

The book of Daniel uncovered

Extracted from newsletters by Dr. Jack van Impe

We will divide the study into two major parts; Part I: A History of the Times...And the Set-up for Coming Attractions; and Part II: Events Prophesied...Prophecies Fulfilled. These two parts will be broken down and delved into in detail.

Wanted: Healthy, Good-Looking Lads

Daniel 1:1, 2

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.

Swords flashed wildly between the nations of Egypt and Babylon, the two great military giants of the Middle East, as the latter part of the 7th Century B.C. was fast coming to a close. The fierce battles between the two superpowers were visible proof that each was determined to seize full control of their part of the world. Any observer then - or historian today - knew that a decisive battle could not be far off, a conflict in which the ultimate victor would once and for all put his opponent to flight. And that's exactly what happened.

The time was early summer in the year 605 B.C. The great army of Babylon, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar - then crown prince - attacked the Egyptian forces in a place called Carchemish, and Babylonian city on the Euphrates River (see Jeremiah 46 for details). It was a thorough defeat for the Egyptians, who were forced to return to their country to lick their wounds and ponder the weakness of a failed battle strategy that had brought them to their knees. With unparalleled world dominance, the Babylonians now had free reign to step into the unguarded territory of Palestine. By the summer of 605 B.C. they had wrestled control of the city of Jerusalem. And this is where our story begins.

Upon the death of Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, a short time after the massive Babylonian victory, Nebuchadnezzar rushed home to be crowned king of Babylon. But he did not return to Babylon empty-handed. His saddlebags were filled with rich treasure and precious vessels - much of it taken from the holy temple in Jerusalem. His ungodly hands had pillaged from the house of God, a sort of in-your-face mockery to the Holy One, a Babylonian slap in the face of the Jewish people, their traditions, and their most high God.

An Opportunity for Compromise

But the man who would be king did not return with merely gold, silver, and temple utensils. Among his inventory of rich booty were also human treasures - young, fit sons of Israel who were taken from their beloved homeland and brought to Babylon, exposed to a foreign religion and traditions that bore no resemblance to their beliefs. But those were the rules of war; Lose the battle, do what your captor says. Among the choicest of Jewish young men in this group now being transported to Babylon was a teenager whose name was Daniel.

Daniel 1:3-7

And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes;

Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.

Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:

Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.

Wise Beyond His Years

Daniel now found himself a captive in a strange land, learning the language of the Chaldeans - the elite, privileged class of Babylon. Young Daniel had to accept the reality that he was now a member of a conquered people, forced to think no longer like a Jew, but like a Babylonian, with the clear demand that he give his full allegiance to Babylonian gods. This was Daniel's greatest challenge.

But in ways that even Daniel could not have understood, he was more than adequately prepared for his new life. Of royal descent, Daniel had already been trained for palace service - even at his young age. He was not overwhelmed by the pomp and circumstance, nor by the tough courses he and his friends had to take in astronomy, natural history, mythology, or astrology. Gilded thrones didn't overly impress him either - he'd seen it all before.

Nebuchadnezzar simply did not know what he had on his hands: Daniel might have looked like just another strong, able Jewish boy on the outside, but the king couldn't discern who Daniel really was on the inside - a man of God, loyal and faithful to his Creator. So unswerving was Daniel's righteousness that even in the polluted atmosphere of heathen Babylon he would find a way to make himself useful to God - something we'll observe again and again as our story unfolds.

The Times of the Gentiles

Now here's a point that I want to make early on because it will be critical to remember it as together we travel on this amazing, prophetic road of *Final Mysteries Unsealed*, Daniel is distinctly the prophet of the "times of the Gentiles." This is significant because the "times of the Gentiles" continues on through the termination of Gentile world rule.

Daniel is not only the prophet of the Gentiles, but he's also a prophet to his own people, the Jews. When Nebuchadnezzar brought the vessels unto the treasure house of his god, this was the beginning of "the times of the Gentiles," which continues until the time when Messiah returns. You may remember that Jesus said in Luke 21:24,

*"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be lead away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the **times of the Gentiles** be fulfilled"* (emphasis mine).

This will be a recurring theme for us throughout the book. In modern English, this is what Jesus was saying: Jerusalem will always be controlled by Gentiles - except for a brief interlude - until I return. So in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and Gentile domination began.

From that time onward, Jerusalem would be controlled by Gentiles, with one exception - the time preceding Christ's return to set up His glorious thousand-year kingdom upon earth. The exception occurred during the miraculous victory the Jewish army experienced as they captured Jerusalem during the Six-Day War, fought June 5-10, 1967. After this military conquest, the Holy City of Jerusalem was in Jewish hands for the first time in 2,553 years.

