**Daniel**

**Expository sermons**

**Dennis K. Muldoon 2007**

**Who was Daniel? Daniel 1:1-2**

*(Scripture quotes from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated)*

‘Daniel in the Lion’s Den’ is one of the best known and best loved children’s stories. The story of his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and AbedNego being thrown into the fiery furnace is also well known. These stories have given rise to songs like, ‘Dare to be a Daniel’ and other gospel songs. I loved the Johnny Cash song about ‘Shadrach, Meshach and AbedNego, into the fire they must go’. These stories and songs come from this book of the OT called Daniel.

Daniel is called a prophet by Jesus (Mat 24:15) for he speaks of God’s plan for the future. But he is somewhat different to the other prophets in that God spoke to him in visions and dreams, in pictures and symbols, in what is called apocalyptic style. He spoke about things in the distant future, things even Daniel did not understand, things which Jesus and then the writer of Revelation picked up and elucidated. Most of the prophets lived in Israel and spoke the word of God to the people of God. Daniel lived in a foreign land among a strange people. He spoke to these Gentiles, as well as to the people of God. ‘Daniel is God’s prophetic mouthpiece to the Gentile and Jewish world, declaring God’s present and eternal purpose’.

**1.Daniel’s time**

Daniel was sixteen years old when he was carried off to a strange land, from Jerusalem to Babylon. He came from the nobility in Israel. He was carried off by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who had besieged Jerusalem and defeated the king of Judah, Jehoiakim. ‘*The Lord gave Jehoiakim into the hand’* of Nebuchadnezzar (1:2). Worship and morality in the land of Judah had been in decline for some time. Manasseh was the worst of the kings. He sacrificed children in the fire, practiced witchcraft, and consulted mediums. Outwardly they were still worshipping God but they had departed from his commands. They were disobeying the covenant commands given through Moses. They were in rebellion against their God, and God accordingly declared his judgment upon them.

Jeremiah was God’s chief spokesman during the latter days of the kingdom. Jehoiakim became king in 608BC after his father Josiah was killed trying to stop the Egyptians advancing to the north. ‘*Jehoiakim did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God’* (2Chron 36:5). He was the king who burned the scroll of Jeremiah (Jer 36). He did this because in this scroll the Lord declared that the king of Babylon would come and destroy Judah and Jerusalem. Neither the king nor the people would accept this word from the Lord. They refused to listen, but turned upon the prophet and persecuted him. In the same year (605BC) Nebuchadnezzar came and besieged the holy city. He had just defeated the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish, thereby gaining control over Israel. The siege of Jerusalem was brief because Nebuchadnezzar it seems got news of his father’s death and returned to Babylon, but not before he entered the temple and took some of the vessels as trophies for his god. He also carried off some of the young nobles.

It was in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim in Judah. This became the first year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. In the books of Kings and Chronicles this is referred to as the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim. Some scholars are troubled by this disparity and suggest reasons for the difference. There is some indication that the Babylonians numbered the years differently to the Jews. What the Jews called the fourth year the Babylonians called the third year. Daniel was writing in Babylon, and indeed in Aramaic much of the time. We know how some people say, ‘she is one year old’ but others that ‘she is in her second year’.

**2.Holy city**

The palace of the king of Judah was next to the temple in Jerusalem. Life and worship for the Jew was centred upon the temple in the holy city. All the people came to this temple to worship God. God’s presence was in this temple, above the Ark of the Covenant. God provided for his people and protected them from generation to generation according to his covenant promise. The people, however, failed to keep the covenant. Their disobedience ultimately led to the Lord departing from the temple. Through Jeremiah God declared that Jerusalem would be given into the hands of Gentiles. *‘The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand’* (1:2). Daniel, who wrote this book that bears his name, recognised the hand of the Lord in this captivity. It was not that God was no longer sovereign; it was not that God was no longer powerful; it was not that God had forgotten his people. God was punishing his rebellious people.

The name Daniel means ‘God is judge’. God was judging his people for their wickedness in turning way from him. ‘They worship me with their lips but their hearts are far from me’ (Isa 29:13). They had come to presume upon God. They thought they could do anything they wished- God would not see, God did not care. But God does see and God does care. Judgment will begin at the house of God.

Daniel suddenly found himself in a foreign land, unable to go to the house of God. How would he cope spiritually? Would he fall away and become like those around him? This is the challenge that faced Daniel, a challenge he shared with other exiles and a challenge he shares with us today. We who believe in Jesus are citizens of heaven, not of this world (Phil 3:20). We are foreigners in this city where we live, just like Daniel was in Babylon. Daniel is like another young man called Joseph. Joseph was carried off to Egypt after his brothers sold him as a slave. He was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, and tested in other ways. But he obeyed God, and God was with him. In the end he could say to his wicked brothers of his ordeal in this foreign land, ‘you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good’ (Gen 50:20).

**3.Heathen city**

Nebuchadnezzar took the holy vessels and put them in ‘*the treasure house of his god’* (1:2) - probably a god called Marduk. They were like a thank-offering to his god for the victory he had just won. He believed that his god had helped him in battle, but Daniel makes clear that the Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand. The God of Israel was still sovereign and always will be. The next king learnt this truth when he took these holy vessels to drink from at a party (5:2).

How was Daniel going to live in this heathen environment? He was only a young man but had to decide. We all have to decide at some time in our life. I was just seventeen when I left home and came to live in the city. I had to decide. Maybe it was later in life that you had to decide how you will live in this city- this heathen city. I had to decide again when I went to India. How will I live in this foreign land, in the midst of idolatry?

Idolatry is all around us today. Evil images confront us wherever we go in this city. I remember getting off the plane in Frankfurt years ago to be confronted by a advertising poster of a near-naked woman. It was a shock after years in India. At the click of a button pornographic images will appear on your computer screen. Idolatry comes in many forms. Joseph had to face one form and Daniel another. You will face it in some way. How will you then live?

Daniel wrote to encourage the exiles in Babylon. We know how they felt from Psalm 137. They could easily have thought, as the Babylonians said, that the Lord their God was defeated, or that he was no longer caring for them. They could have gone along with their neighbours in idol worship. Daniel determined in his heart to obey God and stand firm on the promises of God. The Lord used Daniel in a mighty way in this foreign land. He was not only respected by the king but feared by him, because he was a man who honoured God. God did wonders through Daniel and declared the future through him.

The first half of this book of Daniel (2:4-7:28) is written in Aramaic, the language of the local people. Through his interpretation the dream of the king, and the writing on the wall, Daniel declared the will of God to the king. The king of Babylon was humbled before the Lord God of Israel. ‘*Truly your God is the God of gods … the revealer of secrets’* (2:47). Daniel’s visions are mostly written in Hebrew for the benefit of the exiles. Daniel read his Bible and prayed every day. He had visions at such times, in which the Lord revealed to him His plans for the future and even for the end of the world. Daniel’s time, and the time of the exiles in Babylon would come to an end. The Lord their God had not forgotten them. The heathen city would be judged by God and so would other nations in the days ahead.

Daniel did not understand all that was revealed to him. With the help of the NT we can understand more but still not all that has been revealed. The end is yet to come. But like Daniel we can be faithful followers of Jesus in a foreign land. Let us press on in the knowledge that Daniel’s God and our God is sovereign over the nations, sovereign over atheists, sovereign over the rich and powerful, and sovereign over all other gods. He truly is King of kings and Lord of lords. The whole world is in his hand; yesterday, today and forever, Amen.

**A Re-education program Daniel 1:3-7**

To change a person’s mindset, to change the way a person thinks, is not easy. When Chairman Mao swept to power in China in 1949 he sought to impose his new way of thinking on the whole population. He had to erase any thoughts about God, and fill the people’s minds with humanistic thoughts. Millions were taken from their homes and placed in re-education or brainwashing camps. Dislocation was the first strategy. Next he imposed a vigorous physical routine, and then classes in which the thoughts of Chairman Mao (the ‘little red book’) were drummed into people day and night. As we might expect, younger people were more vulnerable to this brainwashing. Older people were slower to learn or just obstinate. Millions met their death under this re-education program. In the new China, in communist China, men and women had to think and live like true comrades. Daniel and his friends were selected for a re-education program by the King of Babylon at the end of the seventh century BC.

Not all re-education programs are as violent as that of Chairman Mao, or as rigourous. The same objective can be achieved in more subtle ways. The teaching of Darwinian evolution in schools has served to brainwash a whole generation, and more. Those who imposed this program are surprised when they meet educated young people who do not believe in their theory. And then there is Hollywood. The pagan producers have generally succeeded in lowering the moral standards of our society, this new world in which we live.

In capturing Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar helped himself to the treasures in the temple, and also took with him a few of the young Jewish boys of the city. They were young royals and nobles. What did he intend to do with these boys? They were handsome young fellows. In those days it was thought that physical prowess went hand in hand with mental prowess. Also in those days only the elite got an education. So these boys were selected for a re-education program. Nebuchadnezzar was going make them into new men, men fit to serve their new king. He was going to make them into Babylonians. He wanted them to forget their homes, forget their families and forget their God. In this new land there were new gods they would learn to serve. He would train them up to be his loyal servants. What was involved in this re-education program?

**1.New names**

Among the Jewish boys selected by Nebuchadnezzar were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. There may well have been others, but these four feature in the following narrative. One of the first things the chief steward/eunuch did was to give them new names- Babylonian names. They had Jewish names which reminded them not only of their heritage but of their God- ‘el’ in the name refers to Elohim, one of the names for God in the OT. Their new names on the other hand pointed to Babylonian gods. Abed-Nego means servant of Nebo.

We do not read that these teenage boys objected to being given new names; however, there is evidence that they continued to use their Jewish names. Years later even the queen of Babylon knew Daniel by his Jewish name (5:12). The King hoped that with a new name, a Babylonian name, these boys would quickly identify with their new home and culture, including the new gods of the land.

**2.New education**

In this foreign land and in this new situation Daniel was not only given a new name, he was given a new education. He and his friends were actually selected because they were ‘*knowledgeable and quick to understand’* (1:4). They were gifted students. The king was going to teach them all the knowledge of their new land. He wanted them to be knowledgeable and loyal public servants. A training program of three years was set for Daniel and his friends.

What did this training program entail? They would be taught ‘*the language and literature/writings of the Chaldeans/Babylonians’* (1:4). Was there anything wrong with learning the language and literature of the Babylonians? Well, Daniel and his friends did not object to this program. They were already knowledgeable, presumably in things related to the Jews and the God of Israel. What they would be taught was the language and literature of the Babylonians. This teaching would have had a different focus to what they had learnt in Jerusalem. They would have been taught a different view of creation, and of man’s place in this world. They would have been taught a different view about life and death. Their fellow students were magicians and astrologers (1:20, 2:13).

Even though they learnt about the gods of the Babylonians, about astrology and mythology, the true God was with them and helped them to learn. He even gave Daniel the ability to interpret visions and dreams (1:17). Knowledge is not intrinsically evil, but is of course potentially dangerous. Daniel was a top student even though he did not believe much of what he was taught. In fact, this education enabled him to better relate to the king and the people and thereby declare unto them the true God- ‘*there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets’* (2:28).

What are children taught in our society today? Where are they taught? In public schools the teaching is largely humanistic. They learn little of the true God and may well be ridiculed if they believe that God created all things- there are, of course, differences between schools. But school is not the only place children learn. They learn in the home even before they go to school and they can learn in the church- if their parents bring them. Children must be taught about God from the Bible if they are to stand on the truth and not be swept up in humanistic and ungodly- or ‘agodly’- thinking. Like Daniel and his friends, they will be able to withstand attempts by the authorities to indoctrinate them into humanistic thinking in the so-called social engineering policies of state education.

We must be alert to other ways in which our children learn. From where do they acquire their world view? Friends can have a powerful influence on children. Do you know who your children’s friends are? And then there is that box and the screens that children love to watch. Do they learn about the true God from watching the TV? If Nebuchadnezzar had had a TV he would surely have used it to re-educate Daniel and his friends. If just thirty seconds is all that advertisers need to get children to buy their product, what does an hour or two of Hollywood violence, corruption and immorality do?

**3.New Food**

‘The fastest way to a man’s heart is through his stomach’- so the saying goes. The King was going to treat these boys with rich delicacies from his own table. They were to be supplied with rich food and wine daily (1:5). He wanted them to healthy and happy in their new home, their new heathen home. With Babylonian names, a Babylonian education and rich Babylonian food, the King hoped that in just three years these young men would forget all about their old home and their old God and be ready to obey his every command.

Satan is not averse to giving treats to his targets. Was it not a lovely fruit tree with delicious fruit that he used to lure Eve into disobeying God? Was it not the thought of being rich that lured Judas into betraying Jesus? Thirty pieces of silver was a lot of money. Satan tried this trick on Joseph when he was in Potiphar’s house- a young man in a foreign land. But the Lord was with Joseph (Gen 39:21). Satan tried it on Moses also. Moses had pleasures and treasures in abundance in the palace of Pharaoh, but faith in God enabled him to turn his back on these. ‘*He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin’* (Hebrews 11:25). Even the Son of God was targeted by Satan when he was hungry, but Jesus refused to turn the stones into bread at his diabolical suggestion.

Daniel and his friends were very vulnerable to being brainwashed in this foreign land. How would they live in a society where there was no fear of God? How would they live whilst being taught myths and theories about creation and about life, things that were contrary to the revelation of the true God? Would they be seduced by the good things of their new society? Daniel and his friends faced a great challenge. Is it not the same challenge that you and your children face today? How will you then live!

**Daniel’s test Daniel 1: 8-16**

Daniel was long way from home. He was away from his family and away from his place of worship. How would he live in this foreign land? A young Hindu once told me how he had enjoyed meat pies when he was in America. By religion he was a vegetarian and would never have eaten meat at home. But in this far away place who would know. Some who call themselves Christians live by the same thinking. But not Daniel!

Daniel had been uprooted and carried off to this strange land. The king selected him and his three friends for a re-education program. He was to become a special servant of the king. He had a bright future in this new land. All he had to do was learn the way of living in this new land, a way of life centred upon idol worship. Would Daniel conform, or would he live as a man transformed by faith in God?

**1.Decisive Daniel**

*‘Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself’* with food and wine from the king’s table (1:8). From the very outset Daniel made a solemn resolution not to eat food from the king’s table. Such a decision was potentially dangerous for this young captive. It was disobedience but not open defiance, as we will see. It was a personal resolution not to defile himself in the sight of God not a crusade towards martyrdom. ‘To defile himself means more than ceremonial defilement because sinning in the matter of idol- meat would be more than an outward shortcoming’ (Leupold). The Hebrews had strict food laws. If they ate ‘unclean’ foods they would be become ceremonially unclean. They were not permitted to eat with non-Hebrews or Gentiles. Food became a major issue in Judaism. It is a major issue in many religions. Some Christians also make a big issue of food and drink.

Daniel did not object to being given a new name or to learning about other gods. Why did he object to the food and drink he was given? Did he want to make the point that he was a Hebrew; that his religion was different to the Babylonians? Was his religion mainly about what he ate and drank? Whilst the food that Daniel would have been given was probably not ‘kosher’ or ceremonially clean, defilement meant more than this? For Daniel it was a matter of conscience, a matter of the heart, a matter of faith. The food that came from the king’s table would have offered to idols before eating. For Daniel eating this food was tantamount to worshipping such idols. He determined not to defile himself or sin against his conscience in this way. Have you ever faced this problem that Daniel faced, the problem of food sacrificed to idols? Probably not, but young Christians in India do. When Hindus have festivals in honour of their gods they take holy food called ‘Prasad’ and offer it to all their friends, including Christians. In colleges and in the work place Christians have to decide what to do.

Before you start thinking about what you eat and whether it has been offered to idols, consider what the apostle Paul might have done in Daniel’s place. Although Paul says it is wrong to join the pagans in their feasts (1Cor 10:21), he also says that no food is unclean in itself (Rom 14:14). Idols are nothing he says and so he was ready to eat anything (1Cor 8). Yet Paul recognised that it was a matter of conscience for some believers and their conscience must be taken seriously. Faith in God means the conscience is illuminated. We have a Spirit-illuminated conscience and we can sin against our own conscience. This is where faith and religion differ; religion is about rules, but faith is about a good conscience towards God (1Jn 3:21). ‘*The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’* (Rom 14:17).

Daniel’s decision was not a matter of legalism but a matter of conscience. In the light of Scripture he purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Paul would certainly have commended him for not sinning against his own conscience. More importantly, the Lord honoured Daniel’s decision because it was taken out of faith in God. ‘*Whatever is not from faith is sin’* (Rom 14:23).

What have you purposed in your heart before the Lord in order to honour him in your life? Are you a Christian who lives like everyone around you? Believers and unbelievers living in the same way- can this be so? I ask this question with care for we must not start thinking legalistically. We are talking about transformation, about renewing of the mind. We are talking about glorifying God not about glorifying ourselves.

Another problem faced by believers in many societies is that of bribery. Is it a fee or a bribe? If I don’t pay a bribe nothing will get done? Such questions arise. To take a stand against bribery means personal hardship- but honour to God. You may be confronted by gambling. Many think nothing of a school raffle- how terrible to offend the children they say. I heard of a compulsive gambler who traced his problem to raffles. What stand do you take? What stand do you take on swearing? What stand do you take on sexual immorality? Daniel took a stand- will you?

Daniel took a stand at the very beginning. He did not say, ‘when I am in good with the king I will take a stand’. He did not say, ‘when I have lots of friends I will take a stand’. He did not say, ‘when I am well established in my job I will take a stand’. He purposed in his heart from the start, from day one. It is much easier to stand up for righteousness and truth now than it will be later.

**2.Humble Daniel**

Daniel ‘*requested the chief steward that he might not defile himself’* (1:8). He did not bluntly refuse to eat the food; he did not demand to be given other food, but quietly and humbly asked to be excused from eating food from the king’s table. He treated the chief steward with respect. Daniel decision was to honour God, not to antagonise heathen men and make himself a martyr. Daniel responded to his situation with spiritual humility and respect.

Even though he liked Daniel, the chief steward was not prepared to take the risk of letting Daniel and his friends become pale and drawn looking. The word translated ‘looking worse’ is literally ‘to look worried or excited’. The king of Babylon had absolute power. Anyone who failed in their duty or simply displeased him could be executed. The chief steward was duty bound to prepare Daniel for the king’s service. Daniel did not get upset- nor did he give up in despair. He wisely went to the next man down the ladder. Human wisdom says go to the top if you want something done. Daniel went to the bottom. He asked this steward, ‘*Please test your servants for ten days’* (1:12). Again humility and respect mark Daniel’s request.

‘To be able to stand firm and hold Biblical convictions modestly is a great grace that too many of us fail to attain’ writes Sinclair Ferguson. He adds- ‘is it because we are over concerned about the fact that these convictions are our own and too little concerned for the glory of God in them?’ Daniel took his stand for the glory of God, not to display his own religious convictions.

**3.Hopeful Daniel**

Daniel suggested to the steward that he test them for ten days, giving them only vegetables to eat and water to drink. ‘Vegetables’ literally means ‘sown things’, so included pulses. It was a vegetarian diet. Daniel’s wisdom shows forth in this request- as does his faith in God. Why ten days? Ten days seems a short time to test a diet. Did the Holy Spirit suggest this time to him? God did honour Daniel’s faith. ‘*After ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies’* (1:15). If Daniel had suggested a longer period the steward may not have been willing to take the risk.

It was not the food that made Daniel and his friends look healthier, it was God. If you went vegetarian for ten days who would notice? God was with Daniel, just as he was with Joseph. ‘*God brought Daniel into the favour and goodwill of the chief steward’* (1:9). Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself. He determined to honour God, and God honoured him. “‘*Those who honour me I will honour’ says the Lord”* (I Sam 2:30).

Remember, wherever you are you are a child of God (Ps 139). As a child of God you are to live in a way that brings glory to God. If you purpose in your heart to do this God will uphold you. Learn from the Word of God how you should live and humbly hold those convictions. The Lord promises to give you the strength to do so.

**Knowledge and wisdom Daniel 1: 17-21**

A friend of mine in India was a professor at the college where I taught. He was a fine academic. You can imagine my amazement when one day I saw him worshipping a cow! This intelligent man regarded the cow as a god. We are taken aback by similar behaviour in our own society; doctors charged with terrorism, top doctors convicted of patient abuse. Top lawyers are convicted of perjury and tax fraud. Top scientists convicted of falsifying research results in order to get publications and notoriety. Well- educated men and women are not always wise in the way they use their knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom are not the same thing!

**1.Knowledge and wisdom**

*‘God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom’* (1:17). Daniel and his friends had been selected by the king of Babylon to undertake three years of training for the public service. The king selected them for their good looks and ability to learn. They possessed knowledge and were quick to understand (1:4), but he wanted them to learn more about the culture of Babylon. They joined local Babylonian boys in this training program.

Lessons on local myths and legends would have been included in this training. We know that the Babylonians had their own creation story. Daniel would have studied astrology, as well as history and mathematics. Daniel and his friends excelled in these studies. The king ‘*found them ten times better than all the scholars and astrologers in his realm’* (1:20). Daniel was quick to learn and his knowledge became vast, even though he did not believe much of what he was taught, and never worshipped the gods of this foreign land.

The king found Daniel better ‘*in all matters of wisdom and understanding/* knowledge’ (1:20). Why was Daniel such a good student? Many parents strive to make their children into scholars. They send them to the best school and then to private tuition. No expense is spared in getting their children top grades and into good jobs. Daniel did not have any parents around to make him study. He was actually an exile or refugee. Besides, he had to study in a foreign language.

What is the secret to making a top student? If you knew the answer you could be a rich person! Is it genetics, or is it environment? Is it nature or nurture? Is it the child or is it the parents, is it the teacher or is it their friends? There is no one factor of course, but we do learn one factor in this passage which many people fail to consider- which we will come to shortly. Daniel faced many setbacks in this foreign land, but we have already learnt of his determination to honour God in his life. He would have sought to honour God in his studies. This was his motivation. No doubt he applied himself to his studies. Personal motivation is an important factor in education- ‘*whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus’* (Col 3:17)

**2.Source of knowledge**

Genetics, good teaching, personal motivation- is this all? Daniel was from a noble family. As the king’s chosen student, Daniel had the best teachers in the land. But was this why he and his friends excelled in their studies? Not according to the passage before us. ‘*God gave them knowledge’* (1:17). Ultimately it was God who made them excellent students. How is that you may ask? Many today would ridicule the idea that God had anything to do with their learning, but others can testify to the truth of this text. It is not a matter of superstition of course, of seeking to please God by praying and going to church just before an exam. It is a matter of acknowledging God, and honouring him in all things. ‘*Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you’* said Jesus (Mat 6:33). Jesus was talking about food and clothes, but **all things** could include education. When we put the Lord first in everything He promises to bless us in all things- including studies. God made Daniel and his friends excel in their studies.

Many students think the more time they spend in study the better their result will be. Now study is essential- the Lord does not bless laziness. But the Lord has made a time for everything. There is a time to study and a time to sleep. Good students do not deprive themselves of sleep. Moreover, God has given us a day of rest from work and studies- it is called the Lord’s Day. It is a day for rest and worship.

Do you think Daniel studied on God’s day of rest? Daniel knew that God was giving him success in his studies. God had already given him favour in the eyes of the chief steward (1:9). Daniel had already determined to honour God in what he ate. Daniel was going to worship the true God in this new land. The locals may have studied on the Lord’s Day but Daniel had decided to honour the Lord. He knew that God honours those who honour him.

**3.Source of wisdom**

God not only gave Daniel knowledge; he also gave him wisdom. Someone had defined wisdom as the ‘constructive ability to rightly apply knowledge acquired, and do so in the fear of God’. Knowledgeable people are not always wise people. That is why some lawyers are in prison and doctors also. Wisdom is actually rare among men. It is not a learned trait. If knowledge is given by God, then wisdom much more so!

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Wise men like Daniel fear God. Solomon was the wisest man in the whole world. ‘*Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt’* (1Kings 4:30). How did Solomon get this great wisdom? He asked God for an understanding heart that he might discern between good and evil. God gave him a wise and understanding heart (1Kings 3:12). True wisdom comes from above, it is given by God. It is different to the wisdom of this world. Such wisdom is earthly, sensual and demonic (James 3:15). It envies and is self seeking. This is why earthly wisdom leads to corruption, to lies and all manner of evil.

Wisdom from above, or wisdom that God gives to those who fear him, is ‘*pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy’* (James 3:17). This is the sort of wisdom that Daniel had. Daniel acknowledged that God ‘*gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding’* (2:21). Do you have such wisdom? Do you seek after heavenly wisdom, or earthly wisdom? What is your prayer today?

**4.Special understanding**

Daniel was also given a special ability by God- the ability to understand visions and dreams (1:17). The other three young men were not given this ability. God was going to use Daniel to show his glory before foreign kings. Some suggest that Daniel’s witness led to the wise men of the East knowing about the King of the Jews and coming to Bethlehem at his birth over 500 years later. Through Moses God showed his omnipotence before the king of Egypt and brought this heathen king to his knees. Through Daniel God would show his omniscience to the king of Babylon and bring him to his knees. God gave Daniel the ability to interpret dreams and even to tell the king what his dream was. The king was amazed and declared ‘*truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings and the revealer of secrets’* (2:47). God is omniscient. God is omnipotent. God is great.

God was with Daniel, just as he was with Joseph and Moses before him. Daniel was a faithful, God-fearing man, and God blessed him with knowledge and wisdom. He gave Daniel special knowledge that he would use for the glory of God. Through Daniel God would make himself known in this heathen land as he did through Moses in Egypt.

