mystery, the Church Age, was now to be “inserted,” as it were, into the flow of history. Later, after Paul had revealed this mystery age, he wrote to the Thessalonians, saying, “*But concerning the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly [concerning] the day of the Lord*” (1 Thess. 5:1–2). The word “*times*” is *chronos* (as in chronology) and refers to time in succession. “*Seasons*” is *kairos* and speaks of the individual ages that make up history.
- d. He removes and raises up kings, to fulfill His plan for history (v. 21b).
 This is graphically illustrated by God raising up Pharaoh, “*For this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth*” (Exod. 9:16; Rom. 9:17). The salvation of Rahab and her family shows that God’s ultimate purpose is always redemptive (Josh. 2:9–11; 6:22–23).
- e. He gives wisdom and knowledge to those who are wise and understanding (v. 21c).
 This sounds contradictory to us, until we understand a fundamental principle of the spiritual life. This principle is stated in Matthew 13:12 and is illustrated in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25:14–30, summarized by the statement, “*For whoever has, to him more will be given ... but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him*” (Matt. 13:12). To understand the meaning of this, two truths of Scripture must be brought together:
- 1) God gives His gifts liberally to all men on a daily basis (Matt. 5:45; James 1:5).
 - 2) Among these gifts, the greatest is the availability of His Word. Those who receive it and come to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, are the “wise” (1 Cor. 1:30). To them, God continually gives more wisdom and power. “*To you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him*” (Mark 4:24–25).
- f. He who is the Light brings to light things hidden in the darkness (v. 22). “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever*” (Deut. 29:29). There will always be things known to God that we do not know. But as time goes on, He is progressively revealing more, both by Scripture and by history, that was once secret. In Ephesians 2:7 we read, “*That in the ages to come [eternity future] He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*” As “*God is light*” (1 John 1:5), it is His very nature to “*bring to light the hidden things of darkness*” (1 Cor. 4:5).
- g. He is the God of the fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 23a).
 “*O God of my fathers,*” the root that supports us all (Rom. 11:18).
- h. God often uses one to reach a few, so as to reach millions (v. 23b).
 Note the shift from “*me*” to “*we*” and “*us*” in v. 23. From Daniel to his friends, then to Nebuchadnezzar, and ultimately to millions who would have read his “salvation tract” in Daniel 4:1–3; 34–36.

Daniel 2:24–49 The Dream Reviewed and Interpreted

In this section, Daniel shows that God alone, who is the Author of all true revelation, is able to reveal His truth to those who know Him. It is their task to make known the Word of God to those who do not yet know Him, so as to bring them to saving faith.

Principle: The plan and purpose of God is always redemptive, “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*” (Luke 19:10)

Daniel Points to the Living God (vv. 24–30)

1. Arioch seeks to usurp Daniel’s honor. Arrogance is always self-promoting, and therefore is always doomed to failure (vv. 24–25).
2. Daniel rejects false praise, pointing to the true God of Heaven (vv. 26–28). This shows his humility, and God always promotes the humble (Prov. 3:34; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:5–6). The “*latter days*” is a reference to the “*times of the Gentiles*” (Luke 21:24), which speaks of history from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is not the same as “*the fullness of the Gentiles*” (Rom. 11:25), which is a reference to the Rapture, and concludes the “mystery age” of the Church, as revealed to Paul (Eph. 3:1–12). The Church Age, “*the dispensation of the fullness of times*” (Eph. 1:10), and “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph. 3:2) is nowhere revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures.
3. “*For our sakes*” includes Daniel’s faithful prayer team (vv. 29–30) as they all worked together; and all will be promoted (vv. 48–49). Here, we are reminded of an important **principle of ministry**: “*As his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike.*” (1 Sam. 30:24).

Daniel Reviews the Dream (vv. 31–35)

This proves that the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, which he had not told to anyone, is from God and was revealed to Daniel and his faithful prayer warriors.

This dream is the beginning of a prophetic outline of history from the time of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon) down to the Second Coming of Christ.

1. The “*great image*” in the form of a man speaks of human domination of these kingdoms (vv. 31–33). Four great kingdoms, represented by the “*gold,*” “*silver,*” “*bronze,*” and “*iron,*” represent Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The feet being a mixture of “*iron and clay*” speaks of revived Rome under Antichrist.
2. The stone that becomes a “*great mountain*” is Jesus Christ in His Second Coming, at which time He sets up His millennial kingdom on this earth (vv. 34–35).
3. This “*stone ... cut without hands*” is the “rock of our salvation” (Psalm 62:2), the “*stone of stumbling and rock of offense*” who “*has become the chief cornerstone*” (1 Pet. 2:7–8; Eph. 2:20). He alone, Jesus Christ, is the “Rock” on which the Church is built (Matt. 16:18). He will destroy all other kingdoms and rule forever.

The Interpretation of the Dream (vv. 36–43)

Again, Daniel includes the other three members of his team, as he says, “Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king.” (v. 36). This links to v. 30, where Daniel says the interpretation was given, “for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king.” Part of that reason will be their promotion to positions of authority in the kingdom (vv. 46–49), but this also acts as an introduction to chapter 3, where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego must stand alone without Daniel present, showing their own spiritual maturity, courage, and dedication to the Lord.

Five Great Kingdoms—“The times of the Gentiles” (vv. 36–45 and Luke 21:24)

The Church and the Church Age are not mentioned in these prophecies, because the existence of the Church was an unrevealed “mystery” until it was given to Paul (Eph. 3:1–11).

