

A STUDY OF DANIEL

LARGE PRINT
STUDY GUIDE

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Faith Under Fire



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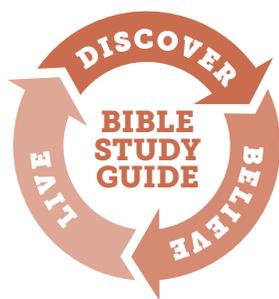
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**BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
LARGE PRINT EDITION**

Faith Under Fire

**A STUDY OF
DANIEL**

**Craig West
Heath Kirkwood
Tom Howe**



 **BaptistWayPress®**
Dallas, Texas

*Faith Under Fire: A Study of Daniel—
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide—Large Print Edition*

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further

thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 9–10 and on the first page of each lesson.
 - Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
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- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching

plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.

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Faith Under Fire

A Study of Daniel

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Introducing

FAITH UNDER FIRE

A STUDY OF DANIEL

Daniel is a book of prophecy written to educate and encourage the exiled Jews by revealing future tribulations and kingdom promises. It was also written to display God's sovereign power through miracles. There are many prophetic interpretations especially in the last half of this book. These chapters contain Bible prophecy, much like the book of Revelation. The challenge of the book of Daniel is interpretation. Please understand that the interpretations written in this study guide may or may not align with your specific beliefs. With that said, use this book, as a road map, to help you navigate which path, and/or interpretations to follow. Your opinions are valuable so enjoy the vibrant class discussion that will, more than likely, occur when discussing these lessons.

Background on the Book of Daniel

Daniel grew up as a good Jewish boy in Israel. As a teenager, possibly around 15 years of age, a foreign enemy conquered his nation and he was taken captive and placed in a different culture, a different environment with different people who spoke a different language and ate different food. Here he would spend the rest of his life successfully exalting God by living a ***faith under fire***.

The book begins in 605 B.C. when Babylon conquered Jerusalem and deported many Jewish captives including Daniel and his three friends. It continues to the eventual demise of Babylonian supremacy in 539 B.C. when the Medo-Persian army conquered Babylon (5:30-31) and even goes even beyond that to 536 B.C. (10:1). After his kidnaping, Daniel spent the rest of his life (another 70 years or more) successfully exalting God by his character and service. He certainly made the most of the “opportunity” God had given him. And throughout this book, Daniel passionately remembered his home as evidenced in his writings.

The Book of Daniel in Our Day

Can you trust God when your world falls apart? Daniel did. He lived close to God all the days of his life, serving Him faithfully and with great integrity in a foreign land. Daniel teaches us that God is faithful and He is in control.

The Book of Daniel was written to encourage the exiled Jews living in Babylonia by revealing God's continued plan for them. This gave the Jews a great hope for the future even though their past was filled with great heartbreak and pain.

This 14-week study is about God's sovereign power through great miracles and Bible prophecy. It also serves as a wonderful reminder of the power of prayer in a Christian's life. As a result of this study, our prayer is that your faith will be strengthened and you will have a deeper dependence on the power and providence of God.

FAITH UNDER FIRE: A STUDY OF DANIEL

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Lesson 3	The Dream Revealed	Daniel 2:31-49
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Lesson 13	History in the Making	Daniel 11:1-45
Lesson 14	Shine Like the Stars	Daniel 12:1-13
Easter Lesson	Because He Lives	Matthew 28:1-10

Additional Resources for Studying the Book of Daniel¹

- Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Daniel (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)*. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2017.
- James Montgomery Boice. *Daniel. An Expositional Commentary*. Ada, Minnesota: Baker Books, 2006.
- Iain M. Duguid. *Daniel. Reformed Expository Commentary*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2008.
- James Harman. *Daniel's Prophecies Unsealed: Understanding the Time of the End*. Maitland, Florida: Prophecy Countdown Publications, 2018.
- Paul R. House. *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2018.
- David Jeremiah. *The Handwriting On The Wall: Secrets From the Prophecies of Daniel*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1992.
- Clarence Larkin. *The Book of Daniel (Illustrated)*. Scotts Valley, California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.
- Tremper Longman III. *Daniel. The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999.
- John MacArthur. *MacArthur Bible Studies Book 5. Daniel: God's Control Over Rulers and Nations*. Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2000.
- J. Vernon McGee. *Daniel. The Prophets*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1995.

- Dwight L. Moody. *Daniel. Man of God: Being a Man of Character in a Babylon World* (Revised Edition). Chicago, Illinois: Aneko Press, 2018.
- John Phillips. *Exploring the Book of Daniel (John Phillips Commentary Series)*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Productions, 2004.
- Ronald W. Pierce. *Daniel. (Teach the Text Commentary Series)*. Ada, Minnesota: Baker Books, 2015.
- Charles R. Swindoll. *Daniel: God's Pattern for the Future*. Nashville, Tennessee: W Pub Group, 1996.
- John F. Walvoord. *Daniel. The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2012.
- John C. Whitcomb. *Daniel (Everyday Bible Commentary Series)*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2018.
- Warren W. Wiersbe. *Daniel (The Wiersbe Bible Study Series). Determining to Go God's Direction*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C. Cook, 2012.

NOTES

1. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BaptistWay Press® with all of its comments.

lesson 1

A Diet for Success

MAIN IDEA

Hard times not only build character, but they also reveal it. How a person handles difficulties says a lot about that person's beliefs.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

When you have faced a difficult situation, how did you handle it and what did it reveal about your faith?

STUDY AIM

To learn to trust God when my world falls apart

QUICK READ

As a teenager, Daniel was taken captive to a foreign land, but he chose to serve God faithfully in a hostile environment.

Introduction

As a younger man, I studied music education in college. One of the first things I learned about a piece of music was that the melody appears repeatedly for the listener. It serves as a point of connection between composer and audience. It takes the smaller sections of the piece, and like a jigsaw puzzle, the melody places them together until the overall picture is revealed.

In a similar fashion, the melody of the book of Daniel repeats itself over and over: God is sovereign over all things, including the kings and kingdoms of this world. As a young man, Daniel was forcibly removed from his homeland and carried away to a place he'd never seen. It would have been completely understandable had Daniel allowed the circumstances of exile to overpower him and lead him to despair. Thankfully, he did exactly the opposite; He used those circumstances as motivation for his faith in God to grow and flourish during a season under fire.

Through this study, it is my prayer that you allow God to deepen your trust in His plan, your faith in His timing, and your dependence upon His power for each day.

Daniel 1:1-21

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and be-

sieged it. ² And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. ³ Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴ youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷ And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹ And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰ and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king."

¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appear-

ance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶ So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. ¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king.

²⁰ And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

²¹ And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Pressured to Compromise Holiness (1:1-7)

Daniel's story begins with an international conflict: a pagan army attacks Jerusalem and spirits away the spoils of war: treasures from within the temple, as well as members of the royal families of Israel (1:1-3). It's very likely that Daniel was in his early teenage years when this occurred (606 B.C.), as he was still alive when the exile ended seventy years later.

Can you imagine how that must have felt, to be so young and separated from your home? The kingdom they once knew was now so far away.

For some time, Israel had been slowly sliding down a slope, away from holiness and toward their ultimate judgment from God (2 Kings 23:31—24:9). Captivity in Babylon would be the discipline for the people's sin of disobedience. Some encouragement can be found in Daniel 1:2, as Daniel records, "And the Lord gave...." Although hidden in the military action against Jerusalem, God has initiated this action for a divine reason.

Verse 4 records that soon after their arrival in Babylon, Daniel and three other Hebrew youth, among others, are selected to be a part of a very intentional assimilation effort. The Babylonians intended to remove any trace of the Hebrew culture by replacing it with a three-year intensive study of Babylonian culture and practices. Through studying archeological evidence, Tremper Longman III makes a strong case for these young adults being taught the art of divination (the practice of making predictions through interpreting celestial phenomena and omens). This pressure to learn and internalize a new culture was only one of the pressures Daniel and other Hebrew youth faced in this new world.

Verse 5 indicates the king intended to have a "final exam" of these new citizens, and evaluate their progress. He also provided a great luxury for them during the process! They would be given food and drink from the king's own table. However, it was not all good news. By changing the Hebrew

names of these four young men to Babylonian names, the verbal testimony of God would be silenced (1:7). This most likely was an attempt to move the Babylonian gods into the minds of the captured exiles, and to speed along the process of forgetting their God in worship.

Daniel's name means "Elohim is my judge." Belteshazzar means "May Bel protect his life." Bel is one of the Babylonians gods; this would have been a direct affront to the Hebrews trained to revere and protect God's name. In similar fashion, cultures today try to remove the influence of God in schools, public meeting places, and literature. The pressure to compromise has not gone away.

Prepared to Pursue Holiness (1:8-10)

Daniel and the other Hebrew youth had been prepared as youngsters to faithfully follow God's leading. Based upon the timing of Daniel's birth (622 B.C.), we know it is highly likely that these noble persons grew up in Israel during the reign of Josiah, one of the greatest reformers of religious activity in Judah's history. Second Kings 22—23 indicates he not only restored the temple to its intended use, but he also called for personal and national repentance, deposed ungodly priests, and returned God's Word to the center of the temple worship. Daniel and the others were prepared for this experience during a time of uncompromising devotion to Yahweh.

Daniel realized that accepting the food from the king's table would present a problem for the Hebrews (1:8). Perhaps it was an issue with the *kind* of food that was being served. If the king served food that was prohibited in the dietary laws, then they would risk being unclean before God (Leviticus 11). Perhaps the food being served had been sacrificed to idols prior to its being set before them. If that were the case, then the Levitical prohibitions against idolatry would have convicted the youth of disobedience (Deuteronomy 6:13-15). A third option is that by sharing a meal with the king, there might have been tacit approval of the pagan king and his beliefs.

Food For Thought

Daniel and his friends had a godly upbringing in Israel that influenced their worldview. What advice would you give to a teenager or friend who asked about the following?

- Drinking alcohol
- Not wanting to exercise
- Reading books about other religious beliefs
- Smoking
- Dressing like an actor/actress

How could you help impart the truth of 1 Timothy 4:8 into the conversation?

Whatever the reason, the phrase “And God gave...” returns a second time, indicating that God was working behind the scenes to assure Daniel’s success (1:9). Daniel took a chance in asking to be excused from the king’s wishes for the young administrators, but he knew that honoring God was more important than pleasing a king. He was willing to remain holy before the Lord, regardless of the cost.

Even though the initial response was that of self-preservation, consider the chief of the eunuchs for a moment. If God was working in the heart of a pagan official, how much more so will He work in the heart of someone who is committed to faithfully following Him?

Empowered Through Personal Holiness (1:11-21)

Daniel wisely suggested that the king’s servant examine the Hebrews after ten days of nothing but water and vegetables to check their physical condition (1:11-12). Daniel acknowledged that the test would be up to Ashpenaz’s assessment. Based upon the results, the servant could do whatever he thought necessary. By choosing to remain pure before God, Daniel positioned himself to advance God’s reputation in the pagan kingdom.

The results of the examination were clear: not only were Daniel and the others better off physically than those who ate from the king’s table, but the Hebrews’ appearance was better than the one who ate and drank the richer things

(1:15-16). Daniel and his friends kept themselves from being offensive to their pagan “host,” but more importantly, they did not dishonor God through the pressures of the culture. By continuing to follow God’s leadership in his life, Daniel was able to trust God in this moment where it literally could have been his life—and the three others lives—on the line.

No Wand Required

The Hebrew word *harṭōm* is translated “magician” and refers to those mentioned in Daniel 1:20, as well as those found in the time of Joseph (Genesis 41:8) and Moses (Exodus 7:11). The literal meaning of the word is “engraver” or “writer.” Their primary function was to write down the movements of celestial bodies to gain wisdom or knowledge from them. Although it can be assumed there were some tricks performed at various times, these magicians were advisors to Babylonians kings on virtually every matter of importance. They would read omens to study the future, employ rites and rituals to heal the sick, and attempt to interpret dreams.

Although Daniel and his friends entered into the king’s court, it should not be assumed they participated in, nor approved of, such practices. They would have been familiar with the Law’s prohibitions against sorcery (Leviticus 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:10-11). While there were some who employed a more evil form of black magic, Dan-

iel's contemporaries were benevolent and protective of their king and kingdom.

Consider the ramifications of Daniel's personal choices to remain holy. He had a powerful influence on every part of himself: body, spirit, and mind. His body was better because he trusted God to provide for his *need*, nothing more. His spirit was invigorated because God rewarded Daniel for his trust and obedience (1:17). His mind was sharpened, along with the three others, and God gave them wisdom beyond their years (1:20). A secular education in Babylon wasn't something to be avoided or shunned; isolation from the ruling nation would not have provided Daniel with any particular benefit. Due to Daniel's consistent behavior of holiness, God was able to use him *in the midst* of an ungodly culture.

Daniel also became a powerful influence over three influential Babylonian rulers. Based upon verse 21, we know that Daniel was present in the royal house of Babylon during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 B.C.), Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.), and Belshazzar (556-539 B.C.). (Note: Belshazzar shared the throne with his father Nabonidus). God placed Daniel in a prime position to bring godly influence at a national level, because Daniel made a choice to trust God's provision despite the concerns of the moment (1:20).

Finally, Daniel also influenced his three friends through choosing to remain holy in spite of worldly compromise. Even though all four received Babylonian names, Daniel was the one who resolved not to partake of the king's food. His three friends took up the challenge to be holy, and by the

time of their trial by fire, Daniel is nowhere to be seen. It should not be missed, however, that God remained in the midst of these four youth (1:17).

Daniel's personal choices paid off for him, and the blessings he received from it rippled out from him like waves in the water after a large stone is dropped into it. We can rest assured that if we are following the Lord, there will come times in our lives—if they have not already appeared—where our faith will be challenged and we are pressured to compromise (2 Timothy 3:12). Will we dare to be a Daniel?

Implications and Actions

People of resolve aren't born...they are fashioned in the crucible of preparation. Most likely, the idea to test his Babylonian captors' will in the dietary offerings did not just appear in the mind of Daniel. For the better part of their lives, these Hebrew youth had heard of God's sovereignty, His provision for His people, and His protection over them. That is what encouraged Daniel to boldly step out; his faith had been fashioned by God over time.

When followers of Christ are pressured to compromise over things that God has indicated in His Word are important to Him, what makes us ignore His Will and choose that of the world?

Daniel's story ought to remind us that it is possible to have a godly life, and be able to have influence in this world.

Too often, I find that I neglect one in an attempt to gain the other.

Do you believe in the power of those words, “and God gave...”? They have the power to change our whole perspective during times of great pressure.

Questions

1. If you had been Daniel, would you have spoken out against taking the king’s food and drink?
2. In what situations in life do you find it hardest—or even feel it might be impossible—to remain faithful to Christ? What examples from culture are Christians being pressured to accept, or change their thinking?
3. What encouragement can you find from Daniel’s encounter in this chapter for those situations?

lesson 2

The Impossible Dream

MAIN IDEA

Difficult situations require us to rely on God alone.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is there anything impossible for God?

STUDY AIM

To understand there is power in my prayers even in difficult situations

QUICK READ

No one was able to interpret the king's dream, but Daniel was quick to point out there is a God in Heaven who reveals mysteries.

Introduction

When I was in college, I auditioned for a role at a local community theatre in *The Wizard of Oz*. I tried my hardest to prepare for the audition: for a month, I talked through the lines at home, and I sang through the song (very quietly) while I was working at the mall bookstore.

The week before the audition, I dreamed I was in a cornfield, with my arms hanging off of a post. All around my feet were crows, cackling and making noise. When I tried to shoo them away, my voice sounded like a squeaky wheel. It just made them get louder and louder, and then I got louder and louder, until I woke myself up yelling. Three nights in a row I spent hanging on that stupid post. On the night of auditions, I waited in the theatre for my name to be called, all the while wondering if I would be able to get that dream out of my head.

In this chapter of our study, King Nebuchadnezzar has a similar problem: he has had a dream, and he cannot get it out of his mind.

Daniel 2:1-30

¹In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. ²Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned

to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. ³ And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream." ⁴ Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." ⁵ The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. ⁶ But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation." ⁷ They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation." ⁸ The king answered and said, "I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm— ⁹ if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation." ¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. ¹¹ The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." ¹² Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. ¹³ So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. ¹⁴ Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who

had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁵ He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. ¹⁶ And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹ Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. ²⁰ Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. ²¹ He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; ²² he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. ²³ To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter." ²⁴ Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation." ²⁵ Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation." ²⁶ The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" ²⁷ Daniel

answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: ²⁹ To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. ³⁰ But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

The King's Vision (2:1-16)

Many times, we experience a lack of sleep due to poor diet or health, noises outside of our bedroom, or we simply cannot relax enough to fall asleep. None of those reasons were the cause of the king's sleepless night. The king had such a disturbing dream that he was not able to return to sleep (2:1). As many cultures viewed dreams as the medium through which gods made their wills known, the king would not let the night pass without knowing the dream's meaning.

Nebuchadnezzar followed what would be considered normal procedure by calling in all of the wise men of Babylon to his court (2:2). These men would be his best chance of arriving at a meaning for the interrupted sleep. They had been trained to find wisdom in the positions of the constellations, the use

of incantations and spells, and various other means of obtaining wisdom. They had done this before, surely they could help!

When the king asks for their interpretation, the Chaldeans respond first (2:4). They express confidence in finding an answer for the king; they need only the details of the dream. This is where things take a distinctively unusual turn. The emotional turmoil inside of Nebuchadnezzar propels him into proclaiming a highly volatile punishment for any mistake. The king will not tell the details of the dream to anyone, but demands—under penalty of death—that the wise men not only give him the interpretation of the dream but the details of the dream as well (2:5)!

Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar is concerned with the validity and truthfulness of these sage's former interpretations. If their wisdom cannot be trusted, then the king is very wise indeed to ask such a task to be completed. Perhaps he is upset with these men who served his father before him, and he is seeking to test their loyalty. Regardless, his proclamation is clear: if they are able to *interpret* the dreams of the king, then they should have no trouble *reconstructing* the dream for the king.

The king promises to reward those who can provide the answers he seeks, but makes a second threat against those who would “stall for time” (2:7-9). It's easy to sympathize with Nebuchadnezzar in this moment; there is a frustration of not understanding what you have dreamed. After all, here is the man named after the Babylonian god of wisdom (Nabu), yet is left in the darkness of ignorance.

Crime and Punishment

Nebuchadnezzar promised to severely punish his magicians, sorcerers, enchanters, and the Chaldeans if they could not do as he demanded (2:5). Does this seem a bit excessive to you? What do you think the purpose was to have the person's house destroyed?

Cutting a criminal into pieces was a common custom during this ancient time. It would serve as quite the visual example to others to refrain from acting in the same manner. Samuel the prophet inflicted this punishment upon Agag, the Amalekite king (1 Samuel 15:32). The Babylonians also had a custom in which the homes of a criminal were reduced to rubble, and then cursing the ground upon which the home had been built. It is possible that the Babylonians and Persians had similar minds about keeping their criminals in line, as Ezra records a similar decree from King Darius (Ezra 6:11).

In any case, Nebuchadnezzar was angered to the extent that he wanted to totally remove the influence of those who failed to satisfy his demands.

Frantically, the wise men declare there is no one on earth who can do what the king requests, no one who can provide an interpretation to an unknown dream. As a matter of fact, there has never been such a request made by a king to any wise man or magician. They go so far as to tell Nebuchadnezzar that only a god could give the desired answer, and there are no gods living among men (2:10-11).

Stop for a moment and consider the response from the Chaldeans: do you think they truly believed this, or were they just trying to assuage the king's anger? In the heat of the moment, a true statement about wisdom is made: in the most difficult circumstances of life, wisdom can only come from a source *outside* of our human experience. The apostle Paul told the Corinthian church that "no one understands the things of God, for they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14b). Nebuchadnezzar's dream had physical implications to him, yes, but the *root* of the dream was a spiritual one. Whether obtaining answers or direction, the *source* from which one seeks wisdom makes all the difference.