The victory in 1967 began the countdown to Messiah's coming to rule and reign at Jerusalem (see Psalm 2:6 and Matthew 5:35). Here's why. Just before Christ appears upon the Mount of Olives to establish His glorious kingdom, all Gentile nations will gather together at the valley of Megiddo and then march to the valley of Jehoshaphat for history's final attack against Jerusalem. At this time the Gentiles temporarily retake the city.

But their victory is short-lived, because then Christ appears and destroys the Gentile armies, bringing the "times of the Gentiles" to its horrendous conclusion. Christ will then reign from Jerusalem, the capital of the world, for a thousand years (see Revelation 16:16; Joel 3:2; and Zechariah 14:2-16).

Now here's the clincher. The Gentiles cannot march against Jerusalem and take it during earth's final battle if the Jews do not control the city. The Jews must be in possession of the Holy City for such an attack. This is why the Six-Day War of 1967 was so prophetically significant - it prepared the way for the battle of Armageddon and Christ's return. In a sense, I'm giving you the end of the story first, but I think it's important for you to understand this as we see the enormous impact that the Book of Daniel has on the outcome of history.

A Young Man of Influence

Whether the heathen king Nebuchadnezzar knew it or not, young Daniel, probably no more than seventeen years old at the time of his capture, was a teenager beyond reproach. No evil motives are ever attributed to Daniel in Scripture. Daniel had great influence on his three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. His moral rectitude rubbed off on them, and they, too, began to demonstrate the purity that God desires for everyone, young or old. With wisdom well beyond his years, Daniel had become a mentor to his three friends.

The Scripture tells us in Daniel 1:4 that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were already intelligent fellows, but mere knowledge is a far cry from a mature understanding of how to apply that learning where it truly counts. But because of Daniel's daily influence, the Hebrew boys demonstrated much more than the accumulation of facts; they knew how to rely on God and to use those facts because the Spirit of almighty God was upon them. They were also fulfilling a prophecy written in Isaiah 39:7, which revealed that the offspring of the royal family of Judah would be taken as prisoners to Babylon, where they would hold high offices in the palace of the king. And this is exactly what was happening.

Can't Have Those Jewish Names, Boys

But Nebuchadnezzar had a problem. He had Jewish boys, with Jewish names, in a Babylonian palace, and he figured he'd better do something about it-especially since their very names

shouted out their allegiance to their God. The name Daniel means "God is judge." When someone would call for Hananiah, that person would be shouting "Jehovah is gracious." Mishael's name asked the provocative question, "Who is what God is?" And Azariah's name was a constant reminder of God's mercy, meaning "Jehovah has helped."

Nebuchadnezzar couldn't allow these names to be echoed in his great hall, so he changed their names to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar was the master of the quick fix. His kingly logic was, if he changed the name, he would change the person. What the king did not realize, however, was that you can change a person's name as many times as you want, but you will not necessarily change that person's heart. So the name changes were purely cosmetic, and I've got a feeling that when the boys were in their quarters, in the privacy of their conversation, they still called each other Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

These brilliant young Jews loved their God and, as we'll look at in more detail later, boldly proclaimed His presence in their lives three times a day in prayer-with the windows wide open. They didn't care who heard them pray. They didn't care who saw them with their heads lifted to heaven. They loved their God, and they would honor Him at all costs. They remained respectful to the king, but they had a greater God to serve. In one of the great "passive resistance" protests in history, they agreed to remain unwavering in their beliefs, even if it meant taking certain life-threatening risks.

Daniel 1:8-16

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself

Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

An Unlikely Training Food

The first challenge was what to eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Imagine the incredible feasts available to Daniel and his friends. Delicacies galore. Meat, fowl, wine, and fruit served in gold and silver vessels. The king's best. Who would have refused that kind of lifestyle? Well, for starters, four young men with the names Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They determined in their hearts they would not eat the rich, fatty, high-cholesterol foods from the king's table.

But there was another reason they refused to defile their bodies: The king's food had already been offered to the Babylonian god Marduk, and to eat the king's food would be to break the second commandment. They knew what Exodus 20:4-5 said:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

But this conviction created a problem. These four boys were in training-and Nebuchadnezzar and his trainers were in charge. They were under strict orders to follow Babylonian rules, not Jewish rules. Nothing kosher here. But-and this is why I hope young people are reading this book, because this in so many ways is a young person's book-Daniel still found favor with the prince of the eunuchs. Character is what counts. Sticking to your guns when everyone else says to do something that dishonors God is what wins the day.

