

Lessons on Daniel and Jonah

Taken from the Book of Daniel and Jonah.

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Dedication

To the memory of John B. and Lillian V. Hendershot – who taught us to “pass
it on.”

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Captivity - Daniel 1

Purposes of this study

It has been some time since our little group has been concerned with the subject of prophecy. Part of that has been the press of other concerns; another part is the teacher's reluctance to tread on the various theories of Revelation. Indeed, prophecy is not the entire reason for studying Daniel. There are indeed three reasons:

- ✚ First, there is the study of the character of Daniel himself. He is indeed a hero of the faith and as such his life is worth study.
- ✚ Next, there is the question of how God deals with an unrepentant nation. We see this in Israel in the Old Testament, but perhaps it has its application to America today.
- ✚ Finally, we need to see the surety of prophecy.

God punishes his nation

We begin by examining the Scripture:

Daniel 1:1-21 NASB In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. (2) The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. (3) Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, (4) youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of* wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. (5) The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and *appointed* that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. (6) Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. (7) Then the commander of the officials assigned *new* names to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego. (8) But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. (9) Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, (10) and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king." (11) But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, (12) "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. (13) "Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see." (14) So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. (15) At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. (16) So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them

vegetables. (17) As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every *branch of* literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all *kinds of* visions and dreams. (18) Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. (19) The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service. (20) As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* conjurers who *were* in all his realm. (21) And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.

God warns the nation in general

It is no secret that God warns the nations who worship him about their conduct. Indeed as the Scripture says, righteousness exalted people but sin is a reproach.¹ Jeremiah puts it this way:

Jeremiah 18:7-10 NASB "At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*; (8) if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. (9) "Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant *it*; (10) if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.

You see the point. It is not just that God concerns himself with the nation of Israel, and no others, but rather all those nations who have any awareness of him or of his righteousness are subject to his judgment. Much of this is done in the general nature of the moral universe. As we say, what goes around comes around. So it is no surprise when a nation falls for its moral failures.

Prophecies

In the case of Israel however, we have specific prophecies which relate to this event. To begin with, there is what is written in the law of Moses concerning the nation of Israel and its obedience to God. Listen to what Moses says:

Deuteronomy 28:47-52 NASB (47) "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; (48) therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you. (49) "The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, (50) a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. (51) "Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. (52) "It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the LORD your God has given you.

Indeed, the entire chapter is instructive. But this is not the whole of the matter. Before this king was born, God had prophesied through Isaiah exactly the events. In the 39th chapter of Isaiah, we see

¹ Proverbs 14:34

him giving a warning to King Hezekiah about the foolishness of his showing his treasures to the ambassadors from Babylon. But note Hezekiah's reaction:

Isaiah 39:8 NASB Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "For there will be peace and truth in my days."

You see the point no doubt. Despite this prophecy of disaster, Hezekiah's only thought is that he will have peace and security in his own time. The comparison with Neville Chamberlain is just too obvious.

But God does not content himself with prophecies from the past to remind those in the present. He sent Jeremiah to speak with King Jehoiakim. Listen to his words.

Jeremiah 25:8-13 NASB "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, (9) behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. (10) 'Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. (11) 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (12) 'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation. (13) 'I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations.

Interestingly, there is no reaction from the king. No doubt he thought Jeremiah just one more gloomy prophet of doom, ready to be ignored. Note, however, that God does not necessarily use the righteous to punish his people. In fact, it seems to be his preference to use the heathen to bring home his prophecy of destruction upon those who used to be righteous.

Object: repentance

God's dilemma is the same as that of many parents. You don't like smacking your child on the rear end, you'd really rather motivate them with rewards than punishment, but -- sometimes you just have to take action. Nothing else works. But do note that the object of this exercise is not just punishment, but repentance. God does not desire the destruction of anyone. He especially abhors the destruction of those who claim his name. He lays out his method for repentance in very simple terms:

2 Chronicles 7:14 NASB and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

A loving heavenly father views punishment as a means to the end of repentance. But note, in this instance, the punishment went on for 70 years. I leave it as an exercise for the reader to determine whether or not there is a lesson here for the United States of America.

Nebuchadnezzar

Hostages

It might occur to you to wonder why Nebuchadnezzar took these people to Babylon with him. It is a common occurrence of the time. There were at least three good reasons to do this:

- ✚ First, the people would be brought back as trophies. Nothing makes the king so popular as a triumphal entry which shows how much loot he has acquired and how many captives he has taken as servants.
- ✚ Next, these young men would also be hostages. They were taken from the nobility, and therefore their presence in Babylon would deter their parents from rebelling against the king.
- ✚ Then too, the young men were the best and brightest. By taking them into his service, he acquired some very useful servants who could be trained to his will.

One other item of note: as you can see, they were placed in charge of the master of the eunuchs. That means these young men were castrated. This is a very good way of breaking up the local dynasty.

Religious impact

You will note that Nebuchadnezzar took a large variety of trophies from the Jewish Temple. No, I do not know if he took the Ark of the covenant. But the trophies were taken were a very obvious reason: they tell the world that my God is superior to your God, since I have your God's possessions in my God's temple.

In addition you will notice that Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of these four young men. It is interesting to see the transition:

- ✚ Their Hebrew names were these: Daniel - God is my Judge; Hananiah - The grace of the Lord; Mishael - He that is the strong God; Azariah - The Lord is a help.
- ✚ Their Chaldean names were these: Belteshazzar signifies the keeper of the hidden treasures of Bel; Shadrach - The inspiration of the sun, which the Chaldeans worshipped; Meshach - Of the goddess Shach, under which name Venus was worshipped; Abed-nego, The servant of the shining fire, which they worshipped also.

See the subtlety of their approach. They do not force the captives to worship their gods, but they do put a subtle pressure on them since they now have the names of those gods. It is a form of voluntary coercion.

Training

You might ask why the Babylonians took so much care and training these young men. There are a number of reasons:

- ✚ First, they would be totally dependent upon the king. This would ensure their loyalty to the King and not particular factions in court or out of it.
- ✚ Thus, they would also be impartial in giving advice and in carrying out the king's business. This promotes honesty, diligence, and reliability. These might even be useful virtues in civil servants today.
- ✚ It is also an example of wisdom. By charitably treating your captives, you lessen the bitterness of captivity and defeat. This makes them more amenable to supporting you as the rightful ruler.

Separation

Why does Daniel refuse the king's food?

It might seem odd at first that Daniel refuses to eat the food set before him. At the very least, we might consider this bad manners. But Daniel, a devout Jew of the Old Testament, had at least three reasons to do so:

- ✚ First the meat could have been sacrificed to idols. As such, the Jewish law would have prohibited him from eating it.
- ✚ Second, the meat in particular may have been considered unclean in the Jewish law. It is well known that the ancient Jew would rather starve to death than eat unclean meat. In fact, the Romans noted that this did happen with Jews confined in their jails.
 - What might surprise you, however, is the third reason: these may be considered the dainties of an evil man.² As such, Daniel would have seen them as temptation to join in the evil doings of the Babylonians.

A matter of will

You will notice in the Scriptures that Daniel "made up his mind." Other translations have the phrase "resolved" or "purpose in his heart". The concept that the Jew of this time, and the Christian of our time, are to be separate from the world is stressed throughout Scripture. Note please that this is a matter of the will. It is not an emotional response, but rather something that the Christian decides to do and systematically carries out.

This is not something that we make up out of our own imaginations. Rather, it is obedience to the command of God. So it is that the Christian must study the Scriptures, so that such separation will be as God commands it, not how we imagine it. We are to be "in the world, not of the world."

Notice that this requires faith. Daniel displays this in his request to the chamberlain to be fed only vegetables and water. He is confident that God's dietary laws will produce a better result than feasting at the king's table.

How its done

Daniel goes about this in an exemplary way. First, note that he does so peacefully. There is no sense of rebellion, no sense of "we are going to do it our way," but rather he does so respectfully. He cares what others think of his faith. It is his objective that they respect his beliefs, and might even be attracted to them. It is a lesson to Christians: if you scream your faith in anger, how do you really expect to be heard?

This concept, the separation of the Christian from the world, is an essential one. Daniel is an excellent example. As the apostle John put it,

1 John 2:15-17 NASB Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh

² Psalm 141:4

and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

The example is before us. Let us go and do likewise.

The Statue - Daniel 2

About Dreams and Prophecy

Is this OK for Christians?

One of the first questions to arise for Christians is whether or not dreams should be taken seriously. It is not at all obvious that the average Christian should pay any attention to dreams, and in particular any attention to someone who in turn for its dreams. So it seems a little odd that the Scripture would have dreams and interpretations. But we may consider the following:

- ✚ First, there are several examples of dreams and interpretation in the Old Testament. The best known outside of Daniel are those of Joseph. So this is a phenomenon which occurs in Scripture from the very beginning.
- ✚ Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, lays out the general principle that dreams can be considered valid if they occur from one of two sources. The first source is divine revelation. The second is what he calls natural causes, which is to say the ordinary workings of the human mind based upon its experiences. He warns however, that it is highly possible to have a demon inspired dream.
- ✚ The same set of problems exists with prophecy. Paul specifies a number of conditions for keeping the prophets under control. The reason is simple: it is easy to abuse prophecy, and it is likewise easy to abuse the interpretation of dreams. Nebuchadnezzar knows this, which partially explains his treatment of his wise men and magicians.

An Unreasonable King

We may now examine Nebuchadnezzar's behavior:

Daniel 2:1-12 NASB Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. (2) Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. (3) The king said to them, "I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream." (4) Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation." (5) The king replied to the Chaldeans, "The command from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap. (6) "But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation." (7) They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation." (8) The king replied, "I know for certain that you are bargaining for time, inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm, (9) that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for you. For you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed; therefore tell me the dream, that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation." (10) The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king, inasmuch as no great king or ruler has *ever* asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean. (11) "Moreover, the thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with *mortal* flesh." (12) Because of this the king became indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

Think of it this way: how would your psychiatrist react if you told him he would have to tell you what you had dreamed and then tell you what it meant? In this, you see the parallel between magic and science. They are twins. They both say, if you tell us what happened we will interpret it. It is beyond science to know what your dream was, and it is beyond magic too.

Why did the king do this?

- ✚ First, he doesn't trust these people. I suspect he has long experience with them and knows that they are very self serving.
- ✚ Second, his dream is capable of multiple interpretations. How does he know which one is correct?
- ✚ The magicians of this time had books of dreams. Perhaps he had encountered these books before, and he didn't like the answer he had gotten.
- ✚ It is even possible that he understood part of the dream to mean that his kingdom would end. Perhaps he wished to keep the truth at bay.

There is, perhaps, a simpler solution. Have you ever awakened from a vivid dream and been unable to remember it? Perhaps he had the same problem.

The king of therefore approaches the problem with a big stick and a huge carrot. One thing is sure: this problem is important.

Types of prophecy

(Taken from a previous lesson.) It may help to review the types of prophecy.

Accidental

It sounds almost silly, but God can use the words of the ungodly as prophecy. One well known instance is from the High Pries, Caiaphas, who condemned Jesus to the cross:

{49} Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! {50} You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." {51} He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, {52} and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. -- John 11:49-52 (NIV)

Literal

Literal prophecy is just that: plain, unadorned by symbolism, a statement of a fact to occur. When a prophet makes such a statement, he does so with his life, for God makes it clear (Deuteronomy 18:18-22) that such a prophet either is 100% accurate, or is a false prophet.

Diagnostic

Diagnostic prophecy is based upon God's sovereign control of the universe. It is the most common form of prophecy, and it usually is phrased in an "if-then" fashion. "If you don't stop beating your wife, you'll soon be in jail." Most of the work of the prophet is in "forth-telling", not foretelling.

Symbolic

The prophecy in this section is symbolic. There is such a mass of this type of prophesy in the Bible that it is worth our time to put forward the methods by which these are generally interpreted:

- ✚ Prophecy centers around the people of God. There is no attempt to create a future history of the world.
- ✚ Symbols used have meaning in their own context. As we will see, the bronze part of the figure becomes a goat in Chapter 8.
- ✚ Prophecy often takes a long view; a single prophetic passage may be partially fulfilled, leaving the rest to be fulfilled at the return of Christ.
- ✚ No prophecy stands alone; it must be compared with other prophetic passages to be sure that interpretation is reasonable.
- ✚ Revelation naturally gets clearer as the time for fulfillment draws nearer.

Daniel's Reaction

Daniel 2:13-28 NASB So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill *them*. (14) Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king's bodyguard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon; (15) he said to Arioch, the king's commander, "For what reason is the decree from the king *so* urgent?" Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter. (16) So Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king. (17) Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter, (18) so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. (19) Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven; (20) Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. (21) "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding. (22) "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him. (23) "To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, For You have given me wisdom and power; Even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, For You have made known to us the king's matter." (24) Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king's presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king." (25) Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows: "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!" (26) The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation" (27) Daniel answered before the king and said, "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians *nor* diviners are able to declare *it* to the king. (28) "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind *while* on your bed.

How do you handle anger?

Daniel now has a problem. He has an angry monarch on his hands. How does he handle this?

- ✚ The words are variously translated: wisdom and tact, discretion and discernment, or counsel and the wisdom. In fact the words are difficult to translate. But it is clear that Daniel does not panic, nor does he try to find an easy way out.
- ✚ Daniel zeroes in on the exceptional, not the threat. He focuses on the anger. There are two questions: first, why so hasty? Second, why so harsh?

Steps

Daniel does what is reasonable: he asks for more time. He was not there at the king's initial interview, so this is indeed a just request. But note what he does next. He asked his friends for support in prayer; he does not organize a protest group. That prayer is a model for us:

- ✚ Daniel acknowledges that he and his friends are sinners.
- ✚ He then extols God and acknowledges him for who he is.
- ✚ Then, logically, he asks for mercy. There is no sense that Daniel thinks he deserves the answer, but he knows the merciful God.

When he gets the answer

Most of us, I suppose, would be so glad to get the answer we would run right off to the king and tell him what we knew. Daniel does the right thing:

- ✚ He begins by giving God praise and thanks. Have you ever forgotten this?
- ✚ He acknowledges who God is. Wisdom and power belong to God, he is the one who controls the future, in him everything is light and there is no darkness.
- ✚ He then acknowledges what God has done: namely, giving him the answer to the problem.
- ✚ Finally, he shows humility. This is not about the greatness of Daniel, but about the greatness of God.

Before the king

Daniel goes before the king. In so doing, he acknowledges the same things he just did in private with God. Specifically:

- ✚ He doesn't take the credit for the vision. It's not because Daniel is special but because God wanted to reveal it.
- ✚ He acknowledges that the problem is beyond mortals. No man could solve this problem.
- ✚ He takes no credit for being wiser than any other man, but tells the king that the answer came because of God's intention.

Result

Daniel 2:25-49 NASB Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows: "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!" (26) The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?" (27) Daniel answered before the king and said, "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians *nor* diviners are able to declare *it* to the king. (28) "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the

visions in your mind *while* on your bed. (29) "As for you, O king, *while* on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future; and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place. (30) "But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than *in any other* living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind. (31) "You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. (32) "The head of that statue *was made* of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, (33) its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. (34) "You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. (35) "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (36) "This *was* the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king. (37) "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; (38) and wherever the sons of men dwell, *or* the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given *them* into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold. (39) "After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth. (40) "Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. (41) "In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. (42) "*As* the toes of the feet *were* partly of iron and partly of pottery, *so* some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. (43) "And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery. (44) "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. (45) "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." (46) Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. (47) The king answered Daniel and said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery." (48) Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. (49) And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel *was* at the king's court.

The vision and the interpretation

Because we have read ahead to Chapter 7, we know what this vision means in more detail than Daniel was able to reveal at this point. There are only minor differences in the various theories about this passage, so we will review it briefly.

- ✚ The head of gold is, of course, the Babylonian empire.
- ✚ The chest of silver is later identified as the Persian Empire.
- ✚ The legs of bronze are identified as the Greece.
- ✚ Only the feet of iron and clay are left unidentified in Daniel. Universally these are interpreted as a Roman empire. The only question is, which Roman empire? Most interpreters, especially before the 20th century, held that this was the Imperial Rome of the time of Christ. This identification is based upon the stone being identified as Christ. Christ came during the Roman empire. So until recently the identification was the original Roman empire. Late commentators have also speculated that the stone is the second coming of Christ, and applies to a renewed Roman empire.