When the king heard his servant's response, he ordered the wholesale slaughter of wise men within Babylon (2:12-13). This rash action included the lives of Daniel and the three Hebrew men from chapter one. Even though they were not a part of the conference with the king, they would still fall under his wrath.

Daniel, however, "replied with prudence and discretion" to the news of the death warrant from the king (2:14). Where the king acts out of anger, Daniel responds with calm purpose. He finds a rationale for the decree, and then asks the king to grant an audience that Daniel might provide an answer. This action might seem somewhat self-assured, but then Daniel was gifted with an ability for this very purpose (Daniel 1:17).

Daniel's Visit (2:17-30)

Consider the contrast between the two main characters in this narrative: one has the world at his feet, yet is troubled by sleepless nights and makes rash judgments without thought to the consequences. The other is, for all intents and purposes, a slave; one who shows himself to be thoughtful and wise, but a slave nonetheless, who will speak boldly and with authority. What makes the difference between these two men?

Daniel enlists some spiritual support from his three friends, and they spent the night in prayer, asking for God to show mercy and understanding to them (2:17-18). The urgency of the moment drove them to recognize the only source of wisdom they knew and would be able to trust. Mercy is God's response to a person's need. Aware of their inability to answer the king properly, Daniel and his friends turned to God in confidence. Elsewhere in Scripture, this practice is presented as appropriate for those who do not know what to do in a given situation (James 1:5), so the four are again placing their futures in the hands of God. Daniel was honoring God in his life, so God honored the request of Daniel and his friends: Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed (2:19).

Upon receiving the interpretation, Daniel broke out in a spontaneous moment of praise to the Lord (2:19b-23). In these verses, we can hear some of those melodies within the book of Daniel coming to the surface: wisdom and strength belong to the Lord, He is sovereign over the nations, and He reveals mysteries and imparts knowledge to those who

follow Him. Many people in our world have power, but no wisdom with which to temper it. Others have great wisdom, but wield no power. God is both powerful and wise, so even when we do not see all that is going on, we can trust that His governance is merciful.

Daniel wasted no time and went back to the king, prepared to tell him the interpretation of the dream (2:24-25). By acting in a timely fashion, Daniel saved not only the lives of the exiles, but also the others under the threat of death in Babylon. The captain of the guard falsely takes credit for having “found among the exiles from Judah” a man who would satisfy the king (2:25). I wonder if he was thinking he might receive a reward for his actions?

Speaking Up

You are the assistant manager at an influential bank in town. How would you speak to your supervisor, the bank manager, when they publicly say the following things?

- Here comes Preacher Bob. I hate religious people.
- I can't wait to foreclose on that business!
- They could never work here; they're stupid.

If presented with the situation this week, name one or two things that would help you be ready to speak truth to power in your own life/circumstances.

When ushered into the presence of the king, Nebuchadnezzar warily asked if “Daniel was able” to give both the dream and its interpretation (2:26). Perhaps he was tired of waiting and wasting time without result; he wanted satisfaction from his servant! Again, note the difference between the ruler and the ruled. The king demands an answer from a position of authority, yet Daniel responds from a position of humility (2:27-28). The simple answer is “Yes,” but Daniel answers in a way that points to the God who delivered the interpretation. Daniel explained that “he who reveals mysteries” told Daniel the king’s dream had been about the future of his rule in Babylon and what would happen in the coming years. What the pagan wisdom could not do, Daniel proclaimed that God in Heaven—the Revealer of Mysteries—would be able to do; He would show the king the events of the future. When faced with this incredibly impossible situation, Daniel relied upon the God who makes all things possible (Luke 1:37). Daniel knew that the *source* of wisdom makes all the difference.

Implications and Actions

When faced with uncertainty, where do you turn for answers? Some go to a horoscope; some seek advice on social media; others ask a family member. Like many people across the world, Nebuchadnezzar worried about future events. However, he sought advice from a source that could not give

him trustworthy guidance. Seeking answers in this way left him emotionally distraught and angry. Every day we are faced with a multitude of decisions that will leave us in the same state, unless we follow Daniel's example to "seek mercy from the God of heaven."

Remember my theatre audition earlier? I asked a friend what she thought about my dream. She was so sure that my voice would crack while singing, and make the people in the darkened theatre laugh at my misfortune. Her words were all that I could think of that night. I was so concerned with preventing that from happening that I sang the wrong song. Looking back now over a lucrative theatre career that never happened, it's humorous to recall that the correct song was "If I Only Had a Brain."

The source from which we draw wisdom makes all the difference in our lives.

Questions

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to speak truth to power? How can a follower of Christ be prepared to speak truth?

Lesson 2: The Impossible Dream

2. Consider where your life is at this moment. Do you see yourself as having been placed there by God for this season? Why or why not?

3. What can we learn from Daniel's example when faced with a personal crisis?

4. Three aspects of Daniel's character stand out in this passage: wisdom, prayer, praise. Which one of these do you most need to work on in your life?

5. What do we learn about the character of God from Daniel's prayer? How can these traits help you in your walk with Him this week?

6. Noting Daniel's response to answered prayer, name one way that you can improve your response to when God answers prayer.

lesson

The Dream Revealed

MAIN IDEA

This passage demonstrates God's sovereignty over His people's past, present, and future and gives His people continued confidence and hope.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Daniel used his position for kingdom purposes. In what practical ways can you use your position, gifts, and abilities for God's Kingdom?

STUDY AIM

To learn that the highest form of devotion is to always seek to exalt God instead of myself

QUICK READ

The dream and the interpretation were both from God, most of which is now factual history. And the best is yet to come.

Introduction

When I was a junior in high school, a man in the western part of the United States claimed that he had worked out the return of Christ to the earth, down to the day and time. For several weeks, he made the news and radio reports, proclaiming his wisdom and knowledge in working out this heavenly timetable.

He seemed so convincing that I asked my father, who was a pastor at the time, if I could stay home from school on the day that was being promoted as “the return.” I wanted to look out from our back porch to the eastern sky and see if I could spot the Savior returning to earth. I figured that if Christ was returning, He wouldn’t want me to take a Calculus test! In the end, I was at school.

All throughout the man’s interaction with the news reports, it was clear he had a very high opinion of himself and his abilities. Looking back, I think the whole experience was designed to draw attention to him. As smart as he proclaimed to be, he was very publicly wrong when it came to predicting the Lord’s return.

In today’s study, we will find that the best way to live is to seek to exalt God and not ourselves.

Daniel 2:31-49

³¹ "You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³² The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴ As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶ "This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. ³⁷ You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, ³⁸ and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. ³⁹ Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰ And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. ⁴¹ And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. ⁴² And as the toes of the

feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. ⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. ⁴⁷ The king answered and said to Daniel, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.” ⁴⁸ Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹ Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king’s court.

The Dream Described (2:31-35)

So far as Scripture records, this is the first time that Daniel has given any type of interpretation publicly. He begins to describe the dream, and makes it very clear he didn’t receive

the interpretation because of any ability of his own; it was given to Him by God in Heaven (2:30). I wonder what the king must have thought as Daniel described perfectly the image from his dream. His internal response might have been close to what the Samaritan woman said to others, after her encounter with Jesus: “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did!” (John 4:29). Everything that Daniel described was 100 percent accurate.

Daniel tells the king there was an image in the dream, one that was “exceedingly bright” (2:31). The image was in the shape of a man, and as the king saw it, it was both mighty and frightening. It had a head made of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a torso made of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay (2:32-33). Comprised of all of these various metals, it made for an awesome, if not curious sight.

What happened next left the king all the more confused; a stone not cut out by any human worker struck the statue in the feet, which created a chain reaction of breaking all of the other metals and parts into pieces. These pieces then turned into “chaff like the summer threshing” and blew away, so far away that the pieces could not be found (2:34-35). Then the stone grew in size until it became a mountain that covered the earth. It’s no wonder that Nebuchadnezzar was so disturbed by his dream! But what does it mean?

Kingdom Qualities

Nebuchadnezzar's dream concerned his kingdom and its lasting impact. Daniel's interpretation indicated that from the top of the image in the dream to the bottom, each successive kingdom would be less than the one above it, in terms of worth and strength.

- Babylon—ruled by a dictator king
- Medo-Persians—ruled by a king, effectively governed through princes and subordinates
- Greece—ruled by king and law
- Roman—Republic (ruled by military through laws)

How is each successive kingdom worse than the one above it? What is the common weakness in them? (Hint: Romans 3:23)

Daniel indicated that God's plan was to wipe away the influence of these kingdoms when the stone smashed into them, bringing about a final kingdom that would be eternal.

- What benefits to humankind will this kingdom bring?
- How will its ruler be greater than the ones of the other kingdoms?
- Would you welcome this ruler or reject him?

The Dream Interpreted (2:36-45)

What happens next shows the heart of Daniel. He sought to place God in the highest possible place, and does so here

by showing again that God is providing the interpretation through him (2:36-37).

He explains that God is the Authority by which kings are placed into ruling positions and people and animals are given life. This gift has an incredible breadth to it: “wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air,” Nebuchadnezzar has dominion over all of them (2:37-38)! In the New Testament, Paul continues teaching this truth that God alone is Sovereign. He writes that “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1b). Daniel states that the golden head of the image is Nebuchadnezzar (2:38b). As the king on the throne, he might have felt a sense of relief as Daniel told him that his kingship was instituted by God. The golden head represented the kingdom of Babylon. The remaining parts of the image are a depiction of world history, specifically those kingdoms that would rule for a time, but would diminish in terms of power and influence. They would ultimately be replaced with an eternal kingdom established by God.

The chest and arms of silver would be an inferior kingdom, just as that metal is to gold. Through the lens of history, it is most likely that this silver represents the Medo-Persian kingdoms. Conquering Babylon in 539 B.C., Cyrus the Great led the Medo-Persian kingdom to a reign lasting almost 200 years longer than the Babylonians, yet was still of lesser importance (2:39).

The belly of bronze can easily be seen as Greece, as they “ruled over all of the earth” (2:39b). In 332 B.C., Alexander the Great won a series of decisive battles over the Medo-Per-sian armies, thus ending their reign. “All of the earth” should be understood as a reference to the civilized world of the time, and not inclusive of anything more.

The fourth kingdom, shown in the image by legs made of iron, is Rome (2:40). Looking at the actions taken by this kingdom to subdue its place in history through force—“breaking to pieces, shattering, crushing”—this is the way that Rome behaved as a world power beginning with its victory at Carthage in 146 B.C. For over 500 years, the Roman Empire reigned as a joint kingdom of two divisions, Eastern and Western. After the West was defeated in A.D. 476, the Eastern division of the Empire continued for almost a thousand years. With its feet mixed of iron and clay, Daniel records this fourth kingdom will be both strong and weak (2:41-42). Daniel states that one of the contributing factors of this kingdom’s demise will be intermingling of the citizens with its conquered cultures (2:44). This last group of kings is identified as “toes” and will be ruling immediately prior to the destruction of their kingdom.

The stone striking the kingdoms and breaking them into pieces is a reference to the promised Messiah that would come from God to rule over the earth (Genesis 49:24; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14-15). At some point in the future, God would establish a kingdom that will demolish all earthly kingdoms (2:44-45). It will be a kingdom that will remain

beyond the constraints of time, and will never pass from its citizens. Because it will be established by God, it will be one of which that no man can claim to be its king. Jesus claimed “the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

This kingdom is the eternal kingdom that Christ will establish as the Conquering King (Revelation 11:15-18). Some interpret verses 44-45 to be a *spiritual* kingdom, established when one in faith accepts Christ to be ruler of their life. Others see the prophecy and interpretation of Daniel 2 to be a *literal* kingdom established by Christ as He physically returns to the earth to inaugurate His millennial reign (Revelation 20). To see this kingdom as spiritual, when all others have been physical, is to misunderstand the nature of the coming kingdom: it will be on the earth, as the other kingdoms have been, and it will be greater than any other kingdom in all aspects.

Daniel finishes his interpretation of the dream by telling Nebuchadnezzar that “a Great God” has shown the king the future (2:45). The purpose of the dream was to introduce the king to the One who placed him on the throne.

The King Responds (2:46-49)

Stop for a moment and consider the king’s position. How would you have responded to the message Daniel has just given? Nebuchadnezzar responds in an appropriate manner,

falling on his face in humility (2:46). His actions in providing sacrifice and incense should not be seen as Daniel's inviting such things, for Daniel has consistently pointed the king toward God's presence. Verse 47 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar realized his error and offered his praise in the correct direction. "God of gods" indicates an issue of pre-eminence; Daniel's God is higher than any other deity. It is a stretch to think that Nebuchadnezzar began to worship Yahweh from this moment, but this royal declaration is the climax of the story.

Daniel is appointed many gifts and rewards for his willingness to tell the king of God's sovereign actions (2:48-49). He was appointed over all of the province of Babylon, including the capital city. More so, he was given the position of counselor to the king, with authority over those so-called wise men in the kingdom. Once again, God has placed Daniel in a position where God's Name might be proclaimed among a pagan people.

Daniel makes a request soon after being praised by the king, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are made provincial rulers as well. Daniel stayed at the court, to assist the king, and the three friends went out into the kingdom to pursue the king's interests. This final detail sets the stage for a fiery confrontation between an idol and the three Hebrew men in the next lesson.

Pick a Side

Many people today experience vastly differing opinions when it comes to interpreting prophecies in Scripture. Using today's lesson, how would you respond to the following?

- I think that all prophecy in the Bible is made up.
- There's no way that all of those prophecies could be accurate. Someone cheated!
- I know that my interpretation is right! I saw _____ teach it on TV/the internet.
- God may have told you that, but He told me this (an opposing view)

Implications and Actions

Doris Day once famously sang, “Que Sera Sera.” The song expresses a belief that “whatever will be, will be”; life is a series of events that happen, and no one is in control. Daniel's testimony to us is not only is someone in control, that someone wants you to know He is working throughout history to bring about His desired result.

Today's lesson also helps us to learn we can trust in God's omniscience when we cannot see beyond our own life. The image and interpretation for Nebuchadnezzar make a very clear statement that what God says He will do, He will accomplish. We can trust that God's actions will always fulfill His plan.

Sadly, many people today make a similar declaration as Nebuchadnezzar: “there is a God.” The *head* knowledge of His existence doesn’t move into any *heart* knowledge of personal experience. What is your understanding of the “stone” mentioned by Daniel? Have you allowed God to smash your self-rule and live with Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

Questions

1. What in this lesson thrilled you about God’s sovereignty? What made you stop and think?
2. In what ways has this text created anger, frustration, and/or confusion among those who read it? Why do you think that is the case?
3. What should you do with Daniel’s explanation of God’s coming kingdom? What commitments should I make or change to reflect my understanding of this lesson?

lesson 4

Cool in the Furnace

MAIN IDEA

An idol is anything that takes the place of God in my life.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Where are you being pressured to compromise your faith?

STUDY AIM

To learn that **faith under fire** purifies me and deepens my walk with Christ

QUICK READ

The intense heat of the furnace killed the executioners but not those faithful to God. God delivered them showing the king once again the supremacy of the one true God.

Introduction

In high school, I participated in a group called FTA, the Future Teachers of America. As a sophomore, I was named to a state officer's position. Normally, officers are elected at a state convention in the spring, and serve in the following school year. It was a pretty big deal, as the organization would only allow a person to campaign for an office once; you had to choose wisely when you wanted to run!

I filled an empty spot due before the new school year began. As I was chosen for that office, I petitioned the organization to let me campaign for the Presidency at the end of my term. It wasn't enough that I had served for almost a year; I wanted to be the Big Dog! It was all I could think of for three months: all I talked about with my friends, all I dreamt of at night. I even imagined people saying my name with the title of "President" following it.

In the end, I did get to campaign, and faced off against a much better opponent who soundly defeated me in the election. Like Custer at Little Big Horn, I got knocked off of my high horse. In today's lesson, we will see what happens when something that *shouldn't* be a priority *becomes* your priority. In the end, someone always gets burned.

Daniel 3:1-30

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." ⁷ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. ⁹ They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of mu-

Lesson 4: Cool in the Furnace

sic, shall fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” ¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” ¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.

²⁰ And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them

into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹ Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. ²² Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. ²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." ²⁵ He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." ²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in

this way.”³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Big Enough to See From the Moon? (3:1-7)

Chapter three opens outside of the city of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar has built a huge statue of gold, and placed it on a flat plain where everyone can see it (3:1). This image was possibly constructed following the king’s dream in chapter two. Made of some other material and then overlaid with gold (see Exodus 39:38 and 30:3 for comparison), the height of the image was ninety feet, close to the height of a nine-story building. At nine feet wide, it was truly an awesome construction!

It was not an unusual thing for great leaders or nations to raise colossal monuments to themselves during ancient times. In 2500 B.C., the Great Sphinx in Egypt was built, measuring 240 feet by 60 feet. The aptly named Colossus of Rhodes was 105 feet tall (c. 300 B.C.), and the fifth century monument to Zeus in Athens was just over forty feet tall.

As we read this passage, let us make two observations regarding this image. One, the sheer sight of the materials and scope of the construction were intended to impress any and all who would gaze upon it. In light of the dream Daniel interpreted for the king, he wanted to make sure that his name was not forgotten in the passing of time. Such an item would demand a response. Perhaps this is why Daniel records the

list of officials and dignitaries that are summoned to view the king's accomplishment (3:2-3). The king wanted to see their responses with his own eyes, hear their cries of approval, and bask in the glow of the applause. There were evidently a great number of other nations represented, for the herald spoke to more than just the Babylonian administrators and leaders; a wide multitude of musical instruments were also present at the dedication (3:4-5, 7).

A second thing to notice is Daniel records that the king applies the pressure to submit to this idolatry (3:5, 7). Seven times Daniel mentions that the king "set up" this image for the world to see (3:1-3, 5, 12, 14, 18). If we contrast this action with Daniel's statement in 2:20-21, we see that Nebuchadnezzar has purposefully positioned himself against God as the founder of a king's legacy. The king will not tolerate any noncompliance, and has a furnace readied nearby to provide visual encouragement to those who might not have made up their minds (3:6).

A Big Enough Faith (3:8-15)

The crowd was immense, and it would have been difficult to see everyone or everything at once. The Chaldeans, or astrologers, came forward and spoke maliciously against these defiant Jews (3:8). This phrase literally means that they "chewed the pieces" of these men. More here than a simple reporting of defiance, these Chaldeans were quite possibly

driven by jealousy and rage to even the score with the king's favored captives (Daniel 1:20).

The Chaldeans made their allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar known immediately and are gratuitous with their accusation (3:9-12). Their charge was simple yet devious: "These men are rejecting your great legacy as king. What will you do to protect your honor?" As if it was not enough to inform on the three Jews, the Chaldeans also reminded the king of his stated consequences to those not bowing before the image (3:11). They tried to set a trap for the courageous Hebrews.

I find it is interesting that the Chaldeans did not accuse Daniel in their list of charges (3:12b). Certainly Daniel's faith was known publicly, he was a Jewish captive just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Perhaps, it was more than just political jealousy that drove the Chaldeans to speak; could it be they were tired of seeing the great faith in Yahweh exhibited by these men?

When the king heard of their refusal to bow, he got more than angry (3:13). The Aramaic words convey a sense of extreme anger, emotion expressed to its fullest extent. Reminded of his elevating them to their positions, he took the time to ask them diplomatically if what they were being charged with was true (3:14-15). For a second time, he gave the command to bow at the sound of music. If they will do so, he would consider the issue resolved.

Verse 15 is one of the most important verses in the entire book of Daniel; it is the hinge upon which the narrative of this chapter turns. By asking, "who is the god who can save,"

Nebuchadnezzar reveals his heart is far from the Lord and the confession he made in the last chapter.