Now it was Melzar, the eunuch-in-charge, who had the problem. His job and his life were on the line. He had a specific assignment-to make his charges obey the rules, follow the instructions, color between the lines, do what they were told, and eat the king's food like the other Jewish boys. What could be so bad about that! "Come on, guys, please," I can almost hear him say. "I like this job, and I really don't need to get into any trouble with the head eunuch." I'm sure that Daniel and his buddies listened to their eunuch friend with hearts of compassion for the predicament he was in, but they still remained faithful to God's agenda for their lives.

Acting Like Gentlemen

Now here's a part I love. Rather than giving Melzar a tongue-lashing, Old Testament lecture on the evils of giving good food to bad gods like Marduk, Daniel did something much more effective: He provided an alternative. He presented the eunuch an option by suggesting, "Let's just check this other idea out, and see what happens." Daniel came up with a "ten-day plan." And what was the essence of this plan?

To eat only pulse-another word for beans. Beans. Not meat, fish, exotic game from the forest, rich desserts, wine flowing by the flagons-but beans . . . and water. I can just see Melzar's face turn ghostly white as he gently touches the side of his neck, wondering how long it will remain attached to the rest of his head. "Beans! Surely you jest. We have beef, and you want beans?"

Daniel and his friends confirmed their resolve, and the diet plan was approved. While the rest of Jewish captives were being wined and dined in the palace dining hall, Daniel and his three friends

ate beans-and amazingly were growing stronger and healthier in mind and body day by day. They trusted their God to make them healthy and strong. They remained obedient to God when all the odds were stacked against them. And when the ten-day experiment came to an end, we read that

"their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse" (vv. 15-16).

And the palace scoreboard read:

Daniel-1
King-O

Daniel 1:17 - 21

17. *As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.*
18. *Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.*
19. *And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.*
20. *And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.*
21. *And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.*

There must be something about the power of beans. But for ten days? I think that's about the only diet I haven't heard about in all the hype and hoopla of today's weight management programs. Of course, the beans and water didn't make the difference-the food was simply the vehicle of faithfulness that God used to prove that He was God, and that there was no other.

Now that the experiment was over, Daniel and his friends began to focus on more serious business-such as praying to God to help them develop their gifts of wisdom, ability to discern truth from error, and the skill to differentiate between true dreams and false dreams. This was a lot for young shoulders to bear, but God was faithful to his four righteous servants, and He gave them more wisdom and knowledge than they ever could have imagined.

The Best of the Lot

We can safely assume that Daniel and his compatriots did not dine at the king's table for the entire three years of their training. Yet, when the king took one look at Daniel and his friends, he realized there were no others in his realm who were as healthy or insightful as these four Hebrew boys. They had proved by their faithfulness to God-while maintaining an attitude of courtesy and respect for their foreign ruler-that God had sent them to the king's palace, and that they were committed to serving their God. The king quickly picked up on this, and we read that:

"in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm" (1:20).

The Message for Today

What is the special word from God for us here? I believe God would have us understand that our heavenly Father wants us to be faithful, regardless of our circumstances. What if Daniel and his friends had chosen to compromise their ideals in that foreign environment? What if they had decided it made no difference to put on rolls of fat from the king's bounty, to play around with foreign gods, to engage themselves with sensuous women, and to allow their active minds to accept the ungodly mind-set of Babylonian life? If they'd taken the easy way out, they would have been ineffective servants. Just four more captives doing their time.

And the king would never have honored them by saying, "I would trade ten of my best magicians and astrologers for one of these men because they have some supernatural power." Ten times better! What a recommendation. What enviable job security. And what a God-given opportunity for Daniel and his friends to begin to influence a king and the affairs of an entire kingdom at the highest level. All this was taking place because four young, God-fearing men were filled with the Spirit of God and were determined to follow His commands.

As we move from one exciting page of the Book of Daniel to the next, we'll notice that the expression, "The spirit of the gods" will appear often. As believers, we know there is only one Spirit, the blessed Holy Spirit. And when our Savior returns-a theme we'll investigate as we go along-there will be only one power. The Nebuchadnezzar's of the world will have had their day. The once powerful, high, and mighty will take a backseat to the Divine Redeemer who will come for His own. At that day there will be only one power, one driving force, and one Spirit. That's why we are reminded in Ephesians 5:18 to *"be filled with the Spirit."* The literal Greek reads, "Be being filled with the spirit." It's a continuous process.