That identification with the Roman empire caused Augustine to predict that Christ would not return until after the complete destruction of the Roman empire. This did not happen until 1453.

The king's reaction

One thing is for certain: Nebuchadnezzar kept his word. He promised riches and honor to the man who would interpret this dream, and he meant it. More than that, however, he acknowledges God for who he is. This is important for later understanding. It means that Nebuchadnezzar does know who God is, and when he rebels against him later he “should have known better.”

It is also obvious that the good old boy network was in full swing at this time. Daniel got the credit, but he also got his three friends a better job.

Lessons for us

May I suggest that there are lessons for us in this passage:

- ✚ First, there is the character of God. We see his eternal purpose, his control of history, and that his will ultimately prevails.
- ✚ Second, prophecy is meant to be understood -- at least in part. At the very least prophecy tells us that God is in control.
- ✚ Finally, there is the outline of prayer. I am a sinner, you are God, have mercy upon me.

Fiery Furnace - Daniel 3

The reader will note that the text of the Scripture, Daniel 3, is omitted for reasons of space. The lesson begins with reading the entire chapter.

Nebuchadnezzar

Our man Nebuchadnezzar does seem to be a strange sort of person, doesn't he? It's difficult to avoid the conclusion that Nebuchadnezzar is a man who ruled by his emotions.

Why did he build the statue?

It is not entirely a question of Nebuchadnezzar's emotions, but there are some other good reasons for building such a statute:

- ✚ First, there is self-glorification. One of the diseases of kings is that of an overstretched ego. Every president thinks his face belongs on Mount Rushmore.
- ✚ More importantly, the statue serves to unify his empire. Unity comes from a set of common beliefs. Without such beliefs, an empire crumbles. In the United States those beliefs are to be found in such documents as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Note, please, that the king does not require that you actually believed in his particular religion, just that you show the outward signs of obedience. A hypocrite can be as loyal as the next man. If this bowing down is not painful to you, then you can be counted as a loyal citizen.

Why did he react with rage?

It must be noted that such religious differences usually do not bother the reigning king. It is simply a matter of working out a compromise that lets the citizenry express their complete loyalty to the King while maintaining their faithfulness to whatever religion they might have. A pair of examples will make this clear. In the United States, it is sufficient for the citizen to declare his allegiance without proclaiming the state to be the supreme moral authority. This has worked well for over 200 years. In China, the opposite approach is used. Those who do not put the state first are persecuted. Notice what happens. In the United States, the church is weak. But the underground church in China is growing rapidly. What does this say for the effective godness of persecution?

Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar shows us here the effects of a ruler who cannot keep his temper under control. This almost inevitably produces poorer results. Pride prevents the king from backtracking and fixing his mistake; and anger prevents foresight. The result is quite predictable -- except in this instance, where God takes a hand directly.

Effects of limited religion

It's interesting to see the kind of religion that most tyrants want. It is a limited religion. It is valued solely for what the tyrant can obtain from it. This has two aspects, one ancient and one modern.

- ✚ In ancient times the desire of the tyrant was to make sure that God is on his side. The God of the Israelites was viewed as just one more god. Therefore, those who believe in that God were required to offer prayers and sacrifices in support of the King. We still do this today, as we pray for those in authority over us. This reflects the Christian view that the current government is of no real importance compared to the government of God.

✚ In modern times the demand is for "private religion."³ This means that the Christian will in no way oppose the state, since religion is purely private. It's what you do in your spare time. So it is that our president can be touchingly sympathetic with those who cling to their guns and religion. As long as your faith has no impact on the world, you can believe whatever you want.

This produces an inevitable conflict. Either the church or the state is the supreme moral authority. If the state claims that role, then persecution of the church is inevitable. As this conflict escalates, the state will eventually decide that no means other than the death penalty will work. If you simply euthanize the Christians, all your problems will be solved.

There is one short test to know whether or not matters have come to such a pass. In its classic formulation, it is this: is the king above the law?

The curious reply

It seems that the three Hebrew children don't quite understand what they should be answering for. You will first note that they do not engage in a protest march, nor do we have any record of them objecting at all until the matter is brought up. This has certain advantages.

- ✚ First, such a process offers an opportunity for reconciliation. The child of God is always a peacemaker.
- ✚ Such a response involves no anger. This is almost always the right way to handle the ruler's anger.
- ✚ More important, it shows that these three understood that dying for the faith is something which may be required. Indeed, it seems to be no big deal. But it is an honor.
- ✚ Note, please, that one reason they did not need to bring the subject up was simply that there is never a lack of accusers for the faithful.

We do not need to give you an answer

That seems a strange reply. But considered from the viewpoint of the faithful it is relatively simple. These men know who is God. As such, since they are in captivity, they are mentally prepared to die. It helps to know what your purpose in life is. May I suggest that purpose does not include whining or complaining or menial bargaining? In this instance, their purpose is actually testimony. Be sure that a witness who is prepared to die for the faith is a powerful witness indeed.

Martyrdom

The subject is not much preached upon these days. After all, the church in America is comfortable, fat and happy. No one thinks they will be called upon to die for the faith. But please do recall that your life on this planet is temporary; you are one who is "just passing through." As such, martyrdom is something which we may yet experience in America. Some of us will be honored with this; the only question is who and when.

Indeed, as we learn in Revelation, it is by the testimony of martyrdom that Satan is overcome. As Tertullian said, the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church. We need to take our example from the

³ Our current president speaks of "freedom of worship;" "freedom of religion" is now politically incorrect. In short, do whatever you please – inside the church building. Outside, you belong to the state.

ancient church; permit me a brief example. Athanasius, writing over 200 years beyond the time of Christ, wrote this:

A very strong proof of this destruction of death and its conquest by the cross is supplied by a present fact, namely this. All the disciples of Christ despise death, they take the offensive against it and, instead of fearing it, by the sign of the cross and by faith in Christ trample on it as something dead. Before the divine advent of the Savior, even the holiest of men were afraid of death, and mourned the dead as those who perish. But now that the Savior has raised His body, death is no longer terrible, but all those who believe in Christ tread it underfoot as nothing and prefer to die rather than to deny their faith in Christ, knowing full well that when they die they do not perish, but live indeed, and become incorruptible through the resurrection. But that devil who of old wickedly exulted in death, now that the pains of death are loosed, he alone it is who remains truly dead. There is proof of this too; for men who, before they believe in Christ, think death horrible and are afraid of it, once they are converted despise it so completely that they go eagerly to meet it, and themselves become witnesses of the Savior's resurrection from it. Even children hasten thus to die, and not men only, but women train themselves by bodily discipline to meet it. So weak has death become that even women, who used to be taken in by it, mock at it now as a dead thing, robbed of all its strength. Death has become like a tyrant who has been completely conquered by the legitimate monarch; bound hand and foot as he now is, the passers-by jeer at him, hitting him and abusing him, no longer afraid of his cruelty and rage, because of the king who has conquered him. So has death been conquered and branded for what it is by the Savior on the cross. It is bound hand and foot, all who are in Christ trample it as they pass and as witnesses to Him deride it, scoffing and saying, "O Death, where is thy victory? O Grave, where is thy sting?"

(Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, V-27)

You might object to its somewhat sexist tone, but the point is clear. Real Christians do not fear death because they know the one who has conquered it.

Prophecy

It may appear that this passage has nothing to do with prophecy. But may I remind you of the symbolic importance of fire in the Old and New Testaments.

- ✚ Fire is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, as given at Pentecost.
- ✚ Fire is often the symbol of judgment, in particular the judgment of hell.
- ✚ As such, it is often associated with the destruction of the wicked.

So you can see the symbolic importance of this passage. It clearly teaches us that the righteous will be unharmed by the fires of hell. Indeed by the coming of our Lord the righteous will be exalted. Many people do not like this type of allegorical interpretation, but scholars of the Scriptures have used it for thousands of years. It must be verified with other uses, but I think this one is sure.

Hell cannot exist.

This argument may surprise you. Among the philosophical it has been argued that hell, as described for example by Lazarus, cannot possibly exist. The reason is very simple: fire consumes. If you place a human body in the fire, you get ashes. Thus, it is argued that the Hell described in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man cannot possibly exist for ever. Indeed, it can only exist for a short time.

Aquinas, in answering this objection, pointed to this passage of scripture. In effect, he said that if the three Hebrew children can be kept from the effects of the fire, then so can the wicked indefinitely. It may seem an unusual problem, but it has risen to give grief over the centuries.

Son of God.

The most prominent prophetic problem raised in this chapter is of course just who is the fourth person in the fire? In the King James version you will see the statement that this is the son of God. Most of the modern translations use the phrase "son of the gods." The Hebrew will support either interpretation, and thus the modern translators take a more conservative view of the original documents.

The allegorical significance of the passage is clear. The more severe the trial, the more visibly and palpably present is our Lord.

In addition, we might take comfort from the fact that it is in the fiery furnace that our Lord, or an angel from the Lord, is given to the three Hebrew children. When the times of trial come, particularly when the lake of fire is visible, our Lord will be there to see that no harm comes to us. Is it too much of the stretch to see this as a picture of the end times?

Madness - Daniel 4



The picture above is from the poet and engraver William Blake. It shows Nebuchadnezzar in his period of madness.

Daniel 4:1-37 NASB Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and *men of every* language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound! (2) "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. (3) "How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation. (4) "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. (5) "I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and *these fantasies as I lay* on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. (6) "So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. (7) "Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me. (8) "But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, *saying*, (9) 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell *me* the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation. (10) 'Now *these were* the visions in my mind *as I lay* on my bed: I was looking, and behold, *there was* a tree in the midst of the earth and its height *was* great. (11) 'The tree grew large and became strong And its height reached to the sky, And it *was* visible to the end of the whole earth. (12) 'Its foliage *was* beautiful and its fruit abundant, And in it *was* food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, And the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, And

all living creatures fed themselves from it. (13) 'I was looking in the visions in my mind *as I lay* on my bed, and behold, an *angelic* watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven. (14) 'He shouted out and spoke as follows: "Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; Let the beasts flee from under it And the birds from its branches. (15) "Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, But with a band of iron and bronze *around it* In the new grass of the field; And let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, And let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. (16) "Let his mind be changed from *that of* a man And let a beast's mind be given to him, And let seven periods of time pass over him. (17) "This sentence is by the decree of the *angelic* watchers And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men." (18) 'This is the dream *which* I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell *me* its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.' (19) "Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, 'Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.' Belteshazzar replied, 'My lord, *if only* the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!' (20) 'The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth (21) and whose foliage *was* beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged-- (22) it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth. (23) 'In that the king saw an *angelic* watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, "Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze *around it* in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him," (24) this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: (25) that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. (26) 'And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that *it is* Heaven *that* rules. (27) 'Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by *doing* righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.' (28) "All *this* happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. (29) "Twelve months later he was walking on the *roof of* the royal palace of Babylon. (30) "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' (31) "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, (32) and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.' (33) "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven

until his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*. (34) "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation. (35) "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' (36) "At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. (37) "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Notes on the chapter

This is one of the more unusual chapters in the book of Daniel. One reason for this is that the chapter is written in Chaldean. The incident described in this chapter is often challenged by liberal scholars because there is no comprehensive record of this set of events recorded elsewhere. This is a reflection of the fact that we actually know very little of Nebuchadnezzar outside the Bible. Only two authors in antiquity, Abydenus and Berossus, (I never heard of them either) wrote any extensive biography. We know of their writings only from the fact that they are quoted by other historians. Those interested in the history of this text should consult Albert Barnes' notes on the New Testament.

You will also note that the chapter takes the form of a royal proclamation. Evidently, the chapter is composed of the Royal proclamation with commentary by Daniel himself. Thus, the writing is in something other than Hebrew.

The character of Daniel.

Daniel's actions.

It is interesting to note how Daniel reacts to the dream told to him by Nebuchadnezzar. His character is clearly shown in his actions. For example:

- ✚ His first reaction is one of concern for Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel does not think of maintaining his position, but rather is concerned for the King about himself.
- ✚ Indeed, his actions show a disregard for his place in the administration. Bringing bad news to the King is usually not a good idea.
- ✚ Most important, Daniel attempts to get the king to repent. He does not attempt to sugarcoat the news. The objective -- and it is always God's objective -- is to produce repentance and reformation.

Daniel's humility.

One of the key characteristics of humility is this: the humble man's first concern is for others. This seems counterintuitive to most of us, but please remember that the humble man of God knows something the rest of the world does not. Specifically he knows, and accepts, that position and power come from the Lord, not from his own scheming. The key to humility is your relationship with God -- and it seems also the key to true success.

No one but Daniel could interpret.

Daniel is, of course, not the only devout Jew in Nebuchadnezzar's court. But it seems he's the only man who can interpret these dreams. God gives his gifts in such manner as fits his purpose. As such, it may seem unfair that others have gifts that we would like to have. For example, have you ever wanted to have the gift of healing? God gives this as he sees fit -- and only occasionally does he explain why.

The prophecy.

Let us begin with the purpose of the prophecy:

- ✦ First, this prophecy is there to establish their credentials of the prophet Daniel. This is not so much as a foreteller as a forth teller. If you please, God gives Daniel the gift of interpretation so that he will be listened to when he calls for repentance.
- ✦ Then, another purpose of this prophecy is to warn the King. Remember that God is just, and therefore provides a warning to those in need of repentance.
- ✦ Finally, there is this: Nebuchadnezzar needs to know just who is God and who is not.

Symbolism.

It is customary when studying prophecy to state what the various parts of the dream mean. We will not disappoint you.

- ✦ The most striking image is that of the tree: the tree, which blesses all the birds and animals, is an image of the kingdom. Indeed it is an image of the King himself. This has the incidental meaning that government is meant to be a blessing to the people. When it is not, it is the Lord's privilege to remove it.
- ✦ The tree is bound with iron and brass. Iron represents strength; brass represents endurance -- it doesn't rust.
- ✦ We see also the role of an angel as a watcher. This reminds us that our deeds do not go unnoticed, but that God knows everything.

As to the symbolism of the seven times, it is not certain. Many commentators take this to be seven years. However, it should be noted that seven, in the Bible, usually represents completeness. So we can say for sure that the madness will last until the time God is finished.

A prophecy of...

This is a prophecy of madness, repentance, and (please note) restoration. Note the purposes of God: it is not sufficient to repent. Restoration must follow.

Cycle of repentance.

We may begin by considering the nature of God. First, he is true and just. So therefore the things that he does our time in truth for the cause of justice. He is fair to all, even those whom he is punishing. You must remember that, in comparison to God, we are like ants. His will prevails. The amazing thing is that he pays any attention to us at all. Beyond that, the fact that he loves us is absolutely astonishing. This is the creator of the universe, and yet he stoops so low as to notice the inhabitants of this obscure planet.

It should go without saying, therefore, that he is able to humble the proud. Unfortunately the disease of pride prevents its victims from seeing this truth.

How God deals with pride

Let us begin with the concept of hubris. As the Greeks said, whom of the gods would destroy they first make mad. God's method be seen as follows:

- ✚ First, a warning is given. Look back on your own experience; how often have you heard, "didn't I tell you so?" It's usually clearer after the fact, but the truth is yes, God told you so.
- ✚ God punishes the sin by letting it run its course. He allows the effects of sin to be the punishment of sin. You have seen this yourself; often enough it is humorous -- when you see it in others. Think of Archie Bunker getting what he deserves.
- ✚ Repentance begins the process of restoration. God does not desire simply the punishment of the sinner, but rather his complete restoration to the family of God. Nebuchadnezzar serves as an example for us that God greatly desires each of us to enjoy our service to him as he plans it. Sin interrupts this. When the interruption is over, God's desire is to restore us to our previous state.