“Son of the Gods”

Nebuchadnezzar remarks, “The appearance of the fourth man is like a son of the gods” (Daniel 3:25). Some Jewish scholars believe this references an angel, sent by God to protect the men. Some Christian scholars see this as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ (cf. Genesis 16:11-14; 22:15-16). The Aramaic word in verse 25 translated as “gods” is *’ēlāhîn*, a plural noun. It is considered the equivalent to the Hebrew *’ēlohîm*, which can be used as a singular or plural noun, depending upon the object being discussed.

In describing his sight, a polytheistic king—ignorant of the Christian Trinity—spoke of a figure supernaturally walking in the furnace, an action only a divine being could undertake. Whether angel or Christ, the fourth person in the fire protected the three men; we simply are not told the identity of the figure. When taken with the king’s statement in 3:28, he most likely meant there was a divine being related to other divine beings in the furnace.

A Big Enough Stance (3:16-19)

This is one of the great moments in Scripture that simultaneously encourages and convicts me in my faith. It's up there with David confronting Goliath, Elijah taunting the prophets of Baal, and Nathan calling out King David. The sheer bravery of these three men that leads them to speak to a king by name! Their bravado is not at all false; it is based upon a personal, experiential relationship with the God of the Universe (3:16-17).

This type of trust and faith is what can make believers today just as bold, if we will but place nothing else in priority over Christ (2 Corinthians 3:4-12). This is the marriage of confidence in, and submission to, the will of Almighty God. This is the voice of Job, who declared "Even though he slay me, I will trust in him" (Job 13:15). These three had seen God move in the giving of the interpretation to Daniel (Daniel 2), and they knew He was capable of all things; whether or not God chose to move was not their decision to make, but their faithfulness to Him was most certainly their decision.

In their response to the king, they made it clear whom they are serving; it is not Nebuchadnezzar (3:17-18). They say to the king, "The God who is able to save us may not choose to do so; still we will not bow." Before they will ever turn their back to God, they will turn their face to the fire. It bears stating that faith standing before the fire knows that God will not always bring a miraculous deliverance; He will always provide grace for His people as they are in need.

Remember the words of the Psalmist: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalm 23:4).

A Big Enough Deliverance (3:19-30)

Throughout Scripture, fire has been used to convey one of two things: judgment and refinement. In Genesis 18—19, God rains fire down upon Sodom and Gomorrah to punish their wickedness. Amos 1 records God decreeing that fire will judge the nations around Israel because of their sin. Revelation 19:20 speaks of the fire that will ultimately judge God’s enemies.

Fire has also been used to show refinement in the process of following God. Malachi 3:1-4 indicates that the refiner’s fire is used to purify the people, allowing them to be pleasing to the Lord. Luke’s Gospel shows that Jesus came for a specific purpose: “to cast fire upon the earth” (Luke 12:49) and to “burn the chaff away with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:15-17). Paul also uses this imagery in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, as he speaks of works set upon an unsure foundation. Fire destroys, but it also reveals the nature of the thing in the fire.

Daniel 3:21-23 indicates that the fire was so hot it killed the “mighty men” before they could accomplish their task. Bound in all of their garments, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell into the fiery furnace. From the language here, it seems possible that the furnace was built with an opening

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on the top, allowing the men to “fall into” it (3:23), while allowing the king to see what was happening.

Nebuchadnezzar quickly realized there was something amiss; there were no screams, nor yelling, nor sounds of distress emanating from the furnace. As a matter of fact, he looked and saw not three, but four men walking around in the flames (3:24-25). He called out to question what had happened and received confirmation that they had indeed thrown three people into the furnace! So, who was the fourth person in the flames?

The Pedestal

Many people today take something in their lives and put it on a pedestal, making it a central focus in their lives. While they may not bow down to it physically, they easily adjust their lives to accommodate it. Using today’s lesson, reflect on how the following currently are or could become an idol today.

- Children / Grandchildren
- Workplace influence
- Sports Teams
- Music
- Other things

Again, Nebuchadnezzar was given a glimpse of God’s worthiness to be the sole object of worship. He got as close as he could to the door and called out to the men, praising them as

“servants of the Most High God” (3:26). The king was once more recognizing the worth of Yahweh above all other deities. God had protected these three servants; the three men walked out alive, unharmed, and steadfast in their faith. Because of their faith displayed, Nebuchadnezzar promoted them in the kingdom and declared that no one could defame their God.

Implications and Actions

What things tend to draw your attention away from God, and casually move into first place in your heart? For those who lead in some fashion, either in the spotlight or from the trenches, it can become very easy to move God off of the throne of our hearts and into second place. While not necessarily sinful to want to leave a great name, Nebuchadnezzar made the mistake of trying to make a legacy for himself at the expense of replacing the One who put him in his position.

Followers of Christ today are not immune to such pursuits. Writers want to write the next bestselling study, musicians want to have the next number one song churches want to sing, and congregations want to have the highest numbers in every conceivable category. Being number one can be powerful and addictive. When our priority is no longer the worship and exaltation of the Most High God, whatever has become our priority has become our idol.

Are there things in your life that are calling you to compromise God's place in your heart?

Questions

1. When you read this passage, is there someone you identify with more easily? Why or why not?
2. Compare today's passage with Matthew 4:8-10. How does the enemy seek to pull our focus off of God so we might worship something else?
3. Reflect on your life as a follower of Jesus to date. Has there ever been a "furnace" in your life where you were challenged to be faithful? How did you respond? What was the result?

4. What encouragement could you find from today's study to help strengthen a fellow believer who is struggling today?

5. What is most difficult in your life at this moment? Do you see it as judgment or as a refinement?

6. Who could you encourage today with the truths of this lesson?

lesson 5

Put Out to Pasture

MAIN IDEA

Pride is the sin of competing with God and humility is the virtue of submitting to God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

In what areas of my life do I fail to acknowledge God's authority?

STUDY AIM

To learn that when I look to God, He will restore me

QUICK READ

Nebuchadnezzar was slow to acknowledge the authority of God and because of his stubborn pride, he was reduced to animal status.

Introduction

In his timeless work *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis states that there is “one vice of which no man in the world is free...no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves; the more we have it in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.” This vice is pride, and it has kept many a prodigal child from acknowledging their sinful state, much less returning home.

In this lesson, Nebuchadnezzar himself is the narrator, and we see through his own eyes how his sin of pride brought on such a horrific fate, punishment, and ultimately, his restoration. A difference of thirty years stands between the events in chapters three and four. Daniel is in his middle-aged years, and the king is somewhat near the end of his reign.

Yet even in the face of a king, Daniel does not shy away from the obligation he has to be God’s instrument of revelation in the final story of this Babylonian king.

Daniel 4:1-37

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you!

² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. ³ How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlast-

ing kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. ⁶ So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷ Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation. ⁸ At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, ⁹ “O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. ¹⁰ The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. ¹¹ The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

¹³ “I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴ He proclaimed aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field.

Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him. ¹⁷ The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.' ¹⁸ This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

¹⁹ Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies! ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, ²¹ whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived— ²² it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. ²³ And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven

periods of time pass over him,' ²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, ²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. ²⁶ And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."

²⁸ All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" ³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." ³³ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

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

³⁶ At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

The Second Dream (4:4-18)

The chapter begins with Nebuchadnezzar addressing as large an audience as possible. His desire is to share the blessings with them that he has received from "the Most High God" (4:1-2). It is interesting to see that a pagan king's interaction with Yahweh has resulted in a moment of proclamation. This is logical, however, for what person having encountered the Living God would want to keep that silent? This chapter continues the melody of Daniel's book: the world needs to know about Daniel's God, and what Daniel's God has accomplished in this world.

When people come to know God personally, it is not unusual to see that understanding occur through the midst of a specific crisis. As the king recounts this story for the reader, it is somewhat noteworthy that he should receive this second vision, for things in his life were in good order. He was “at ease in my house and prospering in my palace” (4:4). Notice the contrast in emotion between verses 4-5: first the king is at peace, and then he is afraid. How quickly things can turn in our lives when we are danger of conviction!

Once again, as in Daniel 2, the king calls the wise men, Chaldeans, and magicians of the court to come and interpret the dream. The result is the same; they cannot decipher its meaning (4:6-7). Daniel is summoned to come and aid, as he had done before as well. Verse 8 states that “at last” Daniel presented himself to the king; perhaps he was away on business when the dream was received, or he was waiting for the direction from the Lord to enter the court. The king notes that Daniel has within him “the spirit of the holy gods,” and as such, might have access to the events transpiring in Heaven (4:8-9).

Nebuchadnezzar continues his narration, describing the dream for Daniel (4:10-18). The king had seen a great tree growing over the world, larger than any he had seen. It grew up into the heavens, and provided shelter and food for many, including animals and birds. Then a messenger from Heaven appeared and declared that the tree would be cut down, all of its glory stripped from it, and the remaining stump would become as a beast of the field. For “seven periods of time,”

this stump would be as an animal, and then be restored. The watcher stated this would happen so “the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (4:17). Nebuchadnezzar then asked Daniel for the interpretation.

The Meaning of the Dream (4:19-27)

Daniel’s face must have given him away, for the king chides him not to let the dream or its interpretation trouble him (4:19). He was reluctant to give the meaning to the king, for Daniel knew it would not be received as good news. The first dream was a blessing to the king; this dream would be a nightmare. So many things could happen to Daniel and the other exiles if the king were removed from his throne; Daniel must have been praying silently as he pondered how to break the news.

Ultimately, Daniel glorified the Lord by speaking the truth to Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 19 indicates that Daniel’s heart was for the king; he did not wish to see the man destroyed completely. He wished the enemies of the king would have received the news instead of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel confirmed that the dream was a prophecy of how the king would lose not only his kingdom and authority, but also his sanity (4:22). Because of the man’s bizarre behavior, the king would live as an animal, outside of the city and culture he created. The Aramaic word *‘āšab* is translated as

“grass,” but can also mean vegetables and herbs. It is possible that the king would not be able to eat anything other than the things animals ate in the wild. The king would face this punishment for a period of seven years (cf. 7:25). If we understand the interpretation correctly, it would take much longer than seven weeks or months for the king’s hair or fingernails to grow to the lengths that are mentioned.

The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar

If a medical professional were to examine the king today, they might return with a diagnosis of *boanthropy*, the belief that a person is a cow or ox. In this state of delusion, a person would act exactly as one of these animals, down to the chewing of the cud or walking in their fashion.

We do not know for certain how the king survived in the open air for seven years—apart from the Providence of God—but because he was a king, it is possible he received some help from those in the kingdom. Perhaps he was kept in a secluded area to protect the reputation of the kingdom?

As it stands, there is not concrete evidence from archeological study to indicate this incident was recorded in the Babylonian histories or documents of the court. The argument from silence is not condemning, however; after all, who would want their country’s history to reflect that their king was behaving in such a manner!

This punishment would come because of the pride with which the king saw himself as the ultimate ruler and not the One who gave him the position (cf. 4:17, 25-26, 32, 35). Daniel ends his discourse by telling the king there is a possibility of reprieve, if the king will change his ways and repent. His life, kingdom, and sanity would be restored once he recognized the authority of Heaven (4:26b-27).

The King Is Rejected (4:28-33)

How long does it take for a life to be changed for the better? According to verse 29, twelve months had passed without the Lord's judgment falling. Either the king had somewhat changed his behavior for a time, or the Lord graciously allowed the king to remain in his position. Either way, the vision the king had received was fixed, but the timing of it was not. As he was walking along the rooftop of his palace, evidence of the true state of his heart poured out. He declared that Babylon's glory was a result of his influence (4:30). Take note of the personal pronouns in his speech, revealing the pride in his heart. The glory that belongs to God, Nebuchadnezzar took for himself forgetting the consequences already promised to him.

Pride can cause us to forget things in our lives as well. We think we can provide for ourselves in this world, forgetting that we are to seek the Lord for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11). We believe we can treat our bodies however we please;

after all, it's *my* body! Then we are felled to our knees when we develop cancer from a lifetime (or even a short period of time) of abusing our flesh. Moses cautioned the Israelites to remember that God was the source of their past, as well as their futures (Deuteronomy 8:10-18). How quickly we forget when times are good that God has been, continues to be, and will forever be, the source of all good things in our lives (James 1:17).

Before Nebuchadnezzar finished his thought, judgment fell from Heaven (4:31-32). Just as Daniel had prophesied, the king was driven from the city to live in the wild. The once tall monarch became hunched over now as a beast, exposed to the elements, the diet, and the hygiene of the animal kingdom (4:33). Daniel later added that the king lived among "wild donkeys" (Daniel 5:21). One of history's most prosperous, most powerful kings was reduced to utter shame and completely debased because of self-centeredness. Hubris gave way to humiliation.

The King Is Restored (4:34-37)

After seven years, the king finally submitted to the Lord and repented of his pride (4:34). "The end of the days" indicates a conclusion to a Divine plan. God had set a timetable for Nebuchadnezzar's punishment, and it had come to its end. Luke 18:14 records that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

That would certainly be true in this instance; the king looks to Heaven and asks for forgiveness for his pride.

Blind Spots

Using today's lesson, what things could be done to address pride in these examples?

- A worship leader who repeatedly makes comments about being the "best keyboard player" in the church?
- A pastor who comments that "people don't mind long sermons... as long as it's one of mine!"
- A co-worker who states "I am the best employee that has ever worked for this company! I deserve as much money as I can get!"
- A teenager who, after self-comparison, comments upon the attractiveness of several other students.

King Nebuchadnezzar once again takes over as the narrator (4:34). His first-person recounting of this event indicates he has indeed returned to his former state of sanity. He has repented of his sin, and been forgiven from Heaven. Not only was his mental capacity restored, but his nobles and advisors sought him out, and his kingdom was restored to him with even greater success (4:36-37).

Consider the words of the king in Daniel 4, verses 1-3 and 34-35. Contrast those words to the words of the king in Daniel 3. What changes can you find? At the end of this study today, Nebuchadnezzar the King has been stripped of

his pride, and Nebuchadnezzar the man has been humbled to recognize that God in Heaven is pre-eminent above all. What will the Lord have to use to strip us of our prideful spirits today?

Implications and Actions

The Queen in “Snow White,” Gordon Gekko in “Wall Street,” Johnny in “The Karate Kid,” all of these characters have shown how pride left unchecked can lead to self-destruction. It is a relatively small word, but the true danger of pride is found directly in its center. “I” can become the one thing that will prevent the Lord from using me, blessing me, or even speaking through me, unless I humble myself before Him (1 Peter 5:6).

As you have read this lesson, was there something in your heart that was stirred by God as if to say, “This is what I am trying to get you to see!” Take note of the lesson learned by a king: the God who is sovereign above all desires that we acknowledge Him in our lives. He wants to have a personal relationship with you, and He is worthy of being our King.

Questions

1. On a scale of one to ten (with one being “never” and ten being “always”), how tempted are you to privatize your faith where no one can see it?
2. How would you describe your living in the ordinary, day-to-day life of a Christian? Are you consistent or inconsistent in your walk?
3. How might you prepare yourself to be ready should the opportunity arise to speak to someone of influence about Christ?
4. How would you describe your heart’s condition today toward those without Christ? Is it callused or tender? How should it be changed, if at all?

lesson 6

The Handwriting on the Wall

MAIN IDEA

We live in a culture of anti-God sentiment and behavior but that is no excuse to turn away from the truth of God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Daniel had a very good reputation both among believers and non-believers. How does one develop such respect among non-believers?

STUDY AIM

To understand that without Christ I stand condemned but in Christ I will never face condemnation

QUICK READ

This passage reveals the debauchery and demise of the empire under Belshazzar. But during this process God once again brought glory to Himself through His humble servant.

Introduction

We all must face reality, whether we would like to or not. This is non-negotiable. While this may look differently from person to person, we all have experienced life events that have required us to “wake up” to reality.

One example is when a high school senior gets closer to his or her graduation date. The excitement and fantasy of “freedom from school” and “what life will be like” can be intoxicating. That is until having to pay for one’s own meal ticket with one’s own money. Like it or not, reality in that situation is feeling the pain of spending your own dollars when you may have been used to someone else picking up the tab. At least, that was the experience for this writer.

The narrative of Daniel leads us by way of some amazing stories of repentance and restoration, particularly for Nebuchadnezzar. But now the story shifts to Belshazzar who is having a big party to celebrate his accomplishments and stature. Like every party, this one will end with a particular bang: a dose of reality that cannot be escaped.

Daniel 5:1-31

¹ Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. ² When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar

his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. ⁶ Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together. ⁷ The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom." ⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

¹⁰ The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers,

Chaldeans and diviners. ¹² This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.”

¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. ¹⁵ Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. ¹⁶ But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.”

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him. ¹⁸ O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. ¹⁹ Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he

wished he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. ²¹ He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes. ²² Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, ²³ but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified. ²⁴ Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

²⁵ "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSIN.' ²⁶ This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENĒ'—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. ²⁷ 'TEKĒL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. ²⁸ 'PERĒS'—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.

- ³⁰ That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.
³¹ So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

Inconceivable Reality (5:1-9)

A party always has someone at the center. In this case, Belshazzar was doing what any “successful” king would have done in his time: he threw a party for himself and invited everyone to eat and drink to his own honor and glory. This feast could have been unnoticed in the narrative except for the fact that he ventured into a sacrilegious extreme by bringing out the sanctified vessels of Yahweh’s Temple in Jerusalem, which in fact Nebuchadnezzar—not Belshazzar—had taken as plunder many years before. As he encouraged everyone to drink to the gods from these elements, the alcohol started to play tricks on them. Or was it from “what” they were drinking?

Verse 5 tells us that amidst the drinking and celebration, “suddenly” an inconceivable reality was on display. The fingers of a human hand came out of nowhere and started to write a message from something otherworldly. Whether a person is sober or intoxicated, this is a startling image that is simply inconceivable. This is what horror stories are made of! Notice the reaction of Belshazzar: he grew pale in countenance, and his body began to give way to the trembling of fear. As natural as it was for a king to puff himself up with pride, he could not shake his natural human instinct of fear.

Someone else—God—was clearly in charge of reality here, not the king.

Belshazzar

The wording of Belshazzar's relationship to Nebuchadnezzar can be confusing, so it is helpful to read between the lines that we have available to us. Was he the literal son of Nebuchadnezzar? It has been discovered through historians that Nabonidus was actually Babylon's last king, and his son's name was Belshazzar, who had more of a managerial role in Babylon while his father was away. This could make sense in the way that Daniel was given the authority of third-in-command by Belshazzar, since Belshazzar would have been second. More can be found by locating and reading the *Nabonidus Chronicle*.

Regardless of lineage, there is a shared similarity between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar: both blasphemed the God of Israel. The former did by exiling God's people as well as attacking and plundering the Temple. The latter did so by using those sacred and holy objects to offer more blasphemy. When it comes to the father-son consideration, there is more to ponder than lineage to be sure.

How do you react to fear, or to an inconceivable reality that shakes you to your bones? Belshazzar reacted in desperation, offering all he could think of in his poor mental state. And when his wise guys were not so wise to give him an answer, he grew more fearful, paler, and all were perplexed. This is what happens when fear takes over. This is what happens

when what should not happen, happens. Instead of turning to the one true God, the king turned to his own way. There is something to learn here about pride and fear: turning to your own remedies will not bring peace.

Incomparable Wisdom (5:10-16)

Ironically, in a culture where women were more property than human, the only one who brought light and wisdom to the situation was the queen. The very woman married to this insolent king enters the scene as the bearer of good news (sort of). Daniel, who seems to be labeled as a “has been big shot,” is brought out from memory as a potential solution to interpreting the inconceivable reality with incomparable wisdom.

