

# Daniel: Civil Servant and Saint

*David Gooding*

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## Introduction

The prophecy of Daniel is at first sight very gloomy. It propounds the view that there is much evil in the world and the very structures of society are so fatally flawed that the age of peace and glory for which we all long will not be brought about except by the coming of the Messiah. He will put aside all present forms of government and set up his own kingdom.

For this view Daniel's prophecy has been dubbed *apocalyptic* and people do not like apocalyptic. They say it denigrates and takes the heart out of sincere human endeavour to make the world a better place, and it leads people to withdraw from life and go and sit on a mountain waiting for the second coming, which they frantically predict will happen next year, or next Tuesday.

But this criticism is manifestly unfair. The author of the prophecy of Daniel spent his long life as a successful civil servant, first under the Babylonians and then as head of the imperial administration of the vast Persian empire. He obviously did not run away from life and its responsibilities. He believed, in fact, that it is in the daily responsibilities of life that we are to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ. From his long experience of men and things he points out how fatally easy it is for us to get life's values upside down; to treat things of relative value as if they were of absolute value, and things of absolute value as if they were of little or no value at all.

As you study the prophecy of Daniel, may you hear his critique of the world's education, politics, culture and values. Consider with him the glorious and realistic hope that God sets before the world and learn how rightly to prepare for the second coming of Christ.

## God and Education

The book of Daniel is one of the more famous prophetic books of the Bible. It not only has some of its leading chapters devoted entirely to prophetic themes, but the imagery and thought forms used in those visions and prophecies become very often the language in which the New Testament writers in turn talk to us about future and coming events. From a prophetic point of view the book of Daniel is doubly significant. It is significant in its own right and for the validity of its own prophecies; significant also for the foundational help that it gives to understanding the language of the New Testament when it talks of the second coming of Christ and the affairs of the world that will lead up to that coming.

### ***How to study the Book of Daniel***

There are basically two ways of studying the book of Daniel. The first is the way of the *systematic theologian*. You will soon gather that I am not one of those. It requires great skill to be an efficient systematic theologian, and you will soon perceive that I do not possess that skill. But the systematic theologian, when he comes to the book of Daniel, will aim to study particularly the chapters and verses that talk about prophetic things. Putting them alongside all else that he can gather from the books of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments where they talk about prophetic things, he will then attempt to arrange all these details into a grand scheme of prophecy. Having erected the scheme of prophecy, he will then incessantly go back over Scripture in general, the book of Daniel in particular, and seek ever more exactly and accurately to fit the details of these books into the scheme that he has erected. That is the way of the systematic theologian and it is an exceedingly important and necessary way of approaching holy Scripture. All the first-rate expositors and theologians tend to follow it. I shall not be following it.

I shall be following a second method, and that is to study the book of Daniel as it stands on the pages of holy Scripture. While many of the chapters of Daniel are concerned to prophesy the future, many of its chapters have very little, or nothing at all, to do with prophecy. They are historical records of certain events that took place in the life of Daniel and his colleagues in the courts of Babylon and Persia. If we were only interested in prophecy we would be inclined to neglect the chapters that talk about these historical affairs. Whereas, if we interest ourselves in the whole of the book of Daniel, we shall be attaching equal importance and significance to the chapters that are stories, records of historical events, as we do to the chapters that are frankly prophetic. Chapters 1 and 3–6 all have to do with historical things.

If we study the book of Daniel as a whole we must first get a good grip of its contents, and then we shall have to ask what each individual chapter is doing in the book. What is the function of the message that each chapter brings and how are those individual messages related to one another?

Let me try and illustrate what I mean. When we study a book of Scripture, the first and simple thing to do is to make out a table of contents to see what the book contains. The second stage goes deeper, and we shall have to enquire what the individual pieces have got to do with one another.

Let me use the analogy of a human hand. Suppose I gave the following description of a human hand to a person from Mars, who had never seen one. 'The human hand is a bit of square stuff (more or less square), made up of bones and muscles and blood vessels and things. Out of the top it's got four bits projecting and one bit out of the side. That's a human hand!'

Well, that will do for the beginning of a *table of contents* of the human hand, but it won't do as a *description* of the human hand. To start with, who would guess that that description is of a human hand? If we are going to understand a human hand, we must understand not only that it has a square bit of stuff in the middle, four bits sticking out the top and one out the side; we shall have to ask ourselves what is the *function* of those various bits in the human hand. For instance, why does the thumb stick out of the side, and what does the thumb do in the human hand? That is an easy one to answer; without the thumb you couldn't grasp things very well. And then we should have to ask why there are four fingers and not three, and why none of them is the same length as the others. We might get round to pointing out that the little finger has one of the strongest grips of all the fingers on the hand. If a baby puts his little finger round your finger, witness how hard a baby can pull. In other words, to describe the human hand you not only have to give a table of contents, you have to describe what is the inter-relation of function between all the parts that make up the human hand.

Therefore, if we would understand the book of Daniel, we shall not only have to make out a table of contents, we shall have to ask how each chapter, each division of that book, is related to all the other divisions in the book and what is its function in the whole, so that those chapters, when put together, function as God intended they should function, to convey his many-sided truth.

For that reason, I have provided a few notes for you. From these you will see that the contents of the book of Daniel are very, very carefully selected and very carefully put together. It is not just a scrapbook of an old man's reminiscences, though Daniel did write it in his old age. This is a very carefully arranged book. (See [Chart 1— Contents of the Book of Daniel.](#))

After chapter 1 there come two chapters, both dealing with images:

Chapter 2: Nebuchadnezzar's dream image.

Chapter 3: Nebuchadnezzar's golden image.

Then chapters 4 and 5 are both about kings, and both about the discipline of those kings:

Chapter 4: The first king was disciplined, humbled in the dust under the discipline of God, and then finally restored when he had learned his lesson.

Chapter 5: The second king, though he knew all that, continued to defy God. In the end God not only disciplined him but executed him without any possibility of restoration.

The two stories in chapters 4 and 5 are connected.

After chapter 6 there come two chapters, each one giving us a vision of the future in which the symbolism of wild animals is used:

Chapter 7: a vision with four wild animals.

Chapter 8: another vision with two wild animals.

The thoughtful will immediately ask, 'Why two visions? And the more so when chapter 8 seems to repeat something of what is said in chapter 7. If you have been given a vision of the future with four wild animals, why do you need another vision with two wild animals?' The very fact that there are two chapters dealing with beasts prompts us to ask, 'What is the function? Surely these two chapters are not just repeating the same stuff all over again. So, while they are similar, what is the difference and why do you need two?'

The final two visions—the vision of chapter 9, and then the great, long vision of chapters 10–12 (all one vision in the book, as originally given)—both of them have to do with the elucidation and explanation of two lots of writings:

Chapter 9: Here, it is a question of the writings of Jeremiah the prophet that Daniel seeks to understand.

Chapters 10–12: A messenger is sent to Daniel to explain to him what is written in the writing of truth.

Just to repeat what I said, it is at once apparent that the contents of the book of Daniel are not the unorganized scrapbook of an old man. They are carefully selected and arranged. But there is more to it than that. In the Enlarged Table of Contents, I have tried to give you a more detailed summary of these chapters. You will notice what many theologians and expositors have noticed: if you set out the chapters in two columns, some of the chapters show an extraordinary similarity.

Look, for instance, at chapter 2. It is the survey of the whole course of Gentile imperial power. Four empires are represented in the form of a colossal statue of a man. Chapter 7 is giving you, likewise, a foreview of the whole course of Gentile imperial power; here in the form of four wild beasts. The image of chapter 2 is destroyed and in its place the kingdom of God is set up. The fourth beast in chapter 7 is destroyed and the kingdom is handed over to the Son of Man and to the saints. Why two visions, so similar and so different? Many commentators have called our attention to it.

Look at this same feature in chapter 4. It is the story of God's discipline of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the beautiful city of Babylon. Because of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar was chastised and made to live as an animal, eating grass until seven *times* passed over him, and then he was restored. An extraordinary thing for a Jewish prophet like Daniel to

prophecy; the Gentile power that had devastated Jerusalem and sacked the temple of God would, in God's mercy, not only be disciplined but be restored. What an extraordinary prophecy to come through the mouth of a Jewish patriot!

Whereas if you look at chapter 9, it is the story of the desolations of Jerusalem city. The two great cities that stand in opposition to one another in the ancient world are Babylon city on the one hand and Jerusalem city on the other. While Babylon stood in all its glory, Jerusalem had been devastated by that same king, Nebuchadnezzar. What a story that is! As Daniel seeks to know the reason for it in his prayer, he is reminded that Jerusalem suffers its devastations and desolations because of God's discipline upon his people and upon their city. Whereas the discipline of Babylon's king lasted seven times, the discipline of God upon the city of Jerusalem is to last seventy times seven—an exceedingly significant observation. Jerusalem and her people were the people of God, and evidently more heavily disciplined than Gentile Babylon. Thereby hangs a very big and important tale when we come to consider the very practical question of God's disciplines of his people.

### **Who was Daniel?**

The author of the book of Daniel is a very easily recognizable type. He was an ex-patriot Jew who, because of political circumstances, had been obliged to leave his own country and was living in what was a foreign country and a foreign culture. Ex-patriot though he was, very true to life he soon found his feet. While originally he was among the captives, and doubtless put into the slave labour and displaced persons' camps in Babylon, he was spotted by the Babylonian authorities and offered a place in the university in Babylon to be trained in administration. In those days this meant the sophisticated, expert knowledge of how to write Akkadian, and all the experience and expertise of being an administrator in the great Babylonian capital city. In that civil service he soon made his mark. He had come through the university with flying colours, first class in all his topics. Throughout his long life he followed a distinguished career in the civil service of the Babylonian empire. When at last the Medo-Persians took over from the Babylonians, Daniel, now an elderly man, came for a brief while to be head of the Persian civil service.

I say 'an easily recognizable type' because ever since Nebuchadnezzar II took the Jews captive in Jerusalem and brought them to his capital city and country, nations in Europe and Asia and other parts of the world have known this interesting phenomenon of Jews living among them. Jews who have to some extent become assimilated into the culture of the country in which they live; but Jews who, out of all proportion to their numbers, have made exceedingly significant contributions to the life of the nations in which they live—in art, medicine, engineering, law, politics and in economics. You wouldn't have to think long to name Jews who have been famous, and still are, in the many countries of this world, in the many departments of life. Daniel was an early example of what we see around us still to this present time.



### ***Daniel maintained his faith in God***

So we follow his writing with great interest. One of the things that will very soon strike us when we read his memoirs is that, in spite of the fact that he lived his life as an ex-patriot in a foreign culture and rose to such eminence within that culture and in their civil service, he was a man who not only maintained his piety, but he maintained also his faith and hope. He maintained his personal life of prayer, and not only in private. Under the first king of Persia, through an edict of the state that banned prayer to any god except to the emperor for a period of a month or so, Daniel maintained his devotions and made sure that the public were aware that he continued in his life of devoted prayer to his God, in spite of his success in the Gentile world.

There have been many men (and there are still many), having been brought up in a Christian environment, and then rising to great positions in the state or in industry or science, who quietly maintain their devotion, if not always publicly. They say their prayers at night, even if nobody else knows about it. But Daniel did not only maintain his devotion, he maintained his faith and that is another thing altogether. He maintained his Jewish hope. That is all the more remarkable because Daniel's faith was not some vague kind of religion composed mostly of moral precepts, 'Do good and try to be kind and honest.' Daniel's hope was centred on this, that Israel's God was the only true God amidst the multitude of gods and goddesses that all the nations of the ancient Middle East worshipped. Daniel held that the God of Israel was the only true God, and that all the other gods of the nations were only nonsense; idolatrous figments of human imagination. You will see at once that that kind of view wouldn't necessarily have been in great favour in the civil service of Babylon, nor in the temples of that nation, but he maintained it nonetheless.

Daniel's faith was that not only was Israel's God the only true god—the transcendent Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, but that that transcendent Creator had chosen Israel to carry a sublime, distinct and special role among all the other nations. They weren't just one more nation; Israel's faith was that they had been chosen by God Almighty and raised up to carry a testimony to the true God, to protest in his name against their idolatry and to point the other nations to him who is the true God, in such words as Isaiah would have heralded, 'Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other' (45:22).

That was Israel's faith, a pointer and missionary for the true God, chosen by him for this unique ministry among the nations. It was Israel's faith; and it was certainly Daniel's persuasion that grew deeper as the years went by, that it was through Israel that the salvation of the world would come about. Daniel maintained that faith throughout his long years, in spite of all that he came to know about the brilliant civilizations of Babylon and Persia and for all his success in those Gentile fields.

### ***The only true God and his unique temple at Jerusalem***

That is all the more remarkable when you think of another thing. Daniel has dated the beginning of his book to the year when Nebuchadnezzar first came into Judaea. Nebuchadnezzar didn't destroy Jerusalem at that time; it was some few years before he

destroyed Jerusalem. But he did subject the people; he took away a number of prisoners, particularly those belonging to the royal house of Judah. He ravaged the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem and took away some of its golden vessels. That makes the fact that Daniel persisted in his Jewish faith all the more remarkable.

Consider the situation. Daniel was brought up to believe that the transcendent Lord was pleased to presence himself in that temple at Jerusalem. It was unique amongst all the millions of temples that filled the ancient world in that there was no statue to its God. Jews were distinct from the other nations. They were not idolaters, but they did believe that God had graciously deigned to presence himself in that temple.

And now here comes Nebuchadnezzar! He ravages the temple and takes away its golden vessels and stops its worship. What happened? Well, nothing happened. No bolt from the blue to strike him dead as a lifeless corpse for his impiety towards the God of heaven. No voice, no Michael the archangel. Nothing!

What do you suppose the Gentiles said about that? 'So much for your God, Daniel! Who did you say he was? The supreme God, the living God? He hasn't turned out to be very good. Our god won this last battle. He is better than your God. We'll treat his vessels reverently in Babylon!'

They took the vessels out of the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem. Being an idolater, Nebuchadnezzar put them in the temple of his god. He was quite respectful, but he still had the view that there were thousands of gods, and that Israel's God was just one more among all the others. For the time being, Nebuchadnezzar's god had beaten Israel's God. How could Daniel stand up and preach that Israel's God was the only true and living God, and all the other gods were mere idols?

But Daniel maintained his faith in spite of it; even when Nebuchadnezzar not only ravaged the temple but eventually he destroyed the royal house of Judah. That was the end of the kings of Judah. The ancient prophets had prophesied that it was through the kings of Judah that eventually the Messiah and Saviour of the world would come. God had indeed made a covenant with David, King of Judah, that his throne should never fail. Never should they lack a descendant of his to sit upon his throne. And here comes Nebuchadnezzar; he opposed the king of Judah, and the throne of Judah has not since been filled. (Unless you count the few years of the reign of the Maccabees.) How could Daniel still go on preaching and believing that the Saviour of the world would be of the seed of David?

### ***This is foundational to the Christian gospel***

I am not talking obscure, ancient history at this point, my brothers and sisters. You have a vested interest in this. What is our Christian gospel? According to Paul, it is a message concerning God's Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3). Our Christian gospel is not some philosophy thought up by some bright spark and consisting of eternal truths. It is based on the God who has revealed himself in history through his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. If those ancient prophecies about David's seed and David's throne have come unstuck, then our Christian gospel lacks one of its great foundations.

Daniel maintained his faith, in spite of the fact that eventually Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. What, then, of Daniel's faith that Jerusalem would be the very centre of the world? We must, therefore, read the historical bits of the book of Daniel with tremendous interest. How did the man survive with his faith undimmed in that kind of situation?

There have been many young men and women, brought up in Christian churches, Sunday Schools and Bible Classes, who gave great evidence that they had grasped the gospel. And then they succeeded, be it in business or politics, or learning or science. At night they still kneel down and say their prayers, but if you were to test them on how much they still believed about the Jewish hope (let alone the Christian hope) and God's programme for this world, you might find that they believe uncommonly little or nothing. The big world has been too much for their faith, if not for their piety.

### ***The importance of knowing Scripture***

How, then, did Daniel manage to maintain his faith? In the first part, because he had been well taught by the prophets that went before him. Daniel was a young gentleman who had been brought up on the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and Amos doubtless, and some of the others.

I don't know what you bring your young folks up on these days. I hope you bring them up on the Prophets, and that before you send them out into this godless, modern world, into whatever sphere, you have grounded them in the faith. Don't say that this stuff is too deep for our younger folks, 'They must have lighter stuff.' To send them out without a knowledge of God's holy word is like sending out innocent infants to face the machine guns of the enemy with bare hands. If their faith is to be maintained, see that they are grounded in God's holy word, and not least in the Prophets.

Isaiah, joined by Jeremiah, and both of them by Ezekiel, thundered out to Israel, 'Yes, you are God's people. Yes, God has deigned to presence himself in that temple. But, precisely because you are God's people, if you don't repent of your sin God will judge you.'

There are modern folks around who will say, 'The Jews claim to be God's people and think they can do what they like. They are God's blue-eyed spoiled boys.' But it is not true. Through Amos the prophet, God had said to Israel, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth;—therefore I will give you a feather bed'? No—'I will punish you for all your iniquities' (Amos 3:2). When Israel refused to repent, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to come against them and Daniel was not surprised, though doubtless he was broken-hearted. Nor was his faith stumbled. Instead of taking the disasters that came against the city and the temple as a sign that Israel was not God's people after all, it confirmed Daniel's faith.

Let me pause for a moment. Writing to the Romans in his famous chapter 11, Paul says,

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant towards the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you . . . They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. (vv. 17–18, 20–21)

As we move towards the great apostasy, Christendom as a whole has no grounds for feeling superior to Judaism. So when Daniel found his beloved city sacked, and himself transported in among the Gentiles, his faith was not dimmed. It was strengthened. The remarkable thing is that he retained his faith and his sense of destiny. We who live in this more advanced age have much to consider here.

I have an elderly gentleman friend in Belfast, a Jew. He just managed to escape Hitler; he was brought up in Austria and had to flee. He came to Northern Ireland (by mistake, he tells me). Many times I have sat and listened to him as the tears have run down his cheeks. His first question is, 'Where was God when Hitler was gassing six million of my people? I can't believe there is a God at all. And yet,' he says, 'I look out of my window and see that man across the street; I can tell he's a Jew. How is it that the Jewish race, thrown about the world and scattered to the four winds, has maintained its identity and its hope?'

That in itself is something to ponder. After all these long centuries with Israel out of their land, now at last they are back into it. Those ancient prophets said that Israel would again be the centre of world politics and all the nations of the world should come against Jerusalem. In 1991 we saw faint beginnings of the idea that the Jewish question must be settled in order to bring in the new world order that the United Nations hopes eventually to achieve.

### ***The terms of Daniel's faith***

Daniel maintained his faith. What was that faith, and what were its terms? Let me read the gospel that Isaiah preached to his people, and through them to the nations.

And many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isa 2:3-4)

What marvellous words they are. How evocative! How they reach down to the very bottom of our hearts. So marvellous that if left to ourselves we should say they must be fairy-story talk. 'The nations shall not learn war anymore'—some of us will remember that when the United Nations was formed after the First World War, in the early days it was going to banish war. What a sorry history it has had. We can see the inscription of Isaiah's wonderful text around their great building and across the road in the garden, 'When the nations shall speak peace to one another, and beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and they shall not learn war anymore.' It appeals to us because it is the only sane way to live.

### ***Modern political theories***

How would we justify ourselves to a visitor from Mars who had never been here before, and had begun to read our history, even the history of the last century when multi-millions were slaughtered by Hitler, Stalin and the Khmer Rouge? How would we explain Yugoslavia?

*Homo sapiens* so called, wisest and most sophisticated of all the creatures on the earth, behaving with less sense than animals. It is an insane way of living.

Therefore Isaiah's prophecy appeals to us. Hope refuses to die in the human heart. Now the United Nations is telling us that they sense their duty to the world at large. They must begin to reorganize themselves and be able to interfere in other nations, so as to stop wars and eventually bring in the age of universal peace. Everybody would like to see it, if it could be so; a great age of universal peace and plenty and glory, man living in sanity and the planet blessed. But how? What recipe shall we have for it? And here modern people have become very suspicious, particularly of political theorists who have a blueprint, a political theory. They tell you that if you believe the theory and it is put into action, it will bring in universal peace. And so, when they get the chance, they seize power and begin to force their theories.

With what results? We have had a sickening example of that with Hitler and his super-race theory, and with Marx and his highly sophisticated theory and analysis of the human condition. His theory promised to bring about a paradise of peace and plenty; a world where government would not be needed and the people should govern themselves. It was a theory, he said, that was founded on the very laws of history, and it was inevitable that it should come to pass. Why they had to enforce it nobody knows, but it didn't come to pass quite quickly enough. They were going to enforce paradise upon the world, and at what a cost. 'You can't make omelettes without breaking eggs,' said Lenin. You can't bring in paradise without cracking a few skulls. He and Stalin and others cracked enough; sixty million and more people eliminated for a theory that was going to bring in paradise! Without God, of course, and the stark ruin of its failure is ghastly to look upon.

Sensible people, therefore, suspect theories that claim to be a blue-print for paradise but have to be brought about by enforcement. These theories say that mankind, little by little, will gradually perfect themselves. A reform here, an adjustment to politics there, the fostering of democracy somewhere else, the elimination of a few corruptions in the administration and, like an island grows out of the sea by the millions of corals that give their lives to form it, somehow mankind's cultures and civilizations will eventually advance and cover the whole world, and in the end banish war.

### ***Daniel's hope was in the coming Messiah***

Daniel cast a wet blanket over the whole thing! He did not believe that either, and it did not make him very popular down in Babylon where they thought they had a good chance of building paradise. With all their latest architecture, the brilliance of their learning, the skill of their administration and economics and the wonder of their arts (one of the wonders of the ancient world), for Daniel to stand in their superb city and tell them that the human hope, that little by little the great civilizations of this world would bring in the paradise for which they longed, was false—that wouldn't make him very popular.

The reason why he held it and preached it was because of the diagnosis of those prophets in God's holy word, about the human heart being 'deceitful above all things, and desperately sick' (Jer 17:9). But also because of his own experience gathered from a lifetime spent in the great civil services of the ancient world. He held that, in spite of man's advance—his inventions, his civilization—there is so much evil. Not only in the heart of individuals but in

the very structures of the politics of the State, in economics and the law. Man will never reach that golden age of peace and prosperity and glory that he seeks simply by the onward progress of human civilization. Daniel held that the only hope for the world was, as the prophets had announced, the personal coming of God's Messiah. He held that when the Messiah came he would have to put down all forms of human rule and government, wipe the slate clean and set up his own messianic kingdom upon earth.

### ***Negative attitudes to prophecy***

That is a view of prophecy which has been dubbed *apocalyptic*, a term that in many circles is a bad word. They say it is a pessimistic view of history.

'In spite of all the genuine, honest, sincere efforts of our politicians, lawyers, medical men and scientists, and all the visible progress which we have attained (at least in a few parts of the world), are you really saying that in the end it will be a failure? Is it so evil that, when Jesus Christ comes again as God's Messiah, he will have to put it all aside and establish his own kingdom? Are you really saying that the coming of Christ is the only hope for our world?'

And when you say 'Yes', they say, 'That is a horrible theory, for it takes the very heart out of all sincere human effort to make the world a better place. We all might as well sit down and do nothing, for, according to you, whatever progress we make it will be no good. It will not bring in this age of peace and plenty.' Understandably, they don't like it.

And then they say, 'The other bad thing about that kind of view is that, if the only hope for the world is the coming again of the Messiah, the second coming of Christ, it encourages people to withdraw from life and its responsibilities. They won't shoulder their part in the affairs of daily life to help their fellow-men.'

Finally they say, 'It very easily goes over to fanaticism.'

And we know what they mean. We have had many books saying that the second coming of Christ is about to happen. I remember in the early eighties some people said it would happen in 1988, because the Jewish state had been established in 1948 and our Lord said a generation should not pass away before he came. A generation in the Bible, they said, is forty years. But he didn't come.

### ***Daniel's attitude to prophecy***

They doubtless said similar things to Daniel when he let his views be known. But the criticism was unfair on Daniel's part. While he did hold that the only hope for the world was the coming of the Messiah, he didn't run away from life. It stares you in the face, if you read the historical chapters of his memoirs. Given the chance of a university education in Babylon, he didn't say, 'No, why would you bother about education? Messiah is coming!' Given the chance, though in a Gentile society, he thought it was worth taking. For God's sake, for his own sake, for his people's sake, it was worth taking. He sweated away at learning Akkadian (not an easy language), and all the business of cuneiform and administration. Though a lot of that education was based on funny mythologies, he thought it worthwhile learning what these people believed. Offered a place in the civil service later on, he took it. He must have

applied himself diligently because he rose to great eminence. He was adviser to sundry of the kings of Babylon, and when the Persians took over he became for a little while head of the Persian administration. He did not run away from life.

I might add at once that the belief that the only hope for the world is the coming of Christ, is not a recipe for running away from life. Not even now! Why didn't he run away from life? Because, as he himself will make clear, even suppose the Messiah were not due to come for centuries, life is still worth living. It is in the daily affairs of life, in the here and now (in business, in school, in the factory, in the lawyer's office, and in the home predominantly), as we face life and live it under God, that we are facing life's chief purpose. This temporary life is given to us as the time in which we prepare for the eternal beyond.

Daniel was told that the Messiah would not come for centuries. He did not say, 'Then it's no good living.' He gave himself to life, in the fear of God, because he knew and believed that this life was given to prepare him for meeting God. Though the Messiah would not come for centuries, when Daniel's short life was over he knew he would have to meet God.

### ***What is our attitude to prophecy?***

We live in another age. Christ came in his first coming nearly two thousand years ago, and told us before he went that he would come again. We know not the hour in which he will come, therefore we have to be ready. But suppose we knew that the Lord Jesus was not coming back for the next hundred years and most of us would be dead, would that mean life would lose its purpose? Of course not! Our age, too, is the one opportunity we have of getting ready for the great eternity and true faith in Christ will show itself, for it is only through faith in Christ, and not by our works, that God accepts us. Not merely in the vigour with which we sing our hymns, nor in the earnestness with which we study Scripture, but in the way we live in the grocer's shop, on the factory floor, in the civil service, in the income tax, or whatever it is we are in. True faith will show itself as we give ourselves to the calling into which God has called us.

And that will be no little battle. In a world that is fundamentally corrupt, it is difficult to live as a Christian. For instance, when the trade unions want to strike and the strike isn't really justified; when they want you to slow down working and you know you could get twice as much work done but you are not supposed to. To stand in the daily affairs of life in the factory is much more difficult than getting together with a few Christians and singing some hymns. If you are a businessman at the head of a big concern in this cut-and-thrust world, it is difficult to remain honest when the pressures against you are enormous. But it is in the daily affairs of life that we demonstrate our faith and get ready not only to meet God but get ready to meet the Lord Jesus when he comes. True belief that only the coming of Christ will bring in the age of peace and glory is no excuse for running away from life. It is, rather, the incentive to get on with life and live it seriously before God.

## **Babylonian civilization**

Daniel maintained his faith then, and entered into life. And that is all the more remarkable because Babylon was a brilliant civilization. You doubtless have read about Babylon. In the

Pergamum Museum in Berlin some of you may have seen the restoration of what the Ishtar Gate of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon would have looked like. What a marvel of art and symbolism and architecture it was; a brilliant civilization indeed.

When Daniel got there it must have made Jerusalem seem by comparison a little village in the outback. What marvels they had down in Babylon. The old shepherds back in Judaea could name a few stars; down in Babylon they weren't content to name the stars, they knew all about their rising and setting. They had measured their settings and had an exceedingly complicated system of mathematics, based not on tens but on sixties. With that cumbersome system they predicted eclipses and they could work out the position of the stars.

It must have been fascinating to a young gentleman like Daniel when he saw how much they knew. And of course the art forms were so different. Up in Jerusalem they didn't have any images, but down in Babylon they did. Not to speak of the hanging gardens! How did he maintain his faith that little Jerusalem had the answer to the world's needs, and not the great civilizations like Babylon?

### ***False values***

He maintained it not only by the diagnosis given to him by the word of God, but by his own personal experience down those long years till he was eighty and more. In the civil service he noticed that, in spite of their brilliant civilizations, the ancient world had this fatal tendency to get their values wrong. Be it in education, politics, culture, or what have you, they showed this constant tendency to get their values wrong. They treated things of absolute value and importance as though they were only of secondary importance, or not at all, and things that were only of relative importance as though they were the be-all and end-all of life. We ought to consider how they got their values wrong in the world of education. That is why chapters 1 to 5 deal with this question of values and of the over-riding importance of getting our values right.

It is an imposing thing nowadays, if you go to Russia. Some of the leading atheists in that country have told us more than once, 'We need this kind of thing in our country.' These people are still atheists. They will tell you that the economic plight of the country is exceedingly serious and dangerous. It is a pitiful sight to see the chaos and deprivation that their godless theories have brought them to. This was the nation that led the world in thinking that they could create a paradise on earth without God and by banning God. It is as though, 'He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision' (Ps 2:4).

You feel sorry for them; but they will tell you that, bad as their economic plight is, there is a bigger danger. They say, 'We are a nation without any values.' Most of them have not believed Marxist theories for the last ten years—they only pretended that they did. And now that that has been knocked on the head they have no values. They will tell you that when the people have perceived the government as being the biggest criminal (liar, thief, torturer, murderer) of the whole lot, the only way the people know how to survive is to copy the government. How do you recreate the vast empire and reorder the administration of a nation that has no values and no basis for its values?

Daniel points out in his memoirs that, marvellous as those ancient civilizations were, nonetheless they were founded on false values.



**Take education.** Daniel didn't object to the opportunity to be educated; he gladly accepted the courses they offered him in the university. Moreover, when they changed his name and the names of his colleagues (names that incorporated the name of God) and gave them names that incorporated the names of their idols, Daniel didn't object (1:7). You can't stop people calling you what they will, can you? But when he was supposed to eat the king's meat in the university dining room, which would have been offered to the gods according to the ceremonies of the time, then he and his colleagues downright refused. They had heard about idolatry from Jeremiah and Isaiah and had seen signs of it amongst the apostates in Israel. But to see idolatry in the university in Babylon, 'No!' said Daniel, 'I will not submit to it.' Why not? Because an idolatrous interpretation of the universe is a false interpretation. It is not true!