The Donatist controversy

This desire on the part of God is often resisted and rejected by a certain segment of the church. Permit me a bit of history. In the early days of the church there arose persecution. Many Christians, including those who were priests, gave in to the persecution and surrendered to the authorities their copies of the Bible. After the persecution a group known as the Donatists arose, holding that those who had betrayed the Scriptures and the church could no longer hold positions of authority in the church. They refused to honor any ceremonies these priests performed, such as baptism.

Their view has not disappeared from the church. It seems there are two views of the church: the first is that of a health club for saints. Particularly for those in authority in the church, certain sins are unforgivable. Those of an older generation will recall the days when a preacher who had been divorced and remarried was considered unacceptable for the pulpit. The arguments for this are many; one might consider the example of the church.

The alternative is to view the church as a hospital for sinners. It is a well known fact that the best preacher to reach out to bikers is a man who is a biker himself. St. Augustine, in arguing against the Donatists, cites this passage. If Nebuchadnezzar then be restored to supreme earthly authority by Almighty God, then is it not also possible that even the greatest of sinners can be restored to a position of authority and great ministry? Perhaps we should consider the future of a preacher or teacher as more important than their past.

Writing on the Wall - Daniel 5

For the sake of space, we omit the Scripture. The lesson is based on the NASB translation; however, any solid translation should do as well.

Historical Background

A little genealogy is in order, first. Belshazzar is probably the grandson of the Biblical Nebuchadnezzar, not the son. The word used is more accurately translated, “male descendant.” His father was probably a ruler named Evil-Meradoch.

It’s an interesting time for the kingdom of Babylon. For one thing, the city is being besieged by Cyrus, king of Persia. He will on this night divert the flow of the Euphrates so that his troops can pass into the city via the dry entrance. He will then give this portion of his empire to Darius, king of the Medes, who was his ally.

What’s really interesting is the timing: according to the (not always reliable) Codex Chisianus, this night is the anniversary of the founding of the Babylonian Empire. What makes this interesting? This prophecy:

Jeremiah 25:11-12 NASB 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (12) 'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and *that* nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.

According to the Codex, the prophecy is accurate – to the day.

Characters

Daniel

It's not obvious, but Daniel is pushing 90 years old. If you remember, the land of Israel is to be in captivity in Babylon for 70 years. Daniel was taken captive at this time, and as he was a young man when taken into captivity, he would be about 90 years old at this time. Interestingly, his reputation is quite high. Notice that he is now called Daniel not Belshazzar. But his reputation largely rests with the old geezers in the court. Belshazzar is a young man. However, his successor Darius is 62 years old, and is old enough to know who Daniel is. As we shall see, Daniel continues his service in the reign of Darius.

Being 90 years old has its problems, but also its benefits. As we shall see, Daniel has learned a disdain for pomp, show, and wealth. He will refuse Belshazzar’s offer of promotion and great wealth. Of course, Daniel knows just how long the appointment would last.

The Queen

The woman identified as the Queen is probably Belshazzar's grandmother. She is in fact sticking her neck out by entering the party. (You might look at Esther 4:10-11 to see the regulations in this court.) But as every young man should know, it is not a bright idea to mess with grandma.

She comes in and attempts to soothe the boy. But her main purpose is to puff Daniel. The memory of his performances in Nebuchadnezzar's court was likely a strong one. One cannot help but see how often the elderly are ignored until it's too late.

Belshazzar

It is interesting that Belshazzar has not heard of Daniel. As a prince, he must have studied the history of the kingdom. So he is not ignorant, but he is willfully refusing to learn the lessons of his own history. This is not ignorance; it is pride.

Even more interesting is the fact that he is throwing a grand party when the Medes and Persians are outside the city gates, besieging the city. Just where should this young man be? Partying, or leading the defense?

Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin

The words

- ✚ the word Mene has two meanings: the first is to be numbered. The word is past tense; it carries with it a sense of complete finality. The second meaning is simply that the matter is finished. The word is used of a completed transaction.
- ✚ Tekel - this word means weighed, as in weighed in the balances. It is the simple word meaning that the scales have been used to determine the weight. It also is past tense.
- ✚ Upharsin - this word means divided. It is interesting to note that the words do not say "turned over to another," but instead that the kingdom will be divided. This indeed happened. Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon and gave that portion of his empire to Darius the Mede.

Sacrilege and idolatry

It's like the song said: you don't tug on Superman's cape. Sacrilege is essentially that action. It is to treat the things of God as if they were no more meaningful than the things of the world. The concept is lost on our home church today. Nothing is sacred; everything is meant to be mocked or used like so much tissue paper. But in these days all would know that these items used were sacred to the Hebrew God. Therefore, their use was indeed sacrilege.

The question is one of fear of God. In our time, we do not teach the fear of God. It seems out of place with the gentle Jesus. But if God is to be feared, then we should worry about the consequences of our mishandling his things. The Scriptures, for instance.

Belshazzar knew all this. Therefore, his judgment was accurate.

"Vice always glories in defiling what is noble." (St. Jerome). The principle is still with us today. The barbarian is within the gates; that which was noble and honored in America is now the butt of the joke. Indeed, our courts have now ruled that "stolen valor" is perfectly legal. You are now allowed to brag that you received any number of medals from the combat service you never had.

Reproof

Daniel's reproof of Belshazzar is simply this:

- ✚ First, he has committed sacrilege.
- ✚ Then, he has failed to repent. As Daniel tells him, "you knew that."
- ✚ Even in this, however, Belshazzar maintains his pride. Despite what Daniel has told him, he insists on giving Daniel his reward.

Why did God do this for Belshazzar?

It's an interesting question: after all, He could just have allowed the conquest on schedule. Nothing prophesies that there will be a hand. So why?

Fulfillment of prophecy

You notice that the king actually *saw* the hand writing? Not just the result? This is to prove it's not someone's graffiti. God's style is to be convincing – to those who are willing to listen.

Consider also what this must have meant to the Jews. It's not just that they had exchanged conquerors; rather, God was delivering on his promise. If the demise of Babylon happened on schedule, they could take hope that the rest of the prophecies would happen as well.

How God deals with the mighty

Belshazzar knew that he was the man in charge – right? He saw that as power and privilege; God sees it as responsibility. We hold the man in charge to higher standards. God is just; he judges according to the situation. And when he does, he shows just who is really in charge.

You and I, then, need to know that the course of history is not set by revisionist liberals, but by God Almighty. They can lie about the past as much as they like; the future is not theirs.

Showing us God's way

The history in the Bible is there for our profit, if we will but read it. May I suggest some points of interest?

- ✚ God is owed the fear due him – despite the emerging church theology. Ignoring this is extremely perilous, especially for those who call themselves his children.
- ✚ God punishes the nation that ill-treats his children. The lessons today might include the nation of Israel; I might suggest that our nation's treatment of Christians will soon provide another example.
- ✚ An abundance of intelligent, educated advisors means nothing when God speaks.
- ✚ God seeks our repentance in humility, hoping to restore us. Sometimes we cooperate. Sometimes, the Persians are at the gate.

Lion's Den - Daniel 6

We have omitted the Scripture from this lesson outline for reasons of length. The lesson is based around the New American Standard Bible translation, however, any reasonable translation should do.

The Nature of the Law

Some preliminary thoughts on the nature of law are required to begin this lesson. Christians sometimes assume that law is inherently bad. This is not the case; law is necessary because people are sinners.

Helpless before mercy

A story is told of New York Mayor LaGuardia. At the time the mayor was permitted to sit in judgment in the court system, particularly in the lower courts. One evening, a grandmother was brought before him on the charge of stealing a loaf of bread. Her excuse was that she needed the loaf of bread to feed her grandchildren. LaGuardia listened sympathetically, and then remarked that the law is the law. He fined her \$10. He then fined everyone else in the courtroom, including the grocer who brought the charges, \$.25 for the crime of living in a city in which a grandmother was obliged to steal to feed her grandchildren. The bailiff collected the fines, and was then instructed to give the collection to the grandmother. LaGuardia himself paid the \$10.

It is an instance of the fact that the law is helpless before mercy. By its very nature, law must be inflexible. Otherwise, any judge can be merciful to any extent that he wishes at any time. Likewise, the judge can be vengeful to any extent that he wishes at any time. Law then degenerates into vengeance or mercy or simply the whim of the judge. The inflexible nature of the law is actually a protection against the fact that the law is executed by sinners. Once you perceive that the law must be this way, you can understand the problem presented in this chapter of Daniel.

Church and state problems

This nature of the law becomes a problem for the Christian when the state decides that it is morally supreme. When that happens, the state must seek a method to enforce that moral superiority. The law is an ideal method for such enforcement. This is not a fault of the law; it merely shows the usefulness of the law as a tool for implementing the will of tyrants.

Ultimately, either the state or God can be morally supreme. But not both. If the state decides to enforce moral supremacy then the Christian must be prepared for persecution. It is inevitable once that decision is made. No amount of smooth wording (which will be used anyway) can cover over this fact. The persecution may be mild or severe, but it must happen.

Of course, the Christian must be prepared for this. How can we do this?

- ✚ First, the Christian's eternal life must be in order. This is the life of study, prayer, and devotion. The personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the foremost tool for resisting persecution.
- ✚ Then, the Christian's life in respect to the church must also be in order. You are not expected to endure persecution alone. The church must stand ready to assist those who are suffering for the faith. And the suffering must rely upon the church to do just that.

- ✚ In all persecution we must remember our destination. This world is not our home, we are just passing through. So it matters little to those who live the life of the resurrection whether we live or die. We must keep our eyes on the author and finisher of our faith, trusting in him to rescue us or raise us from the dead.

Vindication by God

The reader may recall the concept of "trial by battle". In the middle ages it was explicitly presumed that God would vindicate the right. Those who had a legal dispute were entitled to appeal to this trial by combat. The two sides would meet in hand to hand combat, usually with swords, and the victor in this combat was presumed to have been vindicated by God, and therefore righteously entitled to judgment. Winston Churchill notes that monasteries and other large landowners usually went to the precaution of hiring a professional champion to assist the Almighty in determining the right.

The idea however, is simply this: despite the law's failings God will ultimately vindicate those who are in the right. Note, please, that this vindication may be posthumous. God does his vindication in his own way, at his own time, and in such manner as to vindicate his truth, not our opinions.

You might well ask why God does it this way. May I suggest that the first good reason is simply this: vengeance is mine, says the Lord. If the Lord allowed otherwise, the rule of vengeance would quickly replace the rule of law. This can be discouraging to the average Christian. In the short run, we see the advantages of having might rather than right. We forget that the battle belongs to the Lord.

Wisdom, we are taught, is vindicated by her children. This we know, usually by being unwise. But permit me a spiritual application of this point:

By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

(1 Timothy 3:16 NASB)

You see the point: Christ was vindicated by the Spirit. By the world's standards he was condemned, executed and buried. It would seem that no vindication would be possible by the world's standards. But God has his own set of standards.

Character

We may now examine the character of the principle players in this drama:

Daniel's opponents

The men who opposed Daniel are notable for three particular sins:

- ✚ The first such sin is envy. Many of our local students will recall the tale of F. E. B. Meyer. This man was greatly troubled by what he saw as his failures being due to the success of others⁴. But God convicted him of envy, and as he prayed for his competitors God granted him success. Envy crawls into the Christian life masquerading as justice. We must see through the masquerade.

⁴ One of the "others" was C. H. Spurgeon.

- ✚ The second sin might be listed as corruption, but it goes more commonly by the name of greed. Daniel is honest; Daniel is their superior; they want more money; Daniel must be eliminated. Greed is often covered with a cloak of justice. However, if the situation warrants, it can also be cloaked in pleasant flattery.
- ✚ Pleasant flattery is the third sin. One might think of it more as a lifestyle; you lie to the King, telling him how wonderful he is-and neither of you really believes it. But it is pleasant. It seems so smooth and easy; we must remember that at its root is dishonesty. These people are liars.

Darius

The reader will please note that there are at least three rulers named Darius in the Scriptures. This one is the earliest of them; he is the ally of Cyrus the Persian who conquered Babylon.

The first thing to notice is that Darius must know Daniel quite well by now. Certainly the story of the writing on the wall must have been known to him. But most of his knowledge comes from the fact that Daniel has been an administrator for him, and he knows him to be an honest man. An honest man is highly valuable to a King. He is even more valuable if he is politely blunt in speaking with the king. So at the very least Darius sees himself as losing a valuable civil servant.

Darius, however, is a vain man. He is a just ruler but still vain. He is accustomed to being flattered, and as such is accustomed to passing ceremonial proclamations in his own honor. No doubt he thought he had done just such a thing. Now he finds out that this will cost him greatly. But being a just ruler, he must enforce the law.

But see his reaction to the result! Like any emperor of this time, he wants the gods to be on his side. As will be seen in Ezra and Nehemiah, he sends the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple so that the King and his sons might not suffer loss. He does not have a complete view of God. But that which he does have is sufficient to convince him that this God must be pleased. And he certainly must not be offended.

Daniel

Daniel may be noted in this passage for three characteristics:

- ✚ The first is godliness. In particular, this is godliness that shows in his everyday life. His enemies can count on his righteousness. I wonder how many of us could make the same claim
- ✚ The second is innocence. Daniel does not see this conflict as being one of Daniel versus the satraps. Rather, he sees his obligation to God and fulfills it, letting the chips fall where they may.
- ✚ The third is trust, or as some might put it today, faith. Like his friends he does not need to answer the charges. God is his vindication, and he will accept the judgment of God in any case.

The Nature of Trials

God allows trials

The usual reaction of the Christian to the trials of life is to ask why they happened to me. What purpose does God have in subjecting me to this trial?

- ✚ One reason is chastisement. Often enough, God corrects his children through the use of their trials. In this way, he not only delivers the corrective punishment but also strengthens the child of God for whatever might come next.
- ✚ Another reason is that God has his purposes. The early church was persecuted; the result was the diffusion of the Gospel throughout the known world.
- ✚ Therefore as Christians, we should expect such trials. For one reason, we are sinners and deserve them. For another reason, we are followers of God and therefore must do that which supports his purposes.

Per crucem ad lucem

The fact is that trials produce results in the children of God. Trials change us.

- ✚ First, they produce a purer Christian. Our trials shake out of us the sinful desires which used to rule our lives.
- ✚ Trials also produced a more experienced Christian. It is common for a Christian who has gone through a particular trial to quickly become useful to the church by that experience. My daughter had brain surgery at the age of five months. I had never heard of her condition before she had it. But since then, my wife and I have encountered several couples whose children have the same problem. We are able to counsel them, and above all give them encouragement because we went through that trial.
- ✚ Finally, trials produce a Christian who is nearer to God-and the world knows it. Even in our trials, feeling as if we can do nothing, we can bring glory to God and even, perhaps, someone to salvation.

Christ our example

The ultimate example of this situation is shown in Jesus Christ:

- ✚ Christ endured many trials. But each and every one of them was for the glory of God. He came to do God's will; with that intent how could there not be persecution?
- ✚ Christ did so in love for all those he encountered. Even the anger he directed at the Pharisees can be seen as attempting to produce their repentance. It is the will of God that none should be lost, but that all should repent. Love is costly.
- ✚ Ultimately, this intent to do the will of God cost Jesus Christ his life. If they so treat the master, how much more shall they do to the servant? Should we really expect a life of ease, when our master died on a cross?

Beasts From the Sea - Daniel 7

Why study prophecy?

The average Christian must think that prophecy is something well beyond his capability. There are so many books, and so many videos, which proclaim so many different visions of the prophetic future that it becomes quite confusing. However, we are indeed required to study prophecy. Why?

First, because our Lord Jesus Christ commanded it. His words often include prophecy, and his words are our first consideration. If he said it, we should pay attention to it.

Next, we must remember that all Scripture is profitable and instructive. All Scripture is inspired. Therefore Scriptures concerning prophecy may be studied. Here are some reasons for this:

- ✚ First, we are always required to give a ready defense of the faith. The rest of the world is quite well aware of the Bible includes a great deal of prophecy. We therefore must be able to explain what that prophecy means and doesn't mean. If we don't know, who would?
- ✚ Next, we are commanded to watch. We are to know the signs of the end times and look out for them. God intends us to live in hope, and he knows that hope is greatly strengthened in times of trouble when we can see the signs of the end coming. When it's dark, we look for the dawn.
- ✚ Finally, we are to be ready for the judgment. Over and over again our Lord explicitly and implicitly warns us that the judgment is coming at a time which we do not know. He strongly cautions us to be ready. Prophecy is an aid to that readiness.