Think about what made Daniel so significant to this juncture. The current diviners could not do what needed to be done, yet Daniel according to verse 12 was known for his “extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems.” He had a reputation of incomparable wisdom, and he was the man for the job. Take this point to your own life and ask, *what do other people know about me? Even more, what do non-believers know of me and think of me? Is my reputation one of wisdom?*

Sadly, Belshazzar is only interested in solving a problem, not changing his heart. He offers Daniel the same bounty as

the diviners. It is a sad thing when true wisdom is treated as petty treasure. Consider the many statements about wisdom in the early writings of *Proverbs*, where wisdom is seen as far beyond the worth of treasure. We should be careful not to treat the wisdom of God in so small of a way.

Idolatrous Practices (5:17-23)

Have you every noticed in Scripture that prophets and teachers tend to give a history lesson before they give an answer? For example, Stephen in Acts 7 gave a speech to the Sanhedrin, but before getting to the application of his teaching, he spoke paragraphs of Israel's history to lead his listeners to what they needed to hear but did not want to hear. Daniel also utilized this same tactic to point to Belshazzar's idolatrous practices. After telling the king to keep his gifts, he spoke to the recent history of Nebuchadnezzar to get to the main point in verse 22.

What caused God to finally "show up" in light of Belshazzar's self-worship? It was that point earlier in the party when God's sacred and holy objects were used to worship someone other than the one, true God. These vessels were used to praise the false gods with holy goblets. At the same time, they were used to give praise and worship to this idolatrous king. Essentially, Belshazzar took his own idolatrous practices too far to the point that he put himself ahead of God, and it was time for God to show Himself.

Be sure not to skip too quickly past the brief but potent phrase in verse 23: “But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified.” This takes idolatry (worshiping anyone or anything other than God) to its root problem: it robs God of the praise He deserves. Like us, Belshazzar was a human who breathed in order to function. The breath he was breathing was God’s and it should have returned to God, but instead he misused what was given to him. Think about how singing takes place in a worship service when a group of people sing praises to God. This is the natural way God intended it to be, where our breath returns praise to God. When we use our God-given breath to praise anyone or anything else (including ourselves), we are misusing what God has freely given us.

Inescapable Consequence (5:24-31)

The handwriting on the wall that could not be avoided would ultimately be the inescapable consequence for Belshazzar, his party, and his kingdom. This phrase could be viewed as more of a riddle that required divine explanation, which is where Daniel’s commentary on each word comes into play. The fact of the matter is that when a person is told of his or her consequences, that person does not usually get the full picture of what is at stake and what will happen. This is why Daniel’s role is so significant: he is God’s prophetic messen-

ger, speaking on behalf of God, explaining to humans what God is saying.

MENE, TEKEL, and UPHARSIN (PERES) were each weight measurements. These practical tools in the hands of a Babylonian counter meant something by ascribing value and worth based on weight (a shekel, for example). Daniel's interpretation took these practical weights to a whole new level. While "consequence" is a good word to consider for what the end of this chapter points out, another good word to consider is judgment. God had promised to judge Babylon for its cruel treatment of God's people, Israel. As you read these latter verses, imagine God in the judge's chair, sentencing not just Belshazzar, but also his entire kingdom for their wicked ways.

The repetition of MENE is an emphasis. Instead of reading it as a monotone sentence, you could read it with exclamation: "YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED AND OVER!" The boasting of Belshazzar and the cruelty of Babylon could not stand up to the eternal God. In God's judgment, Babylon was found as deficient (TEKEL), meaning the kingdom was not up to God's standard. PERES, which is a singular of UPHARSIN, points to how the weight (or substance) of the Babylonian kingdom will be split in two. Think about how these words must have sounded in the ears of all who heard them that day.

Daniel completed his end of the deal, although he never agreed to his task for the reward. He faithfully delivered the message God wanted delivered before the judgment and

consequence would become the new reality. It is interesting that no response is given to us in the text from Belshazzar, except that he kept his end of the deal by promoting Daniel to a higher “authority,” which would in fact not matter since that same night there would be a new king in place. This ending should cause the reader to tremble at the truthfulness of God’s judgment on idolatry and unrighteousness. Why should we tremble? We should never forget God’s standard is the standard that matters.

At the same time, consider the good news that is available for the Christian: The righteousness of Jesus Christ, which meets God’s standard, becomes the righteousness of the person who has given his or her life to Christ. While the reverent fear and trembling of consequences is healthy to remember, there is also hope that such demise as Belshazzar’s will not take place for the soul that is in Christ’s hands. If there is any good news for you and me, this is it.

Implications and Actions

Because we are well removed from the times of the Bible, we have the opportunity of hindsight as well as the reality that Jesus Christ came to be the Advocate for His believers when the great Judgment takes place. Considering this, it is good for us to respond to this text with an overwhelming gratitude. Why gratitude? It inspires us to direct our worship and

praise toward the one, true God, which is the opposite of Belshazzar's actions.

While using your breath to worship and praise God, do a self-assessment on what other things or people you tend to give praise to. Whatever these things are, ask God to help you no longer offer praise to those things. Idolatry of any kind is a serious offense to the One who lovingly made you. This practice will be as counter cultural as Daniel's presence in the story, which means you will be in good company as you offer God what is rightfully His.

Questions

1. What is your usual response to fear? What does your response to fear tell you about how close to—or how far away from—God you are?

2. Think about God's role as divine judge. When you imagine this, do you see this is a good or bad representation of God? Why?

lesson

Living in the Lion's Den

MAIN IDEA

Daniel had a growing and personal relationship with God and carried on a conversation with Him three times a day, and when he found himself in a pit, God was there.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How much do you depend on God's grace and yearn for His presence and power while living in a world of lions?

STUDY AIM

To learn that my dependence on God should always outweigh my dependence on the physical resources the world offers

QUICK READ

Daniel demonstrated the potential of a godly, uncompromising life in the face of adversity. As a result, God received the glory from the life and work of this faithful and humble servant.

Introduction

My family lives a few miles from our local zoo, and one of the underwhelming enclosures to visit is that of the local lion population. The most exciting sounds a passerby can hear when walking past the lion enclosure is the digitized sound of a lion's roar when an excited child presses a button. We never fear these lions because they are usually asleep and always behind thick glass. However, that changed slightly another day when a lioness snuck up and attempted to swipe at some kids on our side of the glass. No one was in danger, but it did give us shudders because we imagined what it would have been like to be among hungry lions with no enclosure between us.

In civilized culture, we tend to live without fear of wild beasts that might sneak up on us and take a swipe at us. We also live with very little fear that other lion-like forces that live among us (anti-Christians, burglars, etc.) might sneak up on us in the same way, and this is ignorant on our part. Jesus did say He would be sending us as "sheep among wolves" (Matthew 10:16), which means we have very little promise of safety in our surroundings. Daniel, even though he was in a prominent position and had the king's respect, had to endure a lion's den, that at times could be paralleled to our own. And it is in and among our surroundings that we must rely on God to protect us from these opposing forces.

Daniel 6:1-28

¹ It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom, ² and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom. ⁴ Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, "We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God."

⁶ Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: "King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.

¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously. ¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. ¹² Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king's injunction, "Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into the lions' den?" The king replied, "The statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." ¹³ Then they answered and spoke before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day."

¹⁴ Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him. ¹⁵ Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

¹⁶ Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you." ¹⁷ A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel. ¹⁸ Then the king went off to his

palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.

¹⁹ Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. ²⁰ When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?" ²¹ Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king, live forever! ²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime." ²³ Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. ²⁴ The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

²⁵ Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! ²⁶ I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion will be forever. ²⁷ "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." ²⁸ So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Opportunities Abound (6:1-9)

You will want to remember that in chapter 5, Daniel was a nearly forgotten prophet who had once experienced notoriety during previous administrations. It was not until Belshazzar was without options that Daniel moved back onto the scene as someone of prominence. Consider how significant it is that Daniel was the third-in-command of Babylon during its final hours, but now (in chapter 6) is found to be among the top three commissioners under Darius's reign, with the likelihood of a promotion. Frankly, one can only look at his place of influence and reckon it to either luck or providence; we should choose the latter.

When you read verses 1-9, what image comes to your mind as you notice the desires of Daniel's fellow commissioners and satraps? Honestly, it may look quite similar to modern American politics, particularly during campaigning months when "mud slinging" is the most popular sport. Out of jealousy and a lack of success in pinning fault on Daniel, the other pagan leaders took matters to the point of even rewriting the law. Desperation leads to dangerous things, whether in politics or the Christian life. When the opportunities abound to be faithful and transparent as Daniel was, the opportunities for the enemies of God will also abound. This is a natural "tug of war" that remains to this day.

It is important to remember that when the opportunities of the enemy are at work, the God-follower must be on the alert. Darius certainly was not as he allowed these loud

voices to trick him into a trap that had to have been quite obvious. The “everybody agrees with us” attitude of verse 7 clearly excluded Daniel’s opinion, and Darius evidently did not consult, or fact check the proposal. He blindly signed it into law. We must be alert as well as aware as we focus on being faithful to God.

Ongoing Prayer (6:10-13)

The emphasis on Daniel’s prayer practice should not be passed over, and at the same time it should not be made out to be much more than his own personal practice. His prayer routine was probably not totally unique, but it also was not a strict practice of Jewish Law. What the modern Christian should learn from Daniel’s practice is simple: pray consistently and constantly in a practice that draws you closer to God. Copying Daniel by praying thrice a day will not guarantee you drawing closer to God just because you pray three times a day. Oftentimes, Benedictine monks will practice seven “pauses” to pray aloud, which is their routine. Just keep in mind that the emphasis on Daniel’s ongoing prayer is that he was faithful to it regardless of the circumstances.

Part of the story that underlies Daniel’s fidelity is the crafty deceit of his co-workers who were “by agreement” lying in wait to tattle tale on Daniel in order to get rid of him. These minion-like characters are found often in the Old Testament. One example would be Haman from the book of

Esther. He also deceitfully crafted a document that would eradicate the Jews so he could get rid of Mordecai. While we know these workers of evil will get their just reward in the end, one must acknowledge their significant role in the story. When evil is displayed, it will be obviously overcome by God's justice and salvation.

Consistent Prayer

The apostle Paul in closing his first letter to the Thessalonians included a very brief statement worth pondering: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This passage makes for a lot of discussion because we really wonder if praying-without-stopping is a viable option. This could speak to keeping a consistent prayer practice, or to always living prayerfully. At the same time, there is some symbolism to consider. For example, some Anabaptist women make it a habit to wear a prayer veil on their heads. While this may also be a "covering" for prayer, it is also seen as a way to satisfy "praying without ceasing," which is itself a habit. For some practicing Jews, prayer shawls will be part of the attire. While modern Baptists do not tend to adopt such clothing pieces, it is worth pondering what physical elements would be helpful to practice prayer in a consistent and habitual way.

To make this more practical, consider what evil forces are at work against you as you try to faithfully follow God. How do these try to make your life miserable? How do these aim

at discrediting you? What effect do these have on your faithfulness? Like Daniel, it is important to be aware of these evil workers while remaining faithful by depending on God to keep you faithful. In doing this, you can be sure that God's justice and salvation will prevail.

Onerous Expectation (6:14-23)

Do you almost feel bad for Darius when he realizes he has been played for the fool? He was “deeply distressed” because the records would show that he—not his deceitful servants—was the reason for Daniel's punishment. At the same time, the writer of the text offers us a unique insight: In verse 16, he spoke directly to Daniel a statement of belief that Yahweh would deliver when Darius could not deliver. Could this be a foreshadowing of faith to come? Even as the king had to deal with the onerous expectations of his kingship, God was preparing a way to relieve the burden of his concern in the near future.

The emphasis of the lion's den scene ends up being more about Darius than Daniel. The faithfulness of a servant of God will always have side effects on the people who are in contact with that servant. In this case, Darius is the one to be impacted most by the salvation of Daniel from the den of lions. Just as he would survive the “lions” of his co-workers, Daniel survived the wild beasts who were divinely kept from harming him. No enemy of God will succeed, but this is not

because of how strong a Christian you are; it is because of how strong a God we serve. Thus, when we face realities as real as a den of lions, our dependence needs to be on the one who can close their mouths and save our lives. And while we live faithfully, be sure to notice who nearby us may be impacted by what God does with our faithfulness.

Opposition Denied (6:24-28)

Here is the moment we have been waiting for! The bad guys get their just consequence, and the good guy gets to keep being the good guy. Stories are made to end exactly like this, and consumers would incite rebellion if they did not end with the good guys winning. The temptation is to look at this part of the story and think, “Oh good, Daniel won!” But that is the wrong response. Yes, Daniel was faithful, he did endure, and he was safe in the end, but none of this was because of Daniel. The one who denied the opposition their evil desires was God. When we practice faithfulness, we need to see it as our faithfulness being a human example of God’s faithfulness. Just as God does not quit, we should not quit. The point is that human faithfulness should point to God’s glory, which is exactly what happens in verses 26-27.

After the judgment had been carried out where the silent kittens became hungry lions, Darius took to using his pen for something good. To overtake his previous decree, he sent out a message of peace in all languages to all people, calling

them to “fear and tremble before the God of Daniel.” Notice the emphasis is not on Daniel, but on his God! If I were to stumble upon a mother bear and her cubs, and a voice from somewhere were to say, “Fear and tremble before the mother of the bear cubs,” the emphasis would be the same. God is the overarching focus because He proved through divine action that He would take care of His faithful servant. He is the powerful one, and He will do the same for you and me as we follow Him faithfully. Just keep in mind it is God who will be faithful and protective. To think the opposite would be to seek the lesser praise of others that will hold no long-term value.

Implications and Actions

For this story to mean something, one needs to do more than simply admire Daniel’s faithfulness. This story is meant to be an example of faithfulness that Christians should emulate. This means that in circumstances that threaten your livelihood, your way of life, and even your very heartbeat, faithfulness needs to be actively pursued. So, begin by asking God to help you be faithful, and also ask Him what faithful habits you need to include in your Christian practice. Prayer is a good first practice to focus on.

Additionally, practice an awareness of the odds that are against you as a Christian who is trying to be faithful. Culture will challenge you, people will oppose you, and circum-

stances will seek to threaten you. The last thing you need to do is act unaware or ignorant. When you notice situations that will be at odds with your faithful lifestyle, acknowledge them and give them to God. You will not be able to do battle alone. Rather than adopting a “woe is me” attitude, turn your focus on the fact that “God is in me.”

Questions

1. How have I been naïve about the “lions” in my life?

2. What prayer practices have I noticed in others that might work for me?

lesson 8



Back to the Future

MAIN IDEA

This passage shows the numerous prophecies already fulfilled in history and gives believers a wonderful role model in the person of Daniel, who lived a pure life of faithfulness, devotion, and prayer.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can you use the fascination with the end times to witness to unbelievers?

STUDY AIM

To realize that judgment is coming, and I will be judged in Jesus or be judged by Jesus

QUICK READ

God, through Daniel's vision, gives a clear glimpse of the prophetic future and demonstrates His sovereignty over earthly affairs and human history.

Introduction

Have you ever looked at something you could not stop looking at? The human eyes are amazing receptors that take in the local environment but seem to get “stuck” when noticing something that is not ordinary, and in fact may be out of the ordinary. While this may happen in just about any environment, let us go deeper to the point of bigger-than-life happenings.

For example, when a lightning storm takes over the previously calm, dark sky, the usual response is fear and shuddering, and yet a person’s eyes are drawn to look out the window and witness the amazing lightshow from a place of protection. The Discovery Channel (and others like it) share footage of magnificent tornadoes that were captured in video format by people who decided to stop and stare, rather than turn and run. We are fascinated by bigger-than-life happenings.

The human curiosity is an amazing thing. Yet, when reading significant prophetic visions—like the ones Daniel wrote down for us—we easily treat it as if it was not actually seen or experienced. Reading a similar passage, such as Revelation 13, the modern reader more easily likens it to an abstract episode from a sci-fi thriller. But for biblical prophecy to be read and grasped, one must practice envisioning it as if he or she is standing in the scene with the writer, seeing what he saw. So, as we turn to the prophetic visions of Dan-

iel, let us imagine the scenes with our creative minds, which are our “eyes” for the moment.

Daniel 7:1-28

¹ In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it. ² Daniel said, “I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. ⁵ And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, ‘Arise, devour much meat!’ ⁶ After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁷ After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ⁸ While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold,

this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

⁹ "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. ¹⁰ "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.

¹¹ Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.

¹³ "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. ¹⁴ "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.

¹⁵ "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ "These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Highest One will receive

the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.'

¹⁹ "Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, ²⁰ and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. ²¹ I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them ²² until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.

²³ "Thus he said: "The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. ²⁴ As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. ²⁶ But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. ²⁷ Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

²⁸ "At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself."

Earthly Kingdoms (7:1-8)

Having moved from the narrative section of Daniel to the collection of dreams and visions, it is important to first recognize that the supernatural effect has not changed. Just as God was amazingly present in the previous chapters, God is also actively at work in displaying what is anticipated to happen. Considering the brief introductory of verse 1, we must affirm that the dream and visions Daniel saw while on his bed were not flippant or random. They were divinely given by God Himself, the "Ancient of Days" as He is referred to later. When it comes to what is prophetic, the root of inspiration lies in God Himself. So, while imagining verses 2-12, keep in mind that this is a specific vision given specifically by God to Daniel, His faithful servant.

What images are floating in your mind as you read about these beasts? To what do you compare these fantastic beasts that arose out of the chaotic waters? If you are human, you probably cannot fully imagine what these beasts looked like, let alone represented. The backdrop of this entire scene is the "great sea" that was stirred up, which is a chilling environment to ponder. This likely references the beginning of Genesis 1, where all the reader can understand is chaotic wa-

ters and a formless earth from which God would bring His creation to be. Out of nothing came something!

Each of these creatures (as we will see in verses 15-27) represent an earthly kingdom, fallen from God's perfection. While it is easy to want to jump to labeling each of these beasts with a specific earthly kingdom, please consider that urge as missing the main point. The main thing to consider of these dreadful and terrifying representations of earthly kingdoms is that they are unfaithful to God and His people. Their despicable natures are meant to be a big contrast to the eternal King, God Himself. The unreal imagery helps set the stage for a fallen world that will eventually perish and give way to God's perfect world that will be. With that in mind, consider the brief and clear description of the "Ancient of Days" compared to these four evil beasts.

Eternal King (7:9-14)

Like Genesis 1, the chaos is meant to be enveloped and swallowed up by the authority of God. It is unique how Daniel begins this portion by saying, "I kept looking until thrones were set up." The chaos of the previous section had to be overwhelming and frightening to God's witness. How long would these beasts be in charge? How long would the boasts of the horn have to ring out? Daniel was looking diligently for his God to show up and show out. Chaos and evil can only last for so long, and just as Daniel believed this, so should

we. When difficulties arise in our own lives, our eyes that are constantly having to stare at the unimaginable, need to look up and search for the help of God.

While it is hard to envision these earlier beasts, notice how clear and simple the description is of the eternal King. He appears closer to human description, which of course makes sense as humanity was made in God's very image. Even more, look at the stature of the setting: this is a courtroom where the evil and chaotic beasts will be no match for God, the eternal ruler and judge. Fire is an imagery that reminds us of the judgment of God that no one will escape. This judgment imagery takes us to the throne room of Heaven, where all (including, but not limited to these evil earthly kingdoms) will face the Ancient of Days.

Does this sound terrifying to you as well? While it should, there is also a reality for Christians to remember that God is the righteous Judge who will see the righteousness of Christ upon those who accepted and followed Jesus Christ. This is not mentioned specifically in Daniel's vision; however, the book of Revelation is a companion to this scene that is a reality for us. Like a noisy courtroom where debate takes over, the boastful words of the horn continue to speak, yet it eventually receives its judgment.