1. Gold: represents Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar.
2. Silver: The Medo-Persian empire.
3. Bronze: Greece, first under Alexander, then divided into four kingdoms.
4. Iron: Rome. Although the iron speaks of Rome’s military might, it was not equal to the previous kingdoms in administrative ability. However, Rome gave four gifts to the world, which made the coming of Jesus Christ and His saving work known everywhere:
 - a. The continued one-world language of Alexander—*koine* Greek.
 - b. A system of roads that spanned the known world.
 - c. The Pax Romana—the “peace of Rome,” keeping law and order.
 - d. The gift of Roman citizenship, by which Paul was able to proclaim Christ throughout the known world.
5. Iron mixed with clay: Revived Roman empire under Antichrist. The phrase, “they will mingle with the seed of men, but they will not adhere to one another” seems to suggest the infiltration of fallen angels into the kingdom of the Antichrist. We know that he will be indwelt by Satan himself (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 12:9, 17; 13:1–5; 18:23).

Note: In Revelation 17:10, John mentions seven kings/kingdoms. This is because he is looking back over history—beyond the time of Daniel, whereas Daniel is simply looking forward from his own time under Babylon. The seven kingdoms of John are:

1. Egypt: Subjugated the nation of Israel in Moses’ time.
2. Assyria: Conquered the 10 Northern tribes in 722 B.C.
3. Babylon: Conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 606/605 B.C.
4. Medo-Persia: Conquered Babylon as recorded in Daniel 5.
5. Greece (under Alexander): Conquered Medo-Persia, under Darius III, at the Battle of Gaugamela, in 331 B.C. (50,000 Greeks against 250,000 Persians). Under Alexander, Greek culture and the *koine* Greek language spread throughout the known world.
6. Rome: Conquered Greece in 146 B.C. at the Battle of Corinth.
7. Revived Rome: the ten toes of iron mixed with clay.

It is also of interest to note that an ancient false prophecy exists from the 12th century B.C., making it about 700 years before the time of Daniel, that spoke of “Four kings who arise and do poorly, followed by a king who will restore the statue of Ishtar to Uruk from Babylon. The prophecy says that his son will succeed him and that his kingdom will be established forever (an alternative interpretation dates it to the seventh century and identifies the son as Nebuchadnezzar)” (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Old Testament*, by Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, p. 734). This simply shows how

Satan seeks to appropriate and twist the plan of God and apply it to himself, just as antichrist will do, in claiming to be the fulfillment of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The Eternal Kingdom of Jesus Christ (vv. 44–45)

It is worth pointing out that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and Daniel’s interpretation of it, totally supports a pre-millennial perspective of history. The future revived Roman empire of iron and clay will be destroyed by the “stone,” along with all the other kingdoms. This is the point where the “stone” becomes a “mountain,” which is symbolic of a kingdom. The Church has not, nor will ever, conquer the kingdoms of this world!

Daniel’s interpretation ends with the words, “*the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.*”

Even though we live 2500 years after Daniel, we can be certain that history will play out just as God has revealed it “*by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets*” (Eph. 3:5).

Daniel and Friends Promoted (vv. 46–49)

There are four main points of interest in these verses. First, Daniel is given great honor by Nebuchadnezzar. But secondly, Nebuchadnezzar has come a little closer to an understanding of “*the God of gods, the Lord of kings.*” Each encounter with God through his dreams is bringing Nebuchadnezzar closer to saving faith, which he reaches in chapter four. Third, Daniel is promoted to the highest position in Babylon, next to the king. More significantly, he is made head of all the wise men of Babylon. This is why, some 500 years later, the wise men from the East will come, asking, “*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him*” (Matt. 2:2). This story and sign, given to the wise men by Daniel, was passed down for five centuries, until the time of its fulfillment. And finally, the friends are also promoted at Daniel’s request. It is a good reminder to us that those who pray are of equal value to those who are sent and those who teach!

A Tale of Two Rulers

Remember how when Joseph was promoted to second-in-command in Egypt? The result was that Pharaoh welcomed and provided for the young nation of Israel (Genesis 47). In the case of Daniel, however, Nebuchadnezzar is not yet freed from his own arrogance. The chapter ends with Daniel and friends being promoted. In the next chapter, Nebuchadnezzar is prepared to kill Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego because they will not bow down to his golden image. When Daniel is promoted, he remains humble. Nebuchadnezzar, however, uses his dream to inflate his own arrogance.

CHAPTER THREE

The book of Daniel is a divine primer for believers living under tyrannical rulers. We learn that there is a time when civil disobedience is required if we are to remain faithful to God. We see that God is able to protect His children from the wrath of these rulers, though that is not always His will (Heb. 11:32–38). **The whole book of Daniel is “lessons from past history for living in prophetic times.”**

One of the greatest lessons to be found in the first six chapters is the length to which God will go to reach the lost soul and to bring it to faith in the true and Living God. Just consider the steps God took to bring the heathen king Nebuchadnezzar into the family of God:

1. First, he brought Daniel and company to his attention (Daniel 1).
2. Then he gave Nebuchadnezzar a problem that seemed to have no solution, in the dream none of his “*wise men*” could interpret (Dan. 2:1–13).
3. This dream was then told and interpreted by Daniel, with the prayer-backing of his three faithful friends (Dan. 2:14–49).
4. Now, in chapter 3, God allows the arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar to bring the friends of Daniel to the forefront, by their act of civil disobedience (Dan. 3:1–12).
5. In a fit of rage, Nebuchadnezzar commands these three to be cast into the super-heated flame. This only serves to reveal God’s power to protect them, as well as giving Nebuchadnezzar a brief glimpse of the Lord Jesus with them in the fire (Dan. 3:13–30).
6. Finally, proving that “*pride goes before the fall*” (Prov. 16:18), He strikes Nebuchadnezzar with beastly insanity, right when he boasted about his own greatness (chapter 4). This was even foretold by his dream and Daniel’s interpretation; but still he remained arrogant, though Daniel will tell him, “*The Most High rules in the kingdom of men*” (Dan. 4:17, 25–26, 32)—a warning given to him six times (Dan. 2:21, 37).
7. Daniel also made it clear that Nebuchadnezzar could avoid all this by simply humbling himself before God (4:37). Finally, after seven years of imposed humiliation, Nebuchadnezzar humbles himself and writes his testimonial tract (chapter 4).