Methodology

There are certain principles which are common to all systems of interpreting prophecy. Among these are the following:

- ✚ Prophecy centers around the people of God. There is no sense trying to fit the Aztec empire into prophecy. Therefore, our view of prophecy must be centered on Jerusalem and the history of the church. Sadly, we don't know the history of the church. For example, in Western thought prophecy almost always ignores the Eastern Orthodox Church. From the Reformation onward, prophetic interpretation usually focuses upon an anti-Catholic point of view.
- ✚ Symbols have meaning-in context. For example, if we believe the prophecy we are reading applies to the current day then we would expect that an Eagle would represent the United States. However, if the prophecy applied to the time before Christ the Eagle would represent some other nation. Certain symbols have meaning in any time frame. As we shall see, a beast usually represents a conquering nation or kingdom.
- ✚ Prophecy always has the possibility of being either a long or short view. Sometimes the prophecy may include both. A long view includes the time of the return of Christ, or the period immediately preceding it. A short view would be one which is fairly close to the time of the prophecy, and would not include the return of Christ. So if something happens in the short view we might have to ask if it will also happen in the long view.
- ✚ No prophecy stands alone. If you read a prophetic passage remember that there are other passages which apply to the same events. If you cannot reconcile them, it is likely your view of the meaning of the passage is incorrect.
- ✚ Finally, we hope that as the time of our Lord's return approaches, that we will indeed see things more clearly. (This is one of the major arguments for the futurist point of view of Revelation.)

Pitfalls

Please remember that intelligent, learned men disagree greatly on the meaning of many of these passages. At the very least, then, we must maintain our disagreements in a civil manner. We may avail ourselves of H. L. Mencken's retort: "you could be right."

Bearing in mind that we may be wrong, we must not therefore ignore the warnings given—especially as they are very plain. Just because your prophetic scheme is incorrect does not mean you can ignore the warnings of the Gospels.

The Vision

We may now examine the Scriptures:

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind *as he lay* on his bed; then he wrote the dream down *and* related the *following* summary of it. Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. "And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another. "The first *was* like a lion and had *the* wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. "And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs *were* in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!' "After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. "While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great *boasts*. "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, Its wheels *were* a burning fire. "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened. "Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. "As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time. "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.

(Daniel 7:1-14 NASB)

About the Vision

Liberal scholars to the contrary notwithstanding, this prophecy was given in approximately 555 BC. You will please note that what Daniel has delivered is a summary of what he saw. Therefore we do not have all the details.

One thing may be observed. This vision is very much parallel to the statue given earlier, and will be explained further in Daniel later on. This is very much God's style; if you will recall, when Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams he told him that God had repeated the dream to him because he wanted to make him understand that it was sure.

Symbolism

Certain of the symbols are easy to understand:

- ✦ The wind in this passage can be taken to represent either the Holy Spirit, or the judgment of God. The two interpretations are not contradictory and it is convenient to take the interpretation as meaning both.
- ✦ The sea represents the general population of the world. This is seen in Revelation 17:15. The implication is that these beasts arise from the general population, that is to say they are not noticed before they arise. As we shall see, these beasts were not noticeable before they became great empires.
- ✦ The interpretation of the beasts is given specifically later in Daniel. To spoil the surprise the first beast is Babylon. The lion represents its ferocity; the wings represent the speed with which the empire arose. Once Nebuchadnezzar died, however, the empire spread no more -- as represented by the plucking of the wings.
- ✦ The bear represents the Medo-Persian Empire. The three ribs in its mouth are generally interpreted as Lydia, Babylon and Egypt.
- ✦ The leopard represents Greece. The four heads represent the four generals who took over the empire of Alexander the Great dividing amongst themselves. The wings again represent the speed with which the empire was developed; this of course represents the speed with which Alexander the Great conquered the known world.
- ✦ The last beast is Rome. As we shall see in the second section there is more to learn about this beast.

Rome

The various theories of prophecy disagree on what the word Rome means. Most of the ancient writers naturally assumed that the Rome in question was the original Roman empire. Later writers, especially those of the Reformation, viewed Rome as being the Roman Catholic Church, or perhaps the papacy. Futurists, like Hal Lindsey, view this as a Roman empire to come. For example, Talbot, writing in the 1930s, saw this as Benito Mussolini and the revived Roman Empire.

Framework

One of the primary difficulties in interpreting prophecy is the question of framework. Futurists see this Rome as coming in the future because that is what fits with their particular scheme of prophecy. Other interpreters see it in the progression of their times; ancient writers see the Roman empire, and the writers of the Reformation see the Catholic church. Much depends upon the overall framework that you assume to be underlying prophecy.

Daniel gets an explanation

"As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. "I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: 'These great beasts, which are four *in number*, are four kings *who* will arise from the earth. 'But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.' "Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, *and which* devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, and *the meaning* of the ten horns that *were* on its head and the other *horn* which came up, and before which three of *them* fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great *boasts* and which was larger in appearance than its associates. "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. 'As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. 'But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom *will be* an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.' "At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself."

(Daniel 7:15-28 NASB)

The little horn

Daniel now gets an explanation which does not actually explain anything. You can see the overall scheme of things; in the time of the fourth beast the kingdom of God is given to Christ. Does this refer to his first advent, or his second advent? Depending on your answer to that question, you might conclude the following people to be the little horn of Daniel:

- ✚ Ancient writers generally assumed that the little horn was one of the rulers of the Roman empire. Diocletian is a common candidate.
- ✚ Later writers concluded that this was the papacy, or perhaps an individual pope. The papacy is the usual target of the Reformation writers, where the Futurists see an individual pope as being more likely.
- ✚ Some writers see Antiochus Epiphanes . This interpretation usually holds that the third beast is actually the Greek empire, and that the fourth beast is the Roman empire to come. This is also a futurist interpretation, regarding Rome to come.

Those who see the little horn as yet to come identify him with the Antichrist. Interpretations vary at this point.

Time, times and half the time

Virtually all commentators agree that the phrase, "time", means 360 days. This is the length of the Babylonian year. Futurists generally interpret this literally; meaning that days are individual days. This. Then represents approximately 3 1/2 years which is identified with the great tribulation in Revelation.

All other views hold that the day is the same as a year; therefore this is a period of 1260 years. So the question becomes, "how do we fit these 1260 years into our scheme of interpretation?"⁵ the interpretation is influenced by the parallel passage in the book of Revelation which describes the woman in the wilderness. There are two major schemes of interpretation with regard to the papacy:

- ✚ Some hold that the 1260 years start with the assumption of sovereignty by Pope Phocus in 606 A.D. This time would end in 1866 A.D., which coincides with the pope abandoning his sovereignty at the Council known as Vatican One.
- ✚ Others hold that the period begins when King Pepin of France granted sovereignty to Pope Steffen II in either 752 A.D. or 755 A.D. This would bring us to the year 2012 A.D. or 2015 A.D. as this lesson is being written in A.D. 2010, I leave the rest of the interpretation to the reader.

No shortage of interpretation

We have no shortage of interpretation. This time could be the great tribulation; it could be any time of official oppression-but at the end we have the same result: the judgment of God. Prophecy is not given so that you will know how to invest in the stock market. Is given so that you will note the end of all things, and therefore be able to make the right moral decisions. You get one chance at this; I suggest you use it wisely.

⁵ the phrase "times" in the original means two times; a word ending not available in the English.

A Lesson In Prophecy - Daniel 8

This section may be the most clear picture of prophecy in the entire Bible. In it, Daniel is given the meaning of his visions, and a clear understanding of the future. Or is it?

In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously. I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal. Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns *were* long, but one *was* longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no *other* beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified *himself*. While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat *had* a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. Then the male goat magnified *himself* exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful *Land*. It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. It even magnified *itself* to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. And on account of transgression the host will be given over *to the horn* along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform *its will* and prosper. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, "How long will the vision *about* the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?" He said to me, "For 2,300 evenings *and* mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored." When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, standing before me was one who looked like a man. And I heard the voice of a man between *the banks of* Ulai, and he called out and said, "Gabriel, give this *man* an understanding of the vision." So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end." Now while he was talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and made me stand upright. He said, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for *it* pertains to the appointed time of the end. "The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. "The shaggy goat *represents* the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. "The broken *horn* and the four *horns that* arose in its place *represent* four kingdoms *which* will arise from *his* nation, although not with his power. "In the latter period of their rule, When the transgressors have run *their course*, A king will arise, Insolent and skilled in intrigue. "His power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power, And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree And prosper and perform *his will*; He will destroy mighty men and the holy people. "And through his shrewdness He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; And he will magnify

himself in his heart, And he will destroy many while *they are* at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, But he will be broken without human agency. "The vision of the evenings and mornings Which has been told is true; But keep the vision secret, For *it* pertains to many days *in the future*." Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up *again* and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain *it*.
(Daniel 8:1-27 NASB)

Background

We may begin with some notes about the text itself. Conservative scholars believe this was written approximately 553 BC. You should note that the book is not written in Aramaic but in Hebrew. This is the technical reason liberal scholars challenge the date of the book. I submit, however, that there are good reasons to believe in the traditional date:

- ✚ First, Hebrew would be Daniel's native language. As his book is written to the Jews, it would be normal to use Hebrew.
- ✚ The evidence of Josephus clearly indicates that Daniel preceded the period assumed by liberal scholars.
- ✚ The real, hidden objection is that prophecy cannot happen. Therefore, if it appears to happen then we must post date the book.

Regrettably, this new version of history is commonly taught in Bible colleges today.

There is some question as to Daniel's location. Some scholars assume he is in Susa only in the vision. Others have him physically there. I suspect the vision theory is correct, because this is in Belshazzar's reign.

Interpretation

The attractiveness of this passage comes from the fact that Gabriel explains it. Without this, chapter 8 would be a minor footnote.

The Ram

The ram itself was a known symbol for the Medo-Persian empire. Their king carried a ram's head into battle, for example. There exists today in the ruins of Persepolis a symbolic ram's head -- with one horn larger than the other. With such information, we can make the following assignments:

- The two horns represent the two peoples - the Medes and the Persians.
- The longer horn represents the Persians, who eventually came to dominate this empire.

- Charging west, north and south corresponds well to the historical conquests of this empire:
 - ✚ West, to Babylon, Syria and Asia Minor (modern Turkey).
 - ✚ North, to Armenia and Scythia
 - ✚ South, to Egypt, Arabia and Ethiopia.

The Goat

The goat is interpreted as being the empire of Greece. The specific interpretation is:

- The prominent horn is Alexander the Great.
- The phrase “without touching the ground” has reference to the swiftness of his conquests. He became a general at 21; he conquered his empire by the age of 26. His empire ran from Greece to India, from modern Yugoslavia down to Ethiopia.
- The horn was broken; Alexander died at the age of 33 in 323 BC. Kindly note how long after the prophecy was given that this occurred.
- The four horns -- note how accurately the Bible foretells this -- are the four generals who divided Alexander’s empire:

- ✚ Lysimachus took Asia Minor, Thrace, and Bithynia
- ✚ Cassandra to Macedonia and Greece.
- ✚ Seleucus took Syria, Babylon and all the empire into India. Note this well: his descendant must come from this direction.
- ✚ Ptolemy took Egypt, Arabia and Palestine. Secular history is most familiar with his descendants. One wrote (or commissioned) the Almagest, the star chart which guided sailors for almost 1,800 years. The most famous of his descendants was the last of his dynasty: Cleopatra.

The Little Horn

The identification of the little horn of Daniel has occupied scholars for many years. The most common interpretation is to identify the little horn with one Antiochus Epiphanies, who was a descendent of one of the generals of Alexander's army. He was a descendent of Seleucus, which matches the prophecy quite well when you think where the little horn had to come from. At the end of this section we will discuss alternative views to this point.

Let's examine the evidence in favor of Antiochus Epiphanies:

Daniel 8:9

- ✚ Came out of *one of them* (i.e. horns). Antiochus was from one of the four kingdoms
- ✚ *grew exceedingly great*. Yes, if understood from the viewpoint of Judea.
- ✚ *grew towards the south*. Antiochus fought two successful wars against Egypt.
- ✚ *grew towards the Glorious Land*. Judea was left in peace until Antiochus invaded.
- ✚ *grew great towards the East*. Antiochus had success against Media and Armenia.
- ✚ *sequence of growth – south, east, Glorious Land*. Antiochus captured Egypt, invaded Judea, campaigned in the east,

Dan. 8:10

- ✚ He threw down *some* of the host. Yes.

Dan. 8:11

- ✚ *sacrifices removed*. Antiochus is the only king known to specifically have stopped sacrifices.
- ✚ *acted arrogantly against the prince of the host*. Antiochus removed the high priest.
- ✚ *cast down the temple*. Metaphorically.
- ✚ *little horn prospered*. Antiochus collected great booty from Egypt then cleaned out the temple in Jerusalem.

✚ time frame, *3 and 1/2 times* approximately = 1150 days. Duration of persecutions.

Dan. 8:17

✚ *vision to time of the end.* From the writer's viewpoint.

Dan. 8:23

✚ bold king shall arise. Fits Antiochus

✚ a king.. skilled in intrigue. Fits Antiochus

Dan. 8:24

✚ his power shall be mighty. Powerful at the time.

✚ *he will destroy fearfully; destroy the holy people.* Antiochus tore down the walls and the houses and had anyone who continued to worship God executed.

Dan. 8:25

✚ *he shall make deceit prosper.* Those who connived with Antiochus made their own profit.

✚ *in his own mind he shall be great.* Antiochus changed his name to Antiochus *Theos Epiphanes Nikephorus*, i.e. Antiochus the god manifest, the victory-bringer.

✚ *without warning* he shall destroy many. Yes.

Source: Wikipedia article on Daniel 8.

Josephus also gives us the same information:

Antiochus turned about and advanced on Israel and Jerusalem in massive strength. Insolently breaking into the sanctuary, he removed the golden altar and the lampstand for the light with all its fittings, together with the table for the loaves of offering, the libation vessels, the cups, the golden censers, the veil, the crowns, and the golden decorations on the front of the Temple, which he stripped of everything.

(about two years later, after another raid and conquest)

Then the king issued a proclamation to his whole kingdom that all were to become a single people, each renouncing his particular customs.

.... directing them to adopt customs foreign to the country, banning holocausts (sacrifices by fire), sacrifices and libations from the sanctuary, profaning Sabbaths and feasts, defiling the sanctuary and the sacred ministers, building altars, precincts and shrines for idols, sacrificing pigs and unclean beasts, leaving their sons uncircumcised, and prostituting themselves to all kinds of impurity and abomination, so that they should forget the Law and revoke all observance of it. Anyone not obeying the king's command was to be put to death.

.... the king erected the abomination of desolation above the altar; and altars were built in the surrounding towns of Judah and incense offered at the doors of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law that came to light were torn up and burned. Whenever anyone was discovered possessing a copy of the covenant or practicing the Law, the king's decree sentenced him to death. Having might on their side, they took action month after month against any offenders they discovered in the towns of Israel. Women who had had their children circumcised were put to death according to the edict, with their babies hung around their necks, and the members of the household and those who had performed the circumcision were executed with them.

Yet there were many in Israel who stood firm and found the courage to refuse unclean food. They chose death rather than contamination by such fare or profanation of the holy covenant, and they were executed. It was a dreadful wrath that visited Israel.

So the story is told (it is instructive and inspiring reading). Ultimately, this horn is to die, but not by the power of man. His death is recorded in I Maccabees chapter 6:

Then summoning all his Friends, he {Antiochus Epiphanes} said to them, "Sleep evades my eyes, and my heart is cowed by anxiety. I have been asking myself how I could come to such a pitch of distress, so great a flood as that which now engulfs me -- I who was so generous and well loved in my heyday. But now I remember the wrong I did in Jerusalem when I seized all the vessels of silver and gold there, and ordered the extermination of the inhabitants of Judah for no reason at all. This, I am convinced, is why these misfortunes have overtaken me, and why I am dying of melancholy in a foreign land."