The kind of filling that will energize you and me, just as it provided the power for Daniel to remain faithful to God during his time of trials in a foreign land. And just as Daniel stood boldly and confidently before King Nebuchadnezzar~ so we have received the mandate to demonstrate the boldness of Acts 1:8: *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

In Daniel's day, the wisdom of the world-which was Nebuchadnezzar's world-was put to shame by the wisdom of God manifested in the lives of four committed young men. That same wisdom must be exhibited in our day-a time in history when a movement against the one true God is picking up speed and will march us to the end of the age. Daniel is not just a prophet from history, and his book is not just another book. It is our must-read guide to show us where we are heading, and the Book of Daniel will take us to a fuller understanding of the latter days and the great mysteries unsealed, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's amazing dream of a statue and Daniel's fearless interpretation.

A King Dreams... A King Is Confused

DANIEL 2:1-13

1. *And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.*
2. *Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to show the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.*

3. *And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.*
4. *Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriac, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.*
5. *The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill.*
6. *But if ye show the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore show me the dream, and the interpretation thereof.*
7. *They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it.*
8. *The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me.*
9. *But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can show me the interpretation thereof*
10. *The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean.*
11. *And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.*
12. *For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.*
13. *And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.*

Perhaps at some time in your life you've had a dream that was so unnerving and perplexing that it kept you from sleeping through the rest of the night. You tried to figure out what it might mean and may have even asked others to help you with an interpretation that made sense. If this has happened to you and me, we know it's happened to people throughout history.

In the year 603 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream so bizarre that he marshaled his wisest men to his chambers to give him a reasonable interpretation. Not only did the crafty king want an interpretation of the dream he could understand, but he went one step further: He demanded a recital of the dream itself. Unreasonable? Of course. But Nebuchadnezzar was the king, and just as the gorilla sleeps anywhere it likes in the jungle, so the king could make up his own rules—which he did with an impish look in his eye, I'm sure.

Nervous Coughs and Furtive Looks

Did the king really forget the content of his dream? I doubt it. I think this was Nebuchadnezzar's way to test the wisdom and alleged supernatural powers of his magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers. Heavy has been the head that has worn the crown throughout history, and Nebuchadnezzar's crown must have weighed a ton. Kings come and go; their enemies are forever nipping at their heels. What if Nebuchadnezzar's dream were to portend evil for his realm? Superstitious as he was, he demanded an interpretation.

But there was a risk that one of the palace sorcerers might give the king information he didn't want to hear. So what does a wizard do? Equivocate? Beat around the bush? Try to buy some time? After all, the wrong information would produce disastrous results for the wizards-like being cut to pieces and having their houses made into a dunghill. But if they could state the dream and give Nebuchadnezzar an interpretation he could live with, then all manner of blessings would fall on the necromancers. So the stage was set.

I can almost hear the nervous coughs and see the furtive looks as one magician after the other would say something like, "O King, that's a marvelous idea, our telling you your dream- not that it will be easy. Say, would you mind running that dream by your servants just one more time, and then I'm sure we'll be able to come up with just the right interpretation."

Paranoia Abounds

The king didn't bite. He knew he had his magicians and wise men trapped, and he accused them of stalling. Finally, probably with perspiration pouring from their brows, the wizards and astrologers came flat out with the truth, saying that such an assignment was impossible-certainly too great a job for the wisest person in the realm, and one that could only be accomplished in cooperation with the gods-whose "*dwelling is not with flesh*". An interesting comment from savants who were supposed to be able to predict the future and come up with detailed-and accurate-answers to life's most perplexing problems. Yet, when push came to shove, they figured hearkening to the gods might not be such a bad idea after all.

But the king didn't buy their delay and became furious. In a fit of rage he demanded that all the wise men of Babylon be rounded up and destroyed-something we've seen again and again throughout secular and religious history. When frustration mounts in the palace, scapegoats are found, and these innocents are often summarily done away with. It happened when a paranoid King Herod, intent on finding an alleged usurper to his throne, put out a decree to kill all Jewish baby boys in the land.

We saw it with Hitler who, in his cruel attempt to create his Third Reich, killed six million Jews, burned all books that threatened his reign, and more than decimated all non-Aryans under his control. We saw it again just a few years ago, in the mid-to late 1960s, when an equally paranoid Chairman Mao threw all of China into convulsions with his demented "Cultural Revolution"-a nationwide witch hunt that was only an official excuse to kill and maim millions of dissidents, destroy any semblance of ancient tradition that flew in the face of his hybrid communism, and put China on a crash course with history. Will tyrants ever learn?

Now, the net was thrown wide throughout the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar to bring all the men of wisdom to their knees and ultimately to their collective death. Although it appears that Daniel and his friends were not in this shouting session with the king, they were, in fact, to be included in the king's order. The great irony of the king's manifesto as it related to Daniel was that once again God was setting the stage for a display of His sovereignty over the affairs of men. Meanwhile, the hunt was on.