Daniel 3:1–7 **Arrogance Plus Power Equals Tyranny**

Arrogance (what the Bible calls “pride”) is the natural condition of the unbeliever. Arrogance is the basic attitude of independence of man from his Creator. In fact, it is the one-word summary in answer to the question: “Why does God allow so much suffering in the world?” The vast majority of people come to faith in Jesus Christ as a direct result of some suffering or trial in their lives. While suffering purifies and strengthens the faith of maturing believers, it serves to shatter the arrogance of those who are yet without Christ.

The Golden Image (vv. 1–3)

Daniel’s interpretation from chapter 2:37–38, no doubt boosted the ego of the king.

Taking the “cubit” as a measure of about 18 inches, the image (probably with a large base), would have been 90 feet high and 9 feet thick. If it were pure gold, rather than gold overlay, the value of the gold would be in the many trillions of dollars’ worth today. While the size of the image seems immense to us, ancient records state that the Colossus of Rhodes was 100 feet high!

“*Dura*” is a word that actually means “plain” or “valley.” To this place, eight groups of officials were gathered. Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, the list is as follows:

1. Satraps: the chief officials under the king.
2. Administrators (prefects): military commanders.
3. Governors: civil administrators.
4. Counselors: advisers to various authorities.
5. Treasurers: financial administrators.
6. Judges: legal administrators.
7. Magistrates: those who carry out the laws.
8. Other officials: to include subordinate and local officials.

The King's Command (vv. 4–7)

The inauguration of the image began with a herald's announcement, which was to be followed by "Nebuchadnezzar's rag-time band." Five kinds of instruments are mentioned, which would include mainly wind and stringed instruments. The phrase "*in symphony with all kinds of music*" indicates there may have been many more instruments.

The command was not just to prostrate oneself before the image. This was a normal practice before kings (see 1 Sam. 25:23). The command included worshipping the image, giving to it honor belonging to God alone. To fully appreciate this section, we need to understand two important doctrines:

The Doctrine of Arrogance

1. It was arrogance over his appearance and position which caused Lucifer to fall and to become Satan (Isa. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:14–19).
2. Those in positions of spiritual authority (pastors, evangelists, leaders) are warned against pride, as "*the snare of the devil*" (1 Tim. 3:6).
3. The categories of the "lust of the flesh" fall into three ascending groups, called, "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*" (1 John 2:16).
4. Pride (the mental sin of arrogance) is listed by Jesus as one of the things from within that defiles one's life (Mark 7:21–23).
5. Pride is listed first in the seven things that are an abomination to God (Prov. 6:16–19, see also Prov. 8:13).
6. Pride/arrogance inevitably leads to shame and defeat (Prov. 11:2; 16:18).
7. The only cure for pride/arrogance is genuine humility (2 Chron. 32:26; James 4:7–10; 1 Pet. 5:5).

The Doctrine of the Devil's Religion

The devil, in attempting to be his own god, can only imitate the true things of God, with a devilish twist:

1. Counterfeit gospel (2 Cor. 11:3–4; Gal. 1:8–9).
2. Counterfeit ministers (2 Cor. 11:13–14).
3. Counterfeit doctrines (1 Tim. 4:1–3; Col. 2:8, 16, 21–23).
4. Counterfeit communion (1 Cor. 10:20–21).
5. Counterfeit righteousness (Matt. 19:16–22; 23:27–28).

6. Counterfeit spirituality (Gal. 3:2–3; Phil. 3:4–6; 2 Cor. 10:12).
7. Counterfeit power (2 Thess. 2:3–10; Exod. 7:11–12).
8. Counterfeit gods (1 Cor. 10:20–21; 2 Thess. 2:3–4).

Principle: All of the above counterfeits appeal to the arrogance of the sin nature! All “man-made” religions actually originate with the devil, and they take honor away from God and make a way for men to boast in their works, devotion, sacrifices, etc.

Daniel 3: 8–18

Envy and Arrogance vs. Humility and Faith

The great motivator of persecution against God’s people is envy. The nobility, honor, and courage of those who mature in grace and truth inflame this envy. The strength of faith in the face of threats of punishment or death is incomprehensible to those without eternal life.

The Accusation, Born of Envy (vv. 8–12)

The accusation came from the “*Chaldeans*,” those of the inner circle of astrologers (see Dan. 1:20; 2:2). They considered themselves the true citizens of Babylon and resented the rise of these “*Jews*” (Dan. 1:19–20), who had risen to such high positions. The word “*accused*” in verse 8 is very strong, literally meaning, “to tear in pieces” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Walvoord and Zuck).

These sycophants of the king begin, “*O king live forever*” (v. 9) and frame their complaint in religious terms (v. 12), “*These men [spoken with contempt], O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods ...*”

The Threat of the King’s Arrogance (vv. 13–15)

The “*rage*” of Nebuchadnezzar is born out of his arrogance. How dare these “*Jews*,” who have been elevated to such positions, defy his order? He shows what he considers to be benevolence by giving them a second chance. It is critical to take note of how he frames his threat. “*Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?*” (v. 15b). How interesting to see the very opposite conviction coming from the mouth of King Darius in the case of Daniel (Dan. 6:16, 20).

The Courage of Humble Faith (vv. 16–18)

Why Daniel was not present, we do not know. His higher position may have either exempted him from attending, or he may have been on official duties elsewhere.

Without hesitation, the three respond to the challenge, “*Our God is able to deliver us ... and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.*” How beautiful and honorable is the steadfastness and stability of faith! Confidence in God always gives courage before men.