Antiochus Epiphanes died of severe depression.

With all this evidence, it may seem impossible to dispute this interpretation. However there are two facts which must be taken into account:

- ✚ Daniel himself is told that the vision pertains to the "time of the end." He is told that it refers to events many days in the future. Just exactly how do we define end times? Paul thought he was living in the end times; or, one could suppose the end times of the Jews as a nation.

- ✚ In Matthew 24:15 Jesus himself tells his disciples that they are to look for "the abomination of desolation." It is clear he is referring to a future event.

Therefore many interpreters today hold that these events have not transpired and are in the future; or that there will be a literal fulfillment a second time. The latter idea is sometimes called the "dual view" of prophecy.

Indeed, the number 2300 is open to interpretation itself. Does it mean

- ✚ 2300 days or 1150 days, one day being one morning and one evening?

- ✚ 2300 days or 2300 years?

Once you have that figured out, you get to determine when the 2300 starts.

Most commentators hold to 2300 days (or days of years). Those who do not cite the fact that approximately 1150 days passed between the sacrifice of the pig on the altar and the rededication of the sanctuary. The problem with this view is that the simplest counting -- start with the sacrifice and end with the rededication -- misses the mark by 55 days (too soon). Other starting and ending dates must be taken to make this view work. (The actual date of the sacrifice in question is December 8, 167 BC; the rededication exactly three years later.) Some (taking a 360 year day, per Babylonian counting) make the discrepancy 70 days, and transmute that to the 70 weeks we will encounter later.

Taking a different starting date -- Alexander's start of conquest in 334 BC, and interpreting the time as 2,300 years, we come to 1967 A.D. - the date the Jews took back under their own sovereignty, for the first time since Alexander, the site of the Temple in Jerusalem. Date setters in prophecy can have

a lot of fun with this. Similar series of dates are available to make this little horn appear to be the Papacy.

As for the average Christian, there are some lessons in this:

- First, at the very least we can consider this prophecy has been fulfilled at least once. The identification of the beasts and of the little horn are solid. At the least, then, we can say that prophecy does indeed work.
- Next, we can at the very least say that prophecy unfulfilled will be fulfilled. This is one of the reasons God gives us prophecy which has already been fulfilled-to strengthen our faith.
- Third, if it is not already clear to you, God will have his way.

Moral Points

This passage is not without its moral points.

- ✚ As verse 12 tells us (and again in verse 23) this judgment was caused by the rebellion of the Jewish people. Judgment begins in the house of the Lord; just because you are called "Christian" does not mean you will escape it. Just because a nation is called "Christian" does not mean it will escape either.
- ✚ Daniel ends this vision exhausted and ill. Such abomination actually sickens him. I wonder if we would have this reaction. I think we would be so jaded today that most of us would simply respond, "cool. Far out." Perhaps this is not so much a sign of Daniel's sensitivity as our lack of it.
- ✚ "Seal up the vision" -- God does not intend that you understand all of it -- yet. You will understand that which is necessary to make faith sure. As we shall see, judgment at His return is coming up.

70 Weeks - Daniel 9

The ninth chapter of the book of Daniel introduces us to the concept of the 70 weeks. As we shall see, these are broken down into specific periods. For those time frames we can see much of prophecy fulfilled and speculate on what is to come.

Preparing for Prayer

First things first: Daniel's prayer is instructed by his reading of the Scripture. In particular he has been reading the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, which foretold that the Babylonian captivity would last 70 years. This is an example of praying in God's will. If you want to be in God's will, you need to be in God's Word.

You will see below that Daniel pays attention. Note the phrase.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans-- in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was *revealed as* the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, *namely*, seventy years. So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek *Him by* prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,

(Daniel 9:1-4 NASB)

We see signs of Daniel's attention in two things:

- ✚ Fasting, which is the denial of the body for the benefit of the spirit.
- ✚ Sack cloth and ashes, which publicly proclaim that Daniel is in mourning for the sins of his people.

A prayer of

We may point out three characteristics of this prayer:

- ✚ First, it is the prayer of a man to completely trusts in God. Jeremiah says 70 years; thus it shall be.
- ✚ This is also a prayer of national repentance. This may seem strange to Christians in America, who are taught that individuals are all that counts. But we belong to a society, and therefore we have some responsibility for it.
- ✚ It is a prayer of intercession. He is standing between the people of Israel and Almighty God.

Principles

As we read through this prayer, we will see certain principles which are completely contained therein:

- ✚ The constant comparison between man and God.
- ✚ The open confession of the national sins.
- ✚ A plea which is based upon the character of God, not upon the desires of men.

High Prayer

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His

commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. "Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land. "Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day--to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You. "Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. "To the Lord our God *belong* compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. "Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done *anything* like what was done to Jerusalem. "As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth. "Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice. "And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself, as it is this day--we have sinned, we have been wicked.

(Daniel 9:4-15 NASB)

The character of God

If you read the passage in detail, you will discover certain characteristics of God which should be remembered in any prayer. Specifically:

- ✚ God is great and awesome. We are so accustomed to Jesus in the phone booth with me that we forget the holy, awesome, sovereign God.
- ✚ He keeps his covenant of love. First, this implies that he is one who keeps his word. Second he does so by means of the covenant. Recall that covenant is not the same thing as contract, but in fact its terms are given by God and therefore eternal. Finally, it is a covenant of love. Love is the very nature of God.
- ✚ God is righteous. Indeed, it is the divine dilemma that God is both love and righteousness. This dilemma will not be finally solved until the Cross.
- ✚ As part of his character of love, he is merciful and forgiving. It is upon that aspect of his character that Daniel will base his prayer.

Confession

Daniel's prayer begins with confession. He acknowledges these facts:

- ✚ First, the nation has sinned and done wrong. There is no attempt to provide excuses just the admission of guilt.
- ✚ The nation has been wicked and rebelled. Note that the rebellion implies the existence of righteous authority. In other words, Israel knew that what they were doing was wrong and in defiance of God.
- ✚ They did not listen. In many ways God attempted to warn them. First, he gave them Moses and the Law. This was done in a most spectacular manner; you would think they might remember it. They

didn't. So God sent them prophets, both to those in authority and to the common man. They did not listen to them either.

As a result, Daniel says that they are "covered with shame." It is an interesting phrase. I wonder how many Americans today look at this nation's ongoing rate of abortion and just shrug their shoulders. Does no one feel ashamed to live in a society where over 1 million innocent babies are slaughtered every year? Shame is essential to repentance, national or otherwise.

Result

Finally, Daniel makes it clear that the reason the Jews are in the position they are in is that they have defied the living God. It's their own stupid fault, as my mother used to say. And what mess are they in?

- ✚ To begin with they are scattered throughout the nations of the world. This is an interesting parallel to what happens to the Jews since the time of Christ. It appears that God keeps his word even over thousands of years.
- ✚ The judgments that God gave them in the law indeed happened to them.
- ✚ In particular, Jerusalem and the Temple both have been destroyed. To the Jew, there is no greater disaster possible.

Petition

"O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *have become* a reproach to all those around us. "So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary. "O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

(Daniel 9:16-19 NASB)

We may now see Daniel's petitions. Just what does the man ask?

- ✚ He begins by asking that God turn away from his anger and wrath. God is justifiably angry with the people of Israel; it is essential that this anger be deflected before any request can be made.
- ✚ That said, his main request is for the restoration of the city of Jerusalem. In place in this is the resurrection of the Temple as well.

Why should God grant this request?

Daniel now gives us the reasons why God should grant this request:

- ✚ God is righteous. In accordance with his commandments and laws he has dispersed the Jews throughout the area. But in those same commandments and law he tells them that if they repent and call upon his name he will restore them to the city of Jerusalem.
- ✚ God is merciful. One must remember that mercy is dependent upon the existence of justice. You cannot be merciful to the prisoner at the bar until said prisoner has been convicted. But once there is a conviction, the righteous Judge may be merciful as is seen fit.

- ✦ Perhaps most important: God will do it for the sake of his holy name. The Jews are his people; for those around them it is important to know that God is sovereign. In their state of disgrace this cannot possibly be clear. Therefore God will protect his reputation and be merciful at the same time. We may now see the unusual answer to this prayer.

The vision of the weeks

Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God, while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in *my* extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. He gave *me* instruction and talked with me and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. "At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell *you*, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision. "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*. "So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

(Daniel 9:20-27 NASB)

It is convenient to note that the 70 weeks referenced here can be divided into three time periods.

- ✦ First, there is a period of seven weeks. Almost all commentators consider this a period of seven weeks of years, or 49 years. Virtually all commentators hold this to be the period during which Ezra and Nehemiah rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. Much ink has flowed over exactly when these dates must have happened; for our purposes it is sufficient to say this is the time in which Jerusalem was rebuilt.
- ✦ Next comes the 62 weeks. Again most commentators are in agreement that this timeframe stretches from the completion of Jerusalem and the Temple to the time of Christ. The usual endpoint of the 62 weeks is the crucifixion; however there are various other schemes. The important thing for us is that the indeed the Messiah comes and is "cut " at this time.
- ✦ Finally, there is the 70th week. This will take some more time.

Predecessor events

It is clear from history that the 70th week did not occur immediately after the time of Christ. We need to know when this week is going to begin; and the Scripture has given us a certain signs:

- ✦ The Messiah will be "cut off." This is generally taken to mean that Christ did not come into his earthly kingdom at this time. To be cut off usually implies that you have no children. This is a fact about Jesus Christ.

- ✦ Next, the city and temple will be destroyed.
- ✦ The people who will do this are the people of the "prince who is to come." We know from history that in A.D. 70 the Romans sacked the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. We also know that this was not the end of history. So most scholars conclude that we must look elsewhere for the 70th week of Daniel.

Signs of the end

Daniel also tells us that the end will come with a flood. This is usually taken in a metaphoric sense; you can ask Noah why. On the other hand we have no shortage of wars to fulfill that part of the prophecy.

The signal event is something that is called "the abomination of desolation." This has already been associated with another conqueror, Antiochus Epiphanes. But Jesus refers to this event in the future tense in Matthew 24. Therefore we should be looking for something like this as a sign that the end is near.

This has some interesting implications. For those who take the Scripture more literally, it means that the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt. Those who follow this view point to the directions for the construction of the millennial Temple given in the book of Ezekiel. Their view is that the Antichrist, whoever that might be, will strike a deal with many people and keep it for 3 1/2 years. Comparing this with other Scriptures, they conclude that this will be a time of tribulation, followed by the time of great tribulation. One thing is certain: the abomination of desolation, what ever that might be, is yet to come, clear to see, and the sign of just who is the Antichrist.

But take heart: just as this horror is prophesied, so also is prophesied the destruction of the Antichrist. Prophecy may be difficult to understand, and there are many theories about what prophecy means, but some things are easy to know. You see, we've read the back of the book. We know how it all turns out. Let me give you a hint: God wins.

Angels - Daniel 10

We saw in the last chapter the Daniel was greatly puzzled over the vision given to him. In fact, Daniel is worried about several things the vision being just one. In particular he's also concerned about the state of Jerusalem, and why it's wall building has not been done. We know this because we can correlate the dates and Ezra and Nehemiah with the date given here in the kingdom. The problem is described as follows:

Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' *households*, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' *households* of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us." Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

(Ezra 4:1-5 NASB)

That is the physical problem. The spiritual problem is the vision he has been given. He knows from the prophet Jeremiah that the desolation of Jerusalem will last 70 years. Therefore he knows that now is the time for Jerusalem to be restored. He is not content however with book knowledge; he adds to it prayer and supplication.

The point is very important for us. It often happens that our knowledge is incomplete in providing us what we think is the evidence we need for the faith. The solution was found long ago: as one philosopher put it, "I believe, therefore I understand." True knowledge involves faith as well as book learning. So it is that he goes to God in prayer to find that which may not be derived from the records of the faith.

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar; and the message was true and *one of* great conflict, but he understood the message and had an understanding of the vision. In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with *a belt of* pure gold of Uphaz. His body also *was* like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength. But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about

to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding *this* and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. "Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet *future*." When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. And behold, one who resembled a human being was touching my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke and said to him who was standing before me, "O my lord, as a result of the vision anguish has come upon me, and I have retained no strength. "For how can such a servant of my lord talk with such as my lord? As for me, there remains just now no strength in me, nor has any breath been left in me." Then *this* one with human appearance touched me again and strengthened me. He said, "O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!" Now as soon as he spoke to me, I received strength and said, "May my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. "However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these *forces* except Michael your prince.

(Daniel 10:1-21 NASB)

Angels

We may begin by asking about the character and nature of angels. It is relatively rare to encounter a study of angels, for the simple reason that the Bible makes clear they are not to be worshiped. Rather, they are the messengers of God.

We can see clearly that these are created beings. If God creates something, he has a purpose for it. We may ask what the purpose of an angel is. There are several answers to this, but these three serve to cover most instances:

- ✚ First they are the messengers of God, and often enough the instrument of God. We see for example the angel being used to destroy large numbers of people. Mary's vision announcing the birth of Jesus was by an angel.
- ✚ Next, we know that they are sent to minister to the righteous. Throughout most of Christian history the church has taught that each of us has a guardian angel.
- ✚ Angels are particularly associated with the final judgment. We know that when Christ returns the angels will come with him in huge numbers.

Characteristics

We are not given much information about Angels. But there are some things we do know:

- ✚ First, we know that they are organized in various levels of the hierarchy. We have titles like Archangel, cherubim, Seraphim and so on.
- ✚ We also know that they are interested in human affairs. We find them looking into human affairs, inquiring as to the time and place of prophecy, and otherwise concerning themselves with the politics of the human race. This passage is an example.

- ✦ Angels are considered to be wise, mighty, holy and innumerable. And beyond that we are not given very much information.

Misconceptions

Given how little we really know about Angels, it is not surprising that we have seen some distortion concerning them.

- ✦ The greatest distortion comes from Milton: in his Paradise Lost, he sets up Satan as the ruler of hell. This he most certainly is not. Satan is a fallen angel, and he leads a band of angels deceived. Hell is reserved for him and his angels, but not for his rule.
- ✦ Starting with Faust, we have Satan as an urbane and cosmopolitan figure. It is the old myth that evil is enlightening. You must remember that Satan is a liar, and the father of lies. He and his demons have some of the same characteristics as angels, but you need to understand that in spiritual warfare there is a right and there is a wrong. Be on the right side
- ✦ Many artists have portrayed angels as soft and feminine. They tend to be rather fluffy, given completely inadequate wings, and look for all the world to be harmless. The angel in Scripture usually announces his presence with the phrase, "fear not."

Let me give you a different picture. This is a picture of the Annunciation by an artist named Rossetti.



In this painting you can see the look of peril on Mary's face. She is not at all happy; the angel is not at all fluffy; and she realizes that this is the most serious. Look at the angel's feet: they're on fire. Mary gives you all the impression of a woman who has been cornered in her own house. She's afraid, and has every reason to be afraid.

We must mention one other detail. It frequently occurs in the Old Testament that you see a figure named "the Angel of the Lord." Most scholars agree that this is the pre-incarnate Christ. Since Daniel does not fall down and worship this angel we assume that this angel is not Christ before the incarnation.

Spiritual Warfare

Perhaps the most important aspect of spiritual warfare is this: it exists. Most Christians would prefer to ignore it; those that don't often prefer to make him into a major part of their religion. The correct response is rather in between; as seen here, spiritual warfare is quite real. But the weapons of the Christian in this conflict indicate clearly that we have a different part to play than that of the angels. Indeed, I can think of no better phrasing than Paul had for the Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,
(Ephesians 6:10-18 NASB)

We are in spiritual warfare. But our part in that warfare is not the same of that of the angels.

Christian Weapons

in addition to Paul's writing, Daniel here gives us three weapons the Christian may use in spiritual warfare.