What was the idolatrous interpretation of the universe? To put it as briefly as I can, according to the New Testament the ancient nations knew the true God, but 'did not see fit to acknowledge God' (Rom 1:28). When they ceased believing in the true God they didn't start believing in nothing, they had to make gods of their own. Their gods were, on the one part, the deification of the forces of Nature: the storm, the moon, the sun, the great powers of chaos, and so forth. They also made gods out of the physiological processes of the human body. They worshipped the goddess of love. And when they felt aggressive urges they said a god had got a hold of them, so they worshipped the god of war. When men lose faith in the true God that is what they do.

If ever there was an age in modern times that worshipped the goddess of love (Aphrodite), it is our modern world. Ask this bright young woman who has just murdered her lover's wife and she will say, 'It was love that made me do it.' That's supposed to be enough excuse? And then the jury lets them off, saying that it was love made them do it. It's just like the ancients; they would have said, 'The goddess Aphrodite got hold of me.' You can't resist a goddess and if it is love that moves you to murder your lover's wife you must not call that *murder*. You will say, 'I was blinded by love.'

Our modern world may not worship idols made of stone and wood any more. But if you ask our modern atheists and humanists what they regard as the ultimate powers that brought in and will yet destroy our universe, they will answer in their scientific jargon exactly as the old idolaters of the ancient world, 'There is no God!'

What brought our universe and me into being?

'Basic energy; the strong atomic power and the weak atomic power, electromagnetism and gravity, a bit of physiology, chemistry and biology put in!'

And the interesting thing about that is, all these powers and processes are utterly mindless. They don't know what they do, and when they have done it they don't know they have done it. They have no purpose, they are utterly blind. They have made us without intending to and one day they will destroy us. And when they have destroyed us and our planet they won't know they have done it. That's idolatry of the highest order, and it is taught in many of our schools from the infants upwards – atheistic, humanistic evolution.

***Why Daniel had to take a stand***

Daniel wouldn't have it. Even if it cost him his university career, he wouldn't have it. He wouldn't compromise his faith, so he refused to eat the food that had been offered to idols. Why? Because the idolatrous interpretation of the universe isn't true. And universities are places where we are supposed to examine the truth. It not only demeans God; it demeans mankind too. What is the value of a human being? Why shouldn't you kill anyone? If one of these days you had a mind to, and you saw a sophisticated computer coming towards you, you might be tempted to kick it in the 'ribs' and destroy the thing. Nobody would charge you with murder. What's the difference between destroying a sophisticated computer and destroying a human being? Well, if there is no God, there is very little difference; both are the end products of blind evolution.

But if there is a God, there is a difference. Man, says the Bible, is made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). Human beings are more important than the whole universe put together. You wouldn't think of worshipping the sun up in the sky. My poor little brain is but the size of a grapefruit and the sun is millions and millions of miles across, but a human brain is more significant than the sun. I know the sun is there; the sun doesn't know I am here. I know how the sun works, thanks to the scientists; the sun doesn't know how I work. It is just so much gas and a few atoms running around—a big atomic furnace, so some scientists say. A human brain is infinitely more significant. And would you hold a view that says that one day the sun in its mindlessness will explode and the earth will evaporate, and that will be the end of the human race? If that is true, then we are not what we thought we were. We are merely the end products of mindless, irrational, purposeless forces with no future ahead of us but ultimate extinction, not only for us as individuals but for the whole human race.

Daniel wouldn't believe it. He believed there is a God and that man is made in the image of God. It is there that our values are based. Some of us tell the Russians (with as much sympathy as we can), 'If in years past you had believed that man was made in the image of God, Stalin wouldn't have eliminated sixty million.'

Daniel stood uncompromisingly for the God of the Old Testament, the unique Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, and mankind made in his image. This is the truth about man.

We should try to understand what the scientists say, both the believing scientists and the unbelieving; and the technologists, believing and unbelieving. We are not to be ignoramuses! Like Daniel, we shall welcome every bit of education; but we shall need to stand within the world of education for the truth about God and the truth about man. If we are but the product of endless forces, then ultimately we have little significance, and you will never build a paradise on that. Moreover, most of us will be dead before the paradise comes—even if it is coming. And if when we are dead we are done for, you might as well forget everything about paradises to be. Why would you worry about them, if in the next year you will go into the grave and that's the end of you for ever?

***We should know what is being taught in our schools***

We can't all be involved in education, but many of you have children or grandchildren at school or university. What a responsibility there is on Christian parents to know what is

being taught in the schools. Do you know the theories that are being taught in the universities and technical colleges? What a responsibility to come alongside your young people in their days of need, when their faith is being sorely tempted.

You say, 'But that would mean a lot of hard work.' Of course it would mean a lot of hard work! And you who teach in Sunday School, may God increase your faith in his word. And you who teach the senior Bible Class, God give you grace and wisdom to teach the whole word of God, so that you may give them God's answer to our modern humanistic, atheistic and hedonistic society and not allow the young folks to go out into this godless world with little more than a few stories behind them.

With the message we have, we cannot be content just to preach it inside the places where we meet. There is a vast world out there that is lost and hopeless. Beyond our shores millions die, scarcely knowing the name of Jesus. If they have heard it, most of them think it is an old myth and unscientific nonsense. God give us grace, in the light of the coming of our blessed Lord Jesus, to take our stand in the education of our young people, in the home, church, school, and wherever it may be.

## World Government and its Fatal Flaws

In this session we will study Daniel's famous chapter 2, one of the best known chapters in the whole of the prophecy of Daniel. It concerns the vision that God gave to his imperial highness, the emperor himself, Nebuchadnezzar. In that dream and vision God outlined prophetically to him what the course of Gentile government would be from Nebuchadnezzar's time onwards, until the coming of the great kingdom of God that should destroy and put aside all human government, and institute instead the world-wide government of God's Messiah.

### **Nebuchadnezzar's dream**

The vision that was given to Nebuchadnezzar was in the form of a great image of a man, made of different metals from its head downwards. That image represented a succession of Gentile empires, though not all the empires that had ever been from the foundation of the world. Long before Nebuchadnezzar revived the Babylonian empire there had been some very large empires: Egypt, Babylon in its earlier phases and, until then, perhaps the greatest of the world empires, Assyria itself. Nebuchadnezzar now led the new, revived Babylonian Empire; he was the rebuilders and beautifier of Babylon city. Therefore, this great image with its different metals was designed to represent the course of the major Gentile world empires from Nebuchadnezzar's time onwards until what we call *the second coming of Christ*.

From reading the KJV translation of Daniel 2:5, 'The thing is gone from me', you might get the impression that Nebuchadnezzar was saying, 'I have had a dream, but I have quite forgotten what it was. The thing has gone from me; please will you tell me what I dreamed and then tell me the interpretation.' But that is not in fact what Nebuchadnezzar said.

The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, 'The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.' (2:5-6)

He had not forgotten the dream. As we shall presently see, he knew very well what he had dreamed. What he was saying to the wise men was this, 'The word has gone forth from me.' That is, 'I have announced my intention; this is what I have determined and decreed. I have dreamed a dream, my decree is final and nothing you will say will make me change

my mind. I am telling you now what I demand from you. I demand, first of all, that you tell me what it was I dreamed and, secondly, what the interpretation of the dream should be.'

As you will see from the reaction of the wise men, that decree from the king upset them sorely. They ended up by telling him (in diplomatic language) that he was the biggest fool that ever walked the face of the earth. But they hid it in nice, polite court language, lest they upset him (vv. 10–11). (It was a dangerous thing to upset Nebuchadnezzar!)

The king would have destroyed all the wise men of Babylon had Daniel not heard of the affair and taken the whole matter to God in prayer. God revealed to Daniel what the king had dreamed the night before, so he could go in and tell his majesty. Discovering that Daniel knew exactly what he had dreamed, the king was confident to accept the interpretation of the dream. He was all the more certain in his heart that the dream was no accident—brought about by a little bit of undigested cheese, like Scrooge thought of the ghost that came before him—it was a real dream given by God, conveying divine revelation.

### ***The stone that fell on the image***

There is one other thing that we should notice at this stage. The dream concerned a great image made of different metals, which was going to indicate to Nebuchadnezzar the future of Gentile government until the second coming of Christ. In the dream, the coming of Christ to set up his messianic kingdom on earth is likened to a stone cut out from the mountain, without hands. It falls on the feet of the image and smashes the whole image from head to toe into a million smithereens, the wind took it away and the place knew it no more. That detail of this stone cut out without hands, that fell upon the image and ground it to powder, finds an echo in the words of our blessed Lord Jesus in the New Testament. By giving the parable which we can read in Luke 20:9–18, our Lord was indicating to the Jerusalem authorities that he knew exactly what they were about to do. A few days from then they would take Jesus himself and, casting him out of the vineyard of Israel, they would have him nailed to a cross and killed. Our Lord finishes his parable, and makes a comment on it, 'On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder' (KJV).

### ***Daniel still maintained his faith in the God of Israel***

In our introductory study we noticed that Daniel comes before us as an easily recognizable type. He was an ex-patriot Jew living away from home in Babylon, centre of the great Babylonian empire, to which he had been taken as a prisoner of war. He speedily escaped the slave labour camps and was invited to take a university course. He did well in his studies, entered the civil service and had a spectacular career, rising at length to be head of the civil service in the great newly established Medo-Persian empire.

Though he prospered so remarkably in this strange and, to him, foreign culture, we were led to admire the fact that he maintained not only his personal piety and continued praying to his God, but he maintained his faith. The faith of Israel; that Israel was God's chosen and elect people, carrying a special role in the world and given a glorious and unique gospel message to preach to the Gentiles. What a glorious message that was for Daniel to bear in that

pagan Gentile court. There is hope for this world; there is coming a glorious time of peace and plenty and glory.

Our life's experience is not meant to mock us; this world is not a deceit, it comes from the hand of God. The glories of creation around us are not sent to mock us; there is a future for this world. Though this world is marred at present, God has a redemption for it. The day is coming when creation herself shall be delivered from her bondage to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:21 KJV).

### ***The Bible has the only message of hope***

Like Daniel, we are privileged to carry that glorious message of hope to our own contemporaries, who flounder in their humanism, atheism and general worldliness and ungodliness and have no ultimate hope. It is worthwhile noticing that, at this stage in history, this gospel message preached by Daniel (in the Old Testament and elaborated in the New) stands in marked contrast to other major religious faiths in the world. We need that observation nowadays, for there is a spirit abroad that advocates *pluralism*.

They say, 'Let's take the best out of all religions. Are not all religions different ways of climbing the same mountain, so it doesn't matter whether you come up the northern face, or the southern face, the east or the west? If you persevere you will all come up the mountain and meet each other there. All the world religions are but different ways of climbing the same mountain and coming to the same pinnacle at the end.'

It sounds wonderful, but of course a moment's thought is enough to show that it isn't true and the great religious faiths of the world would be insulted if you took them so superficially. The only way to show respect for the great religious faiths of the world is to study them and take them seriously. If you do, you will find that there are irreconcilable differences and contradictions between Judaism and Christianity on the one hand, and, say, Hinduism on the other.

Hinduism, for the most part (although Hinduism is a name given to a whole collection of religions), holds that the material universe (and therefore, our bodies) is, if not unworthy, certainly less than the ideal. This material world was created by some lesser deity, who had not enough wisdom not to do it and went and created this rather demeaning world of matter, instead of leaving things as pure spirit. The ideal for each individual, therefore, is to pass through the cycle of existence as quickly as possible. Being born in this material world, you die and go out into the world of pure spirit; then, having been re-born by reincarnation into this material world, you go back again through death into the immaterial spiritual world. The individual's wisdom would be to try and escape that endless cycle of re-birth and death; to escape from this material world into the great spirit world beyond.

As for human history, they say that human history in this world has no particular goal. It is like a wheel that simply goes round everlastingly in circles, getting absolutely nowhere: an endless cycle of death and rebirth. Therefore, the wisdom for each individual is to escape from the rim of the wheel (it doesn't matter through which spoke) and try and get away from the material world into the refined essence of *Nirvana*, or whatever you would call it.

### ***The Bible does not despise the human body***

At once you will see that that stands in marked contrast to what Judaism and Christianity are saying. The Bible says that this material world around us is not an illusion. It is not unworthy; it is the very handiwork of God, the almighty Creator. When he created it he pronounced that it was good, and good it is. And not only the creation around us, but ourselves. Our human bodies are not things to be despised, to be run away from (as the Greek philosophers like Socrates used to say). Our human bodies are good.

It is true that creation has been marred by the rebellion of the creature; but still again the Old and New Testaments combine to tell us that God, in his great mercy, has a scheme of redemption for his creatures, from which springs new and everlasting hope. There is forgiveness and there is redemption. And not only forgiveness for our sins, but the very body of matter that we inhabit, says the Bible, shall one day be redeemed itself. Our blessed Lord's bodily resurrection from the grave is but the firstfruits of a coming vast harvest. God will not be content to preserve our redeemed spirits, he is going to raise our redeemed bodies from the dead and make them like our Lord's glorious body (Phil 3:21). And, not content with that, creation herself shall be delivered from her bondage to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:21).

God the Creator is not going to be defeated. He is not going to bring this planet to an end and say, 'Sorry, it all went wrong and it is beyond my power to redeem it.' God shall yet be victorious. There is hope and we have a gospel message to preach. In the words of the apostle, 'According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet 1:3).

### ***Daniel did not run away from life's responsibilities***

What a glorious gospel it was that Daniel, even in those far-off days, could bring to that highly developed civilization that, for all its sophistication, had no hope.

We saw that the crucial question in all this was, when and how would this great age of bliss and redemption come? Daniel's message at the beginning and all through his life, after long experience in the affairs of the Babylonian and Persian empires, was that the great age of peace for which we all long, the paradise of God, would not come about by mankind's own efforts or progress, whether in technology or in politics, however great and glorious that progress was. It would come about solely by the coming of God's Messiah, the second coming of Jesus Christ our Lord.

To many people that has seemed a very gloomy doctrine. They say, 'If that is so, it takes the heart out of all human effort. If human society and institutions are so permeated with evil that in the end God will have to put them aside and replace them with the kingdom of his Messiah, surely that means that human effort, progress and improvement are all in vain, and not worth making?'

That is not so, of course. Though Daniel held his view that the kingdom of God would have to replace all other kingdoms, and would not come in with human progress, he gave himself to a long career in the civil service of the two countries he served. He did not run

away from life. He lived it to the full, yet he continued to hold that human progress by itself will not bring in the age of peace. It will only happen with the coming of the Christ.

In chapter 2 he begins to tell us why that is. He offers us a critique of *Gentile politics*, and in particular of the great Gentile world empires from Babylon onward. I say he 'begins' to do that, because in fact this is only one of his critiques of Gentile powers. He gives another one from a completely different point of view in chapter 7 of his prophecy. To get a balanced view we shall have to study both critiques and not rely simply on one. (See [Chart 5 – The Symbolism of Chapters 2 and 7.](#))

For this study we shall look at chapter 2, and chapter 7 in our next study.

## **Divine revelation**

I ought to say that the critique of Gentile government that we have in chapter 2 was not, strictly speaking, Daniel's critique at all. It was God's. God gave this vision to Nebuchadnezzar and communicated the interpretation of it through Daniel. Immediately there is a problem for us! Are we really saying that God gave this vision to Nebuchadnezzar and we accept dreams as being significant? Do we have to accept this as the revealed truth of almighty God?

A lot of theologians deny the inspiration not only of Daniel but of a good deal of the Bible as well. They will tell you that what people have called *the inspired word of God* is really the observations of religious leaders and thinkers like Paul and Peter, Daniel and Isaiah, all of them very spiritually minded and shrewd men. Like our present day futurologists, they amass all the facts, ponder them and come to their shrewd conclusions. Then they offer you their diagnosis of what the world is liable to be in the next twenty, forty or one hundred years. And that's all it is! So that, when we read the Bible, what we have are the predictions of sensible, serious and shrewd men, but in the end really it is only human prediction.

Futurologists are important; many a country has them. The governments need to know how to go about long-term planning. They want to know what the trends are going to be in, say, 2020, and what the population is likely to be. It is very sane and sensible, of course, to try and predict the future like that, and thus to plan for it. But it is an interesting fact, that the Bible writers themselves were aware of this kind of projection, and they inform us, 'No, that's not what we mean by divine revelation.' It is not that Moses was rather shrewd and able to predict things, or Paul either. Peter tells us why we can be absolutely sure and certain of divine prophecy,

Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet 1:20–21)

People have taken that to mean that, if you get a prophecy, you can't put your own interpretation on it. You have to take somebody else's interpretation; the Church's for instance. That is not really what the Greek says. Peter is not talking about how prophecy is to be interpreted, he is talking about how prophecy came. He tells us, 'no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man.' That is what he means when he says, 'no prophecy is of private



interpretation' (KJV). The Greek should be translated 'private analysis'. Prophecy did not come about by shrewd men looking on the world and its affairs, making their analyses and then hazarding a prediction as to what events were likely to happen.

'It did not come about like that,' says Peter. How did it come about, then? 'Men spoke from God, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.' There is such a thing as genuine divine revelation. We shall have to face that basic fact at the beginning of our study of Daniel, because the whole issue will face us all the way through.

It is very interesting that the story that we shall now meet in chapter 2 raises that question. Before it gets down to the details of the prophecy that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar, it deliberately asks, 'Is there such a thing as divine revelation?' You mustn't be offended if these ancient stories appear to be rather naïve; they are not told in heavy theological language. The story will appear very simple, but it makes a profound point.

### **Nebuchadnezzar's dream**

Let me tell you the story. Nebuchadnezzar went to bed one night. It is said, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.'<sup>1</sup> He fell asleep and into a fitful slumber. Presently he dreamed, only he didn't know that he was dreaming—we rarely know when we are dreaming, we just do. It all seemed so real.

There he was, outside the palace. He was going across the plains around Babylon when all of a sudden a colossal statue was standing there. He had not noticed that before. When he turned round to ask his courtiers who had put it there and who had given them permission, there was no one there. That was odd because he didn't usually go out alone. He came forward to look at the image and he saw that it was a colossal statue of a man. It was so big it was awesome, not to say frightening (and it took a lot to frighten Nebuchadnezzar). What on earth was the sculptor trying to say? Who was it supposed to be? It was a mighty big man; but there was only one big man around here, as far as Nebuchadnezzar knew, and that was himself. The thing was sort of composite; there was a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, and then bronze, iron, and (how crude!) the feet were part iron and part ceramic. What on earth was the artist trying to say?

Just then he happened to notice there was a range of mountains around, but there were no mountains in that part of the world. As he looked, the peak seemed to come off one of the mountains, as though invisible hands had quarried it out of the mountain. Then it began to get larger; in a second or two he realized it was coming his way and it was going to hit the image. It did hit the image on the feet and the whole thing exploded. Then he woke up!

He was very relieved it was just a dream. But was it just a dream? The ancients knew that dreams come from all sorts of things; sometimes from the gods. This was such a spectacularly vivid dream that he could remember every detail. Perhaps it was a message from the gods, but what did it mean? There was only one big man in Babylon, and there it was, smashed to smithereens. If it was a message from the gods that would be serious. What did it all mean?

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<sup>1</sup> From Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*.

Like any oriental monarch, he had a fleet of magicians and sorcerers. The Babylonians were expert in the stars; they knew a lot about astronomy. They had silly interpretations by way of astrology, but they weren't all fools. They were supposed to be able to interpret dreams that came from the gods, so perhaps he should call them in. But if he called these men in and asked them to interpret this dream, how would he know that their interpretation was correct? He paid them a lot of money, but suppose some of these rascally magicians were hand-in-glove with some of his enemies who wanted to unseat him; they might tell him that the gods were saying that he ought to abdicate. He hit upon a scheme and he knew what he would do.

So the next day he called for his magicians, and said, 'I have dreamed a dream and would like to know the interpretation.'

They said, 'You tell us the dream and we will tell you the interpretation.'

'No!' said Nebuchadnezzar. 'You tell me the dream and then tell me the interpretation. You claim that you are in touch with the gods and that they reveal all sorts of secrets to you. Well, prove it then! Before you can interpret my dream to my satisfaction, prove to me that you have had a message from the gods. You are supposed to know; and if you don't know then find out from the gods and I shall know that you are talking by divine revelation.'

When they saw he meant what he said, they diplomatically said that no other king, emperor or prince had ever asked such a thing of anybody. They admitted that, when it came to it, they had no communication from the gods. Give them the evidence and they would interpret it, but they couldn't supply you with the evidence.

At that point Daniel came on the scene; he was a wise and shrewd man, and versed in politics. Time and time again he made the point to the king as he interpreted the dream, 'I am not telling you this because I am particularly shrewd or more clever than your other scientists. I owe this to direct revelation from God, who showed me what you dreamed last night.' Being encouraged, therefore, that Daniel had been shown what he dreamed, Nebuchadnezzar was ready to listen to the interpretation.

### **God's critique of Gentile power**

The first thing to notice is the marvellous write-up that God gives to human government. You will say, 'There's another view of Gentile government in chapter 7 that puts it in very doubtful light.' I know that; but for the time being we are concentrating on the first diagnosis, and that has a marvellous depiction of the majesty and the sheer glory of Gentile achievement in the realm of government.

What Nebuchadnezzar saw (by God's own deliberate design) as a representation of Gentile imperial powers in the earth, was the image of a man. It was a magnificent image with a head of gold, shoulders and breast of silver, and thighs of copper. Majestic in its size, almost awesome in its demeanour, God was not being sarcastic; he meant it.

What is your estimate of human government? If you are a Christian, you might just need to be wary of not always looking at one side and deploring it all as a tale of endless bloodshed and cruelty and wickedness. There has been a lot of government like that, but there is another side to it. Human government down the years has been the story of great,

immense human achievement. In the fifth century BC the Greeks were very proud of their politics. They looked back upon the time when they said human beings had lived in the forests and life was very beastly.

Don't you share with the Greeks a sense of progress? Would you prefer to live under Nebuchadnezzar, 'Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled' (5:19), or under Mrs Thatcher<sup>2</sup> in a democracy?

Yes, the Greeks were very proud of mankind's progress. They had come out of the forest and learned to live together in cities. They had learned to create laws and strive more and more towards equality and justice and freedom. It is true that eventually they became disillusioned, as their political systems were abused, but we shouldn't 'throw out the baby with the bath water.'

The Christian attitude is that we respect government. We are not to be subversives. There is no power but of God, says Scripture, and they are God's ministers for the encouragement of well-doing and the punishment of evildoers (see Rom 13:1). We are not animals, we believe in human achievement and progress. Most of you have got a really modern watch, and some of you drive super Japanese cars. We don't still use old scrubbing boards; there are these marvellous computerized washing machines. Life is much more comfortable than it used to be, so be careful how you rant against modern civilization. And aren't you thankful now that you don't get sent to Australia for stealing a sheep? (Not that you would steal a sheep anyway!) We deplore those ancient days and feel that government has made vast progress and is far more equitable than it used to be. If you feel that way, thank God for it.

If Nebuchadnezzar didn't like you, he killed you. But, on the other hand, he did create a magnificent city. Babylon was a riot of wonderful art and architecture to satisfy the heart and the eye; it made life so much more interesting and enjoyable. And even Nebuchadnezzar was better than the savages who would cut your throat and boil you in a pot.

Then there was Alexander and his worldwide empire. It cost a lot of human lives, but he was attempting to weld the Asians and Europeans together and bring some harmony into the world. And what shall we say of the Romans, with their colossal feats of engineering; we still have some of their roads in Britain. Or who can stand in the marketplace in Segovia in Spain and look at the aqueduct and fail to marvel at the sheer genius of the Romans? Their civilization planted itself on virtual primitive society and brought it up to date. The great legacy of their laws and administration brought the 'Roman Peace', the *Pax Romana*, to many a troubled country.

In this story the great Gentile imperial powers are to be likened to a magnificent man and great human achievement. 'Why, then,' you say, 'do you contradict yourself and say that, despite all these wonderful things, mankind will not progress to the point where he brings in the great age of peace, plenty and world-wide prosperity? And that, in order to set up the great age of peace, God will eventually have to put aside human government and bring in the messianic kingdom of his Son?'

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Thatcher was British Prime Minister, 1979–90.

I am sure you would like me to be able to tell you when the messianic kingdom of Christ is going to come! With the vast happenings during the last few years in Europe and Asia, the world is now looking around for an improved United Nations' mission to the world to bring in peace. One can applaud the motives, without being committed to the starry-eyed un-realism that somehow this will eventually succeed and bring in world peace.

### ***Lessons we can learn from the image***

#### *No government is permanent*

The first thing to notice about God's communication to Nebuchadnezzar through the vision was that he said there would be a succession of world empires, and none of them would be permanent.

That is so obvious to us in this advanced age, that perhaps we don't notice its significance as a prophecy in those early days. There had been earlier empires, vast and great and significant; Babylon, under Hammurabi,<sup>3</sup> and then Assyria and Egypt. But few enough for mankind at that stage to hope that one day there would develop a perfect empire that would last forever. In the heart of the founder of every empire there nestled the hope that his empire was going to be the exception and it would last.

My teachers at school laboured to teach me geography. In those days a true depiction of the world had England right in the centre of the map—that's how I knew where to find it! Most of the world was coloured pink and 'the sun never set on the British Empire.' We thought it was there forever, but it was a puny little thing that lasted only a very few years, compared with some of the very big empires of the world.

'None of them would be permanent,' said God. 'Not you, Nebuchadnezzar, and your neo-Babylonian empire; nor all those that follow you.' Has it come true? America is now looking a bit wobbly. And as for the great Russian empire, that claimed it would last forever and give way eventually to the Utopia that all men seek for, it managed to last very little more than seventy years.

#### *Two extraordinary things that are worth pondering*

1. How civilizations grow and flower and then decay. They seem to run out of steam or energy or something, and generally end up either becoming second-rate, or disappearing altogether.
2. While all these world governments will show different features, and all are valuable in their way, none of them is of absolute value. Nebuchadnezzar's unconditional, absolute monarchy might be a head of gold and that was glorious, but it wasn't of absolute value. The iron that depicted the Roman Empire might not have been so glorious, but it was a great deal stronger and more effective. Various political forms of government have had more advantages than disadvantages, but none is of absolute value.

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<sup>3</sup> King Hammurabi (c. 1810–1750 BC) was an important Babylonian king known best for an early law code. He united Mesopotamia and turned Babylonia into an important power.

We in our modern day, and particularly in the 'Christian' world, need to listen to God. Christendom has had a fatal habit of mixing up Christianity, and confusing Christianity with whatever political system happens to be in power at the moment. In the Middle Ages, when you had the Divine Right of Kings and an absolute monarch, Christendom favoured absolute monarchy. When great parts of Europe turned to constitutional monarchs, the Church favoured constitutional monarchs. Now Christendom's great idol is liberal democracy, and Christianity has to be modelled after liberal democracy. Because it has proved to be, in many respects, an equitable form of government, large sections of Christendom seem to think that it is of absolute value.

Democracy certainly has its weaknesses. Take moral questions, like abortion. Liberal democracy says that you mustn't impose your views on anybody else. See what that means. It means that, when you come to the great moral issues of life, the government can't take a stand. It consults one extreme and the other extreme, and comes to a compromise. Then the laws of the land are framed as a compromise, as though ultimate moral values were a matter of bargaining. It is a highly dangerous thing and Christianity can never consent to that. The present modern liberal democracy is not of absolute value. It has desperate weaknesses.

### ***The process of change does not bring about peace***

The various forms of government would change, but that process of change would not itself bring in the great age of peace. What a message that has for our modern day. You know what our Communist-Marxist friends have taught for the last seventy years around the world; that their political theory was based on the laws of Nature that were absolutely irresistible. Following the philosophical idea of thesis and antithesis and then synthesis, the process being repeated time and time again, you gradually work through the forms of government. From serfdom, through various forms of aristocracy and monarchy to capitalism, and then finally to socialism and communism. These are the irresistible laws of history; this is how history would evolve, and nothing you could do would stop it. That's how they preach but it was always a little difficult to understand why they had to kill so many people to make the laws of history work.

And why do we need to work with the laws of history, if the laws of history are inevitable? They said the glorious utopia would inevitably come because of the laws of irresistible change written into history. Change would bring in the utopia we desire. It was proved wrong. Russia was the great power that influenced so many millions in the world and told them that they were going to build a utopia without God and in spite of God—if there was one. It has crumbled to the very dust and the prophecy has been proved true.

### ***The Messianic Kingdom is unique***

It isn't that humans should do their best to progress through various forms of government until, imperceptibly and little by little, human government merges with the government of God and one day you will wake up and find that the kingdom of God has come.

The lesson of the image is that the great messianic kingdom of Christ is not one in the series. It is a totally different thing. When it comes it will smash all human government to

pieces and take its place. Why will that be necessary? Because that great image, majestic as it was, was basically unstable. Its feet were made part of iron and part of ceramic. That wasn't a recipe for stability. Ceramic will not mix with iron, and iron will not mix with ceramic.

It wouldn't have been so serious if the head of the image had been made of an iron and ceramic mixture, particularly if it was meant to represent Nebuchadnezzar's brain (that would perhaps have been a suitable metaphor). But it was not in the head; it was in the feet. It meant that the image, though great and glorious and magnificent, was essentially unstable. Soon it would have fallen on its face and been removed by God in his mercy. This very impressive man had a fatal weakness. Governments have found it, and the more democratic they have tried to become the worse it becomes. When the people rule, the government can be put at their mercy.

### ***The problem is with the sinfulness of the human heart***

There is a deeper flaw. It lies in the heart of man himself, and not only in government. In the end it lies in you and me. We are a mixture; we have our ideals, but we are not so good at carrying them out. That is the basic human problem. As late as the 1950s the Communists were holding their great congresses in Russia. At one of them they announced the programme for the congress. It was this: Our Marxist theory is a marvellous theory, but it won't work without human beings. It is no good having a theory; we must aim to create a new man.

The lesson is there for everybody to see. You can have wonderful theories, but where they break down is in the weakness and sinfulness of the human heart. Any scheme that does not allow for the fact that man's heart is basically evil is doomed. 'The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick' (Jer 17:9). What hope have we then of a golden utopia ever coming?