“*But if not*” simply declares that, should God will, they are ready to die rather than dishonor God. “*We do not serve your gods*” is a direct challenge to the king’s polytheistic religion.

Daniel 3:19–25

The God of Israel Answers the Challenge

The reason “*Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury*” is because human arrogance cannot stand to be questioned or challenged. But he himself had framed the argument as a challenge to the true God in verse 15.

Now, in his rage, he has the furnace heated “*seven times more,*” a figure of speech for its hottest possible degree. These furnaces, made of clay and lined with special stones (something like a modern pizza oven), were able to reach about 900 to 1100 degrees centigrade (1800–1900 Fahrenheit) (*Bible Background Commentary*, Walton, Matthews, Chavalas). If he was thinking rationally, he would have lowered the temperature, so as to prolong their agonies. Emotional rage is not logical.

When the “*mighty men of valor*” (see 2 Sam. 23:8–39) cast them into the fire, they themselves were consumed by the flames (see Dan. 6:24). Then, looking into the flames, Nebuchadnezzar sees “*four men loose ... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*” This was more likely stated as, “a son of the gods,” since Nebuchadnezzar had no concept of The Son, revealed in Psalm 2:12 and Proverbs 30:4. Here, we see the extent to which God will go, not only to deliver His own, but also to reach a lost soul with the truth. We will consider this idea in more detail in the remainder of chapter three and chapter four.

The Doctrine of Envy

1. In Daniel 3:8–12, as in 6:3–9, the motivating force behind the accusations against the believers was envy, which is the deadliest of human emotions.
2. In James 3:6, the tongue “*set on fire by hell*” is the verbal expression of envy. This is the envy of those in v. 1, who want to be teachers, but are not gifted or called by God to that ministry.
3. In Galatians 3:1, Paul asks the Galatians, “*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*” The word *baskaino* in the Greek means, “to bewitch, to place under a spell, to cast the evil eye on you.” This refers to the power of envy to shame and control those it is directed against.
4. Recently, while in India, we drove by some very nice houses of the wealthy. All along the front were painted grotesque faces of demonic figures. When asked why this was done, the pastor replied, “These faces are to scare away those who would covet this house, and cast the evil eye on the owners, which they fear greatly.” Those in other countries know the deadly effect envy can create.
5. In Proverbs 27:4, Solomon asks, “*Who is able to stand before envy?*” As Daniel and his friends show—only the mature believer.
6. In Romans 1:29, those who are “*full of envy*” give rise to “*murder, strife, deceit, and evil mindedness.*”
7. It was envy, combined with arrogance, that led to Lucifer’s fall (Isa. 14:12–14; Ezek. 28:14–16). Envy is insatiable lust to have what another has and a willingness to destroy them, by either murder or slander to get it, or to keep them from having it. Often, when envy leads to murder as a “crime of passion,” the explanation is, “if I can’t have her/him nobody will.”
8. What is the envy in Daniel 3:6 directed against? It is the humility, courage, and integrity of these three faithful men.

9. It was envy that moved the brothers of Joseph to first seek to kill him, then to sell him into slavery (Acts 7:2).
10. It was envy that put Jesus on the cross (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10).
11. Envy was the driving force behind the persecutions of the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:45; 17:5).
12. Tragically, envy is often the motivator of those in the ministry (Phil. 1:15). Many a pastor has been soured and derailed by his envy of another's success.
13. Whenever there is envy in the local church, it gives rise to division and strife (1 Cor. 3:3; James 3:14–16). **Beware of the sin of envy, as it destroys all who embrace it!**

Daniel 3: 26–30
Devotion Leads to Promotion

As has been said, confidence in God produces courage before men. This is certainly illustrated by the bold stand of the three Hebrew youths.

Another great truth is that devotion to God will bring His promotion among men.

The Devotion of Mature Faith (vv. 26–28)

“*Servants of the Most High God ...*” (v. 26). This is the highest commendation anyone could have:

1. Note where they were: “[in] *the burning fiery furnace.*”
2. How they are addressed: “*servants*”—the greatest compliment. This is in contrast to their given heathen names (Dan. 1:7). The brainwashing technique did not work!
3. Who they have trusted and served: “*the Most High God.*” As was mentioned, this designation is used 13 times in the book of Daniel, seven of them by Nebuchadnezzar. Only the book of Psalms uses this title more than Daniel. This is what we call “Historical Impact,” where the lives of faithful believers leave their mark in a generation of history.

“*And the Satraps ... saw these men ...*” (v. 27). These are the very officials who had reported them in the first place! The fire had no visible effect on the three men!

*“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers,
they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”* Isaiah 43:2–3

Prophetic note: This incident is a historical preview of what God will do for His servants during the Tribulation Period. See Revelation 12:1–11. This will follow the “*abomination of desolation*” spoken of by Daniel (Dan. 9:27; 12:1–3, 10–12; Matt. 24:15–22).

“*Blessed be the God of ... His servants ...*” (v. 28). God is only known and recognized by many when they see Him working in the lives of those who love and serve Him.

“Who trusted in Him ...” (v. 28). The Hebrew word is *rechats* (*hithpael*, perfect), which includes the idea of both trust and service—to serve because you trust in your Master. The *hithpael* stem implies that we work on ourselves so as to trust. This is trusting in the promises of God, as in the Isaiah 43 passage above. The perfect tense indicates a completed action—the “follow through” of faith. It is the idea of finishing the race (Heb. 12:1).

Seven Hebrew Stems

1. *Qal*: simple active.
2. *Niphal*: simple passive
3. *Hiphil*: causative active.
4. *Hophal*: causative passive.
5. *Piel*: intensive active (called today, resultive active).
6. *Pual*: intensive passive (called today, resultive passive).
7. *Hithpael*: reflexive.