Speaking of Jesus Christ, the "Son of Man" entrance in verses 13-14 cannot be confused in any way. The return of the rightful King is a bold entrance to claim the authority that Jesus alluded to in His earthly time. Daniel witnessed God the Father granting all authority to the Son, the true

eternal King: “His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.” Considering the fearfulness of the first section, how does this reality of Jesus calm those fears?

Son of Man

This title is given in other Old Testament prophecies in addition to Daniel, and generally references to a human being. Ezekiel is probably the most notable prophet to use this phrase. At the same time, Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man throughout the gospels, revealing Himself as God Incarnate: Jesus is both fully God and fully man.

The Incarnation itself is what makes Jesus so significant to Old Testament prophecy. In Daniel’s context, the understanding of Jesus the God-man would not have been grasped. Yet in Revelation, it is clear that Jesus is the fulfillment of all prophecy and the ultimate explanation of Daniel 7:13-14.

What could not be fully understood in the past will be fully understood (in part now, but totally at the Second Coming of Christ). This is the potency of prophecy: what was seen in the past will happen in the future, what was not fully known in the past will be fully known in the future. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is the pivotal part of all divine revelation.

Everlasting Reality (7:15-28)

If you were still left wondering after the introduction of the beasts, in true teacher form Daniel does not leave his listeners hanging with curiosity. Like Jesus, a true rabbi, Daniel made sure to follow through with explanation of the visions he experienced. His motive for explanation came from his distressed spirit over what he saw. It is truly a frightening thing to witness something, keep staring at it (or replay what you saw), and still have no clarity. There is something practical for you and me to emulate as we see Daniel's approach: he was not afraid to ask for explanation.

Daniel asked those around to explain everything, and so verses 17-18 reveal the concise answer. Next, he wanted to know more about the fourth beast, the one that was most dreadful and most beyond-explanation, and verses 23-27 give as full of an answer to once again see the greatness of evil in stark contrast to the greatness of God. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy would be an example of a non-biblical writing that emulates the same stark contrast between the greatness of evil and the greater-ness of God. It captures the human imagination, leaving the reader with the decision to either side with the evil or with the good.

Think about what a Christian's response should be to such imagery. Are we to talk about it with others, or should we keep silent? Daniel admitted in the final verse that these visions impacted him significantly, and so he kept it to himself. We are not told why this is the case, but we are left to

ask if we should follow suit. Like Daniel, we should feel shaken over the reality of God's judgment, the reality of evil forces, as well as inspired by the reality of the eternal kingdom of God that will vanquish all evil. Because of this, the Christian response should be to share the good news that good will conquer evil.

The gospel itself is grounded in the vision, especially in verses 26-27. God will get the final say, and evil will receive its final judgment. In a world where chaos is the headliner of every newspaper, each news program, and almost every social media post, the world is in need of some good news. No matter how bad things can be, there is no limit to how good God will make things to be. Daniel's vision is a hope for us, just as John's *Revelation* was meant to be a letter of hope to those after Jesus' resurrection. The hope is not in the dismal scenes of reality, but the true Eternal Hope is found in God who will show Himself fully as the ruler of the eternal Kingdom. In that kingdom, no evil will be able to stand. That is good news that we should not be silent about.

Implications and Actions

While Daniel's narrative sections are easier to find practical application in, it is important to also believe that such visions and dreams can have application. Fear of evil is something we should work to vanquish right here, and right now. With the knowledge that evil will eventually fall, there is

no good reason to fear evil. With that in mind, what fears in your life need to be submitted to God? Once you submit those fears to God, faith inside of you will flourish, and evil will have no hold over you.

In light of fear, Christians are often hesitant to utilize passages such as these visions in Daniel, Revelation, as well as other prophetic books in the Old Testament. To be honest, simply speaking with others about what Jesus said is much easier and practical. This does not discount prophetic passages as real and necessary visuals for communicating with non-believers. With the sci-fi infatuation in media culture, such imagery as Daniel 7 (if spoken of appropriately) can also be a good aid in showing the ultimate victory of God over evil. Just because it is more difficult to use these passages as gospel conversations does not mean they should be abandoned.

Questions

1. How do I currently handle chaotic situations that arise in everyday life?

2. When it comes to God on His judgment seat, does this imagery inspire me in how I should worship God?

3. Keep in mind that this entire dream and vision includes happenings that are still in the future. Why should I be concerned with what has not happened yet? Is prophecy still as important to me today as it was to Daniel and his contemporaries?

4. What do I need to do to make sure I am not silent about God's victory over evil? What urges to stay silent have I already experienced, and how will I speak instead of giving in to silence?

lesson 9



A Glimpse of the Future

MAIN IDEA

Daniel was able to interpret this vision only with the help of the angel Gabriel, which serves as a great reminder of God's faithfulness.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What is the value of studying prophecy and how can it benefit a Christian?

STUDY AIM

To learn that God will never forsake me even in troubled times

QUICK READ

Alexander is a picture of worldly greatness marked by failure, but Daniel is a picture of steadfast service in tough times.

Introduction

Nightmares are a strange phenomenon. According to what is known about dreams, people tend to experience images and scenes in their sleep but after waking up will not remember most of them. Sometimes it is easy to remember good dreams, but more often than not it is the nightmares (scary dreams) that tend to linger on after waking up. Why is this the case? Each of us could conjecture one way or the other, but the thing we could all agree on is that scary possibilities cripple us more than good possibilities encourage us.

This particular vision in Daniel 8 is meant to be linked with the previous chapter, although these are separated by a brief span of time. Another thing to notice is that while chapter 7 contained both a “dream” and “vision,” this chapter is referred to as a “vision” while Daniel was in Susa. The reason why I compare this waking vision of Daniel’s to a nightmare is it seems to linger on without much resolve. In Ezekiel-like fashion, Daniel is carried away in broad daylight to witness a crippling vision, one that left him feeling sick.

When you and I stare into a harsh reality (or a strange phenomena) that seems so unreal and evil, while at the same time very real, it is easy to be crippled in fear. The forces of evil are always lingering in the background for the Christian who is trying desperately to follow God in opposition to what is ruling the world. If you look beyond the political arena of your geography, you will find that there is evil contending for power in every nation and in every corner of the world.

The scary part is that it seems as if nothing and no one will be able to stand against these contending forces. And it is in these particularly strange and frightening times we must trust that God's beyond-human power will not abandon us as we face these harsh realities.

Daniel 8:1-27

¹ In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously. ² I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal. ³ Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. ⁴ I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified himself.

⁵ While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. ⁶ He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. ⁷ I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to

withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. ⁸ Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

⁹ Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. ¹⁰ It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. ¹¹ It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. ¹² And on account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper. ¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, "How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?" ¹⁴ He said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored."

¹⁵ When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, standing before me was one who looked like a man. ¹⁶ And I heard the voice of a man between the banks of Ulai, and he called out and said, "Gabriel, give this man an understanding of the vision." ¹⁷ So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end."

¹⁸ Now while he was talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and made me stand upright. ¹⁹ He said, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for it pertains to the appointed time of the end.

²⁰ The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia.

²¹ The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. ²² The broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power.

²³ "In the latter period of their rule, When the transgressors have run their course,

A king will arise, Insolent and skilled in intrigue. ²⁴ "His power will be mighty, but not by his own power, And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree And prosper and perform his will; He will destroy mighty men and the holy people. ²⁵ "And through his shrewdness He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; And he will magnify himself in his heart, And he will destroy many while they are at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, But he will be broken without human agency. ²⁶ "The vision of the evenings and mornings Which has been told is true; But keep the vision secret,

For it pertains to many days in the future."

²⁷ Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it.

Battling for Power (8:1-14)

It is a bit easier for the modern reader to visualize the ram and the goat (compared to the four beasts of the previous chapter). At the same time, it is the portrayal of these horns that leave us wondering. The horns were intended to show the power associated with these creatures, which represented kingdoms and power movements. As Daniel looked into the vision, standing beside a canal, he noticed by looking up that there was a ram with not just one, but two mismatched horns standing by the water passageway. The defense mechanism for rams is their horns, and so this powerful contender was using his power to defeat all opposing forces that were rising against.

This sounds similar to an undefeated contender who defeats all his foes. You could imagine a professional boxer who has yet to be defeated, or even go back to the Greco-Roman days of the gladiators where being undefeated meant you were still alive and rising in status. The significance is that the more a person gains power and remains undefeated, the greater influence and the higher pedestal he or she will be seated on. Then again there is the prominent saying that, “the higher you are, the further you’ll fall.” This butting ram could not be defeated, but “did as he pleased and magnified himself.” Pride is associated with this nightmarish creature that oppressed people, including Daniel’s fellow Israelites, and worse, it could not be stopped.

Next enters this lesser creature, a male goat who seemed to float along the surface of the earth. This is no ordinary goat, but one with a strange horn between its eyes. In nature, I have never seen a goat try to take on a ram, and that seems to be the point of this vision: something surprising is about to happen. This goat is filled with so much wrath that it not only defeats the powers of the known world at that time, but also trampled the kingdom in such a way that no one else could rescue. On one hand, this seems like good news because the undefeated kingdom was defeated; on the other hand, history seems to repeat that the new victor can easily become as bad or worse than his predecessor. Commentaries tend to agree that the strange horn on this male goat represents Alexander the Great, who rapidly defeated the known kingdoms, including the very one that Daniel was living in and serving.

Alexander the Great

While we should be cautious to assert an earthly historical figure in biblical prophecy, the ram and the goat are quite obvious to historians, as Alexander the Great would dethrone Persia's Darius III. Just as prominent and powerful as Alexander would rise to power, he also died at a young age, leaving an empire that was divided. As the horn of power was shattered, so was Alexander's conquest and kingdom, falling to conspicuous leaders and kingdoms.

This battle for power reveals a playing board that remains the same: earth and its inhabitants. And like every board game, there is a battle of chance and luck as to who is winning at one moment compared to who will be winning later. The sobering part is that while human forces battle for power over the earth, there is very little mention of the superior power of God. God's seeming inaction contributes to the fearful scene. Why does it seem that while earthly powers rage against each other, God is not rising up immediately against these ungodly evils? That same "how long" question comes up in verses 13-14, where a term limit is given for how long the unholy will contend.

Searching for Understanding (8:15-22)

Like the previous chapter, there is something to appreciate and emulate about Daniel: he sought understanding. Keep in mind that up until the latter half of this book, Daniel has been the voice of understanding, revealing the meaning of dreams and scenarios on behalf of God to the rulers of his kingdom. Now, he appears as uncertain and clueless as those to whom he was the messenger of God. This does not detract from Daniel by any means. It seems that God is only revealing these futuristic realities to Daniel, which is both a heavy and consuming task. After asking for understanding, the "voice of man" called out to the angel (messenger) Gabriel to give him understanding. This would not be the only time this

particular angel of God would be sent to reveal God's divine plan for the world.

Have you ever noticed that when an angel approaches a human in Scripture, fear seizes the human who is encountering this other-worldly being? Daniel was so frightened; he fell down in fear. If he thought the haunting features of his nightmarish vision were difficult to swallow, imagine how much more it felt to now encounter Gabriel face-to-face. The simple answer given by Gabriel is one that is helpful, but not too clear: what Daniel saw pertained to the very end of times. It is interesting how this vision impacted Daniel physically. He was so distraught that while listening to this greater-than-life messenger, he fell into a deep sleep, one that an overwhelmed person could easily fall into.

When it comes to revelation, our human bodies are impacted physically. From the time of being a child, anytime something apocalyptic was brought up, my body would feel the paralyzing sensations for hours and even days after. Yet, Gabriel saw it as necessary to give these explanations in verses 20-22. This is because God's desire is never to keep His people in the dark about the harsh reality of evil forces that are contending for earthly power. He gives us a limited understanding of what will happen so we will not be ignorant of how difficult things will be before He intervenes. Until God does put all things in place as they should be, we are called to seek His wisdom and understanding, and believe that no matter how dark the nightmare is, our God of Light will shine and overwhelm the darkness of evil.

Angels

Culture has painted angels to be cute, innocent, and even child-like. Sometimes it is believed—or at least said at funerals—that a person may become an angel after death. Neither of these visuals is proven to be true. Angels are specifically “messengers” who are to speak and act on behalf of God. Gabriel (which means “warrior of God”) is named here specifically, and Michael will be mentioned in chapter 10. Scripture paints angelic beings as terrifying, yet God-sent messengers. They are significant to announcing and carrying out the plans and will of God.

Looking for the End (8:23-27)

Christians are called throughout Scripture to be actively pursuing God’s kingdom while looking to God as the one, true ruler of all things. As we look, there is one final foe to be warned about (8:23-25): one who will stand above all the other rulers, one who will be mighty and to an unforeseen level, yet one who will “be broken without human agency.” Some will reference this as an anti-Christ being, but regardless of what you label this final evil power, he will be broken by God who is beyond all human power. This is the end of the end. In the final point of the great nightmare of what is to come, evil will be defeated. It will not be a fair fight, nor should it be.

If you consider 2 Thessalonians 2, you will see the charge to Christians as we draw closer and closer to this final struggle of evil versus God: be firm in God. No matter how crippling reality is, when your body wanes because of the effect of such nightmares, let your faith be grounded completely in God who will defeat your greatest nightmares. This simple solution of firm faith is much deeper than your own physical ability. As Daniel looked toward the end of all things, we are also to look toward the end, but not crippled with fear. God will not abandon His people when the going gets tough, so God's people should not abandon Him when things get intense. Let faith, not fear, be the rule for how we navigate the nightmares of evil.

Implications and Actions

If each of us in the room is honest, many of us would as soon skip past passages like this one and move on. Christian prophecy is a challenge because it is usually unexplainable and shocking altogether. But there is a benefit to spending time on these passages and others like it because God is showing Himself as the only hope that will stand against the evil realities of this world. Faith in God may not terminate the fears we experience, but ultimately it is God who will terminate the evil behind these fears.

It is one thing to know and believe that God will one day be victorious over all our nightmares and fears. It is a whole

other thing to sit down and specifically confess your fears to God. With that in mind, on your own, consider writing down the fears and anxieties that have crippled you. In prayer, confess your fears to God, commit these nightmares to Him, and ask Him to give you such a deep faith in Him these fears will no longer cripple you. Ask Him to give you a vision of His power that will overwhelm even the scariest thoughts of your mind. Next, move forward in faith, not fear!

Questions

1. What are some of the nightmares and scariest thoughts that have lingered with me? How have these crippled me?

2. Looking at the news of the world, what evil forces are currently struggling for power? What should my response be to these?

3. Seeking understanding from God for what I don't understand is the right step. How should I ask God for understanding? How could I expect Him to reveal Himself?

4. Why should I study and read biblical prophecy? What benefit will it have to my understanding of God and His plan for this world?

lesson 10



Daniel's Prayer of Confession

MAIN IDEA

Daniel's prayer stands as a model of genuine, heartfelt intercession characterized by humility, confession, and self-denial.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

As you reflect on Daniel's prayer, what example or encouragement can you discern for your own prayer life?

STUDY AIM

To learn to pray according to God's Word to discern God's Will

QUICK READ

As Daniel studied the prophecies of Jeremiah, he recognized that the time of captivity was almost over. He was so filled with hope, he began to fast and pray.

Introduction

The old man Daniel picked out the scroll of Jeremiah from his collection. He had been through so much in his eight or nine decades. He very well could have been holding the scroll that was covered with Jeremiah's handwriting. It would have been weathered and darkened with time, much like the hands of Daniel holding it. He had survived seventy years in captivity, first in Babylon and then in Persia. Surely, he had read those words regularly since being taken into exile. The long-ago days of the lion's den were a distant memory, as was the test of his youth to partake of forbidden food and drink. Even more remote, but alive in his memory, was a promise.

Daniel 9:1-23

¹ In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. ³ So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴ I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have re-

belled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.

⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

⁷ "Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

⁸ We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you.

⁹ The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; ¹⁰ we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. ¹¹ All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.

"Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. ¹² You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. ¹³ Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. ¹⁴ The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.

¹⁵ "Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. ¹⁶ Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn

away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

¹⁷ “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸ Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. ¹⁹ Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”

²⁰ While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill— ²¹ while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. ²² He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. ²³ As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision.

The Time Had Come (9:1-3)

Imagine old Daniel unfurling the scroll to Jeremiah 29:10, “This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.’” His mathematical acumen was as sharp as ever. Daniel knew the time had come.

Much too old to travel the 1,000 miles from Susa back to Jerusalem himself, he then wrote in his own scroll, “in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years” (Daniel 9:2). He then wrote down the prayer he had poured out to God.

Prayer of Confession (9:4-11)

Daniel's prayer is a model prayer. He began with a long confession where he contrasted God's loving and just nature with the sinfulness of the people of Israel. He recalled God's steadfast love and covenantal faithfulness, then of the open disobedient rebellion of his people. Along with Joseph and Noah, Daniel is one of the most righteous characters in the Old Testament. His life was filled with faithfulness to God and yet he wrote himself into the guilty rebellion, using the words, “we,” “us,” and “our,” numerous times throughout the prayer. He did not dodge the guilt and never excused himself. We must pray similar prayers of confession. Living in a generation that does not want to take ownership of our sin, we either shift the blame by pointing at others' fault, or minimize our part by saying, “we're all just human.” Often, we are more worried about what others think of our reputation than what God thinks of our culpability.

Daniel's prayer is a direct challenge to two modern Christian trains of thought: 1. Cheap Grace and 2. Prosperity Gospel.

First of all, grace, forgiveness, and love are extraordinarily important doctrines of the Church. Jesus led with these, but they can be overly emphasized when they are preached without the balancing message of confession and repentance. Cheap Grace is a grace that offers salvation and goodness without any real change in one's life, turning the cross into a cheap, meaningless cosmic "oops, sorry," like an obliging but insincere twelve year old boy snorting to his brother under the watchful eye of his mother. Grace is costly. It cost the blood of Jesus! Daniel recognized the gravity of sin: his and that of his people.

Costly Grace

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was an outspoken critic of Hitler and the Nazis. Having returned to Germany from New York, he eventually was executed. In *Costly Grace*, Bonhoeffer wrote, "Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

Secondly, the prosperity Gospel is the belief that God has only good things for His people if they just claim it or believe it enough. Faith is meant to be fun or rewarding, and those who pedal it, drive far from confession, repentance, guilt, and shame. Daniel's prayer is anything but prosperity gospel. Indeed, so was the entirety of his life, as were the lives of his predecessor Jeremiah, or Jesus and all the Apostles, or even the legions of Christians who have been martyred, tortured, and persecuted for the cause of Christ. Those who preach cheap grace or a prosperity gospel should pause on Daniel 9 and dwell in the prayer of confession.

Recognition of Sin's Judgment (9:11-14)

It is one thing to recognize sin and then confess, but it is another thing to accept the consequential judgment that comes from that sin. Daniel understood that sin has consequences. Many people struggle to understand that they have sinned, and some of those may not truly understand the gravity of their sin or its consequences. True followers understand that a general apology does not absolve all sins or the results of those sins. We certainly live in an age of grace, but grace does not wipe every problem associated with sin in one swipe. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death." Death comes in many forms.

1. Physical death is part of the judgment of sin. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death

through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). God allowed the animal sacrificial system in the Old Testament to substitute for human sin—but even those animals had to die. Ultimately, Jesus’ physical death became the final and permanent sacrifice in the way that the ongoing animal sacrifices in the Old Testament could not (see Hebrews 1:1-18). Our sin led directly to Jesus’ death, not in some general spiritual blob but every sin was upon the shoulders of Jesus on the cross.

2. Eternal death is also part of the judgment of sin. Sin separates us from God and leads to eternal death. *“But your iniquities (sin) have separated you from your God”* (Isaiah 59:2a). Daniel wrote, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

3. Spiritual death is a judgment of sin. Dodging shame and guilt are evidence of how sin corrupts the self. Spiritual life is not just about life after death but a life of richness, fullness, and abundance, here and now (John 10:10).