16. *Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon:*
17. *He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel.*
18. *Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation.*
19. *Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:*
20. *That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*
21. *Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.*
22. *Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:*
23. *And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:*

24. *He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.*
25. *I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.*
26. *Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation.*

Daniel's Strategy

We've now begun to see the sterling character of Daniel. Though still young, he was wise beyond his years; though relatively inexperienced in the affairs of life, he demonstrated how God can use a servant who gives his absolute loyalty to the Father. Now, it was again Daniel's turn to settle uncontrollable waters. Here's where we as believers need to take careful note of Daniel's spiritual strategy.

- First, he asked for time-always a good idea when we are trying to come up with a solution to one of life's challenges.
- Second, he was bold enough to say that he would fulfill the king's demand-that is, he promised to do what the other wise men could not. Daniel knew that with God on his side he was not stepping out on a partially sawed-off limb. He knew his heavenly Father would give him the insight required at the time he would need it.
- Third-and how often we fail to do this-Daniel went back to his quarters and held an impromptu prayer meeting/counseling session with his companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Proverbs 15:22 reminds us, "*Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.*" Daniel knew the importance of feedback from his companions-an awareness that runs throughout the entire book.

Daniel's "Model Prayer"

Now I want you to pay special attention to Daniel's prayer- just one of the many prayers of this great man of God we will discover in the pages of this amazing prophecy. Remember, Daniel already believed that God would give him the answer he'd need when he would soon stand before the king. He'd already conferred with his friends and received their counsel. But Daniel knew that unless he prayed earnestly to his God for divine insight and wisdom, he would never be prepared for his daunting assignment with a paranoid king.

For years, I've felt this prayer of Daniel should be a model for our own time with God-a prayer that moves me anew as I read it again, perhaps for the thousandth time. Daniel blesses God for His wisdom. He acknowledges that earthly kings are just that-as common as dirt-and that God alone sets up rulers and brings them crashing down from their man-made thrones. He recognizes that only His God-not Marduk, or any other Babylonian idol-gives wisdom to the wise and has the necessary resources to bring light to that which is shrouded in darkness.

Then, in a final burst of praise, Daniel thanks God for the wisdom and might He's given to His servant. Daniel thanks God - giving no credit to himself - for the answers he now has to King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Can't you just hear Daniel's prayer build with confidence as he moves toward his final crescendo-his glorious amen to his God?

Ready to Meet the King

Daniel has done his homework. He's been patient. He's prayed. Now he's ready with an exuberance and confidence that can only come to a believer in the one true God. Only after this serious, pre-audience preparation does Daniel finally say to Arioch, "All right, now's the time. I'm ready to enter the presence of the king . . . and by the way, make sure that the king spares the lives of the wise men of Babylon. There's now no reason for them to die." Daniel, a young man with limited life experience, is now used by God to shape the destiny of an entire kingdom.

The apostle Paul, hundreds of years later, would say to another young man, Timothy, "*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*" (1 Timothy 4:12). In God's eyes, age has little significance when it comes to being a wise servant. Just as He did then, all God demands from His people is obedience. This spirit would be the hallmark of the man Daniel to the end of his days.

Daniel 2:25 - 30

Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation.

The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the sooth sayers, show unto the king;

But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the King Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these;

As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what Should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass.

But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

Glory to God Alone

Daniel now had the king's attention. He also continued to remind the king that the wisdom he was sharing was from the one true God and not from his own knowledge. What integrity! Daniel could have made this a public relations spectacular for himself by taking all the credit, comparing himself to the other wise men (who failed to speak the dream or interpret it), saying, "Hey, King, look at me. I'm the man. You can always count on me for the answers to your tough questions."

But that is not the Daniel of this book. He took no glory for himself, but instead insisted that only God in heaven could do what the king had requested. I can almost see King Nebuchadnezzar's mouth begin to drop as Daniel set him up.

Nebuchadnezzar was probably saying something like, "Come on, Daniel, enough of this 'My God' stuff. What's my dream? More importantly, what does it mean? And why are you making me wait?" But Daniel was not to be rushed. He was in control of this particular discussion and, once again, the king was compelled to wait for the time when this young Jew would come forth with his secrets, which he finally shared when he said:

Daniel 2: 31 - 35

Thou, 0 king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.

This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass,

His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.

Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

I imagine the king was startled, and dumbfounded, probably exclaiming something like, "I can't believe this, Daniel. You're a genius! You've done what my most seasoned astrologers and magicians could not do. You're amazing. . . and you're still so young!"