### ***The only answer is the power of God***

What Nebuchadnezzar saw was a stone cut out without hands. In biblical language that means by *divine power*. A stone cut out by divine power smashed this tottering image, and in its place put a kingdom based on God's divine power. Here is no pessimistic message, this is the gospel. If there is going to be a kingdom of peace and glory, then (in the words of the Lord Jesus) its first condition is this, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). No mere outward reform will do; no political theory will suffice to cure the trouble and the weakness. It needs nothing less than a radical new birth.

That is why the Lord Jesus has not yet set up his kingdom in power and great glory. He waits to perform this greater miracle in the hearts of men and women who will confess their weakness and sinfulness, come to him as their Lord and Saviour and be born again. It does not mean that when we receive Christ we are sinless. It means that when we receive the Saviour there is implanted a life within us that is of supernatural origin and is the basis for life in the coming kingdom of God.

### ***The sure foundation***

So let us be wise and listen, not only to God's message to Nebuchadnezzar but to our Lord's comment on it. He likened himself to a stone. As Isaiah had foretold, God has laid the chief cornerstone.

Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.' (Isa 28:16)

The building of our lives and the building of eternity are only safe when based on that cornerstone, which is Jesus Christ. Many stumble at it and fall and are broken. The world still finds it difficult to hold that the key to the solution is Jesus, who was crucified as a criminal on a cross. It seems nonsense to the world, a message of despicable weakness and folly. But the Ages have proved that this apparently foolish message is the power of God for salvation (see Rom 1:16). It is no bad thing if, stumbling first, we are broken, and find therein the way to repentance and to faith, proving by personal experience that Jesus Christ is alive and the new birth is a reality.

Let us also be warned. It is one thing to stumble in difficulty and eventually come to accept it; what shall be said of those who reject it knowingly and outright? It is written that when Jesus Christ comes again in power and great glory to set up his kingdom, and to destroy them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess 1:7-9), 'the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him' (Matt 21:44). God is exceedingly patient; he has his plans for the redevelopment of earth, but he will not wait for ever. In the end he will have to remove all those who deliberately oppose him.

## [World Government and its Hideous Strength](#)

Perhaps we should spend the first part of this study on some necessary preliminaries and we might also take up some unfinished business from our last session.

We were studying together the vision given by God to Nebuchadnezzar, recorded in Daniel 2; the vision that gives us a survey of the rise and fall of Gentile imperial powers from the time of Nebuchadnezzar until the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those empires were figured in an image of a man, composed of various kinds of metal. It was destroyed when a rock cut out without hands from a nearby mountain fell upon the feet of the statue and smashed the whole thing to smithereens. The stone that fell upon the feet of the image was, of course, a picture of our Lord and his coming, and the setting up of his messianic reign.

We then raised the question, does the prophecy tell us anything about when the messianic reign is to be set up? Let us think about that very briefly. Not exhaustively, of course, but as a preliminary to the further studies of this book.

### **Understanding Nebuchadnezzar's vision**

The empires represented in the image were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome—Imperial Rome. In their understanding of the vision, some observe that our Lord Jesus was born under that fourth empire, Imperial Rome. They have concluded therefore, that it was when our Lord Jesus was born that he destroyed Gentile dominion and set up his own messianic kingdom here upon earth.

If you should ask those that hold that view, 'How does it come that the Gentile powers have survived in such enormous strength and increasing power all these long centuries?' they will then seriously reply that we have to understand the setting up of the kingdom of Christ in two phases. It was set up when he was born (or when he died, or perhaps when he rose again and ascended) and then the Gentile powers were, in principle, destroyed. But it has taken all these long centuries to gradually mop up all the pieces into which the image was broken. The messianic kingdom of Christ will eventually be manifested at his second coming, but the image was destroyed in principle when our blessed Lord came first to earth.

I humbly submit that this is not what holy Scripture really teaches. To start with, we should notice that the image was formed, not simply of four different kinds of metal. The first kingdom was of gold, the second of silver, the third of copper and the fourth—in its first and early phase, was formed of iron. It was only in the last phase of that great kingdom that there came this mixture of iron and clay. That in itself is significant. You may talk if you wish of the



four-kingdom image; or you could talk of a five-kingdom image. Perhaps, more exactly, you should divide the fourth kingdom into two, 4a and 4b. The fourth kingdom lasted an exceedingly long time. It is sometimes forgotten by us who live in the West that the Roman Empire continued to survive in the East, based in Byzantium, until the year 1453 AD.

Our Lord was certainly born under the fourth kingdom, Imperial Rome. But he was born in its very early phase under its first emperor, Augustus. When he died and ascended to heaven it was still only in the reign of the second emperor, Tiberius Caesar. Our Lord was not born in the last and final phase of that fourth kingdom. Moreover, we should perhaps notice how helpful it is to distinguish between the two meanings that are given to us in the book of Daniel of the phrase, the kingdom (the dominion) of God.

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives for ever, for his dominion is *an everlasting dominion*, and *his kingdom* endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?' (4:34–35)

So here Nebuchadnezzar is making observations about the inhabitants of the earth, and you will notice that the kingdom of God is already in existence. He describes it as an everlasting dominion, for he is talking of the kingdom of God, the Creator. He has always been king and has never ceased to be king; he has never abdicated the throne of the heavens, nor departed from his rule over earth. It was a present reality in Nebuchadnezzar's day; it is still a present reality in our day. It goes on from everlasting to everlasting. The kingdom of God therefore, in that sense, is a present reality.

### ***The problem of evil has not been settled***

But that, as you will rightly see from the book of Daniel, is not the final answer to the problem of evil in the world. Already in Daniel's time (as in centuries past and in the centuries that were to follow), the Most High, in the exercise of his kingdom, would sometimes allow Nebuchadnezzars or Hitlers to arise. He would eventually chastise them and bring them to a better frame of mind, or else destroy them as he destroyed Belshazzar.

God's providential government of this world—his raising up and putting down of world authorities—has not solved the problem of evil. Anybody who has lived through the twentieth century will have proved by experience that the problem of evil has gone on, almost unabated. We have witnessed Hitler and Stalin and the Khmer Rouge and Yugoslavia, and the butchering of many millions. The problem of evil has not been settled, not even by the coming of our Lord—his birth, his death, nor by his resurrection and ascension to God's right hand.

Scripture would not encourage us to think that it has been settled. We must not confuse God's governmental kingdom—his control of the nations, in which from time to time he chastises evil governments and puts them down—with God's final answer to the problem of evil. That shall be a kingdom of another sort.

### ***The Messianic Kingdom***

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever. (2:44)

Here, then, is the messianic kingdom, to be distinguished from God's kingdom in the other sense of the term. God's kingdom, his providential rule, was already in existence when God announced here that the day would come when he should set up another kingdom, the messianic kingdom of his Christ.

When, therefore, shall Christ put down evil and reign? The quickest way to solve that problem is to consult the Lord Jesus himself. He tells us, as he told his disciples, when he proposes to put down evil and set up his kingdom manifestly in the world. Let us read two scriptures relating to that topic.

Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' (Matt 19:28)

Our Lord Jesus is talking to his disciples and telling them that one day they will be rewarded for their sacrificial following of him. It shall happen when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory; the time when his faithful followers shall be rewarded and given to share the government with him and reign with Christ. 'The new world' is described as *the regeneration* in the KJV. And when will that be?—is it now? Or when?

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. (Matt 25:31)

Here our Lord is interpreting the prophecies of Daniel for us. The time for the public setting up of his messianic kingdom, the time for him to sit upon the throne of his glory, the time for him to gather the nations and to judge them is not now. Nor was it at the time of his ascension and certainly not at the time of his birth, but at the time of his second coming in power and great glory with all the holy angels. Then shall he sit on the throne of his glory and execute the judgments of God upon the nations.

### **Daniel's vision**

With that we ought to come to a survey of chapter 7, which will occupy us for the remainder of this study. We ought to notice the structure of this vision, the problems it raises, and the answers that are given. Daniel here tells us of the vision. Three times over he uses the phrase, 'I saw in my vision by night' (v. 2); 'I saw in the night visions' (vv. 7, 13). There were three parts to the vision that he saw, and he very carefully distinguishes them.

In the first part of his vision he saw three beasts, representing three successive Gentile dominions. But the fourth beast was so remarkable that he prefaces his account with the

words of verse 7, '*After this I saw in the night visions*'; and he describes this fearful, destructive fourth beast. And then he saw what God's answer to that destructive beast would be.

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgement, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. (7:9–12)

God's first answer to the problem of this destructive beast was the setting up of his throne, the day of judgment, and the destruction of that beast. Then there is a second part to the answer. Notice how Daniel prefaces it once more with the observation, '*I saw in the night visions.*'

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. (vv. 13–14)

After that, Daniel says he was distressed, and asked certain questions to seek answers to the things that troubled him.

As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and *asked him the truth concerning all this*. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever.' (vv. 15–18)

Now you find a third part in answer to the problem of the destructive beast. Not only shall the throne be set up and a judgment take place; not only shall the dominion be given to the Son of Man; but, in the third place, dominion shall be given to the saints of the Most High.

Daniel had a second question to ask,

*Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet.* (v. 19)

He asked about the significance of the fourth beast and the answer was given to him in the words of verses 23–27. In that reply, another element is given to God's answer to the destructive beast. The dominion shall certainly be given eventually to the saints of the Most High, but not until God has permitted those saints to endure unequalled suffering and persecution at the hands of the beast.

He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court shall sit in judgement, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them. (vv. 25–27)

### ***A second critique of Gentile imperial power***

It was a complicated vision; therefore it receives not just a single answer but a complex one. And these are the facts that we shall try, by God's grace, to understand in our present study.

We notice at once that this second critique of Gentile imperial power and politics in chapter 7 of the book of Daniel is vastly different from the first critique in chapter 2. (See [Chart 5 – The Symbolism of Chapters 2 and 7.](#))

In chapter 2, God's presentation of Gentile imperial politics is of a magnificent image, beautiful in its construction; the image of a man, so large and beautiful and wonderful as almost to be awe inspiring. Thus did God pay his divine compliment to human progress and attainment in the field of politics.

It is not good that we should take the view that all human government has been impossibly corrupt; a thing of evil to be despised. God's own comment is different. He recognizes that mankind has made magnificent advances and attained outstanding achievements in the ordering of this world. It has been done, of course, with divine assistance, for there is no power apart from God. That is not to overlook the faults and failings, but it is to be honest to the fact that, from some points of view, human achievement in the great empires that have ruled the world has been splendid and magnificent.

### ***Differences in the two visions***

In chapter 2 God presented the four empires in the form of a great, splendid, glorious, magnificent image of a sophisticated man. He uses very different symbolism in chapter 7 to depict these very same Gentile imperial powers. Now he presents them, not as an image of a sophisticated man, but in the form of four wild, ravaging beasts. The second vision is not meant to contradict the first, but it is meant to put another side of the equation.

We shall notice the second difference. In chapter 2 the fault that God found with the image of a man was its inherent, basic instability because of its fatal weakness. It had this unhappy mixture of iron and ceramic in the feet and this mixture of incoherent substances rendered the whole image ultimately unstable. For all its magnificence it had this fatal weakness, and was therefore destroyed as being inadequate to bring in the great age of peace and glory that was anticipated.

How different it is with the critique in chapter 7. The fourth beast, the last in the series, is not criticized for being weak; the very opposite is true. The fourth beast is represented as a wild beast, and not only a wild beast but a wild beast of unprecedented strength and ferocity. It stamped, it chewed, it pulverized all the opposition. It was not for the reason of its

weakness that it had to be set aside, but because of its hideous strength. Allowed to go free and continue much longer, it would have destroyed the very planet and the whole phenomenon of a human race. It had to be put down therefore, not because of its weakness, but its hideous strength.

Notice, then, the difference in the symbolism that is used in these two visions to represent the messianic kingdom of our Lord that will one day take the place of all Gentile dominion and authority.

In chapter 2, the messianic kingdom is represented by a stone cut out of the mountain without hands. At first sight it seemed a somewhat crude alternative to that sophisticated and highly polished image, which had been finely wrought by the best skill that the artist could bring to bear upon it. It was a dream image, though, that never did exist in reality. The kingdom that supplanted it was a rough stone, vividly different from the sophisticated image. But now we are told that this rough stone was not the subject of any human artist's device; no human hand had raised a chisel upon it. It was cut out by divine power, for that is the meaning of the Hebrew term 'cut out without hands.' It forms a perfect substitute and answer to the problem of the image that was so desperately weak. The answer must be a kingdom that is based, not on human power but on divine strength and power.

If in the vision of chapter 2 the messianic kingdom is represented as a stone cut out without hands, in the vision of chapter 7 the kingdom that supplants the rule of the Gentile beasts is not a rough-hewn stone, nor is it another beast. By vivid contrast we are told that the kingdoms of the earth are given into the hands of the Son of Man. Notice the carefulness of the vision. You might have thought that the Son of Man was the more appropriate substitute for the image of a man in chapter 2. But it isn't! Here the Son of Man, in all the wonder of his ideal manhood—rationality, justice, morality—stands in contrast to the lower order of those fearful beasts.

The two visions are very different, and deliberately so. They put two sides to the same question. Both are answering the question that has arisen in our minds: If mankind on this earth has made such remarkable progress, and not least in the area of politics and world government—why is it that human efforts at governing the world will not lead to the paradise we all seek? Contrariwise, God will have to remove human government and set up the kingdom of his Messiah. Why?

### ***God's diagnosis of the nature of Gentile imperial political power***

We have already considered the answer given in chapter 2. Now let's consider the answer given in chapter 7. He pictures them as four wild animals. God is not being unnecessarily insulting and sarcastic. I hope you like wild animals; I do.

*They can be very pleasant.* When I was in Kenya a friend took me into one of the national parks. To my surprise we were able to come within a few feet of a lion. He sat there unperturbed and kindly disposed. It was explained to me that he had just had his breakfast—the remains of a giraffe were by his side, and he was perfectly content and happy. But then there is that other feature about wild beasts.

*They are absolutely amoral.* Please note I did not say *immoral*, but *amoral*—they have no concept of morality. They are not led in their decisions by morality. Not even your pet dog is

led by considerations of morality if he refrains from misbehaving himself in the lounge. That's simply because you have trained him not to misbehave. He remembers the discipline of it and decides not to do it again. It has nothing to do with morality; animals have no concept of morality. So if you meet a lion when he has had his breakfast and his stomach is full he will be as genial a companion as you could possibly desire. But if you should meet him one evening when he is short of food and hungry, and you are the only potential dinner in sight, he will eat you without compunction and without the slightest qualm of conscience. Animals are only concerned with animal instinct; the law of the jungle is survival at any cost.

When God here depicts Gentile political powers as wild beasts, God is not being unnecessarily critical. He is only saying what political philosophers have said many times. While individual men and women are expected to behave morally, governments cannot be expected to behave morally and very frequently don't. If you have a personal enemy, try shooting him in the dark and you'll end up in court. But if you should be a government in charge of the Secret Service, you murder who you like and who you can for the good of protecting the country and you don't get hauled to the courts. Curious, isn't it?

America, to take an example, has enough oil by herself and from her friends. But if the day ever came that America ran out of oil and her whole economy was about to go bust and the only way to survive was to take your oil, be warned! The American government would do what governments have done in the past; when it comes to survival they would take everybody's stuff that they could lay their hands on without compunction.

There was more than a slight suggestion last year that the reason for Allied interference in the Gulf was not without its interest in maintaining the West's oil supplies. It was not all undiluted questions of principles and morality. If we doubt that, let's read our history. What a story it has been—Gentile governments behaving like wild animals. If you want a modern example you have Yugoslavia on your door step.<sup>4</sup>

### ***They have become more humanized***

But wait a minute! It's not all gloomy. I must call your attention to a very interesting feature of the vision.

The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind (heart KJV) of a man was given to it. (7:4)

The vision is saying that this was an extraordinarily powerful wild beast. Together with the strength of a lion, it had the agility of an eagle. It was made to stand up on its hind legs like a man, and a man's heart was given to it. It was humanized a little bit. You may perhaps hold the view that this is referring to Nebuchadnezzar and the experience he had, that taught him sense that he never had before. But let's stay with the sheer imagery of it. This first beast was, to some extent, humanized, made more humane; a man's heart was given to it. That has been true of more than one Gentile kingdom.

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<sup>4</sup> These talks were given in 2002. The Yugoslav Wars were a series of ethnically-based wars and insurgencies fought from 1991 to 2001 inside the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

It has been true in our own country in comparatively recent times. In the nineteenth century, if you had stolen a sheep or a horse you could have been transported to Australia. You can steal a sheep now if you want and they won't send you to Australia. They might not even put you in prison and they certainly won't execute you. When I was a child, in my home town I remember seeing the children of poor people walking the streets in bare feet, clad only in a vest. The government is more humane than that now. With all its faults and failings, since the war there has been a compassion that introduced the Health Service and you won't see children running barefoot in the streets, wearing just a vest. Governments have become more humane in large parts of the world.

### ***It will not lead to paradise and peace***

You might say, 'There is the hope! Little by little, by humanizing the human heart and the heart of governments, it will lead eventually to the great paradise of peace that we all look for.' But I am sorry to disappoint your hope. It will not be so.

Come back to the beasts. Don't forget that they start off by being beasts. Governments are, in technical terms, power blocs; they are amoral in the final analysis. Notice the fourth beast. It is said that he was given the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things. Alas, it is not said of him that he was given the heart of a man; his heart remained that of a wild beast. The combination of human intellect, signified by the eyes, and the heart of an amoral beast is a recipe for such hideous, destructive strength that would make shivers run down your spine.

We have lived through a day when human beings have been allowed to have insights into Nature, its basic building blocks and the basic energies stored in the atom and elsewhere, to the point where mankind has power to obliterate Europe, if not the planet. Just imagine that insight given to human intellect and marry it with the heart of an amoral beast. It has been a considerable worry of the Western powers, now that Russia has fragmented, to know into whose hands Russian atomic power might fall. Let it fall into the hands of some nations and they would have no compunction in holding the whole world to ransom. There are desperadoes enough in this world that would blow the planet up rather than give in to their enemies.

### ***Not the answer to the problem***

Humanized though some Gentile governments have become, humanizing is not the way into the coming kingdom of peace and glory. What, then, is God's answer to the problem; how and by what steps will God introduce his solution? The first part of the answer is given us first in the vision. In that first part no mention is made of the Son of Man.

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgement, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of *the great words that the horn was speaking*. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. (7:9-11)

See the final infatuation of human government. A politician with the intellect of a man and the heart of a beast, so obsessed with the colossal power at his command that now he begins to blaspheme God. The great swelling words he speaks are words against God himself. He conceives of the fact that he is God; there is no other god out there. He has the ultimate power and therefore he can play at being God. That has been a fancy in man's mind ever since the fall, 'You shall be as God' (Gen 3:5).

I was listening to some eminent scientists just recently. They were holding forth the view that, now we understand (according to them) all the secrets of the universe and how the universe came to be, we no longer have need of God. What more hideous end to humanity could you imagine than a man (however great his intellect) with the heart of a beast, trying to play God? What shall he do when he tries to play God?

He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. (v. 25)

'He shall think to change *the times and the law*.' These terms are familiar to the Israelite. The law of God, given from Sinai and onward, lays the foundation for all true, responsible behaviour on earth and governs human relationships. The times are the great religious festivals that mark the rhythms of God's creation and redemption. This great ruler, obsessed and infatuated with his power, wants to play God. He will change the very ground rules of human existence, if he can.

There are times when it is suitable to get frightened. Biological engineering can be a very helpful thing in its right place, but it has its obvious dangers. Human beings can now begin to control what kind of people shall be born. Who shall decide who qualifies to be born? 'The normal people,' some will say. Who shall decide what's *normal*? A human being? When human insights into Nature have gone ten times more than they are now, imagine such power being put into the hands of this kind of a dictator, playing God. He could alter the very gene pool of humanity and decide what people should be born and what people should be allowed to live.

Think of God's holy laws about the family, for instance. It is startling to hear the British government now saying that perhaps the time has passed when we shall only have families of a husband and a wife. A different mode could be adopted, changing the basic law that the Creator has laid down. Wait till it comes to its zenith. Daniel says the result will be a power bloc so hideously powerful that it will stamp and destroy and bite, and unless God intervenes it will destroy the planet itself and humanity with it. God's answer to it is threefold.

### ***There is going to be a judgment***

You have never heard a more marvellous gospel ever. We have a funny idea of God's judgment—perhaps we wouldn't be wise to talk about it in a gospel meeting, lest our unconverted friends should get offended and not come any more? I don't hold that view of



the judgment of God myself. I see it as a glorious gospel. And so did the psalmist in ancient Israel (Ps 94–98). ‘What is the answer to evil?’ asks the psalmist.

Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Ps 98:8–9)

Don’t you want there to be a judgment? Who wants the evil of the world to go unchecked for ever? The unconverted man with any moral sense would want a judgment; even if he doesn’t believe in it and thinks it is ‘whistling in the dark’ and comforting yourself with fairy tales. But he would hope it is true that evil will not go on for ever, and there is going to be a judgment.

[God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

Picture the scene with the help of the imagery. ‘The Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool’ (Dan 7:9). Over against this fearful, hideous beast, put the triumph of rationality and wisdom. The books are opened—a perfect record; the thrones are set—perfect justice. The ultimate triumph of rationality, wisdom and justice. Incidentally, notice that it is not one throne, but *thrones*. We shall come to that again.

Praise God in your heart that the vision is true and let us preach it unashamedly. It is gospel for our world; let us hold up our heads before the atheist and the humanist. Precisely at this point they have no gospel to preach. The humanist declares that his interest is in humanity. He has got rid of God with all his tyranny and he is on man’s side.

Let’s take him to visit Auschwitz. Here is a row of cells and the occupants are scheduled to be gassed next Thursday. What shall we say to them?

When they see us and think we bring hope they ask, ‘What are you doing for us? We want justice.’

I will say, ‘You will not get justice in this world. You will be gassed, and there’s nothing anybody can do about it. But there is hope; this life is not the end. The sense of right and wrong that you have in your heart is not your own imagination. Our Creator put it there; it is not put there to mock you. There is to be a judgment where earth’s wrongs will be put right. For you, there is forgiveness of all your sins right now, if you will have it. The marvellous assurance from the judge himself is that, if you trust him, you will never come into judgment, but will pass from death to life.’

And what will the humanist say to them? These people want justice, and he is interested in humanity; he has got rid of God in order to improve the lot of humanity. But he will have to say, ‘I am sorry, you are not going to get justice in this life. You are going to be gassed on Thursday, and since there is no God, no life to come and no judgment, you are never going to get justice.’

The prisoners will say, 'Do you mean that all my hope in justice has been a mocking delusion?'

'Yes,' says the humanist.

And it is not just Hitler's victims in the gas chambers. Who shall count the multi-millions that have died unjustly in this world? God has an answer to it, our sense of right and wrong is not put there to mock us. It comes from our Creator God and there is going to be a judgment where earth's wrongs will be put right. The resurrection of Christ is the final assurance of the fact.

### ***The judge is the Son of Man***

Perhaps some of you are saying, 'You denounce one tyrant and his excessive power; but you seem to substitute one tyrant for another tyrant who happens to have a bit more power, namely almighty God.'

Is that so? The final answer in the great struggle of life is simply who has the greatest power. The beast destroyed other people; now God destroys him. What's the difference? They both destroy. You wouldn't say anything so silly, would you? God has anticipated this objection. 'With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man' (Dan 7:13). We know exactly who that person is. It was precisely with reference to that text that our Lord claimed to be the Son of Man. To his judges in the priestly court, he said,

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son . . . And he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man. (John 5:22, 27)

Our Lord is qualified to be judge because he is the Son of Man. The amazing grace of almighty God, he shall judge nobody. It will not be a question of God Almighty, in his position of God Almighty, just crushing his creatures; God himself has decreed that the judgment of man shall be done by a man, a perfect man who isn't obsessed with power. As he looked over his beloved mother city of Jerusalem and saw the sufferings that must descend upon that city he (the judge in that final day) broke down and wept over it.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (Matt 23:37)

The judgment of mankind will be in the hand of that sinless, compassionate, perfect, ideal Son of Man.

### ***It is not a question of who has the greatest power, but who has the greatest love***

Nobody—not even the devil himself—has ever thought that he could attain greater power than God Almighty. The ultimate question is, who loves man the best? Judgment shall be given to the Son of Man. Not only because it shall be judgment by peer (man judged by man), but because of his worthiness to judge.

I would remind you of that well-loved vision of Revelation 5, where the hosts of heaven proclaim the Lamb worthy to take the book and open the seals. With that the preparations for

the judgment of mankind begin. Why is he worthy to do it? It is not only because he is the Son of Man, but because he himself was slain. There shall be no voice raised at this judgment to say it is unfair and he is unqualified. They shall be shown Calvary and how the wild beasts tore him there, with their enmity and jealousy, their envy and spite, their power politics, both religious and civil. Invested with the very power of God, why did he put up with it?

If you were out walking and a mosquito landed upon you and stung you, you wouldn't think twice what you would do to it. But to think that a little bit of clay six foot tall should turn round and do insult to God and crucify his Son—why didn't God smudge out the planet? Because that's not God! Before the blessed Son of God should mount the throne in judgment, he was first lifted up on the cross of Calvary. He is worthy to execute judgment because he was slain so that men might go free and be redeemed.

And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.' (Rev 5:9–10)

God is determined not just to destroy creation—he will not thus yield to defeat. Christ is going to make something of it and he will yet make something of human beings. By his redemption not only to forgive them, but to turn them into a kingdom of priests to live and serve God for his eternal pleasure.

### ***Dominion shall be given to the saints***

Incredible though it seems, there is a third part. The answer to the destructive power of the unregenerate Gentile political system is not only that God shall have a judgment; and not only shall the Son, the Messiah, be the judge; but dominion shall be given to the saints.

Who are the saints? Some theologians will say, 'Daniel's people, the Jews. He is talking about Jews in the last days before the coming of Christ, who will be persecuted by the Beast.' Yes, that is what Daniel is saying—in the first place. Those dear people shall be persecuted with unparalleled ferocity by the final administrator of that final, fourth kingdom. What a persecution it will be, and God will not hand over the kingdom to them until it is finished.

But I have been reading the New Testament. You won't mind if I add a codicil to Daniel in the light of my New Testament knowledge. I have read there that the likes of you and me, 'who were far off' (Eph 2:17), will reign with them.

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (2:11–12, 19)

We shall reign with him. But we shall also suffer for him, 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*' (2 Tim 2:12 KJV). Almighty God is no tyrant. It is not because he is jealous of the

Beast and the power that is in his hands. Great power shall be allowed to come into the Beast's hands, but in the day to come the merest saint of God shall be entrusted with power that shall infinitely surpass any power that the Beast may ever wield. They shall reign with Christ. Almighty God wants to share his government. Right from the very first, you may remember, it was not just one throne that was set up, but *thrones*. That's the marvel of God; what shall we be like when at last the Almighty hands the kingdom and the dominion to the saints of the Most High?

### ***Why do believers have to suffer?***

Before they reign, those people of that final day shall be called upon to go through unimaginable sufferings. In principle it has been similar down the ages. Daniel's three companions were thrown into a fiery furnace, and Daniel himself into a den of lions. Our early Christian brothers and sisters were eaten by lions in the city of Rome, for the entertainment of the crowd. Why must God's people be allowed to suffer before they reign? There are many answers to that problem and on another occasion we shall have to think of some of them.

### ***God is a god of justice***

As we finish now, I call your attention to one answer. Paul is writing to comfort the Christians in Thessalonica over the question of the sufferings that they are enduring for Christ's sake.

Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. (2 Thess 1:4–7)

Why must you suffer? For the vindication of God's name and to demonstrate to the universe at large that God is just.

Imagine the scene. You are taken up and, at the invitation of God, the dominion is given into your hand and a throne is prepared for you with Christ. Your next door neighbour is eventually consigned to perdition—what do you think your next door neighbour is going to say about that?

'Who would have thought it! Why has God put him there? You should have seen him at work; I was more honest than he was. God puts him on a throne and me into a pit.'

To put not too fine a point on it, my brothers and sisters, God has got a problem of justice. Our sins are forgiven because of the blood of Christ; does it not matter then how we behave? If we behave worse than a friend at work, nevertheless shall we reign and the friend goes to perdition and has nothing to say about it? None of us deserves to reign; but if by God's grace we have been forgiven and are given to reign with Christ, God is going to demonstrate to the world that he is just in his choice.

He needs to be able to point to us and say, 'In spite of all their imperfections and shortcomings, they are covered by the blood of my Son, in whom they trusted. They were then prepared to suffer for my Son's sake. They stood with him through thick and thin and suffered for him. In elevating them to the throne I am being just. It is manifestly fair.'

My brothers and sisters, we must take notice of the situation. If ever God puts me on a throne in the coming kingdom, shall he be able to demonstrate before the whole world that his decision to put me there is just, in light of the sacrifice that I was prepared to make for him here in this life?

### *One final thing*

We are called upon to suffer with Christ, showing him our allegiance, so that we might be glorified together. It wouldn't do for us so to forget ourselves and start to behave like wild animals. Surely no believer ever behaves like a wild animal! I am only saying what Paul said: 'If you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another' (Gal 5:15). That's how wild animals behave. Our study lifts us up to the very heaven above, but it also brings us down to the realities of daily life in the world, and life in the family of God.

## God and Culture: A Tale of Two Cities

In this fourth study in the book of Daniel, we have come almost to the mid-point of our small series. It is, therefore, appropriate that we look around us, take our bearings and see where exactly we are (see [Chart 1 – Contents of the Book of Daniel](#)).

In chapter 1, the first item is Daniel's refusal to eat the king's impure food. In taking that stand Daniel and his colleagues are vindicated. The setting of that incident was the university in the imperial city of Babylon.

In chapter 2 we considered Nebuchadnezzar's dream image. This was no longer in the setting of education, but of politics. Through the vision given to Nebuchadnezzar by God we have one of the two divine critiques of the politics of the Gentile imperial system.

If now we went on to study chapter 3 (which we shall not be doing), we should find that it continues with the theme of Gentile politics from another point of view. In chapter 2 the central feature was the image of a man, given in the vision by God to Nebuchadnezzar. In chapter 3 we should meet another image, the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar made and set up for political reasons, as an attempt to achieve political coherence amidst the rulers and deputy rulers in his vast empire. That remains for our final study.