4. Relational death is a consequence of sin that is not easily fixed. There are steps to biblical reconciliation, but sin can be so damaging that full restoration may not be possible.

5. Societal death comes from the collective sin of the citizens of the community. Crime, poverty, racism, war, and other such ills of society are multi-generational consequences and judgments of sin. They all can also become factors that contribute to more sin, thus creating a vicious cycle.

Daniel understood that the sin of the people of Israel led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile into Babylon and then Persia. Unlike many from a cheap grace or prosperity gospel mindset, he was not surprised by judgment. A simple apology did not instantly erase consequences. Likewise, even though we have received God's grace, our sin has harmed us, others, and the society around us. Those damages take time to heal and reverse, like victims of crime and injustice or those physically affected. A drunk driver may truly be sorrowful, but it does not restore the ability to walk for the child that was run over. Someone may repent from a lifetime of using and abusing people, but that does not negate the incalculable direct and indirect damage one has inflicted on the victims and their families. Some consequences are not fixable. Remorse may flood the heart of the enraged spouse who murdered the lover of the cheating partner, but it cannot bring the dead back to life. Sin has consequences and judgment. God's grace covers sin, but it has lingering effects. Daniel 9:11-14 acknowledges Moses' call to death and life, blessings, and curses (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). Sin's judgment is also always a reminder of the promises of life and blessing that God has set for those who love Him and walk in obedience.

Plea for Mercy (9:15-19)

Daniel's prayer does not end with the sorrow of judgment. He does know that God is good, gracious, and merciful. His request for mercy is built on five foundational precepts.

1. His prayer is based on what God has done before in the past (when God brought the people out of Egypt). The bondage of Egypt would have been similar to the captivity in Babylon. We can trust what God will do in our lives based on what He has done before.

2. Daniel's prayer was not about him or his people, but rather about who God is, based on His character not Daniel's righteousness. God is the Creator, Healer, Deliver, Savior, Sustainer, Provider, Father, Mighty One, Merciful, Way, Truth, and Life, et. al.

3. God is powerful enough to accomplish what He wants. Daniel's prayer (and ours too) is reflective that God is able to do more than we could ever do. We pray in faith, trusting His power.

4. Daniel's plea for mercy is also based on God's promises (in keeping with His righteous acts). As followers of Jesus, we have the hope that every promise found in the Bible is answered "yes" in Jesus for all those who walk with Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). Again Deuteronomy 30:15-20 gives a promise of blessing for those who are faithful to walk in obedience to the commands of God.

5. Ultimately, the plea to God's mercy is to magnify Him, not those to whom He is merciful. Daniel's prayer is for the city and the people who bear His name.

Why doesn't God listen to my prayers?

God will not always listen to our prayers when we pray in open sin (Isaiah 1:15), when we pray selfishly (James 4:3), and when we pray for our will, but not His (1 John 5:14). However, we can be confident that He will always answer our prayers of confession (1 John 1:9).

An Answer From God (9:20-23)

God sent the angel Gabriel to Daniel to provide a threefold answer for his prayer. First, Gabriel's arrival demonstrated that God had indeed heard Daniel's prayer. Secondly, God offered His presence to Daniel in the form of Gabriel. Gabriel's name in Hebrew means, "God is my strength," whereas Daniel means, "God is my judge." After spending three weeks in prayer about the judgment of God, Daniel received the strengthening from God in the person of Gabriel. In fact, Gabriel said he was commissioned to go to Daniel, "as soon as you began to pray" (9:23). God was sending an answer before Daniel even finished the prayer. Finally, God provided an answer. Through Gabriel, He gave "insight and under-

standing.” God hears our prayers, offers us His presence (in the form of the Holy Spirit), and gives us answers.

Implications and Actions

God has demonstrated His power and His love in the Gospel message. Our sin led us away from God and we are powerless to reach Him by ourselves. The gospel shares how God fixed our situation. Jesus is God and He became human. He lived a righteous (perfect) life and He died as the sacrificial substitute for all who would believe and receive His salvation by faith. He extended His righteousness to us to be received by faith. Have you received salvation by faith? Do you trust God by faith to bring you a new righteousness (through the Holy Spirit)? If you have experienced the power of the gospel, how can you help others to do the same?

Questions

1. How will you practice the spiritual discipline and prayer of confession?

2. Do you think people ignore or overlook God's judgment, especially for themselves? Discuss how people might deflect the responsibility of judgment.

3. Have you considered the different aspects of death that comes from sin? Discuss how sin's affect has led to any of the following forms of death: physical, eternal, spiritual, relational, societal.

4. How much of what we pray for is about self-interests and how much of what we pray for is about giving glory to the Name of God?

5. Which is more comforting to you: knowing that God hears your prayer, or that He will provide insight and understanding?

lesson 11

The Beginning of the End

MAIN IDEA

Even though things are getting worse, we know that, in the end, Jesus will return, establish His Kingdom, and set everything right.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What should be our greatest priority during this “age of grace?”

STUDY AIM

To learn to trust God’s Word even though I do not know all the details

QUICK READ

During the final seven years the Antichrist will make and break treaties, desecrate the temple, and be defeated when Jesus returns.

Introduction

Parts of biblical prophecy have easy, straight-forward explanation, while others are cloaked in complexities, symbolism, and double meanings. Along with selected passages in Ezekiel, Zechariah, Revelation, and other books, Daniel 9:23-27 is key to understanding the end times. The interpretation of this portion of Scripture is one of the most debated set of verses. The meaning is difficult enough to discover if read literally, but many have seen these verses to carry a high level of symbolism (as much of prophecy does), which complicates the interpretation. Nevertheless, there are basic truths in Daniel 9 that apply to all Christians regardless of how the text is interpreted.

Daniel 9:23-27

²³ As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision:

²⁴ "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.

²⁵ "Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in

times of trouble. ²⁶ After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. ²⁷ He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

The Messiah Will Cancel All Sin (9:24a)

Sin is described as defiance. "Transgression" from the Hebrew *aveira* means rebellion, revolt, active rejection against God's way. It can be a single act, a lifestyle, or a mindset by someone who knows right but chooses wrong. Israel was told not to have any other gods before Yahweh, but they chased after Baal, Asherah, Moloch, and other gods. Many people today have chosen to disregard parts of the Bible for various reasons: inclusiveness, modernism, selfishness, or simply to pursue pleasure. These are forms of transgressions against God.

Sin is described as deficiency. The most common word for sin in Hebrew is *hata*, which means "to go astray" similar to the Greek *hamartia*, which is "missing the mark." There is an assumption that God has a path for each person; when we miss it or wander off the way, we are moving away from God's desire and command. Sin can be overt (something

committed), or passive (something neglected), leading to a deficiency in character or actions. King Saul sinned when he *almost* did all that God told him to do through the prophet Samuel, but he was always slightly off from God's commands (1 Samuel 15). Matthew 25:31-46 demonstrates the significance of sins of neglect: failing to provide clothes, food, and water to the needy, visiting the sick, or those in jail. Jesus warned of eternal punishment for such neglect.

Sin is described as deception. The term "iniquity" is the Hebrew word *avone*, meaning not being equal or not measuring up. The English word "iniquity" has the same etymology as "inequity." Both come from the image of a set of scales not balancing. Inequity is usually understood as unfair, unjust, or unequal. Iniquity is stronger, referring to extreme injustice, heinous acts, or gross immorality. The unbalanced scale represents a purposeful attempt by one party to deceive another by cheating them on improper scales. It also represents a distortion of truth that is close but still not right.

All three descriptions of sin are still relevant today: rebellion, misdeeds, and corruption. Jesus' death on the cross dealt with all three. Daniel 9:24 describes exactly how Jesus cancels all sin. He finishes the transgressions (ends the rebellion and turns the rebellious heart to God), ends sin (keeps His sheep from wandering by being the Way Himself, see Ezekiel 34:11-16, John 10:1-14, John 14:6), and atones for iniquity (Hebrews 10:1-18). Jesus' removal of sin (in all forms) is the personal work within each believer.

The Messiah Will Provide Ultimate Victory (9:24b)

The rest of verse 24 lists three additional things the Messiah will do. First, he will bring an everlasting righteousness. In contrast to injustice, immorality, rebellion, or wandering away from God, Jesus will provide righteousness to every believer. Micah 6:8 is a model verse of what righteousness looks like; it says, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” The power of such righteousness has two sources. First, Jesus is the one who establishes our righteousness. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

There are three parts to our righteousness: past (justification), present (sanctification), and future (glorification). In the initial act, Jesus credits His perfect righteousness to all who received His sacrificial death in a one-time transactional event. Jesus starts the work, but we must accept His gift of salvation (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). We are seen in Christ’s righteousness, instead of our own sinfulness before a Holy God. Yet, we all know that we continue to sin and that we are all far from perfect.

The ongoing process of receiving Christ’s righteousness is sanctification. We are being made pure before God as we grow in faith and in righteousness. This process is described in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your

mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will." We are constantly being transformed. But we also know that even though we are growing in Christ, we will never be perfect, at least not in this world. Our future righteousness will be established at our glorification, where we will forever escape all sin (Roman 8:30; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 2 Corinthians 4:17).

Secondly, Jesus will establish a righteousness that will be eternal. Hebrews 10:12, 14, says "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, . . . For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." There will be no more sin in eternity. We will be in the presence of Jesus living without fear, guilt, shame, sorrow, or pain in the new Eternal City (Revelation 21).

Thirdly, the Messiah will seal up vision and prophecy meaning. He will close and confirm Scripture. The New Testament affirms this by disclosing that Jesus is indeed the Word of God that created and sustains all things (John 1:1-3, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3).

Also, the Messiah will anoint the Most Holy Place and He will establish and confirm the Sanctuary. The Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed, but it would be rebuilt soon after Daniel's time and would last until Rome destroyed it in A. D. 70. The Bible anticipates it to be rebuilt one more time so the offerings could begin again; however, we know the real and final manifestation of God's sanctuary to humanity is still to come in the person of Jesus (John 2:19; Hebrews 8:1-

5; Colossians 2:16-17). Jesus will anoint it for all of eternity and we have an end to sin and an everlasting righteousness.

Sir Robert Anderson

Sir Robert Anderson was a police officer turned theologian in England around 1900. He identified four Persian decrees as a possible starting point for the countdown to the first coming of Christ. They were the Decrees of Cyrus to rebuild the Temple (538 B.C.), Darius to motivate the stalled workers to get back to work on the Temple (519 B.C.), Artaxerxes to establish spiritual and civil reforms (458 B.C.), and Artaxerxes Longimanus to rebuild Jerusalem and let life flourish there again (445 B.C., this was the time of Nehemiah). The latter was the first day of Nisan 445 B.C. Using the Hebrew annual calendar of 360 days multiplied by 483 years equals 173,880 days. 1 Nisan 445 B.C. plus 173,880 days is 10 Nisan A.D. 32—the day he said that Jesus rode on a colt into Jerusalem as King. Whether his calculations demonstrated a literal interpretation of the weeks or if it is indeed symbolic, we can take confidence in knowing that God knows every minute of every day of all of creation.

How can we live out the righteousness of Christ in the following (especially the ones with whom we do not always get along)?

- at work
- with our spouses
- with our children
- with our neighbors
- at church

The Seventy Weeks (9:25-27)

Daniel 9:25-27 is one of the most confusing and debated passages in the Bible. It is helpful to examine five aspects of the passage to develop a comprehensive interpretation.

First, the passage is about time. Seventy weeks refers to a period of time in Daniel's future in which God would bring final victory through the Messiah. A week in this context is seven years, not seven days. In fact, the terminology is seventy "sevens." Seventy weeks is equal to 490 years. There are two interpretations of time (and numbers) in end time literature: literal and symbolic. Seventy weeks could be understood as there being 490 literal years of God's future work to come (the starting date will be discussed below). However, it is worth considering that the Jews had an extensive understanding of numeric symbolism. Seven and ten both referred to a completed work of God. Multiplying the two into seventy could indicate a fullness (extreme completion). The symbolic understanding that Daniel is simply referring to an undefined time period to come that will be full and complete as God sees it. Both understandings are plausible, but the specific details described seems to lean toward a literal understanding. The time is broken into three parts: seven weeks (49 years), 62 weeks (434 years), and a final week (7 years). Combining the first two equals 483 years. Something significant happens at year 483.

Secondly, the passage is about events. Daniel lists seven events in these verses: 1. Restoration and Rebuild of Jeru-

salem; 2. Anointed One (Ruler) will come; 3. Death of the Anointed One; 4. Jerusalem will be destroyed; 5. Wars and desolation will multiply; 6. There will be final covenant; 7. The Abomination of Desolation. The city of Jerusalem, its walls and the Temple were all rebuilt in series of stages. The Hebrew term for the Anointed One comes to English as the “Messiah.” From Greek, it is translated as the “Christ.” Daniel is predicting the coming of the Messiah as well as His death. Christians understand that Jesus was the fulfillment of these verses. Shortly after the death of Jesus, Jerusalem was also destroyed again. The first four have already happened. The last three are yet to come, or at least have not been finalized.

Thirdly, the passage is about sequence. The trickiest part of understanding the seventy weeks is how it all fits together and if the time period corresponds to specific dates in history. Jesus has already partially fulfilled these verses. The first period of 49 represents the time period until the close of the Old Testament. The second period of 434 years represents the time between the end of the Old Testament and the coming of Jesus. Again, remember that this could be literal or symbolic. The significant thing that happened at year 483 was the death of Jesus. The destruction of Jerusalem ended the sequences of the first four events. There is a break in time between the destruction of Jerusalem and the final week. Wars, desolation, a final covenant, and the Abomination of Desolation is still to come. Some interpreters have identified the Abomination of Desolation as the moment

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when Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem in 167 B.C. That event was a foreshadowing of the real Abomination, which Jesus said was still to come (Matthew 24:4-15). The final week is what is yet to come. Some Christians understand that to be a literal seven-year period, which will include the second coming of Christ and the end of the time. Some see the last week as symbolic for the entire Christian age. The last week will be time of great tribulation like the world has never known (Matthew 24:21). In those seven years, the Antichrist will come to rule over the world. He will offer false peace but break it, desecrate the temple, and ultimately be defeated by Jesus. More will be discussed on this topic in the lesson on Daniel 12.

Implications and Actions

God is in control even when things seem chaotic and troublesome. Much of what God predicted through Daniel has already come to pass. This should give Christians incredible confidence in difficult times. Daniel lived through very difficult times himself and took comfort in the words of Jeremiah that God would restore the land after seventy years. Under the same inspiration, Daniel has said the same thing to us, that God will restore righteousness after the seventy weeks of years. Though some of the details are challenging to understand, we can know these things: 1. God is in control; 2. Jesus cancels our sins; 3. Jesus will be victorious (and so

are those in Christ); and 4. Everything is in God's timing so we can trust God. Having a confidence in these truths, we should be motivated to live transformed lives honoring what Jesus has done for us, and we should want others to share with us in the victory in Christ.

Questions

1. How do people dismiss, minimize, and excuse their sin? How do they shift blame to circumstances, events, or other people?
2. Describe in your own words what it means for Jesus to provide victory.
3. Do you ever feel that life is out of control? How can at least a surface layer of understanding of this passage help provide confidence that God is in control? Describe how that makes you feel.

lesson 12



The Power of Prayer

MAIN IDEA

The mystery of prayer is the key to victory in spiritual warfare.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

When have you sensed the unmistakable touch of God on your own life?

STUDY AIM

To understand that my most powerful prayers start with a burden and don't stop until an answer comes

QUICK READ

Daniel experienced a vision of a glorious man who revealed that Israel's peace and freedom would not last.

Introduction

Daniel was left alone. He was probably in his eighties or nineties when the events of Daniel 10—12 occurred (these three chapters are one complex vision). He had seen the destruction of his homeland as a youth, endured trials and persecution, rose to the highest ranks in the Babylonian Empire, served at least three Babylonian rulers and then was forgotten. He was called on again in his old age to come from obscurity to interpret the vision of the handwriting on the wall but was taken into captivity once again by the Persians. He served at least two Persian rulers, watched his friends all die, and the remaining faithful Israelites leave him to return to Jerusalem (led by Zerubbabel and Joshua). Once again, he was referred to as Belteshazzar as a reminder that he was in a foreign land. Daniel received one last vision. He demonstrated how we are to receive a Word from God in prayer.

Daniel 10:1-21

¹ In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.

² At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. ³ I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

⁴ On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, ⁵ I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. ⁶ His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

⁷ I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. ⁹ Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

¹⁰ A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹¹ He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

¹² Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. ¹³ But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. ¹⁴ Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."

¹⁵ While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. ¹⁶ Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth

and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I feel very weak. ¹⁷ How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."

¹⁸ Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. ¹⁹ "Do not be afraid, you who are highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

²⁰ So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; ²¹ but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.

Understanding the Revelation Only Came Through Prayer (10:1, 4-6)

Daniel 10:1 provides a revelation and its understanding, though both are far from easy to comprehend. His vision was fantastic and has perplexed scholars for over 2500 years. How many people did he see, one or two? There were two. Who were they? One was the angel Michael. The second man is harder to name. He who was dressed beautifully and who shone brilliantly has been equated by some with Jesus in Revelation 1, but that seems unlikely since he struggled for three weeks to get to Daniel, and then only with the aid of Michael. Surely, Jesus could have defeated His foe much more easily, unless He intentionally limited Himself. Some

have speculated that it was Gabriel from the previous chapter or yet another unnamed angel, but those are indeed mere speculations. Certainly, the individual is a representative of Heaven, coming to answer Daniel's prayer.

Daniel Made Great Preparation for Prayer (10:2-3)

Daniel prayed for three weeks. This does not mean he prayed a few times within those three weeks, but rather that he was in constant prayer. His prayer included mourning. The Hebrew word *mitabbel* is only found three times in the Bible and in each it means deep, grieving, mournful lamenting. In 1 Samuel 16:1, God asked Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul?" indicating that Samuel was in deep grief and mourning of the calamitous and dramatic experience of Saul's sad demise as Israel's first king. Samuel never wanted Saul to be king. He reluctantly agreed but was still hopeful, nonetheless. His reign was a catastrophe. Samuel must have been dwelling on all the sorrowful details in his lament. Likewise, in Ezra 10:6, Ezra was mourning over the sinful disobedience of the people of God while they were in exile. Daniel 10:2 is the third time in the Bible that this word is used. God pulled back the veil to the future and Daniel mourned for the situation Israel was in and for what was to come. In each of these three circumstances, the one praying was mourning on behalf of others. Daniel demonstrates a type of depth our prayer lives should include, and he did so for three weeks.

What if God's people had such heartfelt prayer for our communities?

Daniel also fasted from choice foods, meat, and wine during this time. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is not practiced as much today as it has been. There are different kinds of fasts: *full fast* of abstaining from all food and drink (other than water) for an extended period of time, *partial fast* (as is here) where only a little amount of items are consumed or a *specific fast* where a particular item is given up for a period of time. Many people practice specific fasting during the Easter season (Lent). Fasts are to be focused and purposeful where the person fasting is thinking and praying for God to reveal something, or work in a special way. Daniel fasted for his vision to be understood. We can fast for our lost friends, family, or neighbors. We can fast for our own personal revival or renewal. We can fast for our church or community. Daniel's fast also included no lotion. He was in a hot and dry environment and was forgoing the comfort of personal care, which may seem trivial until we consider the value of our air-conditioned homes, ointments, cream, powders, and comforts we use regularly. Daniel's intention was to focus as little on himself as he could to give all attention to God's revelation. We should have that same devotion in detail to hearing God's voice too.