Daniel just stood there and listened politely, continuing to assert that God gave him the dream. He probably reminded the king of what he'd already told him, "*But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets*"(2:28). Wouldn't you like to have seen Nebuchadnezzar's face as Daniel spoke the dream one scene at a time? The king's heart rate must have increased as Daniel talked about an image so large and brilliant that it was virtually impossible to look at for any length of time. His blood pressure must have climbed as Daniel described the statue from head to foot-the head of gold; breast and arms of silver; belly and thighs of brass; legs of iron; and feet and toes of an unstable mixture of iron and clay.

The Dream Interpreted

Then, thundering from a distance came a stone cut out without hands-that is, not of human origin-crashing into the statue with such meteoric force that it dissolved the image into chaff, blowing away any semblance of the statue. Where the image had stood-this is what had to give King Nebuchadnezzar pause-the stone, now a large mountain, "filled the whole earth" (2:35).

If you were a superstitious Babylonian king constantly looking over your shoulder at the slightest movement of your enemies-or wondering if inside-the-palace intrigue might one day do you in-what would you think if you had a dream like this? Without waiting for the king's response-or perhaps because Nebuchadnezzar was too dumbfounded to respond-Daniel proceeded with the interpretation of his dream.

Daniel 2: 36 - 45

This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.

Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.

And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in Pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay.

And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.

And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

Not So Fast, O King

Daniel was anything but timid, for God had removed any spirit of fear from his heart as he stood eye-to-eye with Nebuchadnezzar, giving him the message from God. Nebuchadnezzar undoubtedly saw himself as a self-made king-powerful, in control, able to make heads roll at a snap of his finger. Yet Daniel says, "Wait a minute, King. Not so fast. You are only where you are because my God has given you dominion, power, and glory. Yes, you're a mighty and powerful king, but your reign simply cannot last." Daniel consistently gives God the credit in the preface of all his prayers and speeches.

The king would probably rather not have to sit there and listen to these extended preambles, but this was young Daniel's moment. And Nebuchadnezzar would have to be patient.

Daniel's description of Babylon's place in world history is fully in sync with other historical references. Babylon was the greatest power of the day. It had always been a superlative empire, with its great beauty, economic position as a center of commerce, and fabled hanging gardens-one of the exquisite wonders of the ancient world. But even all

these accomplishments, Daniel would argue, were not Nebuchadnezzar's doing-but God's.

Although Nebuchadnezzar was the "gold head" in his dream, the inference was that he would not be in charge of his kingdom in perpetuity: Daniel's message was that God was in control, and that his heavenly Father would have the final say as to who would and who would not occupy all earthly thrones-including Nebuchadnezzar's.

Kingdoms Come... Kingdoms Go

Marduk, Babylon's chief god, was also called the "god of gold"-something that surely did not escape the king's notice. In fact, the precious metal gold was almost synonymous with the nation of Babylon. There was gold everywhere-in the ornate palaces, the worship places, and the ubiquitous shrines. Even the walls were overlaid with what was then the most precious substance in existence. Now King Nebuchadnezzar was told that all this gold would one day be swept away by a second kingdom, the kingdom of Medo-Persia.

This later became a historic fact when the two disparate cultures-the Medes and the Persians-united in 550 B.C. under one king to form a great world power. This was the "silver" part of the statue and a proper representation of the Medo-Persian empire since the Medes and Persians based their partnership on the power of money collected through an elaborate system of taxation. Nebuchadnezzar must have been relieved to hear Daniel prophesy that this "silver" kingdom would be inferior to his own, probably because as a partnership nation,

Medo-Persia did not have the political and military unity of Babylon. But despite this weakness, Medo-Persia would one day break the "head of gold." Because God's Word speaks only the truth, we should not be surprised to note that Daniel's prophecy became reality when Medo-Persia brought Babylon to its knees in military defeat in 539 B.C.

But what about the third kingdom, the belly and thighs of brass? The element bronze later became a characterization of the Greek empire, primarily because the Greeks used it extensively as the material for their weapons of war. Daniel foresaw that Greece would one day "bear rule over all the earth" (2:3 9). History shows that Greece did dominate the world of its day. The kingdom of Alexander the Great encompassed much more of the known world than Babylon or Medo-Persia ever did. Again, a prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled in world history.

The Renewal of the Roman Empire

Imagine how Nebuchadnezzar must have reacted to the news from this young prophet. His was probably a mixture of fear and disbelief. But we must also note that Daniel wasn't finished yet, and the king did not interrupt Daniel's interpretation.