The apostle Paul was also given knowledge and wisdom by God. Before he met Jesus on the Damascus road he had great knowledge but no heavenly wisdom. The Roman ruler told him his great learning was driving him mad (Acts 26:24). But the Lord gave Paul wisdom from above, a wisdom that is regarded as foolishness by the world. With great knowledge and divine wisdom Paul witnessed before kings the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. In the wisdom and power of God he called upon all men to repent and believe in Jesus.

Has not the Lord given each one who fears him wisdom from above? Are you not wiser than those who have no faith and no fear of God? ‘Do you not know that the saints will judge the world’ said the apostle. ‘*Do you not know that you will judge angels’* (1Cor 6:2,3). Is the Lord using you to confound the wicked? The ‘foolishness’ of the gospel of Jesus Christ is wiser than all the wisdom of this fallen world.

**Bad dreams Daniel 2:1-13**

Have you had a dream lately? Maybe you had a nightmare and woke up in fear. What are we to make of dreams? This is an age-old question, and a vexed question. Some people dismiss dreams altogether while others are guided by them- even within the Christian community. Scientists analyse impulses given off by the brain in an effort to understand dreams, while astrologers and the like offer to interpret dreams for a fee. We are not going to try and answer these questions just now, but it is interesting that in the Bible we find a number of accounts of dreams being interpreted by servants of the Lord.

Joseph had dreams which he told his brothers- they called him the Dreamer. They had some understanding of what his dreams meant and hated him because if this. It was in Egypt that Joseph used his God-given power to interpret dreams to actually save the nation. The Pharaoh had a dream that troubled him. He called his magicians and wise men but they could not interpret his dream. When Joseph was called he said, ‘*it is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace’* (Gen 41:16). In a dream God revealed the future to the king but only a servant of God could interpret this for him. Without Joseph the Pharaoh would have remained in his troubled state and his people would have perished.

**1.An insecure king**

In the second year of his reign ‘*Nebuchadnezzar had dreams and his spirit so troubled him that sleep left him’* (2:1). There is some debate about the date at this point. If it was his second year then Daniel’s three year training would not have been complete, some say. But the difficulty is not insurmountable, nor is it important. Nebuchadnezzar was ruler over a vast kingdom. He was a very powerful and no doubt rich man. He could have anything and everything he wanted. But this night he was denied sleep because of a dream. He was a troubled man. He had no peace in his heart. His vivid dream meant something, but what? He maybe sensed it was about the future, his future. He was terribly insecure.

Most heathens live in fear of the unknown future. Do you not see people grasping at any and every piece of information (or misinformation) they can get about the future. The media is full of predictions about interest rates, elections, weather and all manner of things. If you want something more personal you can go to the horoscopes and clairvoyants. I am sure there are ‘dream interpreters’ to be found also. Nebuchadnezzar had his own band of ‘dream interpreters’ whom he called this night when he could not sleep.

As much as Nebuchadnezzar wanted to be god and have his subjects worship him, he was only a man. He was bound by the things of this world and this time. ‘The horizons of his ambitions always moved with the change and decay of this world’. “When pagan intellectuals reminded him that they and he were humans and not gods, he flew into a rage and reacted in a way reminiscent of the words of the 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: ‘if the is a God, how can I bear not to be that God’”.

People who are outside of Christ think of themselves as gods, as rulers of their own lives, as men who determine their own destiny. But dreams can be very unsettling for such people. Remember Pharaoh. Remember Pilate’s wife who told him not to touch Jesus because ‘*I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him’* (Mat 27:19). Here we see Nebuchadnezzar similarly troubled. What about you? Are you troubled by bad dreams? Do you think you are in control of your own destiny, or do you acknowledge a power greater than yourself? Do you acknowledge the omnipotent and omniscient God? Do you know the peace of God in your heart that guards your heart and mind from the anxieties of the heathen?

**2.A hostile king**

Insecurity and anxiety often lead to hostility. The desire to be god and rule one’s own life has a cost. It puts a strain on interpersonal relationships. A king like Nebuchadnezzar would have made many enemies in his rise to power- some of them were still alive. Those who want to be rulers, even of their own lives, tread upon those around them as they seek greater control over their life. They grow to trust no one but themselves.

Nebuchadnezzar called his spiritual advisors and they dutifully came, probably in the middle of the night. But when they came he decided not to tell them his dream. A poor translation in Daniel 2:5 (‘the thing is gone from me’) has led some to think that he forgot his dream but what he said was his decision was firm or he had made up his mind. Why? Why did he decide not to tell his dream? We know that in the providence of God, Daniel would come forth to reveal the omniscience of God. But at the human level Nebuchadnezzar did not trust his own advisors. He accused them of stalling for time (2:8) and then of conspiring to speak lying and corrupt words (2:9). He had long suspected that their interpretations were ‘not worth the paper they were written on’- but then again, what could he expect from mere men like himself.

‘In his heart of hearts Nebuchadnezzar must have known, as must the magicians themselves, that the religion of Babylon was mere superstition and man-made religion’ (E J Young). This is a profound statement. It occurred to me many times as I watched men make offerings to idols. Surely they know that this is just a lump of clay. We would see students worshipping an idol they had made all morning and then in the afternoon throw it in the river. Did they really believe that such a god would help them in their studies?

Many today resort to all manner of superstition to pass exams, to win matches, to win the lottery and so on. More than twice the usual number of couples were married on the 7th of July this year (7/7/2007). They thought it was a lucky day and that their marriage would be better for getting married on this day. Such is the desperate search for a happy marriage! Such is the blindness of men and women outside of Christ.

*‘The Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic’* (2:4). Chaldeans seems to be a general term for these magicians and sorcerers. They were probably natives of Babylon and spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language somewhat different to Hebrew. Daniel began to write in Aramaic from this point until the end of chapter 7. Why, we do not know, but maybe because these conversations were in Aramaic, and because the focus was upon Babylonian people. E J Young concludes, ‘all in all the solution which seems to be most free from difficulty is that Aramaic, being the language of the world, is used in portions of the book which outline the future history of worldly empires and their relation to the people of God, and Hebrew is used in those portions which interpret for the Hebrews the meaning of the visions of world empires’.

**3.Only God**

Nebuchadnezzar threatened his magicians with death if they did not tell him his dream and its interpretation. His demand was totally unreasonable, as his advisors pointed out. Here was a troubled man, getting angry and threatening death to his servants because of the dream that he had. Here is life under the rule of Satan in all its horror. Wicked people are too ready to make others pay for their own troubled hearts.

The Chaldeans declared that ‘*there is not a man on earth who can tell the king’s matter’* (2:10). What the king was asking was something only the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh, could tell. They admitted that they were not gods and that there was a power greater then them. Would the king admit this also? Well, not for the present. He was furious and ordered that all his wise men be destroyed- including Daniel and his friends (2:13). These Chaldeans had laid the platform for the Lord to reveal himself through Daniel to this proud and troubled king. He would learn that there is a God who knows all things, even his dreams and the thoughts of his heart.

As the apostle Paul wandered the streets of Athens he saw an altar to ‘the unknown god’. This city was the home of great philosophers like Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. Some acknowledged the existence of gods who could not be known but who they felt they should worship. Even today some people are kept very busy worshipping all the gods just in case they offend any. Paul used this altar as a platform to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. ‘*The one who you worship without knowing, him I proclaim to you’* said Paul (Acts 17:23).

Into the midst of a troubled people, people filled with fear because of dreams, because of horoscopes, because of financial woes or political hype this glorious gospel of peace with God through Jesus Christ must be proclaimed. The platform is there for us. People today are troubled at every turn. They are running for help in all sorts of places. Oh, that they would come to the light of life, Jesus Christ the Lord.

**Daniel faces death Daniel 2: 14-23**

The king of Babylon was ‘angry and very furious’. The ruler of this vast kingdom had a dream which troubled him. Lack of trust in his own advisors led him to make the totally unreasonable demand that they tell him not only the interpretation but the dream itself. This heathen king then threatened them with death if they failed to come up with the answer. In fact, he had already started killing his wise men (2:13).

Daniel and his young Jewish friends had recently graduated and joined the king’s service. Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard came knocking on their door also. They were only young but were now wise men advising the king. Would they be executed along with the other wise men, the astrologers and magicians of Babylon? The other wise men told the king that no human being could tell the king the content of his dream. What he was asking them was impossible. Or was it?

Abraham’s wife Sarah thought it was impossible for her to have a baby when she was so old- and humanly speaking it was. But the Lord said to her, ‘*is anything too hard for the Lord?’* (Gen 18:14). Is anything impossible for God? Did Daniel believe that the situation in Babylon was hopeless? A humanly orchestrated tragedy was in progress. How would Daniel respond in the face of imminent death to himself and many others?

**1.Seek information**

When Arioch came to Daniel’s house to arrest him it seems that Daniel had not heard about the king’s order. The furious king was acting in haste. How did Daniel respond? Did he panic? Did he resist arrest? Did he threaten to take legal action? With counsel and wisdom, with humility and respect, Daniel asked the captain a question; ‘*Why is the decree from the king so urgent/harsh*?’ (2:15). The king was clearly being totally unreasonable and irrational, but Daniel did not say this. He acted and spoke with wisdom and tact. Remember that the Lord gave Daniel, and his friends, knowledge and wisdom. Here we see this ‘wisdom from above’ in action. Wisdom from above is peaceable and gentle (James 3:17). ‘*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger’* (Proverbs 15:1).

What might ‘earthly wisdom’ have looked like in this circumstance? The king was clearly crazy. He had to be stopped. Was a plot to assassinate the king needed? Perhaps a street rally protesting against the king could be organised? Yes, a civil disobedience program; that would be the way to go. What did Ghandi call it - ‘non-violent protest’? One wonders if such a campaign would have been effective against the king of Babylon.

What would you have done in Daniel’s situation? Do you favour the ways of earthly wisdom or those of heavenly wisdom? What did Daniel do? He spoke to the captain with respect and tact as he sought more information about the king’s command. Arioch responded favourably to Daniel’s polite question. He did not have to explain the king’s decision, and probably would not have dine so if Daniel had confronted him or abused him. Daniel’s discretion and wisdom resulted in him getting the information he wanted. Armed with this information Daniel then took his next step- he went to the king.

Daniel went in and asked the king to ‘*give him time that he might tell the king the interpretation’* (2:16). God was certainly with Daniel at this moment. Here was a young man, a man barely out of his teens, a man under arrest and facing execution, going to speak to the king. Moreover, the king was furious with his wise men, of whom Daniel was one. From a human perspective Daniel was incredibly bold and brave. But going in the strength of the Lord as he did, he was simply being calm and confident. He promised the king to interpret his dream. Daniel believed that God knows all things, even the secrets of men’s hearts. Daniel trusted God to reveal these secrets in a desperate time such as this.

Although Daniel’s own life and that of his friends was under threat, he was not simply acting to save his own skin. Such motivation might have led him to hide, or flee. Daniel had purposed in his heart to live an upright life and declare the truth of God. He determined to glorify God in this heathen land. Fearing God, Daniel did not fear man. In the strength of the Lord he did not even fear this raging king.

**2.Share in prayer**

Daniel was a man of prayer. It was his custom since his youth to pray three times a day (6:10). In chapter 9 one of his prayers is recorded. Time was short and Daniel had to deliver an interpretation. But for Daniel there was always time for prayer. It seems the busier Daniel was the more time he spent in prayer- contrary to many people.

On returning from the palace Daniel shared all he had learnt with his friends and they prayed together. They sought ‘*the mercies of the God of heaven concerning the [king’s] secret’* (2:18). This title, ‘God of heaven’ is not common in Scripture, except during this time of the exile. Some think it is significant in the context of the Babylonian’s propensity to worship the sun, moon and stars.

*‘Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need’* (Heb 4:16). It is as if Daniel knew these words from the NT. With his friends he prayed to God for mercy. Daniel prayed alone in his room but on this occasion he prayed with his God-fearing brothers. Corporate prayer is important. When Peter was arrested by King Herod the church came together and prayed earnestly for his safety (Acts 12:5). The church at Antioch fasted and prayed before sending Paul and Barnabas out as missionaries (Acts 13:3). God delights in the prayers of his people, and is especially pleased when they agree in prayer. Do you value prayer as much as Daniel did? Do you have a prayer partner or partners as Daniel did?

What was the outcome of this prayer of Daniel and his friends? They sought mercy from God in the desperate situation confronting Daniel and his friends, and lots of other men in Babylon. Have you ever prayed for mercy in this way? Have you been in a situation in which you could do nothing except rely up the mercy of God? Have you ever spoken to the Lord of your helpless condition? I am sure you have?

Daniel prayed specifically for the secret of the king’s dream. He knew that God knows all things. He also knew that God was gracious and merciful. His prayer was that God would reveal the king’s dream to him. Daniel had a vision in the night in which God did just that. God revealed to Daniel the kings dream and its interpretation (2:19).

**3.Thanksgiving**

*‘So Daniel blessed the God of heaven’* (2:19). Daniel was full of praise and thanksgiving when God answered his prayer. He had not yet gone to the king. He had not yet escaped the king’s threat, but thanks flowed from his grateful heart. He knew that God was sovereign in this situation, not king Nebuchadnezzar. Do you believe that God is sovereign in all things in your life? Do you have any troubles at present? Have you brought the matter to the Lord in prayer believing that he is able and willing to help you?

Look at the wonderful words of praise that flow from Daniel’s lips. Note that many lines begin with ‘God’ or ‘He’ for emphasis. God controls history, not nature itself or idols or fate. How many people believe this today? Do you? God is all powerful, he is all wise; and what is amazing is his grace in revealing to Daniel the exclusively divine knowledge he requested. Do you know this amazing grace of God?

Some people do not get wisdom or strength from God because they do not ask. Remember that the time you spend in prayer is not wasted time as the heathen think. He who asks receives. Jesus said, ‘ask and it will be given to you’, a cup full and running over. Daniel believed this promise. Many say they are too busy to pray, too busy come to worship, yet they still expect God’s blessing.

Some people do pray, and God answers their prayer, but they do not thank him. A student once told me how she had been to a healing service and her arm got better. ‘Have you thanked the Lord’ I asked her. ‘Are you now worshipping the Lord who you say healed you’? Many were praying for rain in recent days. The Lord has blessed us with rain, but who is giving thanks?

Let us, like Daniel, be filled with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for all his blessing to us. You were in danger of death were you not, when the Lord reached out to save you? Has not God answered your prayer for salvation, for salvation from the wrath of God, from the penalty of sin? If you are a sinner saved by grace through faith your heart should be filled with thanksgiving today and everyday. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**The God who reveals secrets Daniel 2: 24-49**

King Nebuchadnezzar was on the rampage. A royal decree went out and they began killing the wise men of Babylon. The king was angry because these men could not tell him his dream. He demanded that they tell him not only the interpretation but the dream itself. Daniel and his friends were next in line to be executed. They cried out to the Lord in prayer and the Lord revealed the secret to Daniel in a night vision (2:19). Daniel was filled with praise and thanksgiving to the living and powerful God whom he worshipped.

**1.Glory to God**

Arioch, the captain of the guard had gone to Daniel’s house to arrest him. Daniel received him with wisdom and respect. It was probably under the auspices of Arioch that Daniel gained an audience with the king on the first occasion. On Daniel’s second audience with the king it was Arioch who brought him before the king (2:25). Daniel had gone to Arioch after the Lord revealed the king’s dream. Arioch was still carrying out the pogrom against the wise men of Babylon (2:24). He took Daniel to the king as a matter of urgency, for wise men were being executed even as he spoke. ‘*I have found a man of the captives of Judah who will make known the king’s interpretation’* (2:25). Just as God made the chief steward favourable towards Daniel, so it seems the captain was also favourable towards Daniel. He was eager to save Daniel and his friends.

Arioch ‘*found a man’* to tell the king his dream, but Daniel did not speak in this way. He took no glory to himself. He gave all the glory to God. With God-given confidence and boldness Daniel made it clear to the king that a God in heaven reveals secrets (2:28). He reminded the king that his wise men, astrologers and magicians could not tell him his dream. Nor was Daniel claiming to be wiser than anyone else in this matter (2:30). He was just an ordinary man, the servant of an extraordinary God. This was the difference between Daniel and the rest; Daniel was different because he knew the true God in heaven.

*‘Not unto us Lord not to us, but to your name be the glory’* (Ps 115:1). Daniel would have been familiar with these words and sought to live in this truth. He was just a young man, who we might think was vulnerable human praise. He might well have been a man ready to exalt himself at any opportunity. But here we see Daniel both trusting in the Lord and giving glory to the Lord, something that is not always done by Christians. The apostle Paul was like Daniel in that he also had opportunity to stand before kings and testify of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He reminded rulers that they had no power except that which God gave them. He called upon rulers to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 24:25).

Andrew Melville reminded James VI of Scotland that, ‘there are two kingdoms and two kings in Scotland’. Christ Jesus is king and head of the Church, not James or any other man. Rather, James is a subject of this King of kings. The natural man is deeply flawed in this respect. He is ever ready to receive the praise of men. We see it in sports, in politics, and other pursuits, even in the church. Men get to the top; they bask in the glory, and get addicted to it. They cannot live without their fans, and they start believing they are like a god. Take heed to the example of Daniel, a young man who gave all the glory to God.

**2.The dream**

Nebuchadnezzar was on his bed when thoughts came into his mind (2:29). This was not a day dream as some suggest. It was not just his own imagination running wild. It was a dream, a nightmare that shook the king. The things he saw meant something about the future, but he did not know what they meant. Daniel told him that ‘*he who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be’* (2:29). The dream was indeed about the future, the future not only of his own kingdom but of kingdoms to come in this world.

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar his dream. He saw the image of a man, huge and awesome. The head was of fine gold, his chest and arms of silver, his belly and sides of bronze and his legs were of iron. His feet were a mix of iron and clay. As he watched, a stone impacted this image on the feet, shattering the mix of iron and clay and causing the whole thing to fall and disintegrate. Then the stone became a mountain engulfing the whole earth.

**3.The interpretation**

Daniel did not condemn the king for the injustice he was perpetrating- even though Daniel himself was condemned along with all the wise men. Daniel acknowledged the power and authority of king Nebuchadnezzar. He acknowledged that God had given this man a kingdom, power and strength (2:37). Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was the head. His kingdom was indeed coming to an end. He had only recently become ruler but God told him in this dream that his kingdom would not go on forever. The interpretation was not at all comforting to this despot and megalomaniac seeking world domination. But he listened quietly to Daniel as he related the rest of the dream.

Moving down the body of this image we come to the neck and arms of silver. The metals become less valuable and the kingdoms smaller and less autocratic- even though their duration was longer. The silver is generally understood to represent the kingdom of Medo-Persia. Cyrus the Persian over-ran Babylon in the year 539BC. The bronze belly and thighs represent the Greek Empire which came to power with Alexander the Great around 330BC. The iron legs represent the Roman Empire. This empire was strong but was also fragile. Political infighting and moral corruption made it vulnerable to decay.

It was during the time of the Roman Empire that a stone would come from out of nowhere as it were, and shake this empire to its very foundations. A stone that was ‘*cut out without hands’.* This stone represents the kingdom of God which shall never be destroyed (2:44). This stone represents Jesus of Nazareth. He is the stone which the builder rejected which became the chief cornerstone. Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem, not in a king’s palace. He grew up in obscurity but his powerful ministry shook not only the Jewish world but the Roman world also. His death and resurrection stand as the hallmarks of the kingdom which he inaugurated.

As this gospel was proclaimed through the world by the apostles, and by the church, so his kingdom grew. As Jesus himself said, ‘I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it’ (Mat 16:18). Not even Satan-inspired and empowered kingdoms are able to overcome this glorious kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was there in embryonic form even in the life of Daniel, but it was fully revealed in the coming of Jesus. The kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ will break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever (2:44). The picture of a stone growing into a mountain and filling the whole earth is powerful, and at the same time wonderful.

This was not good news to Nebuchadnezzar or to the rulers of these other empires. Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar accepted this interpretation and the inherent message from God. As a man who believed in the supernatural, he believed what Daniel said as being the word of God. He fell down before Daniel as if to worship him. ‘*Truly your God is the God of gods, and Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets’* (2:47). Nebuchadnezzar was filled with awe but not converted. This king never sought the mercies of the God of heaven. Nonetheless, God transformed the king’s wrath into praise, and the chapter that began with Daniel under sentence of death ends with him sitting in the king’s palace.

The message of the glorious kingdom of God that has come in Jesus Christ was not good news to the king of Scotland and of England, or to kings and rulers today. Nor is it good news to men and women who regard themselves as rulers of their own lives and destiny. Is it good news to you?

The kingdom of God is the most glorious kingdom of all. The King is just and righteous; he is slow to anger and abounding in goodness and truth. He is full of mercy and grace. A king who lays down his life for his people cannot be surpassed. And this kingdom has no end- it endures forever. You who belong to this kingdom by the grace of God need not fear another kingdom or another ruler ever coming forth to overthrow the King of kings and Lord of Lords. ‘*The dream is certain and its interpretation is sure’* (2:45).

**Kingdom Conflict Daniel 3: 1-18**

After the death of Eli the priest the people of Israel became corrupt. The Philistines defeated them and captured the Ark of the Lord. They put it in the temple with Dagon and their others gods (1Sam 5). The next morning they found Dagon flat on its face before the Ark of the Lord. They set Dagon up again and the next morning it was flat on its face again with its head and hands broken off. The Philistines realised the God of Israel is not like other gods. He will not take a place alongside other gods. After sending the Ark of the Lord to other Philistine cities, and seeing people suffer and die, they decided to send it back to Israel. They feared the Ark of the Lord because the hand of God was heavy upon them.

Daniel and his friends worshipped the God of Israel. They were in a foreign land where people worshipped others gods, gods of wood and stone. Even the king of this land was regarded as a god. Sooner or later there was going to be conflict. The king of Babylon would come face to face as it were with the King of heaven.

*‘Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands’* said Nebuchadnezzar as he raged against Daniel’s friends (3:15). They would inevitably be caught up in this confrontation of kingdoms. The outcome of this conflict was never in doubt but for these young men life on the frontline would not be easy. Would they find faith to follow God, or would they falter in the face of a raging king. Was the path of compromise an option for them?

**1.Glory taken by man**

Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold 27m high. He set it up on the plain near Babylon. A few thousand years before, on this same plain in the land of Shinar, men started to build a tower whose top is in the heavens (Gen 11, Dan 1:2). ‘Let us make a name for ourselves’ they said. The Lord came down and confused their language and the building stopped.

When sin entered the world the heart of man was corrupted and it has been so ever since. He continues to exalt himself against God. He continues to take glory to himself rather than giving the glory to God (Rom 1:21). And God continues to put men in their place. He allows them to self-destruct, but they destroy many in doing so.

Nebuchadnezzar was troubled by a dream which Daniel, in the power of God, revealed to him. He was most impressed and praised the God of Daniel. ‘His sinful heart had been shaken but not renewed. The truth was that instead of having a new heart he had the same old heart- now a little more hardened as his blatant blasphemy on the plain of Dura demonstrated’. What led Nebuchadnezzar to build this statue we are not told. Some say the idea came from his dream. He was defiantly building a man who would not fall. He was not the first to build a monument to match his ego, and will not be the last.

Not long ago on TV we watched an enormous statue of Saddam Hussein being torn down as his kingdom came to an abrupt end. This was yet again on the plain of Shinar; but it is not just in this place that men exalt themselves against God. It happens in every nation, in every city and in every home. It is in our fallen nature to proclaim ourself king and seek after praise and glory.

At Nebuchadnezzar’s command officials were called from all the provinces to pay homage to his image. The nation, indeed ‘*all people, nations and languages’* came to a standstill on the day of dedication for his image (3:4,7). You may note the similarity between this formula and that in Revelation 10:11, 11:9. All people without exception were commanded not only to honour the king but to worship him as god. ‘An intriguing feature of the arrangements made for the statue unveiling is that it was shrouded in a religious atmosphere’. The orchestra was on hand to lead the people in worship. This was an essential part of worshipping this image. When the music played the people fell down in worship - idol worship.

Nebuchadnezzar had already shown his maniacal tendency by killing his wise men when they could not tell him his dream. He was a man drunk with power. He was given to anger and ruthless violence. If anyone refused to worship his image they were to be cast into a burning fiery furnace (3:6). As we will see, this furnace was like a giant chimney, fuelled through a door at the base and open at the top. Roasting people alive was not uncommon in the ancient world.

**2.Gloating ‘gophers’**

*‘Certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews’* (3:8). Power hungry kings always attract discontents. These Chaldeans were probably jealous that these Jews, specifically Shadrach, Meshach and Abde-nego, had been promoted ahead of them in the public service. It is surprising that Daniel is not mentioned here. Maybe they did not target Daniel because he was a bit too close to the king. The Chaldeans noticed that the Jews did not fall down and worship the gold image when the orchestra played. You will notice the phrase, ‘horn, flute, harp, lyre and psaltery in symphony’ being repeated a lot. Repetition is a feature of the original language. Some translations have ‘bagpipes’ or just ‘pipes’ where the NKJV has ‘in symphony’.

Pagans and polytheists had no qualms about worshipping the image of gold. Expediency, not truth, was their motto. They would do anything to keep their jobs, and in this case keep their heads. They went along with the king on his ego trip. They were even prepared to set their colleagues up for a fiery death.

‘We were just following orders’. ‘We were just doing what everyone else was going’. ‘I am not going to put my head up to get it cut off’. Have you heard such words spoken? Have you said such things yourself? Saddam Hussein’s soldiers tried to excuse themselves with such words. Many try to excuse their corrupt behaviour with such reasoning. ‘Everyone tells lies, everyone takes bribes, everyone lives together before marriage, everyone gambles, everyone drinks’. Is this not the way many think today? They are just like the Chaldeans, men and women who will sell their soul to the devil just to make life a bit easier for the moment.