We shall now move to chapter 4, first of all, where we shall once more find that the setting changes. It is not the university and the general setting of pagan education, nor is it particularly the setting of Gentile world politics. It is (if I may use the general term and not be misunderstood) *culture*, Gentile culture. Chapter 4 is about Nebuchadnezzar as the one who was responsible for the rebuilding and beautification of the city of Babylon. He was a genius of an artist, builder and planner, who made the newly rebuilt city of Babylon one of the seven wonders of the world. It was majestic and glorious for the splendour of its art and architecture, its city planning, its murals, hanging gardens and so forth. We are now in the context of Gentile culture.

In chapter 5 we shall still be in that context, when we come to our final study. Perhaps we ought not to use such an exalted term as 'culture' when we come to chapter 5. Perhaps we might dismiss it as *socializing*; but it is the story of a glittering banquet that Belshazzar, the prince regent, put on in the city of Babylon towards the end of his reign. It was a magnificent banquet, with all the splendour that he could muster in that marvellous civilization. It was a banquet given to a thousand of his lords; all their ladies dripping with diamonds and the nobles with their military medals. It was a fantastic affair. And as for the cuisine, I forbear describing it to you lest your mouths should water. It wasn't high culture like art and architecture, yet the building in which they held the banquet was a magnificent showpiece of

Babylonian architecture. Inside they held a banquet such as would make the Lord Mayor's Banquet in London look like a lorry drivers' café.

### **God's critique of Babylonian culture**

Chapter 4 is the story of Babylon, rebuilt and restored by Nebuchadnezzar. Alongside that we shall also consider chapter 9, an exceedingly famous chapter as you well know. For, in its few concluding verses, there is one of the most notorious prophecies of the whole of the Old Testament. They not only describe the final restoration of Jerusalem; they tell us the *times* (as the rabbis would put it) of Messiah. They prophesy when the Messiah would be born, how he should be 'cut off', and what would be the result of his nation's rejection and crucifixion of him. As a result of that crucifixion, desolation should come to Jerusalem until the very end. They prophesy when that end shall be and give us a detailed timetable regarding it. Chapter 9 has been the subject of many detailed studies by preachers and commentators, but we shall not have the time to deal with that aspect of the prophecy.

#### ***The two cities: Babylon and Jerusalem***

What I wish to do is to call attention to the theme that chapter 9 has in common with chapter 4. As you look at the two chapters you will see that they are the 'tale of two cities'. To see that in more detail, look at the chart. Look down to chapter 4 on the left hand side, and chapter 9 on the right hand side. Chapter 4 deals with Babylon city—the glory of the magnificent city of Babylon, rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter 9 deals with an equally, and perhaps more famous city—not Babylon, but Jerusalem; the two great pivotal cities of the ancient world and indeed of the Old Testament and, in a sense, the pivotal cities of the New Testament.

All of you will be familiar with the fact that when the book of Revelation comes to sum up the history of mankind and what has been going on through the centuries in our world, it finds it convenient to use the figure of *Babylon the Great* on the one hand, and the *New Jerusalem*, the bride of the Lamb, on the other hand. These two cities have this much in common; they are two famous cities. By way of eloquent contrast, chapter 4 deals with the glory of Babylon—it describes the time when Babylon stood there at the very peak of its splendour; whereas chapter 9 describes Jerusalem during one of those sad periods when the city of God stood in ruins.

#### ***God's discipline of Babylon's king and of Jerusalem***

Then they have another thing in common. Chapter 4 is the story of how God disciplined Nebuchadnezzar, the great monarch, the restorer and beautifier of Babylon city. Chapter 9 accounts for the desolations of Jerusalem, not so much on the ground that it was Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed it (though that was true); it accounts for the desolations of Jerusalem in terms of God's own discipline of his ancient people and his city.

The magnificent thing about chapter 4 is that God took the trouble to discipline an ungodly monarch. It is an extraordinary demonstration of the magnificent grace of God—who would have thought that almighty God would have troubled his head about Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon? The amazing fact is that God is not only concerned with his

people, who know him by the ties of redemption and salvation; he is the Saviour of all men. Though he is the Saviour of those who believe in particular, he was still concerned about Nebuchadnezzar. So concerned was God, that he took the trouble to discipline him and not to destroy him. He disciplined that godless monarch who had destroyed Jerusalem city, laid waste its temple and stolen its sacred vessels, so that he might bring him to his senses and restore him.

When the watchers and executives of God's discipline pronounced their sentence upon Nebuchadnezzar's tree, they gave careful instructions that the tree was not to be rooted out and destroyed completely, but simply cut down. The stump was to be left and a band carefully put around it, so that in due course, after seven times, the tree might grow again (4:13–15). If we gain no other lesson from our study, it will be a heart-widening experience to remind ourselves of the magnificent grace and mercy and patience of God.

If chapter 4 is about God's discipline and eventual restoration of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, chapter 9 is about God's discipline of the city and people of Jerusalem. You will notice a solemn thing, which we already noticed in our first study. Whereas Nebuchadnezzar's discipline lasted for what is termed *seven times* (4:25), the disciplines of Jerusalem are said to last for *seventy sevens* (9:24). They are not yet complete; that is a heart-chilling observation.

The question immediately rises, why was God apparently more severe with Jerusalem than he was with Nebuchadnezzar? A part answer is that in Nebuchadnezzar God was dealing with one individual and in Jerusalem he is dealing with a city and a nation. But there is a deeper reason. Jerusalem city was God's city, its inhabitants his people; hence his disciplines are not less, but more, severe: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities' (Amos 3:2).

For all the solemnity of that announcement, yet shining at last through that long, long tunnel comes the assurance that Jerusalem city will one day be restored.

As we read these historical and prophetic things, we shall be particularly interested in what they have to say to our own hearts, both as creatures of God (like Nebuchadnezzar was) in the ordinary affairs of daily life; then as children of God. We have not come to a literal Jerusalem city. As Christians ours is another calling; we have come to the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city of God (see Heb 12:22). As those who represent the Jerusalem that is above, we too need grace that we may seek to serve God in all godliness and honesty (1 Tim 2:2). Our citizenship is in heaven, and we too stand under the discipline of God.

### **God's discipline of Nebuchadnezzar**

Let us come now to chapter 4, to consider God's discipline of the king. I suggest that at this point we shall have to take especially good care, lest we misinterpret what we are about to read. Our danger lies in this. In many parts of the Old Testament Babylon city has got an exceedingly bad reputation. The beginnings of the city of Babylon are related in the book of Genesis; they were inauspicious indeed. They started on altogether a wrong foundation, spiritually as well as physically. Later in Old Testament times the sins of Babylon rose so high towards heaven that God pronounced his judgment upon them.



In the New Testament, as we have already remarked, Babylon eventually becomes a symbol of consummate evil.

And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: 'Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.' . . . She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. (Rev 17:5; 18:2)

Because of that, if we are not careful we might misinterpret what chapter 4 of the book of Daniel is going to tell us. We might suppose that Babylon city itself was so evil that that was why God disciplined Nebuchadnezzar, but that is not so.

In chapter 4 it is not the city that comes under God's judgment, it is the king that comes under his discipline. You won't say that he was disciplined because he was king of Babylon, will you? The very same chapter tells us that it was God who raised him up to be the king of Babylon (v. 17). Nor will you say that he was judged because he had made the city of Babylon too brilliant and splendiferous because, when he was eventually restored, we are told that God restored him to his former brilliance. In fact, he gave him even more brilliance and all his lords sought him once again for the brilliance of his glory. It was God who gave him the brilliance in the first place, and it was God who restored to him his brilliance after his discipline. We must get that straight to start with, otherwise we shall go astray.

What was wrong with Babylon's king—why did God have to discipline him? Let us remember again the significance of Nebuchadnezzar. He was the rebuilders and restorer of Babylon, and a magnificent job he had done. It was the policy of the Babylonian kings, as distinct from the later Persians' that, whenever they invaded a foreign country and defeated it, they would cream off all the intelligentsia—the philosophers, the political leaders, the architects, the artisans and the technicians—anybody who had any craft or special ability. They would leave all the others behind, take the leading men to Babylon and set them to work beautifying Babylon. No wonder its gardens were one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Have you seen the murals in the Pergamum Museum in Berlin? Some of them are original and some have been restored. How magnificent they are—the archaeologists rave about those blue tiles still.

The plan of the city was magnificent, the sweeping boulevards and the ziggurats; it made Jerusalem's buildings look like cottages in a village. Where did the architects get the mathematical know-how to plan the ziggurat? I don't know! And then, of course, the sweeping river, channelled so it graced the city with gardens going down to the rim of the water. It was a magnificent city.

You say, 'What was wrong with that?' Well, nothing that I know of. We have to get it out of our heads that the God of heaven is somehow against art and architecture, doesn't like beautiful things and prefers us to be drab and poverty-stricken looking. That is not true.

When God gave Nebuchadnezzar his dream, he likened Nebuchadnezzar to a great tree and the top of it reached towards heaven. It was visible the world round. In the words of the dream, he says, 'the leaves of this tree were beautiful' (4:12, 21). It wasn't some scraggy old tree! The leaves were beautiful and there was fruit in abundance—it was nourishing for food. The tree spread and gave shade. If you can imagine the hot plains of Iraq: how wonderful to

have a tree that gave you shade and relief from the heat, so that you could sit down in the cool and think in peace. It was a contribution to sanity. All the beasts found shelter and comfort under it, and the birds found security in it. What's wrong with that? That is God's assessment of Nebuchadnezzar and what he had done for Babylon.

*God's handiwork in Creation was good to look at*

If I must produce another Scripture to prove that in God's estimation there was nothing wrong with it, let me point out how these words echo the handiwork of God himself, as he describes the garden of Eden that he planted at the beginning. Genesis 2:8 says, 'God planted a garden' (which shows, incidentally, that the rest of the world wasn't garden). He planted it not only for Adam and Eve's delight and enjoyment, but as an example of what they could do. By copying their Creator, they could make a garden of the whole world. They were to subdue the world and make something of it. That was God's idea.

When God planted the garden he put trees in it. 'And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food' (v. 9). There were two types of tree: trees that were good to look at, and trees that were good for food. I personally like to think that the order is significant. I might have put the trees for food first. If you are going to enjoy life at all, you will have to survive, so you had better have some apples and oranges on the trees. But God put the trees that were good to look at first. He was concerned with men's stomachs, of course—he made them. He did not make us like cars, which just need refilling with petrol. We have appetites and we enjoy the pangs for the anticipation of satisfying them. Then you see a beautiful meal prepared for you, with the colours of the broccoli against the carrots, and then the meat—and the gorgeous feeling of eating it! We should thank God the Creator for being able to enjoy these humble necessities in life.

But he is more interested in the mind. Aren't you? What would you say is more important in life—the stomach or the mind? The mind is made up of many departments, and one of them is *aesthetics*. That is why God has made the world such a beautiful place. Just imagine living in a country where all is colourless and drab; it would be like a prison cell. God has not made it that way. He has filled it with colour: green grass and blue sky, and birds galore with all kinds of feathers. What a wonderful God he is. He knows how important mental health is. He has given us lovely things to look at to preserve our mental health and satisfy the aesthetic sense he has given us.

There are times when beauty and flowers are more important than even potatoes. If you have a friend dangerously ill in hospital, do you take him potatoes? No, you find a lovely bunch of flowers, and you leave the flowers in the hope that as the weary patient looks at them he can see how lovely they are. And that sense of loveliness gives an added incentive to fight the illness and to survive it and come through. In one hospital they found that taking a harp thorough the wards and playing it softly helped many patients to recover. It restored the will to live. He is the God of music. He gave us ears, and delightful sounds to fill and satisfy them.

When chapter 4 says that God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to the throne, it wasn't simply that he raised him up to pass laws to govern the people; though he passed enough of them,

and they were stringent indeed. He raised up the man as a genius in that part of the world to add something of the marvel of the colour of life for the people of that day. He was to be like a lovely tree whose leaves were beautiful and plentiful, providing shade, peace, refreshment, sustenance and security.

We have these in abundance. Some nations today scarcely have any, and we take them for granted. How rarely do we thank the Lord as we should for his marvellous provisions at that natural level?

### ***Nebuchadnezzar's mistaken understanding of the source and goal of his gifts***

It was not for beautifying Babylon that God complained at Nebuchadnezzar. What was it then? We learn what it was from the advice that Daniel gave to Nebuchadnezzar when he expounded the dream to him.

Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practising righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity. (4:27)

We notice two things there. People to whom God has given such lovely natural gifts and beautiful things do not always manage to produce beautiful behaviour. Nebuchadnezzar had been so gifted but, in spite of it, he had been indulging in iniquity. In particular, he had ground down the poor. Babylon was marvellously beautiful, but a lot of it was built on sweated labour and that casts a bit of a shade over its beauty.

Much beauty and grandeur was produced in our own country in centuries past, to our present enjoyment; but if we look back carefully we should find it was built on the sweated labour of the poor.

Incidentally, we ought to turn aside to talk to ourselves as Christians. It is not wrong to love nice things or to have beautiful homes, havens of peace and colour, relaxation, refreshment and sanity. But because we like nice things, sometimes there does come easily a temptation to forget to be generous to the poor. We who are Christians, and have altogether higher honours and responsibilities, must think of our duty to the spiritually poor of the world. God give us sanity and wisdom in deciding how much we spend on beautiful things; and how much we decide to sacrifice for the Lord's sake, so that his gospel might reach the spiritually poor and the lost.

That aside, there was another element in Nebuchadnezzar's sin. You may judge that from the point at which the blow of God's discipline fell upon him.

Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty? (v. 30)

Foolish man! He got so carried away by his art and architecture, his own sophisticated ability, that he first of all made a mistake about the source of his ability. He said, 'Is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power?' Tracing his abilities to himself rather than God, puffing up his royal chest and indulging the pride of his heart as though he were responsible and the source of all this magnificence. It was not true.

We are in danger when we get that stupid idea into our hearts. It is a persistent disease and it's likely to crop up in the most unexpected places. Paul had to warn his fellow-believers at Corinth about making the same mistake.

He says, 'Those spiritual gifts you have: where did you get them? Do they come from your own resources, or were you given them?'

'We were given them,' they said.

'If you were given them, if you have received them, why do you boast and parade yourselves around as if you hadn't received them, as though they came from your own abilities?'

We could take our spiritual gifts and so parade them, and forget that the credit is not ours. These things are given to us.

### *The one who is the source of the gift should get the credit*

The story is of a young boy at school. He came before his headmaster just before he left school. He had done brilliantly in the exams. The headmaster said to him, 'You are a very gifted boy,' and the boy blushed. The head said, 'I was not praising you, I was praising the one who gave you the gifts. I said you were gifted! That's not to your credit.'

If you are gifted don't take the credit for it, and don't parade it as though it were to your glory. We have nothing but what we have received. But you should hear us, particularly when we have foreigners around.

'You have mountains? You should see our mountains! We have the biggest river in the world!'

That's not to your credit, is it? Did you put the river there, or the mountains? How stupid can we get!

'My boy was top of his class.'

Well thank God for that; but don't boast about it, and least of all amongst your fellow Christians. If your boy is the cleverest, it is only because God made him that way. God loves the boy who isn't the cleverest and God gave him his gifts as well. Sometimes it is difficult for God to be kind to us. He gives us gifts, and then we go off and parade ourselves as though it was to our credit and not to his glory.

### ***Nebuchadnezzar's goal was his own glory***

Nebuchadnezzar made a mistake, not only about the source of the gifts but also about the goal of them. He said, 'I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence—*and for the glory of my majesty.*' Instead of letting all his artistic gifts flow back in a paeon of praise to the glory of God, he shut himself up in a dead end and posed as the goal of all his gifts, for his own glory.

Humankind is too small for that. We are not big enough to be the goal of life. The man or woman who exercises his or her gifts simply for their own glory and satisfaction soon finds that the goal they have set themselves is not big enough. All we do, from the smallest to the greatest, should be done to the glory of God.

I remember once I had a student. I had to mark his Latin prose. He was not altogether the brightest student I had ever met, but he was diligent. His name was Mullan. When he handed

it in I noticed on the top of his paper were the four letters *AMDG*. I thought these were perhaps his initials, and that he was adding my initials on for some reason: A. Mullan, D. Gooding. It was only later I stumbled on to what he was writing. Those four letters are the initials of four Latin words, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*—to the greater glory of God. Here was the student, writing his Latin prose in school for the greater glory of God. I wish I could say I had always marked them for the greater glory of God, and not lost my temper with some of the students sometimes. Do you work your computer to the greater glory of God, and lay the bricks and repair the car and do the sewing and the cooking *ad majorem Dei gloriam*—to the greater glory of God? We are missing our vocation if we do not.

Here is the desperate danger that nestles in the heart of lovely things. God made trees good to look at and good for food. But there was one tree in the garden that also had leaves that were good to look at, and the fruit was good for a lot of things. There was nothing wrong in the tree itself, but God had said,

You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (Gen 2:16-17)

You know what happened. The devil came along and said, 'I am so sorry for you! God is such a kill-joy. I understand he has told you that you must not eat of any of these trees in the garden.'

'No, that's not right,' said Eve. 'We may eat of them all except this one.'

'Well, that's God all over. He puts a beautiful tree in front of you, all attractive and lovely, and then he says you can't have it. He is always tantalizing people with all the lovely things in life that you must not enjoy.'

Millions have believed that nonsense. Eve had another look at the tree and she saw that it was beautiful to look at; that's *aesthetic satisfaction*. And it was good for food; that's *physical satisfaction*. And it was desirable to make one wise; that's *intellectual satisfaction*.

'That's life,' said Satan. 'Take it! Aesthetic satisfaction, physical satisfaction, intellectual satisfaction; that's the sum total of life. You don't need anything more. Take the fruit, woman.'

'But God has said we must not. He said that in the day we eat we would die. I must obey God's word.'

'Come off it, Eve. Nobody accepts God's word these days. You won't die; you will enter into life.'

And she was deceived by it. She took of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and she gave also to her husband, and they fell into the abyss of sin and alienation from God.

### *Loving the world*

We Christians need to listen to that too, as well as the world. The world has swallowed the lie and they have no time for God. Time for music, but not for the God who made music. Time for food, but not for the God whose hand provided it. Time for art, but not for the God who gave them the ability and the eye to see with. They are like the girl who takes an engagement ring, but is not interested in the fellow who gave it to her.

The Apostle John has to warn us:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. (1 John 2:15–16)

What's wrong with loving the world? If the world is understood as those lovely things—not wrong in themselves but things that would draw your heart away from God the Father—then those very things become perniciously dangerous. Instead of the love of them leading me nearer the Lord, if they lead me away from him that is an unqualified disaster.

Imagine a wealthy father who took his son, on becoming twenty-one, outside on to the lawn in front of his stately home. He said, 'You are my son, and I would love to mark your coming of age by a beautiful present. Here is your own private jet aeroplane.'

There's nothing wrong with jet aeroplanes. But suppose the boy got into the cockpit, started the engines, waved good-bye to his father and never came back again. He had no time for his father. Don't you suppose his father would curse the very day he gave the boy the aeroplane?

Our hearts are such deceitful things. We enjoy what God gives, but we must love the Father and let all his gracious gifts draw us nearer to him.

### ***Why did God discipline Nebuchadnezzar this way?***

And so God had to discipline Nebuchadnezzar, and the discipline was not arbitrary. The discipline humbled him, of course. From being a highly intelligent, artistic personality, he now began to behave like a wild beast. He didn't bother to clothe himself, he let his hair grow and didn't cut his nails. He lived outside, going about on all-fours and eating the grass like an ox. The discipline certainly humbled him. God could have disciplined him in many ways; why did he choose this way?

### ***The references to animals in the Book of Daniel***

We now meet what we shall see many times in our studies, the constant reference in the book of Daniel to man and the animals. Here in chapter 4 we have a man who began to behave like an animal, and then was restored. In chapter 6 it is the story of Daniel being thrown into the den of lions; sizeable and ferocious animals. In chapter 7 it is the story of four wild beasts, standing over against the Son of Man. In chapter 8 it is another two beasts, wild and ravenous. Man and the animals; symbolic and highly significant.

There is a difference between humans and animals, but we do actually have a lot in common with animals. Take eating, for instance. If you are sitting at your table eating a juicy beefsteak and your dog catches sight of you, he will come up wagging his tail. He has a stomach, like you have a stomach. Physiologically they serve the same purpose. He knows some of the enjoyment you have and he would like to share it with you. We have a lot in common; a lot of our appetites are the same.

And yet how different we are, even when it comes to eating—we were meant to be different. Give the old dog a bone and he will go and eat it anywhere; in the filth and dirt of a yard or the door mat, it doesn't matter. He doesn't get out a knife and fork and a white

tablecloth, and he doesn't learn to use his napkin. He has no concept of aesthetics. He has no concept of manners either, nor morality. He will be so friendly to you until he gets the beefsteak; but when you have put it into his dish and he starts to eat it, don't try to take it away! I have not observed any dog bowing his head before a meal, giving thanks to God, either. We are different—we are meant to be different. There is a spiritual dimension, even to your Kellogg's Cornflakes! You recognize that it comes to you from the very hand of God. We are not animals.

When it comes to love between man and wife, that has a physiological base too. Human love is meant to be a far more exalted thing than just animal passion. Alas for our modern world that is fast turning that lovely thing into sheer disgusting animalism, so it is altogether sub-human. It pervades our literature and the television.

### ***The humbling of Nebuchadnezzar***

What a disaster it was to see poor old Nebuchadnezzar. He had failed to live to the glory of God. He had made himself the chief end. And now the great beautifier of Babylon, who had imposed order on the waste lands of that part of the world and made something beautiful of it, was living like an animal. He had just let himself go without any order whatsoever, and was living like a beast.

The discipline carries a message by itself. The New Testament talks about these things in those solemn and black verses in Romans 1. What happens when men decide not to acknowledge God? God judges them (v. 32). Not merely in the day to come, but he judges them now. Because they refuse to retain the knowledge of God, God gives them over to a debased mind—God does it. It is not that they develop a debased mind, and then God judges them for having it—the debased mind is God's judgment on them. They said they could enjoy life without God and the discipline of God on that kind of thing is to deliver people over to a reprobate judgment. Their own judgment goes all astray; they dishonour their bodies and then glory in perversion.

It is not merely that God will judge them for it; *this is the judgment of God*—'God gave them up to a debased mind' (v. 28). They shall receive in their bodies their due penalty, says Paul (v. 27), a mind that can no longer discern what is truly holy, healthy and beautifully human, but descends to the level of the beasts.

Listen to Peter, talking to the church. He says that there are false teachers who will come into the church preaching permissiveness, that pre-marital unchastity is OK, just like the world does it.

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption. (2 Pet 2:12 KJV)

That is God's judgment on a decadent civilization. We need, therefore, to evaluate the culture that surrounds us. Our young people especially need help and guidance in this very matter; the peer pressures in school and in society are tremendous. Satan finds it so easy to represent God (as he did to Eve) as a kill-joy who wants to keep us back from beautiful things

and lovely experiences. It is so easy to swallow part of the lie and think that to indulge ourselves is the way to health and maturity. It isn't.

We need to evaluate art. I love going round art galleries, but not all art is good. Much of it is, but some of it is positively evil. Not all literature is good. It secretly used to amaze me to see young women coming up to university and reading subjects that involved them reading literature written by the most rabid existentialist philosophers, preaching their values. Good literature is good, like good bread and butter is good; it is not to be despised. We don't have to avoid the world's good literature. In the world there is good and healthy literature, but there is also poisonous literature. And not all you see on the TV is good, is it? It is not good when believers are watching programmes late on a Saturday night for which they would need to repent before they go to the Lord's Supper on Sunday morning.

Our minds are our most valuable things. Listen to the advice of the apostle,

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Phil 4:8)

But fill your mind with the immoral trash and beastliness of the world, and what you sow you will reap.

My dear young folks, you don't have to yield to peer pressure and dress scruffily! I remember one student coming to me. I was his adviser of study, and we got on well together.

He said to me, 'I couldn't dress like you.'

I said, 'Why not?'

'That's impossible up here.'

He was dressed very scruffily. Perhaps someday someone will explain to me this dilemma. I can understand a young person coming to me and saying, 'You old fuddy-duddy—your clothes are dull and colourless, we want to be *beautiful*.' That I could understand!

I have listened to the Lord Jesus and his ideas on dress. He said, 'Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these' (Luke 12:27).

When our Lord died and the soldiers got his robe, they found it was a beautiful piece of cloth and a lovely piece of weaving, woven in one piece from the top throughout. It was such a beautiful tunic that the soldiers, rough though they were, said, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be' (John 19:24). That's God's idea on dress. He would love you to be as beautiful as he could make you. You don't have to be scruffy if you don't want to be. I will say no more, lest you suspect that I am a crotchety old man!

### ***God's restoration of Nebuchadnezzar***

The final lesson from Nebuchadnezzar is that God restored him. Having learned his lesson that human pride and godlessness in the arts and music and architecture lead eventually to the dehumanizing of man, he lifted up his eyes to heaven (lovely gesture) and saw again that



there was this bigger dimension to life. Life's lovely things are meant to lead us to him who is the source of all loveliness and beauty, to his heart and eventually to his home. Nebuchadnezzar was restored as a healthy, sane individual and given his former glory.

He stands as a lesson. History has not always been on a slide down, from goodness to badness and to perdition. Civilizations have risen up, and they have been exceedingly beautiful. They decay and become corrupt and then they vanish. Then what? God raises up another lot!

Our own country before Wesley came was in the pit of filth and rotteness. What lovely things God did through that *evangelical awakening*. He restored sanity to the nation. God is the God of restoration and he cares for the world outside. God help us to be Daniels in our day and generation, so that we might not only show the world the way of salvation, but what it means to lead sane, healthy, human lives under the grace and government of God.

## Jerusalem City

It is almost disgraceful to dismiss Daniel 9 in five minutes, but that I must do. In Jerusalem city in chapter 9 we think of a very different city from Babylon. Its task was not to lead the world in its culture, though it was at times a moderately beautiful city. It had the infinitely higher honour of witnessing for the true Lord. Theirs was the covenant and theirs was the glory. Not now simply the glory of Creation or of created human abilities, but the magnificent story of how the almighty, transcendent Lord deigned to come and dwell and place his glory in the temple at Jerusalem.

This is not Nature now, but the God of grace, redemption and revelation; the God who stationed himself there, so that Israel might be his servants in pointing the way to the Messiah and the salvation that men and women sorely need.

### *God's discipline of Israel*

The sorry story is that Israel abused her privileges and lived in such carelessness as compromised the very name of God, until God could not tolerate it any longer. He turned them out of their city and had Nebuchadnezzar destroy Jerusalem and the temple. Jeremiah prophesied that it would last for seventy years (25:11). The false prophet said it would never happen, but it did happen. And when it happened he said it would only last for two years (28:11). You don't fool around with God. Don't suppose you are going to be given the high honour of witnessing for him in the world, while at the same time you are living like the world does.

The disciplines of God lasted for seventy years, and when they were nearly completed it drove Daniel to his knees. Why? Because Daniel saw that a terrible thing had happened. Israel had come under the discipline of God and, instead of repenting like Nebuchadnezzar did, they went on in their sin. Instead of repenting of their sin and seeking the grace of God that Jerusalem should be restored, they were going on in their sin as they had always done. They had prospered in Babylon city and the large majority had given up the vision of being God's witnesses to mankind. What would God do? He said he would restore the city in

seventy years. What would he do now, when, for the most part, his people were utterly unrepentant? Would he restore it in spite of them?

Daniel prayed to the Lord (9:3–19). ‘O Lord, I have to confess that the people are still sinning. From that point of view I have no ground for my intercession, but I do have one ground of appeal. This city was called by your name and you called your name on the people. If you destroy them permanently, the world at large will say there was never anything in it and God has failed. “For your own sake,” God, will you restore them.’

And God said, ‘Yes, I will restore them. But listen, Daniel. I said they would be restored after seventy years, and Jerusalem would be rebuilt. It is going to be restored after seventy years, but not fully.’

God is not interested simply in timetables, clocks and calendars. Great events like the discipline of his people wait upon spiritual decisions as well as timetables. ‘The city will be restored, but only partially. The people will continue in sin, in spite of my discipline. Sin will so harden them that when I send the Saviour they will be too blind even to recognize him, and they will crucify him; hence desolations are determined right to the end’ (see vv. 24–27).

God’s people did not respond to his discipline as well as the old pagan king Nebuchadnezzar responded. Sin is terrible; it has a hardening and a snowballing effect, and in the end it hides people’s eyes from the Saviour himself. The disciplines continue, and will continue until the Lord comes; but Jerusalem one day is going to be restored.

Said God through Ezekiel, ‘Tell Israel I am not doing it for your sake, I am doing it for my name’s sake. I have a reputation to uphold before the nations. I am going to prove to the nations that the Old Testament revelation was true; I did actually choose Jerusalem and it was I who dismissed Israel out of Jerusalem. I did it—not the nations—and I will prove it by restoring Jerusalem one day. I will prove the case to the whole world, for my own name’s sake’ (see Ezek 39).

### ***God’s discipline upon us to maintain the honour of his name***

We can’t help but apply the lesson to ourselves. We are not members of physical Jerusalem; we are citizens of the Jerusalem that is above, and our task is to witness for the Saviour. If Israel stood under God’s disciplines, we do even more. The very cup of the covenant that we take each Lord’s Day reminds us.

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds . . . I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. (Heb 10:16–17)

He will do it with our cooperation, if we allow him. If we become careless, he will do it still. Then he will have to do it under his chastisement and that can be painful and severe. ‘For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives’ (12:6). He will make us holy with or without our cooperation. Why? Because his name is called upon us; the very name of the Trinity rests upon us. May God help us to bear the name with dignity and holiness and beauty before the Lord, ‘so that in everything we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour’ (Titus 2:10). Who of us has not deserved God’s discipline? If it

were merely for our sakes, then we should have been lost forever. But God does it for his own name's sake, and therefore he restores our souls. Let's take the words of Psalm 23 to our hearts. 'The LORD is my shepherd . . . He restores my soul . . . He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake . . . I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.'