After the world-dominating empire of bronze another empire would arise-a fourth kingdom composed of two legs of iron. This kingdom would be Rome with its "two legs" representing the expansive empires of the Western Roman Empire, headquartered in Rome, and the Eastern Roman Empire, with the cosmopolitan city of Constantinople as its capital. This empire also would fall. The great historian Edward Gibbon powerfully describes it in his work entitled *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. However, just before Christ returns, this empire will revive as the iron mixed with clay begins to wiggle in the form of ten toes.

Only God could have given Daniel the wisdom to know what is now becoming reality for us who live in the beginning days of the twenty-first century. According to Daniel, the final revival of the Roman Empire would be comprised of a confederation of ten nations, which would finally lead to a new world order encompassing the globe . Why would they come together? For monetary and military security and strength-something we're already seeing as the European Union moves ahead with such plans at break-neck speed. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar's image with ten toes pictured the revival and conclusion of the Roman Empire.

Note the gradual deterioration of the metals in Nebuchadnezzar's dream: from gold to silver to bronze to iron to clay, a clear demonstration that as history marches on, men and their cultures become increasingly corrupt. Tregelles is a scholar who has called attention to the decreasing "specific gravity" of each of these metals: For example, the specific gravity of gold is 19; silver, 11; brass, 8.5; cast iron, 7.8; mixture of iron and clay, 1.93.

The world in which you and I live-the world of the fourth and revived fifth kingdom as prophesied by Daniel-is going to get worse up to the moment that the great stone breaks the feet of the image. That stone is Jesus Christ, who becomes a mountain and fills the entire earth.

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (2:44).

The Ten Toes Begin to Wiggle

The entire end-time message is predicted here in the Book of Daniel thousands of years, in some instances, before the actual historical events occurred-just as Rabbi Shvili in 1935 suggested in his book, *Reckonings of Redemption*. How could Daniel know this? Because God, historically, has chosen to reveal His secrets through spirit-anointed prophets.

Let's bring Daniel's prophecy even closer to home. There was a long interval between the time when Rome's power began to wane and fall-around 476 A.D.-and the year 1947 when the "ten toes" ; of the statue began to wiggle. First of all, Benelux met in that year-Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg- creating the first three members of the

confederation. In 1957, three additional nations met with the countries of Benelux- Italy, France, and Germany-for a total of six, ratified by the Treaty of Rome.

Little by little, in our daily newspapers, we see a revival of the Roman Empire just as Daniel predicted. In 1973, England, Ireland, and Denmark joined the confederation, making it a total of nine members. Then, on New Year's Day, 1981, Greece became number ten. The time that Daniel prophesied is here. We are living in the latter days, and Jesus is coming soon.

Jesus Is Our Rock

One of the most profound messages of these verses is that you and I don't have to worry about straightening out our world. We have almighty God, Adonai, who is in charge of the affairs of earth. Jesus is the rock, that stone, on which the true church is built. You'll remember in Matthew that Jesus asked the apostle Peter, "*Whom do men say that I am?*" Peter answered, "*You are the Christ, the Son of God.*" And Jesus said, "*On this rock I will build my church*" (see 16:13-18). Christ was that rock (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Yes, the rock in Nebuchadnezzar's dream that eventually engulfs the entire world, a rock that will hit the feet, not the head-Babylon; not the chest and arms of silver- the Medes and the Persians; not the stomach and thighs of brass-Greece; not the legs of iron-Rome. They went out of existence. Instead, the rock strikes that group that revives at the time of the end-the ten toes, the restored Roman Empire. Thus, on January 1, 1981, when Greece became number ten, pictured by the ten toes on the image, we were given the clearest signal yet that we were headed toward the end times and would soon be ushered into an environment that would be ready for the return of Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

God's Sovereignty

We can therefore reasonably conclude that the dream of Daniel chapter two reveals that the Kingdom of God will soon be established in connection with the second coming of our Savior. Daniel 2:44 states, and I repeat this for the sake of emphasis,

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

It's all starting to happen. Just as the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream contained metals that degraded as they descended from gold to iron and clay, so will the world in which you and I live become increasingly apostate and the more our society at large will be governed by outright militarism as its only vehicle to control the violence that is present and that is yet to come.

What was the actual purpose of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? To show God's sovereign rule over the affairs of men, leading to the future Gentile world domination and its ultimate destruction, to be replaced by a Kingdom and a King who would reign forever on earth (Matthew 6:10).