The Promotion of the Faithful (vv. 29–30)

“Therefore I make a decree ...” (v. 29). This shows he still does not understand God, who gave free will and will not violate it by force. Worship that is not voluntary is an offense to God.

“There is no other God ...” (v. 29). This is a true statement, in contrast to the edict Nebuchadnezzar just made. He is still in the mist and darkness of unbelief. But God has one more mighty thing to do in his life to humble him (chapter 4).

“Then the king promoted ...” (v. 30). The Bible assures us that God honors those who honor Him (1 Sam. 2:30). Sometimes this honor takes the form of more persecution (Matt. 5:10–12).

God’s 12-Step Program (Psalm 37:1–11)

1. “Do not fret” (v. 1). This goes with Proverbs 3:5–6.
2. “Trust in the LORD” (v. 3, imperative mood); compare with “cast your cares on Him” (1 Pet. 5:7).
3. “Do good” (v. 3b)
4. “Feed on His faithfulness” (v. 3b). This is consistent Bible study.
5. “Delight yourself ... in the LORD” (v. 4).
6. “Commit your way to [Him]” (v. 5). Again, see Proverbs 3:5–6. Note His promotion here.
7. “Rest in the LORD” (v. 7a).
8. “Wait patiently for Him” (v. 7b). The word here speaks of “inner healing.”
9. “Cease from anger” (v. 8a).
10. “Forsake wrath” (v. 8b).
11. “Do not fret” (v. 8c). This stresses, for the third time, that this attitude must be maintained (vv. 1, 7, 8).
12. “Wait on the Lord ... inherit the earth” (vv. 9–11). The “wait” here is a different word from verse 7. There it is *yaqal*, a word for healing. Here, it is *Chavah*—the strongest Hebrew word for faith. It means to weave threads into an unbreakable rope.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Breaking of Pride, the Beginning of Humility

The book of Daniel is a book of dreams and revelations. In this, it is closely connected to the book of Revelation, and the former sets the stage for the latter. It must be pointed out that not all dreams are revelations. No doubt Nebuchadnezzar dreamed all the time, as did Pharaoh before him (Genesis 41). But there was no doubt in their minds, upon awakening, that these dreams were supernatural in origin. We have met many in the course of our travels who want us to interpret their dreams. That God used dreams in the past to reveal divine truth is evident (Heb. 1:1). There are many reports today, particularly in Muslim countries, of people having dreams where an angel appears to them and reveals the offer of eternal life through faith in Christ. These appear to be genuine occurrences. However, most of our dreams mean nothing. Always stick close to the Word of God and beware of supernatural speculations.

Daniel 4:1–3

The Gospel According to Nebuchadnezzar

Introduction.

Amir Tsarfati, in his book *Discovering Daniel*, points out that this is the only portion of Scripture written by a Gentile monarch. Actually, vv. 1–3 and vv. 34–37 go together.

The main point in these two sections is that Nebuchadnezzar wants to share his newfound faith with the whole world. Isn't this so typical of the new believer?

His focus is "*The Most High God*" (*El Elyon* in Hebrew), which he comes to know through his experience. The term is introduced in Genesis 14 (4x), found most often in the Psalms of David (21x), and then in Daniel (14x). This speaks of the One True God who is sovereign over Heaven and Earth, and who rules in the affairs of men.

Daniel 4:4–18

The Dream of Nebuchadnezzar

Revelation

The impartation of divine truth to man always follows a necessary sequence. First, there is **revelation**, then there is **interpretation**, and finally **application**. The revelation of God's Word comes to us through prophets and apostles. The interpretation of this Word results from the labor of gifted pastors and teachers, under the leading and illumination of the Holy Spirit, and under strict principles of hermeneutics (the science of biblical interpretation). Then, it is up to the hearers to make the application of the truth to their lives, again under the guiding and enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In the case of both Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, God gave the dream, but they had no capacity to understand it until it was revealed to them by a God-appointed interpreter.

In the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 2), the image he saw was a great statue—a man-made object. Note that it gradually diminished in value and glory from head to toes. From this, there was no recovery. Now, the image is a tree, a common biblical figure for a kingdom (Judg. 9:7–18; Isa. 11:1–10; Matt. 13:31–32; Rom. 11:16–24). The shift from the man-made image to the God-created natural tree is significant. This tree, though about to be cut down, will yet recover and flourish (cf. Romans 11).

The Setting (vv. 4–5)

God's Word invades man's sense of complacency and, at first, brings conviction and discomfort. This is the "bad news" side of the Gospel message.

In John 16:7–11, we see the three aspects of conviction by the Holy Spirit, using the Word of God as a probe to the conscience of men:

1. Concerning sin—because of unbelief.
2. Concerning righteousness—because of Christ's victory over sin.
3. Concerning judgment—because of the doom of Satan and all who follow him.

The Dilemma (vv. 6–7)

The problem is that *"The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor. 2:14).

The barrier that exists between the holy Word of God and the soul of sinful men is described in the Gospel of John.

*"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it ...
He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world did not
know Him."* John 1:5, 10

*"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and
men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."*

John 3:19

The Dream (vv. 8–18)

Just as Jesus often did with His parables, God uses nature to reveal spiritual realities. This is because the natural realm of creation is a reflector—a mirror, of the very nature of God (Psalm 19:1–11; Rom. 1:18–20).

1. Daniel, the interpreter, arrives (vv. 8–9, 18).
"Daniel" ("God is my judge"), here is contrasted with *"Belteshazzar,"* which means "Bel's prince," or "Bel protects the prince." This contrast is to show that Daniel had remained true to his faith and heritage, and thus was spiritually able to interpret God's message.

Note that in vv. 8, 9 and 18, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges, based on the events recorded in chapters 1–3, that he recognized a spirit of a greater God, *"the Holy God,"* was with Daniel. Could these three references (*"Holy, holy, holy,"* Isa. 6:3) relate to the Holy Trinity?