There is a rumour going around, that the place where our Lord Jesus Christ is sitting now is better than Bethlehem ever was! It is indescribably beautiful and magnificent, the wealth of it is beyond description and we shall soon be there. By God's faithful care, and if needs be his discipline, we shall not only be there, but one day we shall be like him and as beautiful as he is.

## Law and Freedom

We come now to study chapter 6 in the prophecy of Daniel and before we do so we should stop once more to take our bearings. There are, as you know, many analyses of the prophecy of Daniel, and some doubtless are better than mine; but I put mine before you simply as a practical means of calling your attention to certain features of the book that would be important for us to observe.

Once again (See [Chart 2— An Enlarged Table of Contents](#)), notice there are two columns: chapters 1–5 on the left and chapters 6–12 on the right. Looking at the left-hand column you will notice that it begins with Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, reverently placing God’s vessels that he had taken from the temple at Jerusalem in the temple of his idol in Babylon. Notice that the first column ends with Belshazzar calling for those same golden vessels. It is not written there under chapter 5, but that is what he did—he called for the golden vessels that his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar had put in the temple, having stolen them from Jerusalem. He drank from them himself and he invited his wives, his concubines, all his lords and ladies to drink from them. That apparently small but significant piece of information brackets the first column together.

Then look at chapter 1 again. It starts with Nebuchadnezzar, the rebuildler and beautifier of Babylon; then at the end of the column we have the story of Belshazzar. At his death, on the night of his banquet, the Babylonian empire came to its end and the Medo-Persians took over the kingdom.

So chapter 5 forms a logical climax and end to the first five stories that start with Nebuchadnezzar in the hey-day of his glory and finish with the end of the Babylonian empire.

Chapter 6 begins another column because it begins the story of another empire. It is the first story about what happened in Daniel’s day within the empire of the Medes and Persians under their ruler, Darius.

Now let us go back to the first column and notice this (chapter 5 once more, at the end): the demise of the Babylonian empire was accompanied by this remarkable divine intervention. When Belshazzar committed his blasphemy against God by drinking from the sacred golden vessels, the fingers of a man’s hand emerged and wrote upon the wall—an event so famous and so significant that the phrase has passed in English into our metaphorical vocabulary. When something is coming to an end and we can begin to see it, we say *the writing is on the wall* for such and such a project. The writing on the wall indicated the coming, immediate end of the Babylonian empire.

When we go over to the second column (beginning in chapter 6), we read about a new empire, the Medo-Persians (i.e. new to Babylon, taking over Babylon).

In chapter 8 we have our attention concentrated on the empire of the Persians, followed by the Greek empire of Alexander the Great.

In chapters 10–12, in the final vision the prophet is given to see not only the Greek empire, nor even the Roman empire that followed it, but he is given a vision right to very end of Gentile power in the earth. *The end*. Not just the end of Babylon, nor the end of Persia, nor the end of the Greek empire, nor the Roman, but the end of all Gentile rule and authority the world through; at which time, of course, the messianic kingdom of our Lord Jesus will be set up.

Interestingly enough, in the vision of chapter 10, when Daniel is to have revealed to him the programme that shall lead to the end, that programme is related to him in the words, 'I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth' (10:21 NASB).

You may care in your mind to turn over the comparison between the two.

Chapter 5: the last of the first column, *the writing on the wall*.

Chapter 10: the last vision in the second column, *the writing of truth*.

That leads us to consider another thing. Notice the thought-flow through these two columns of chapters.

### *Column 1. Theme—Values*

The theme for chapters 1–5 is broached by the opening verses of chapter 1. When Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem he took some of the golden vessels of divine service out of the temple of Jerusalem and put them into the temple of his god in Babylon. Those vessels were of gold because they were Israel's metaphorical and symbolical way of expressing their ultimate values. The highest, the ultimate value in life, as Israel saw it, was God himself and the service of God; hence the vessels with which they expressed that service to God in his temple were vessels of gold. From that you will pick up a theme that goes through all those five chapters—the theme of values.

In chapter 2 for instance, the image of a man that was there to represent the various successive Gentile empires. It was made of metals of varying values—gold, silver, bronze, iron, and iron mixed with ceramic.

Then in chapter 3, when Nebuchadnezzar set up an image for all his governors to bow down and worship, so that he might try and keep his empire together, the image that he set up was a golden image. That was not an accident. Nebuchadnezzar was saying that what this image represented—namely the State in the person of its monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, and the gods of that State—was the supreme and absolute value before which everybody in the State would be required to bow down and give to it ultimate loyalty and obedience. The expression of a totalitarian state, if ever there was one.

In chapter 4, when Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt Babylon he made it not just a city to live in; it was a city of tremendous splendour, the glory of his majesty and its brightness.

In chapter 5 we come back to the golden vessels and then to the writing on the wall, with the famous phrase *Mene mene tekel upharsin*; words indicating weights and money—values. These were the denominations of weights, and therefore of coins in the Babylonian Empire.

Chapters 1–5 in the first column, then, deal with the question of life’s values. Life’s ultimate values.

### *Column 2. Theme—Law, Truth and Times*

There is another theme that is taken up in chapter 6 and proceeds all the way through the remaining chapters. That is the theme (the question) of law, truth and times. You will notice how it is expressed in chapter 6: ‘the law of [Daniel’s] God’ (v. 5); and the writing ‘according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked’ (v. 8). The unchanging writing.

Then we read in chapter 7 that the fourth beast thinks to change the times and the law (v. 25). The times and the law here being the times that God has set down and God’s inviolable law. The beast tries to change them until the heavenly court sits and the books are opened.

In chapter 8 we are told that the stern-faced king casts down truth to the ground (v. 12). When we arrive at that study we shall find that the truth concerned is, in great part, the truth of God communicated in the writings of the Old Testament.

Similarly in chapter 9 Daniel tells us how he understood, by books, the time for the restoration of Jerusalem (v. 2). The books in question are Jeremiah’s books; his prophecies written down, the prophecies that he made about the duration of the exile and the eventual restoration of Jerusalem.

In chapters 10–12 it is a revelation of what is written in the writing of truth. And what a vivid and eloquent contrast that is to the writing we read of in chapter 6, ‘Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked’ (v. 8). ‘It cannot be changed,’ said his civil servants to King Darius; but it was changed.

There is another writing that shall never be changed. It is called here ‘the writing of truth’ (10:21 NASB). This is not the Old Testament writing, but the writing of the counsels of God recorded in heaven that will be fulfilled to the letter and never be changed. Finally, a delightful touch; the man above the river explains to Daniel that, in spite of the terrible tribulation that will come upon the Jews at the end of time, those that are written in the book shall be delivered (12:1).

If this has seemed to you unduly literary and far removed from practical experience, let that last observation comfort you. This is far from being impractical. I have authority to tell you that you are to rejoice in this above all, ‘that your names are written in heaven’ (Luke 10:20). No matter what laws the Medo-Persians proclaim and say cannot be altered; no matter what dictators (even the final one) shall try to change; rejoice that your name is written in the Lamb’s book of life—your name is written in heaven.

## A writing that cannot be changed

As we come to study chapter 6 we ought to pay special attention to this matter of the law of the Medes and Persians that doesn't change. Let's scan the verses of chapter 6 and notice how many times it occurs, and that will convince us that we have to take it seriously.

Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it *cannot be changed*, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which *cannot be revoked*. Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open towards Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, 'O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?' The king answered and said, 'The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, *which cannot be revoked*.' Then they answered and said before the king, 'Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.' Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he laboured till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, 'Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes *can be changed*.' (vv. 8–15)

You couldn't miss it. Chapter 6 of Daniel has got something to do with a writing that cannot be changed; with the law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked. We shall have to take account of that.

One final observation by way of preliminaries. This story too is about man and animals; it is the story of Daniel in the den of lions, much loved by Sunday School children. At the end of the study we will listen to Darius's enquiry, 'Has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?' (v. 20). That is a potent question, for lions have very strong instincts and they relish human beings for dinner! Is there a God who can suppress the animal instinct of a lion?

As we come to the close of our study we shall find that there is an even bigger question. We who live in this age are not concerned so much with whether God is able to change the instincts of animals around us; we have an even bigger problem nearer to home. Is God able to control the animal instinct within us?

I should like you to read a verse or two from our brother James in the New Testament, for he raises that problem explicitly. Let us break into his exhortation.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (Jas 3:7–8)

Is there a God that can tame the animal instinct within us? And if so, by what law does he do that?

No sooner has Daniel (under the inspiration of God) recorded his story of the end of the Babylonian empire and its replacement by the Medo-Persian king, than he is moved to tell us of an incident that immediately shows us the significant advance that the Medo-Persians have made in the area of political theory and practice. Granted, that progress was not very extensive but it surely was progress. They had hit upon the scheme and the idea of the supremacy of the law, in the sense that when once a law was passed by royal decree then everybody in the kingdom had to be subject to the law, including the king himself. Not even the king, who had passed and promulgated the law, was at liberty to disobey it. The king, like the people, was subject himself to the law (at least for a while after the law was passed).

Of course, it wasn't the fully developed system that we have now of the rule of law, much proclaimed by our modern politicians with the motto, 'Freedom under the law.' In those days Medo-Persia was not a democracy; the citizens had no say in the passing of any law. It was the king and his civil servants who made the laws.

And it certainly wasn't the marvellous freedom that the Greeks in Athens achieved in the fifth century BC when in democratic Athens every grown-up male sat in parliament. Athens was a small city state and every male in the city sat in the parliament and voted. No wonder it lasted a long time! They prided themselves that it was the people themselves that made the laws and everybody was equal under the law. That was fully fledged democracy, a democracy that we haven't quite reached in Britain yet. We would do well to thank God that we live in a land where we have known freedom under the law for so long. There are multi-millions of men and women, and thousands of our fellow believers, who live in fear under the tyranny of totalitarian states and have not known the first meaning of freedom under the law.

The Medo-Persians were not so advanced that it was what we know now as 'the rule of law', yet it was a beginning. They weren't quite so crude as the Babylonians. If Nebuchadnezzar got up with a sore head one morning, 'whom he would, he killed,' and if he happened to like you, 'whom he would, he kept alive' (5:19). In the Medo-Persian realm, if the king had signed a writing not even the king himself could go against it. It was a defence against the king passing a law that applied to some people, but then exempting himself and his favourites. He could not do that in Medo-Persia. And it protected the king against powerful lobbies, because once a law was passed you could say what you liked but he was powerless to change it.

### ***Animal instinct and human instinct***

Since our passage starts with lions and men being cast to lions, you will permit me to observe how this concept of the rule of law, and everybody being subject to the law, is a marvellous characteristic of human-kind as distinct from the animals. Lions and monkeys don't make laws; they have their own tribal customs. The bull is master of the herd until some young bull comes along and wins all the cows in the herd for himself. They have their rules and protocol, but they did not make them. You never see them sitting in parliament and discussing amongst themselves whether they shall have this law or not; and then, once it is written



down, forbidding any of them from going against it. Animals don't do that kind of thing because they are animals. They go by instinct that they themselves did not put there and it rules them. If the lion breaks your law and eats you, when the country says that lions shouldn't do that kind of thing, it's no good finding fault with the lion. He never did have a law that said you weren't to be eaten; instinct told him that you were.

It is, therefore, an interesting phenomenon and not to be brushed lightly aside. This is a thing that marks human beings. If we believe the evolutionists, we shall have to scratch our heads very deeply to find out where this concept of the law ever came from. Is it the result of some accident, when we are prepared to have the abstract notion of law and everybody bowing to it? It is a marvellous human phenomenon.

You might well ask, 'In the last analysis is this going to prove to be the way to paradise; the age of peace and glory, the way to world peace and prosperity that all of us long to see?' The political theorists have had this idea for centuries, but it is an idea that hasn't always triumphed too well. You say, 'With patience it will, in the end.' Shall all the nations in the world submit to some international law and thus bring in the age of unqualified peace and prosperity that we seek?

*The law cannot completely suppress animal instinct in human beings*

The early Greeks were very impressed by the rule of law. It used to be said that mankind started life in the forest living like animals. It was all very beastly; men pulled their wives around by the hair of their head and beat their enemies with stonecutters and things. Then they came out of the forest, learned to live together in cities and invented laws. Nature is beastly; the key to prosperity is law. All went well for a while but very soon the Greeks discovered that law wasn't the final answer. Law was not able to completely suppress the animal instinct in mankind. They found that the laws men made, men could subvert, and all too often the very laws of the state were an intolerable burden, if not a disaster. Law by itself became a tyrant: the instrument of the powerful and the wealthy to the suppression of the poor; the instrument of the majority to deny the minority their rights. The Greeks then began to say, 'Law is a rotten thing, let's scrap law and get back to Nature.'

That's what the *hippies* said in the 1960s. The *flower children* were saying that there is so much corruption in the legal system, the banking system, the insurance system and all the other systems in the finest democracies you have ever met (let alone the totalitarian states)—let's get rid of the law and live the life of anarchists. It didn't last, of course. How could it? You can't have civilized life without law.

You say, 'I know what the answer is. It is the law of God.' Certainly, the law of God is good; it is spiritual (Rom 7:14). But the best saints in the New Testament are heard to complain that the law has become a slavery. It cannot justify us before God; it condemns us. It cannot make us holy, but simply make slaves of us. Leaving politics behind we shall have to think of the basic human problem. Has God got an answer that can suppress the animal instinct inside, without turning us into machines?

Let's get back to chapter 6 of Daniel. Law is not the final answer, and law made by man doesn't necessarily suppress the animal instinct. Man himself can pervert the law and you have a vivid example in this chapter. It concerns the eminent civil servants of the court of

Darius and his imperial administration. Don't imagine that they were unsophisticated jobbos; they were sophisticated, highly educated and polished gentlemen of the first order. Their conversation would have been charming. And yet, when Darius proposed to put Daniel over them and make him head of the Persian civil service, they put their heads together and said, 'This is not going to be.'

What drove them to try and stop it, and in the end collaborate together to get Daniel utterly destroyed? The answer is animal envy and jealousy. Could such a thing exist in the civil service? It did exist in the civil services of the ancient world and it exists in many great organizations to this present day. Of course, they didn't let their claws appear in public. They covered their claws with the velvet of 'the good of the state' and loyalty to his majesty. They had in mind, of course, the peace and prosperity of society, so they put their idea to the king and suggested that he passed a law. The motivation behind it was sheer animal; they were out to get Daniel destroyed so that one of them might take his place.

We would be wise men and women not to deceive ourselves. It is all right to harass the civil service (particularly when they send you their income tax claims), but we should be unwise Christians to forget that we still have animal instincts within us. Sometimes we manage to cover them up and they don't appear for what they really are. I have known churches where great feuds have broken out. You will never guess over what—over who should arrange the flowers. Mrs Green was arranging them until one day Mrs Brown came and she arranged them, then there was an eruption. The thing split the church, with families dividing down one side or the other. Or some brother is accused of coming out with heresy, or not toeing the lines of assembly principles; but if you press a little bit deeper it isn't that. It's because number one brother wanted to give out the notices and number two brother wouldn't let him and someone dared to suggest that number three brother ought to be allowed to do it! We do have these little animal instincts.

Listening to that bird singing so beautifully on the telegraph pole, you would think it was a cherub come down from heaven. But the biologists and ornithologists tell us that he is warning all the other birds, 'This is my territory, don't you dare come here!' We all have our little territories, even in the church. If somebody dares to step on our territory it will take a lot of Christian grace not to react with sheer animal instinct. The path to holiness lies in facing ourselves and recognizing that those things are still there. If we don't recognize them we shall cover them unintentionally with all kinds of cloaks and make out it's a matter of principle or doctrine or something else, when all the time it is nothing of the sort.

### ***Daniel's area of 'weakness'***

These civil servants were determined to destroy Daniel, when all the time it was jealousy. They scratched their heads and wondered on what score they could trump up a charge against him, but they could not find anything in his general conduct, his efficiency, his work, or his loyalty to the king. All these were beyond question. But there was one question, they noticed, in which he was wide open to their attack; where they could very easily represent him as being an absolute bigot, anti-social and disloyal to the king. They saw their opportunity and they went into it very quickly and very cleverly.

The area of weakness, the area where he was open to attack, was his monotheism. Whereas Daniel was a faithful civil servant in Medo-Persia and loyal to the king (in spite of all the idolatry), if you had asked Daniel (and I suspect they had) what his idea of religion was and what Jews stand for, Daniel would have told the truth. 'Your gods are but idols, figments of human imagination, not real. There is only one true God; the Lord God, the Creator, the Lord God of Israel.'

It didn't please the civil servants and a lot of other people in Medo-Persia that anybody should be so arrogant as to say that his religion was the only true religion. Medo-Persia was a multi-faith society with all kinds of gods. For one person to say that his god was the only god, that was intolerable arrogance and bigotry and disloyalty to the regime.

'Do you mean to say, Daniel, that you are not prepared to worship the god of the state?'

'That is right,' said Daniel.

'And not even the god that his majesty worships?'

'No,' said Daniel, 'I am not prepared to do that.'

When they saw their chance they took it. We Christians ought to listen to this story, because it is not only godly Jews who have found themselves in this position in Gentile societies from time to time; our early brothers and sisters in the first century found themselves impaled on this difficulty. The Roman government did not care which god you worshipped. It was a polytheistic society, so they didn't mind which god you worshipped so long as you were prepared to show due respect to other people's gods. If required by social custom, you had to worship them as well.

They didn't like the Christians—they called the Christians *atheists*, if you please. They meant that the Christians didn't worship the gods of their fathers. When a young Christian man or woman got converted they no longer worshipped the gods that their parents worshipped. The Romans didn't like that. They said it made for social tension, division in society, and in the end it would lead to strife. To a polytheist, the idea that a man could begin to believe that there was only one God, and his god was the only god, seemed preposterous arrogance. Not only were the early Christians not prepared to worship the gods of their fathers, they weren't prepared to worship the gods of the state. When called upon to offer their pinch of incense to Caesar and they refused, like Daniel they were thrown to the lions.

### ***Why Daniel faced towards Jerusalem when he prayed***

In the Acts of the Apostles we read that when the early Christians would not bow down they were slandered (very often by the Jews). They were slandered for being disloyal to the emperor himself. So was Daniel. When the civil servants secured the ban on anybody praying to anyone other than King Darius, Daniel went and prayed as he always did, opening his windows towards Jerusalem. That was adding insult to injury!

Why Jerusalem? Daniel not only believed that there was one true God, but that God had chosen Jerusalem as his capital city. It would be through Jerusalem that the Saviour of the world would come. The salvation of the world would not come through the now-vanished Babylon, nor even through the Medo-Persians. Salvation would come through the Messiah whose capital city was Jerusalem. He prayed openly. You can see how the civil servants would make that out as an act of arrogance and disloyalty to the king of Medo-Persia.

The Jews in the Acts of the Apostles said to the Romans, 'These Christians are preaching a form of politics. They are saying that there is a Messiah, another king called Jesus, and they are against the government. They are fomenting civil unrest.'

The famous phrase that is often quoted regarding the missionaries, as though it was some good thing to do, 'they are turning the world upside down' (Acts 17:6), means in Greek that the Christians were fomenting political anarchy and subversion against the Romans. It took Paul all his power and grace to stand time after time in the Roman courts to defend the gospel and explain to the Roman authorities that he was not a political subversive. He was as loyal to the Roman emperors as anyone else.

### ***Foreshadowings of the final dictator***

Could it ever happen to us? It will happen once more to the Jews. In this second column, we notice a thing beginning to occur that hasn't occurred before.

In chapter 1 Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple at Jerusalem and took the vessels out of the house of the Lord, but he didn't forbid the Jews to go on worshipping Jehovah.

In chapter 3 Nebuchadnezzar tried to compel the Jews to bow down and worship his golden image, but he didn't forbid the Jews to worship Jehovah.

In chapter 5 Belshazzar took the vessels out of the house of the Lord and drank from them, but he didn't forbid the Jews to worship Jehovah.

But now, in chapter 6, for the first time Darius is persuaded to pass a decree that bans the Jews from worshipping Jehovah, and everybody else from worshipping their gods. No one must worship any god but Darius for a whole month. It only lasted for a month or so, but it was an ominous beginning.

Before you come to the end of the book of Daniel you will read prophecies relating to the great tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes who invaded Palestine around the year 167 BC. And as you read further in Daniel you will find that that great tyrant is but a prototype of what shall be at the end of the age. A dictator shall arise who shall sit in the temple of God.

And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. (11:36)

He shall exhibit himself as though he were God, exalt himself above all that is honoured or worshipped and forbid the worship of the true God of heaven, under pain of death. That's the seriousness of it. Daniel 6 is but a beginning, the first rumbling of a distant thunder.

How easily it can be represented as disloyalty to the state. I remember being in Spain once, in the city of Valladolid and I was asked by the Spanish believers to conduct a fortnight's meetings on the tabernacle. A student from Iran was studying in Valladolid. He began coming to the meetings, but then he stopped. He explained that he daren't come anymore because the tabernacle was something to do with Israel, and if his government had found out via their spies that he was attending lectures on something to do with Israel his grant would be withdrawn.

Before the walls came down in Europe I was in Opava, Czechoslovakia. One night before we went to the meeting the believers told me that I must go early because the secretary wanted to meet me. I thought it was the secretary of the church, but when I got there it turned out to be the secretary of the religious division of the Communist Party! He stood at the back of the building and gave me what was meant to be a meeting. It was packed full of cynicism, and after this supposed meeting he walked up to the front and sat in the front row. As my custom was I leaned over to my translator, just to make sure he would know certain crucial phrases in what I was going to talk about. I was going to talk about the early verses of Hebrews 11, creation and redemption; Enoch as a pattern of the Lord's coming, and Noah and the end of the world.

I said to him, 'Do you know the English word 'consummation'?

'Not tonight,' he said.

I said, 'I want to talk about the Lord's coming tonight.'

'No, not tonight,' he said. 'And nothing about the end of the world either!'

I was in no danger; I might have been thrown out of the country, but I would not have been thrown to any lions. Nor were the believers in any danger of being thrown to lions, but it would have made it very difficult for them to get speakers from abroad if I had spoken that night on the Lord's coming. That was in the days when things were getting easier, but the government would have held it as disloyalty to the state to even talk about the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

### ***Pluralism in religion***

There are signs around us in this country now of a very big rise of pluralism in religion. We are being told that we must get rid of all this religious fundamentalism and imperialism, trying to convert people of other faiths to Christianity. The previous archbishop of Canterbury came home the other year from India saying how deeply impressed he was by the spirituality of India, and it was time now for people of all faiths to get together in open dialogue and seek for the truth. (Implying that we don't have the truth yet, even if we are Christians!) We are to join with Hindus and Muslims and seek for the truth.

You mustn't say that you have the truth. And, should you dare to stand up and say, 'There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12), you would be in danger of being accused, not by the government yet but by religious leaders, of being hopelessly arrogant and insensitive.

In the year 1968/9 the Jesuit order of Roman Catholics withdrew all their missionaries from India. When asked why, they said it was no longer appropriate to try and convert Hindus; they had no need to. 'They are as good as we are, so long as they are sincere,' they said. The Roman Catholic theory of missions is that the Pope is in the centre and then there is a series of concentric circles. Roman Catholicism is the first circle, the second is Protestantism, the third is the Jewish faith, the fourth is the Muslim, the fifth is the Hindu, then come the Buddhists and the Animists and everybody else. So long as they acknowledge the centre, you don't have to convert any of them. There is truth in all!

Liberal theologians, who have long given up on the resurrection of Christ, his deity and the incarnation, don't see any reason why you shouldn't take that attitude. When one

considers the problems now of a multi-cultural and a multi-faith society, if you get up and preach that there is salvation in none other than Jesus Christ you are liable to upset people in certain areas. You could understand a government being eventually persuaded to ban that kind of preaching for the sake of the public peace. What would you do if the British Government introduced here the laws that were introduced in Malaysia, that you must not try to convert the Malays who are Muslim? It is far from being fairy tales or mere antiquarian stories of little practical interest. We would do well to let this chapter begin to make us think, if we have not thought before, of the kind of things that may lie ahead in the coming years.

### ***Daniel was not ashamed of his faith in the one true God***

So in the end the civil servants were able to persuade Darius. They may have said, ‘Darius, we have been thinking. Your empire is vast, with many religions; all religions need to have the same goal. Unfortunately, though, some people are very bigoted and think their religion is the only one. To keep the empire together we want all religions to realize that they are working to the same end, so we have thought of a scheme to get across to the people that all religions are really the same. For a month we should have a celebration of the one goal of religion, and to get that across we should get you to pass a decree banning prayer to any god other than yourself!’

I can imagine his majesty saying, ‘I am not worthy of that!’

‘Oh, but you are,’ they would say. ‘You are an expression of the gods. Think what good it would do: it would stop civil strife and lead to cohesion. If any bigot would dare to be so disloyal and antisocial as to carry on praying to his own god, instead of joining in the spirit of the universal religion, then he should be thrown to the lions. In a big empire like yours, you can’t afford to have trouble-makers.’

Though he might have thought it a rather excessive honour, Darius saw the point of it. When Daniel heard it, he wasn’t going to be afraid of their charge of disloyalty, or bigotry either. Praise God for a Daniel! There is only one God and there is only one salvation. If he wasn’t frightened we shouldn’t be either. It is not arrogance to say, ‘There is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby you must be saved.’ ‘There is only one sacrifice for sin’ (Heb 10:12)—that is a glorious fact and you don’t need any more.

I remember being in Japan and one good lady came to me. She said she rather liked Christianity, but why did we Christians insist that Jesus was the only way to God? Why can’t you have Jesus-and-Buddha?

I said, ‘Well, I have a practical difficulty. I am a sinner and I notice that all the big religions tell us that we ought to behave. Indeed, I knew that before they told me; but my problem is that I have not behaved, I have sinned. Where can I find forgiveness of such a sort that will not say my sin doesn’t matter, that will uphold my values and God’s values (which are more important) and yet grant me forgiveness? I know of only one in the whole of human history who offers it. His name is Jesus Christ.’

In Buddhism there is no such thing as forgiveness. Islam has no sacrifice by which man shall be reconciled to God and neither has Judaism. Christianity stands alone. It is not

arrogance to say there is one God, one Saviour and one Sacrifice, but it is so big it will do for the whole world and you don't need another. There is no other!

### *A power that can override animal instinct*

Daniel went home, opened his windows and prayed as before. It was extraordinary, he had scarcely opened his windows and the civil servants just happened to be passing by—they didn't usually attend prayer meetings! When they heard his voice they couldn't make out where it was coming from, and they looked around and found that it was coming out of a window. They said, 'Whose window is that? I think that's Daniel's window!' They were obliged to tell his majesty that this Daniel was breaking the law. They were animals, like the lions, stalking their prey.

Darius saw through them and he would have saved Daniel, but he could not. Daniel went to the lions so that the writing of the Medo-Persians should not be changed. When Darius came in the morning, he asked anxiously,

'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?' Then Daniel said to the king, 'O king, live for ever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me.' (6:20-22)

Do you believe that? Do you believe there is a power in this universe that can override animal instinct? The civil servants didn't believe in angels. But when the king found out what they had done he ordered that they should be thrown into the den of lions. When they fell down to the bottom, there weren't any angels there. Then it was a question of a battle of the beasts and the biggest animals won. If there is not a power somewhere in this universe that can override animal instinct, then it will be the law of the jungle to the end. You can have what laws you like; they will ameliorate the situation but in the end it will be the law of the jungle.

Many Russians have told me that the government is the biggest criminal of all and the only way people know how to survive is by copying the government. We can recall instances like Watergate and realize that, in spite of America's claims to democracy, corruption exists at the highest level.

### ***Can God suppress the animal instinct within us?***

There is a God who can override the instinct of the animals. Has the story any immediate lesson for us? Let's think long before we answer it too glibly. How easy it is to tell the unconverted that God can break every fetter, only to find that as Christians from time to time we give way to the ferocity of animals. We tear and devour and snipe at and wound our fellow believers. We all have the difficulty. James reminds us of it very plainly, 'For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue' (3:7-8). Men have this marvellous power of being able to tame even ferocious beasts; but what they can do to the beasts outside them, even Christians find difficult to do to the animal inside them.

What is the answer? You say, 'The answer is the law of God.' But wait a minute! The law of God is good; it is spiritual and true. We need it to tell us what is right and wrong; we need

to study it and believe it. But the witness of holy Scripture itself is that even God's law isn't the final answer, 'For by the law *is* the knowledge of sin' (Rom 3:20 KJV). It cannot justify us before God and neither can it sanctify us. You say, 'Why doesn't God make us holy, then?' He could, I suppose, but it would be a funny kind of holiness. He could make us behave as we should by taking away our free will, and then what should we be? Well, we should be like animals; we wouldn't be humans any more.

### ***How does God solve the problem?***

God does not drive his people to holiness by holding over us the threat of eternal sanctions and penalties against sin. He informs every true believer who has repented and trusted the Saviour, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1). We can be accepted with God, not on the grounds of law but on the grounds of grace; 'For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace' (6:14). Therefore, if as believers we fall (as so often we do), it is not the end. Sin shall not tie us down and tyrannize us. If we were under law, with its eternal penalties, the moment we sinned as a believer we should be finished. It's no good saying, 'I will try and do better next time.' Under law you only have to make one slip and the law would condemn you eternally. Thank God we are not under law as a principle; if we slip and fall as believers we may confess it. The Scripture says, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9).

That's only one side of the story. It doesn't mean that we are no longer responsible to fulfil the law. Paul puts the other side of the case when he says,

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:2-4)

May God help us. There can be no paradise until the Lord Jesus comes and sets up his just government. There is no entry into paradise, save for those who have found rest in God's salvation, justification through Christ and the empowering of that new life, which is the Spirit of God within, enabling us to rise over our merely animal passions and to control them to the glory of God.



## Ultimate Truth

Let us again take our bearings to see where chapter 8 fits into the general message of the book of Daniel (see [Chart 1 – Contents of the Book of Daniel](#)).

You will notice that, after chapter 6, there come four final visions. The number of the visions is obscured somewhat in our English versions, because the last vision is distributed among three whole chapters. It is one vision, filling chapters 10–12.

Therefore, from chapter 7 onwards we are presented with four prophetic visions. In a sense they are distinct from all that has gone before. While we have had one vision before (in chapter 2), that vision was actually given to King Nebuchadnezzar. The other chapters are largely historical. (chapters 1 and 3–6).