The thing that Chaldeans and the like hate most are people who take a stand upon some principle, especially a religious principle. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were diligent servants of the king. They could not be accused of wrongdoing in their work. They ‘*submitted themselves to every ordinance of men for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme or to governors’* (1Peter 2:13f). They were hated by the Chaldeans who ‘*agreed to speak lying corrupt words’* to the king (2:9).

The Chaldeans conspired against these young Jews, reporting to the king that they were disloyal to him as king, and that they did not worship his gods (3:12). Actually, they were most loyal to the king, but to worship his false gods was a different matter. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego discerned the difference even if men blind to the truth of God did not. They would suffer from the arrogance and ignorance of unbelievers.

**3.Glory to God**

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego feared God, not men. Under the covenant that God had made with them were divine commands which they were bound to obey. There was no ‘opt out’ clause in these commands; no ‘if I agree’ clause; no ‘if it is expedient’ clause. The Chaldeans followed their own laws. ‘We will worship the gold image today if this pleases the king; tomorrow we will worship some other god if we feel like it’. This vast difference in belief led to a vast difference in response to idol worship. Do we see such differences in our society? If not why not? We do not have idols did you say? Take another look!

‘You shall have no other gods besides me’. ‘You shall not make any carved images; you shall not bow down to them nor worship them’. These two commands headed the ten that the Lord gave through Moses on Mt Sinai. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego knew these commands but would they obey them? Would they obey them in the face of death? ‘*Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands’* the king roared? ‘Who will deliver you from the flames?’ What would these young men do? Would they ‘*stand in this evil day’*? (Eph 6:13). Will you stand in this evil day? How strong is your faith?

The words of these young Jews to the king are amazing. They stand out from the page as a distinct peak of doctrine and faith. Their faith was not blind faith. They were not prepared to die for something that **might** be true. They were not prepared to die for a god they had made themselves. They had no doubt that the God who gave the commands was sovereign over the whole earth. They had no doubt as to His omnipotence. ‘*Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king* (3:17).

Whether God would deliver them through life or death was not theirs to know. They did not presume to know the secret counsels of God. They knew only what God had spoken and they believed what he had spoken. They trusted God’s promise never to leave them or forsake them. With Job they would say, ‘*though he slay me yet will I trust him’* (Job 13:15). And with the apostle Paul they would have said, ‘*for me to live is Christ and to die is gain’* (Phil 1:21).

Do you comprehend and marvel at the tremendous faith of these three young men? Where do you stand? Where do you stand in relation to the promises of God? ‘*Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand’* (Eph 6:13).

**Fiery Trial Daniel 3: 19-30**

In this well-known story from Daniel the fiery death that faced Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego became a fiery trial. God wonderfully intervened to save them from death and bring glory to himself. God demonstrated that his power is greater than that of the most powerful king on earth, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Wonderful story of victory that it is, remember that the faith of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was not dependent upon being delivered from the fiery furnace. Their bodies may well have been consumed in the flames, but they faith would never be destroyed. Moreover, they were not saved from the fire, but through the fire.

When we turn to the NT we read, ‘*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you, but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s suffering’* (1Peter 4:12). Peter may well have been reflecting on this passage from Daniel as he wrote to NT Christians who were suffering, and dying, at the hands of the Roman emperor.

**1.A fiery heart**

When king Nebuchadnezzar was told that some of his royal servants, namely three young Jews, would not worship his gold image, he had them appear before him. He gave them a chance to reconsider, but they stood firm- ‘*we will not worship the gold image you have set up’* (3:18). They explained that they served another God, the omnipotent and true God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego witnessed the good confession before the king, just as Jesus did before Pilate (1Tim 6:13). Jesus said, ‘*my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my servants would fight’* (John 18:36). Pilate did not understand what Jesus was talking about; nor did Nebuchadnezzar understand these young Jews. He simply saw three young men who were disobeying his royal decree- and he flew into a rage.

*‘The expression of his face changed’* (3:19). In fact, his whole attitude towards these men changed. He had previously promoted them (2:49) and had tried to get them to change their mind. But when they stood firm in obeying God and not man, he burned with hot anger against them. He ordered the furnace to be made seven times hotter. More fuel would have been added to the fire to make it as hot as it could possibly be. Proof of the intense heat of the furnace is seen in the instant death of the strong guards who took Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and tied them up- fully clothed in their royal attire (3:22). They carried them to the top of the furnace to throw them in. But as they did so the roaring flames devoured the guards instead. The king’s hot anger led to the unintended death of his own guards. This is often the way with hot anger and rage- innocent people get hurt.

**2.A harmless fire**

This was not a few smouldering coals that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were forced to walk on, as some sceptics might say. They were thrown into a raging fire that killed the guards instantly. They were expected to become just a handful of ashes at the bottom of the fire within a moment. But Nebuchadnezzar did not see their ashes at the bottom- he saw them walking around in the fire (3:25). The young Jews were not hurt; they were not even harmed by the fire. Nebuchadnezzar stood amazed as he gazed in through the door of the furnace. He went closer to the open door and called to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come out. And wonder of wonders, they came out and stood before the king and all his officials.

The planned execution of these three young ‘traitors’ was a very public affair. All the leading officials were there to witness the king demonstrate his power and authority. ‘*Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands’* was his challenge. All would fear the word of the king after this day. All would bow down and worship his gold image after this day. But things did not turn out as he planned. ‘*The hair of their head was not singed… and they did not even smell of fire’* (3:27). The smell of singed hair is very strong. These men were not even singed by the fire. Even if they had been wearing special ‘firemen suits’, they would have smelt of fire. They were saved in a supernatural manner, as Nebuchadnezzar himself recognised.

These days some people start living in an unreal world because of all the drama they see on TV. They see ‘superman’ and ‘star wars’ and the like to the extent that they cannot discern what is real and what is unreal. Reading the Book of Daniel they may think they are in this unreal world of fiction and fantasy. But we must be very clear that this is not fantasy. What we read in the Bible is a true story of faith and the power of our God.

The faith of these young men was vindicated in this miraculous deliverance. They knew, and they made known, that God was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace. But their faith was not dependant upon God delivering them- it was unconditional faith in God. They did not say, ‘if God delivers us we will believe’. Christians should not think that God will keep them from all sickness, from all financial problems and all opposition. Tragically some do think like this, and even ‘believe’ in God on this condition. Their ‘faith’ is more like that of Nebuchadnezzar than of Daniel’s friends.

What does Peter tell us? Fiery trials are part of life for a Christian. Our faith is strengthened, and God is glorified, when we go through trials trusting in Jesus. Are you able to ‘*glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character and character hope*?’ (Rom 5:3-4). Do you find that trials strengthen your faith as the furnace tempers and toughens the steel?

**3.Son of the gods**

How were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego saved through the fire? Was it their faith that saved them in some abstract or emotional sense? No! It was the God in whom they believed who saved them. This is clearly shown in what Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fire. Remember, Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen, and was certainly not expecting to see an angel deliver them. Nor was he having a vision at this particular time. ‘*Look’ he answered, ‘I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God’* (3:25). This translation is somewhat interpretive. The alternative, a ‘son of the gods’ is a more accurate translation. As we just said, Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen and as such not likely to identify the figure as Jesus, the Son of God. This is not to say of course that this was not a Christophany. Nebuchadnezzar later refers to this figure as an ‘*angel’* (3:28). He understood this angel to be sent by the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The angel of the Lord appeared in the fire with these young men of faith and protected them from the flames.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been taught the Ten Commandments from their youth. They knew the Scriptures and the promises of God. God’s presence was with their forefathers as they travelled through the wilderness. God promised Joshua, ‘*I will be with you; I will not leave you or forsake you’* (Josh 1:5). They knew God was with them and was powerful to save. Nebuchadnezzar was astonished at what he saw, but would they have been astonished?

An ‘angel of the Lord’ stood by Peter in the prison and led him out, past the guards and then through the locked gates (Acts 12). The church had been praying constantly for Peter’s safety but they were all astonished when Peter appeared at the front door. Why were they so surprised? Should they not have been expecting God to answer their prayers? Before we start to criticise let us examine our own hearts. Do you believe that God can do mighty things in your life? Yet at the same time, will you trust in God even if he does let you go through fiery trials? Will your faith grow stronger through such trials? Remember these young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and seek to live like them.

**A second dream Daniel 4:1-18**

Years ago, during a trek in the Himalayas, I entered a village house for some chai. The doorway to the house was only half my height so I had to crouch down to enter. If I ever get to build a church I think I will make such a doorway. Everyone who comes in will be forced to get down on their knees and enter the Lord’s house with humility.

In the fourth chapter of Daniel we find ourselves once again in the palace of the king of Babylon, the greatest kingdom in the world at that time (6th century BC). Things were never the same in this palace after Daniel and his friends were taken there from Jerusalem. These young men purposed in their hearts to obey God rather than man. They put themselves into the hands of the covenant God of Israel. In so doing they put themselves into conflict with the ruler of this foreign land. He worshipped other gods and even thought of himself as a god. In the previous chapter we saw a divine showdown as it were, with king Nebuchadnezzar being forced to admit that the God of Daniel was unique and all powerful.

The God of heaven was not only protecting his faithful followers, he was set on teaching this earthly king a lesson in humility. A man who thinks of himself as a god is usually a slow learner in the school of humility. Nebuchadnezzar was a slow learner. First, God sent him a dream which Daniel interpreted for him. He told Nebuchadnezzar that the God of heaven had given him power and glory and that his kingdom, the head of gold, would soon come to an end. Nebuchadnezzar outwardly acknowledged Daniel’s God but did not humble himself before the true God.

The popular proverb, ‘God helps those who help themselves’ is not true to the Bible. God does not exalt those who exalt themselves. The Bible teaches, ‘*humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up’* (James 4:10). God exalts those who humble themselves before the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar, like many today, would not do that- well, not voluntarily. The Lord has ways of humbling those who refuse to bend their knee to him. One day every knee shall bow to the Lord Jesus (Phil 2:10).

**1.A flourishing king**

This chapter is not a narrative like the previous chapters in Daniel. It is in the form of a letter composed by Nebuchadnezzar. ‘*Nebuchadnezzar the king, to all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth’* (4:1). Babylon ruled the known world in those days. The letter includes an introductory doxology like that found in many of the Psalms of David. ‘*Peace be multiplied to you’*, and ‘*His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion from generation to generation* (4:1,3). These are not words we might expect from a man like Nebuchadnezzar who not long before had tried to kill the servants of the Most High God. But these words are exactly the same as some found at the end of the letter, after the king was humbled by God. Had the heart of this man finally been broken?

Nebuchadnezzar began his open letter to the nations describing the rest he was enjoying in his palace. He was flourishing, a word which literally means ‘growing green’. History tells a little of this great Babylonian empire, including the famous Hanging Gardens in this city. The king had subdued all his enemies and had completed great building projects. He boasted in his power and wealth. He revelled in his treasures and pleasures- until he had another bad dream.

**2.A second dream**

Nebuchadnezzar’s outward peace and prosperity was not matched by any inner peace. His dreams troubled him greatly. In his first dream he saw the awesome image of a man. His wise men could not tell him what this dream meant because he refused to tell them the dream. In a rage he started killing his wise men.

With this second dream he was not so demanding. He called all his magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers and told them the dream (4:7). Even then they could not tell him what the dream meant- it seems they kept their heads this time. But at last Daniel came before the king (4:7). Why did he not call Daniel in the first place some people ask, since he told the king his first dream? Probably some years had elapsed and traditional life had returned to the palace, or maybe Daniel was away on some duty. Whatever the reason, the effect is to once again demonstrate to impotence of false gods and their followers, against the strength and knowledge of Daniel’s God.

Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that the Spirit of the holy God was in Daniel (4:8,18). Pharaoh similarly recognised such a presence in Joseph when he interpreted his dream (Gen 41:38). Nebuchadnezzar admitted to calling Daniel ‘Belteshazzar’, ‘*according to the name of my god’,* but it was the Spirit of the holy God that was in him.

Daniel, like his young friends, did not walk in the fear of men or of anything in this world. They did not even fear death. Daniel was not troubled by dreams because he knew the God in heaven who reveals secrets (2:28). What a great testimony these young men had in this heathen nation. They did not set out to convert the king or anyone else, but they did determine to live in obedience to the covenant commands of God.

What effect would you have on those around you if you similarly lived in obedience to the covenant commands of Jesus Christ? What are these commands? In summary they are, ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your strength’, and, ‘love your neighbour as yourself’.

**3.Vision of a tree**

In his dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a tree, an enormous tree, ‘*in the midst of the earth’* (4:10). It was flourishing just like his kingdom. This great tree gave shade to the animals and a home to the birds. It gave fruit to feed all who came. ‘*All flesh was fed from it’* (4:12). Can you picture such a tree? I remember an enormous wild cherry tree on the farm. We would eat the cherries in season. The cattle would shelter from the sun and from storms under this tree. In India our children loved to play in a large spreading tree they called ‘Silky’. Did you ever have such a tree?

The Bible is rich with imagery of large and flourishing trees. In the beginning God put trees in the Garden of Eden, trees that were pleasant to the sight and good for food. The Tree of Life was in this garden, a tree which appears again in the heavenly Jerusalem. In Psalm 1 the righteous man is likened to a flourishing tree bearing fruit in season. Jesus is the only truly righteous man. What a glorious tree he is to those who come to him for shelter and for their daily needs.

In Nebuchadnezzar’s vision the tree was cut down. He saw ‘*a watcher, a holy one coming down from heaven’* (4:13). The watcher gave the order to cut down this tree that reached to the heavens. Only a stump was left. This mighty tree looked indestructible. It was strong, it was lovely, it was pleasant, and it was flourishing. But, at the word of the ‘holy one’ the tree was cut down. Why was it cut down? ‘*In order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives to whomever he will’* (4:17). The Most High removes kings and raises up kings, as Daniel previously declared (2:21).

The prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 31) spoke to Pharaoh about Assyria that it was like a great cedar of Lebanon. As its top reached toward heaven God intervened to bring down this nation (at Carchemish in 609BC). This mighty nation became proud so God cut it down. The message is the same for all nations, and for all individuals. ‘*Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall’* (Prov 16:18). This is not just a proverb, a matter of cause and effect; it is divinely ordained. Our popular proverb about bringing down ‘tall poppies’ takes on a whole new meaning in the kingdom of God. God will not give his glory to another. Those who change his glory into an image and worship creatures or man-made things will be brought down by God.

This dream troubled Nebuchadnezzar, as it was meant to. He realised the message was meant for him, and the message was not that hard to understand. The message was quite clear. All Daniel would really tell him was ‘you are the man’ (4:22). That Nebuchadnezzar and his wise men could not get the meaning of the dream is strange. Maybe they were afraid to tell him. Maybe he was afraid to hear the truth.

Knowledge of God is not the same as believing in God. Many in our society have some knowledge of the Bible, indeed sufficient knowledge to believe in Jesus Christ. But they keep that knowledge at arms length, well away from their heart. ‘I am not like other people’ they say; ‘I am not a terrible sinner, I am not an insecure person in need of religious crutches’. They are proud in their self-sufficiency.

Pride blinds people to the truth, just as it did with Nebuchadnezzar. They dread the day when God will say, ‘you are that man’. They love to point the finger at anyone and everyone around them but never at themselves. But one day the finger of God will touch them. One day their knee will bow to Jesus. Have you humbly come to Jesus, repenting of your sin, of your pride and rebellion against God? Better to bow before Jesus now than wait till that day when you will do so because of deadly divine power.

**Second dream interpreted Daniel 4:19-27**

In a second dream Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, saw a giant cosmic tree. This was no ordinary dream like those you and I have. This was God’s way of speaking to a rich and powerful man who did not know God. He called Daniel, a man in whom was the Spirit of the Holy God, to tell him what the dream meant. How he would respond to the message is another matter. What is amazing in the passage before us today is the option of avoiding the dire consequences foretold in the dream. Daniel suggested how Nebuchadnezzar might retain his sanity, his position and prosperity. He could turn from sin and seek the mercy of God. Would he listen to Daniel’s advice?

Daniel’s role was not unlike that of a Christian minister. In love the minister advises people as to how they can get peace with God and also peace with one another. He tells them how Jesus will take away their burden of sin and set them free. But do they listen? Do they heed this advice? The heart of man is so rebellious. When we are told to do something, our natural reaction is to rebel. Every kind of beast has been tamed by man (James 3); even the wild brumby can be broken and made useful, but not so easily the heart of man.

**1.Astonished**

*‘At last Daniel came to me’* (4:8). Nebuchadnezzar told Daniel his dream, even the divine decree that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men. Daniel was astonished and troubled for a while- so much so that Nebuchadnezzar had to encourage him. Why did the dream trouble Daniel? Daniel was in the king’s service. He genuinely honoured the king as the divinely ordained king of the nation. He did not wish him any harm or evil. He wished the dream applied to the king’s enemies rather than the king.

What an amazingly gracious man Daniel was. Here was a man who not long before was arrested and about to be executed by this megalomaniac. His dear friends were arrested and thrown into a blazing furnace by this same man. We might have expected Daniel to have taken delight in any suffering that came upon this man. Or at the least he might have been unmoved. But instead he felt sympathy for the king

Do you, like Daniel, love your enemies, and those who wish to harm. Jesus acted in the same way as Daniel, and tells us ‘*love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you’* (Mat 5:43).

**2.Application**

Daniel was a loyal servant of the king, but was also a faithful servant of God. He was bound to obey the covenant commands and not to lie or mislead the king. He knew what the dream meant because he indeed had the Spirit of God. He told Nebuchadnezzar that the cosmic tree, the tree that reached to the heavens, fed all who came, and sheltered the beasts and the birds, was him. ‘*It is you, O king, who have grown and become strong’* (4:22). As the most powerful man on earth he was pictured in the dream as a mighty tree.

What happened to the tree in his dream? It was chopped down and stripped bare with only a stump remaining. This was done by divine decree, by the word of the ‘watcher’ or holy one (4:13). The stump strangely turns into a beast, grazing without shelter in an open field. The band of bronze and iron assists in making this transition (4:15).

The mighty tree that is chopped down, becoming a mere stump in a paddock, represents king Nebuchadnezzar. He would be driven from his palace and left to fend for himself in the fields. He would be forced to eat grass and be wet with the rain and the dew. We can only imagine what he would have looked like after ‘*seven times’* had passed (4:16). Was this seven years, seven months or seven days? We are not told, so do not know. What is important is that it was time long enough to complete the purposes of God.

What was God’s purpose in subjecting Nebuchadnezzar to this drastic demotion and humiliation? ‘*Till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men’* (4:25). God planned to humble this proud man and make him realise he was not a god but just a man. He ruled at the pleasure of Almighty God. His kingdom would be taken from him in a moment- even though in the dream it was later restored to him.

This dream must confuse evolutionists. A man becoming a beast! Would they regard this as humiliation or exaltation! Evolutionists tell us that man is evolving into some type of ‘superman’, able to rule the world and solve all its problems. On the other hand, they also say man is just another animal. I heard a man on the radio speak in one sentence of the ‘human animal’ that we are, and then in the next being critical of some men who ‘act like animals’! Those who hold the theory of evolution have one main aim- to leave God out of the picture. They are like Nebuchadnezzar who also ignored the true God and called himself a god. Being forced to live like a cow for ‘seven times’ he would think a little more humbly and clearly about God.

God still has ways of humbling those who exalt themselves and take all glory to themselves. Some weeks ago a man was telling me how his wife was in this top job earning lots of money and was currently overseas on holiday. The other day he was almost in tears as he told me she had been diagnosed with cancer. Ultimately, God humbles every human being in death. Nebuchadnezzar could not defy death, any more than Elvis Presley or Kerry Packer. ‘*Naked I came from my mothers womb and naked I shall return, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord’* (Job 1:21).

It is not belief in evolution *per se* that makes a man proud- it is sin. Sin seeks to exclude God and put self at the centre of the universe. This can be a bold declaration -‘move over God, I will take the wheel now’- or it can be a more subtle shift in our focus. We simply stop reading the Bible, stop praying and spend the time making our own plans and doing our own thing.

Does God have rule over your life? Do you still need to learn that God rules in the kingdom of men, not just at the national level but at the personal level also? Do you believe, and do you live as if you believe, that God has fashioned all your days, all your life according to his good pleasure and perfect will (Ps 139:16, Eph 1:11)?

**3.Advice**

The message for Nebuchadnezzar was not good. His dream, interpreted by Daniel, pointed to a deeply traumatic and humbling experience. It would not come as an accident, but as ordained by God. This was the whole purpose of the dream. God told him beforehand so that when it happened he would understand and might believe.

Jesus told his disciples again and again that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed and be raised on the third day. Why did he tell them all this? So that when it happened they would understand - understand it was not just an accident but God’s plan. And after Pentecost they did understand and started preaching the gospel. Jesus also told them that he was going away but that he would soon return. He would return on the clouds of heaven. So will you be surprised when you see Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven. Will you say, ‘this is some strange, inexplicable phenomena’? Many will, but will you? Will you not say, ‘well this is just like what I read in my Bible’?

Knowing what lay ahead for Nebuchadnezzar Daniel advised him to break of his sins by being righteous and showing mercy to the poor. Daniel exhorted the king to repent and seek the mercy of God. ‘*What does God require but that you act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God’* (Micah 6:8). Nebuchadnezzar needed to turn from wallowing in wickedness to walking in obedience to God’s righteousness law. He needed to show mercy - for God is merciful. He needed to show justice and stop oppressing the poor -for God is just. Nebuchadnezzar probably made his beautiful place and hanging gardens with slave labour.

Men and nations that become powerful often do so on the back of oppression and injustice. To our shame, even the British Empire was not innocent in this matter. Many who were proclaiming the gospel two or three hundred years ago, quietly or otherwise condoned the slave trade. It can happen, and still does happen today at the individual and national level. What does God say in Micah 6:8?

The words of a contemporary prophet come to mind. Ezekiel cried out to Israel, ‘turn from your ways and live!’ ‘*I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies’ says the Lord God, ‘therefore turn and live’* (Ezek 18:32). God is still crying out today to all people- ‘turn and live!’ Every page of the Bible cries out, and every faithful follower of Jesus should be crying out- ‘turn and live!’ Just like Daniel and Ezekiel, we must call upon people facing the judgment of God to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ.

God promises mercy to all who turn to him because of the Cross of Jesus. He promises life, new life, and eternal life in Jesus Christ. Do you know this life? Are you advising, indeed urging those among whom you live each day to turn and live?

**Second dream fulfilled Daniel 4:28-37**

*‘God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows that he shall also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the spirit will of the spirit reap everlasting life’* (Gal 6:7-8). Ignoring God and his word is tantamount to mocking God. Do you take seriously the word of God?

*“Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers died all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”* (2Peter 3:3-4). Scoffing at God and his word is certainly mocking God, and will lead to God’s judgment. Let no one presume upon the grace and patience of Almighty God as Nebuchadnezzar did. We come today to the end of Daniel chapter 4 and to the utter humiliation of this proud and arrogant man. God’s word to him in his dream was fulfilled.

**1.Deliberate deafness**

There are none so deaf as those who will not hear! What was the advice Daniel gave the king after telling him the meaning of his dream? (4:27). His dream pointed to Nebuchadnezzar being humiliated to the extent of living like an animal. ‘*It is you, O king, who have grown powerful’* and very proud (4:22). He was chief of all builders, but also chief of all boasters, and chief of all bullies. God, who is jealous for his own glory, determined to humble this upstart- unless he came to his senses and humbled himself first.

Daniel, a man in whom was the Spirit of God, advised Nebuchadnezzar to turn from his sin, from his boasting and his bullying. But proud men are rarely ready to take advice, least of all from those closest to them, or those who love them. Daniel wanted no harm to come to the king (4:19) and for this reason gave him this good advice. Nebuchadnezzar had called Daniel to interpret his dream because he trusted Daniel. He knew Daniel spoke the truth. Yet he did not take Daniel’s advice. Repenting of sin is not easy. Nebuchadnezzar put it off till tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. Soon life was back to normal and the dream was forgotten- by Nebuchadnezzar but not God.

At the end of twelve months Nebuchadnezzar was walking about the royal palace of Babylon admiring his handiwork (4:29). There were the famous hanging gardens he built, as well as many other beautiful things. Nebuchadnezzar congratulated himself- ‘look at the things I have made, aren’t I great’. What is wrong with that you might ask? He had worked hard to achieve all this.

I find this passage somewhat scary, having just completed some renovations to my own house! I am tempted to say, ‘look what I have done’. There is nothing wrong with building a new house and enjoying some comfort, but who gets the thanks and who gets the glory? As you drive home today take a look at the hardware store down the road. The car park is full - yes even today, the Lord’s day. Thousands are busy building their dream home just like Nebuchadnezzar, and they will boast in their achievements, just like Nebuchadnezzar. Thousands are right now boasting in other achievements, in their promotion, their new car, their exam results, or the like. Today is father’s day and millions are boasting in their father or their family – or are supposed to be. What is wrong with this you ask? Let me ask, ‘where is God in all this boasting and self-congratulation?’ For twelve months Nebuchadnezzar had God’s warning and Daniel’s advice before him. How long since you heard, and more to the point ‘listened to’ the word of God?

**2.Dream fulfilled**

I was going to title this second point ‘lycanthropy’ but this is not a word we hear every day. Yet it is in the dictionary as a specific form of insanity. ‘Lycanthropy’ comes from the Greek meaning wolf-man. It is a recognised form of insanity in which a person thinks they are a wolf or wild beast.

While Nebuchadnezzar was congratulating himself on his worldly achievements and success, ‘*a voice came from heaven’* (4:31). God was watching and listening to him all the time. God is long-suffering and patient, but not indefinitely. What God says he will do! Time had run out for Nebuchadnezzar. His day of reckoning had come. ‘*All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar’* (4:28). This passage opens with these ominous words. Personal tragedy struck Nebuchadnezzar just as God had told him in his dream. God warned him and Daniel advised him to turn from his wicked ways, but he failed to do so. So what now? After this the judgment! God will not be mocked. ‘Vengeance is mine’ says the Lord. No one, not even the king, can ignore the word of God with impunity.