Angels

Though the Bible says a lot about angels, it only provides the name of four. Michael and Gabriel are both mentioned in Daniel and elsewhere. Abaddon (also known as Apollyon) is mentioned in Revelation 9:11 and is the angel of the abyss. Lucifer is the fourth angel mentioned, but of course, he was the chief fallen angel. He is named in Isaiah 14:12, but in Hebrew, his name would be Heylel (hay—lell). The intra-testament books list three others: Raphael, Uriel, and Jeremiel. The early church fathers reference these books and these angels too. Angels are servants of God and not to be worshiped (Colossians 2:18-19; Revelation 19:10; Hebrews 1:6-14). Angels assist us and always point our lives and focus onto God. Even though it seems most pictures and Christmas ornaments depict angels as female, all Angels have male names and they do not procreate (Matthew 22:30). Daniel (and other books of the Bible) shows an active supernatural world around us in which the angels take a significant leading role.

Daniel Experienced Great Emotion in His Prayer (10:7-9, 15-17)

There are nine different descriptions of Daniel's response to the vision. He was without strength, pale-faced, helpless, in a deep sleep, bowed face down to the ground, speechless, anguished, weak, and breathless. Daniel's prayer was a work

of intense spiritual labor beseeching a word from God. He would soon learn that his prayer was effective. James 5:16b says, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” Compare Daniel’s posture and emotion of prayer to what we do today. A list of needs (or wants) thrown up to God in a few quick sentences or repeating the same prayer formula over and over are not powerful prayers. Daniel’s whole being was surrendered before God in the prayer and fast. He was overwhelmed by the heavenly visions and was seeking an explanation of what was to come. He shows how we are to fervently pray today.

Daniel Experienced God’s Comfort From His Prayer (10:10-19)

Daniel prayed in anguish, but God heard him and sent an answer. This heavenly messenger was assisted by Michael, but it was not Michael. The messenger touched Daniel three times and provided six benefits. God still desires to give all six of these benefits to his faithful prayer warriors today.

1. By touching Daniel the first time, the messenger demonstrated his presence. There is great encouragement to know one is not alone. A scared child can be calmed by a mother’s touch. A warm embrace can encourage the grieving or distraught. Upon hearing a difficult medical diagnosis, a patient reaches out to grab the hand of her husband. After years of hard work, a college graduate joyfully hugs her

friends at the conclusion of the ceremony. We are communal people who need the physical presence and embrace of those around us. The church is to be a community of faith reaching out and embracing its neighbors. God offers us His presence through the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:1-16).

2. The messenger said he was sent, which means there was still even a higher authority interested in Daniel. Missionaries and church planters across the world are greatly encouraged when we let them know we care for them and send them support and workers. God wants each of us to know He is interested in us.

3. The second touch provided composure to Daniel allowing him to speak. Sometimes we simply need to break the paralysis that comes from shock, fear, or anger and be able to “snap out of” our own stupor or trance (like Daniel was in). God’s redemption work is to lead us to overcome fear and being confident and composed in Him and His plan.

4. The primary reason the messenger came was to give Daniel understanding. Chapters 11 and 12 provide the understanding to Daniel’s vision (though the understanding needs a lot of explaining).

5. The final touch provided strength. Shaken alert from his stupor, Daniel was ready to hear what God had said. We must find our resolve and strength in the Lord. There are many verses that remind us that God is our strength. Here are two. Psalm 46:1-3 says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the

heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” Isaiah 41:10a adds, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you . . .” Through prayer, we can find our strength in the Lord.

6. Finally, the messenger brought peace. Nearly every biblical encounter with an angel, or with Jesus appearing in unusual ways, is started with the comfort of “peace.” Jesus is the Prince of Peace and He is our wellspring of peace in difficult days.

Daniel Was Told of Great Spiritual Warfare Around His Prayer (10:13-14, 20-21)

These verses provide a rare glimpse into the supernatural cosmic realm. The messenger told Daniel that he had been on an arduous journey to answer his prayers. The journey lasted twenty-one days, which equals the three weeks that Daniel had been fasting, praying, and mourning. That is not a coincidence. Daniel’s faithfulness in constant prayer was rewarded with an answer. Perhaps the reason we may feel that we do not receive answers to our prayers is because we really were not all that interested in praying. It is doubtful that the messenger and Michael would have fought as hard to get to Daniel if he had offered a quick quip of a prayer to God. Churches or communities need to be houses of *fervent* prayer for revival to come again.

The introduction of Michael and the princes of Persia and Greece are confusing and unique in Scripture. Spiritual warfare has been going on since Lucifer fell from Heaven and took a third of the angels with him. The bible refers to Satan as the prince (ruler) of this world (John 12:31; 16:11), prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), and the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). Ephesians 6:12 provides the most concise and comprehensive understanding, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” There is no conclusive evidence of what is meant by the prince of Persia or Greece, but most scholars seem to understand that, along with the other verses, there is a dark spiritual hierarchy that these princes fit within. According to Jude 1:9, Michael is an Archangel on the side of the Light.

Humble Prayer

Using the Model Prayer, how can you demonstrate humility in prayer and not selfishness:

- Holy is the name of the Father
- His Kingdom, not ours
- His will, not ours
- Daily provision
- Forgive our trespasses
- Deliver us from evil

Since our struggles are against this hierarchy, Ephesians 6:10-18 warns to be prepared for spiritual warfare. Paul detailed the full armor of God for us to utilize and finished off the preparation by saying, “With all kinds of prayers and requests” pray at all times in the Spirit, Ephesians 6:18. The effectiveness of the messenger and Michael seems to be connected to Daniel’s prayer posture. Let us strive to be prayer warriors. It is important to note that the spiritual warfare is not an undecided, eternal battle between equal forces of good and evil (that is Buddhism). God is supreme over all things. He cannot and will not lose. Spiritual warfare is what is going on within us and around us whether we are faithful to God and His victory or succumb to Satan and eternal destruction.

Implications and Actions

Prayer is one of the most effective tools we have for living the lives God wants. Our prayers should be with full surrender under the authority of God, with transparent authenticity before God and with a commitment to live by the movement of God’s design. We cannot have confidence and victory in our prayer lives if we do not strive to grow in this spiritual discipline.

Questions

1. How does prayer help our understanding or discernment of God's work or will?
2. Have you ever made great preparations for a prayer time in your life? If so, what did you do? How could you imagine preparing for a season of prayer?
3. Think for a moment. Have you ever had a period of great emotion surrounding a time of prayer or a crisis that caused you to enter a season of prayer? What was the event and what emotions did it touch on?

lesson **13**



History in the Making

MAIN IDEA

The Bible is a divinely inspired book. (Mark 13:31)

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How should we react when we see prophecy being fulfilled in our lifetime?

STUDY AIM

To realize that I must share the Gospel with as many people as possible because Jesus is coming soon

QUICK READ

The details of this pre-written history in the first 35 verses has already been 100% verified by history, so we can have full confidence knowing that the rest of prophecy is history in the making.

Introduction

Daniel 11 is the most detailed prophecy of any passage in Scripture. Furthermore, the first 35 verses were fulfilled in the time between Daniel and Jesus, which makes this chapter one of the most important in the Bible. If predictive prophecy was as perfectly fulfilled as this chapter is then it is obvious that there is a master of time (God) who precisely told Daniel of what was to come. Critics of the Bible have argued that it all must have been written down after the fact. Their best argument, for such a conclusion, is that it is just not possible for someone to predict it as accurately as it happened. That is a circular argument, like if someone says they do not believe in Jesus' divinity and thus He could not perform the miracles, and He could not perform the miracles because He was not divine. Though this discussion could fill volumes, here is a quick response.

Daniel 11:1-45

¹ "In the first year of Darius the Mede, I arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him. ² And now I will tell you the truth. Behold, three more kings are going to arise in Persia. Then a fourth will gain far more riches than all of them; as soon as he becomes strong through his riches, he will arouse the whole empire against the realm of Greece. ³ And a mighty king will arise, and he will rule with great au-

thority and do as he pleases. ⁴ But as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom will be broken up and parceled out toward the four points of the compass, though not to his own descendants, nor according to his authority which he wielded, for his sovereignty will be uprooted and given to others besides them.

⁵ "Then the king of the South will grow strong, along with one of his princes who will gain ascendancy over him and obtain dominion; his domain will be a great dominion indeed.

⁶ After some years they will form an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the South will come to the king of the North to carry out a peaceful arrangement. But she will not retain her position of power, nor will he remain with his power, but she will be given up, along with those who brought her in and the one who sired her as well as he who supported her in those times. ⁷ But one of the descendants of her line will arise in his place, and he will come against their army and enter the fortress of the king of the North, and he will deal with them and display great strength. ⁸ Also their gods with their metal images and their precious vessels of silver and gold he will take into captivity to Egypt, and he on his part will refrain from attacking the king of the North for some years. ⁹ Then the latter will enter the realm of the king of the South, but will return to his own land.

¹⁰ "His sons will mobilize and assemble a multitude of great forces; and one of them will keep on coming and overflow and pass through, that he may again wage war up to his very fortress. ¹¹ The king of the South will be enraged and go forth and fight with the king of the North. Then the latter will raise a great multitude, but that multitude will be given into the hand of the former. ¹² When the multitude is carried away, his heart will be lifted up, and he will cause tens of thousands

to fall; yet he will not prevail. ¹³ For the king of the North will again raise a greater multitude than the former, and after an interval of some years he will press on with a great army and much equipment.

¹⁴ "Now in those times many will rise up against the king of the South; the violent ones among your people will also lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they will fall down. ¹⁵ Then the king of the North will come, cast up a siege ramp and capture a well-fortified city; and the forces of the South will not stand their ground, not even their choicest troops, for there will be no strength to make a stand. ¹⁶ But he who comes against him will do as he pleases, and no one will be able to withstand him; he will also stay for a time in the Beautiful Land, with destruction in his hand. ¹⁷ He will set his face to come with the power of his whole kingdom, bringing with him a proposal of peace which he will put into effect; he will also give him the daughter of women to ruin it. But she will not take a stand for him or be on his side. ¹⁸ Then he will turn his face to the coastlands and capture many. But a commander will put a stop to his scorn against him; moreover, he will repay him for his scorn. ¹⁹ So he will turn his face toward the fortresses of his own land, but he will stumble and fall and be found no more.

²⁰ "Then in his place one will arise who will send an oppressor through the Jewel of his kingdom; yet within a few days he will be shattered, though not in anger nor in battle. ²¹ In his place a despicable person will arise, on whom the honor of kingship has not been conferred, but he will come in a time of tranquility and seize the kingdom by intrigue. ²² The overflowing forces will be flooded away before him and shattered, and also the prince of the covenant. ²³ After an alliance

is made with him he will practice deception, and he will go up and gain power with a small force of people. ²⁴ In a time of tranquility he will enter the richest parts of the realm, and he will accomplish what his fathers never did, nor his ancestors; he will distribute plunder, booty and possessions among them, and he will devise his schemes against strongholds, but only for a time. ²⁵ He will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South with a large army; so the king of the South will mobilize an extremely large and mighty army for war; but he will not stand, for schemes will be devised against him. ²⁶ Those who eat his choice food will destroy him, and his army will overflow, but many will fall down slain. ²⁷ As for both kings, their hearts will be intent on evil, and they will speak lies to each other at the same table; but it will not succeed, for the end is still to come at the appointed time. ²⁸ Then he will return to his land with much plunder; but his heart will be set against the holy covenant, and he will take action and then return to his own land.

²⁹ "At the appointed time he will return and come into the South, but this last time it will not turn out the way it did before. ³⁰ For ships of Kittim will come against him; therefore he will be disheartened and will return and become enraged at the holy covenant and take action; so he will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. ³¹ Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. ³² By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. ³³ Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword

and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days.

³⁴ Now when they fall they will be granted a little help, and many will join with them in hypocrisy. ³⁵ Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time.

³⁶ "Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done.

³⁷ He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all. ³⁸ But instead he will honor a god of fortresses, a god whom his fathers did not know; he will honor him with gold, silver, costly stones and treasures. ³⁹ He will take action against the strongest of fortresses with the help of a foreign god; he will give great honor to those who acknowledge him and will cause them to rule over the many, and will parcel out land for a price.

⁴⁰ "At the end time the king of the South will collide with him, and the king of the North will storm against him with chariots, with horsemen and with many ships; and he will enter countries, overflow them and pass through. ⁴¹ He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon. ⁴² Then he will stretch out his hand against other countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape. ⁴³ But he will gain control over the hidden treasures of gold and silver and over all the precious things of Egypt; and Libyans and Ethiopians will follow at his heels.

⁴⁴ But rumors from the East and from the North will disturb

him, and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many. ⁴⁵ He will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain; yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

Daniel's Prophecy Demonstrates God's Sovereignty

First, the best arguments for Daniel writing the events before they happened are as follows. The vocabulary is consistently 7th century B.C. I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. Whenever anyone mentioned “the war,” everyone knew the reference was to World War II (even decades later). The Korean and Vietnam wars had come and gone but the country had to be designated if someone was referring to them. There were still a few older people that might have referred to the “Great War,” which everyone would have known to be World War I. Everyone also would have immediately known what was meant by the “Cold War.” None of that would make any sense to my sons if I said something about the “war.” Just one generation later, the vocabulary has changed enough that it would be easy to identify an era of an author by the words (or the words’ usage in context) that the author uses. For example, using each of the following words in every day conversation would date the speaker to an era, “swell,” “keen,” “groovy,” “cool,” “gucci,” and so forth. It is easy to pinpoint when something was written or if it was written later after the fact. Daniel’s writing fits his era. There are three Greek words in Daniel that some have said indicates it was written

later, but all three are instruments and it would make sense that the Babylonian or Persia courts would have collected instruments from other nations (with the original name for that instrument being used) and there are no other Greek words or even Greek influences that would be expected if the text was written after the Greeks ruled the world.

Secondly, though the predictions are fulfilled, they are written with a general vagueness and confusion as though one is looking through an opaque lens instead of with clarity after the fact (hindsight is 20/20). It is not clear if verses 24-39 are the same as verses 40-45 or if they are separate events.

Thirdly, though there is a flow of the events, there is no specific time periods or even consistent intervals and there are significant details left out. If one was writing after the fact, it would seem the writer would include all of the history in a relatively uniform narrative. Only the details of history pertinent to the people of Israel are recorded.

Finally, only part of the prophecies in this chapter are fulfilled. Why would someone vaguely record a history and then still add future events with the same vocabulary, syntax, and flow? The writer was looking at the entire chapter from one perspective (that God predicted prophecy). The fulfillment of these prophecies is reason to trust God's knowledge, power, and sovereignty. What He said came true and will continue to come true.

Trusting God

Knowing that you can trust God's control in the entirety of time, how can you trust Him in:

- Your marriage
- Your family
- Your vocation
- Your finances
- Your faith
- Your crisis

Persia and Greece (11:1-4)

Without getting bogged down in the details of each section, a quick historical lesson connecting basic people or events is necessary. The three more kings to come in Persia are Cambyses, Smerdis, Darius I Hystaspes and the fourth greater one is Xerxes I. Darius III came after Xerxes, but his reign was at the end of the empire when Alexander the Great was already pushing through the land. Xerxes was the richest and most powerful. Daniel was predicting the increasing wealth and power of the Persians until the coming of another even greater power (Alexander, 11:3). Alexander died without an heir and his empire was divided and ruled by four generals: Lysimachus (Asia Minor), Cassander (Greece and Macedonia), Seleucus (Syria and Persia), and Ptolemy (Egypt and Israel). Daniel had seen the Babylonian empire rise and fall

and was then told of the same of the Persian empire. And since then, nations have risen and fallen and will continue to do so. God will always be the same.

Seleucids and Ptolemies (11:5-9)

Seleucus would establish the Seleucid Empire, which is the “Kingdom of the North” and Ptolemy would initiate the Ptolemaic Empire, the “Kingdom of the South.” The other two lines would quickly fade. The legacy of Alexander’s empire would fall to the winner of the struggle between these two empires. Verses 5-9 predicted that struggle, which would last for generations and included battles, marriages, treaties, betrayals, wars, and political drama that would fit the best written plots of a television series. The land of Israel was caught in the middle of the two powers and would belong to one then the other back and forth between them. The daughter of the king of the South mentioned in verse 6 was Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy II and given in marriage to Seleucid king Antiochus II in a marriage that was hopefully going to unite the two again. It did not. These stories remind us that all the political deals, plots, and schemes of humans cannot create anything lasting. The same can be seen in families, businesses, and governments today. The drama does not develop much good. Only trusting God’s plans leads to fulfillment, meaning, satisfaction, and contentment.

Antiochus (III) the Great (11:10-20)

Antiochus III came to power in 222 B.C. and expanded the Seleucid Empire to larger than the Persian Empire was. He took Israel and parts of Greece and defeated the king of the South, Ptolemy. He was wildly successful and even challenged the growing Roman Empire (which provided his only defeat, late in his reign, 11:18-19). His empire would be the most impressive between Daniel's day and the Roman Empire. He did not have the amount of territory as Alexander but lasted much longer. He tried to make peace with Egypt by giving his young daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy V, while they were both very young. Her age would fit the idiom "daughter of women" (11:17). He thought she would solidify his plan to bring Egypt under his rule. Instead she and her husband Ptolemy celebrated Rome's victory over the Seleucids. She was not the same Cleopatra that was famously connected with Julius Caesar and Marc Antony, that was Cleopatra VII. Antiochus III's impact was significant, especially on the people of Israel. He was friendly toward the Jews, giving them favor and freedom to live, work, and worship as they wanted. Even in the peoples of the world, God sometimes places those who will give favor to His people. The modern political narrative is so divisive, it is hard to imagine one party working with the other, but Antiochus III proves that good can be found even among the most unlikely people. In an ever-increasing secularized world, Christians must look for ways to work

with others, even those with whom we do not agree. God may place an Antiochus in our lives.

Antiochus (IV) Epiphanes (11:21-35)

Antiochus III produced a son, Mithradates, who took the name Antiochus IV upon taking the throne. He also declared himself divine and gave himself the additional name of Epiphanes, which means manifestation (of God). The English word “epiphany” comes from the word that refers to the appearances of Christ in the Bible. Sometimes Antiochus IV would refer to himself as Theos Epiphanes (the Manifestation of God). His declaring himself to be a god, did not sit well with Judaism and the favor his father had for the Jews swung to the opposite, persecution. He is the Antiochus who is mentioned in the books of the Maccabees. He profaned the Temple and set up the abomination of desolation (11:31-32) by setting up a statue of Zeus in the Temple (which he said represented himself) and offered a sacrifice of a pig on the altar to himself (in direct confrontation against the Jewish dietary laws), which led to the Jewish revolt under the Maccabees. Upon hearing of his army’s defeat in Judea, Antiochus IV killed himself while in the Mediterranean Sea. Some interpreters see this as the final fulfillment of the Abomination of Desolation that is mentioned at the end of Daniel 9, but Jesus refers to that happening even after him, so it could not be Antiochus IV. Instead, his defilement of the Temple is

a foreshadowing of what is still to come. The Antichrist will rise with the arrogance and power of Antiochus.

The Maccabees

First and Second Maccabees are books in the Apocrypha, found in the Catholic Bible, but not recognized by Jews or Protestants as authoritative. The early reformers still thought they should be read, but most Protestants know very little of them. The books tell of a family that led the revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes after he profaned the Temple. The revolt was started by a rural priest Mattathias, but vigorously led by his son Judas Maccabee. They were also fighting the influence of Hellenism (Greek ways and thoughts) as it was spreading in the Jewish culture and within the religious systems. Maccabee means "hammer" in Hebrew indicating the force of the revolt. They pushed into Jerusalem and retook the city and Temple, placing Judas' younger brother Jonathan Maccabee as the High Priest. He would later be known as Jonathan Apphus (the diplomat) in contrast to his brother, "the Hammer." These are important books because they established Hanukkah, the rebuilding of the Temple, and set the religious stage for the New Testament.