### **Daniel's four visions**

The four visions that fill the remaining chapters are special in this sense, that they were all given to the prophet Daniel himself for his private consumption and for the benefit of the people of God who should come afterwards.

When we look at these four visions we see at once that they have many details in common. To some extent they all tell us the timetable of certain future events.

1. In 7:25, for instance, we are told that when the final dictator comes the saints of the Most High shall be given into his hand, and he shall persecute them until 'a time, times, and half a time.'
2. And then, when we come to the next vision in chapter 8, the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes,<sup>5</sup> we hear a conversation going on between two angels.

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, 'For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?' And he said to me, 'For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.'  
(8:13–14)

3. Chapter 9 likewise includes in its final verses a very complicated, complex and interesting piece of prophetic timetable. The angel tells Daniel,

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<sup>5</sup> In 168 BC Antiochus defiled the temple; he offered a pig on its altar and erected an altar to Zeus.

Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. (v. 24)

The angel proceeds to analyse those seventy weeks. They turn out to be seventy weeks of years, and he analyses them into two major periods, and then breaks them down yet further. So the third vision, like the previous two, concerns itself with the timetable of prophetic events.

4. The same thing is true of the final vision.

And someone said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, 'How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?' (12:6)

Perhaps the better translation would be, 'How long shall the end of these wonders be?'

And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand towards heaven and swore by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished. (v. 7)

In the remaining verses the angel proceeds to explain even further the time that the faithful people of God must wait until the final end.

### ***Timetables of future events***

So these four visions are not only prophetic but they all resemble each other, in that they give us the timetabling of certain future events. The obvious question that arises in our minds would be therefore, why are there four visions of the end times? Why did the Holy Spirit of God decide not to put it together in one great vision and amalgamate the timetable all the way through? Would that not have been simpler? Well perhaps it would have been simpler, but it would not have been so sensible or effective.

There are four visions, just like there are four Gospels at the beginning of the New Testament. Each one of those Gospels gives to us the life of the Lord Jesus, but they do not duplicate each other; they give us the life of the Lord Jesus from four different viewpoints. And so it is with these four prophecies that end the book Daniel. They are all directing our attention towards the future, hence some of the similarities that they contain. But each one of them is looking at those future events from a different vantage point and dealing with different elements in *the end time*. If we would get a complete picture of the time of the end, then we must not take just one of these prophecies; we must take all four and from them form a composite picture of what the time of the end will be like.

### ***The four visions are given in two pairs***

Let us look at our notes again. That will remind us that these four final visions are given to us in two pairs. Chapters 7 and 8 stand together, then chapter 9 and the final vision in chapters

10–12 stand together. For instance, with the last two both of those are concerned with the timetable of God in particular.

In chapter 9 Daniel has read Jeremiah's timetable for the desolations of Jerusalem to be finished and the restoration of Jerusalem to begin. He takes the whole matter of what God's word has said about this timetabling to God in prayer and seeks to know what God is going to do about his timetable and the promised restoration of Jerusalem.

The final vision likewise concerns itself with a writing, and the detailed prophecies and plans of God that are included in that wonderful writing. But now it is no longer a question of the writings of holy Scripture—what is written in the books of the Old Testament; it is concerned with *the writing of truth*—the hitherto undisclosed purposes of God, known only to God, recorded only in heaven until at this point in history they were revealed to Daniel.

Those two prophecies, therefore, stand together.

And it is even more simple to see that the two prophecies of chapters 7 and 8 stand together as a pair. Both of them see the future under the symbolic language of wild beasts; that much they have in common. They are describing the course of certain Gentile imperial powers and they represent these powers under the figure of wild beasts.

But then the differences begin. In chapter 7 Daniel sees four wild beasts; in chapter 8 he sees only two wild beasts. And then there is another difference. The four beasts in chapter 7 (we may deduce) represent four empires: 1. Babylon; 2. Medo-Persia; 3. Greece, founded by Alexander the Great; 4. Imperial Rome.

In chapter 8 Daniel is not given to see all four empires, but only two of them. The two beasts do not start with the empire of Babylon; they start with the second empire, the Medo-Persians. We are expressly told that that is so (vv. 20–21). His vision ends with the third empire, the Greeks, and does not proceed to say anything about the fourth empire. Naturally, we ask ourselves why that is so.

When we start thinking, another thing we notice immediately is this. In chapter 7 you will see not only the wild beasts, but you are given a vision of the coming messianic kingdom. In chapter 7 the fourth wild beast that stamped around him so destructively is finally taken and destroyed, and the kingdom under heaven is given to the Son of Man and to the saints, who proceed to set up the messianic kingdom.

Not so in chapter 8. There is a terrible tyrant there; but he is not the emperor of the fourth empire, Rome. He is one of the emperors that arose in a certain part of the third empire. He is eventually destroyed, but nothing is said about the setting up of the messianic kingdom. No vision is given to us in chapter 8 of Messiah, whether under the figure of a stone cut out without hands (as in chapter 2), or under the guise of the Son of Man (as in chapter 7). Our blessed Lord is referred to in chapter 8 as the Prince of princes (v. 25), but nothing else is said about the setting up of his messianic kingdom.

At first sight that is startling and presses the question further upon us: what is the point of chapter 8? The answer is simply this. Chapter 8 is looking at the end times, but from a different point of view. It is looking forward to one of the elements that shall be in the last time; and in order to illustrate it the Holy Spirit of God has chosen here not to talk about the fourth kingdom and its final dictator, but about the third kingdom and one of the dictators

that arose in that third kingdom. He was one of the Greeks, his name was Antiochus Epiphanes and he arose in the Seleucid Empire.<sup>6</sup> More about him shortly.

What he did was staggering in its effrontery against God. It was so absolutely unprecedented that the Holy Spirit decides to record it here and call our attention to it. Nobody had ever done the like of it before; he banned the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem and set up an image of his idol in the very temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem.

Nebuchadnezzar had never done anything like that. He had destroyed the temple, but he had not set up any false idol in the temple. Belshazzar had taken the vessels of gold from the temple and had drunk from them. That was blasphemous enough, but he didn't attempt to go to Jerusalem and set up an idol in the temple. Darius banned worship of all gods and decreed that no one should pray to anyone but himself for a whole month, but not even he went to Jerusalem and had the effrontery to set up an idol in the very house of the Lord at Jerusalem.

When it happened it was such a staggering effrontery and such a colossal shock for the faithful in Israel to observe, that they coined a name for it (or rather the Holy Spirit did). It was Antiochus Epiphanes who set up in the temple at Jerusalem the *abomination that makes desolate* (12:11). The Holy Spirit records it not only because of its hitherto unprecedented evil but so that we might use it as a kind of lens through which we may view the future.

That is what the Holy Spirit frequently does in these prophecies. In chapter 7 he had us think of the fourth empire and of the terrible dictator that shall arise out of it; using that, like a slide projector to show your friends the pictures of your holiday trip to Malaga! You have a tiny slide and the beam of electric light comes through it and it puts up an enormous picture on the screen. The Holy Spirit will take a period of history in the past and ask you to think of the principles and issues that were then at stake. Then, showing the light of his inspiration through that historical 'slide', he will project upon the future much bigger events that are going to happen and show us that the future will be a reproduction of the past, but on a tremendously enlarged scale. Only by getting us to look at it through the past, can he get us to analyse what shall be in the future. The Holy Spirit is doing that in these four visions, and particularly in the two visions in chapters 7 and 8.

### ***Why two visions?***

Because the end time is going to be far more complicated than some people realize. In order to give us a full and detailed picture of the future, you will need to allow the Holy Spirit to use four slides—four chunks of history through which he may shine the light of his inspiration, and through them project the future.

If I may illustrate that by slightly changing my analogy. Forget now about slides; let's take an overhead projector. You draw an outline on a piece of acetate and when the light shines through it, it puts a picture on the wall. The first picture is only an outline. Then, instead of taking the first one away and putting a second in its place, you put a second one on

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<sup>6</sup> The Seleucid kingdom, (312–64 BC), was an ancient empire that at its greatest extent stretched from Thrace in Europe to the border of India. It was carved out of the remains of Alexander the Great's Macedonian empire by its founder Seleucus (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

top of the first. There are now more details on the picture. A third film on top will add even more information and you are getting a combined picture.

So it is with these four visions. They are not separate things to be put one alongside the other in the future; they were four separate pieces of history. When the Holy Spirit shines the light of his inspiration through them he is projecting only one future, but the visions are to be piled up one on top of the other. What you get in the end is a complex build-up of what the future shall be.

It is common knowledge that in holy Scripture one of the elements of the future will be the old Roman empire—what it stood for and the principles upon which it ran. Yes, there will be elements in the future that answer to that ancient situation. But it is important to notice that there will also be elements in the future that will take you back, but not to the Romans. They destroyed the temple, but they did not put into it any ‘abomination that makes desolate’. You will have to go back to this Greek empire and Antiochus Epiphanes and see what he did to the temple at Jerusalem. What he did, the final great dictator will do again in his day.

So we have to think of two things. Firstly, the historical Antiochus Epiphanes and the prophecy that was given through Daniel of what he would do when he eventually came to the throne of the Seleucid Empire in the years 167–164 BC. Part of Daniel 8 is prophesying from the time of Daniel down the centuries to this time, when the historical Antiochus Epiphanes thus desecrated the temple at Jerusalem. We shall have to think of that historical event and the exceedingly profound and basic issues it raised.

Then, as we think of that, the Holy Spirit will direct our minds forward to the time when another will do what Antiochus did, but on a far greater scale.

### ***Daniel’s vision of the ram and the male goat***

One or two things before we proceed. Let’s do a little reading from Daniel 8. In this vision Daniel is given to see two animals. One was a ram—a very powerful ram, which had two horns.

I saw the ram charging westwards and northwards and southwards. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great. (v. 4)

Political power so great that for the time being his power was virtually absolute, compared with the powers of the other nations around him. But then eventually there came another animal, a male goat. It was even more powerful than the ram.

As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground. And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath. I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand

before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. (vv. 5–7)

This is going to be a study of what happens when, for the time being, a political power gets to itself a power that is almost absolute. For many centuries that has been recognized as a very dangerous situation in the world and, because of it, over many long years the continental governments tried to effect what they called a *balance of power*. They saw the dangers that could arise if any one power managed to be so strong as to be virtually absolute and nobody could possibly challenge it. But there have been times in history when such powers have arisen that have held absolute power for the time being. What happens then?

At the end of this age there will arise a colossal power, and it shall be said of him, 'Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?' (Rev 13:4 KJV). What will happen then? See what Antiochus Epiphanes did:

It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. (Dan 8:11–12)

What happened when this historical figure, Antiochus Epiphanes, gained such power? One of the things he did was not only to usurp God's place in the temple, he threw truth to the ground.

Before we answer that, there's another question: What has power got to do with truth? I would like to turn to some New Testament passages that discuss this kind of thing.

### ***'What is truth?'***

What has power got to do with truth and what has truth got to do with power? You will remember that, in the last chapters of John's Gospel, we have Christ as he stood before Pilate for judgment. At one time when Pilate questioned our Lord he answered nothing, until Pilate eventually nearly lost his temper. Said he to Christ, 'Look here, you had better start answering my questions.'

So Pilate said to him, 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.' (19:10–11)

In the previous chapter, we read,

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.' Then Pilate said to him, 'So

you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.’ Pilate said to him, ‘What is truth?’ After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, ‘I find no guilt in him.’ (18:33–38)

Is anything really true; is there an absolute truth? It is a big enough question in itself, but when you ask it in this context the importance becomes even more significant. ‘I have power to crucify you,’ said Pilate, ‘and power to release you.’ Poor little Pilate, like so many others he was obsessed with power. Men have it in their hearts that the ultimate solution to earth’s problems is the question of power. Unknown to him there stood before him the incarnate ruler of the universe with all power in his hand.

Our Lord told him, ‘You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. You see,’ our Lord said, ‘I am a king, but my kingdom rests on this—I have come to bear witness to the truth.’

Pilate could not think what that had to do with anything at all. What has truth got to do with politics, and what has truth got to do with imperial power? ‘What is truth?’ he asked.

### ***Antiochus Epiphanes***

So, in the years 167–164 BC Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem and set up the abomination that makes desolate. The record of this, as far as the historical records go, is to be found in the *First and Second Books of Maccabees*. They are incorporated in the Apocrypha, which is a bunch of all kinds of things of diverse quality. The Books of Maccabees are the prime historical source for this particular part of ancient history. They have to be treated with a great deal of circumspection; they are not inspired records nor interpretations of history. They do not claim to be, but they are exceedingly important historical sources that give an account of this tremendous period of history.

The learned historians, however, disagree among themselves as to how to interpret the motives that Antiochus Epiphanes had for doing what he did. I feel sure in my own mind (naturally enough, perhaps) that those modern historians are correct that interpret Antiochus Epiphanes’ motives along the same lines as the prophecy of Daniel does.

In chapter 11 we are told that Antiochus was the emperor in the Seleucid empire. That empire goes back to Alexander the Great, who established his tremendous Greek empire over the world. When he died at a young age his empire was divided into four parts and distributed to four of his generals. Two of those generals became very important. There was Ptolemy in the south, who inherited Egypt and set up there the Ptolemaic dynasty. There was a certain Seleucus in the north, who inherited great parts of Asia. He had his headquarters in Antioch, and after him his dynasty was named the Seleucid empire. As often happens, the Seleucid empire and the Ptolemaic empire were forever at each other’s throats—when they weren’t dining together and intermarrying. They varied the recipe from time to time. It made life more interesting, I suppose. Now they were friends, then they were enemies; now they inter-married, then they slaughtered each other.

Antiochus Epiphanes inherited this desire to increase his part of the empire. He conducted a tremendous campaign, passing through Palestine and made a very successful

attack on Egypt. He could perhaps have taken it over and absorbed it into his own empire, the empire of the Ptolemaics, but just then he received a violent shock. 'For ships of Kittim shall come against him' (Dan 11:30). In other words, the Romans came. One Roman general and official arrived on the spot, and in the name of the up and coming Roman empire he told Antiochus Epiphanes to get himself off home. Crestfallen, Antiochus was obliged to obey the Roman general. He went home in a rage (like Naaman before him); and not only in a rage, but now very much concerned for his own empire. The Romans might come and use their growing power to destroy him and take him over. He decided that he must, at all costs, solidify his own empire and keep his hand on power.

Therefore, he conceived a scheme in his head that a lot of people have conceived all down the centuries (particularly totalitarian powers). He decided that all his citizens in every part of his empire must be bound in their allegiance and loyalty to him by the strongest possible bonds. That was, of course, the bond of religion. Antiochus was aware that perhaps the strongest bond of loyalty that the human heart can possibly know is the bond of loyalty to the god they worship. He was not the first politician to get it into his head that if you could tap that kind of loyalty and, instead of that loyalty being directed to a god, direct it to the State, you would have the people in your very hand by the strongest sense of devotion that the human heart is capable of.

Nebuchadnezzar had the same idea in his day. When he had the vision that told him that his empire was not going to last, he seems to have taken advantage of the vision (at least to some extent) and decided to do his best to keep the empire loyal. So he called in all the sheriffs and the governors—the very people who, given the chance, would revolt and set themselves up to be contestants with Nebuchadnezzar. To keep his empire together he made a great statue of gold, assembled everyone and told them that when they heard the orchestra play they should bow down to the golden image. 'But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?' (3:15).

The golden image was not merely an image of his god; it was an image of his state and of himself as the emperor. He was determined to tap that loyalty in the human heart that is religious—loyalty that should be given to God, and divert it to the State.

### ***Augustus Caesar***

Long after Antiochus Epiphanes, Augustus Caesar founded the Roman Empire. Before he came on the scene the Roman republic had been torn limb from joint by the terrible atrocities of the civil war. Everybody was tired of bloodshed when Augustus came to the throne and established an empire, which in the east lasted peacefully for four hundred and eighty years. But, in order to bind this great empire of all kinds of different nations and different religions together, subsequent emperors also decided to tap this religious instinct in the hearts of men and women. They instituted the worship of the emperor, the worship of the state. People were required to come to the emperor's image and his altar and offer their pinch of incense to the emperor. Of course, the ordinary citizens were prepared to do it; they did not care, really. They worshipped one hundred and one gods already, so they did not mind worshipping the emperor. But then the Christians said 'No!' and they got thrown to the lions.



## Ultimate loyalty

What Nebuchadnezzar did before him and the Romans after him, Antiochus was determined to do now. He would bind his empire together and keep the power in his hands by enlisting the religious instinct of worship and devotion from God to the state. So he came to Jerusalem and he proposed to establish the worship of his particular god, Baal Shamaim, in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. In a way that had not been done for centuries, this raised for Israel the basic question, what did they really believe about this temple in Jerusalem? Did they really believe that it was the temple of the living God and it must not be compromised, or was it just a Jewish tradition that could be modified as the years went by? What about the claim of Jehovah, preached so powerfully by people like Isaiah where God said, 'I am God, and there is no other' (Isa 45:22)? Was that true or was it only a religious myth?

When that question arose there were people in Israel who said they did not care what Antiochus Epiphanes said. The Bible was the inspired self-revelation of God Almighty and they would not compromise it. It is God's word. The regulations regarding worship in this temple are not just traditional rules and regulations that can be altered with the passing centuries, but the unalterable words of God. They resolved not to let their temple be desecrated by idolatry. As Antiochus insisted on his claim, they said to themselves (quoting the words of the Ten Commandments), 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exod 20:3). For them it was the question of ultimate loyalty. Not only to the rules in a book, not even an inspired book; it was a question of the ultimate loyalty of the human heart to almighty God.

But there were others in Israel who thought differently. Interestingly, they weren't some beggars brought up on the dunghill; they were the high priests themselves who were in charge of the temple. They were in the habit of making deals with Antiochus Epiphanes; if he made them high priests, then they would bring him in more taxes.

They said, 'This is not 2000 BC. We have to move with the times. You can't take the Bible literally. When we were all in the desert with Moses, and we thought we were the only people living on the earth, we could believe that there was no other god but Jehovah. But now we are grown up and aware of the other religions about the place, and it would be arrogant of us to say our religion was the only religion. Indeed, we have been doing some research and we have discovered that when the Greeks say 'Zeus', they really mean Jehovah; and when the Syrians say 'Baal', they mean Jehovah. It doesn't really matter what you call God—Zeus, Baal, Jehovah—it all amounts to the same thing. If we stick to this isolation and say our God is the only god, we will leave ourselves high and dry economically.'

These high priests were very wealthy men; they got a lot of money from the sacrifices in the temple. They thought that if they could only please Antiochus, they might persuade him to raise Jerusalem to the status of a Hellenistic city. That would raise the standard of their citizenship overnight and make them full citizens of the empire. They could have a lovely gymnasium and a theatre, like the Greeks. (When you have been reading Moses all day, it's nice to have a bit of theatre!) If they were fully a Greek city they would get international trade and it would put Jerusalem on the map. They were annoyed at the narrow-minded little fundamentalists; they couldn't see their opportunity. 'Why not let Antiochus come, and we could have an altar to Jehovah and an altar to Baal? It's all the same thing, isn't it!'

As the arguments raged, the high priests joined with Antiochus Epiphanes. As they had the authority in the temple, they encouraged Antiochus and he set up the *Abomination of Desolation*. He soon showed them what he thought of their notion that it didn't matter which religion you adhered to. He banned the worship of Jehovah and made possession of the Bible illegal. If it was discovered that a child had been circumcised, he had the mother and the child thrown from the battlements of the city to bash out their brains below. And none of that straightforward morality stuff of Moses; he brought the temple prostitutes into the temple. They made the temple like a Greek temple, and set up altars to all kinds of deities down the streets of Jerusalem. It was a time of distress for the faithful in Israel such as they had never known before.

### ***Why did God allow it to happen?***

Think of the shock of it. Here were the apostate high priests encouraging Antiochus Epiphanes. And here were the faithful believers standing by God and his word and daring to assert that the law of Moses was inspired, the directions for the temple were inspired, and that Jehovah—the transcendent Lord Creator—was present in that temple. They watched aghast as they saw Antiochus's lieutenants come with that great idol and dare to put it on the great altar in the temple.

They felt that surely God would intervene and strike them dead; there would come a thunderbolt or something. God would surely not let himself be insulted and he would demonstrate his reality by some supreme exhibition of power. They waited and they waited and they waited. Nothing happened. No voice came, no loud protest from the inner shrine, no bolt of lightning to consume the blasphemer, no opening ground to send him down to the pit, like Korah, Dathan and Abiram of an earlier age. Just silence! Can you imagine the shock and can you imagine how the liberals smiled and the Gentiles would say, 'Where is your God now? We always knew it was a myth and now it has been proved.'

### ***The two witnesses***

We should be wise to listen to that history, for history is going to repeat itself. The book of the Revelation tells us that at the time of the end God shall have his two witnesses (never mind who they are!).

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, 'Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1, 260 days, clothed in sackcloth.' These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. (11:1–6)

Whatever it means, it is clear enough that they shall be possessed of such supernatural power that, if the beast and his minions or anybody else tries to overpower them and stop the worship of God and blot it out, they have power to call down fire from heaven and make the temple for a while impregnable. There will be evidence for everyone to see that here is supernatural power. There is a God in heaven and for a while the beast will be kept at bay. Then the beast that comes up out of the abyss shall overcome the two witnesses and kill them, and their dead bodies shall lie in the streets for three whole days.

The world will go mad with relief, says the Bible (v. 10). 'There you are,' they will say, 'it has been finally proved that there is no God. All that fuss that we thought was supernatural, now it has been demonstrated that it does not come from God. The effect can be reproduced. All that talk of God was just empty talk and now we can live.' They shall be delighted that they have proved to their own satisfaction that there is no God and they have silenced the very voice of God and all claims to supernatural power. So excited will they be that they will send presents to one another throughout the whole empire of the beast. They thought they were living free of God.

### ***We are in the same war***

We have thought of the past and of the future; but we would be unwise to say it has nothing to do with us. While those battles are not our battles, the war is the same war. The war is this, 'What is truth?'—Is there such a thing as truth?

Not too long ago, if you had been living in Bulgaria, Romania, Russia or Czechoslovakia, what would you have thought of Scripture? That it is God's truth, which must not be compromised, or simply religious opinions of men that can be adapted and compromised to suit any situation, so long as you survive? One of the saddest things in many a university in Eastern Europe and Asia is that there are learned academics, supposed to be devoted to academic truth, who for years have been pretending to be atheists and teaching it to their students. Now they are having to tell their students that they didn't really believe it. But why did they teach it? If they had objected they would have lost their places in the university. They could have been sent to the concentration camps or they could have been eliminated.

'What is truth?' Is it something that you can hold today and then, if your life is in danger, you can give it up tomorrow? Is truth an opinion, or is there an ultimate truth that there is not only a God but God has revealed himself through his word, and supremely in Jesus Christ?

It wouldn't necessarily take the *Great Tribulation* to come along and test us. We live in a world very much like the world of Antiochus Epiphanes, where it is not merely the atheist but it will also be the liberal theologian who will tell you, 'Moses is not inspired and the New Testament is not necessarily inspired.' And some of them say, 'Even Jesus Christ made mistakes, so you can't just take it as it stands.'

That does raise the question, what is truth? What is the truth about you? I don't mean what is your body composed of? Clever men can analyse that it is so many chemicals, worth about £5—more with inflation! You are more than that, aren't you? What is the truth about you? Have you got a mind as well as a brain?

You say, 'What difference does that make?'

I am asking whether you are just a machine and your thoughts just the grinding out of the atoms inside your head. Your thoughts are really not under your control, it's the atoms in your brain that control what you think. Which is it? Do you have a mind that is superior to your brain? Are you a person or a machine? You could do with thinking that one out. (Doubtless you have.)

The very able, who make artificial intelligence in their labs, many of them are saying that presently their computers will be so sophisticated that, if you put a human being and a computer behind a screen and put questions to them, you won't be able to tell the difference whether it is the human being answering or the computer. So, is a human being just a computer? Some say yes.

Where did you come from, what is the truth about your origins? You know what the Bible says. It says that you are the creation of a personal Creator. He not only made you but he loves you and has revealed himself to you in his word. And not only so, but when you went astray in rebellion he sent his own Son to redeem you and to bring you back. Because he is your God and Redeemer, your Creator and Saviour, he demands of you in return absolute personal devotion, obedience and loyalty. Your Creator is not just an abstract principle or physical cosmological law; he has revealed himself as a person. He calls on you, not only for your belief that he exists but your undeviating love and loyalty to him.

That is not the balance of thought of a lot of our modern world. They say, 'There is no God; there is no Creator.' Well, if there is no Creator, what is the truth about you? To say the best, it's not very flattering to think that you started off like so much ooze in a pond, and then, by all kinds of accidents, without any planning or purpose, mindless forces interacted and began to produce the early stages of you. They were very humble things, but then the genes in these humble affairs now and again coughed up an oddity and, as that oddity manifested itself, Nature began to work. (She is blind, doesn't have much sense and certainly no purpose.) She chose the gene whose oddity was the strongest and most likely to survive. It's the fittest that always survives, and you are here today because of the millions and millions of times Nature's automatic rules declared that the fittest and the strongest and best should survive, and the weak should go to the wall.

Make sure you really want to believe that, if you say you do. If you are but the result of the survival of the fittest and the strongest, when a big dictator arrives and he is ten thousand times stronger than you, you won't have any objection if he decides that you shouldn't survive and he should because he is the stronger, will you? What intellectual objection can you have? That has been the law of Nature all the way along.

What happens when the government gets into its hands such power as is almost absolute and sends you off to the Gulag and says you are a weakling in society. Because you don't agree with their political views you had better be put into some lunatic asylum or eliminated. You won't be able to intellectually object—that's all human beings are anyway and only the fittest survive. You had better think it through!

### ***God will never try to force us to love him***

When God shows us what happened when Antiochus Epiphanes assaulted the temple, he is telling us what will happen when the beast eventually destroys the two witnesses. There will

come a time when God will allow atheism to appear to triumph and no voice, no thunder will come. It will look as if he has been proved wrong permanently. What a trial of faith that will be. Why will God allow it? God is love—why will he not do some miracle and demonstrate to the world that he exists and make them believe?

Do you think that he ought to make people believe? He could put on such a demonstration of power that he would reduce you to a gibbering wreck; would that convert you? No, it would not. Do you know why God will not do that? It's because of who he is. 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). He is not just a fact. We believe facts if we are intelligent, but God is not like that. He is not just a fact; he is a person.

Belief in God means having a personal relationship with God, a relationship of free, willing, deliberate trust, love and devotion. That's why God does not terrify you into believing. The truth about you is this. You are the product of a personal Creator who loves you, but he will never force you to love him. Forced love is not love. How would God convince you of the truth and what is the truth?

Our blessed Lord stood before Pilate. Pilate was not a very big dictator; he was merely a servant of the great Tiberius in Rome, but like all dictators he fancied himself. He had a fascination for power. What an ironic scene as the Creator of the universe stood before one of his creatures, and his creature was so infatuated with power and so blind that he couldn't see it. Said he to the Creator of the universe, 'Don't you know, I have power to set you free or to crucify you?' Poor man, he thought power was everything. The Lord Jesus could have dismissed him to eternal perdition by a mere word. Why didn't he? Because that would not have been the truth about God.

He said, 'For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth' (John 18:37). You can see the truth when, a few hours later, you see God incarnate spiked to a tree and dying in agony, crying, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matt 27:46).

That is the truth about this universe and that's the truth about you and me. We are the creatures of a personal Creator. When we rebelled against him he could by his power have dismissed us, or by his force he could have compelled us to obey. But he so loved us that he thought it worthwhile coming and dying on a cross to gain your heart, your love, your trust and your loyalty. What a magnificent truth! In this world so full of voices, how can we know the truth?

You remember the story of Solomon and the two prostitutes (1 Kgs 3:16–27). They lived in the same room and they each had a child. In the middle of the night one woman lay on her baby, smothered and killed him. Waking up and discovering what had happened, she decided to replace the dead child with the other woman's living baby. In the morning when the other woman woke up she found that the child was dead, but she realized that it was not her child, it was the other woman's child. They were brought before the king, who listened to the whole story. The king decided to settle it and he called for one of his officers. He told the women that he was going to be utterly impartial, and he instructed the officer to cut the child in two and give one half to one woman and the other half to the other woman.

One said, 'Yes, do that!'

But the other said, 'No, give the living child to her!'  
Solomon said, 'That's the mother.'  
She loved her child and wanted anything other than that her child should perish.

How do I know the true God among all the others? Because of Calvary! He will do anything rather than leave you to perish. He has won your heart, has he not? Not with gold or gems, but with his own life's blood. If that is the truth, then God calls upon us to show our response.

### ***How should we respond to God's love?***

Israel had an altar in front of their temple, and from that altar every morning and night the lamb of Israel's dedication was sacrificed; a burnt offering, typifying Israel's devotion to God. When Antiochus came he put an end to it.

The God of truth expects us to present our bodies to him as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1). The world will do everything it can to stop that devotion. He appeals to you for intellectual loyalty to the Lord Jesus in your school, university, physics laboratory, your chemistry and biology laboratories. He asks for intellectual loyalty to him and to the truth. We have to know what the world thinks and what it teaches, but the Lord watches and expects intellectual loyalty from us all.

The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. 'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.' (Rev 3:14-17)

The Lord was saying to the church at Laodicea, 'Your heart has gone from me; you are only lukewarm, your heart is not loyal.' He expects intellectual loyalty in the church.

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Tim 6:13-14)

Paul was encouraging Timothy to keep the treasure entrusted to him and the commandment given to him uncompromised to the end. God grant us that, as we have found the truth that is in Christ Jesus, we might show our response by undeviating loyalty to him.

## [The Man above the River of History](#)

We come now to the last major vision of the book of Daniel, which occupies chapters 10–12 of the prophecy. They comprise one single vision, dealing with the time of the end. The term, *the time of the end*, is a technical phrase and not to be confused with other similar sounding phrases. For instance, ‘the end of the times’.

The king of the north shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former; and he shall come on at the end of the times, even of years, with a great army and with much substance. (11:13 RV)

A glance at the context will show you immediately that that phrase, ‘the end of the times’, is not talking about the final end time just before the coming of the Lord Jesus in power and glory. It means at the end of this particular epoch in history (‘After some years’ ESV). Later verses are to tell us quite explicitly that the end time, ‘the time of the end’, has not yet come.