The king of Egypt scoffed at the word of God time and again, before he came under divine judgment. King Herod took the glory that was due to God alone, and he was judged. King Nebuchadnezzar took the glory to himself and he also came under divine judgment- or rather chastisement at this stage. He was not destroyed by God as Pharaoh and Herod were.

In his dream a great tree was cut down and the stump turned into a cow. Nebuchadnezzar was struck with insanity and was driven from his palace to live like a cow in the field. ‘*That very hour’*, the hour he was boasting of his greatness, ‘*the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar*’ (4:33). His royal robes were probably taken off him leaving him naked, for his body was wet with the rain and the dew. He acted like a cow by eating the grass. His hair grew long, as did his finger nails, so that he started to look like the animal which he thought he was.

Heathens often revere animals and try to be like them. There are Hindu holy men called ‘Nagas’ who never wear any clothes. They live in caves or huts in the forest. In our society some people like to dispense with their clothes and live like animals. Some prefer to learn morals from monkeys, rather than from the Bible. Some want to get back to nature, rather than get back to the Bible.

**3.Realisation and Restoration**

*‘Seven times will pass over you till you know that the most high rules in the kingdom of men’* (4:25). The extreme humiliation was for the purpose of getting Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge the Almighty God as ruler, even over Babylon, and that he was a mere man and servant of God. The Creator of the universe is sovereign over every part of his creation.

The letter returns to a first person narrative as Nebuchadnezzar tells of his restoration. At the end of the divinely appointed time Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘I lifted my eyes to heaven and my sanity was restored’ (4:34). He acknowledged God’s absolute and eternal sovereignty on earth as well as in heaven. He praised and honoured the Most High ‘*who lives forever’*. Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his palace and his throne. In fact, ‘*excellent majesty was added to him’* (4:36). He became an even better king, and a more respected king, from the realisation that God ruled over him.

It was not the riches and power *per se* that offended God, for he restored these to Nebuchadnezzar. It was Nebuchadnezzar’s failure to acknowledge God as the giver of all good things, including power and authority, in the kingdoms of men. ‘*In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil’*. This is the advice of another great king called Solomon (Prov 3:6,7). It is wisdom for all kings, both great and small. ‘Fear the Lord and depart from evil’ is wisdom for us all.

To what extent Nebuchadnezzar repented of his sin and departed from evil we are not told, and so the question of his conversion is left open. But he did learn to fear God. He acknowledged that God is great, that God is just, and ‘*those who walk in pride he is able to put down’* (4:37). Such fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; the beginning of wisdom and of life.

Fear of the Lord must underpin any belief in God and Jesus Christ. There are many who repent and say they believe, but they do not fear the Lord. They do not believe in the sovereignty of God. They come to God on their own terms, not God’s. They never acknowledge their total depravity or the sovereign grace of God in bringing them to himself. They run their own lives and simply ask God to pick up the pieces. But God must be sovereign over all aspects of your life- your work, your study, your family and your finances.

The other day while I was visiting my daughter we went for a drive. From the back seat she said, ‘it feels strange being in the back seat’. She was used to being in the driver’s seat. Nebuchadnezzar was used to being in the driver’s seat. God put him in the back seat. Do you like being in the driver’s seat or do you humbly take the back seat as the Lord directs your ways?

**Writing on the wall Daniel 5:1-16**

It is interesting listening to Christians share their testimonies. Many have no dramatic event to tell of- they just listened to the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ. Others, however, have had dramatic ‘Damascus road’ experiences; so-called because of the Apostle Paul’s dramatic conversion. But few have seen the detached hand of a man writing on their wall as King Belshazzar did. Despite this personal message from God, however, Belshazzar did not repent and humble himself before God. Another king, the king of Nineveh, got up from his throne and covered himself with sackcloth and ashes when he heard the word of God through Jonah- but not Belshazzar.

The Jews had the prophets and the very oracles of God but they did not repent and believe in Jesus Christ. It is tragic when people grow up in homes hearing the word of God, and in a land where the gospel is preached week after week, but still they do not repent. Nevertheless, the writing is on the wall.

Chapter 5 refers to a time many years after chapter 4. King Nebuchadnezzar has died and his son Nabonidus taken over as king of Babylon. Nabonidus sought to exalt the moon god, Sin, as the chief deity among the Babylonian pantheon, replacing Marduk. For this or other reasons he was not a popular king. He moved his residence out of Babylon and left his son Belshazzar as viceroy in the palace. Belshazzar was as unpopular as his father it seems, for when the city was attacked by the Medes in 529BC there was little resistance. This chapter records the slaying of Belshazzar, and passing of the kingdom into the hands of Darius the Mede (5:30,31).

**1.Delight in drink**

Belshazzar decided to throw a party for his friends, a thousand of them. The general public may have hated him, but he was popular among the elite- at least when he invited them to his party. Drinking wine and getting drunk was the focus of this party. Belshazzar took pride in being a hard drinker it seems. In a drunken state Belshazzar sought to impress his guests with lewdness and blasphemy. He called for the gold and silver goblets which his father/ancestor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the temple in Jerusalem to be brought. He was going to mock the God of the Jews to impress his friends, including many women.

*‘Wine is a mocker and strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise’* (Prove 20:1). Belshazzar was not wise. ‘In his pathetic display of manliness, he crossed the line of proper restraint in God’s world’. Many before him did the same thing, and so have many since. If our Sunday papers are anything to go by, this wisdom is still widely ignored today. We have a society in which binge drinking is on the increase. We have a society in which thousands of families are terrorised by drunken behaviour. Thousands of families are broken because of drink. Thankfully, we have had the wisdom to make drink driving a criminal offence. When will drunken parenting be made a crime? When we will stop excusing people’s bad behaviour ‘because they were drunk’? The judge and jury may accept the plea of drunkenness, but not God. The writing was on the wall for Belshazzar and it would stay on the wall.

**2.Danger of blasphemy**

Wine in itself is not evil but it has the potential to do great harm. It leads to the lack of self-control, a personal characteristic emphasised in the Bible (Gal 5:23). Without self-control man’s moral compass goes haywire, leading to all manner of corrupt and wicked behaviour. The drunken Belshazzar called for the holy things of God to be brought to him so that he and his friends could drink from them. Was this just to impress his friends and get a laugh? If so, that would have been blasphemous anyway. God will not be mocked. Belshazzar knew that these goblets had been set apart for holy use in the temple of God.

What Belshazzar was guilty of before God was idolatry. He not only drank from the goblets but proceeded to worship the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone (5:4). Such gods may well have lined the walls of his palace. From the sacred things of the only true God, Belshazzar was drinking toasts to the gods that he had made. *‘In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote on the wall of the palace’* (5:5). God was not slow in condemning the blasphemy and idolatry of Belshazzar. In clear view of the king and all his guests, a man’s hand appeared and wrote on the brightly lit wall. A message from God was etched onto the plaster wall of the king’s palace.

Belshazzar, like most heathens, was a superstitious man and when he saw the hand and the writing he became a nervous wreck. He started to shake all over with fear. He screamed for his wise men to be brought so they could tell him what the strange words meant. But they could not help him. The king became even more troubled. He stood there trembling as he stared at the writing on the wall; and no one could help him. The party was over.

Men utter blasphemous words when in a drunken state, but they also do so while in a sober state. They think they are being smart and entertaining but God thinks otherwise. If the writing was on the wall for Belshazzar what will it be like for those who persist in offending God in this way? What will it be like for those who worship man-made gods, knowing that there is a holy God who made all things and before whom they will be judged? God gives such people over to vile passions, the Bible says, to a debased mind, to violence, strife and murder (Rom 1). We do not have to look far to see evidence of this in our society. People think it strange that you do not follow them is such behaviour.

‘Come out from among them and be separate’, says the Lord. ‘*Put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man’* (Col 3:8). Let us put on Christ and live to honour and glorify his holy name.

**3.Discarded Daniel**

While Belshazzar was still shaking in fear and asking what the words meant, the queen entered the hall (5:10). The queen, or probably the queen mother, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, came to give this young king some advice. She reminded him that there was a man in his kingdom who could interpret dreams, solve riddles and explain enigmas, a man called Daniel. The queen remembered how king Nebuchadnezzar had found Daniel to be the wisest man in his entire kingdom. He had interpreted dreams for Nebuchadnezzar. He was a man in who was the Spirit of the holy God.

What had happened to Daniel after the death of Nebuchadnezzar? Clearly, he was not among the wise men of Belshazzar, although Belshazzar obviously knew of Daniel. ‘*Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah’* he asked Daniel when he came (5:13). ‘I have heard about you’ he said, but he did not respect the wisdom of Daniel.

Daniel it appears was discarded by Belshazzar when he became king. He probably gathered around him a younger school of wise men. We are reminded of another young king who rejected the advice of his elders in preference for that of younger men. Rehoboam took over the kingdom of Israel from his father, King Solomon. When he rejected the advice of his elders he had trouble and the most of his kingdom was taken from him. Belshazzar lost the kingdom all together.

Daniel was brought and Belshazzar offered him a reward if he could read the writing on the wall and tell what it meant. He offered Daniel a royal robe of purple and a gold chain, along with the status of being third in the kingdom. This indicates that Belshazzar was only second in the kingdom after his father Nabonidus. Daniel politely told Belshazzar that he could keep his gifts (5:17). They were more of an insult than a gift to this man of God. He was following in the footsteps of the prophet Elijah who was offered gifts by Naaman if he could cure his leprosy. Sadly, there are so-called men of God who are more like Gehazi than Elijah or Daniel. There are those who peddle the gospel for a profit. ‘*They run greedily into the error of Balaam for a profit’* (Jude 11). Remember, Balaam was a prophet who tried to make a profit from the word of God. Not so Daniel or any true servant of God.

Once again the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Babylon come face to face. Belshazzar had brought about this confrontation through his pride and self glorification, just like Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar had gone even further in provoking God’s wrath through desecration of what was holy. What did Nebuchadnezzar learn- that God is sovereign and will not give his glory to another. Belshazzar would learn the same lesson even as he felt the severe wrath of Almighty God. God is sovereign. He will not be mocked by any man.

**Weighed in the balance Daniel 5:17-31**

*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*. These words were supernaturally written on the wall before King Belshazzar as he partied with his friends. The king was terrified, even before knowing what the words meant. He feared the worst, as do most people when they are disturbed in their wickedness. Those who are walking in the truth have nothing to fear. ‘*There is not fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear’* (1John 4:18).

Belshazzar had taken the golden goblets that came from the temple of God in Jerusalem and was drinking from them with his friends. He was toasting gods of gold, wood and stone with these goblets when the writing appeared. He knew what he was doing. He knew these were holy cups. He was deliberately mocking God but did not think that God would respond. He thought the Most High God was just like the idols in his palace- they did not get upset when carted about or mocked.

Still today people mock God, thinking he is dead. Men write books entitled, ‘the God delusion’ and ‘Adams versus God’. They persist in their ignorance; they go on ignoring the word that God has spoken. God is alive, God is sovereign and God will not be mocked by Richard Dawkins or Phillip Adams any more than he would not be mocked by Belshazzar. One day they will meet their Maker, just like Belshazzar- and it may be sooner than expected. Only fools think they will live forever. Only fools think they can escape the judgment of God.

**1.Excuses**

One of the many attributes of God is that he is just. His judgment is always fair and just. Before interpreting the writing, Daniel made it clear to Belshazzar that he had no excuse for his wicked behaviour. If Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar he would surely have heard something of the life of his forbear, especially the time when he was afflicted with lycanthropy. Daniel affirmed that he indeed knew all this (5:22).

Nebuchadnezzar had gone down the same pathway of pride and arrogance that Belshazzar was on. He was a great and powerful king, feared by all men (5:19), but when he exalted himself against God, and the people of God, he was deposed from his throne and his glory taken from him (5:20). God told him this in a dream which Daniel himself explained. He lived like a cow until he recognised that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men.

Belshazzar should have learnt from the history of his own family that God was sovereign over Babylon and all the nations. God raises up one man and puts down another (Dan 2:21). Belshazzar had no excuse for not humbling himself before the Lord. He knew what he was doing was offensive to God. We might have expected him to make some excuse, but the evidence placed before him was incontrovertible.

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man cried out to Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers about hell. He had died and gone to hell, having ignored the warnings while he was alive. Abraham told him that they have Moses and the prophets, just as he had had- ‘*let them hear them’* (Luke 16:29). We might think the rich man had not committed any serious sin but he ended up in hell. Why? He lived only for this world, ignoring the truth about eternity. Ignorance is not bliss, it is death and hell.

God will judge justly. God has revealed himself in the creation and on this basis will judge all people. ‘*God’s invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen in what he has made, so that men are without excuse’* (Rom 1:20). God has also spoken in what we call ‘special revelation’. He has given us the Bible so that we are without excuse. Men like Dawkins and Adams, and all the people in our suburb, and our city, have access to the Bible. If they fail to read it, and heed it, they will be without excuse on Judgment Day.

**2.Exaltation.**

What was Belshazzar guilty of? What was his sin? He was just having a party with his friends you might say- what is wrong with that? He was drinking wine- is that a sin you might say? ‘So what’ if they were holy goblets from the temple. ‘So what’ if he worshipped some deaf and dumb gods. ‘After all, he was only human like everyone else’. How easily people try to dismiss sin with this phrase. We should not say ‘so what’, but ‘so what about God’. God forgives sin; he does not dismiss it. And to be forgiven one must ask. And to ask one must repent.

Belshazzar was guilty of the same sin as Nebuchadnezzar. He was proud and exalted himself, not only in the eyes of men, but of God. God is a jealous God and will not give his glory to another. This is what he declared through Moses at Mt Sinai (Exod 20:5) and what he spoke through Isaiah (Isa 48:11). The God who made all things, and gives men like Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar a kingdom, and glory, and honour, will not just watch when men ignore him. He will not remain silent when men worship other gods, or take all the glory to themselves. ‘*The God who holds your breath in his hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified’* (5:23).

It is hard to believe that Daniel was speaking to a Gentile, a man outside the covenant of Moses. Belshazzar was, of course, bound by the covenant with Adam. He was created by God and lived in this world created by God- and on this basis was answerable to God. The apostle Paul spoke in the same way to the pagans in Athens. ‘*We are all God’s offspring’* he said; ‘*in him we live and move and have our bein*g’ (Acts 17:28). Ignorance is no excuse.

The rich man in hell was joined by the rich fool (Luke 16, Luke 12). Neither of these men committed any serious sin- no murder, no adultery, and no theft. They just got on with their lives; they worked hard and got ahead in life. They built fine houses and presumably raised children who, like them, were very successful in life. How did these men end up in hell? This is worth thinking about if you wish to avoid the same end.

**3.Execution**

After reminding Belshazzar of his own theological heritage, and detailing his sin before the Lord, Daniel proceeded to interpret the writing on the wall. There were just four words, the first being repeated for emphasis. This must be one of the shortest judgments in history. The words have the common theme of being measured or weighed.

*Surely men of low degree are a vapour*

*Men of high degree a lie;*

*If they are weighed in the scales,*

*They are altogether lighter than vapour (*Ps 62:9).

*Mene* means to number, or to fix a limit. *Tekel* means to weigh, and *Phares/Peres* to part or divide. *Pharsin* is simply the plural of *Phares,* while the *u* is the conjunction ‘and’. *Phares* also means ‘Persians’. ‘It is given to Daniel to discern that this means that the kingdom is to be ‘given to the Medes and Persians’ after it is broken up. God had numbered the days of Belshazzar’s reign and that number was up. Not only the days of his reign but the days of his life were up by God’s timetable. God had examined his life; he had weighed him in the balance and found him wanting. ‘*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’* (Rom 3:23). Belshazzar, like all people without Christ, was found short. The third word of the judgment meant that his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians. Belshazzar’s son would not sit on the throne of Babylon. The mighty kingdom of Babylon was finished, just like all other kingdoms that men make for themselves.

Belshazzar rewarded Daniel as he said he would. Although making it clear at the outset that he was not giving this interpretation for money (5:17), Daniel accepted the gifts of the king for what they were worth. Being made third ruler in the kingdom did not turn out be such a great reward!

Belshazzar would not have expected God’s judgment to come so quickly. ‘*That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain’* (5:30). The army of Cyrus was just outside the city. Babylon was a walkover. Cyrus states in the ‘Cyrus cylinder’ that he entered Babylon without encounter or battle. Belshazzar was slain by him, or maybe by his own men, and Darius the Mede was installed as king of Babylon. He was not a young man, being sixty-two years old (5:31).

God’s judgment on Belshazzar was just, swift, and final. ‘This is the verdict on all human pride and achievement apart from God. The sentence contains an irrevocable doom that is ringing to eternity’. What should we do? The Psalmist prays ‘*teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom’* (Ps 90:12). This is a good place to start. If you are wise you will listen to what God says and take heed to his word. Remember, ignorance is no excuse before the Lord.

**A plot to eliminate Daniel Daniel 6:1-9**

A number of states in India have enacted ‘freedom of religion’ laws. Christians are suffering greatly under these laws because they are designed to prevent people from changing their religion. Most people in India believe you are born into a religion, and they cannot understand those who want to change their religion. The effect of these laws has been to criminalise conversion. A person who wants to change their religion, i.e. become a Christian, must prove before a magistrate that they have not been coerced or bribed in any way. The person who baptises them is liable to imprisonment under this law.

Daniel fell foul of a law fabricated specifically to trap him in his religious belief and practice. He was the victim of jealousy in the new regime now operating in Babylon.

**1.Promotion**

Daniel was a young man when taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605BC. He served as chief minister in Nebuchadnezzar’s regime. The king found him full of integrity and wisdom, and the spirit of the Holy God. When Nebuchadnezzar died, his son became king, and then Belshazzar. Although not in the ministry of Belshazzar, Daniel was called upon to read the writing on the wall. The Babylonian kingdom ended with Belshazzar, some sixty-six years after it began. The gold head of the image dreamed of by Nebuchadnezzar came ‘crashing down’ (3:35).

The Babylonian kingdom and its kings had all gone, but Daniel remained. The kingdoms of men will come and go, but the kingdom of God remains. The kingdoms of this world will all one day become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev 11:15). At the age of about eighty Daniel was again taken into the royal service. He was made a governor in the new regime of Darius the Mede.

Some people dispute the historicity of Darius since his name does not occur outside the Bible. Those who believe the Bible to be historically accurate still have difficulty identifying this man. Some say that Darius was actually another name for Cyrus the Persian since elsewhere in the Bible Cyrus is spoken of as the liberating king (Isa 45:1). But that would mean the ‘and’ would have to be removed from Daniel 6:28. It is quite possible that Darius was appointed by Cyrus to rule over Babylon when they took it from the Babylonians.

Darius divided the kingdom into 120 administrative regions and set satraps over these. To keep a check on these local rulers he appointed three governors, one of whom was Daniel. Good administration requires delegation, but there are risks associated with delegation. What if the delegates turn out to be incompetent or corrupt? Daniel distinguished himself above the other two governors- whose true credentials will soon be seen.

The king found ‘*an excellent spirit’* in Daniel (6:3). We know that the Spirit of God was in Daniel, but this reference was probably to his integrity and honesty, a rare character in rulers in those days, not to mention our own day. The other governors could find no error or fault in Daniel – and they tried hard (6:4). They were jealous and dug deep to find dirt they could throw at Daniel. Politics has changed little it seems. Not only politics, of course, but basic human nature which is sinful.

‘In the midst of graft and corruption on every hand, Daniel stood out as a man governed by a sense of loyalty and integrity that stemmed from his right relationship with God’. This is the secret to upright living- a right relationship with God. Do not jealously compare yourself with others, even as Christians. Make Christ the yardstick of your life.

What a tremendous testimony Daniel had in this heathen nation, a testimony that began when as a young man he purposed in his heart not to defile himself (1:8). Do you find Daniel’s life a challenge as you examine your own life? Maybe Peter was thinking of Daniel when he wrote, ‘*Beloved… have such conduct among the Gentiles that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God’*- and further he writes- ‘*when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God*’ (1Peter 2:12,20).

**2.Plot**

‘A common situation develops at this point: jealousy leads men to attack a colleague who is more competent than themselves’. When the king contemplated promoting Daniel to chief governor over the whole realm (6: 3), the hearts of the other governors and satraps were stirred to jealousy. They probably despised Daniel already because he was a Jew and refused to join in their corruption and idolatry. Daniel did not go with them to the pub or the gambling parlour. He did not go with them to the football on the Lord’s Day but instead he went to church.

These jealous men met together in secret to plan how they might discredit Daniel, and even get rid of this upright man altogether. They realised at the outset they would not be able to find fault in his words or actions. Daniel always spoke the truth and acted with integrity. He faithfully served the king while remaining faithful to his God. They decided the only way to get at Daniel was through his faithfulness to God. If they made worship of his God illegal, they could trap him.

Such a plot was nothing new. Satan knew that if he could get Adam and Eve to compromise in their obedience to the Lord God who made them, they would he his. Daniel was also under Satanic attack. These men were agents of Satan. Daniel’s faith in God would be sorely tried. He had faced many tests to his faith throughout his life; advancing age did not give him any immunity to further attacks. Let us not think that it is only the young or those immature in the faith who face faith-testing times.

There is one difference between Daniel and Adam in the test they faced- Adam was living in a perfect world. Sin came into the world when Adam failed the test, and the whole world was plunged into sin and death. Daniel was living in this sinful world. To live in obedience to the laws of God in a fallen world automatically puts one at odds with the world. ‘For in no case can a man of God live a consistent life in the world without making apparent the fact that his life is separate from what the world does and approves. And whenever the world becomes aware of this difference she resents it and finds her animosities stirred’.

Having hatched their plot, the wicked men raced off to tell the king. They did not, of course, tell him it was a plot to trap Daniel; they told him he was a great king and should be worshipped more. Their very first words were a lie. It was not ‘*all the governors’* because clearly Daniel was not ‘consulted’. The words ‘consulted together’ are interesting. They are a translation from the Aramaic of course, but note the hypocritical overtones in this word. A wicked plot to kill a man is called a ‘consultation’.

Satan is an expert at declaring the view of ‘experts’ and the ‘majority view’. How often are we told that some opinion or theory is scientific fact because ‘all the experts’ say so. If you are able to look behind such statements you may well find that many ‘experts’ disagree, and for this reason were not consulted. Deceit and hypocrisy are well oiled weapons in Satan’s armoury. If ever there was a case of wolves in sheep’s clothing it was these men standing before king Darius.

**3.Permanency**

What was the decree they wanted the king to sign? They wanted him to forbid anyone in his kingdom praying to any god or man, apart from the king, for thirty days. It was nothing really- just thirty days. It would do no harm! No one would even notice! Is that what they hoped the king would think? The penalty for breaking this law was, however, very severe; it was in effect the death penalty.

Why did Darius sign this law? Why did the Victorian State Government sign the law on religious vilification? Was he ignorant of the intent of this law? Was he being hoodwinked by his advisors? So it seems. This law, like that in Victoria, was bad law, law designed not for the good of the people but for the evil intent of a few. The people of God often suffer under such laws. Darius signed the law into effect without consulting the wisest man in his kingdom, the man in whom was the Spirit of the Holy God.

The law of the Medes and Persians does not alter (6:8). No one could change this law once it was signed, not even the king, so it seems. It was like the Pope declaring a doctrine or practice for the church *ex cathedra*- he is supposed to speak with infallibility. But the law of God does not change either, and the law of God overrides any law made by men, as we will see. The question is, ‘will men obey the law of God rather than the law of man when the two come into conflict?’

**A man of prayer Daniel 6:10-17**

Daniel and his friends were carried off to a foreign land- a heathen land. They could no longer go to the Jerusalem temple to worship God. They saw most people going off to worship idols. Such worship would have been colourful with lots of music. To go along would have made living in this city much easier because everyone else was going. It was, in some ways, like living in Sydney.

Idol worship was, in fact, demanded of Daniel’s friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of himself and commanded everyone to fall down and worship. But these young men told the king, ‘*we do not serve your gods nor will we worship the gold image you have set up’* (3:18). Daniel was not with them at the time they faced the fiery furnace, but now he faces his own trial. To pray or not to pray, that was the question.

**1.Decree**

Out of jealousy Daniel’s colleagues had drafted a wicked decree aimed at his destruction. They lobbied the king to sign this decree which would forbid prayer to any god or man for thirty days, except to the king. Satan was actively working in these men to destroy a man of God. Daniel was a faithful witness in this pagan place, as we have seen, so the enemy of God wanted him taken out. The wicked men desperately wanted Daniel in the den of lions.

The decree was valid for just thirty days. If there was any substance to this religious law why was it not an ongoing decree? Clearly, this was religion designed by men for their immediate benefit. Man-made religions are useful in this way- you can change the rules as you like. Man-made rules often cater to man’s fallen nature. Men turn to Islam, or to Mormonism so they can have more than one wife. Some even try to change the teaching of the Bible to suit themselves.

There would also have been politics behind the thirty days. They flattered the king as they lobbied him, and probably suggested that the decree would was no big deal- it was just for thirty days. Here was Satan parading as an angel of light, as Paul would say (2Cor 11:14).

**2.Decision**

When Daniel heard that this decree was signed he went home (6:10). What would Daniel do? What were his options? He could have stopped praying for thirty days- just thirty days. That way he would escape being fed to the hungry lions. For some Christians this would not even be a decision to make for they rarely pray anyway. One month without prayer would be no big deal for some. Others might reason that to stop praying is not a serious sin. After all, Daniel was not being forced to worship idols like his friends, just to stop praying. Moreover, this was the law. Do you think it polite not to pray when you have visitors or when you are in public? Should Christians not offend others by their prayer or reading of the Bible!