2. Nebuchadnezzar relates the dream (vv. 10–17).
 - a) The tree (vv. 10–12)
This obviously relates to the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar at the time of the dream. It relates to v. 4, in that Nebuchadnezzar felt secure, successful, and at ease. The kingdom appeared to be strong and prosperous. How quickly the empires of men can be turned to dust! (compare Hos. 14:4–7; Matt. 13:31–32).
 - b) The judgment (vv. 13–16)
The *"watcher"* (vv. 13, 17, 23; Jer. 4:16; Rev. 4:8, *"full of eyes around and within"*) is a ruling angel. God's will from the beginning, both with angels and

men, was to share various parts of His rulership and dominion with them (Gen. 1:26–28; Ezek. 28:14–15).

“*Chop down the tree*” (v. 14). See the parallel with Assyria in Ezekiel 31:3–14. This is the command of God’s judgment on the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar.

“*Leave the stump ... let him graze with the beasts ...*” (vv. 15–16). This is a direct reference to Nebuchadnezzar, who would go insane and live as a wild beast.

“*Let seven times pass over him*” (v. 16b). By comparing Daniel’s uses of “*time/times*” in Daniel 11:13 and 2:7, as well as in Revelation 12:14, we can conclude that we are dealing with a span of seven years.

c) The authority (v. 17)

The “*decision*” comes by “*the decree of the watchers ... the holy ones.*” These appear to be a council of angels, who have delegated authority from God to rule over nations (in Deut. 32:8, the phrase “*according to the number of the children of Israel,*” in the Septuagint, reads, “*according to the number of the sons of God.*” See also Psalm 97:9; 103:20–21).

This decree and sentence are given under the ultimate authority of “*the Most High,*” who rules the affairs of men. The purpose is both evangelistic and evidential. “*In order that the living may know*” In v. 25, the purpose is applied directly to Nebuchadnezzar, “*till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men.*” The title “*the Most High God*” occurs four times in Genesis 14, twenty-one times in the Psalms, and fourteen times in Daniel chapters 1–7.

Amir Tsarfati mentions that seventy-two times in the Old Testament, we find the phrase, “*Then they will know that I am the Lord.*” Fifty-eight are found in Ezekiel alone.

This revelation and judgment will bring Nebuchadnezzar to saving faith. However, to those who harden themselves, it will only increase their judgment (2 Thess. 2:9–12; Rev. 9:20–21).

Daniel 4:19–27

Daniel Reveals the Meaning of the Dream

Interpretation

As was mentioned earlier, no revelation from God is able to be understood by the unbeliever. Only those who are born again and are spiritual are able to understand divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14–16). In the case of Daniel, we have a believer who has grown in grace and truth (John 1:18; 2 Pet. 3:18) for many years. Furthermore, though he has had no personal revelations yet, in his final years he will become one of the greatest of Old Testament prophets (chapters 7–12).

Daniel’s Dilemma (v. 19)

Daniel’s alarm and reluctance to interpret the dream was no doubt due to the relationship that had developed between himself and Nebuchadnezzar. Finally, at the king’s urging, he tells the meaning of the dream.

Nebuchadnezzar's greatness (vv. 20–22)

Here, the dream picks up where the last one (chapter 2) left off, with the greatness of his kingdom. The missing element and key to the interpretation, is that the tree represents Nebuchadnezzar himself: “*the tree that you saw ... it is you, O king ... for your greatness has grown ... and your dominion to the end of the earth.*”

A Prophetic Preview (vv. 23–25)

This experience of King Nebuchadnezzar is not only personal, but also prophetic. Just as the dream in chapter 2 revealed the course of Gentile world powers up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, so now we see a preview of what will happen to many world rulers just prior to Christ's return to this earth. Remember that the “*seven times,*” in vv. 23 and 25 speak of a span of seven years. What God will do for Nebuchadnezzar, in breaking his pride and bringing him to saving faith, He will also do for many Gentiles who are on the Earth during the seven-year Tribulation (Rev. 7:9–17). The Earth will be under world-rulers who are identified as beasts (Rev. 13:1–18). The brutal and savage conditions that will prevail on Earth at this time will break the pride of multitudes who will turn to God in faith.

The Offer of Deliverance (vv. 26–27)

Daniel foretells the ultimate recovery of Nebuchadnezzar, but also holds out the possibility of escaping this terrible judgment, if only he will repent and turn to God before the judgment falls. In the same way, we who are believers need to be pleading with people to come to Jesus Christ in faith, before the coming of the impending judgment of the Tribulation Period, which Jesus warned would surpass any sufferings known in all of human history (Matt. 24:21). Verse 27 shows that the judgment could have been avoided, as does the 12-month delay in v. 29.

Daniel 4:28–37

Nebuchadnezzar Acknowledges the Most High God

Application

The longsuffering of God gave Nebuchadnezzar twelve months to consider Daniel's warning and to humble himself. At the end of this time of grace, the judgment fell (vv. 28–29). God's Word never returns void, nor fails to accomplish the will of God (Isa. 55:10–11; 1 Pet. 1:24–25). However, the Word of God never has power in our lives until we first believe it, and then act in obedience to it.

Pride Before the Fall (vv. 28–33)

The truth of Proverbs 16:18 now becomes a reality for Nebuchadnezzar. After the twelve-month period of grace, as he boasts of his own greatness, “*While the word was still in the king's mouth,*” the judgment of God fell upon him. All that God had said now became a reality, as he descended into the madness of a beast and was driven from the presence of men. “*That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar ...*” (v. 33).