Let us compare that phrase at the end of 11:13, ‘the end of the times,’ with the very significantly different phrase in verse 35, ‘And some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.’ That is not just the end of an epoch, it is the end of time before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power and great glory.

I take it that, when Daniel makes his enquiry about these things, the better translation is as suggested by some scholars, ‘One said to the man clothed in linen, which was above the waters of the river, “How long shall the end of these wonders be?”’ (12:6). Daniel is likewise enquiring there about the time of the end—that short period that shall close history before the coming of Christ, ‘the end of these wonders’, as he calls them. The reply is given to him in verse 7:

And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand towards heaven and swore by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.

That is, ‘the time of the end’, ‘the end of these wonders’, will not be a point, it will be a period. It shall last for ‘a time, times, and half a time’. It will be a period of unparalleled suffering for the people of Daniel (known as *the great tribulation*). So, amongst other things, this vision is going to talk to us about the time of the end. It will spend most of the time

explaining to Daniel what should be the course of events between the period at which he stood and the time of the end.

With that study of the vocabulary, 'the time of the end', let us notice how the very position of this vision in the book underlines the fact that here we are going to be concerned with the time of the end.

Look again at the table of contents; the last vision, down at the bottom of the second column.

**Chapters 10–12:** The king exalts himself above every god, and regards no god. The 'writing of truth' (10:21 NASB). The series of apparent 'ends' leading up to 'the time of the end' and eventually to *The End* itself.

A summary of those chapters would read, 'He shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god . . . Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers' (11:36–37). Daniel is given to know the contents of the writing of truth that spell the end of that wilful king. He is told that there will be a series of apparent ends leading up to the time of the end, and then eventually to the end itself.

Then look over to the last item in the first column.

**Chapter 5:** Belshazzar makes a god of his pleasures, but still recognizes the gods of stone etc. The writing on the wall. The end of Belshazzar and the end of the Babylonian empire.

In chapter 5 we have the story of Belshazzar, prince regent of Babylon. Very soon after his banquet he met his end, when he was executed by the incoming troops of the Medo-Persians. With the personal end of Belshazzar there came the end of the Babylonian Empire. So the first column finishes with the end of Babylon and the second column is going to finish with the end of all Gentile imperial systems—the end itself and the dawning of the messianic kingdom.

### ***Symbolism in the vision***

Let us look at some further matters of vocabulary and symbolism. If we turn to Daniel 10 we shall notice where Daniel was when he received his vision.

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz round his waist. (vv. 4–5)

We notice from Daniel's wording that this was not a dream given to him in the night. He was actually standing by the banks of the great river Hiddekel (the Tigris) in the middle of the day when this great figure appeared to him in a vision. And let us notice how rivers are used in passages like this and in many other prophecies not only for their geographical and material sense, they are also used symbolically.

The LORD spoke to me again: 'Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah [Siloam] that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River [Euphrates], mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory.' (Isa 8:5–7)



So the other big river, Euphrates, along with the Tigris, is now used metaphorically of the king of Assyria and his gigantic armed forces; just like you could use the Thames as a symbol of Britain, or the Rhine as a symbol of Germany. What a vivid metaphor it makes here in Isaiah.

And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. (vv. 7–8)

Euphrates is not used simply as an emblem of the power of Assyria, but it is used as a vivid metaphor to picture the oncoming of the vast hosts of the Assyrian army. Having conquered all the other nations, they now overflow like a tempest into the land of Judah and the waters begin to rise until they have risen right up to the neck and nearly drowned the people of Judaea. Not a literal river, but the army of the Assyrians. What a mess was left behind when the 'river' subsided and got back into its channel, and they went home.

We shall meet that metaphor again in Daniel 11:10. The man above the river has been explaining to Daniel the goings to and fro of the armies of the northern kings (the Seleucids), and the responses of the southern kings (the Ptolemies). He says, 'His sons shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall keep coming and overflow and pass through.' Once more, that vivid metaphor of the armies of a great imperial power sweeping through the land of Palestine with all the inevitable destruction that it would leave in its wake. The use of the metaphor of a river, both as an emblem of an imperial power and as a metaphor for the effect of its armies, is worth observing. We shall meet it later on in our study.

The particular prophecy, which we are now studying, is a very long prophecy; one of the most difficult in all the book of Daniel and perhaps the most difficult in all holy Scripture. We shall certainly not be able to study it in detail.<sup>7</sup> If we want to see the overall purpose of this final vision, we do well to notice that it is divided into four great movements of kings and armies. Let's have a look at the notes (See [Chart 4 – The Four Great Periods of Daniel 11–12](#)), just to summarize:

*The first great movement* is in 11:5–19. It starts 'in the end of years' (v. 6 KJV). After much toing and froing over the subsequent years and generations this movement comes to its peak when, at the end of the times, the king of the north sets out to invade Egypt with a vast army (v. 13). None can withstand him. He stands in 'the glorious land' and in his hand is destruction (vv. 15–16). It will look as if it may turn out to be the time of the end, for you now have many of its features: a wicked, evil and ambitious king, his armies standing in the very holy land, destruction in his heart and in his hand. Will this turn out to be the time of the end, when the perfidious Gentile emperor decides to attack the city of Jerusalem, invades the very temple of God and places himself in the temple, claiming divine honours? It shall look as if it

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<sup>7</sup> I have listed for you on the very last sheet of your notes a suggestion that you can work out in your own studies ([The Symbolism of Chapters 2 and 7](#)).

might be. Indeed, some in Israel will think the time has come for the messianic kingdom to be established and they will take steps to try to establish the vision.

In those times many shall rise against the king of the south, and the violent among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfil the vision, but they shall fail. (11:14)

In spite of great success, the king of the north is eventually turned back and goes home. According to verses 18–19 he falls and *it will turn out not to be the time of the end*.

*The second great movement* starts in verse 20 and proceeds to verse 28. It is another account of the toing and froing of the two great imperial powers, the Seleucids to the north and the Ptolemies to the south. It looks as though they are going to overflow.

His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. And as for the two kings, their hearts shall be bent on doing evil. They shall speak lies at the same table, but to no avail, for the end is yet to be at the time appointed. (vv. 26–27)

Instead of it being the end at this period in history, the kings concerned will turn round and go home and the whole thing will fizzle out. *It will not be the end*.

Similarly in *the third period*, a much darker period than any before. It begins in verse 29 and goes through to verse 35. And here is a detailed study, such as we were studying earlier, of what Antiochus Epiphanes would do when he came to the Seleucid throne; how he would actually come into Jerusalem city, enter the temple and set up in that very temple the abomination of desolation. It would look to many as if this surely was the time of the end.

And some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time. (v. 35)

The abomination of desolation is set up—it must be the time of the end! But no, ‘it shall not be,’ says the man who stands above the river. *This will not be the time of the end*.

Finally *the fourth section*, which runs from verse 36 onwards, tells us that the time of the end will eventually come. When it comes, the time of end will gather up (like a gigantic wave) elements that have been present in all the other waves of history as they have mounted up and broken on the shores of Palestine. It shall contain all of them and add to them some of its own. It shall prove to be the time of the end and with that we face a very gloomy topic indeed (see 12:1–13). *This is the time of the end*.

## **Recollections of the elderly Daniel**

I think it must have been a very moving experience for Daniel when, as an elderly man, he stood one day on the banks of the river Tigris. Tigris was not an inland waterway; it was the

mighty Tigris, one of the two rivers that form the backbone of the two great empires, Babylon and Assyria. It flowed through the territory of the Medo-Persians when they took over Babylon. As Daniel stood on the banks of the river, I wonder what he was thinking. A lot of water had flowed under its bridges since he had first come to this part of the world. Did he reflect on the days when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar came like a flood, surrounded Jerusalem and, to the great heartbreak of the people of Jerusalem, took the city and the temple, ravaged the golden vessels, swept away Daniel and a multitude of others, like a river sweeps away the flotsam and jetsam of life, and brought them all to Babylon?

It was years ago now. Perhaps the elderly Daniel thought back about the past and recalled those early days when he was first given the chance in the university, and then how God had given him the power to stand with Abednego and his friends. God had stood by them and vindicated them and it had made them take a stand in those early days of their university career. God had honoured Daniel after that, not only in his exams but in his career.

Yes, there was a heart-stopping moment when he was asked to come in and interpret a dream for Nebuchadnezzar. Fancy having to come in and tell his majesty to his face that he was going to be cut down! But he had done that too.

And then there was the extraordinary occasion when as a last resort Belshazzar called him in to interpret the writing, and he had to tell Belshazzar that that very night the king would be slain.

Like things do in a dream, the experiences of life came floating up. He could almost smell the breath of the lions; he would think of the night he spent among them.

It was all past now and gone. Gone, like life goes, so quickly. He was an elderly man now. I wonder what he was thinking. As he stood there and watched the waters flowing on beyond until they went over the horizon, he maybe wondered what the future would hold. Perhaps he said to himself, 'I shall not be here much longer to see it.' He may have been in a pessimistic mood.

Not so long ago he had been given a timetable for the restoring of Jerusalem. All the long years of his brilliant career in the civil services had not dimmed his love for Jerusalem. Loyal to the Gentile empires though he had been, his heart still burned and in his daily prayers he had mentioned Jerusalem. Opening his windows to where Jerusalem was geographically, he prayed that God would restore Jerusalem. Jeremiah the prophet had said, 'Seventy years, and God would restore Jerusalem' (25:11–12; 29:10). Jeremiah had painted it in such marvellous colours that I suspect Daniel as a middle-aged man hoped that he would survive to see the great time of the restoration.

Then, as the years went by, he began to have his doubts. Not just because of his age, but because he watched the sinfulness and the worldliness of his fellow Israelites who lived around him. Some of them had made a great success of their sojourn in Babylon and they were not concerned with going home. (They were like many Jews in America who have done very well and don't want to go back to Israel.) As a nation, in spite of the exile, they had not repented and had gone on sinning as they had always done. So Daniel was worried as he prayed to the Lord about his promise to restore Jerusalem.

God told him that it would be restored after seventy years, but because of Israel's continuance in transgression this would not turn out to be the final restoration, only a partial

restoration; the future years of their continuing to break the covenant would lead in the end to their rejection and murder of their own Messiah and Saviour. As a result of that, desolations were determined right out into the distant and undated future.

I wonder with what melancholy in his heart did Daniel stand by the river and watch the waters go over the horizon beyond his vision. The feeling, perhaps, that he had contributed but little; the goal for which he had striven was still far beyond and not likely to be fulfilled and achieved soon.

### ***The troubled times that would come for Israel***

In the wisdom of God, Daniel was going to be told as much as he could bear of what would lie beyond him and his age and the time of the end, just before the Messiah would return in power and great glory to set up his messianic kingdom and restore Jerusalem. He was not told everything; it would have been more than the human spirit could have borne to contemplate everything that would happen to his beloved Israel. Nothing was said of the persecutions under King John, or the Spanish Inquisitions, or the pogroms in Russia, or the gas chambers in Germany. A veil was drawn over that. How would the aged Daniel have borne it? What he was told was gloomy enough; it nearly broke the thread of life in that elderly man's heart.

What should happen as the waters went over the horizon? The Medo-Persian empire would come and the foolish Persians would attempt to extend their empire into Europe and attack Athens and Greece. After some time, Alexander, in the name of Macedonia and Greece, would lead the return attack. With his brilliant generalship and mighty forces he would smash the Medo-Persian empire and on its ruins build his own even greater empire. But he would die early and at his death, at the age of 33, four of his generals would split his empire between them. Two would become famous; Seleucus in Antioch in the north of Israel, Ptolemy in Egypt to the south of Israel.

Then in the succeeding years a pattern would recur. Filled with that power loss that empires feel, not content to sit at home and enjoy their prosperity, these two great powers in the north and south would play their war games, each trying to out-do the other on all kinds of foolish pretexts. From time to time they would swell up like great rivers and come the one to attack the other. When they did that (though they did not have the immediate intention of attacking Jerusalem), because the path between the north and the south lay by the coastal road of Palestine, their great armies would sweep through from the north to the south like a vast overflowing flood of a river and the southern armies would sweep back like another gigantic river, leaving devastation on every hand.

Picture them in those great periods of history that are outlined in chapter 11—the Seleucid armies and the Ptolemies. See them on the day they prepare to march. How romantic it was to see the whole battalions, and the king himself, with all his bright ribbons and medals, emblazoned shield and embossed armour, riding his proud charger of a horse. And his generals and lieutenants with their war medals—what a thing it was.

What a terrible fascination war and conquest has had for mankind. It seems so romantic when it begins; so noble, so colourful. How impressive to see one hundred thousand foot soldiers tramping the plains of Palestine to get at the enemy. If it looked romantic when it

started out, can you picture what it was when the flood subsided and they had gone home? All the rack and ruin and the debris, the pillaged farms, the ruined crops, the wounded bodies, the crazed minds, the cries of the widows and the corpses of the babies. And you say to yourself, 'What is it all about?'

Some of us may not know who the Seleucids and the Ptolemies were—maybe we are not interested. What does it matter to us who won? What a lamentable and largely lunatic world this has been, with all its pomp and glory ending in human disaster and heartbreak—wounded bodies, crazed minds, broken families and economies virtually destroyed. What has been the sense of it all?

All down the long years, not only the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, but the Romans and the English and the Germans and the French under Napoleon, and the Khmer Rouge and the Yugoslavians and the Russians. What does it all mean; is there any sense in it? Is there any hope for our world? Will mankind ever get rid of this lunacy? Is there any discernible purpose in life and in history? You who have studied the ebb and flow of human events down the centuries, have you perceived any hint of a purpose? Is it all going anywhere, or is it going to end up in one gigantic atomic bomb or something— nothing but the debris of a human civilization that has been blown out of existence?

How would Daniel feel when the veil was lifted a little bit and he was shown what lay between him and the fulfilling and achievement of his great hope: the restoration of Jerusalem at the coming of Messiah? Was there any hope? It was to comfort Daniel and to give him not only information but encouragement that the man appeared to him above the river to explain this fearful phenomenon.

### ***Enemies that are more than human***

The explanation was given him right from the very start in terms of a great warfare. As he outlines history, the man is to be heard talking of powers greater than human: of the prince of Persia that has power enough to withstand the pre-incarnate Son of God; of battles in the heavenly places, of demonic forces, of satanic attack. In previous visions we have seen human empires under the guise of wild animals fighting it out between them, but the distinctive thing of this vision is not wild animals but mighty spirit forces waging their warfare, going about their deadly and devilish designs.

If you would account for the endless disasters, the miseries and warfare that have come upon the human race, then according to this vision you must not put it down, altogether and unqualified, to the responsibility of mere human beings. This vision says there is more to human warfare and disasters than mere humans. There is a spirit realm; there are demonic forces, and they fight battles.

It is easy to laugh at that kind of thing, and it is not merely modern men who laugh at it. Peter had occasion to warn his fellow-believers that certain false teachers had crept into the church. Among the wares of their trade they taught that it was perfectly acceptable for Christian people to live a permissive lifestyle of pre-marital and post-marital unchastity and unfaithfulness, but another element in their false teaching was that they laughed at the whole idea of spirits and angels and a devil.

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption. (2 Pet 2:12 KJV)

If we are to be balanced men and women we must realize that we stand in the middle, in tension between two realms. Beneath us there is the animal realm. We have certain things in common with the animals; we have bodies, we have stomachs and we have lungs and things. But at the other side we stand in contact with the spirit realm. Man is not just body and not just physical. Man has a spiritual dimension and therefore has contact with a world of spirits. If we refuse to face the fact that there is a spiritual dimension to mankind and to world affairs, as Peter tells us, we will sink to the level of mere animal behaviour.

### ***Why is Jerusalem so often the focus for attack?***

There is a spirit realm. Why was it that the Seleucids and the Ptolemies should so often come and destroy the land of Palestine? Because it stood geographically in their way? That is one answer to the problem. But they were not just pawns on the chess-board of international politics. If that had been so, they could just have used Israel as a corridor and gone backwards and forwards, up and down, with their armies. They did not do that. From time to time one or other of the emperors would cast his eye on Jerusalem city, perched there upon the mountains of Judaea, and think about that city and its temple. Greedy and ominous eyes would be turned in that direction. Why? Not because of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, but because of the demonic powers that motivated them and drove them on, whether they knew it or not. *That city stood for the fact that God has a visible purpose in history.*

### ***The nation of Israel***

It started with Abraham, and God's calling-out of Abraham to form a unique nation. Israel, that latecomer among the nations, was distinct in the fact that she did not worship idols (officially, at least). She bore witness to the one true God and to the fact that the God of heaven did have a purpose on earth. Israel was to be the favoured nation; one day it would bring in the coming Messiah and deliverer.

Because of that very fact Satan has set himself all the way down history to destroy that people, if possible, and to destroy their city and their testimony to the coming of Messiah.

He did it in Egypt when he raised up a genocidal pharaoh who attempted to wipe out the nation of Israel by casting every new born baby boy into the Nile (Exod 1). Insane, of course. He did it again in Athaliah's time when that daughter of Ahab rose up and slaughtered all the royal family of Judah (2 Kgs 11). Apart from God's good providence she would have destroyed the line of Messiah, but God in his mercy saved little Joash as a baby. And again, as we have noticed, under the absurd Antiochus Epiphanes.

When at last our blessed Lord came, Satan had the outrage to attack him. Trying not now to conquer him by fears, but to overcome him by corruption.

And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. (Luke 4:6-7 KJV)

Skipping the centuries, we can watch it happening again in the insanities of Hitler's gas chambers. Can you explain it to me in any rational terms? How did any human get it into his head to eliminate a whole nation? It wasn't a pagan, savage nation that did it; it was a nation that led the world in its intellectual advances. Don't blame it on mere mortals altogether. There is a devil. Whatever power lusts and war games fill men's little minds, the devil uses them for the bigger purpose that he has in his own heart, to discredit God's people and to destroy them; and to destroy the nation of Israel and make the fulfilment of God's purpose impossible.

### ***Should we care about what happens to Israel?***

Why should Daniel care, if he wouldn't be there to see it? (Not on earth anyhow.) Away beyond the Seleucids there would come 'the time of the end', the apparent final triumph of Satan when the leader of the Gentile empire of the day would seat himself in the temple of God at Jerusalem, claim to be God, and claim to have proved scientifically that there is no God out there. Man is his own god.

Why should Daniel worry? He would be in heaven. But Daniel was a Jew and if this was what was going to happen to his people, would his heart not nearly be broken? Come to Paul the apostle.

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh . . . my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (Rom 9:3; 10:1 KJV)

What are they to us? 'As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers' (Rom 11:28). Aren't you concerned before God as to what will have to happen to that nation?

Someone says, 'They deserve it because they murdered Jesus!'

Careful! Who murdered Jesus? Caiaphas was implicated and the Pharisees at Jerusalem, and the crowd at Jerusalem were certainly responsible. They said, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' (Matt 27:25). But there were multitudes of Jews throughout the Roman and Greek parts of the world in those days who had never heard of the crucifixion of Jesus until months and sometimes years had passed. You won't say they were responsible for it, will you? Let us be careful in our talk, lest we Christians add to the atmosphere in which Jews can get persecuted.

I have an elderly friend in Belfast. Many times he has brought out his cuttings from Jewish newspapers where the writers say it was the Christians who encouraged the holocaust by teaching their children in Sunday School that it was the wicked Jews who crucified Jesus.

'You Christians are responsible for it,' he would say.

I would tell him, 'I am not blaming you Otto. You weren't there. I would never dream of accusing you for being responsible for the murder of Messiah in any other sense than I too am responsible. I am a Christian and I believe the reason why Jesus died was that God gave him as a sacrifice for sin. It was my sin that killed Jesus.'

'The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me . . . He bore my sins in his own body on the tree' (Gal 2:20; 1 Pet 2:24).

Can we sit by and rejoice in God's extravagant grace to us and care nothing for what Israel must yet face under the disciplines of God and the spite of the enemy? The war is not over yet. It may be true that we fight on a different battlefield from what Daniel fought on, but it is the same war. We fight on a battlefield far more elevated. We are risen with Christ and seated with him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:12)

There is a war on still. It is the same war, even if the battles are different battles. You cannot work for God, whether in Sunday School or whatever it may be, without finding that it is not a pleasant little hobby to be done when you have the time to do it. You will discover sooner or later that it is a war and I am telling you now that you will get hurt. To your surprise, you will get hurt from all kinds of unexpected quarters. Sometimes your very brethren in Christ will seem so difficult, so irrational and so unreasonable, you would think the very devil had got into them. (Perhaps he has not got into them, but he could have suggested a thing or two into their heads.)

How sad it has been in some countries to see vigorous testimonies blown to smithereens. Why? Because the believers fell out and they didn't care whether the assembly prospered, or whether it was destroyed. They stood by and saw it blown to smithereens, and thought they had won. It is a war and there are attacks from unexpected sources.

### ***The presence and comfort of the man above the river***

As Daniel heard of these things they surely increased his gloom; he fainted as a man who was nearly dead. The text says, 'For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me' (10:17). I suspect one of the elements in that courageous man's near collapse was the feeling that he had done everything he could all his life, but things were going bad and there would come the final apparent triumph of the enemy. After what he thought was his great success with God, perhaps he now felt how little he had accomplished.

When you come to life's end and you look back over the 'river', like Daniel you think of all the waters that have passed under the bridges and you remember your early youthful intentions. You were going to live for the Lord, weren't you? You were going to devote your life to him. You remember the wonderful encouragements God gave you and the advancements you made; your life has been made up of many, many victories. It has gone quickly and from time to time you think how little you have done. How should we comfort ourselves? Well, make sure you keep at it in life, my brothers and sisters, so that when you come to the end you will have no regrets and you can't say you have wasted it on stupid things.

Listen to how God comforted Daniel.



And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand towards heaven and swore by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished. (12:7)

He was not in it, he was above it. It was none other than the blessed and eternal Son of God come to reveal himself to Daniel. Praise God in your heart for the wonder of your affinity with Daniel. You know him who, before he left his apostles, said, 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you' (John 14:18). Judas wondered how he would manifest himself to them and not to the world. And yet he does! We don't see visions like Daniel saw; but in your spirit you know that the Lord Jesus comes to you.

Maybe as you read and ponder the Scriptures, like the two on the road to Emmaus; maybe grieving at a tomb, like Mary Magdalene; or maybe in the midst of hard and apparently fruitless toil, like the men in the boat on Galilee. You know it in your spirit and you say, like John did to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' (John 21:7). He manifests himself to you in the 'breaking of the bread' maybe, or when the going gets rough and the wind is howling and the waves are high. You seem to be getting nowhere fast, perhaps seeming to be going back, but he comes to you, 'walking on the water'—he who stood above the river. In your spirit you feel him drawing near and you invite him into your 'boat'. As the great Lord of eternity comes into your little boat of life and work for God, and he is in you and with you—in that very moment you sense the boat is at the harbour and life is not a frustration.

As we survey the course of life, however much lies beyond us before the blessed Lord Jesus comes, the wonder is that he comes to us now, bringing his eternity into my little bit of time. Daniel saw him standing *above* the river—not on a boat on the river, being carried along the river like all of us are—in eternity, of course, yet he came down to meet Daniel in time. How blessed are we in this life that we may know eternity coming right to us in the person of the Lord Jesus.

How did the Lord comfort Daniel? First, by telling him what the future was going to be (12:7) and issuing a warning (v. 10). In their anxiety to believe in the coming of Messiah, some of his people would make mistakes. And as world patterns develop, these shall repeat themselves from time to time. Situations will arise in which it will look as if they are standing at the end of the age, but it won't actually be. Daniel wrote it down so that people may be comforted and steadied in their thoughts, keeping alive the coming of Messiah but not being taken in by interpretations of prophecy that aren't necessarily true.

About ten years ago we were told that because the taxis in Israel had number plates that said 666 this was a sign of the end, and the end was due to come in 1988. That is foolish! Instead of increasing people's trust in prophecy it undercuts their trust. The Lord is careful to warn Daniel, and through him his people, to observe the signs of the times; see the pattern of sin working itself out, watch how the waves mount up and then break upon the shore of time. Who knows whether this wave is the final one or not; but we still believe that there is going to be a time of the end.

### ***Beyond the end***

He warned him that there would come a time at the end of the age when evil would appear to triumph, but it became evident that the man who stood above the river could see beyond time (vv. 1–2). He could see beyond the end! He could even then see that there would come a time when he would say, ‘All who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement’ (John 5:28–29). He sees the end from the beginning. He sees us not merely as we are now; he sees us as we shall be. He can already see the glory that will be ours at the coming of the Saviour.

Our Lord is not pessimistic. Faithfully he told Daniel that there would eventually come a time of unparalleled suffering. It is known technically as *the Great Tribulation*. Listening to his word, many believers have felt their hearts failing for fear. They shouldn’t, because wherever our blessed Lord or his apostles speak of it they add a comforting word. The man above the river said to Daniel, ‘But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book’ (v. 1). Talking of that time the Lord Jesus said, ‘And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved.’ But immediately he added, ‘But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short’ (Matt 24:22). He doesn’t underrate the time of trouble, but he buttresses his people’s hearts with this assurance. He has a special word for the church at Philadelphia:

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. (Rev 3:10)

That is not to say that no believer will ever perish under persecution. You could not travel in Spain, Russia, Czechoslovakia or Poland and forget that myriads of our fellow-believers have perished.

You say, ‘Who has the power to say whether I perish or survive at any time in history? Is it the Beast, or the Serpent?’ No! Listen to the man above the river encouraging Daniel.

And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand towards heaven and swore by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished. (12:7)

‘Your people will be persecuted, but it shall not last one second more than it takes to accomplish the purpose of God.’

Why should God allow it? Because God has yet to purify his people, Israel, and bring them to the point where they are prepared to confess that they are unbelievers. He once took the proud Saul of Tarsus (who thought he was a believer and wasn’t) and had to bring him to the point where he fell prostrate on the ground and admitted that he was not a believer, and learned what it is to believe in the Lord Jesus. So, says that same Paul, God will have to bring Jews to the very ground, shutting them up in unbelief until they are brought to confess that (in spite of their proud boast that they have believed in the one true God) in the only sense

that matters they are not believers. Nor will they be believers until they come to believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, as their Lord and personal Redeemer.

Even in the darkest times there will be those who strive to 'turn many to righteousness', and whatever their earthly lot turns out to be, they 'shall shine like the brightness of the sky above' (see v. 3).

Then Daniel is told, 'But go thou thy way till the end *be*: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days' (v. 13 KJV). Nothing more was said. If you ask, 'What will that *lot* be, where exactly will it be placed and what will it consist of?' —I cannot tell you. But there is a lot and it has got Daniel's name on it. The imagery is borrowed from the idea that, when Joshua led the people of Israel into the land, each man got his inheritance. When he came to the end of the journey and entered the land, there was an inheritance with his name on it.

The vision has gone long since. It was given specially for the people of Daniel (i.e. the Jews), in a coming age. But we can't go without applying it to ourselves. In the battle of the Lord, may the man above the river come to you and comfort you. You are destined for eternity and, as time passes you by, the very eternal and unchanging Christ is with you and in you. Though he may allow you to suffer, be assured of this,

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Cor 10:13)

Why would he let you suffer? To give you glory when Christ comes! He has in mind by our very sufferings (though Satan doesn't mean it so) to purify us and increase our holiness so that we might be more like him when he comes.

Carry on, Sunday School teacher. It's a battle sometimes when the children are fractious; it doesn't seem they are listening and nobody takes any notice of what you do. You just carry on! If you turn one to righteousness, what will it mean? You shall shine as the very stars of heaven. One of these days, as you walk through the courts of heaven, you will come round a pillar in the celestial city and there is somebody from your town. They will say, 'It was you that first pointed me to Christ' —and they will tell it to you every time they meet you. Then you shall shine as the very stars in the heaven.

Are you really a believer? Well then start rejoicing, for your name is written in the book. It is enlisted in the citizens list in heaven already and never will be blotted out. If you are a blood-bought child of God there is a 'lot' marked out for you. It is yours, with your unique name on it. You shall stand in your lot at the end of the days and throughout eternity.

## Ultimate Values

In our final study we must attempt to scan the details of two stories, both of which deal with the question of ultimate values. The story in chapter 3 will talk to us about the cost of resisting idolatry, and in chapter 5 about the cost of rejecting God.

The first story is the story of Nebuchadnezzar's image. Not the one he saw in his dream, but the golden image that he made and set up in the Plain of Dura. He commanded all his ministers of state, from the highest to the lowest, to bow and worship his image. On the one hand it was meant to be an image of his god, and on the other hand it was a very thinly disguised symbol for Nebuchadnezzar himself. When three young Hebrew men refused to bow down and worship his image, Nebuchadnezzar was obliged to bring the final twist of the thumbscrew on their will. He pointed out to them that if they defied his order they would be cast into the fiery furnace. 'And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?' he demanded (3:15). Significantly, he did not say, 'What god will deliver you out of my god's hands?'

The story is how these three Hebrew young men refused to bow down and worship his image, and for their trouble were thrown into a furnace of fire. They were delivered by the miraculous power of God.

As a first step, let us read one or two passages in the New Testament that will put this ancient story into a more up to date context, where the writer is sketching for us in symbolic language what conditions will obtain at the end of this age.

Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666. (Rev 13:11-18)

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.' Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. (14:9-12)

The fact that a miracle took place in that ancient story should not allow any of us to imagine that it is a kind of a fairy story. If there lingers in our mind some suspicion that it might be, reflection will show us that what Nebuchadnezzar did in his day is all too relevant to the century in which we live. He was not the last to deify the state and make the totalitarian demand that all his subjects should own that the state has absolute claim on their complete loyalty. In our own times one could think of half-a-dozen countries that have the same law. It is interesting and solemnizing to remember what happens when totalitarian governments do that.

Last September some friends and I were in Moscow. We visited some of the national firms there and we had for our guide, translator and friend, an exceedingly cultured lady. As we got to know her we eventually felt free to ask her whether she had any personal faith, or not. She said, 'A year or two ago I was baptized as a Christian. I couldn't do it before. My father was an airline pilot and he flew planes from Russia to the outside world and back. Therefore, he had to be a member of the Communist Party. If the state had known that any of his children were Christians he would have been dismissed from the party, and of course from his job.'