Imagine you were there with Daniel and he sought your counsel. How would you have counselled him? What do you do when sport or a family picnic clashes with going to church? I remember when church time had to be changed because of a TV show. What do you do when friends drop in just as you are going to church? Don’t forget that for Daniel the stakes were much higher than they are for you- it was stop praying or die! Maybe we should let Daniel counsel us!

Daniel, it appears, did not spend hours agonising over what he should do. He knew from the outset what he must do. He went home and went to his upper room. He did not go to confront the king, or attack his enemies. He did just what he had done every day since he was a boy. He went to his upper room, knelt down and prayed. How disciplined is your prayer life? Are you a ‘spontaneous’ prayer person, or are your prayers as regular as your meals?

Do you find that you are too busy to pray? A friend of mine once tried praying as he walked to work. Sure, we can call upon the Lord in any place and at any time, but He does like to have your full attention. Daniel was a governor in the most powerful kingdom on earth. I imagine he was a busy man. But he made time to pray, not just once a day, not just twice a day but three times a day! Daniel never went to work before praying and never went to bed without praying.

What did Daniel say in all his prayers? Do you run out of things to say to the Lord? It would be wonderful to know all that Daniel said. We do have one of his prayers in a later chapter (Dan 9). It is one of the few recorded prayers in the Bible- apart from the Psalms. But we do know something from what is written in this passage. ‘*He prayed and gave thanks to before his God*’ (6:10). Thanksgiving is an essential element of prayer. If you have nothing to thank God for you should question your salvation. What about Jesus who died for you that you might live!

It has been suggested that Psalm 92 would have been a fitting prayer for Daniel at this time. Many of the Psalms are prayers and we can use these as a guide to prayer. After giving thanks, Daniel would have brought his concerns before the Lord. He would have asked the Lord to help him, and would have been assured that God indeed was powerful to deliver him from the hands of his enemies.

How did Daniel pray? He went to his upper room, and facing Jerusalem, knelt down and prayed. He did not make a public show of praying like the Pharisees, but at the same time he was not ashamed to be seen in prayer. He did not go into hiding for fear of being seen. He continued ‘*steadfast in prayer’* as was his custom (Rom 12:12). He prayed toward Jerusalem, for God’s presence was in the temple (or had been). Solomon spoke of praying towards the temple when he dedicated it with prayer (1Kings 8). This was not a meaningless ritual but was a way of focussing upon God, and the covenant he made with Israel. It is good to focus on the works of God and his covenant promises when we come before him in prayer. For this reason it is good to read the Word of God before you pray.

**3.Deliver**

His enemies could find no fault in Daniel because he was faithful (6:4). Sure enough, when they came to spy on him they found him being faithful to his God. Their trap had worked. They caught Daniel breaking their law and raced off to tell the king. ‘*That Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah’* (6:13); he was not, ‘Daniel the governor’. Daniel had been in Babylon for some eighty years but still they called him a captive from Judah. In their jealousy they derided Daniel in every way they could think of.

Time does not make life in this world any easier for a child of God. If you think life will get easier, if you think that corruption, dishonesty and idolatry will decrease, then think again. Sure, we pray for revival and that many will be saved, but ultimately only the coming of the Lord will set things right in this fallen world. This world must pass away to make way for the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness. While we live in this world we will face tribulation. You cannot love the world and love God also (1Jn 2:15). It is just like it was in the days of Noah.

King Darius, who was fond of Daniel and planned to promote him, realised his mistake. He ‘kicked himself’ for being tricked into making this wicked law. He tried desperately to get Daniel out of this mess, but he was in a corner. He was just were Daniel’s enemies wanted him. The law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed.

Darius reminds us another ruler called Pilate. In fact, the whole scene is reflected in the trial of Jesus of Nazareth. The Jews plotted to get Jesus. They asked him under oath if he was the Christ, the Son of God. If Jesus said ‘yes’ they would charge him with blasphemy, but if he said ‘no’ Jesus would be denying the truth. Like Darius, Pilate was tricked into signing the death warrant of an innocent man and regretted doing so only when it too late.

**4.Den of lions**

Daniel was brought out and thrown into the den of lions. He came silently, like a lamb to the slaughter. The king expressed confidence that his ‘*God whom you serve continually will deliver you’* (6:16). That the king should express such confidence in God saving Daniel shows how Daniel must have witnessed to him. Even under the threat of death, like Paul and Silas, Daniel maintained a faithful witness to the Lord.

What do people around you know about God from your witness? Do they see you honouring God in all things and putting Jesus before all others- before work, before study, before friends, before family? Have you ever said to your friend, ‘I cannot come to your party because I am going to church’? Imagine how God would be glorified if you acted in this way. Do people see that you are sincere and serious about following Jesus?

**Delivered from the lions Daniel 6:18-28**

Lions are not fussy eaters. Hungry lions waste no time in devouring whatever flesh is put before them. The Persians, and later the Romans, found them efficient killing ‘machines’ and used them for this purpose. Daniel was thrown into a den of hungry lions for breaking the law forbidding him to worship his God. A stone was placed over the doorway to the den and it was sealed by the king. One man- and an old man at that- did not stand a chance against these lions- except Daniel was not just any man, he was a man of God.

**1.Sleep**

King Darius liked Daniel’s faithfulness and wisdom, and planned to promote him. He was devastated when he realised what he had done in signing the law thrust before him by his other officials. Even the king could not save Daniel. All he could do was hope that Daniel’s God would save him. The king went back to his palace. He ate nothing and could not sleep. His conscience was so disturbed he spent the whole night tossing and turning, waiting for the first light of dawn. He was worrying about Daniel, this upright man whom he had sent to his death.

Many people suffer from insomnia, the inability to sleep. This may be chronic or spasmodic. It may be due to physiological problems, but often stems from worry and anxiety, as in the case with Darius. He had done wrong and his conscience was bothering him because of his sin. He did not know the God of Daniel who forgives sin. He had to live, and try to sleep, with sin on his conscience. He had no peace because he did not know the peace of God in his heart. ‘*There is no peace for the wicked’* says the Lord (Isa 48:22).

While the king was tossing and turning, Daniel was in with the hungry lions. Was he sleeping? He was probably praying, but whatever he was doing he had the peace of God in his heart. He was not anxious or afraid. Daniel could sleep in the midst of hungry lions just as David could sleep in the midst of his enemies (Psalm 3). ‘*The Lord gives his beloved sleep’* (Ps 127:2). Do you know the peace of God that drives away worry and anxiety?

**2.Sealed**

A stone was used to seal the entrance to the lion’s den. The den it appears was open at the top, probably so people could watch the lions devour their victims. Daniel was ‘*taken up out of the den’* when the king found him still alive the next morning (6:23). The den was sealed by the most powerful man on earth. No man was allowed to remove this stone. It was sealed that the purpose of the king ‘*concerning Daniel might not be changed’* (6:17). This was man’s purpose. But what was God’s purpose?

Half a millennium after Daniel another tomb was sealed by men- the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth. The Jews who hated Jesus had him crucified. His body was placed in a tomb. These Jews went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting a guard (Mat 27:66). It was their purpose that Jesus remain in the tomb. But what was God’s purpose?

The Jews were very religious but they did not know the power of God as Daniel did. They did not believe in the God for whom nothing is impossible. They held to a religion that was impotent. Like the men who had Daniel thrown into the lion’s den, they did not know the God ‘who sits in heaven and laughs’ at men who think they are all powerful, yet are but a breath before Almighty God.

Man sealed the door of the den, but God sealed the mouth of the lions. God’s ways truly are higher than our ways, and his thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isa 55:9). ‘*My God sent his angel and shut the lion’s mouths’* said Daniel when the king came in search of him. Daniel knew he was innocent of wrongdoing before God, and before king Darius. Daniel was not without sin, but knew he was the victim of injustice perpetrated by evil men. He would have brought his case before the Lord in prayer, as David often did according to the Psalms. Darius said to him, ‘*your God whom you serve continually will deliver you’* (6:16). Why did he say this? Presumably because Daniel had indicated to him that his God was powerful to save his people.

The jaws of death could not hold Jesus. Since Jesus was innocent of any sin it was not possible that death, the penalty for sin, should hold him. He was sealed in the tomb but God sent his angel inside the tomb as he did to Daniel. By his mighty power, God worked in Christ to raise him from the dead (Eph 1:20).

Paul reminds us that this exceedingly great power is available to you who believe (Eph 1:19). God who shut the mouth of the lions, God who raised Jesus from the dead, is the same God who you have come to worship today and remember in the sacrament. He is the same God who saved you, and works in you and through you to accomplish his purposes, and bring glory to himself! ‘*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’* says the apostle Paul (Phil 4:13).

Why did God save Daniel? Firstly, God was **able** to save him. The wicked men did not count on God saving Daniel. The wicked know nothing of the power of God, until it is too late. God can do greater works than the wicked ever imagine. We see God at work around us still today, frustrating the plans of the wicked and saving his people. Do you know the power of God in your life?

Secondly, God’s **purpose** was to save Daniel. God saved Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace because it was his eternal purpose. God saved Peter from prison and execution because it was his eternal purpose (Acts 12). Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego understood that God’s purpose may well have been not to save them from death, but they never doubted his power to save them. God did not save Stephen from stoning, nor James. They knew he could have, but also knew that their death would bring glory to God.

Thirdly, **Daniel believed in God**. ‘*Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him because he believed in his God’* (6:23). God responds to the prayer of faith. God hears the cry of his people when they come humbly before him repenting of sin and believing in him. ‘*Call to me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you do not know’* (Jer 33:3). Daniel believed this promise from God- do you?

Daniel takes his place among the cloud of faithful witnesses in Hebrews 11 (Heb 11:33). He stands before us today as a faithful witness, calling us to turn from sin which so easily entangles us, and run the race with endurance (Heb 12:1). Are you running the race of faith, the race that Jesus set before you when you first believed?

Although many versions of the story of ‘Daniel in the lions den’ end with Daniel being saved, the Bible does not end there. We read of the end of the wicked who plotted evil against Daniel. God not only saves those who believe- he destroys those who do not believe. God saves his chosen and destroys his enemies. The works of the holy God include salvation and judgment.

King Darius commanded that the men who accused Daniel be brought and they were cast into the den of lions (6:24). If you are a sceptic who thinks the lions were not really hungry when Daniel was thrown in, see what happened to the wicked when they were thrown in. They did not even reach the floor before being torn to pieces.

Not only the wicked men, but their wives and children were thrown in with them. As a covenant making and covenant keeping God, God saves families not just individuals. ‘*His promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’* (Acts 2:39). When he sent the flood he saved Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives- eight in all. The wicked were destroyed in the flood- fathers, mothers and children.

**3.Steadfast**

This chapter concludes with King Darius making a declaration to all peoples and nations and languages that dwell on the earth (6:25). What he was about to say concerning the God of Daniel he says to all humanity because the God of Daniel is the only living and true God. Darius came to the lion’s den grieving at what had he had done to Daniel. ‘Has your God been able to save you’ he cried out in a despairing voice. A great burden was lifted from him when he heard Daniel’s voice. He was ‘*exceedingly glad’* and publicly acknowledged the God of Daniel before all people. God is steadfast forever, he is the eternal God who rules over heaven and earth and all that he has made. God is alive and powerful to save. This was great news to Darius and he wanted everyone to know.

Today we bear witness not only to Daniel being saved from the jaws of hungry lions, but to Jesus of Nazareth being saved from the jaws of death. Yes, Jesus truly died on the cross, he was killed by wicked men, but God raised him to life and exalted him to his right hand in heaven. Through the glorious gospel we are witnesses to an empty tomb, to the power of the resurrection.

*‘God exalted Jesus far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.* God *put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’* (Eph 1:21-23).

**Kingdoms come and kingdoms go Daniel 7:1-8**

Governments are full of men and women who want to change the world. Many want to make their mark in the history of this world. The walls of parliament house are lined with brass busts of political leaders, most of whom are now in the grave. Who can recall their names? Who can point to how they changed this world. When you cast your vote in a few weeks will you be hoping for a better world?

Nations rise and nations fall. Kings come and kings go. In the Bible we are told that God is the judge who puts one down and exalts another (Ps 75:7). The kingdom of God is the only kingdom that remains for ever. ‘*The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever’* said the angel blowing the seventh trumpet in the apocalyptic vision of John (Rev 11:15). The message in this apocalyptic vision of Daniel is basically the same.

Chapter seven is a turning point in the book of Daniel. In one sense it still belongs to the first half of the book for it is still written in Aramaic. This was the common language, the language the world could read. Later chapters are written in Hebrew, the language of the people of God. In another sense however, it is the first of Daniel’s dreams or visions. Up till now he had interpreted the dreams of the king. Now ‘*Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed’* (7:1).

The introductory words to this chapter are the same as those in chapter 2 vs. 28. There they were spoken with regard to King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In a dream God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar ‘*what will be in the latter days’* (2: 28). For God to speak through a heathen king goes against the doctrine of some men today- as does God speaking through a dream at all. But in a vision of a metallic man, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, albeit with Daniel’s interpretation, the future world kingdoms, kingdoms leading up to the time of Christ (2:44). Daniel’s vision closely parallels that of King Nebuchadnezzar in that it details future kingdoms or world superpowers.

Daniel was about eighty years old when Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, became king of Babylon. It was in the first year of Belshazzar that Daniel had this vision. He was on his bed, the usual place to have dreams, but this was no ordinary dream. Daniel knew this so he wrote down the main points of his dream. His dream was vivid and complex, and it troubled him (7:15). He sought, and was given, the interpretation of his dream.

**1.Lion**

Daniel saw four great beasts coming up out of the sea (7:3). They came in quick succession with one fading from the scene as the other emerges. The Great Sea is usually the Mediterranean Sea but may be any sea stirred up by winds from heaven. Here is a picture of turmoil and chaos as usually depicted by the sea in apocalyptic writing. John saw a horrible beast coming up out of the sea to do Satan’s dirty work (Rev 13:2). The beast John saw was actually like all the beasts Daniel saw wrapped into one.

The first was like a lion with eagle’s wings (7:4). The UK has the lion as its national emblem, and the USA has the eagle. Are these the nations symbolised here? Many nations have taken the lion as their emblem. Many palaces are adorned by images of lions, including most probably that of the king of Babylon. After all, the previous chapter was all about lions. Just as the lion is the king of the beasts so the eagle is the queen of the birds. It is swift and powerful. I once saw a wedge-tailed eagle swoop and pluck out the eyes of a newborn calf.

Daniel saw the wings of the eagle get plucked off and the lion stand up like a man; and it was given a man’s heart (7:4). This may be an allusion to the time Nebuchadnezzar was driven from his place to live like a beast. He was a beast on two feet with a man’s heart. He was forced to acknowledge the Almighty God who rules over the nations. God gave Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom, and God would take it away, as he did soon after Daniel had this dream (5:30).

This beast, like the other three, symbolised a king or kingdom- so Daniel was told (7:17). So what kingdom did the lion symbolise? In Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of a metallic man four kingdoms were also symbolised. The head of gold stood for the kingdom of Babylon (2:37f). Here also the lion stands for Babylon.

**2.Bear**

Suddenly a second beast like a bear emerged from the sea (7:5). It was raised up on one side and had three ribs in its mouth. The bear is another powerful beast used as a national emblem by Russia and other nations. What nation would be in view in Daniel’s vision? Not Russia but the kingdom that followed Babylon, the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. They became the world superpower in the time of Daniel (5:31, 6; 28). The bear raised up on one side probably points to the predominance of the Persians in this federal coalition. The three ribs may indicate the three great victories won by the Medes and Persians, or it may simply be symbolic of a large mouthful.

The bear was told to arise and devour much flesh. Who was the ‘they’ that told him to do this (7: 5)? We are not told, but clearly this beast or kingdom was under direction from a greater power, just like the first and third beasts. Notice the word ‘given’ in the text- one had ‘*dominion given to it’* (7:6). They were not independent even if they thought and acted as if they were.

**3.Leopard**

As Daniel looked he saw a third beast, this one like a leopard (7:6). The leopard is known for its violent swiftness. The four wings on its back would enhance it speed. Alexander the Great as a young general conquered one nation after another in amazing speed to establish the Greek empire within just four years. He died at the age of 33 years leaving no successor. His kingdom was divided among four of his generals. This may be what was symbolised in the four heads on the leopard.

**4.Fourth beast**

The fourth beast was beyond description in terms of jungle creatures. It was a dreadful and terrible looking creature, and exceedingly strong (7: 7). It was like a giant front-end loader running out of control. Huge iron teeth devoured and crushed all that was before it. This beast ‘must surely signify a singularly voracious, cruel, and even vindictive world power’.

The iron teeth link it to the legs of iron representing the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision. The feet of that image were of iron mixed with clay. It was the feet that were struck by a stone causing it to crumble and fall. In Daniel’s vision this fourth beast was also the last. It was the one slain and destroyed in the fire (7:11). The Romans were renowned for their brutality in gaining and maintaining world domination.

The fourth beast is further described as having ten horns. Horns are symbols of power. As Daniel observed and considered this beast he saw a little horn emerge and tear out three other horns. Ten horns point to ten kings that will arise from this kingdom (7; 24).

The little horn attracted Daniel’s attention. On it were ‘*eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words’* (7: 8). With these eyes, and a mouth, this little horn was more human-like than the other beasts. With its mouth it could boast and speak pompous words, words of blasphemy against God (7:25). Because of this blasphemy, and an arrogant disregard for justice and mercy, divine judgment came upon this kingdom.

**5.Conclusion**

Daniel was living in Babylon in the 6th century BC. He was confronted by idolatry and the rule of men who called themselves god. In this dream Daniel is shown what will happen in the world with regard to

‘superpower’ nations. God revealed this to him, and he wrote it down to show that God is the ultimate ruler of the nations.

Daniel was at the forefront of the conflict between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. Such conflict would continue for the next 500 years until thrones were put in place, the Ancient of Days was seated, and one like the Son of Man came on the clouds of heaven.

The kingdoms of this world come and go according to the will and power of God. God will establish his kingdom on the earth, an everlasting kingdom that shall not pass away. Daniel, like Abraham, saw the day of Jesus Christ and was glad (Jn 8:56). Daniel, like Abraham, lived in a foreign country as he ‘*waited for the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God’* (Heb 11:10).

Are you, by faith, waiting for the kingdom of God to come in all its fullness? Jesus is coming again to bring to completion the kingdom which he inaugurated in his first coming. He is coming on the clouds of heaven to dwell in the New Jerusalem where those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life reside.

**Kingdom without end Daniel 7:9-14**

Chapter 7 stands out as a pinnacle in the book of Daniel, and indeed in the whole Bible. The passage before us tells of the coming of the Messiah who was given universal and everlasting dominion over all the kingdoms of this world. The passage is both prophetic and apocalyptic, telling about the coming of the kingdom of God and of Jesus as the King of kings. Jesus began his ministry saying, ‘the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel’ (Mark 1:15). In Jesus, God showed his hand as it were with regard to this world and its future. Jesus said, ‘*My Father has committed all judgment to the Son’* (Jn 5:23). He also said, after his resurrection, that ‘all glory in heaven and on earth has been given to me’ (Mat 28:18).

Jesus did not simply come to give you a better life in the here and now. Many are encouraged to become Christians with the promise of a better life, of a happy marriage, of healthy children, of a big house and all sorts of comforts in this world. Jesus did say, ‘I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly’ (Jn 10:10), but it is wrong to interpret this verse in such a worldly way. As Paul said, ‘if in this life only we have hope in Jesus we are of all men the pitiable’ (1Cor 15:19). Jesus came to overthrow all the kingdoms of this world and to establish the kingdom of God. Your salvation has cosmic and eternal dimensions.

In a dream Daniel saw four powerful, devouring beasts come out of a raging sea. These beasts symbolised kingdoms of this world, kingdoms ruled by men. The last beast in particular was horribly vicious and destructive. As Daniel heard it speaking boastful and blasphemous words the scene in his dream suddenly shifted. He saw into the heavenly throne room, in a vision much like that which John was given in Revelation 4.

**1.Ancient of Days**

As Daniel watched he saw thrones put in place and the Ancient of Days seated (7:9). This title for God is unique to Daniel and this chapter. What does it tell us about God? Most probably it is to highlight his enduring nature over against the ephemeral nature of the beasts. ‘*From everlasting to everlasting you are God’* (Ps 90:2). The Ancient of Days had hair like pure wool and a garment as white as snow. Here is a picture of absolute purity and holiness. It is a picture which John also had in his vision. He saw one like the Son of Man whose head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow (Rev 1:14).

While the white wool and snow reflect his purity and holiness, the fire surrounding his throne is symbolic of judgment. The throne itself had wheels like the chariot throne which Ezekiel saw in his whirlwind vision (Ezek 1). John saw lightning coming from the heavenly throne which he saw. Fire came from heaven to consume the sacrifice made by Elijah, a sacrifice which lead to the judgment of the prophets of Baal. The disciples of Jesus understood God’s judgment as fire from heaven when they wanted to destroy an unwelcoming village of Samaritans (Luke 9:54).

There is no mistaking this scene as that of a courtroom. First the judge was seated, all the court was seated, and then books were opened. These days we see men bringing into the court trolleys loaded with books. All the evidence is put forward in order to make a just judgment. In the courtroom in heaven the books were opened. This is God’s record of the deeds of all people. John also saw these books opened (Rev 20:12). The judge is seated ready to make his just and eternal judgment upon the nations, upon small and great, rich and poor, the dead and the living.

The scene is complete with a myriad of servants standing around the throne. Servants often line the walls of a courtroom ready to do the bidding of the judge. This was the case in India anyway. These are probably angels ministering before the Lord. John saw thousands upon thousands of these angels actually singing as they gathered around the throne of God (Rev 5:11). The number is not literal. He was not counting them. There were too many to count.

**2.Beast is slain**

While Daniel watched the Ancient of Days take his seat upon the throne it seems the little horn of the fourth beast continued uttering pompous words. But he would not do so for much longer. The judge was seated and the court was in session. As Daniel watched the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and thrown into the burning flame (7:11). Some refer to this beast as the antichrist. The beast of course, symbolises kings and a kingdom (7:24) which, in the first instance, points to the Roman Empire. This beast is very similar to the beast of the sea which John saw in his vision, the beast that spoke pompous words and blasphemies against God for 42 months (Rev 13:5,6). This beast symbolises antichristian government in this world.

The beast was slain and cast into the fire. Since fire flowed from the throne of the Ancient of Days it is apparent that the beast was condemned and slain by order of the judge. The beast of the sea was similarly cast into the lake of fire after a brief battle against the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:20). The other beasts were removed from their thrones, as already implied in the vision. They seemed to just fade away but the sovereign God was behind their demise. Nothing in this world happens without God knowing. In fact, nothing ‘just happens’ in this world outside the will of God. As our Confession states, ‘The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass’ (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q7).

**3.Son of Man**

Daniel’s first vision comes to an end with the appearance of another figure, ‘*one like the Son of Man’* (7:13). Coming on the clouds of heaven, he came before the Ancient of Days. ‘*Son of Man’* indicates one having human form in contrast to the form of beasts exhibited by the other kingdoms. The Son of Man enters into the presence of the Ancient of Days without danger and without judgment or rendering obeisance. No mere human being could do this.

Why did this ‘one’ come to the heavenly throne? ‘*To him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom’* (7:14). He was anointed and installed as king over all the peoples, nations and languages. God sits in heaven and laughs at the nations that exalt themselves against him because he has set his king, his anointed one on his holy hill. He has given his Son the nations as his inheritance (Ps 2). The title ‘Son of Man’ is clearly a Messianic title. Messiah means Christ or anointed one.

Why this title ‘Son of man’ or ‘one like the Son of man’? What does it mean? ‘Son of man’ indicates one having human form. God gave Adam dominion over the creation but he failed to obey God and forfeited this dominion. ‘Adam sinned and lost his dominion, falling short of the glory of God. Since then we have sought rapaciously to recover that dominion, without letting go of our sin. When the Son of Man came, however, he became the servant Adam failed to be; he reflected the glory of God in his obedience to him’. Jesus was obedient unto death. Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him all authority in heaven and on earth (Phil 2:9, Mat 28:18).

‘Son of Man’ therefore takes on a specific and exalted meaning in this passage. It takes on a divine as well as human aspect. As a title it is not without ambiguity and it is probably for this reason that Jesus chose to call himself by this title. It is a Messianic title but not one the Jews were familiar with. By using this title Jesus could clearly claim to be the Messiah, the Christ of God, but avoid much of the misunderstanding that surrounded the term Messiah in first century Judaism and among Jews even till today. Using the ‘Son of man’ title, Jesus spoke of giving his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). He was the suffering servant Isaiah spoke of. Jesus could also use this title to speak of his coming on the clouds of heaven (Mat 26:64) as portrayed in this passage in Daniel.

One like the Son of Man inherited all the kingdoms of the earth. He was given universal dominion. ‘*The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ’* (Rev 11:15). He was given everlasting dominion, dominion that will never pass away and his kingdom will never be destroyed (7:14). He was given glory as the only one worthy to rule the nations of the earth because he was slain to redeem us to God by his blood.

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain*

*To receive power and riches and wisdom,*

*and strength and honour and glory and blessing* (Rev 5:12).

**Kingdom for the saints Daniel 7:15-28**

In a dream Daniel saw four beasts coming up out of the sea. They were powerful, devouring beasts. The fourth one was particularly horrible and destructive with its ten horns and its little horn. Daniel saw the Ancient of Days take his seat upon the throne to make judgment. He saw the little horn get slain and thrown into the fire. Finally, ‘one like the Son of Man’ came and was given total and everlasting dominion. All the kingdoms of the earth were given to him.