The first is fasting. The question might well ask, "why should I fast?" There are at least three good reasons (which I got from Thomas Aquinas):

- ✚ Fasting serves as a bridle to the flesh. It is hard to think of spiritual things when you are eating and drinking merrily. By fasting you put the body under control, and therefore it is not in opposition to spiritual warfare.
- ✚ It is also an outward sign of inward repentance. When people know you're fasting, the logical question is, "why?" It helps you prevent secret repentance.
- ✚ Since your mind is not on your body it can be on the things of the Lord.

The next is prayer. Have you ever wondered why you should pray for your country? Here's the answer; look what Daniel's prayers have done. How this works I do not know, but I do know that it works. The righteous people of God are permitted to intervene on behalf of their nation.

Think of it this way: in intercession, it is always the strong who intercede for the weak. I doubt our president prays for this nation with any great fervor. But all he has is political power. We have contact with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Who should be praying for whom?

Finally, there is the act of humbling oneself. In those days it was done with sackcloth and ashes. We don't have such a formula today. But is still true; humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Christian Defense

in addition to the weapons Paul outlines in Ephesians 6, I would add two things to your list of weapons the Christian must have:

- ✚ First, there is the life in the Spirit. If your Christian existence is not in touch with the Holy Spirit, you will be miserable at spiritual warfare. But if you walk in the Spirit every day, you will soon begin to see that your prayers are answered and that those you care for are cared for by God.

✚ Finally, there is the virtue of patience. Daniel got no results for three weeks --- but he continued to pray.

History Foretold - Daniel 11:1-35

The Prophecy

This section of Daniel is unique: practically every commentator agrees on what this section means. For all that, it is still a section of controversy.

Preliminaries

in reading this passage of Scripture there are a few ground rules we must observe.

- ✚ The passage is "Jerusalem-centric." That means that North and South, for example, are to be taken relative to Jerusalem. The suffering indicated is that of the Jews who lived in Palestine.
- ✚ Titles like "King of the North" are parallel to titles today such as, "Queen of England." They mean the same Royal rank and location, but not necessarily the same person.
- ✚ Indeed, given this interpretation, liberal scholars are adamant that the date of writing must be after 150 BC. Why? Because the prophecy is so accurate and so detailed they feel it must be written after the fact. Of course if you believe that prophecy is possible, then there is nothing wrong with the traditional date. This fact however does tell you that the prophecy in question is quite unique --- and very detailed.

Table of events

The table in question is taken from John Stephenson and in the web view will be a [hyperlink](#).

Why is this prophecy in Daniel?

The prophecy is so detailed that one may ask, "why is this here at all?" There are lessons to be learned:

- ✚ The first set of lessons concerns the nature of God. It is good for the Christian to know the character and the power of God. In particular, we see that he is omniscient, omnipotent, and ruling through divine providence.
- ✚ The second set of lessons we learn concern the nature of the Scripture. We must learn to see it as being revealed (rather than written after the fact); accurate, even when we are not dealing with the past; and in all cases instructive.
- ✚ Finally, this section is here so that you may be confident of the prophecies God has given. This is not an impractical point. Christ teaches us to be ready for his return at any time; human nature says, "but not just yet." Prophecy exists to warn us that he will return just as he says.

Lessons learned

Scripture is instructive; so let's see what we can learn from these Kings and the people they ruled.

Concerning Kings

In normal human existence the life of King is well beyond that of his subjects. It seems as if the rules just don't apply to our rulers. But this is not entirely so:

- ✚ First, they are human beings too. They have emotions, they get jealous, they do stupid things, they commit crimes, and in short do the same things that we use policemen to correct.
- ✚ Next, they all die. It sometimes looks like their reign will go on forever, and that we will always be oppressed. But they will die.
- ✚ Finally, despite all temptation, Machiavelli did not get it right. The scheming, murderous, conniving King does not prevail. It may seem so for quite some time, but the universe is a moral place.

Concerning people

it would appear that people in those days are very much like people in our time. In particular,

- ✚ The sins of the rulers are visited upon their people. It's well known in the Army that the private pays for the general's mistakes.
- ✚ As if that weren't bad enough, the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. You can see here that often enough the children appear to have no option but to attempt to avenge their fathers.
- ✚ Suffering is inevitable for the people --- but so is God's triumph.

About God's dominion

Examining this, we see 300 years of history in which the people of God are constantly being washed over by waves of invasion; oppressed by various rulers, and generally have a hard time. Why does God allow this? It seems as if politics are of no particular concern to him; or rather, that they're just not important to him. This is in fact correct. The ruler of the universe, the Almighty one, does not see politics the way we do. His purpose is to prepare his people for their ultimate blessing; therefore, a little dirty politics along the way doesn't seem to be a major problem.

But God is righteous; therefore, why does he allow such evil? The question is an old one. Discuss as you please, but note these things:

- ✚ First, he has a plan for the universe. His will ultimately will be done.
- ✚ But this must be reconciled the concept of free will.

How do we reconcile this? Perhaps Rabbi Akiva put it best: "all is surveyed, and the power is given."

Religion and Politics

The relationship of religion and politics has been a controversial topic since our earliest days. In this short lesson we will attempt to give some guidance as to how the to should relate.

Red Herrings

May we begin with a few red herrings? Here are some thoughts that you will hear which actually distract from our understanding of religion and politics.

- ✚ "You can't legislate morality." Of course you can. We do it all the time. For example, is bank robbery immoral? Of course it is. But that doesn't prevent us from passing a law against it.

- ✚ "Separation of church and state." This is taken to mean that anything the church (meaning of course, Christians) happens to think is right must be ignored. Our founding fathers intention was quite the reverse; they wanted to keep the state from ruling over the church. They had plenty of historical examples of why this was a good idea. It is only recently that liberals have claimed the church should have no business in the public arena of ideas. This is nonsense.
- ✚ "Morality can be kept in tiny little compartments." The example most cited is Bill Clinton; his affair with Monica Lewinsky is dismissed as being in a separate compartment from his ability to keep his promises (including the one to his wife.) This goes over well with the Liberals, who see sex as being a separate compartment of the rest of the human being. May I give you a counter example? Mike Duvall was an assemblyman from Orange County, California. He made the mistake of bragging about his sexual conquests into an open microphone; his constituents, being mainly conservative, took this to me that he was not worthy of his position. A promise is a promise; a politician should be able to keep one.

The Classic Christian View

It may come as a surprise to some, but there exists a classic view of the Christian relationship between church and state. Its main points are as follows:

- ✚ In most normal circumstances, the government is considered to be an agent of God. For example, we hire policemen. They exist to catch criminals. We hire judges to try and sentence the criminals. All these things are done to reduce crime or prevent crime. It is clear to see that these employees of the state are doing God's work in a minor way. The duty of the Christian is to support them in this.
- ✚ It does happen that we find rulers over us who are evil. We are warned that this is going to happen. The Christian response to this is to suffer, not revolt. The exception to that is when the ruler begins to take himself as being like God.
- ✚ The operating principle is given to us by Christ: "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." In short, we are to find out what duties we have to the government and perform them faithfully and cheerfully; and likewise to be sharply aware of our duties to God. The problem, of course, is in the details.

Problems in Democracy

A democracy presents some unusual problems for the classic Christian view. There are three particular types of problem:

- ✚ First, it is possible for the church to co-opt the state. An example of this in the United States would be the temperance movement. Whatever your views on temperance, it is clear that the movement was a religious one, particularly Christian, and rode a tide of victory to the abolishment of alcohol. In the process, much of American political life was skewed based upon the politicians preference as to temperance. It got rather ugly. The saving grace is that when the church co-opts the state there is a limit to what can be done. It is hard to imagine a democracy taken over by a theocracy.
- ✚ Second, it is possible for the state to co-opt the church. This is the much more common case. The usual symptom is division in the church, between those who are cooperating with the authorities and those who are defying them. An example of this in the early church history would be the Donatist controversy.
- ✚ The worst-case is when the state thinks itself supreme, and takes upon itself the responsibilities of God. The phrase, "the Fuhrer is always right," is not part of a comedy routine. In the earliest days of such a domination, the persecution of the church is indirect. Taxation and regulation are the usual forms; it's made clear that those who wish to advance in this world had best change their ways.

When that fails (not if) the more powerful means are employed. Christians are arrested and locked up. Sometimes they're shot. If you don't think this can happen now, consider that picketing an abortion mill is almost a certain guarantee of being arrested. Announcing from the pulpit that the Bible declares homosexuality to be a sin is now considered "hate speech". It can happen here.

Perhaps the most important point of this lesson is this: as Americans, we are accustomed to freedom of religion in a quiet country which honors God. That is an extraordinarily unusual circumstance. I fear that we are now moving to a time when the relationship between church and state will be more normal by historical standards. Oppression and martyrdom occur for good reason in church history. And church history is not over yet.

The Antichrist - Daniel 11:36-45

There is perhaps no personality in the Bible more mysterious and important as the Antichrist. In a curious way he is introduced to us here in Daniel, chapter 11. Let's begin by examining the Scripture.

Who is this?

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. "The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price. "At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

(Daniel 11:35-45 NIV)

Antiochus Epiphanes

The argument that this passage must refer to Antiochus Epiphanes is very simple: it's a continuation of the first 35 verses. But there are some significant problems with this view:

- ✚ The prophecy does not agree with the career. For example, he never conquered Egypt.
- ✚ The prophecy itself refers to the "time of wrath" or "time of the end." These are generally recognized to refer to the day of judgment and the coming of Christ. Those events clearly have not yet happened.
- ✚ In chapter 12, we shall see that these events are connected to the resurrection of the dead --- which also has not happened yet.
- ✚ Finally, the central figure of this particular passage is neither the "King of the North" or "King of the South." It would seem logical, therefore, that the passage refers to someone else.

Looking around through prophecy, most scholars agree this passage refers to the Antichrist. In particular we see some similarities with the Antichrist as described in section Thessalonians, chapter 2. Let's take a look at that passage:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed

to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 NIV)

As you can see, we have quite a bit of information about the Antichrist. There are other passages, particularly in first John, which mention the Antichrist but the major knowledge of the Antichrist in history to come is found in Revelation. The Antichrist is identified with the beast of Revelation. There is some dispute about that identification, but that is the opinion of a great majority of the scholars.

Candidates for the Job

There are two primary views about the Antichrist. The first, associated with the post-millennial and amillennial views of Revelation, hold this to be a figure in history. It is clear from Revelation that the Antichrist is associated with Rome. Many scholars conclude that he might also be Jewish, and this is given rise to any number of speculative answers concerning this person in history. There are literally hundreds of candidates who have been proposed to be the Antichrist. However, most scholars hold that the most likely candidate for Antichrist is the Pope. This breaks down into two views: one says it's some particular pope, the other says it's just the Papacy.

The second view, associated with the pre-millennial view of Revelation, holds that this figure is yet to come. Because of the ecumenical nature of premillennialism, this figure is usually not identified with the Pope but is seen as someone who is in Rome, ruling and showing the characteristics of the Antichrist, but not within the church.

Obviously, these two views are not easily reconciled, nor will we attempt to reconcile them today. Instead we shall attempt to give you the clues by which you might recognize the Antichrist when he comes, both in terms of his characteristics and the sequence of events which will occur in his arising.

Recognition

What is a "person?"

One of the difficulties of this passage is that we can't tell whether we are dealing with one individual or, as in the case of the Pope, a succession of individuals. We might begin with the asking of the question, "just what does it mean to say a person?"

- ✚ Please note first that a person doesn't necessarily have to have a body. We see that God is in three persons, two of whom have no body. Sherlock Holmes is a person; but he is not possessed of a body. So it could be that the Antichrist is a series of bodies which taken together are seen as a person --- such as the Pope.
- ✚ The Pope is such a person in the same sense that the King of England is such a person. If you would recall, the King of the North and the King of the South in the first part of this chapter are persons composed of multiple bodies in a sense.
- ✚ The key to identifying a person is -- personality. Can we say what this person is like? If we can, we may be able to spot him in real life.

Personality of the Antichrist

We know something about the personality of the Antichrist. In particular, this section of Daniel and chapter 2 of Second Thessalonians give us his key characteristics. Here's what we have from Daniel:

- ✚ He exalts himself above every God. We might take this to mean that he denies the existence of God, or any form of religious system. More likely, it holds that he is superior to such a system. A contemporary example of this would be those individuals who believe that science explains everything, and any form of religion must fit into their particular system of science and metaphysics.
- ✚ He says "unheard of things" about God. This could apply to any number of people today; after all, anyone with a "brilliant theory" about God can have a hearing today. Because we have rejected the concept of absolute truth, we hear all kinds of nonsense about God. So this aspect of the personality would also apply to a large number of people.
- ✚ He honors the "God of fortresses." Perhaps we might take this to mean that he believes military power is supreme; as Mao Tse-Tung would put it, "power grows out of the barrel of a cannon."

So at the very least, it is at least possible that this individual is alive today. Let's take a look at what Second Thessalonians has to say:

- ✚ We see him as "man of sin" also translated as "man of lawlessness." This is a man who ignores or defies the law; most probably it means one who defies what is described as the natural law. It is very common today to deny the existence of natural law; the absurdity of which is given in the fact that most of us do feel that murder is a crime. But this person would fit in very well today with the idea that each of us defines his own reality and his own morality.

- ✦ We are told that he takes his seat in the Temple of God. This would seem to imply that at least outwardly the person is associated with the church. If you believe this person is the Pope, this is fairly obvious. As we shall see from the sequence of events coming up next, it is highly likely that he is a person in authority over the church.
- ✦ Finally, we see that this man exalts himself to the point of being God. To the best of my knowledge, no one successfully maintains this status. A look at Revelation gives you more detail on this. The disturbing fact is this: many will trust this man as if he is God. We need to take warning about this.

Sequence of Events

We can recognize someone by their characteristics, their personality, or by their achievements. If I claim to be a great opera singer, I should be able to belt out a very sound aria. So let's look at the sequence of events that accompanied this man's rise to power:

- ✦ First, there is the apostasy. Apostasy means denying the faith; it is not the same thing as heresy, which is not the same thing as being mistaken. Being mistaken is something that happens to all of us; the chance that your teacher is right about each and every little detail of theology is exceedingly slim. Heresy is the denial of particular doctrines which are essential to the faith; for example, the relationship between Christ and God the father. Apostasy denies the central fact of the faith: that Jesus is the Christ, who died and rose again for our salvation. If this person is the Pope, these events are yet to come. If this person is within the faith, it is unlikely that he is in power now.
- ✦ We also know that "that which restrains him" must be removed before he can come. There are a number of interpretations about this; the most modern one is that we are talking about the Holy Spirit. In my humble opinion, this is incorrect --- for it appears that the Holy Spirit has no choice about it, which seems absurd. As you would suspect this is a futurist view, and the more recent opinion holds that it **is not the Holy Spirit but the gifts of the Holy Spirit that** restrained the man of sin. This conforms very well to the idea that the rapture occurs before the Antichrist is revealed, which is a main principle of the premillennialist interpretation of Revelation. The classic view, held from the earliest days of the church, is that this refers to the Roman Empire!⁶ Both Chrysostom and Augustine held that the Roman Empire would have to fall before Christ returned, based on these passages. Jerome tells us that this is the traditional interpretation of the church, dating back to the apostles.
- ✦ The "man of sin" is revealed, not discovered or created. If you will, events bring him to our notice. So it is entirely possible that he is living today, just that we don't recognize him yet. If you accept the classic view that the Roman Empire must fall first, you could see this person as the Pope. The final End of the Roman Empire did not occur until 1453 A.D., at the fall of Constantinople. This is generally taken as the date the Middle Ages end. It is very close to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. The post-millennial theory holds that this is when the man of sin was revealed as being the Pope. The revelation is the fact that he opposes the faith based upon the Scriptures, and in papal infallibility sets himself up as God.
- ✦ We should expect to see "signs and wonders" from this person. For those who think this is the Pope, we can see signs and wonders such as people being healed by touching relics of saints. If you want the Protestant side of this, there are any number of faith healers on the television airwaves today. If you see this as a futurist, this could mean the signs and wonders being done by science, viewed as evidence of the Bible must be false.

⁶ The thought was that the Roman Empire, bringing universal peace, made the spread of the Gospel much easier.