An ancient record exists that is so parallel to this story that it is worth quoting from *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, by Walton, Matthews and Chavalas:

“One of the documents found at Qumran (4Q242 or 4QPrNab) is entitled *The Prayer of Nabonidus*. In this piece it is the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus, rather than his more famous predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, who is afflicted. Similarities include the seven-year illness and restoration by a Jewish diviner (unnamed). A dream is involved, and worship of the correct deity is the result.” (pg. 737, on Daniel 4:34).

Humility and restoration (vv. 34–37)

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14)

As we saw at the beginning of our study (pg.7) the “stair-steps of spiritual destiny” go either up or down, depending on whether we begin, with arrogance or humility. All human beings begin in a state of arrogance, which is the mind-set of the sinful nature of Adam (Rom. 5:12). We all need to be humbled, before we will turn to God in faith and surrender. Some are humbled at a far less cost than was Nebuchadnezzar. Consider the spiritual insight that came to him as soon as he was humbled.

1. First, he lifts up his eyes to Heaven. He looks beyond this world for answers, and as a result, *“my understanding returned to me.”*
2. He then acknowledges *“the Most High,”* indicating his recognition that there is but one true God, and he *“blessed ... praised and honored Him who lives forever.”*
3. He recognized that the kingdom of God (and not his own earthly kingdom) is that which will be everlasting. In the phrase *“His dominion”* Nebuchadnezzar is acknowledging the sovereignty of God over all things in Heaven and on Earth.
4. He comes to realize that God, and not earthly rulers, is the great Guide of human history. The *“army of heaven”* refers to the host of angels, which includes the *“watchers”* of vv. 13, 17, 23, who are instrumental in carrying out the commands of the Most High God.
5. Finally, he realized the futility of all puny human efforts to resist or to overcome the guiding hand of divine providence. No one can restrain or question the wisdom of the working of God in human history (Job 33:12–13; Isa. 29:16; 45:9; Rom. 9:19–20).

With his newfound humility, God fulfilled His Word by blessing and exalting him with restored honor and glory (vv. 36–37; see James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:5–6). If we now link vv. 1–3 with v. 37, we have the “gospel” message of Nebuchadnezzar—a call to all men everywhere to seek and find the true God (Isa. 55:6–7; Jer. 29:13).

He concludes his “tract” with the central truth of his experience, *“Those who walk in pride He is able to put down.”* (See Prov. 16:18; 1 Pet. 5:5; Luke 18:14; James 4:6–10). We know historically that Nebuchadnezzar lived only a short time after this experience. However, he was able to finish many of his great building projects, and no doubt died in peace through the faith he had found. One day, all of us who have trusted in Christ will be able to meet this great monarch-turned-believer in Heaven!

The Longsuffering of God toward Sinners

1. The longsuffering patience of God is based on His desire that all might come to saving faith (1 Tim. 2:3–4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 18:21–23).
2. Christians are urged to pray for the salvation of all men (2 Tim 2:1–7).
3. God is faithful to give sufficient light to all men to come to the saving truth of Christ. (John 1:4–5, 9, 14; Rom. 1:18–20; 2:14–16).

4. Jesus made it clear that He works at all times to draw men to Himself (John 12:32).
5. Both creation and human conscience are a witness to the truth of God's Word (Psalm 19:1–6; Rom. 1:18–22; Rom. 2:14–15).
6. As part of this work, the Holy Spirit is always convicting men of the truth (John 16:7–11).
7. Those who turn away from the light given them do so knowingly, without excuse (John 3:18–20; 2 Thess. 2:11–12).
8. Jesus' invitation to all men reinforces the truth of the longsuffering patience and love of God (Matt. 11:28–30).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Hand of God on the Helm of History

In the biblical record of Daniel and his friends, we have an inspired, textbook example of effective conduct for the believer in the turbulent events of the rise and fall of nations. First, we see them as young men in their teens facing the destruction of their own nation. They are taken as slaves to a foreign, heathen nation. Then, we see them being tested regarding their dedication to the Word of God in a heathen environment. The spiritual dynamic of their faithfulness results in promotion to positions of prominence in Babylon (chapter 1). As the testing continues, by prayer and spiritual illumination, they are enabled to explain supernatural revelation regarding the course of the Times of the Gentiles (chapter 2). This results in further promotion for them. With their increasing prominence, the devil, working through Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance, intensifies the testing to the point of them being "*faithful until death*" (chapter 3; see Rev. 2:10).

Once again, their faithfulness is rewarded with divine deliverance from the fiery furnace. Such a living testimony of the power and the grace of God ultimately brings Nebuchadnezzar to saving faith, once his arrogance is broken by his temporary insanity known as zoanthropy (chapter 4). Now, in chapter 5, Babylon will fall to the Medo/Persians. By this time, Daniel is in his 70's, and his friends are apparently already dead. Through it all, Daniel and friends graphically illustrate that, whatever conditions prevail in this world, the mission of the child of God remains the same: to live and serve by faith, for the salvation of some, and as a witness against the rest.

Daniel 5:1–4 **Spitting in the Face of God**

Approximately 30 years have passed since the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. After the death of Nebuchadnezzar (562 B.C.), his son, Amel-Marduk reigned for a short time. He was killed by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar, who soon died and left the throne to his son Labashi-Marduk. Then, Nabonidus, the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar, came to the throne. He made his son, Belshazzar, co-regent on the throne, while he retired to his palace in Tema, Arabia.

For years, Bible critics used the name of Belshazzar as a proof that the Bible was not accurate. His name was not found in any of the histories of men like Xenophon and Herodotus. It was claimed that he was a made-up figure in the Bible. Then, in 1854, British archeologist Sir H. C. Rawlinson found

inscriptions naming him as the first-born son of Nabonitus. Between 1854 and 1882, other inscriptions were found, including the *Nabonidus Chronicle*, which spoke of his absence from Babylon for ten years, while the crown prince Belshazzar ruled in his place.