What did all this mean? Daniel knew his dream was significant. His spirit told him it had some meaning. Daniel had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams but what about his own dream. In his dream he approached what was probably an angel asking for the interpretation. We are later told this angel was called Gabriel (9:21).

The four beasts he was told, ‘*are four kings/kingdoms which arise out of the earth’* (7:17). We have already suggested that in the first instance these are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome- and not the UK, Russia, the USA and a revived Roman empire as some suggest. Yet there is an overriding and enduring aspect to this conflict, the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.

This chapter of Daniel has led to all manner of speculation regarding the future. Some link the ten horns to the ten toes of the image Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, the feet of iron and clay that were struck by the stone (2:35), but no emphasis is given to the number ten in that dream. Some people closely watched the European Union increase until it had ten members, but that has been passed. Others are watching the United Nations and the World Monetary Fund that was founded by ten of the world’s richest nations (the big ten) when they all went to Rome in 1971.

But this vision is not only prophetic; it is apocalyptic in style. The number ten should probably be taken as symbolic of a large number and not taken literally. Unlike the four beasts, no particular point is made about the ten horns or the three that are defeated. Even the four kingdoms are not actually named. We must interpret the passage in the light of the rest of Scripture, noting that this chapter forms the background to some of John’s visions in Revelation. John also writes in a prophetic and apocalyptic style.

**1.Pompous little horn**

Who or what is this little horn? Daniel was particularly intrigued by the fourth beast with its iron teeth and bronze nails. This beast, and especially the little horn that appeared on its head, had human-like features. Daniel was told that the ten horns were ten kings that will arise from this kingdom (7:24). The little horn was a king that would subdue three kings and cause havoc on the earth. In what sense was this horn little? Was he diminutive in stature, or insignificant in other ways? He was little but his ‘*appearance was greater than his fellows’* (7:20). If he was not easily seen, he was certainly heard. He was a bold and boastful blasphemer. He spoke pompous words against the Most High God.

Daniel tells something new about this little horn as he recaps on what he saw (7:20, 21 cf. 7:8). The little horn was making war against the saints and prevailing against them. The angel went on to tell him that this particular king will not only speak pompous words against God but will also ‘*persecute the saints of the Most High’* (7:25). Who are these saints? They are the followers of God from the old covenant and the new covenant. The little horn specifically targets the people of God in his ruthless destruction. Some who interpret the forth kingdom to be Greece point to Antiochus Epiphanies as the little horn. This ruler persecuted the Jews to the extent of desecrating the temple in 168-165BC. However, it is more likely to be a ruler from the Roman Empire who brutally persecuted Christians.

Calvin had ‘no doubt that the little horn relates to Julius Caesar and the other Caesars who succeeded him’. ‘He calls it a little horn because Caesar did not assume the name of king’. Others have looked to the rise of the papacy in interpreting this little horn. He is seen as the antichrist by many, an interpretation that extends well beyond that offered by Calvin. Yet the point is the same. This little horn, this ruthless ruler will persecute the saints of God. The little horn spoke pompous words, he persecuted the saints and he sought ‘*to change times and law’* (7:25).

God created this world, making time and setting in place the laws of nature. ‘*Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are his, and he changes the times and seasons’* asDaniel noted previously (2:20, 21). At various times in history, rulers have sought to change God’s created order- six days work and one days rest. With the French revolution came an attempt in 1793 to change the calendar to make a week ten days and three weeks to make a month. Other rulers have sought to change times and seasons but these come to nothing. Even today, there are attempts to change times and seasons but God has set times and seasons in place and has declared that they shall continue until the end (Gen 8:22).

John saw a beast come up out of the sea. This beast spoke pompous words and was allowed to make war with the saints and overcome them - for a time (Rev 13). This beast was the servant of the Dragon or Satan. Satan always has, and always will, stir up his followers to persecute the saints. ‘Wherever God’s people have sought to carry forth his work and extend his kingdom Satan has tried to interfere’. But God has determined that this apparent victory will be only for a time, times and a half time (7:25)

**2.Persecuted saints**

For a time, Satan inspired persecution will prevail against the saints. They will suffer in this spiritual battle (7:21, Rev 13:7). Jesus said that all who follow him will suffer in this world. He spoke of taking up your cross and following him. ‘*In this world you will have tribulation’* he said (Jn 16: 33). The apostle Paul knew this when he wrote, ‘*all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution’* (2Tim 3:12). Paul endured terrible persecution but he pressed on because he knew that this was exactly what Jesus had said. Is this what you understand to be the life of a Christian today? Do you expect to live without trouble and persecution in this world? Will you be one who turns back when the going gets tough? Many did turn back from following Christ because of what he said.

The suffering of the saints will come to an end. The little horn made war against them until the Ancient of Days appeared. Daniel had seen him take his seat in the heavenly throne (7:9). He now tells more about this vision, as he awaited the interpretation. He said the Ancient of Days made a judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High. He had previously focussed on the condemnation of the pompous little horn. This condemnation will be expanded upon shortly, but for the moment the focus is on the saints being delivered from the power of Satan and being given dominion in the kingdom (7:22). They would share in the kingdom that was given to the Son of Man (7:14, 27).

‘How long, O Lord’ is the cry that goes up from those who are suffering for their faith in God. The time is set by God because the victory has already been won. As Calvin understood this vision it pointed to the first coming of Christ. It was in his death and resurrection that the Son of Man won the victory over Satan - he defeated him who has the power of death that is the devil. Satan is still on a leash as it were, and his ultimate demise will not be until the second coming of Jesus. But let us not forget that it is in his first coming that the victory was won. Satan is still active and even more active because his days are numbered.

Time, times and a half time (7:25). Many read this as three and a half years. John seems to pick up on this time and vary it to 42 months or 1260 days. This number is symbolic of the Last Days. The time appears to be progressing for the little horn- one time, two times and then maybe four times. This would add up to seven. But instead it is cut short - one, two and then a half. This is for the sake of the saints (cf. Mat 24:22). The time comes to an end with the court being seated and Satan being cast into the fire.

**3.Proclamation of God**

The vision and the chapter end in the courtroom of heaven. While the little horn is actively speaking against God and persecuting the saints the court was seated. The kingdom of this tyrant was taken away. It will be destroyed by order of the judge. ‘The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of God and his Son Jesus Christ’. And those who belong to Jesus, those who remain faithful and endure the persecution will reign with the Lord. ‘*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’* (beatitude Mat 5:10).

The courtroom scene shows God’s sure and sovereign judgment of evil. Let us keep this great truth in mind as we live in this world. We live in the shadow of the Cross, taking hold of the victory that Jesus won. We must not be ignorant about the reality and strength of evil in this world. Daniel was troubled by what he saw. He was living in the midst of evil. He was concerned for the saints of God into the future. Let us not become complacent but be earnest in prayer for the kingdom of God. Jesus taught his disciples to pray- ‘your kingdom come’.

We live looking to the glory of Jesus coming again with the kingdom of God in its fullness. Let us keep looking to Jesus and toward his coming. Let us keep on praying, ‘even so, come Lord Jesus’. This world is not going to keep on the way it is for much longer. Keep all this is your heart just as Daniel did.

**Vision of a little horn Daniel 8**

In his second vision Daniel saw a ram and a goat engage in mortal combat. The goat, symbolising the kingdom of Greece, won. Alexander the Great ruled the known world from 336BC to 323BC. Following his death the kingdom he ruled was broken into four parts. Of these four kingdoms, one takes centre stage in Daniel’s second vision. ‘*Out of one of them came a little horn that grew exceedingly great towards the south, toward the east and toward the glorious land’* (8: 9). This little horn did not necessarily take centre stage in secular history for secular history does not focus on the people of God. In the Bible history is viewed from God’s perspective with a focus upon his people and his kingdom.

Some years ago in India a TV series on the Mahabharata, a Hindu epic was very successful. The producers then started to make a TV series on the Bible. They made a number of episodes on Nimrod the mighty hunter but then they got lost and the series collapsed. They were trying to make the Bible into the history of man, a story about man’s exploits and triumphs. The Bible is very disappointing to secular historians because it does not exalt man but exalts God. The story of the Bible follows the people of God and the kingdom of God.

When God called Abraham and made a covenant with him He promised that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. From Abraham God raised up a people unto himself, a people not mighty in the eyes of the world but rather ‘*the least of all peoples’* (Deut 7:7). God made a covenant with his people and declared they would be a light to all the nations. They would reflect the glory of God in this fallen world. The covenant people of God still exist today. They are the church. The true church does not feature greatly in the media or in secular history. I say ‘true’ church because people know the history of the crusades and the inquisition as if these represent the history of the true church of God. The other day a reporter asked a Buddhist monk if his doctrines allowed him to react with violence in the way the Muslims have in ‘jihad’ and Christians in the crusades. The reporter ignored the teaching of Jesus and the history of the true church.

**1.Antiochus the antichrist**

Claimed divinity

The little horn moved towards ‘*the glorious/beautiful land’* (8:9) and exalted ‘*himself as high as the prince of the host’* (8:11). This simply means that he led his army to attack Jerusalem, the holy place of the Jews, and exalted himself against God. In the interpretation given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel he is told that a king shall arise (8:23), rising up against the Prince of princes and attacking the holy people. The king represented by this little horn is not the same as the one represented by the little horn in Daniel’s vision of the four beasts. The little horn there arose from the fourth kingdom which probably symbolised Rome. The little horn in this vision arises from one section of the Greek kingdom. Although not the same king, there are many similarities in their character. Both represent the antichrist; men who proudly put themselves in the place of Christ.

Who then is the king symbolised by this little horn? This king is somewhat easier to identify than the previous little horn because in the interpretation here the kingdom of Greece is named. Babylon became the centre of the Seleucid section of this empire. In 175BC Antiochus Epiphanies IV usurped the throne of his nephew to become king. Antiochus was his original name and ‘Epiphany’ means manifest or appear. He later added the title ‘theos’ or god to his name.

In the apocryphal book of Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanies IV is spoken of as ‘the man who only a short time before seemed to touch the stars in the sky’ (2Macc 9:10). Daniel says he saw this little horn cast down ‘some of the host and some of the stars’. This probably refers to believing Jews, the people of God. Such action goes along with exalting himself against the God. The saints are often seen as already dwelling in heaven. ‘God numbers us amongst the stars’ write Calvin. Let us remember that we are citizens of heaven, and live as such in this fallen world (Phil 3: 20).

Daily sacrifices stopped

In 168BC, after attacking Egypt and being turned back, Antiochus Epiphanies IV vented his rage on the Jews, brutally attacking them in Jerusalem. One Sabbath he entered Jerusalem with 20,000 troops. He desecrated the temple by offering a pig on the altar. He would not allow the Jews to sacrifice a lamb every morning and evening in the temple, as was their practice.

Desecrated the temple

*‘The place of his sanctuary was cast down’* (8:11). Antiochus Epiphanies IV further desecrated the temple by installing an idol of Zeus in the temple. This became known as the ‘abomination of desolation’, referred to in a later chapter (11:31), and also by Jesus (Mat 24:15). Jesus used this term to refer to a later destruction of the temple -in AD 70 by the Romans. In fact, the picture of Antiochus Epiphanies IV serves as a type for later antichrists that appear in apocalyptic visions given to John in the book of Revelation.

**2.Why and when**

This persecution under Antiochus Epiphanies IV is said to be ‘*because of transgression’* (8:12). The Hebrew is not so clear but we take it that this refers to Jews who had departed from the truth. In the interpretation we read ‘*in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness’* (8:23). ‘The transgressors are not the heathen, but apostate Jews who introduced heathen rites among the Jews and built in Jerusalem a heathen gymnasium for their games’ (Young). We know the terrible status of teaching and worship in the temple just two hundred years after this time of Antiochus. Jesus himself had to cleanse the temple.

Satan can use evil men like Antiochus Epiphanies IV to bring down the house of God in an instant, but he often uses more subtle means. The church in our land is not being brutally attacked, as it often has been down through the ages and still is in many places today. But we see the hand of Satan in the false teaching that continues in various churches. Did you hear of the preacher who denied the virgin birth, the resurrection, the miracles, and even discounted the Cross of Jesus Christ. He was more concerned with being ‘inclusive’ and welcoming homosexuals into the pulpit. We must be alert to attacks not only from without- and they may well come soon- but also from within.

Daniel overheard two ‘holy ones’ or angels speaking about this desolation of the temple (8:13). He heard that it would be for 2300 days, or literally 2300 ‘evenings and mornings’. After this the temple would be cleansed (8:14). We know to be careful with numbers in apocalyptic literature. This number indicates a divinely determined and definite period of suffering. Nevertheless, many say that this 2300 refers to the morning and evening sacrifice and so to 1150 days. This period of just over three years which some link with the three and half years of Daniel chapter 7, while others say that it corresponds to the time the temple in Jerusalem was used for heathen sacrifices. Antiochus Epiphanies IV set up the idol of Zeus in 168BC and in 165 BC Judas Maccabaeus led a Jewish revolt defeating the heathens and cleansing the temple. Daniel was told that this king who exalts himself, this king who ruled by deceit and cunning, this king who prospered for but a short time, would be broken without hands, meaning without human hands. God himself would take care of this antichrist figure.

Antiochus Epiphanies IV died in 164BC from a mysterious illness which the Jews attributed to the hand of God (1 Macc 6). He did not die at the hands of man but at the hands of God. We are reminded of a later king, King Herod, who was similarly struck down by God for glorifying himself and not God (Acts 12). How many other rulers, and not only rulers but ordinary men who exalt themselves against God have been struck down by God?

God may allow the wicked to prosper for a time, according to his divine purposes. But be sure that those who are full of human pride and live their life ignoring God and taking the glory that is due to him upon themselves, will come under his judgment. ‘*God resists the proud but give grace to the humble’* (James 4:6). Remember, friendship with the world means enmity towards God.

On the other hand, as a humble child of God, as one who walks by faith and not in your own strength, you can be comforted in the knowledge that God will, in his time, destroy those who oppose and persecute his chosen people. Daniel was told to seal up this vision, not that no one see it but that it not be lost. How precious are the words of God to those who love him and walk in his ways!

**Vision of a ram and a goat Daniel 8**

Daniel had a second vision, this time during the third year of the reign of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. Belshazzar was the last of the Babylonian kings. This kingdom lasted some seventy-five years. Daniel spent all his adult life in exile in this kingdom. The walls of his home city were broken down and the temple where he worshipped as a boy was in ruins. He was living among idol worshippers.

What would become of him and of the people of God? They longed to return to Jerusalem and to worship of the true God in his holy temple. But God had greater plans for his people, plans that went way beyond worship in a temple on earth. He revealed some of his plans for his people, and for the whole of creation, in these visions given to his faithful servant Daniel.

In his previous vision Daniel saw four great beasts coming up from the sea. These beasts represented kingdoms that would rule on earth. Whilst they are not named in chapter 7, two kingdoms are named in the interpretation of the vision in chapter 8. These two visions correspond in many ways, as we will see, even if the emphasis is different.

Daniel identifies himself as the man who had both of these visions (8:1). He wrote down what he saw. The first one he wrote in Aramaic, but the second in Hebrew, his mother tongue. The focus of the second dream is more towards the Jews in exile. Daniel shows a deep concern for the future of the people of God. In fact, he fainted and was sick for days after the vision (8:17). Daniel would not personally face the persecution spoken of in his vision- it was for ‘*many days in the future’*- but he still felt a deep burden for the future of the kingdom of God.

Daniel had long term goals, goals for the kingdom of God not just goals to make his own life prosperous and comfortable. He ‘*arose and went about the king’s business’* (8:27) with renewed zeal for the kingdom of God. Do you have a concern for the kingdom of God? Are you praying ‘your kingdom come, your will be done’. Are you praying, ‘yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory’? Do you daily seek to glorify God in your life?

**1.Ram**

In his vision Daniel was in Shushan/Susa, the capital city of the Persian Empire. This was in the province of Elam, in what today is Iran. His vision was not about Babylon but about the two world dominating kingdoms that would come. By the river Ulai, a tributary of the Euphrates, Daniel saw a ram with two horns. Such a sight would not be unusual except that one of the horns was higher than the other, and it was the one that came up last (8:3). This powerful ram pushed from the east. It pushed to the west, the north and the south. Nothing could stop the advance of this ram.

The angel Gabriel interpreted this vision for Daniel (8:16). He brings what in the end is good news, just as he did to Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-27). Daniel actually saw ‘*one having the appearance of a man* and *heard a man’s voice’* which instructed Gabriel (8:15). Calvin says this voice is that of Christ while others think it was the voice of God. Either way, it was a voice of authority.

Daniel’s reaction to this sight was just like that of John when he saw the risen Jesus. He was afraid and fell on his face. But Gabriel touched him and stood him up (8:18). He wanted Daniel to understand what the vision was all about. God does not leave his people in the dark with regard to the future. People run here and there wanting to know the future. The ‘mind, body, spirit, festival’ will offer all manner of information about the future to the gullible. How wonderful that God has told us already- and for free- if we have ears to hear! We have here what some call ‘pre-history’.

The ram with two horns stood for two kings Gabriel said- the kings of Media and Persia (8:20). These kings came from the east and conquered Babylon in the year 539 BC. Daniel was still alive when this happened (5:31). He actually told Belshazzar his days were numbered and that his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians- and it happened that very night. How reassuring would that be for a man of God!

In this coalition the Persians were dominant; hence one horn was higher than the other. It was like the Liberals in the federal coalition with the Nationals. This is not unlike the second beast in Daniel’s first vision- a bear that was raised up on one side (7:5). The Persians were pagans but did not persecute the people of God like later regimes. In his very first year Cyrus the Persian actually aided the return of the Exiles and the rebuilding of the temple, according to the will of God (Ezra 1:1).

**2.Goat**

As he watched Daniel saw a Billy goat suddenly come up from the west. This goat had only one horn initially. The goat moved fast and furiously to lock horns with the ram. After a brief battle the two horns of the ram were broken off. His power was destroyed and he was trampled into the ground by the goat.

This Billy goat symbolised the Greek kingdom. In 336BC Alexander the Great moved swiftly with his army to the east conquering all before him. He would be the large/notable/conspicuous horn that appeared first on the goat. At the Granicus River in 334BC Alexander crushed the Persians. ‘With only 35,000 men Alexander’s forces plunged through the river attacking Darius’s 100,000 footmen and 10,000 horsemen, reportedly killing 20,000 at a loss of only 100 Greek troops.

Alexander became a general when just twenty-one years old. But by the age of thirty-three he was dead. Power went to his head and he made his soldiers bow down to him as if was a god. He died in suspicious circumstances. How true it is that those who live by the sword die by the sword. Moreover, those who live with ever increasing pride are setting themselves up for a sudden fall. We see this in history and we see it today. When will we learn?

When Alexander the Great went to his grave, the Greek kingdom was broken up into four regions with separate rulers. Daniel saw four new horns grow up in the place of the single horn that was broken off the goat (8:8). Similarly, the second beast of his first vision had four heads. These four new kingdoms did not have the same power as the single kingdom under Alexander (8:22).

Daniel’s visions, which stretch through history, show how quickly kingdoms come and kingdoms go. We can look back in wonder at great kingdoms of the past. We have recently seen the exhumed body of Tutankhamen, an Egyptian Pharoah. What a great kingdom he ruled over. But what is there today? Just a dead body in a tomb! How quickly the heroes of today fade away, or in many cases become the horrors of the past. Let us remember that what is seen is temporary and passing away- only what is unseen remains (2Cor 4:18).

**3.Time of the end**

This vision goes on to tell of a little horn that came out of one of these four kingdoms. We do not have time to deal with his little horn now but will conclude with some words about the ‘*time of the end’* (8:17). Note that this is explained further in the passage as ‘*the latter time of the indignation’* (8:19). Indignation means the time of God’s wrath.

From a NT perspective ‘the end’ means the second coming of Jesus. Some people, especially dispensationalists, take it to mean the same thing here in Daniel. But in the OT ‘the end’ may refer to more immediate judgment, as indicated in verse 19. Moreover, at this point in history Jesus had not yet come the first time. ‘It is the end of the OT period and the ushering in of the New’ writes E. J. Young. It is the end of the special afflictions that are to come upon the Jews before the Messianic period. The focus of the OT is predominantly upon the coming of Messiah, the first coming of Christ. Let us not forget that it was in his first coming that Jesus won the victory over Satan and all the forces of evil. It was at the Cross and in his resurrection that he won the victory. Some people get so wrapped up in prophecy that they forget this central message of the gospel.

I once visited a man who spent almost an hour showing me all the information he had gathered with regard to the prophecies of the Bible, especially things about the red heifer. It is easy to bewilder people with prophecy, and easy to get bewildered yourself. As I left I said to this man, ‘you have told me so much about prophecy but not said one word about the Cross of Jesus Christ. Do you really understand the gospel of Jesus Christ’?

**Daniel’s prayer Daniel 9:1-19**

As a young man Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself (1:8). He determined not to worship idols even when most of the people around him did so. He would live with integrity and honour God. Daniel prayed and gave thanks to God three times every day and would not stop praying even when threatened with death in the lion’s den. We are privileged to hear one of the prayers of this greatly beloved servant of God; and I trust will be blessed.

There is an old evangelical saying that goes like this: ‘what an individual is in secret, on his knees before God, that he is and no more’. True prayer must come from the heart, so as we listen to this prayer of Daniel we get a glimpse into the heart a faithful child of God. We see his commitment to God, we see the covenant relationship he had with God, and we see his desire to glorify God. ‘Prayer is an expression of what we know of God and ourselves. In public we may successfully disguise the truth about ourselves but not in private prayer- or the lack of it’. This is the reason why it so difficult to pray and why so many Christians fail to pray.

Why do we pray? Do you value your prayer times? We pray to confess our sin. We pray to ask for God’s help. Jesus said, ‘ask and you will receive’. ‘*If you ask anything according to the will of God then you will receive it’* (1Jn 5:14). You can accomplish more and greater things through prayer than by your own strength. But in our pride we often struggle on, refusing to confess our sin and weakness before God.

**1.Commitment**

Daniel was living in exile. He was not free to go and worship God. He longed to return to his home in Jerusalem and worship God in the temple. This was one reason why he prayed. He called upon the Lord who by faith he knew could deliver him and his people from bondage. Daniel did not rely upon his own strength or cleverness. Daniel was further stirred to pray because of what he read in the Bible. God spoke to Daniel in dreams but this did not obviate him from reading the Bible. His whole life was not guided by dreams. In the first year of Darius the Mede, Daniel was reading his Bible and came to a passage in which Jeremiah said the exile would last for seventy years. He did not get this truth through a dream but from the written word of God.

Many years ago I went to prayer meeting down the road from where I lived. The small group was sitting around chatting and then began to pray. Some were quite animated as they sought guidance from the Lord. After a while one person claimed to have received a message from the Lord. The message was, ‘be still and know that I am God’. I came away thinking they could have read this in the Bible- which I don’t remember being opened in that prayer meeting.

Daniel opened his Bible and read it- and see what a wonderful promise he found. The seventy years spoken of by Jeremiah was now up. Daniel had been in Babylon for seventy years. It was in the first year of Cyrus the Persian (and Darius the Mede) that the Lord stirred the spirit of Cyrus to have the temple rebuilt (Ezra 1).

God has spoken to us in his word. In the past he spoke by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken by his Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-2). There are great and wonderful promises in the Bible. Let these promise inform and direct your prayers. It is futile to pray anything contrary to what God has already spoken in his unchanging word.

Daniel was committed to daily prayer. Daniel was committed to reading the Bible. Daniel was also committed to earnest prayer. See the beautiful way in which he described his prayer- ‘*I set my face toward the Lord God’* (9:3). Could you say this of your prayer- ‘I set my face toward the Lord’. This was no tired and hasty prayer at the end of the day. Daniel did not regard prayer as a waste of time.

Look further! He put on sackcloth and ashes, and fasted. This self-denial shows his humility and sincerity in prayer. It shows his total commitment to the Lord. Wearing sackcloth and pouring ashes over the head was the Jewish way of expressing extreme anguish of heart. It was commonly practised during mourning. Still today some Christians fast during special days of prayer. Daniel valued above all else his time with the Lord each day. Just as he continued steadfast in prayer we are also commanded to do the same (Rom 12:12). How often does prayer get squeezed out of your busy day?

**2.Covenant**

Daniel prayed and made confession (9:4). Confessing sin is essential in prayer, but even before this it is essential to acknowledge who God is. ‘*Those who come to God must believe that he exists and rewards those who earnestly seek him’* (Heb 11:6). Daniel did not pray to a God he did not know. See how well he knew his God. He is a great and awesome God who keeps his covenant and mercy with those who love him (9: 4). Daniel knew God as the mighty creator of heaven and earth. He knew the works of God in creation and redemption (9:4,15). He knew God as the redeemer of his people, the God who made a covenant with them through Moses after bringing them out of bondage in Egypt. The whole of his prayer is based upon this covenant.

Firstly, Daniel knew many attributes of God from what God declared through Moses. See the word mercy (9:4, 9). God declared himself to be merciful and forgiving (Exod 34:6-7). There was no point confessing sin if there was no forgiveness. The Bible does not teach that there is any value in confessing to an idol; nor in writing an autobiography that tells all. Such confessions benefit the bank but not the soul. God is also ‘righteous’ (9:7, 16). This word is sometimes translated as ‘justice’ and seen in a courtroom setting. In the OT it is a covenantal term with a somewhat wider meaning. Justice is part of it, but it refers to the integrity and faithfulness of God under the terms of the covenant. ‘Righteousness’ for Daniel meant forgiveness as well as judgment. Daniel knew that in his ‘rightness’ God would forgive but that he also got angry and punished those who broke his covenant (9:16).