- ✦ This we accompanied by God sending a "deluding influence" or "powerful delusion." One candidate for this delusion is the theory of evolution.
- ✦ This person is going to be slain by the "breath of Christ". Older scholars held that this came in the Reformation; this refers to the influence of the Scriptures newly translated into common languages. Futurist views here hold when Christ comes he will slay the Antichrist, and that this is rather figurative.
- ✦ Finally, the last event in this sequence, is the Day of the Lord. This refers to the return of Jesus Christ; Seventh-day Adventists to the contrary notwithstanding, this event has yet to occur.

What should we do about these things?

Let's take a look again at second Thessalonians Chapter 2 for some advice from St. Paul.

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 NIV)

It would be comforting, I suppose, to be given some prescription like anointing things with holy oil. Paul does not do that; rather, he gives us some simple instructions:

- ✦ First, remember that you are loved by God. Remember the relationship you have with him. If you stand in that relationship, you cannot be deceived by the Antichrist. You know that God is love, and that God loves you. The "God of fortresses" is not superior to the God of love.
- ✦ Remember that you are saved. You are saved by the sanctification of his Holy Spirit; you are saved by faith; and you are saved by the preaching of the Gospel to which you listened.
- ✦ Therefore, you should stand firm in the teachings and traditions of the church. You should be able to say, "our God, and the God of our fathers." He is "our God" because we have worked out our salvation in fear and trembling. He is the "God of our fathers" because we have examined that which

has been learned by previous generations and make it our own. It is not blind obedience to tradition; rather, it is accepting the truth found in the past.⁷

✚ Finally, we are to pray. We are to pray for comfort, for the coming of the antichrist will bring tribulation to the true church. We are to pray for hope, so that we may firmly know that our Lord will return and put an end to the Antichrist. We are to pray for strength; we're going to need it in times like that.

⁷ It bothers me much that our congregation proudly proclaims that we have only one tradition at Eastside – which is that we have no traditions.

The Resurrection of the Dead - Daniel 12

It is a somewhat common but incorrect assumption that the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is strictly from the New Testament. As we shall see here in Daniel 12, this is incorrect. We will examine the resurrection of the dead from both the Old Testament and the New Testament in this lesson.

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge." Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?" He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

(Daniel 12:1-13 NIV)

Resurrection

Old Testament

As seen here, the Old Testament specifically proclaims the physical resurrection of the dead. We know something about this from the following biblical passages:

- ✚ First, this resurrection is not one to a ghostly body, nor is this a symbol for resurrection meaning that my grandchildren or descendants will see this. It is a resurrection in the flesh. (Job 19:25 – 27)
- ✚ As we see in Ezekiel chapter 37, this resurrection is performed by the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel is specifically told to "prophesy to the breath." The breath is the same word used for spirit — as in the Holy Spirit — in the New Testament. This makes sense, for it is parallel to the way in which creation itself was performed. You will recall the "spirit brooding upon the waters."
- ✚ At this resurrection death itself ceases to exist. We die no more, as proclaimed in Isaiah 25:8.

New Testament

Of course, what we learned in the Old Testament is hardly sufficient for our curiosity. The New Testament does add some details:

- ✚ We are told that those who are included in this resurrection shall be "like the Angels." (Matthew 22:23-32)
- ✚ We are also told that this will happen at the return of Christ (see Matthew 24:30-31.)
- ✚ One thing which is not clear in the Old Testament, but is made very clear in the New Testament, is that there is more than one resurrection of the dead. As Luke 14:13-14 tells us, the righteous will rise with Christ, which implies the unrighteous will not. Various schemes have been proposed for this; the current record holder is Hal Lindsey who says there will be six resurrections, including that of Christ.
- ✚ The resurrection is associated with the Judgment (Revelation 20:4-6.) So

The Emerging Church

It is not surprising that the emerging church does not see the resurrection of the dead as being a literal or physical event. One would think with so many references in the Old Testament and the New Testament that this would be very difficult to maintain. It is not. This is explained by "trampoline theology." The explanation is relatively simple; all these references are considered to be mythological passages in the Bible. Their use is to serve as a trampoline, for us to spring upwards to new theological insights. As one writer put it, "we need to free Jesus from brick-ianity." The theory is that our traditional interpretations of the Bible are holding us down and bricking us in. We need to interpret these things spiritually, not literally.

Just exactly what that means varies by preacher. In our own church, our pastor delivered his sermon on the subject of heaven. One would think it would be difficult to do without mentioning the resurrection of the dead, but he did. In his view, good people go to heaven after they die — and that's the end of the story.

To see why this gives us great problems, we must first examine the central fact of Christianity: the resurrection of Christ.

The Resurrection of Christ

Paul refers to the resurrection of Christ as being of first importance. Let's see why.

Received and Passed on

it's important to understand what Paul is saying; it's that he did not invent the resurrection of Christ, nor did any of the other apostles. It is something that he got from those who were eyewitnesses and as well from the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The specific points of his arguments are:

- ✚ The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was prophesied in the Old Testament. Those of you who have an annotated Bible will see that there are many, many verses associated with this topic.
- ✚ Christ himself appeared to over 500 people, including the apostles on more than one occasion. This has provoked our modern thinkers to proclaim that it must be a mass hallucination; however, these facts don't accord very well with hallucination at all. This was a popular theory in the 19th century

when people did not understand hallucinations. With all those witnesses, it's tough to conclude that they're all lying — especially when they can get crucified themselves for doing so.

- ✚ The first importance of the resurrection you can also be seen by simply looking at the preaching of the New Testament church. The central fact of New Testament preaching is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no sense whatever of "trampoline theology" in the New Testament.

Arguments

Paul himself makes a number of arguments in first Corinthians chapter 15. We may review three of them:

- ✚ Christ is a human being; he is man. If Christ did not rise, then no one can rise; it is impossible.
- ✚ Consider Christianity as a religion belonging only to this world. If you do, you will see that its elements of self-sacrifice, the risk of persecution and the lack of fear towards death all combine to make Christianity a religion which clearly is not in accord with the idea that the only stuff that exists is in this world. Why you be so stupid as to believe something like that, when you can eat drink and be merry?
- ✚ Also, if the apostles didn't see this, but chose instead to be faithful to this idea of the resurrection despite the persecution they faced, then these men must of been seriously mentally disturbed. Further, these men lived in the Roman Empire. The Romans were quite capable of extracting the truth via torture; yet none of those who proclaim their faith in Christ ever said it was a hoax. Many renounce their faith under torture; no one broke the conspiracy.

The Effect of Christ on the Christian

One may also see the validity of the resurrection by its effect on the life of the Christian.

- ✚ The primary factor is the change between sin dominating the human being and the hold of sin being eliminated. No longer are we helpless before sin; we aren't entirely rid of it, but now Christ is our master. If you think this has no effect, I suggest you look into Celebrate Recovery. It's a 12 step group — and you know how well they work. For Christians, the reason for that is that sin no longer has the death grip it had.
- ✚ Christians are forgiven; therefore they forgive — it's a package deal.
- ✚ Most of all, consider the attitude Christians have towards death. Or at least the one they should have. The death of the Christian often prompts a joyous remembrance known as a funeral. For we hold the to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Fear of death does not belong to the Christian, though fear of dying might.

We may summarize it this way: because Christ rose, we have proof of the resurrection of the dead. God has promised that resurrection to us, and therefore our lives are completely different. To be a Christian and not believe in the resurrection of the dead seems to me to be the strangest distortion of Christianity.

Nature of the Resurrected Body

So of course we want to know: just what does this resurrected body look like? How does it perform? Am I going to like it? Here is what we know:

"Utterly Different"

Let's start with the physical characteristics of the body in question.

- ✦ We are told that this body is imperishable. That is to say, it does not decay or grow defects — rather it starts out perfect and stays that way.
- ✦ It is a "glorious" body. One writer held that if such a body were to walk into the room right now, you and I would be strongly tempted to fall down at its feet and worship. It is a body which shares the glory of God.
- ✦ It is powerful. We see this in some of the bodily manifestations of Jesus Christ; walking on water, walking through locked doors, refusing to be recognized until you want to.
- ✦ Most important of all, it is tangible. Thomas was told to stick his hands in the nail prints and his hand into the side which a spear had carved out a hollow space in the ribs. This is a body you can touch and feel.

"In the Twinkling of an Eye"

This has some interesting implications: we are told that our bodily transformation will happen in the twinkling of an eye — virtually instantaneously.

- ✦ At the very least, we should be ready for it. There will be no time for negotiation when this transformation occurs. That's why Christ tells us to be ready.
- ✦ This also implies a great change in physical and spiritual reality. This is not a slow metamorphosis but rather an instantaneous change. It is therefore not a natural process, but the divine one.

What Should We Do

One thing which we haven't mentioned so far is this: there is nothing you can do about it. This change to the new body is going to happen, if not to you at least to other Christians. In the last verse of First Corinthians 15, Paul gives us these instructions:

- ✦ Stand firm. Don't let anything move you. This of course implies that something will try to move you. Over the course of Christian history the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead has been under continuous attack. The major attack is upon the resurrection of Christ, the opponents of Christianity know that the resurrection of the dead is perfectly plausible if Christ is risen from the dead. It is only recently that the resurrection of the dead aside from the resurrection of Christ has been attacked. This comes from postmodernism, which proclaims that there is no such thing as absolute truth.
- ✦ Give yourself fully to the work. If this great and glorious new body is to be yours, how can you possibly justify being lukewarm and apathetic to the work of Christ? Great days are coming, and you will want the rewards that are coming with them.

Remember this: your labors in the Lord are not in vain, because the Lord rewards those who work for him; indeed when he speaks of it, he says that the reward will be well out of proportion to the labor in question. There is a hell to shun, a heaven to gain — and beyond that a new heaven and new earth. Included in that is a new body for you. Be ready.

A Fish Story - (Jonah, chapter 1)

No other story of the Old Testament has been ridiculed as often as that of Jonah. It comes as a surprise, then, when we read it: the writer was quite serious about this. It is no weaving of legends; the man Jonah had a father and a village – in those days quite sufficient to make him human. Things haven't really changed. Let us examine, then, the great fish story of the Old Testament.

The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten *it* for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep. So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps *your* god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." Each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity *has struck* us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account *has* this calamity *struck* us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"--for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm *has come* upon you." However, the men rowed *desperately* to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming *even* stormier against them. Then they called on the LORD and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased." So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

[\(Jon 1:1-17 NASB\)](#)

Background

There is some debate as to the destination Jonah has chosen. Some consider it to be Tarsus, which would be in modern Turkey. Others point out a similar name in the south of what is now Spain. In either case, Jonah's voyage would be a dangerous one.

But not – perhaps – as dangerous as Nineveh. Nineveh was a famous city of the Old Testament, said to have been build originally by Nimrod. At this time it was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire –

the enemies of the Jews. Its destruction, prophesied in Zephaniah⁸ and Nahum⁹, took place about a hundred years later.

Jonah simply doesn't want to go there. In this he echoes Moses and Elijah, two men who both thought they were not suited to the job. Indeed, making excuses to God as to why you can't do it seems to be a part of the job. But there is a lesson in this – especially for those who have been called to a task:

At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. "When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. "Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. "Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. "However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself."

(Eze 3:16-21 NASB)

We often forget that those who are called to preach the word are given a heavy load. Our Lord himself makes it clear that we must not look back, once the work is given:

⁶²Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62)

That being said, we can now examine this little incident by its characters. We will begin with Jonah.

The character of Jonah

Though it is not specifically stated here, Jonah was a prophet of the Old Testament.¹⁰ One of the most fascinating of coincidences appears with Jonah. He is a contemporary of Amos, the prophet. Amos was to preach to the Israelites; Jonah to the Ninevites. What a reproach to those ancient Jews – that the preaching of God to their enemies brought repentance, while preaching to them brought only more disobedience.

We should learn from this. When God allows trouble in someone's life, and they repent because of it, we should be quick to learn by example. Otherwise we may learn by repetition.

Jonah, it is clear, does not have a very rational relationship with God. He fears God – both as creator and Lord, the one who controls the very reality in which he lives. More than that, God has spoken to him. He has directly commanded him to go to Nineveh. Consider it: what would you do if

⁸ Zephaniah 2:13-15

⁹ Nahum 1:11-14

¹⁰ See II Kings 14:25

God spoke directly to you and commanded you to go to, say, North Korea? Would this increase your faith, or would it increase your sense of panic?

Jonah's faith, on the other hand, permits him the fancy that he can ignore God when it is convenient. Or at the very least, he can leave the area, head in the opposite direction – because there is nothing God can do about it. It is not wise to think of this as an ancient failing.

I give you Granoff's law: "I want to sleep with my girlfriend, therefore there is no God."¹¹ When it is inconvenient – especially when it is repugnant – we want nothing to do with God's commands. We presume upon his character by simply refusing either to do or discuss it. After all, He's the forgiving sort, isn't he? This view fails to take into account the slight possibility that God might have an opinion on that subject.

Here's Jonah's problem in step by step fashion:

- ✚ Nineveh is one wicked city – San Francisco comes to mind today.
- ✚ Not only that, Nineveh is the city of our enemies. (Dodger fans will understand that one).
- ✚ BUT – I know God. He is the kind that is slow to anger and quick to forgive. If I go there, they'd probably repent. He'd forgive them. That makes me look like a fool, and worse yet keeps my enemy from getting what he deserves.
- ✚ Therefore, I will frustrate God's intentions and make him find another fool. I'll head in exactly the opposite direction. He'll have to forgive me and find someone else.

This, as we see, reckons without the living God.

The character of God

Those who are frequent flyers know the problem well: you get to the airport and the plane is late, being maintained, lost its compass, is being cleaned, or something – and you're late. But note that you can only be late when a schedule has been declared. In Jonah's time, ships sailed when the wind and tide looked right. Isn't it convenient that there was a ship waiting for Jonah?

How often we hear of God opening doors! We usually hear this when someone is praising God for his goodness; we need to remember that he will open the doors that lead to repentance, too. He works all things together for the good of those who love him – and some of those things seem very bad at the time.

But that's God's method. We see it here. He has called Jonah to service, and when Jonah refuses and runs away, we do not see the often-expected lightning strike. Nor do we see the other extreme of God doing nothing. Instead, God has made some travel arrangements for Jonah. This trip will put him in a position where he is obliged to do two things:

- ✚ He will acknowledge his sins.
- ✚ He will proclaim the greatness of God.

¹¹ The Granoff in question is now a firm believer in Christ.

Why these two? These two are primary requirements for a relationship with God. If you want a personal relationship with someone, you must have a very good idea of who the other person is – and who you are. You are the sinner (aren't we all?); He is God Almighty.

He is also the God who provides. When the moment comes, God provides Jonah with three things:

- ✚ He provides him with understanding - in particular, that the threat this storm poses is due to himself.
- ✚ He provides him with guidance. There is no sense saying, "It's your fault," if you don't also provide guidance on what to do about it. (How many of us can say that we do that, too?)
- ✚ He then provides a test of faith. Jonah will pass the test – which will render him that much stronger for the task ahead.

Character of the sailors

The sailors might be modern men, for all their reaction. First, they are not particularly concerned with sound thinking or theology. When the boat's in trouble, the rule is that everyone gets up and helps – and everyone prays to whatever god he thinks appropriate. Maybe one of these gods will be awake and help out here.

So naturally they wake up the Jew from the hill country and tell him to do likewise. Make a vow to him, or something. These gods can be bribed if your offering is big enough. So get with it, country cousin.

As the waters rise, the sailors indulge themselves in another human failing, the placement of blame. Obviously, this malevolent storm must be intended as a lesson to one of us. Let's find out which of us it is. You see the idea: we're not sure who it is, but we're sure it's somebody's fault. The method of selection seems a bit arbitrary, but in this instance it works. Sometimes God humors us in that – which is no reason to think it sound theology.

The real trouble comes when they realize who they are dealing with – the God of creation, the one who made all things. This god cannot be bribed – and now where are we?