The Antichrist (11:36-45)

Antiochus IV Epiphanes fits the prophecies of verses 21-35, but not exactly verses 36-45 (for example, he did not defeat

Libya or Cush). Remember that Old Testament prophecy was futuristic from the prophet's point of view, but there are patterns that fit both the first and second coming of Jesus. The Christian era fits between verses 35 and 36. Daniel 11:36-45 correlates with Revelation 9—18 and describes how the false trinity of the Antichrist, the Beast, and Satan will try to usurp the position of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Father. Just as God defeated the arrogant Antiochus IV, so will He defeat the Antichrist. The Antichrist will gather the nations of the world against the people of God and lead a major attack against them in Israel with a final battle at Megiddo, Israel, which lays at the crossroads of Lebanon, Syria, the Golan Heights, West Bank, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. The Hebrew word for Mountain is *Har* and the name Har Megiddo in Hebrew moves through Greek and Latin into English as Armageddon. God will defeat the Antichrist and bring final victory.

Implications and Actions

We can trust God who fulfilled these verses to equally fulfill the rest. We know God is in control. Daniel was written to demonstrate that God is sovereign, and the prophecies set the stage for the true Messiah (chapter 12). The Bible is full of prophecy, especially Daniel. He lived his life in the shadow of Jeremiah's prophetic word that the Jews would return after seventy years. Having seen God's prophecy coming true, he

was then a conduit for God's revelation for those who came after him. Knowing that God's Word is true, which includes that Jesus is coming back, ought to challenge all Christians to prepare for His coming. It should also motivate us to share the Gospel to as many people as possible.

Questions

1. How does predictive prophecy verify the sovereignty of God?
2. Discuss how nationalism can become more important than following God. Can you think of times in history that the two were mixed? Considering that nations come and go but God always remains, how should we live as citizens?
3. How can we be faithful to God while working in favorable governments or companies? How can we be faithful to God while in unfavorable situations?

lesson 14



Shine Like the Stars

MAIN IDEA

The purpose of prophecy is not to tell the future but to reveal Jesus Christ.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Given the certainty of the coming judgment, how will you pray differently from this point forward?

STUDY AIM

To understand that when I lead others to righteousness I will shine like the stars

QUICK READ

The preservation and ultimate restoration will be the destiny of God's people.

Introduction

People who live in the middle part of the United States can tell when severe weather is brewing. A front moving from the west compresses the air in front of it making it thick with moisture. The warm winds, which were coming from the south, suddenly shifts to cool winds coming from the west. The marriage of the two weather systems produces a growing tower of thick, billowing, white or black clouds. Next comes the predictable: lightning, thunder, strong winds, heavy rains, hail stones, and possibly tornadoes. There are similar days coming of a final cataclysmic storm destroying much of the world.

Daniel 12:1-13

¹ "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. ² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ⁴ But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

⁵ Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. ⁶ One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?"

⁷ The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

⁸ I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"

⁹ He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰ Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

¹¹ "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. ¹² Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

¹³ "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

Tribulation, Resurrection, and Judgment (12:1-4)

Daniel 12:1 says that it will be the worst time in the history of the world, so does Jesus (Matthew 24:21). Seven seals will

be broken open, each containing judgments of death and destruction (Revelation 6—11). 1. A conqueror will go across the world. 2. Violence will erupt worldwide. 3. Financial ruin, inflation, and scarcity of food will ensue. 4. A quarter of the world will die (almost 2 billion people in today's numbers). 5. Martyrs will cry out. 6. Great natural disasters will come: earthquakes and darkness in the sky. 7. Silence from Heaven will come for 30 minutes, then seven trumpets will repeat the destruction: a. a third of the earth will burn up, b. a third of all in the sea will die (including ships), c. a third of the freshwaters will be poisoned, d. the sun and moon will be dark, e. a star will fall upon the earth unleashing a terrible plague or pestilence, f. angels will release a fury upon the earth killing a third of those that remain, g. the seventh and final trumpet will be the end. It will close out the seven trumpets and the seven seals. It will transition the time from the "kingdom of the world" into the "kingdom of our Lord and His Christ" (Revelation 11:15). Three other verses speak of the trumpet, Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. It seems that the trumpet is the seventh and last trumpet of Revelation 11, but that has been highly debated.

As scary as this verse is, it does provide a word of hope. The people of God will be delivered from the torment of this world into the eternal Kingdom of God (Matthew 25; Revelation 19—21). Daniel said that only those whose names are written in the book will be delivered. To what book is he referring? The book is mentioned fourteen times in the Bi-

ble. Seven times it is called the “Book of Life” (Psalm 69:27-28; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:11-15; and 21:27). It is simply called the “book” five times (Exodus 32:31-33; Psalm 56:8; 139:16; Daniel 12:1; and Malachi 3:16). Luke 20:20 says that our names are “recorded in heaven.” Hebrews 12:22-23 uses the phrase of those who are “enrolled in heaven.” Revelation 20:11-12 speaks of two separate sets of books. One group of people will be judged by the “books” according to what they had done. These are the books of works and no one is righteous by his own works (Psalm 14:1; 53:1; 143:2; Romans 3:10-11; and 1 John 1:8).

Only eternal judgment awaits those who depend on their own righteousness or good works to enter Heaven. The alternative is to place one’s trust in the salvation and righteousness provided by Jesus (Romans 3:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Only those whose names are found in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be saved from the “lake of fire” (Revelation 20:11-15). Daniel describes those who will be judged as being raised to everlasting shame and contempt (12:2). Jesus calls them goats who will be cast into eternal punishment (Matthew 24:46a). In contrast, Daniel refers to those who are written in the book as being raised to everlasting life and will shine like the brightness of the sky (12:2-3). Jesus calls them sheep who will be raised to eternal life (Matthew 24:46b). Additionally, Daniel adds a special designation for those who turn others toward righteous and shining like the stars (12:3).

Goats and Sheep

In Matthew 25, Jesus described that works are important: feeding the hungry, providing water, providing clothing, and visiting those who are sick or in jail. Serving the “least of these” is the same as serving Jesus. These are examples that can be metaphorical for simply meeting the needs of others, but it is obvious that Christians are called to do these several specific things at the very least. We should feed the hungry, care about clean water for all people, make sure others have adequate clothing, and visit those in need. How do those teachings compare to Revelation 20:11-15: the “Book of Life” and the “books” of works? We cannot earn our way into Heaven by a list of works, we must trust in the salvation that Jesus provides. He gives us His righteousness so we can enter Heaven, but His righteousness is not passive or inactive in us. If we truly have the righteousness of Christ, we will be propelled to serve His purpose and that always includes the needs of others.

Two Witnesses (12:5)

Revelation 6—11 provides more detail to Daniel 12. Both passages mentioned two witnesses (see Revelation 11:3-14). The two witnesses will come between the sixth and seventh seal. One of the witnesses is described as having the power to shut the heavens and provide no rain (Revelation 11:6a). The other is described as able to turn water into blood and

bringing plagues upon the earth (Revelation 11:6b). Those are clear references to Elijah and Moses. Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the prophets. Jesus came to fulfill all the Law and the prophets. He said so at the beginning of His ministry in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17) and at the end of His earthly time on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27). Moses and Elijah were both with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). God spoke at that moment and declared, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 17:5).

Besides demonstrating that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets, we can see there is life after death. Moses and Elijah had lived long before Jesus and yet gathered with Him in the New Testament in some supernatural way. Neither man died in a normal way either and there were no remains for anyone to venerate, much like the case would be for Jesus after His death and resurrection. Elijah ascended to Heaven in a whirlwind, accompanied by chariots of fire (2 Kings 2:11) and Moses died and was buried by God. No man knew of his final place on earth (Deuteronomy 34:5-7). Revelation 11 says that both will appear again in the Tribulation and be killed with their dead bodies lying in the streets of Jerusalem for the entire world to see for three and half days. The nations will rejoice, and people will even trade gifts, but after three and half days, the two prophets will be resurrected, stand up, terrify the world, and ascend into Heaven at the call of God (Revelation 11:7-12).

There is no way that anyone in the ancient world could have imagined how it would be possible for how the whole world could see someone die, lay in the streets for three days, and then arise again. Of course, with the advent of television and worldwide broadcasting, this once impossibility has become common place.

What Will the End Be Like? (12:6-13)

One of the two asked, “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?” (12:6). Jesus’ disciples asked a similar question, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). Many Christians have wondered the same thing. Several different parts of Scripture provide pieces to the puzzle. As demonstrated above, Daniel 12 fits well with Matthew 24—25 and Revelation 6—11. The esoteric answer in 12:7 (also in Daniel 7:25) of “a time, times and half a time” is a reference to three and a half years (one time, two times and half a time). There are other references to a time period around three and a half years, which according to the Jewish calendar of 360 days would be 1260 days. Daniel 8:14 listed 2300 evenings and mornings (1150 days). Daniel 12:11-12 references 1290 and 1335 days. Revelation 11:2 mentioned 42 months and the next verse (11:3) tells of the two witnesses prophesying for 1260 days. The Bible utilizes the numbers seven or half of seven (three and

a half) throughout its end times predictions. Chapter 9 contains the seventy weeks, one of which is still to come. There will be one final week (seven years) of tribulation, a time of destruction and devastation unequalled in the history of the world, which will provide the Antichrist to rise to power. Without getting bogged down in the debatable details, something significant will happen at the three-and-half year mark (the middle of the seven-year tribulation), namely the Abomination of Desolation. It does not matter how much of the end times has been told (or how much is understood), there are many who will still not listen and will continue to be disobedient to God. Daniel 12:10 says that the wicked will continue being wicked, but the wise will be purified and will understand the plans of God.

Shining like the Stars

So much of what we strive for in this life will not last. Daniel 12:3 gives an exact prescription of how to have something that will last for all of eternity, turning others to righteousness. How can you do that in the most meaningful way in your church and community?

It seems that neither Daniel nor Jesus directly answers the question of when the end will come, but in a way they do. Jesus said that the coming of the end time will be sudden and unexpected (Matthew 24:36-48), but also that it will be like

seeing new growth on a fig tree (Matthew 24:32-33), or like labor pains (Matthew 24:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:3). He means that no one knows the exact time except for the Father (Matthew 24:36), but there will be evidences that it is approaching (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-7). The world will grow increasingly cold to Christ, and godlessness will increase. The world will become ripe for the Antichrist to seize control and commit the Abomination of Desolation. Though the exact date is not given, enough clues are provided for the people of God to be paying attention to the inevitability of the return of Jesus. It seems that the days of increasing godlessness are upon us.

Implications and Actions

The Bible's description of the end times can be confusing but ultimately all the passages tell of some basic truths. 1. God is in control. Nothing surprises Him and nothing is outside of His authority. 2. Jesus will come again for those who remain faithful. 3. The world will become ungodly and then will experience a purging judgment. 4. Those who remain faithful will be victorious with Christ. 5. There will be a resurrection in which the wicked will be judged, and the righteous will inherit eternal life. 6. We should want to bring others to Christ, not wanting any to receive everlasting judgment. The primary purpose of the end times prophecies is not to

foretell future events, it is to reveal the person and power of Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of all those who believe.

Questions

1. How does reading about the tribulation make you feel? Why?
2. Daniel 12:3 encourages us to turn others to righteousness. How does this study motivate you to do that?
3. What do you think about your name being in the Book of Life?
4. How would you live if you knew we were at the end of time?

lesson 15



Easter Lesson

Because He Lives

MAIN IDEA

The resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

If indeed Jesus was raised from the dead, what does that mean for us?

STUDY AIM

To understand that as a Christian, my death will not be the end

QUICK READ

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Everything that we believe is based upon this reality. Without the resurrection there would be no Christianity.

Introduction

The season of Easter is always close on the heels of the Christmas season, and it is never the other way around. This means that it seems like such a quick transition from welcoming baby Jesus into the world to watching as Jesus is crucified, buried, and brought back to life as a 33-year-old man. The point in mentioning this is not to challenge the significant range of years between Christ's birth and death/resurrection. Rather, it is to point out that in the church calendar, we are still remembering the "warm fuzzies" of the Christmas season when songs of Jesus's birth were just sung by candlelight. The birth of Jesus was life changing! The awaited promise of God's Messiah was literally just realized in the Advent season. What else could eclipse the life-changing reality that Immanuel ("God with us") finally made His way to earth?

While Christmas changes so many things, Easter changes absolutely every single thing. The birth of Jesus is a big deal, and yet Jesus would have been an ordinary person had it not been for His death and resurrection. Miraculous births can be received more easily than the unexplainable coming back to life of a man who was tortured and murdered for His claims of being God's Son. The Easter event is the backbone of the Christian faith: if the resurrection is removed, there is nothing for Christianity to hang on. Our faith relies on not only the reality that Jesus came, lived, and died, but even more so on the fact that He came back to life and is living

today, awaiting the time to return and rightfully become the King of all kings.

When you look at your life so far, what are some of your most life-changing events? Your birth is certainly pivotal, without a doubt, because without that event you would not be with us today. There are undoubtedly other significant events having to do with education, family, career, lifestyle, and the list goes on and on. Some of you may have even experienced death in some way, whether by nearly dying, actually dying but being brought back, or being near someone as they died. Yet each of our experiences are eclipsed by the fact that Jesus actually died, was actually buried (that is pretty “final”), and actually came back to life being witnessed by hundreds of people. The great thing about the resurrection is not that it changed Jesus’s life, but that it can change your life also.

Matthew 28:1-10

¹ Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. ² And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. ³ And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. ⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been cru-

cified. ⁶ He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. ⁷ Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

⁸ And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus *said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

Fearful Encounter (28:1-4)

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary must have had full faith that Jesus was dead. Like all other practicing Jews on the day Jesus was pronounced dead on the scene, they had to rush back before dusk to observe the Sabbath, which would have continued through Saturday evening. Now, they were in a good place to go and specifically seek out Jesus’s burial place to take care of the needs of the dead body they had no time to take care of two nights before (Matthew does not refer to their burial tasks, but the other gospel writings do). The very last thing they expected to encounter was anything or anyone alive or angelic. The story is about to get very interesting indeed.

We are not told exactly when this happened, but seismic activity shook the place in a big way. In fact, the word where

we get “mega” describes that this was not some ordinary ground shaking. It was a significantly severe earthquake, shaken because an angel of God came from above, rolled the stone with its seal away, and plopped down for a seat. This was a fearful encounter! Imagine the ground shaking out of control, bright lights from a heavenly presence nearly blinding you, and then a grave opened that should not have been opened (and could not be opened by mere human force). This is the kind of scene that inspires fear like movies about alien encounters. Just as angels announced Christ’s birth, now a singular angel came to announce that Jesus was alive...again.

What images does this scene inspire in your mind? This is a pretty dramatic scene. Lighting and brightness, the sounds of a shaking earth, people falling down as if they were dead, an other-worldly being invading the atmosphere: this is the stuff that scary stories are made of. Have you ever wondered why “fear” is often associated with close encounters between humanity and God? Why is it that such events cause humans to nearly die? Perhaps fear is a healthy reminder for us, an opportunity to remember how big God is and how small we are. Such fear causes us to tremble before God and revere Him for who He is.

Fear

The word for fear in the Greek is “phobos,” from which we get the word “phobia.” For example, if a person has Arachnophobia, that person has a legitimate fear of spiders. Those I know who have had this type of fear are literally unable to function because of that fear. It is a beyond crippling sensation. The angel and Jesus called on the women not to fear because the good news had to be shared, not kept with them because of fear of whatever could happen. In the same way, we are not to be crippled by fear because the good news of the resurrection needs to be shared.

Fantastic News (28:5-7)

It is almost humorous that the phrase, “Do not be afraid” is uttered by the angel to the women. When angels encounter humans, these beings are usually tasked with first telling the people not to resolve to fear. Why? Because there is every good reason to be fearful! What should not have happened has happened. What no one expected to see was being seen face-to-face. When E.T. (in the movie bearing the same name) first faced the little boy Elliot, both screamed and ran in fear. This was not supposed to happen, but does that mean that something went wrong? In that particular movie, yes, because E.T. the alien was accidentally left behind on earth. In the biblical scene we are looking at, this was no ac-

cident: Jesus was supposed to come alive, and the angel was supposed to sit near the grave to announce the good news.

The good news, the fantastic reality is found in verse 6. After telling them he knew they were looking for Jesus, the angel simply said, “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.” Fantastic news needs to be founded on proof. For news to be good, it needs to be evident and not fanciful. All the women had to do was look inside the empty tomb to believe that Jesus was not there. All the women needed to recall was that Jesus had previously announced several times that He would die and come back to life. The reason we still call Jesus’s resurrection “good news” is because it was proven and witnessed that Jesus came back to life. People saw (and still go to see) the empty tomb. People back then witnessed Him alive and walking through Galilee. We are charged to speak this good news because it is well founded and true.

Good news, though, is not meant to be for one person. The final directive of the angel is to (1) go to others, and (2) tell others the good news. At the heart of Christianity is the gospel, the “good news,” which is to be shared to the whole world. In fact, the final verses of Matthew 28 speak to this very point. Remember, just as the news of Jesus’s birth was announced, celebrated, and witnessed, in the same way Jesus’ resurrection is to be even more announced, celebrated, and witnessed to others today. Because Jesus lives, this is the fantastic news that is meant to be shared, just as these two women shared it.

Full Reality (28:8-10)

If we stopped the story at verse 7, things would still be good. But the full reality of the resurrection came with the women meeting Jesus in person. What they believed; they could see. The good news of Jesus changed their day, but the good news of meeting Jesus, alive and well, changed their lives. The same is true for us today. Believing that Jesus is alive can change many things for us, but knowing Jesus in an intimate relationship is what changes our lives. The full reality of this resurrection—what makes Easter what it is—is not solely in what happened, but WHO happened.

Women: the first to carry the good news

Do not miss out on the amazing reality that Jesus chose women to be the first messengers of the gospel. In a society that put the word of men above women, we see that Jesus wanted His resurrection to be legitimized by the unassuming characters. For example, in the courts of their time, women were not seen as valid or reliable sources. The testimony of these two women, though, was proven by Jesus when He showed up to prove that what they said was true. You could easily say that Jesus intended to legitimize the voice of women as they were the first to carry the good news.

It is a unique thing to experience what these women experienced. Notice how they were mixed with both fear and great joy. The same “mega” that described the earthquake is the same word that described their joy. As great a fearful event may have happened, the joy of the full reality of resurrection was even greater. Jesus has this effect on us: He can amaze us and cause us to tremble, and at the very same time fill us with an unexplainable joy. Putting ourselves in their shoes, we would have experienced it no different. As Christ defeated death, so our death is defeated. As Jesus lives, so we can live too. Because He lives, we can face tomorrow and beyond. This is a full reality, not a fanciful idea, and it is meant to be lived out and shared.

Implications and Actions

Easter is the greatest day in history. For the Christian, it stands out as the pivotal point of faith, and so it should be observed as such. People from all over the world will observe the Easter story today alongside you. The challenge of this text is this: do not merely observe that it happened, rather celebrate that it happened. Try to recapture that amazement of what happened, especially from the point of view of these two women who were amazed by what happened. Get excited! Tell others! CELEBRATE!

Jesus’ resurrection is what makes salvation and eternal life a reality. Without Him coming back to life, there is noth-

ing to celebrate. So much hinges on whether or not you believe He really did come back to life. As a helpful practice, consider filling in this statement: “Because He lives, I can _____.” Don’t just stop at one thing; keep filling in the blank of this sentence. By doing this over and over again, you’ll realize how much is possible because Jesus came back to life.

Questions

1. When have I been surprised because something unexpected happened? How do those experiences relate to what the two Mary’s experienced?

2. Is it a good thing to be filled with both fear and great joy? How so?

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