Secondly, Daniel knew the details of the covenant in the Law of Moses (9:11- see Lev 26, Deut 28). God declared, ‘I will be your God and you will be my people’. Attached to this declaration was a statement of duties, as it were. God gave ten rules for them to obey. They were written on stone by God himself. If the people obeyed these rules then God would bless them in the land he gave them to settle in. If they failed to obey the rules then covenant curses would come upon them.

If Daniel did not know beforehand then he did from reading his Bible that he and thousands of other Jews were in exile because they had broken the covenant. The last and most severe of the curses stated that they would be scattered among the nations and their land destroyed (Lev 26:33, Deut 28:34). ‘*Yes, all Israel has transgressed your law … therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God has been poured out on us’*, because we have sinned against him (9:11). The people of God were in exile because they had sinned by breaking God commands. They were not there by accident or even because they were not strong enough to defeat the Babylonians. They were suffering because the heavy hand of God was upon. God had given them up. ‘You want to worship idols, then go and live among idol worshippers’ said God in effect (Rom 2:26).

God says this to nations and to individuals. How much of the suffering in our nation, child abuse, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, gambling abuse and so much more, are because God has given us up to follow these dark and destructive ways. We need to say sorry to more than the first inhabitants of this land. We need to say sorry to the thousands of children murdered in the womb, as well as too many who have been neglected and abused in their childhood. Above all we need to say sorry to God for we have broken covenant with him. We no longer want to hear his word in the Bible but want to go our own ways- and we are seeing the outcome.

Daniel confessed his sin and the sin of his people (9:20). He pleaded for mercy and forgiveness from the Lord, just like David when he sinned, and the prodigal son in the story Jesus told. ‘*O Lord, according to your righteousness I pray, let your anger and your fury be turned away from your holy city Jerusalem’* (9:16).

**3.Glory**

When the people of God rebelled in the wilderness and made the golden calf, God was going to destroy them. But Moses pleaded with the Lord suggesting that to do so would not bring glory to the Lord (Exod 32:11-12). The Egyptians would say that God turned upon his people and destroyed them.

Daniel similarly prays for the Lord to glorify his own holy name by forgiving their sin and restoring Jerusalem, your city Jerusalem. ‘*For the Lord’s sake cause your face to shine on your temple which is desolate’* (9:16,17). Notice the word ‘your’ that comes up again and again as Daniel closes his prayer. There is not one ‘I’ or ‘me’ here. It is 'not my will but yours be done'. It is not, ‘make my life better but may the Lord be glorified’. Their sin had brought shame and reproach upon them, the people who were called by God’s great name. ‘O Lord, listen and act …for your own sake, my God, for your city and your people are called by your name’ (9:19).

Some may think it strange that Daniel prayed with such commitment, and confessed so readily when God has already declared in the Bible that the exile would end soon anyway. God was going to restore Jerusalem anyway so why pray? We never see true servants of the Lord saying such things. We never see them saying, ‘the Lord will save whom he has chosen so why pray for the lost’. Daniel prayed and his prayer was pleasing to the Lord. The Lord heard his cry because he prayed according to God’s will as revealed in the Bible.

**Seventy sevens Daniel 9:20-27**

Daniel was at prayer, as was his custom. It was at the time of the evening sacrifice. He was stirred to pray after reading in his Bible of God’s promise, through the prophet Jeremiah, to bring the exile to an end after seventy years. Daniel did not consider prayer a waste of time, as so many do these days.

**1.Greatly beloved**

Seeking the face of God in earnest, he confessed his sin and ‘*the sin my people Israel’* (9:20). He also brought his supplications/requests to God, believing that God was faithful to his promises. In particular, he prayed for ‘*the holy mountain of my God’*, or, in other words, for Jerusalem. He prayed for the restoration of the temple where he and his people once worshipped God.

As Daniel prayed an angel suddenly appeared before him. The angel Gabriel flew swiftly to reach him as he prayed. You may not have had an angel visit you in prayer- but then again have you been in such earnest prayer as Daniel? Even if you have not had a heavenly visitor while praying be assured that the Lord hears your prayers immediately. That is why Gabriel came to Daniel. When Daniel fell on his knees before the Lord the word went out in Babylon that Daniel was disobeying the king’s decree. But here we see that the word went out in heaven also- Daniel is praying (9:23). How often does the word go out in heaven that you are praying? While men hated him praying, the Lord was very pleased. He sent Gabriel to tell Daniel ‘*you are greatly beloved’* or highly esteemed (9:23).

Why does God hear and answer our prayers? Is it because we deserve his blessings? Daniel was a faithful servant of God but he did not come boasting of his faith or his works. He came humbly before the Lord, and we see in this message from the Lord that he was heard because of grace. Daniel was heard because God loved him. ‘*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God’* (1Jn 3:1). Do you remember how much God loves you when you come to him in prayer? Do you remember that Jesus went to the Cross to die for you when you come to God in prayer? We know and feel God’s love most acutely when we draw near to him in prayer. While Daniel was praying God’s answer came in a very real way. While Jesus was earnestly praying in Gethsemane God sent an angel to strengthen him (Luke 22:43).

**2.Seventy sevens**

Gabriel had more to tell Daniel than that he was loved by God. He had come to help him ‘*understand the vision’* (9:23). What vision? The vision about to be revealed to Daniel. Daniel’s prayer was stimulated by the prophetic word of Jeremiah that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years (9:2). The time was almost complete. Jerusalem and its temple would be rebuilt. The new king of the empire issued a decree to this effect in his first year, 538BC.

Was this vision explained by Gabriel about returning to Jerusalem after the exile? It was related but this vision is much greater. It is a Messianic vision. ‘The Lord wanted his faithful servant to see those seventy years (of exile) in a new and sharper focus’. He was telling Daniel of a much greater ingathering of the people of God.

Daniel was to understand not only the seventy years of exile in Babylon but the ‘*seventy sevens’* leading to an end of sins, to reconciliation, and the coming of everlasting righteousness (9:24). For seventy years there had been no sacrifices in the temple. Why did the Jews make sacrifices? To atone for sin. Without the shedding of blood there is not forgiveness (Heb 9:22). They thought these sacrifices would go on for ever. But here Daniel is told that after ‘*seventy sevens’* there would be an end of sins- and presumably an end of sacrifices required to atone for sin.

This ‘seventy sevens’ vision of Daniel 9 is one of the most difficult portions of the Bible to understand, and also one of the most disputed portions. It has been called the dismal swamp of OT criticism. You may not wish to enter into this criticism but many do. You may not have heard of the seventieth week of Daniel, the Great Tribulation and the Millennium, but for many it is a central doctrine. What will you say when confronted with such doctrine? Will you join those heading off to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and start animal sacrifices again? Such people have convincing arguments taken from this very passage.

*‘Seventy sevens are determined’* (9:24). This is the overriding declaration of this vision. ‘Sevens’ is often translated ‘weeks’ (seven days), as you will see in the NKJV Bible, or as sabbatical years (every seven years). Seventy sevens would be 490 years. The big questions are, ‘when does this period start’ and, ‘are we to take the numbers literally’. Before we tackle these questions let us look at the content of verse 24.

What was to happen at the end of this period of 490years? It was something to do with the Jews, the people of God, and the holy city, the temple city of Jerusalem. Six things are listed here. The first three refer to the removal of sin.

* To finish transgression/rebellion (sin)
* To make an end of sins
* To make reconciliation for iniquity (sin)/ atone for wickedness.

The second three refer to the establishment of righteousness.

* To establish everlasting righteousness.
* To seal up vision and prophecy
* To anoint the Most Holy/ Holy of Holies.

From a NT perspective all these things clearly point to the Cross of Jesus Christ- the Messiah. The NT teaches that now ‘*at the end of the ages (Christ) has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself’* (Heb 9:26). In Christ we are reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18f). Jesus came to fulfil all that the Holy of Holies represented. In Christ all the OT prophecies are fulfilled or sealed up. God has spoken fully and finally in his Son. ‘*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes’* (Rom 10:4). It is clear that the end of the ‘seventy sevens’ points to the coming of Messiah and all that he achieved through his death and resurrection.

What about the next verse? ‘*Know and understand’* Daniel was told. He is given more detail, with the seventy sevens being divided up into seven sevens and sixty-two sevens (total 69). From the going forth of the command/word to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince will be these two periods. Messiah means ‘anointed one’. Isaiah 45:1 refers to Cyrus as the Lord’s anointed, so some think that this Messiah in 9:26 is Cyrus. But in the light of the previous verse, and the most common reference of this word, we must see Messiah as Jesus Christ. Jesus is Messiah. The anointed deliver is also Prince, a royal title (Ps 110).

The word to rebuild Jerusalem (9:25) probably refers to that which Jeremiah spoke in 594 BC, although Cyrus the Persian actually made the decree to rebuild Jerusalem in his first year (Ezra 1:1- 538BC). The temple was rededicated in the sixth year of Darius or 515BC (Ezra 6:15). It was rebuilt with much opposition and distraction, as both Nehemiah and Ezra record.

It is this question of when the command went forth that leads to great differences in interpretation. Dispensationalists, in a strict literal interpretation, take it to be a later decree of Ezra when he returned in 455BC. This conveniently brings the year of the Cross within the frame of 490 years. They hold that the Messiah here is Christ, but take their own view on the ‘*one week’* of the next verse (9:27).

**3.Seventieth seven**

*‘After sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off’* (9:26). To be cut off is to be killed, as in Isaiah 53:8. This refers to the death of Jesus at the end of the seventy weeks. But then some say the one week of verse 27, the seventieth week, does not occur until the second coming of Jesus. It is the seven-year period of the great Tribulation before the Millennium. There is a gap or ‘breach’ between weeks 69 and 70, a gap of almost 2000 years so far.

But it will not be for much longer, according to this view. ‘The minute the prince of the revived Roman Empire affixes his signature to a treaty with the government of Israel confirming the covenant, the seventieth week will begin. Since 1948 there have been numerous attempts to bring peace between Israel and the surrounding Arab nations, but to date all such attempts have failed’. They hold that the temple will be rebuilt and sacrifices restored and then antichrist will come. It is somewhat strange that in their strict literal interpretation they can insert a gap of 2000 years (so far).

This seventieth week should be understood as continuous with the sixty-ninth; the vision began with this overriding declaration of ‘*seventy sevens’* without gaps. The last week is of course, most important, because all that was spoken of in verse 25 is accomplished in it. After the sixty-two weeks (total of 69 weeks) Messiah shall be cut off or killed. He was cut off not for himself but for others. He was killed not for his own sin but for others.

During this same period, the last week, they shall destroy the city and sanctuary (9:26). Jesus effectively ended the function of the temple. The curtain into the Most Holy place was torn as he died. His was the last sacrifice. It was some thirty-five years later that the Romans actually destroyed the temple, and the Jews were scattered. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that this temple will be rebuilt. Moreover, Jesus has won the war against the devil and antichrist (9:26, Heb 2:14).

The one week of 9:27, the ‘seventieth week’ about which volumes have been written, is divided in half. In the middle *‘he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering’*. He shall confirm/ ‘cause to prevail’ a covenant with many (not *make* a covenant), ‘*and on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate’*. This latter point is very difficult but the picture of this one week is clear. It extends from the birth of Jesus in 1AD to the Cross in 33AD and to the destruction of the temple in 70AD (cf. Mat 24:15). There is no compelling reason to extend this vision beyond the first coming of Jesus.

What a wonderful vision this proved to be for Daniel. No wonder Gabriel wanted him to understand. Oh, that we would understand it today. This is a vision of the glorious Messiah. Daniel was told what God would do after some 500 years. The Messiah would bring an end to sins, the reconciliation of man with God, and the giving of righteousness to all who believe. He did all this, bringing an end to all sacrifice by his own once-for-all sacrifice on the Cross.

**Daniel’s divine visitation Daniel 10**

Daniel was a man of prayer. In the first year of Darius he prayed earnestly for the people of God who were in exile. He fasted and confessed his sin and the sin of the people. While doing so the angel flew to his side with an answer to his prayer. He came to reveal to Daniel God’s plans for the future of his people and his kingdom.

**1.Daniel**

Daniel was still seeking the face of God two years later- the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia. He was fasting once again and not eating any fancy food like meat or wine. He was not ‘*anointing himself’* (10:2), which probably means not shaving or even washing. He says he was mourning for three whole weeks.

Why was Daniel mourning? His prayer for the exiles and for the holy city had been answered. In his first year (538BC) Cyrus decreed that Jerusalem and the temple be rebuilt (Ezra 1). Zerubbabel led a contingent back to Judah and Jerusalem. Worship was restored and rebuilding commenced. But in the second year opposition arose and the king, probably the son of Cyrus acting as regent, ordered the work to stop. If such news reached Daniel he would have had good reason to mourn and pray.

It may be asked why Daniel was still in Babylon and not back in Jerusalem. He was over eighty years old at this time, and so left the work of rebuilding to younger men. Moreover, what these rebuilders needed most was someone who would engage in the hidden but strategic work of prayer for the defence and advance of the kingdom of God.

Remember how Moses prayed for Joshua and his troops as they fought the Amalekites (Exod 17:8f). Aaron and Hur had to hold up the hands of Moses because it was when his hands were held up in prayer that victory came. The work of prayer is just as important as being on the frontline. The work of rebuilding the temple required ongoing prayer because opposition would be ongoing.

Is it not the same in the church today? The other day a minister spoke of the great unity that was in his congregation. But in such a situation he feared an attack of Satan. There is no place for complacency, and indeed no time for rest, if the kingdom of God is to advance. At student camps we attended prayer was offered up around the clock. Our society wants to have shops and pubs and gambling houses open 24/7. Will the church meet the challenge with prayer 24/7?

Praise God for faithful prayer warriors in the church today. Such people may be unknown to us, but they are well-known to God. When we were on the mission field, one old, invalid lady always prayed for us. We never got to meet her but the Lord heard her prayers. One Bible commentator writes that it is often Danielles rather than Daniels who are most faithful in prayer for the church of God in the local area and worldwide.

Daniel was by the river, maybe a place of prayer during the exile, when he looked up and saw something awesome. John was worshipping on the Lord’s Day when he had a similar vision. We will come to the actual vision shortly but notice the response of Daniel. See how many times he says he ‘*has no strength’* (4x) or that ‘he *trembled’.* Daniel fell on his face trembling when he saw this great vision (10:8). He was speechless until ‘one like the sons of men’ touched his lips (10:16). This one sought to comfort and strengthen Daniel, for he had important news for him- news he wanted Daniel to understand.

Seeking the face of God in prayer is not something we take lightly. The great and awesome God is on the throne. His glory is dazzling, indeed blinding. His presence caused Ezekiel and others to go dumb for a time. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was dumb after being in the presence of the Lord. Daniel, like these other men of God, realised the depths of his human frailty when in the presence of the Lord (10:8). The apostle Paul had a ‘thorn in the flesh’ which always reminded him of the Lord’s words, ‘*my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness’* (2Cor 12:9).

**2.Divine visitor**

Now we will turn to focus on the man Daniel saw in his vision. He saw a man dressed in linen with a belt of gold (10:5). Linen was the dress of priests (Exod 28:42). The priests were the ones who offered sacrifices in the temple to make atonement for sin. It was around the time to the Passover that Daniel had this vision. Daniel saw the true ‘*High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens’* (Heb 8:1).

With the gold belt around his waist this man was like the vision of John in Revelation 1. The parallel goes further with ‘eyes like fire’ and ‘feet and arms of bronze’. In trying to describe this glorious man Daniel said his face was like lightning. Great brilliance and power are associated with lightning. The ‘one like the son of man’ who John saw was the risen Jesus. Daniel saw the same Lord Jesus. This is a Christophany, an appearance of Jesus before his incarnation. Only Daniel was fit and ready to receive this vision. Those with him by the river, like the companions of Paul on the Damascus Road, heard the sound but saw nothing (Acts 9:7). They fled in fear. Daniel was left alone, prostrate and trembling before this glorious man.

This glorious man touched Daniel and addressed him as the ‘*man greatly beloved’* (10:11). This is what Gabriel said to him in the previous chapter (9:23) and also what the ‘one like the sons of men’ said later in this chapter (10:19). However, this does not mean this glorious man was Gabriel. Neither does it mean the ‘one like the sons of men’ was Gabriel. As we have seen, Jesus is called ‘one like the son of man’ in Revelation. The title comes from Daniel 7:13.

This glorious man later touched Daniel’s lips enabling him to speak. His words and his touch strengthened Daniel. Daniel was in the presence of God, and was about to given a message for the people of God and for the world- a message about the future. ‘*The vision refers to many days yet to come’* (10:14). Daniel would have the solemn privilege and responsibility to convey God’s word to his people, and to the world.

*‘Do you know why I have come to you?’* the glorious man asked Daniel (10:20). Daniel would have been asking the same question- ‘what is this vision all about?’ This was not simply a wonderful, ecstatic experience to make him feel good. This was a visitation from heaven to convey truth. ‘*I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth’* (10:21). In other words, Jesus would tell Daniel what was ‘written’ in God’s diary, a diary which contained not only past events but also future events for this world, and especially for the people or the church of God. This is the content of the closing chapters of Daniel.

**3.Devil**

Daniel was mourning for three weeks (10:2). Why the delay in getting an answer to his prayer? Daniel was told the reason in a verse that is one of the most mysterious in the whole Bible (10:13). Who could have hindered the Lord Jesus in his coming? ‘*The prince of the kingdom of Persia’*. This was a heavenly being not an earthly man because Michael the archangel contended with him. We rarely consider this dimension to our lives, and some dismiss it altogether. But the Bible clearly teaches about angels, good and bad, angels of God and angels of the devil.

Ephesians 6:12 is a verse we must reflect upon. We are in a spiritual battle; we fight ‘*against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’*. This is exactly what Daniel was being told about. The kingdom of Persia had its earthly ruler and it also had its ‘prince of the air’. This prince was behind the decree to stop the rebuilding of the temple. There was also a prince behind the kingdom of Greece (10:20). The devil inspired these men to exalt themselves against God and oppose his divine purposes.

Spiritual warfare as we call it, is not like earthly warfare. We must take up the armour that God gives us for this battle, the battle for the kingdom of God. We take up different weapons, spiritual weapons not carnal weapons (2Cor 10: 4). Prayer is the most important of these weapons, as Daniel well knew. Do you know how important it is to pray? You will be more earnest in prayer if you recognise and understand that your struggles in this world are not against flesh and blood but against your enemy the devil, who prowls around like a lion seeking whom he may devour.

**History is His story Daniel 11:2-20**

I have borrowed today’s title from a book on ‘Daniel’ by Stuart Olyott. It reminds us that God is in control of this world, of kings and kingdoms, so that history is actually the outworking of God’s eternal purposes. ‘Whatever happens in history does so because it is written in God’s book’. What would you say if I told you that in 400 years time Kenya will be the major world power? ‘Not very likely’ you might say. Besides, how do I know and how does anyone know what the world will be like in 400 years. In this chapter Daniel writes of the rise and fall of world powers for the next 400 years, and does so with considerable detail.

What Daniel wrote is so accurate that many doubt he wrote this when he did. Liberal theologians have argued that this was not written by Daniel in the 6th century BC, but by someone else in the 2nd century BC. They, like unbelievers, do not believe in the supernatural so seek to discount this is prophecy. They do not believe in a God who is omniscient, and who reveals himself to man if he so chooses. Daniel was no ‘star gazer’ but an ordinary man who gave himself to prayer (2:28,30). The pre-incarnate Jesus appeared to Daniel and told him this history long before it became human history. It is history written before it occurred.

In the Bible you will be aware of a large gap between the OT and the NT- a gap of over 400 years. The OT closes with Nehemiah returning with the last of the Exiles around 430BC and Malachi prophesying at this same time. What happened during this inter-testamental period? Some Bibles include the apocryphal books, like Maccabees, which tell of the Jewish revolt against Antiochus Epiphanies in 168BC. There is also a secular history of this period. But here in this chapter we have a Biblical history, albeit in a condensed form but amazingly written years beforehand. The Bible truly is a book like no other.

**1.Persia and Greece**

In a previous vision, one when Belshazzar was still king of Babylon (8:1), Daniel saw a powerful ram get crushed by a more powerful goat. The ram symbolised Persia and the goat symbolised Greece. The focus of that vision was the ‘little horn’ arising from the goat and making threats towards the glorious land (8:9). The focus is the same here in chapter 11, but with much more detail.

*‘Now I will tell you the truth’* (11:2). The ‘glorious man’ Daniel saw by the river tells him of coming kingdoms that will dominate the world. Cyrus the Persian was on the throne at the time as the leader of the world superpower. After him would come three more Persian kings and then the Persian Empire would fall. Xerxes was the fourth Persian ruler. He became very rich and with his wealth built a large, well equipped army. He went and attacked Greece. And what happened? A mighty king arose, namely Alexander the Great, who swiftly crushed the Persians and many other nations before him (11:3).

Alexander’s exploits were so amazing that history books are filled with the story of this great conqueror. But here in the Bible we have history recorded from God’s perspective. Divine history is His story, as we have said. It focuses on the kingdom of God as it interacts with and indeed confronts the kingdoms of this world. Consequently Alexander the Great passes with just one verse (11:3). Alexander was dead by the age of thirty-two. The kingdom of Greece was divided among his four generals; he had no son. Eventually four kingdoms emerged as prophesied here in 11:4 - and also back in 8:8. From these four, two became more prominent as they jostled for power over the next 400 years. Syria became the realm of the Seleucids, while Egypt became the realm of the Ptolemy’s. These are the kings of the North and the South respectively. In between these two competing nations was the glorious land, the home of the Jews, the people of God.

**2.North and South**

The rest of the passage before us tells of the political intrigues and battles of these two kingdoms. We see the pendulum swing from one to the other as pride leads kings to overstep the mark, or fall through internal strife. We see royal marriages aimed at settling disputes but failing to do so.

The king of the south, namely Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246BC) gave his daughter Berenice to the king of the north- in a bigamous marriage. After Ptolemy died the marriage was broken. The former wife however, poisoned her husband Antiochus, and got her sons to murder Berenice and her child so they could inherit the throne (11:6). But Berenice’s brother became the next king in Egypt. He attacked the north and killed those who had murdered his sister and her children.

The secular history of this period is detailed and interesting, according to historians. But the amazing thing is that it fits very neatly with this prophecy in Daniel. We will not go through all this in detail today but will try to get an overview of this history. It is good to view history on a time line. These two Hellenistic or Greek kingdoms ruled from 330BC through to 63 BC when the Romans came to power. There will be special focus upon the years 175-164BC when Antiochus Epiphanies ruled. He attacked Jerusalem and the temple, as we have seen before and will see again later in this chapter.

**3.The Glorious land**

In the middle of this ongoing struggle between North and South was the glorious land. As the kingdoms of men rise and fall the kingdom of God remains. Daniel’s main concern, like that of God’s, was for the kingdom of God. He prayed for the restoration of the temple and the holy city. He wanted worship to start again and for God to be glorified. God revealed to Daniel what his people would experience over the coming centuries- indeed until Messiah comes.

When one king of the North became powerful he made a ‘*stand in the Glorious Land with destruction in his power’* (11:16). This king was Antiochus the Great who became almost invincible, although it is not clear what was the nature or outcome of this stand that he took. The next Seleucid king was called Seleucis Philopater (187-175BC). He sent his chief minister to rob the temple of its treasures, but according to 2 Maccabees he was put off by an apparition. Philopater disappeared shortly after this. It is generally believed that his chief minister poisoned him- ‘*he shall be destroyed but not in anger or in battle’* (11:20).

Reading this chapter is hard going when we are not familiar with this history. But is helpful to our Christian life to get a better understanding of history, especially the history of the people of God. The Jews taught their children their history and we have it written in our Bibles. We must teach ourselves and our children this history.

History reminds us of God’s working in this world. Many times down through the ages attempts have been made to exterminate the people of God, to get rid of these people who insist that God created the world and that he is still alive and powerful to save. You do not have to look back very far to see that the world has not changed a great deal. In fact, you can look around today and see the same struggle going on between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.

Let us be discerning as we read secular history and even as we read the news today. There will be little mention of God is such histories, but God is never separated from the events of this world. There is no mention of God in this prophecy we have just read, but it is the word of God nevertheless. It is like the book of Esther. The world may not see the hand of God but all that happens is written in his book before it happens. The Bible teaches us to view history, and current events also, from God’s perspective. What is God doing in the world today? Is this the way that you think?

God not only rules over the nations, he rules over economies and over the environment. God knew what nations would rise and fall in the next 400 years- he told Daniel. We can be confident that God has such knowledge today. We can be confident that God knows about our economy and our environment. Let us not therefore get caught up in all the speculation and ‘disaster scenarios’ that come out of summits going on around the world. Remember, God is on the throne and he will remain there even when this world and all that is in it passes away.

Isaiah said

*God sits above the circle of the earth*

*And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers*

*He stretches out the heavens like a curtain*

*And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in*

*He brings the princes to nothing*

*He makes the judges of the earth useless* (Isa 40:22f)

**A vile person Daniel 11:21-35**

*“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place”* (Mat 24:15). Jesus spoke these words to his disciples in answer to their question about the time and manner of his coming again at the end of the age. What did Jesus mean by these words?

Clearly, he expected his disciples to know about the ‘abomination of desolation’ in Daniel, and to have some understanding of its significance. If we are to understand what Jesus said then we also need to know what he was talking about, and to do this we need to know what Daniel wrote. Those who ignore the OT will have trouble understanding this reference, and many other passages of the NT.

**1.Rise**

The glorious man whom Daniel saw in this his final vision continues to tell him about future kingdoms on the earth. He has covered some 350 years with kings of the North (Seleucids in Syria) jostling for power with kings of the South (Ptolemy’s in Egypt). The glorious land or holy land was in the middle of this jostling, but there was no concerted effort to attack Jerusalem and destroy it over this time- apart from attempts to rob the temple of its treasure. Remember, this is history from God’s perspective. The focus is upon the kingdom of God, upon his people and his dwelling place. Whereas Alexander the Great was given only one verse (11:3), Antiochus Epiphanies is the focus of the fifteen verses we are looking at today.