They do get one thing right: God is righteous. A minute earlier they had found out whose fault it was. But he belongs to God Almighty. If he can whip up a storm like this, we don't want to anger him by murdering one of his own. So, we all pull for shore. Just like us – do whatever it takes to placate God.

And just like us, they eventually run out of options. When all other methods have failed, they follow instructions. They throw Jonah overboard. But just to make sure they are in good graces with this Jehovah, they offer sacrifices and make vows.

Who is our God?

We see in this some pictures of God – and they seem remarkably familiar to us; they haven't changed that much.

One view is that God can be manipulated by bribery (call it an offering), ignored when convenient and finally will be quick to forgive when we decide to come home. This is a very convenient god; the only real problem is that there is no such god. But we do keep looking for him – even in the church.

Another view is that of the God who needs to be placated now and then. In those days it was sacrifices and vows; today it's occasional church attendance and a sporadic check now and then. God? We have him covered, no problem. He may be the angry God, but I'm on his good side.

Then there is the Lord God Almighty. He has three characteristics shown here:

- ✚ He is perfectly willing to allow you to get yourself in deep trouble – especially when it will help you understand how you got there. Sometimes we need the fear to realize how serious life is.
- ✚ He is also the God who will turn evil into a greater good. We have seen it often; we should praise him for it.
- ✚ He is, ultimately, the God who Provides. In the voyages of life, in times of trouble, and ultimately at the Cross.

The only question left: just who is your God?

Fish Faith - (Jonah 2)

The prophets of the Old Testament were a rather rugged lot. Perhaps God selected them for their stubbornness. If he did select Jonah for that, we should also note that he honored Jonah by using his experience as a type of the Resurrection.

As you read through this lesson, there are two points you should keep in mind:

- ✚ Whom the Lord loves, he disciplines.
- ✚ Sometimes he has to discipline us very loudly – because we’re just not listening.
So it is with Jonah.

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. "For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.' "Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. "I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars *was* around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple. "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD." Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

(Jon 2:1-10 NASB)

“In my distress...”

It is of first importance: Jonah was motivated to pray. He was in deep (pun intended) trouble. It took a little arranging, but God has gotten the man’s attention.

Once that happens, we look to the reaction of Jonah. He could have whined and complained; he could have said a lot of things. But when we examine his prayer, we see he has put his words on the most important problem he has: his relationship with God.

Acknowledgment: God is responsible

Jonah does not place the blame on “bad luck.” He doesn’t suppose that God is being capricious about this; instead, he begins with his confession.

- ✚ First, that he knows that God is responsible for his present circumstance. Most of us don’t do that. We start off with “God, I’ve had a bad day and ...” Jonah knows exactly who put him in this mess.
- ✚ He also knows why: his own sin. He’s the one running away.
- ✚ So, he implicitly recognizes the justice of God.

How often we miss that last point! We can be very eloquent on the subject of how God is not fair to us. How could he miss our prayers the way He does? Could it possibly be that He is righteous, and is waiting for us to repent?

Acknowledgement: I'm desperate

Jonah, at least, has the press of physical circumstances to make the point. The sailor's handbook has no section on what to do when swallowed by a fish. Keep calm – and light a fire?

This is not as common as our usual desperate end: in our emotional and spiritual circumstances. Is it not the case that we exhaust all means but God before we give up – and tell God the obvious?

Acknowledgment: I feel like I lost God

This is the depth of despair – to carry the feeling that God no longer cares for you, that he is indifferent to your fate. Sometimes the weight of our problems drives us to this. We begin to say that God could never forgive me for what I've done. This is not depression – this is despair.

But take heart, Christian. God is not through with you yet.

Job's Prayer

...for God's presence

To those who know the Lord, there is no feeling so bad as the thought that the Lord has left you; no assurance so grand as his presence. Stripped of his pride, Job wants only one thing: to be restored to God's fellowship. For Job, that would mean the worship of God in his temple. To Christians of all times, the presence of God has been described as "sweet." It is an adjective which fails to describe it, for there are no words high enough to describe that fellowship.

Humility

Jonah's prayer lacks some of the features of our own. For example, there is no word of advice to God – no instructions on just how to get out of this mess. Indeed, Jonah seems to assume that God, having got him in this mess, is just as capable of getting him out. The real question is, does He want to?

Another lack in Jonah's prayer is that of reproach. Those who are evangelical Christians often assume a familiarity with God which would have stunned Christians of earlier time. How shocked they would be when they heard us telling God that He's wrong!

Perhaps Jonah had read of an earlier man's encounter with God; that of Job:

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell *Me*, if you have understanding, Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? "On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy? "Or *who* enclosed the sea with doors When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb; When I made a cloud its garment And thick darkness its swaddling band, And I placed boundaries on it And set a bolt and doors, And I said, "Thus far you shall come, but no farther; And here shall your proud waves stop'?"

(Job 38:4-11 NASB)

The Temple

Job directs his prayers at the Temple, where God's Name is. It is well beyond the scope of this lesson to deal with the Name of God – but one thought might be permitted. God knows that we need

material, tangible things to deal with. We are uncomfortable with a God who is so “other-worldly.” But since the coming of Jesus, we know that God understands that; he came to us as one of us.

God Answers

One of the great proofs of God’s amazing grace comes in answer to prayer. Not the answer which comes to those with clean hands; the answer that comes to us who are guilty. Despite our guilt, despite his judgment of our sins, he answers.

How

God answers our prayers:

- ✚ In all circumstances – the possible and the impossible. It’s just that when we get to the impossible circumstances, we notice it a bit more clearly.
- ✚ He answers just in time. How often we have had his deliverance at the last hour!
- ✚ He answers us piece by piece – as if we could take only so much.

Why?

God’s actions seem irrational to some; this is because they do not understand his purpose. His purpose is not to show us “who’s God around here.” No, he does these things for other reasons:

- ✚ It is his desire to have fellowship with us; his answers to prayer tend to restore us to that fellowship.;
- ✚ He also desires that we be merciful, just as he is merciful. Some of us do know how to learn from example.

The Picture of God’s Grace

In Job’s prayer we see some aspects of God’s grace.

Open to all

In his prayer Job tells us that those who worship idols “forfeit the grace of God.” In our time we see very little of idols, but they were commonplace then. In our time, the cares of this world have taken the place of idols. If you would understand why you can’t hear God’s answer, take a look at your cares and worries. Perhaps you hear them so much that you cannot hear God.

Our response

Job also gives us a model here – when we need to respond to God’s salvation.

- ✚ First, we should not keep this quiet – rather, we should tell others how thankful we are for what God has done for us.
- ✚ Next, Jonah promises sacrifice to the Lord. Look at it this way: even for a small gift you should send a thank-you card. How much more so when God has pulled you out of trouble?
- ✚ Finally, he will perform his vows. He’s telling God (and us) that the promises he made in the belly of that fish are binding – even if the fish coughs him up. How many of us can say we kept our promises that way?

Salvation comes from the Lord

It seems so simple, doesn't it? We all know this. But hear what one of the great preachers said about this:

Salvation is the work of God. It is He alone who quickens the soul "dead in trespasses and sins," and it is He also who maintains the soul in its spiritual life. He is both "Alpha and Omega." "Salvation is of the Lord." If I am prayerful, God makes me prayerful; if I have graces, they are God's gifts to me; if I hold on in a consistent life, it is because He upholds me with His hand. I do nothing whatever towards my own preservation, except what God Himself first does in me. Whatever I have, all my goodness is of the Lord alone. Wherein I sin, that is my own; but wherein I act rightly, that is of God, wholly and completely. If I have repulsed a spiritual enemy, the Lord's strength nerved my arm. Do I live before men a consecrated life? It is not I, but Christ who liveth in me. Am I sanctified? I did not cleanse myself: God's Holy Spirit sanctifies me. Am I weaned from the world? I am weaned by *God's* chastisements sanctified to my good. Do I grow in knowledge? The great Instructor teaches me. All my jewels were fashioned by heavenly art. I find in God all that I want; but I find in myself nothing but sin and misery. "He only is my rock and my salvation." Do I feed on the Word? That Word would be no food for me unless the Lord made it food for my soul, and helped me to feed upon it. Do I live on the manna which comes down from heaven? What is that manna but Jesus Christ himself incarnate, whose body and whose blood I eat and drink? Am I continually receiving fresh increase of strength? Where do I gather my might? My help cometh from heaven's hills: without Jesus I can do nothing. As a branch cannot bring forth fruit except it abide in the vine, no more can I, except I abide in Him. What Jonah learned in the great deep, let me learn this morning in my closet: "Salvation is of the Lord."

Let's remember just who is God, and who is not.

The Quality of Mercy - Jonah 3,4

One of the blessings of the Scripture is that we can see ourselves in its mirror – and learn.

Jonah 3

¹Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ²“Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

³Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. ⁴On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” ⁵The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

⁶When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

¹⁰When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah 4

¹But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

⁴But the LORD replied, “Have you any right to be angry?”

⁵Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. ⁷But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

⁹But God said to Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?”

“I do,” he said. “I am angry enough to die.”

¹⁰But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”

Repentance

Repentance is far more often preached than practiced.

We are very concerned with the sins of others, sure of what they need to do – and finding that it seems very difficult to them. Why the difficulty? If we would but examine ourselves, we could see the difficulties very clearly.

The nature of repentance

Most of us are quite convinced that, in large part, we are doing the right things in the right way. “Change is good – you go first” is our motto. But see the types of change required by repentance:

- ✚ *Change of mind.* At the very least, we must recognize that what we are doing is wrong; we must say so and be convinced of it. There is no repentance if I still think I did it right.
- ✚ *Change of heart.* Equally, however, I must have a change of heart. Simply acknowledging that I did it wrong is of no use unless I turn my will in the right direction. Sometimes this needs help from God.
- ✚ *Obedience.* If you are now pointed in the right direction, step on out. Anyone can say “I’m sorry.”

The successful repentant

Have you ever wondered why your repentance seems so shallow and fruitless? Perhaps you have not considered the lessons the Bible gives you on the subject. Repentance, after all, is a skill, if nothing else. Evidently we are meant to practice that skill until we get it right. Like most skills, success lies in balancing between the extremes.

- ✚ *Dare not presume.* When you repent, do not presume upon your Lord. Don’t start with, “Well, I know you’ll forgive, so I really can make this quick.” Remember you are dealing with Almighty God.
- ✚ *Dare not despair.* Some come to repentance with an attitude of hopelessness. “I’ve done this so many times before.... How can God ever forgive me this time?” Do not despair; he is God, he is the unchanging and eternal one who loves you.

The intensity of repentance

Do you see how the Ninevites went about this? Their attitude was one of true repentance. See how intensely they sought God’s mercy:

- ✚ *Focus on God.* They stopped their daily activities – even to the point of not feeding their animals. Nothing was allowed to get between them and God.
- ✚ *Outward display of inward change.* Many of us hope the world never notices our repentance. They, on the other hand, sought the assistance of those around them. How? By taking the traditional signs of repentance on themselves, they implicitly asked others to hold them accountable. If you proclaim your repentance, it creates social pressure on you to follow through.
- ✚ *Put aside their possessions.* The animals were used here only as bleating reminders that their lust for possessions had driven their sin. They threw out the things that were causing them to sin.

Restoration to service

Jonah himself teaches us a lesson here. Many of us fall into the pit (of our own making) which holds that once we have sinned, we can never regain the relationship we had with God. We could never go back to serving him in the same way. But God paints a different picture. After Jonah’s repentance, God does not find some quiet backwater for him – he sends him on to Nineveh. What can we see in this?

- ✚ *Same task, same esteem.* God regards Jonah just as he did before. He goes to Nineveh in the same rank – prophet – that he was before.
- ✚ *Same task, no relief.* Just because Jonah has repented does not mean that he gets a new assignment. No, God wants to show the world that all are sinners – but repentance restores your relationship.
- ✚ *Same task, God's acceptance.* If God gives you the same task that you had before your repentance, then handing that same task to you is a sign that he has accepted your repentance as real.
It's interesting to think about. If you were told you had 40 days to live, what would you do?

Wrath

Jonah, of course, is not done teaching us by his mistakes. He now discovers the sin of wrath. We need to study this sin carefully, for it is the root of much separation from God.

The nature of wrath

The first thing you must see about wrath (or anger) is that it arises from hatred – and therefore cannot withstand love. You can be sad over a loved one's mistakes – but vicious wrath takes hatred.

Worse, when wrath arises, its sure sign is that it is feeding itself – at your expense. Wrath loves to rehearse the wrongs done while you are awake in the middle of the night.

Ultimately, wrath consumes the wrathful. Have you ever met someone so swallowed up by his own anger that his life purpose is revenge? It is a terrible fate for a human being, made in the image of the loving God.

Wrath – the barrier to mercy

Have you ever tried to forgive someone while you are still mad at them? Rather difficult, isn't it? One of the first steps in reconciliation is to get both parties to calm down. If left to itself, wrath will become the excuse we use to avoid forgiving. "How can I forgive that dirty rotten..... when he did"

But understand one thing: if you will not forgive, you will not be forgiven. If your wrath stands between you and forgiveness, then rush to God in prayer and ask him to remove your wrath.

Anger with God

Sometimes our anger is not with our fellow human beings; sometimes it is with God himself. When things don't go the way we expected, we are tempted to blame God – even to become angry with him, as Jonah did here. Even God's virtues became a cause for our wrath ("I knew you were quick to forgive..."). Such anger is a failing with us.

- ✚ *Failure to recognize his righteousness.* In our anger we forget who He really is: the righteous one. When we feel ourselves wronged by God, we are saying that we know more than God does about righteousness. Is this wise?
- ✚ *Failure to recognize his sovereignty.* He is, after all, Lord of all things. When you are displeased with what he has done, do you then deny him the right (as he certainly has the power) to do

- ✚ *Failure to recognize his mercy.* When at long last our enemy repents, and begs forgiveness, do we, like Jonah, become angry? This is a failure to recognize the mercy of God – mercy upon which we all depend.¹²

Sometimes we must remember that God has mercy upon whom he has mercy – and be simply grateful that we are among the “whom.”

OBS – Older Brother Syndrome

If you would understand Jonah’s attitude toward the Ninevites, you need to look back to the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son. To refresh your memory:

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. "And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be. "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him. "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.

(Luk 15:25-31 NASB)

The older brother

May I point out three things which the older brother teaches us?

- ✚ The attitude that the sinner should not be allowed restoration after repentance is a very common one. Each of us understands the older brother’s point of view. He, after all, is the one who did the hard work.
- ✚ This point of view is based upon our own righteousness. The older brother is undoubtedly the more righteous. But it is not the prodigal’s righteousness which is the standard of judgment – it is the Lord’s.
- ✚ Note, please, how the father *gently* corrects his son. Those of us who try to live holy lives day by day need to be alert for the gentle correction of God. (See the same with Jonah).

Mercy and judgment – a relationship

One reason we act like the older brother is that we want judgment. We want the father to declare that we behaved righteously while the prodigal did not. But do you not see that mercy declares judgment? How can the judge announce an act of mercy for the innocent? If you didn’t do the crime, how is it merciful not to punish you? Mercy declares judgment – but does not take vengeance. That, in honesty, is our problem. We want mercy – but only for the worthy. But consider:

- ✚ Is there such a thing as a sinner who deserves mercy? It is an oxymoron.
- ✚ Even our Lord made no attempt to distinguish the worthy sinners from the unworthy. He knows that all were unworthy – and therefore is merciful to all who will come to him.

¹² See the parable of the vineyard owner, Matthew 20:1-16

✚ Consider too that even the vilest of sinners has a place in the kingdom – and even in the judgment to come. These same Ninevites will rise up on the last day to condemn the generation to which Christ came.¹³

Forgiven much, love much

Perhaps our troubles stem from this: we know that those who are forgiven much, love much. But is it not equally true that those who are forgiven little, love little? Do you not see the peril for the Christian? If I'm forgiven little, I love little. If I love little, I forgive little. If I forgive little, I am forgiven little. The spiral into wrath and hatred is always before us.

What is the Christian to do, then? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. How can I do that? It is no accident that Jesus told the sinners to repent – and told the righteous Nicodemus that he must be born again.

¹³ Matthew 12:41