On the very night recorded in Daniel 5 (16 Tishri, 539 B.C.), the city was surrounded by the Medo-Persian army under Cyrus. Belshazzar and his officials felt secure behind the massive walls of the city, which were over 80 feet thick and 350 feet high, with 250 guard towers. The water supply was secure, for the Euphrates River ran diagonally through the city, entering and exiting through massive iron barred gates at the base of the walls.

In his deluded arrogance, Belshazzar threw a massive party. To show his contempt for the army of Cyrus, and his confidence in his gods, he called for the articles Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. These vessels represented God's initial victory for Israel at Jericho (Josh. 6:19) and were instrumental in the Temple rituals, which anticipated the Gospel message of the coming Messiah. If Babylon had defeated Israel and their mighty and storied God, Yahweh, then surely Cyrus was no threat at all. His blasphemous act of treating what is holy as common, and of elevating Marduk, his god, above Yahweh, would be the ending of both his kingdom and his life. We will see more on this later.

Daniel 5:5–12 **Divine Intrusion: The Writing on the Wall**

The disembodied right hand that wrote on the wall is significant. In those days, after a battle, the right hands of the enemy dead were cut off and counted for the record. The idea then existed that the dead, who would now be in the "shadow world" of death, would be unable to fight. The God that Belshazzar assumed to be defeated and "dead" appeared in the form of the right hand, to write the message of doom on the wall.

Today, the assumption of world leaders is that Jesus was long-ago crucified and put to death, and no longer has any relevance. He is about to show them how wrong they are. Keep this in mind as we come to the end of this chapter.

The phrase "*in the same hour*" (v. 5) literally means "suddenly." It speaks of the perfect timing of God's intervention in the affairs of men. Consider how the concept is found in Isaiah 48:3, Mark 13:36, and 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

The immediate effect on Belshazzar was absolute panic and loss of both mental and physical control. He called on all the wise men of the realm, offering great riches and promotion to anyone who could interpret the writing. As we saw with the dreams in both chapters 2 and 4, none were able to decipher the message, because it was a matter of divine revelation, which no unbeliever can comprehend (1 Cor. 2:14).

Daniel had been largely forgotten in the years since the death of Nebuchadnezzar, though he was still serving in some capacity (see 8:1, and 27). Yet, the Queen (most likely the Queen-mother, Nitocris, daughter of Nebuchadnezzar), remembered him. This lady may also have become a believer through her father's witness.

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.... Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord."

Jeremiah 17:5, 7

Daniel 5:13–28
Daniel’s Rebuke and Interpretation

Daniel is represented as one “*in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God*” (vv. 11, 14; see 4:9, 18). He is also identified in v. 16 as one who can “*explain enigmas,*” literally, “untie knots.” Daniel shows complete disdain for Belshazzar’s gifts (v. 17), knowing they will last but a night.

His rebuke of Belshazzar (vv. 18–23) was based on a review of the history of Nebuchadnezzar and how he came to saving faith through God’s gracious dealings. The crux of the condemnation is seen in v. 22, “*But you his son [grandson] ... have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.*” His arrogant self-exaltation was in the face of “*the God who holds your breath in His hand*” (v. 23). He had failed to learn Nebuchadnezzar’s greatest lesson (Dan. 4:37b)! For those who spurn the light of God’s revelation, there is no excuse (Rom. 1:18–32).

Not only would Belshazzar know of the story of Nebuchadnezzar, but he would also have heard of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, which had been carried to Babylon. In Isaiah 44:28–45:4, God had called Cyrus by name over 125 years before his rise to power. In Jeremiah 50–51 (written in 594 B.C., over 50 years before), the judgment of Babylon is predicted as coming from Israel’s “*Redeemer ... the LORD of hosts*” (Jer. 50:34). Amazingly, in Jeremiah 51:7–8, in a reversal of Belshazzar’s blasphemy in using the golden vessels from the Temple, God says, “*Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD’S hand, that made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore the nations are deranged. Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed.*” And all of this is but a preview of the final destruction of this world’s Babylonian system in the Tribulation (Rev. 17–18).

With this, Daniel interprets the message, which literally is, “number, number, weigh, divide.” While the words, written in the Chaldean language, were plain enough to all, the interpretation required spiritual illumination. On this very night, the 15th of Tishri (12 October, 539 B.C. by our calendar), the army of Cyrus diverted the Euphrates River and entered the city. Amazingly, the Babylonians dedicated the month of Tishri to the constellation Libra (the balance scales), for the rising of that constellation occurred on the 15th of that month—the day before Belshazzar was “*weighed in the balances, and found wanting*” (Dan. 5:27; see comment on v. 27 on page 738 of *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, by Walton, Matthews and Chavalas).

Daniel 5:29–31
Babylon is Fallen!

Daniel was promoted to be “*third ruler in the kingdom*” (v. 29), that is, after Nabonidus and Belshazzar. This promotion was over that night, as the Medo-Persian army, under General Gobryas, diverted the Euphrates River and entered the city through the sluice gates. He took the city without a fight! That very night, Belshazzar was slain, and Cyrus placed Darius over the kingdom. God’s Word never fails!

Application

How relevant is this chapter to this very hour in history! The lessons of Daniel, chapter five will bring both cursing and blessing to those living in America today. Cursing to those who arrogantly reject the truth of God’s Word, and blessing to those who humble themselves and receive it in faith (Jer. 17:5–6; Heb. 6:7–8).

On March 31, 2024—Resurrection Sunday—Joe Biden, acting President of the United States of America, declared it the “Day of Transgender Visibility.” This act of blasphemy and defiance against God makes Belshazzar’s seem minor by comparison. And just as Belshazzar and Babylon learned that the God whom they considered dead and gone was very much alive, so will this nation. This vile affront and challenge will be answered,

“For the Lord is the God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed.”
1 Samuel 2:3