*‘In his place shall arise a vile person’* (11:21). This is none other than Antiochus IV or Antiochus Epiphanies (‘illustrious one’). He was commonly known as Antiochus Epimanes (the mad man). He was not in direct line to the throne of the North, but seized it by intrigue from his young nephew. Hence he was not given the honour of royalty (11: 21). Antiochus Epiphanies was a smooth talker, he was cunning and deceptive, but also a man of violence. We have come across him in a previous vision of Daniel’s; he was the ‘little horn’ which grew exceedingly great towards the east and towards the glorious land (8:9). In this vision Daniel is given more detail of this vile and violent person, the enemy of all that is true and righteous.

Antiochus Epiphanies started sweeping across the land taking local provinces, and breaking long standing agreements if expedient. With further expediency, since he had only ‘*a small number of people’* (11: 23) he made an alliance with Egypt. ‘*He shall enter peaceably’* (11:24), gaining access and making alliances. He distributed plunder and spoils of battle to further his alliances- but only for a time. This man was only concerned about himself and his power. Relationships and alliances meant nothing to this man of ever increasing wickedness.

By 170BC Antiochus Epiphanies had became powerful and attacked Egypt with a great army (11:25). The king of the South had an even greater army but was weakened by internal dissent- ‘*those who eat of the portion of his delicacies shall destroy him and his army shall be swept away’* (11:26). Eventually the two kings met around the table making a sham agreement. Antiochus Epiphanies pretended he would share power with Philometer, who in turn pretended to believe him. They departed in mutual deception - but it would not be the last time they met, for God’s appointed time had not yet come (11:27). On his return from Egypt, Antiochus Epiphanies, who hated anything and anyone with any semblance of holiness, paused to attack Jerusalem. He killed thousands of Jews, profaned the temple and robbed it of its wealth.

Antiochus would launch another invasion on Egypt not long afterwards - it was at the appointed or divinely ordained time (11:29). He was still bent on world domination. But things did not go as he planned. Ships from Kittim/Cyprus shall come against him (11:30). The Romans got news of this attack and came to the defence of Egypt. The Roman commander Popilius Laenas met Antiochus Epiphanies with a letter from the Roman Senate demanding he leave or face the armies of Rome. Antiochus was humiliated. He returned in rage, rage which he vented upon the holy city and its people in 167BC.

**2.Rage**

Antiochus Epiphanies had a special, devil-inspired hatred for ‘*the holy covenant’*, the Jews and their religion. He found some apostate Jews and gained their confidence. And so he came to the holy city ‘in peace’ as it were. He came on a Sabbath day. But his deception soon gave way to violent attack upon all at the temple, including women and children. He entered the sanctuary defiling it with a pigs head. He removed the altar and set up an idol, the idol of Zeus- or the ‘*abomination of desolation’* (11:31). Sacrifices were effectively ended, and he also banned circumcision.

These were very dark days for the people of God. With this ‘abomination of desolation’ in the Most Holy place, their place of worship remained desecrated. Some of their own people had been taken in by flattery and joined the forces of evil. They did not know who they could trust for ‘*many shall join them by intrigue/slipperiness’* (11:34).

It is hard for us to imagine worshipping in secret for fear of being arrested or killed- although it is the case in parts of the world today. As part of this opposition, evil regimes send spies into meetings. People pretend to be believers to gain access to meetings and spy on the worshippers. Living in such hard times has a cleansing effect upon the fellowship of God’s people. There are no half-hearted believers in such meetings. There are no ‘Christmas and Easter Christians’ in such meetings.

Antiochus Epiphanies wanted the Jews and their religion exterminated- as have other rulers even in recent times. Men like Stalin and Mao Tse Tung wanted Christians and their religion exterminated. But there will be those of God’s people who ‘*will be strong and carry out great exploits’* (11:32). They shall find strength and take action to resist evil. While ever they had breath they continued to worship God and gave special instruction (11:33).

The Jews could not attend to rituals but they could attend to the word of God. No one could stop them from instructing their children or their neighbours. The enemy knows the importance of doctrine to the people of God and seeks to undermine the truth of God’s word. Antiochus was ready to use the sword, but also ready to use deception and any other means to undermine and destroy the faith of God’s people. Again, many rulers have followed these methods in an effort to destroy the church.

**3.Fall**

Antiochus Epiphanies did eventually fall. He died suddenly through illness or some non-human means. But this vision does not refer to his fall- although we find mention of ‘*the appointed time’* once again (11:35). This is an encouraging word. In a sense he continues on, being transformed into the antichrist in the next section.

The fall that is spoken of in this passage is of the people of God. The time of persecution will be one of severe testing. Some will fall by the wayside and some will fall by the sword- very different ways of falling! As Jesus indicated in the parable of the soils, some seed fell on stony ground and soon ran out of sustenance and some seed fell among the weeds which choked it. This was a time of purifying and pruning among the Jews in Jerusalem.

Pruning of course, has the effect of strengthening the tree and bringing better fruit. Though the number of faithful may fall, the depth of the faith of those who stand grows deeper. How deep is the faith of those who are ready to die by the sword or the flame? They died rather than deny the God of their fathers. They died knowing that death is not the end. The end is judgment day.

You have been hearing a lot about the end times as we have looked at this book of Daniel together. You probably want to hear more about the present and how you can have a better life today. But a Christian who does not know what death holds for him, a Christian who does not understand the promise of eternal life, will not be able to stand in days of testing. And such days may come sooner than we think. Will you be one who falls by the wayside, or will you be one ready to fall by the sword?

To conclude, we see here a lot about Antiochus Epiphanies because he is an antichrist figure pointing to the antichrist spoken of in the next section, and in the NT. What have we learned from this prototype antichrist? We have seen unbridled hatred for the things of God. Jerusalem was a small city, insignificant in the days of Antiochus. He attacked it, not because it was a threat to his regime but because it was a reminder of his wickedness. He could not stand the sight of truth and righteousness. Maybe you know such people today.

Antiochus found a weakness in the defence of the holy city. He could get some Jews to cross over to his side. We in the church must be on guard against any doctrinal, moral, or spiritual weakness. We are engaged in a spiritual battle, no less so than the people of Jerusalem in the time of Antiochus. Teach yourself and your children the word of God so they can stand firm in this battle. Hold on till Jesus comes again- it will not be long and you can do it in his strength.

**Man of Sin Daniel 11:36-45**

Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul spoke of the man of sin/lawlessness… ‘*who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God’* (2Thess 2:3,4). Who is this man of sin that Paul is referring to? This ‘man of sin’ is often called the antichrist. To find out more about the antichrist we need to go back to the OT and to this passage in Daniel 11. In Daniel 11 we read of a king who will ‘*exalt and magnify himself above every god’* (11:36). We have also come across such a person previously in Daniel as the ‘little horn’ who will speak pompous words against the Most High (7:25) and exalt himself in his heart (8:25).

In the previous verses of chapter 11 Daniel spoke a vile person who will become king of the North. He was prophesying of Antiochus Epiphanies, the historical person who attacked the temple and stopped the Jews from worshipping God. As we come to vs. 36 we find things about this king that do not fit Antiochus Epiphanies. We find a subtle change from the historical person to an eschatological figure, a king who will come at the end of time (11:35,40). Many try to identify this figure, and indeed have identified him down through history. As John tells us ‘*even now many antichrists have come’* … but he also says, ‘*the Antichrist as coming’* (1Jn 2:18). The antichrist has not yet come because when he does come it will be the end.

‘History is full of prominent individuals who have set themselves up and tried to put down the people of God’ (Olyott). ‘They are forerunners of the final Antichrist’. We have in our Confession reference to the Pope as the antichrist. I am sure some Christians thought Hitler was the antichrist. I remember one member of the Beatles band claimed he was more popular that Jesus Christ. He is now dead, as is Hitler, and all who have exalted themselves against God down through history. But when the antichrist comes there will be a final battle and it will be the end of the kingdoms of men and of this world.

**1.Greater than God**

The previous section of this final vision given to Daniel spoke of the people of God persevering under the terrible persecution of Antiochus Epiphanies. It was all in the ‘*appointed time’*. But Antiochus Epiphanies, who like many other kings of his day did claim divinity, did not seek to destroy all religion-just true religion. Of him it could not be said ‘nor regard any god (11:37). This king shall ‘*magnify himself above every god and speak blasphemies against the God of gods’* (11:37). This king is viler than Antiochus Epiphanies, or any other earthly king. Antiochus Epiphanies is spoken of in detail because he points forward to such a king, but this king is worse by far.

The antichrist will ‘*honour a god of fortresses'* (11:38). He will get everything he wants by brute force. ‘Might is right’ will be his motto. Here is sin that is fully matured. Like the devil, he is a liar and murderer. He will have total disregard for love and relationships, even love between a man and a woman. He will engage in unbridled corruption and violence as he promotes his own power and glory.

The antichrist will appear invincible as he advances across the face of the earth, crushing all before him. No human being will be able to withstand him. ‘*The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all power, signs and lying wonders’. ‘He will sit as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is God’* (2Thess 2: 9, 4). But God will bring him down, according to what has been determined.

**2.Last battle**

*‘At the time of the end’* (11:40). This verse tells of a battle at the end of time. Many readers point to particular nations as they link this battle with Armageddon in Revelation 16: 16. The passages may well be related but they are apocalyptic in genre. What Daniel is now writing is not historical, as was the case previously. How can we say this? Well look at Daniel 11:41. Edom, Moab and Ammon were not in existence in Daniel’s time, or after him. These were nations that opposed Moses as he led Israel to the promise land. Like Armageddon, which symbolises the place of battles in Israel, these nations symbolise the enemies of Israel.

Those who wish to take these verses literally must also contend with another anachronism- that of the nature of the last battle. ‘*The king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind with chariots, horsemen and many ships* (11:40). If this refers to a literal future battle then such equipment will need to be revived!

The kings of the North and the South are again in battle in this passage, but they are engaged in battle against a third king, namely antichrist. The antichrist will strike many countries but not those that are already enemies of Gods’ people. He ‘*will enter the Glorious Land’* (11:41) in this time of the end. ‘This should come as no surprise’ writes Allan Harman, because ‘as part of prophetic symbolism the idea of major battles in the land of Israel at the end times has already been introduced by Ezekiel in his reference to God and Magog attacking Israel (Ezek 38:18)’. The book of Revelation also picks up on this battle as we have also seen, referring to Gog and Magog being gathered together for battle (Rev 20:8).

**3.His end**

The antichrist ‘*will come to his end, and no one will help him’*, according to this word of Daniel (11:45). Just what is the news from the east and the north that troubles him is not clear, except that it leads him to great fury and destruction. We might recall the news the wise men brought from the east to King Herod and the savage pogrom he launched against baby boys in the holy land. With deception and violence Herod sought to kill the newborn Son of God. Herod is another king who prefigures the antichrist. He reminded the people at that time of the power of evil in this present fallen world. Do you really understand the depth of what God was doing in sending his Son into this world? How shallow is the understanding of many as they sing and celebrate at this time of the year.

Daniel writes of the antichrist planting his tents between the seas on the holy mountain. He will make a last ditched effort to destroy the people of God; but he will fail. He is now restrained but will be revealed at the end. However, as Paul tells us, ‘*the Lord will consume him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him with the brightness of his coming’* (2Thess 2:8). Jesus Christ will simply ‘blow him out of the water’ when he returns in all his power and glory.

Let us be comforted by these words, even as we are made aware of terrible times ahead for the people of God. There will be martyrs again. Evil will increase before the Lord returns (2Tim 3:13). We must be serious about our faith. There is too much flippant and light-hearted Christianity today. There is too much careless Christianity today. We must be alert to the truth of the antichrist and the power of evil. But we need not be alarmed because Jesus is coming and he will bring an end to the antichrist.

‘We will be better prepared for those days if we can learn from this chapter a lesson we have already learned several times in our studies of the book of Daniel. It is that nothing happens without the approval of our heavenly Father. History is in God’s hands’.

**The end Daniel 12:1-3**

Marvellous and profound truths were revealed to Daniel in this final vision recorded in this book that bears his name. He was an old man at this time but still walking faithfully with his God. He was by the river in Babylon; he was fasting and praying when the Lord Jesus appeared to him.

The pre-incarnate Jesus told Daniel what his people would see and experience in this world in the next 400 years. He went to tell Daniel of the antichrist who would arise, and of tribulation for the people of God as the end of the world approaches. But in the end the antichrist will be destroyed and, according to the passage before us today, the people of God will be delivered.

**1.The book**

The archangel Michael is mentioned once again. He was first mentioned with reference to Jesus coming in answer to Daniel’s prayer (10:13). The chief prince, Michael, fought against the prince of Persia. Michael is the angel or ‘*great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people’* (12:1). He is the guardian angel of the ‘people of God’, a reference to the Jews in this context but, in the light of the NT, to all who trust in God and follow him.

Daniel was engaged in a spiritual battle while living in Babylon. We are engaged in a spiritual battle living in this city. In this vision we get a glimpse of the nature of this battle. It is a battle in the heavenly realms, so it is impossible for us to fight with purely human resources. The apostle Paul told the Ephesian and Corinthian churches the same thing (Eph 6, 2Cor 10). He told them to put on the armour of God and to fight with the weapons of God. Prayer is essential in this battle. Daniel was a man of prayer.

Even though we have angels watching over us we do not pray to angels. Certainly we do not pray to dead men and women whom the Pope calls saints. Why do people want to talk with servants when they talk with the king! We are privileged to be able to call upon God in prayer. The only Mediator is Jesus Christ who died for us. We pray in his name but Jesus himself told us to pray, ‘Our Father in heaven’.

Daniel was told that there will be great trouble for his people; trouble like never before in the history of the world. Jesus is now telling about events beyond the time of Antiochus Epiphanies. He is telling about events towards the end of the world. He is telling about the people of God who now include Gentiles as well as Jews- as a brief look at the book of Revelation will confirm. Those who believe in Jesus Christ will suffer in this world. Jesus told his disciples, ‘*in this world you will have tribulation’* (Jn 16:33). Suffering will not get less but will in fact increase as the end approaches. The antichrist will become more active and more desperate as he seeks to increase his army and his power in a vain attempt to defeat Almighty God.

In the midst of this suffering God’s people will actually grow stronger. They will draw near to God and carry out great exploits (11: 32). They will stand firm in the truth of the gospel. Jesus told Daniel ‘*at that time your people will be delivered’* (12:1). The incarnate Jesus told his disciples much the same thing- ‘*be of good cheer; I have overcome the world’* (Jn 16:33). ‘*Then comes the end’* wrote the apostle Paul, ‘*when he [Jesus] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet’* (1Cor 15:24, 25).

Who are the people who will be delivered? They are ‘your people’, the people who are of the same faith as Daniel. But notice the extra detail about these people. They are those whose names are ‘*written in the book’* (12:1). Moses first referred to such a book in Exodus 32:32. This is the book referred to in Revelation 20:12, the Book of Life. God knows those who are his people because he chose them. He wrote their names in his book in the very beginning, and he will deliver them in the end.

This is not a book recording the names of nations, of ethnic groups, of families, or of religious groups. It is not like the book at cemeteries with different sections for Protestants and Catholics, for Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Anglicans. This is the Book of Life with the name of everyone who is saved by the blood of Jesus Christ and who will be raised to life on the Day of Judgment.

**2.The Resurrection**

These final words spoken to Daniel in this vision are saturated with doctrine. We find in the second verse the doctrine of the resurrection clearly outlined. For the first time in the Bible ‘everlasting life’ is spoken of directly. The apostle Paul did not invent this doctrine. He clung to the doctrine of the resurrection with all his might because it is true and essential to faith in Jesus Christ. ‘*If the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen* *and if Christ is not risen your faith is futile’* (1Cor 15:16-17).

Did you hear the archbishop saying the virgin birth is not essential to the Christian faith? There are those who say the resurrection is not essential either. What a great tragedy it is when men make up their own doctrines and still call themselves Christians. ‘*Your faith is futile, and you are still dead in your sins’* is the simple word the apostle Paul has for such people! Jesus also spoke of the resurrection in unequivocal terms. He said, ‘*all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out’* (Jn 5:28). Do not be put off by the word ‘many’ in Daniel 12:2; it means nothing less than ‘all’.

What will happen at the resurrection? Some will rise to everlasting life. Who are these? In this context they are those whose names are written in the book. The sovereign God wrote their names in his book and he will raise them to life in the last day, just as he raised Jesus to life. What about those whose names are not written in the book? They will be raised also, but not to life. They will be raised ‘*to shame and everlasting contempt’* (12:2). All will be raised, but there will be two destinies. Those who are outside of Christ will be put to shame as their life is exposed. As their life is exposed they will be rendered speechless. They will not have Jesus to intercede for them because they rejected Jesus in this life. They will be condemned by the Judge of all men, and live in utter contempt and eternal punishment.

**3.Shining stars**

The final word of the pre-incarnate Jesus to Daniel is indeed beautiful. It is a word about ‘*those who are wise’*, who is this context are those who stand firm in the truth of God and his word. This has nothing to do with earthly wisdom. This is heavenly wisdom. This is wisdom from above. The wise are those who upon hearing the gospel repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Knowing the righteousness of God, the wise are concerned above all things for righteousness. They ‘*are those who turn many to righteousness’* (12:3).

In this dark world the wise will shine like stars in the night sky. A star guided the wise men to the Christ child in Bethlehem- despite what the bishop of Canterbury says. It is written in the Bible and true Christians believe the Bible. They believe every word as the infallible word of God. Stars were once used in navigation, guiding mariners across the dark ocean waters. This is the picture set before us in this verse. There is a great and desperate need for such guiding lights in this dark world in which we live. We need a light to guide us on our journey, lest we get lost and perish.

Jesus is the light of the world. Followers of Jesus are called upon to reflect his marvellous light. Paul calls upon the children of God to be blameless and pure, without fault in this crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold fast the word of life (Phil 2:15). Paul may well have had these words from Daniel in mind as he wrote this letter to the church at Philippi.

What an amazing description this is of a believer. Are you like a star shining forth into this dark and depraved world? Are you reflecting the glory of God? Are you telling those around you the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you praying for many to turn from sin and believe in Jesus Christ? What a great passage this is for evangelism. We have here the doctrines of heaven and hell, of sovereign election, of the resurrection, and of divine judgment. And finally, we have the doctrine of mission, the people of God shining like stars into the community in which the Lord in his providence has placed them.

**Press on Daniel 12: 4-13**

The message of the pre-incarnate Jesus to Daniel in this vision covers events in this world from the time of Daniel to the end of the world. Close to the end there will be great tribulation but the people of God will be delivered. Following the judgment will be the resurrection of the dead, some to everlasting life and some to everlasting disgrace. ‘*And now I will tell you the truth’* (11:2).

Daniel was told to ‘*shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end’* (12:4). But the vision does not finish here. The man clothed in linen was speaking to Daniel, but two others now appear on the scene. They ask Jesus how long it will be till these wonders take place (12: 6). Daniel is also interested in this question (12: 8).

You are probably interested in this question also. The matter of when this world will end potentially affects all that we do. People take a very different view of life when told they only have a few weeks or months to live. The matter of when we will face divine judgment affects how we live today. But of first importance is to acknowledge that what is written here is true. We must believe this word of Jesus. By believing in Jesus, fear of the end and fear of judgment is removed.

**1.Wrap it up**

Many libraries have a rare book section. Such books are treated very carefully. They cannot be borrowed, but may be read in the library or copied. Sometimes they are sealed in a glass case for further protection. Each day a page may be turned so people can read, but not touch, this rare book. A few hundred years ago libraries were quite small by today’s standards. Many books were still written and copied by hand. But all these libraries would have had a copy of the Bible in them, usually in a prominent position. Some people would go to the library every day to read the page that was opened for that day. Knowledge has increased exponentially but is not God’s word, the Bible, fundamental to all knowledge even today?

Daniel was told to seal up this book, this book containing the words of Jesus, till the time of the end. This book is like no other. It is not like a newspaper, a history book or a novel because it tells the absolute truth, the truth of God, and it tells about the future of this world as God has planned it. These words are precious; indeed they must never be lost. They must be passed on to successive generations. Daniel would not see the days he wrote about. He would rest; he would pass from this world and rise to receive his inheritance at the time of the end (12:13). Future generations of God’s people would experience even greater suffering and tribulation. They would need the same comfort and encouragement that Daniel was now receiving from heaven.

Some parents worry about bringing a child into this troubled world- and they have every reason to be worried. But the words that we read here give us hope, and they will give hope and assurance to our children. In the middle of the darkest tunnel that we may enter, even that of death, these words shine as a light at the end of that tunnel.

In all this we are reminded of the solemn nature of the Bible that we have in our hands. Every word of Scripture is divinely inspired and is for our instruction and edification (2Tim 3:16). These are words written by men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2Peter 1:12). Peter tells us that men of old were ministering to us when they wrote the Scriptures, because they were searching for and writing about things which we are blessed to understand more fully (1Peter 1:10-12).

Daniel was here recording a vision about things in the near and the distant future. He confessed he did not understand all that was revealed to him (12:8). But this did not lead him to despair, much less to unbelief. Some people get unsettled when they cannot understand something in the Bible. They rack their brains and start twisting things to make them fit. We are going to come across things today that we will not understand, but let us not get upset. Let us press on in the faith and let the light of the glory of Christ shine ever more brightly in our lives.

How amazing is the Bible that we have before us. It is a book in which our parents found blessing as they read it, our grandparents and their parents also. Here is a book which Daniel received and wrote. He was blessed by this revelation. The Bible is the book for all generations. Is the Bible precious to you? I was encouraged to read that our Prime Minister used to carry a small Bible with him wherever he went. I pray that he continues to do so, and that you also will always have a Bible within reach. Best of all, memorise portions of the Bible. Then if trouble comes and your copy of the Bible is forcibly taken from you, you still have it in your mind, and accessible by your heart. How thankful we are today that Daniel did seal up the words of this vision and that God has preserved them for us to read today.

**2.When**

Daniel saw ‘*two others’* appear as his vision came to an end. They stood on each bank of the river. They asked Jesus, who was above the waters, when these ‘*wonders’* would be fulfilled (12: 6). They were indeed amazing things which Daniel was told. These other heavenly visitors must have been listening to what Daniel was told. They now ask a question which was on Daniel lips. When will the end come? When will the books be opened, when will the antichrist and Satan be destroyed, when will the people of God be delivered, and when will all be raised from the dead.

When Jesus came into this world as a man he was asked the same thing. His disciples asked Jesus ‘when will these things be’ as he spoke about the end of the age (Mat 24:3). Whilst Jesus told his disciples all about the end, what life would be like and how they would survive, he did not tell them the time of the end. He told them of signs pointing to the end. For one thing, Jesus said he did not know (Mark 13:32), but more importantly it was not the will of God to reveal the day or the hour.

The answer here in Daniel’s era was much the same. Jesus raised both hands to heaven to utter a solemn oath as he answered this question. He gave no precise date but a rather cryptic word about a ‘*time, times and half time’* (12:7). This was not the first time that Daniel had heard these words. In a previous vision he was told that the people of God would be given into his [the enemy] hand for a time, times and a half time (7:25).

The time of tribulation will not go on forever. God determines times and seasons, not man or Satan. When things seem to be going well for the enemy- from time to times- then God will cut short their time - and a half. God will cut short those days for the sake of the elect (Mat 24: 22). The people of God will be brought very low towards the end. They will be powerless in the face of intense opposition. They will be broken and shattered, but by the power of God they will be delivered. This is what God will permit, and he will permit it for good reason as we see- that many may be purified and made white (12:10).

Daniel heard the answer but did not understand it (12:8). He asked Jesus what was in effect the same question. When? After a gentle rebuke he was reminded of what, in the purposes of God, would happen at the end. But he is then told two time intervals- 1290 days and 1335 days (12:11, 12). The first, at least, is from the time that the abomination of desolation is set up. This points to the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanies in 168BC, but in the light of Jesus words in Matthew 24:15 could also point to the tyranny of Titus in 70AD. It is difficult to understand what these times mean, but still many take them literally and get lead into all manner of speculation. This is a vision, and like similar numbers in other apocalyptic passages it is best to take them as symbolic. God is certainly counting the days and we should be also but only God knows when the counting will stop.

**3.Wait**

In answer to the question ‘when’, Daniel is told to ‘wait’! To accept there are things we cannot know is not something human beings readily accept. To be told to wait is regarded as being of no help at all. But for Daniel and us it is different in that we know the One who does know. We can wait with patience, knowing that God knows the day and the hour, and that he also knows us, that he loves us and has delivered us already in his Son Jesus Christ.

*‘Blessed is he who waits’* Daniel was told (12:12). ‘*He who endures to the end will be saved’* said the incarnate Jesus (Mat 24:13). Daniel was told not once but twice in this final message- ‘*go your way till the end’* (12:9.13). Jesus had told him all he needed to know, all he needed to know to live in this world; to live with hope and assurance that he and future generations would indeed be blessed as they waited for the second coming of Jesus and the judgment.

Nothing is going to change dramatically in this world until the end. ‘*While the earth remains seedtime and harvest …shall not cease’* (Gen 8:22). The wicked will go on in their wicked ways. They may increase in knowledge but not in wisdom. The people of God on the other hand, will continue to suffer at the hands of Satan and his wicked followers. But this will be a time of refinement and purification for the saints. Being made more and more like Christ, they will be ready and waiting to enter into his glory when he comes. Amen.

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Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

Sydney West congregation

P.O. Box 3007, Mt Druitt Village

NSW, Australia 2770

Ph.02 97240877

Email. dkmuldoon@hotmail.com