I have a friend in east Germany, whom I used to visit in the bad old days before the wall came down. I remember vividly sitting in his home (the telephone of which was bugged). His little girl of some twelve or thirteen years old told us that at school the teacher had brought pressure to bear upon the children to join the Young Communists, the Marxist atheistic organization for young people. This little girl, being a believer, had refused and told the teacher that she would never join the Young Communists League. Looking her straight in the face the teacher told her, 'There is no higher education for you!'

All of us are aware that Russia was not the worst in this regard. In Albania it was a capital offence simply to believe in God and to profess that belief. According to the New Testament, what has happened in times past, and in our own century with millions of people, will happen again at the end of this age. Before the Lord Jesus comes again, the final form of Gentile imperialism will be a dictator who will ultimately ban every kind of religion, deify the state and demand on pain of death that all bow down and receive his mark on their hands or foreheads.

That is not so lurid as you might think. It has happened many times in history, and there has been a common thread of reasons why. It happened with Nebuchadnezzar because he received a vision that his own empire would not prove permanent and it would pass into the hands of others. Being a shrewd politician and suspecting that disloyalty would come mainly

from his ministers of state, he summoned together some governors from distant provinces who could easily have become disaffected. He sought to tap the ultimate loyalty of the human heart; that loyalty that should only be given to God the Creator. He wanted to harness it for the security of the state and the solidifying of his empire. Making an image of gold and setting it up in the plain, he commanded that all his ministers of state at the appropriate moment should bow down to the image and offer the state their ultimate abject worship and allegiance.

It was for a similar reason that the Roman emperors in their day introduced the worship of the emperor; it was not so much that they themselves wanted to be worshipped. Among their educated friends it was a bit of a joke and they 'worshipped' with their tongues in their cheeks. They didn't mind a bit of incense here and there, and if it kept the emperor quiet it was all to the good. The emperors did it because they had inherited a vast empire. The republic that had preceded it had gone down in rivers of blood, in the civil wars that destroyed the Roman republic. How could they unite all these different nations, with all their different religions and their tendency to nationalism and to fight each other? How could you get them welded together into one great empire to live in peace? That was the motivation originally of the Roman emperors—to get worldwide peace. And they thought to do it by giving all the member states a heart, a centre, a something that their ultimate devotion could be aimed at. Therefore, they deified the state in the person of the emperor.

It will be so at the end. You shouldn't suppose that the biblical prediction for the end of this age is that 'hobgoblins and foul fiends'<sup>8</sup> shall stalk the earth and people will live in ultimate distress, poverty and persecution.

While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. (1 Thess 5:3)

They will have devised mechanisms (perhaps throughout the whole world) to secure peace and security, to stop the smaller nations getting all heated up about nationalism. They will at first use religion; but then the mighty and cunning dictator that shall head the final phase of Gentile power will dismiss all other religions and set himself up in the temple of God, claiming for himself divine honours. If anybody refuses to obey they shall not be able to sell, buy, or eat.

I have to remind you of the simple lessons of history that, when emperors do that kind of thing, the majority of people bow down and worship their image. And not only the poor, illiterate and ignorant, but also the highly sophisticated; the members of the intelligentsia, the leading politicians in the end bow down to that kind of totalitarianism. They did it under Nebuchadnezzar—all except the three Hebrew young men. They did it under the Romans; the senators, philosophers and the learned bowed down to the terrors of those persecuting emperors.

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<sup>8</sup> John Bunyan, 'He who would valiant be'.

### ***Satan's lie***

There is a deeper reason why the end of our age will see this kind of totalitarian worship of the state and its emperor. That is a completely different reason, but it comes from the fact that there is spiritual warfare in the universe. Behind all the affairs of men and states there is a spirit of opposition against almighty God, a satanic spirit that is watching over the harvest of a seed that Satan sowed all that long way back in the garden of Eden. It is the seed that he put into the mind of Eve and Adam.

'Eat of that fruit and you shall be as the gods. You don't have to be dependent upon God, you can make up your own mind. Mankind is the master of his fate. You can live and enjoy life to the full, dismissing the notion of God or any supreme authority. Eat of that tree and you shall be as God.'

That is the lie—the Bible calls it *the lie* (2 Thess 2:11 NIV). It has run in the background and in the soil of human experience all down the centuries. Sometimes its obnoxious weeds have appeared on the earth in the form of a Nebuchadnezzar or an Antiochus Epiphanes or a Tiberius Caesar or a Nero or somebody. It will come to its full-grown harvest as men and women, who for generations taught atheism—that there is no God behind our universe, in the end exalt man as God.

Don't think it is ludicrous; it is already the belief of millions of people. The Bible warns us that when it happens it will be the ultimate degradation of mankind. When *the mark of the beast* is given to us in the Revelation under the symbolic number of 666, the Holy Spirit of God points out that it is the number of a human being. What degradation of the human spirit is this, that men and women shall bow down and give ultimate loyalty to a mere man?

It was a tremendous blow for human dignity and intellectual independence that the three young Hebrew men struck, when they defied Nebuchadnezzar to his face and refused to bow down to his image. In our day we have admired the dissidents in Eastern Europe, the Solzhenitsyns of this world, who have dared to stand for human intellectual freedom, freedom of conscience and the freedom of man who is made in the image of God, against the totalitarianism of an atheist state.

### ***The ultimate sin***

If bowing down to a fellow-man and deifying the state is the ultimate degradation of the human spirit, it is also the ultimate sin against God. Here we would do well to make sure that we have an adequate concept of sin. According to many people's popular ideas, the greatest and most grotesque sin is perhaps murdering somebody—your mother or father maybe. As serious as that kind of thing is, according to the Bible it is not the ultimate sin.

The first and greatest commandment in God's holy law is, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' (Matt 22:37). When God says we should so love him, he is not thinking of nice feelings that course through us. He is thinking of love, both as affection and desire; but also in a political sense. Love in the sense of loyalty; utter, absolute loyalty. If there is a God, if we are his creatures and we were made for his pleasure, as the Bible says, then the chief commandment is understandable—that we

love him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. To fail to do so and to compromise our allegiance to him is the ultimate sin.

It is so easy here to imagine that we can sit on the fence.

Someone will say, 'I am not against God.'

Well, I am glad to hear that! That's something for a creature to say about the Almighty: 'I am not against him.'

Or someone else, 'I don't like to take things to extremes. I am not altogether mad keen on God, but I am not against him.'

People imagine that they can sit on the fence. Some will even imagine that sitting on that fence is a mark of sanity and balance of mind. What would you say to a young man who is proposing to marry a young lady, if the day before the ceremony you ask him, 'What do you really think of her?' and he says, 'Well I am not against the woman! On the other hand, I don't take things to extremes. I am not mad keen on her, I like to keep a balance!' I doubt if you would say, 'His sanity is commendable!'

Our blessed Lord warned us of it. Talking to one of his churches, he said, 'I have this against you: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!"' (Rev 3:15). 'You are not against me, but you are not mad keen for me.' The risen Lord Jesus said to them, 'I find it absolutely nauseating that you stand there and tell me that you are not against me, nor are you mad keen on me.'

How do you think that sounds in the ears of almighty God? Not to be mad keen on God is the ultimate sin, the ultimate treason. It will bring its ultimate punishment. Therefore, our study takes on a sombre tone. We cannot possibly dismiss it as just an ancient story; it has a searching lesson that is all too uncomfortable for us today.

At the end time, when there shall exist this dictator who will sit in the temple of God (showing himself that he is God, and demanding divine honour), it is not only said that our blessed Lord will destroy him by the brightness of his second coming; it is said that in those terrible days, 'God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie' (2 Thess 2:11 NIV). Why? Not because God himself is a tyrant, but there will come a point when he himself shall desist from warning and beseeching any more. They heard the gospel, they knew the truth, they had holy Scripture, but steadfastly over the years they had rejected the truth and refused the gospel. God had pleaded with them many times to repent and believe, but in the end he will say, 'Have it your way. If you will not believe the truth, believe the lie.' It is the most colossal lie, that you can have a paradise on earth under a reign not merely of atheism, but of the deification of man.

### **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego**

We turn now to consider these three young men who resisted the emperor. There too I issue a warning, lest there lingers in our mind that this is some kind of fairy story. I suspect that you had pictures of it in your childhood storybooks, perhaps even published by the secular press. There was Jack and the Beanstalk on one page and Noah in a ridiculous-looking ark with a giraffe sticking his head out the top. On the next page was old Nebuchadnezzar with his



moustache going up and down, the three young men defying him and getting put into the furnace.

Somehow it went like this. There was this old tyrant who, puffing his cheeks out, said that everybody must bow down to his image or get thrown into the fire. And there were three young men who opposed the great giant tyrant (like David and Goliath). He could take it no longer and he commanded his servants to fling them into the furnace of fire. At that precise moment God did a miracle and they didn't have even a hair singed. They came out unscathed. What a story!

And you think, 'I could do that too. Come the day that some old tyrant faces me I will defy him too. I could be sure that, just as I was going to be tortured or executed, God will send his angel and I will come out unscathed.' What a story to tell your friends.

If you think that, then you have got a childish idea. Sometimes God has done miracles and his people have come through their persecutions. But it doesn't always happen; some die under it. Apart from that, read the story carefully and you will see that these three young men were not saved from suffering. That was the last thing they were saved from. They were not saved from the fire, but they were saved in it. They didn't know in advance that there was going to be a miracle. Listen to them talking with Nebuchadnezzar (3:14-18).

'Is it true that you won't bow down to my image?' asks Nebuchadnezzar.

'Absolutely true! Our God is able to deliver us. But if God does not deliver us, we must pay the penalty. We will still not bow down to your image.'

The story tells us that the furnace was heated so hot that even the guards who stood near the open mouth of the furnace were suffocated with the heat and died. If there had been no miracle the three young men would not have suffered any pain. The moment they were thrown in, instantaneously they would have perished. But they suffered—the suffering was not inside the fire, it was in those terrible days before the fire. Can you imagine it, as the three young men went to their various homes that night? Their children in bed, with hushed and worried tones they told their wives of the decree. 'There is to be this massed meeting and we are going to be required to bow down.' Can you imagine the anguished discussion between husband and wife?

'What are you going to do?' says the wife. 'You can't leave me and the children. We are foreigners in this land and if you go what will happen to us?'

'I shall have to refuse; how can I bow down? Our God's holy law says, "You shall have no other gods before me . . . It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear"' (Exod 20:3; Deut 6:13).

'Could you pretend to bow down? There will be so many others there. They will bow down, but they will be cursing Nebuchadnezzar under their breath. They will bow down and keep their jobs. You could praise the Lord in your heart, but you could bow down too.'

Pretending to be disloyal to God and failing to stand and confess God before men, brought home to their hearts what the issue must be. They would have to refuse to bow down. In the worried nights that followed there would not have been much sleep. They kissed their wives and children and went out on the appointed day.

You say, 'I don't think that's very fair of God; he could have warned them that he was going to do a miracle. It would have saved them all that anguish.' God can't do that!

Consider what the issue was at stake. It was a choice between worshipping God and all other forms of idolatry.

### ***We have to choose where our loyalty lies***

To settle that, God will have to make us face it and we shall have to make the choice. Therefore, even for us in our smaller circumstances, before we go home to glory there will have to come a situation where God piles up everything else on the one side and himself on the other and says, 'Choose!' That is what the battle is. You can't go home to glory until you have decided it.

That's why Abraham was called upon to justify his faith by his works. He had begun by professing to believe in God (Gen 15). His faith was altogether in God and in his promise (not in his own works), and he was justified by faith. But there had to come the day when Abraham was called upon to demonstrate that his faith was genuine (Gen 22). God raised the issue with Abraham, 'Who do you really trust, Abraham? Me, or Isaac? Were you faced with the choice between me and everything else, what would you choose?' Abraham chose God and surrendered Isaac, and demonstrated that his faith was genuine faith.

It can't be done without our making the decision. Sooner or later God must bring us to the point where we have to choose. That is the cost of resisting idolatry. Hence the apparent severity of our Lord's term, 'So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:33). Salvation is free; but for many people it becomes obvious very soon after their conversion (and for some, before) that if they accept the free gift of salvation from Christ, receiving it will involve them in the loss of all things. If you are a Muslim that gets converted to the Lord Jesus and then gets baptized, you are liable to be severely punished within the next few weeks.

With what right does Christ face us with such an alternative? He is God! How little our concepts of God are these days. Christ is not a 'resource person'. We treat him like we treat our garage man. We don't spend much time with him, but when the car goes wrong and things have broken down we go to him, believing he can put things right. Of course he puts it right, but we don't ask him to get in the car and come home with us and guide us in our lives. As soon as he has put it right, we say good-bye—until we need him again.

In our anxiety to get converts we are tempted to preach that sort of gospel to the people. 'Jesus Christ is a resource person. Are you feeling the blues? Well, Christ could help you with that!' You are not feeling the blues? Well then, you won't feel any need of Christ. The very terms of salvation are these. If you want salvation as a free gift, it is through faith in Christ; you become his disciple and he will demand that you renounce everything else you have and take him as sovereign Lord.

You say, 'Why do you try to apply this ancient lesson to us in this far-off day? Our circumstances are easy. We are not likely to come into the kind of crisis situation that the three young Hebrew men came into.'

Perhaps you may manage not to, and get home to glory before you meet any dictator. That is not the point! This is a decision that each one must make. Unless our hearts are surrendered absolutely to Christ—given the choice between him and everything else we will choose Christ—we wouldn't be safe in heaven. What do I mean? If the devil can take the little

things of this passing world and so hold them out in front of our noses that, in fear of losing them, we grasp them and leave the Saviour, what would happen if we were in heaven with ten thousand million delights and our hearts were not first and foremost rooted in the Saviour and he is supreme above them all? I fancy we would maybe turn up to a heavenly prayer meeting once in two years and the very delights of heaven would take us away from the Saviour.

### ***Present your bodies as a living sacrifice***

When the young men were finally thrown into the fire their decision had been made. The trial and examination passed with flying colours, God chose on that occasion to deliver them from death. They found, as they entered the flame, not merely that the flames did not hurt them; in the flame they found one that is imperishable. Here in this life those young men had discovered the living and eternal God, and they found they had the better part of the bargain. The fire loosed their bonds and set them free to walk. Even at our lowly level so shall we, as we journey through life and are called upon to make our decisions. As we learn to let things go for Christ's sake, we shall find the eternal and the imperishable. Having found him we have lost nothing, we have all.

Nebuchadnezzar had them brought out. Then he began to commend their God to everybody else and to commend them as sincere and genuine men. How could he tell they were genuine men? They yielded their bodies! The exhortation and command comes to us from holy Scripture through the pen of Paul.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom 12:1)

Who knows, but one day we may be called upon to yield our bodies in the full and final sense. It is good if we have learned to practise it in the little affairs of our lives. We don't grow courageous all of a sudden; courage is built up by many decisions constantly taken in the smaller affairs of life to prepare us for the big occasion. We have been showered with God's uncountable blessings. I call upon my heart and yours, in the name of him who for our sakes surrendered everything (heaven itself and his Father's presence), to present our bodies a living sacrifice, which is but our reasonable service.

## **Belshazzar**

We are bracketing together chapters 3 and 5 because both deal with the question of ultimate values. Chapter 3 is bringing before us the cost of resisting idolatry and chapter 5 will bring before us the cost of indulging in idolatry. Our blessed Lord tells us that there is a cost involved in being his disciple. Elsewhere he reminds us that there is also a cost in not being his disciple—that cost is immeasurable.

So we come to the story of Belshazzar and his banquet. We will see a vivid description and watch that great crown prince of Babylon coming to his ultimate decisions about what life's values are, as each one of us shall ultimately do.

For long years Belshazzar had apparently been dilly-dallying; not making up his mind, as many of us do. We meander through life, never coming to grips with what life's ultimate values are; but one day we shall have to, as Belshazzar did. He was only crown prince, but he acted as king. He made a banquet for one thousand of his lords. What a banquet it was! With all the wealth of the city at his command, some of the finest buildings that human ability has ever been able to build and all his lords and their ladies in their finest dress, it was the very finest that imperial Babylon could devise.

It was at that banquet, when Belshazzar had had enough wine, that he faced the truth about himself. You know how it is. A matter that you had been thinking over for months, perhaps years, suddenly it seems to become stark and clear, you know where you stand and you make your decision. It was a sorry thing that he did it when he was a little tipsy.

My friend, it could happen to you. If you are not a Christian, but you have heard God's gospel many times and you have dithered over the pros and cons, it could happen to you too. One of these days in some fashionable hotel at a business conference, you could have drunk just a little bit too much and it will suddenly seem clear to you, and you will make your decision. God's mercy be on you—it could be the wrong decision.

The thing that had apparently been irking Belshazzar all these years was this. His grandfather (not his real grandfather, but his ancestor on the throne) had some kind of a spiritual experience. He had got converted or something. He had been an idolater like everybody else, but then he had a breakdown and lived like an animal for some years. In his distress he lifted his hand up to see if there was anybody there and found the hand of almighty God coming down. He gripped Nebuchadnezzar's hand and pulled him out of the distress of his mental breakdown, the indignity of his animal behaviour, and brought him to sanity and health once more. Everybody in the palace had heard of it and Belshazzar had heard it many times.

### ***Belshazzar's evaluation of God***

This night at the banquet he came to a decision: he decided once and for all what life's true values were. He asked one of his officers to go to the temple where Nebuchadnezzar had deposited the golden vessels that he had taken out of the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, and bring them to the banquet-table. Those vessels had originally been made and placed in the temple at Jerusalem by the Israelites to express their faith that God is man's supreme value; and the supreme significance and value of human life is to worship almighty God, our great Creator and our redeemer. We were created to do his will. It is our significance as human beings that we were made in the image of God, and life's supreme value is to worship and to serve the Creator.

Nebuchadnezzar had taken those vessels and with great reverence (idolater though he was) he had put them in the house of his god. He never attempted to use them for his own pleasure. This night, as Belshazzar came to his decision about what life's ultimate values were, he called for the vessels and commanded that they be filled with wine. Everyone looked to his majesty. Taking the golden vessels that were made for divine service, he rose from the table and drank from them. The crowd was aghast. He made his lords and ladies

drink from the vessels. He was saying, 'I am tired of all this conversion business. Life's chief value is me; it all exists for me and my pleasure.'

Sooner or later we face the choice. What is life's pleasure? What am I? What am I meant to be living for? We shall choose either what the three Hebrew young men chose—life is for God; or what Belshazzar chose—life's chief value is myself and my pleasure.

So Belshazzar made the decision; he came to his evaluation of God. What happened next? God replied and made his evaluation of Belshazzar.

In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. (5:5 KJV)

Now his face was going pale. The people followed the gaze of the emperor and saw he was looking at this mysterious writing on the wall. Try as he might, he couldn't read the writing. It was scary! He didn't need to be told that this was God intervening—God was writing on his wall, and he couldn't read it.

That is a scary thing to wake up to. There are many people, and they take a Bible in their hands in their distress. They know it is God's word, instinct tells them it is so, and they can't read it. They don't know what it means. Can you read the writing? Let's take the very simplest of the writings.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Can you read the writing? Does it make sense to you, or is it all double Dutch? Our very eternity depends on our being able to read the writing. Why couldn't Belshazzar read the writing? It was very odd, because he had seen these words on the weights and measures of his kingdom.

And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. (5:25–28)

Aramaic words: *mene*, for a maneh; *tekel*, for a shekel; *upharsin* (KJV), meaning two halves of a shekel. They were stamped on the weights and measures of his reign. In those days they did not have coins and they used weights for coinage. *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* on the king's wall were simply weights and measures—money. He had seen them thousands of times. Why couldn't he read them now, when the hand of God wrote them?

If the hand of God came out and wrote on our wall, 'pounds, euros, dollars', could we make sense of it? What might God want to tell us? What on earth is he saying? What is money? Money is value. No, it is not—money is only the way of measuring value.

As we go through life values change. Give £10 to your grandson who is ten years old and see what his values in life are. He will probably want to spend it on the biggest succession of ice-creams you ever saw—that is his sense of values. Give your sixteen-year-old niece £10

and she will probably put it to the rest of her savings and buy a new dress. Ice cream has long since lost its value for her. If a man of fifty-six has already got everything he needs, what will he do? His values will be different again. When you come to life's end are there any eternal values that never change?

You could look at it another way. What are you worth, what is your value? They tell me that a child needs his mother; but then the mother needs her child. She loves to feel wanted and that little infant makes mother feel good. Someone needs her. It is sometimes a cruel thing for women in middle age when their children have grown up and left home and nobody wants them. If diamonds were not used in industry, their only value would be that women like them. If women didn't like them, men wouldn't pay thousands of pounds for them. You can't eat them! Because women like them that is what gives the diamond its value. When the children have grown up, maybe husband has gone and you stand on the edge of the great eternity, will anybody want you? What will you be worth? Human worth is this—God our Creator wants us. Explain it if you can; the self-sufficient God made us and he wants us. When we sinned against him he so much wanted us that in the person of his Son he died to redeem us. That is our value.

### ***God's evaluation of Belshazzar***

Here comes God now to evaluate Belshazzar. Daniel comes in and takes the words:<sup>9</sup>

*Mene* (turning it as a verb): God has measured your kingdom and brought it to an end: 'Life is past now, Belshazzar. The good wine, the food, the lords and the ladies, the power; it is all over now, Belshazzar. You are weighed in the balance and you are found wanting. Your character is eaten through with sin; you are a light kind of a thing; you have come short.'

*Peres*: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Persians: 'You know what it means, Belshazzar. If the Persians come here tonight they will kill you. The show is over! You have to go out into the great eternity. You are a sinner like the rest of us, your only hope is to cast yourself on the mercy of God your Creator. Perhaps he will save you yet. The table does not look so pretty now, with bits of bread and fish, and stains of wine; how bedraggled it looks when the show is over. Amongst the debris of the banquet stand the vessels of gold. You have rejected the only thing that could ever have given you value for life and eternity—God himself. You made your decision. You said, "the chief value in life is self." Tonight you will be slain.'

What would you value Belshazzar at now? He has gone out into the darkness to exist there eternally. What would you say is the value of a lost soul?

### ***The value God places on us***

We bring the lesson home to ourselves. What are we worth? What are we? Ultimately are there any eternal, unchanging values? Is there anybody that wants us? Let atheism wither away, the magnificent answer is this. Yes, there is a God and he made us in his image. We have all sinned, God cannot pretend otherwise. But, not on the basis of our works, and in

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<sup>9</sup> Keeping the consonants and putting in other vowels, as you can do in Semitic languages.

spite of our shortcomings, he loves us still. He gave the precious blood of his Son to redeem us.

Your worth is here. If you will receive God's Son, his blood will not only atone for sin but buy you eternal redemption, eternal significance, and with it an eternal inheritance and eternal glory. Think long before you take the cup and raise it to your lips and say, 'I have decided that the ultimate value in life is myself and my pleasures.' Ponder the cost of indulging in idolatry. Rather, let our decision be to rise up and, as the psalmist put it, 'Lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD' (Ps 116:13).

## CHARTS

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## Contents of the Book of Daniel

GROUP 1	GROUP 2
<b>Chapter 1.</b> The refusal to eat the king's impure food. Daniel and his colleagues are vindicated.	<b>Chapter 6.</b> The refusal to obey the king's command and refrain from praying to God. Daniel is vindicated.
<b>TWO IMAGES</b>	<b>TWO VISIONS OF BEASTS</b>
<b>Chapter 2.</b> Nebuchadnezzar's dream-image.	<b>Chapter 7.</b> The four beasts.
<b>Chapter 3.</b> Nebuchadnezzar's golden image.	<b>Chapter 8.</b> The two beasts.
<b>TWO KINGS DISCIPLINED</b>	<b>TWO WRITINGS EXPLICATED</b>
<b>Chapter 4.</b> The discipline and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar.	<b>Chapter 9.</b> The prophecy in the book of Jeremiah.
<b>Chapter 5.</b> The 'writing on the wall' and the destruction of Belshazzar.	<b>Chapters 10–12.</b> The 'writing of truth' and the eventual destruction of 'the king' (11:36–45).

## [An Enlarged Table of Contents](#)

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**Chapter 1.** Nebuchadnezzar reverently places God's vessels in his idol's temple. Daniel and others refuse to indulge in pagan impurities. Court officials sympathetic. Daniel and his colleagues' physical and mental powers vindicated. They are promoted to high office.

**Chapter 6.** Darius bans prayer to God for thirty days. Daniel refuses to cease practising the Jewish religion. Court officials intrigue against him. Daniel's political loyalty to the king vindicated. He is restored to high office.

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**Chapter 2.** A survey of the whole course of Gentile imperial power. Four empires in the form of a man. The fatal weakness: an incoherent mixture of iron and clay in the feet. The whole man destroyed by the stone cut out by divine power. The universal Messianic kingdom set up.

**Chapter 7.** A survey of the whole course of Gentile imperial power. Four empires in the form of wild beasts. The hideous strength: a frightening mixture of animal destructiveness with human intelligence. The final beast destroyed and universal domination given to the Son of Man.

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**Chapter 3.** Nebuchadnezzar thinks that 'no god can deliver (the Jews) out of his hand.' He commands them to worship his god. The Jews defy him. They are preserved in the furnace. God's ability to deliver is thereby demonstrated.

**Chapter 8.** The little horn: 'none can deliver out of his hand.' He stops the Jews' worship of their God, and defies God himself. God's sanctuary and truth are finally vindicated.

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**Chapter 4.** The glory of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is warned that he deserves discipline. He persists in pride, is chastised, and his chastisement lasts for 7 times. He is then restored.

**Chapter 9.** The desolations of Jerusalem: Israel's sins have brought on them the curse warned of in the OT. Jerusalem will be restored, but Israel's persistence in sin will bring on further desolations lasting to the end of  $70 \times 7$  years. Then Jerusalem will be finally restored.

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**Chapter 5.** Belshazzar makes a god of his pleasures, but still recognizes the gods of stone etc. The 'writing on the wall'. The end of Belshazzar and the end of the Babylonian empire.

**Chapters 10–12.** The king exalts himself above every god, and regards no god. The 'writing of truth'. The series of apparent 'ends' leading up to 'the time of the end' and eventually to The End itself.

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## Thought Flow

### **Questions of Value**

- Chapter 1      The golden vessels of divine service placed in the temple of Nebuchadnezzar's idol.
- Chapter 2      The Gentile empires: image of a man, made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay, smashed by a stone 'cut out without hands'.
- Chapter 3      Nebuchadnezzar's golden image and the worship of the state.
- Chapter 4      Great Babylon's splendour, built by Nebuchadnezzar for 'the glory of his majesty'. Nebuchadnezzar goes mad, behaves like an animal, and then is restored to his 'majesty and splendour'.
- Chapter 5      The golden vessels of divine service again; taken from the temple and used by Belshazzar to drink from himself. The writing on the wall = money values and weights. Belshazzar weighed in the balances and found wanting.

### **Questions of Law, Truth and Time**

- Chapter 6      The law of Daniel's God and the unchangeable writing according to the law of the Medes and Persians which changes not.
- Chapter 7      The fourth beast thinks to change the times and law. The heavenly court, the books of judgment. The Ancient of Days gives the kingdom to the Son of Man.
- Chapter 8      The stern-faced king 'throws truth to the ground' and causes the continual burnt-offering to cease. The duration of the persecution revealed.
- Chapter 9      Daniel seeks to understand how the prophecy in the books (Jeremiah) about the ending of Jerusalem's desolations can be fulfilled, when Israel is still disobeying God's law. He is told the timing of the restoration.
- Chapters 10-12      A revelation of what is written in the Writing of Truth. Events leading to 'the time of trouble' and to THE END. The final deliverance of those 'written in the book'.

## [The Four Great Periods of Daniel 11–12](#)

### **1. 11:5–19**

The first great movement starts ‘in the end of years’ (v. 6 KJV). After much toing and froing over the subsequent years and generations this movement comes to its peak when ‘at the end of the times’ (v. 13 RV) the king of the north sets out to invade Egypt with a vast army. None can withstand him. He stands in the glorious land and in his hand is destruction (vv. 15–16). It will look as if it may turn out to be the time of the end; and some in Israel will think the time has come for the vision of the messianic kingdom to be established and they will take steps to try to establish the vision. But events will prove them mistaken (v. 14). In spite of great success the king of the north is eventually turned back and goes home. There he falls (vv. 18–19).

### **2. 11:20–28**

The second great movement climaxes in Antiochus IV’s first attack upon Egypt. On his return through Palestine after great success, ‘his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it’; but then he will ‘return to his own country’ (v. 28 NIV). The strategies and deceitful diplomacy of the Gentile kings shall make it look as if they are about to create the conditions of the end-time. But the appearances will be misleading. It will not prove to be the time of the end, ‘for yet the end *shall be* at the time appointed’ (v. 27 KJV).

### **3. 11:29–35**

The third great movement commences ‘at the time appointed’ (v. 29) with another invasion of Egypt by Antiochus IV. This time he is unsuccessful; for the ships of Kittim come against him. Returning in frustration he enters Palestine and wreaks terrible outrage on the sanctuary, setting up the abomination that makes desolate (vv. 29–31). Even so, he does not meet his end in Palestine. Only in the time of the end does the invading king meet his end there. In spite of Antiochus’ enormous outrages upon the sanctuary and his persecution of the faithful, they are not living in the time of the end. Rather Israel shall experience persecutions, captivities and death, and from time to time even the wise shall fall, and all this will go on happening ‘until the time of the end’ (vv. 33–35).

### **4. 11:36–12:13**

THE TIME OF THE END with its ‘wilful king’ (vv. 36–39; 2 Thess 2) and its time of unparalleled trouble (12:1), culminating in the resurrection of many ‘who sleep in the dust of the earth’ (v. 2).

## The Symbolism of Chapters 2 and 7

### **1. The successive world empires represented by**

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**Chapter 2.** Majestic man.

**Chapter 7.** Wild beasts.

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### **2. Their ultimate incurable unacceptability**

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**Chapter 2.** Fatal weakness and instability.

**Chapter 7.** Hideous strength and destructiveness.

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### **3. Superseded by**

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**Chapter 2.** A stone cut out by supernatural power becomes a mountain that fills the earth.

**Chapter 7.** The Son of Man and the saints, given an everlasting kingdom by the Ancient of Days.

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## About the Author

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