One of the reasons the Book of Daniel is so important is that it provides us with a complete scenario for the end times. And it all begins to wind down with the current revival of the Roman Empire, which I believe is the present-day European Union. After this episode is completed, there is no more. This will be the last empire, and it will continue into the latter days, with the Antichrist as the primary figure taking over the resurrected Roman Empire (Revelation 17:10). He will be a dictator of world proportions and will rule the world of his day just as King Nebuchadnezzar ruled his world as leader of Babylon.

But for those of us who know the whole story, we need not fear the perilous times yet to come because "the stone [which] was cut out of the mountain without hands" (2:45) is none other than the person of Jesus Christ, God's anointed, our Savior, the Rock of our salvation. When He returns to gather His own, God will establish His Kingdom which will prevail in our world, and for a thousand years all beings on earth will be tremendously blessed under the personal reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Daniel 2: 46 - 49

Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him.

The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.

Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

Daniel's God Is Greatest!

Nebuchadnezzar's subjects often fell on their faces before their leader, but for the king to subject himself to such a humble posture meant that Daniel had indeed gotten through to him. It also appeared that Nebuchadnezzar may have been making some spiritual progress, revealed by his act of contrition, admitting that Daniel's God was the greatest god of all. The king made good on his promise that he would reward the wise one who

met the demands of speaking and interpreting his dream, and Daniel was subsequently exalted throughout the realm.

But Daniel, always a man of integrity, did not forget his friends, and requested that the king give them key positions as well. His wish was granted. Daniel continued to be a person of great influence in the king's court by being allowed to sit in the gate of the king-a position of judge, the equivalent of a Supreme Court justice and confidant of the king. Yet Daniel never compromised his standards in that foreign land.

Through it all, Daniel remained faithful to his God, continuing to speak the truth fearlessly, always serving notice to Nebuchadnezzar that God alone, not earthly kings, has the real power. God does not tremble at the sight of monarchs. If anything, He laughs at their rebellion, and in Psalm 2:1-4-a passage that pictures the battle of Armageddon-we read:

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision."

But kings will be kings. Seemingly a victim of short-term memory, Nebuchadnezzar goes on yet another rampage. During his recurring paranoia he commands that his servants turn up the heat in the palace furnace seven times hotter. It's a futile attempt to destroy three Hebrew teenagers-surely one of the most fascinating and familiar stories in all the Bible, and a dramatic preview of the real wrath that is yet to come during the Tribulation hour-another mystery which we will see unsealed.

DANIEL 3:1-7

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasures, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasures, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and

they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,

That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up.

And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

We said earlier that kings will be kings, and Nebuchadnezzar was no exception. One moment Daniel had Nebuchadnezzar's undivided attention, almost persuading him of the ultimate power of the one, true God; the next minute, the king was again egocentric and self-promoting, forgetting Daniel's prophecy and its implications. Perhaps the king was simply denying his mighty Babylonian kingdom would ever really collapse—especially at the hands of the Medo-Persian empire.

A Preview of 666

Imagine the sight of a golden image of Nebuchadnezzar that was ninety feet high (sixty cubits) and nine feet wide (six cubits in all, a cubit being approximately eighteen inches), erected on the plain of Dura. While the 'golden image' may simply have appeared to be little more than a massive statue, it actually holds great prophetic meaning and is yet another end-time mystery about to be unsealed.

For example, the numbers 66 come together here: the number of man (sixty cubits high) and six cubits wide, resembling the number of the Antichrist in Revelation 13:16-18 (six cubits). This gives us a reference to the time when the Antichrist comes into power and his false prophet sets up an image of his likeness in the temple. Revelation 13:15 says,

"And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed."

Faucet's Bible Dictionary Encyclopedia reports that the archaeologist Opert once journeyed to present day Iraq—the area of biblical Babylon—and excavated what most evangelical scholars believe is the pedestal on which Nebuchadnezzar's great image had been placed—proving this biblical event really happened! Some believe the gold statue may have been built to honor Nebuchadnezzar's deceased father, Nabopolassar. Others suggest it was erected to appease Bel or Marduk—the revered pagan gods of Babylon. More likely, the image was a representation of the king himself.

Nebuchadnezzar had a flair for publicity, and he knew where to position the gigantic statue so that no one could miss seeing it. While Babylon was a skyscraper city of its day, the plain of Dura was a huge mound of earth, about six miles southeast of Babylon, probably a walled area that Nebuchadnezzar could have easily used as a focal point to stage an event of this enormity.

Anything constructed in that area would be seen for miles around. Its strategic position allowed for thousands of people to descend on the area at once, thus giving the king a venue for a mass rally where loyal supporters could bow and pay their homage to the king. This seemed to be a carefully planned "photo op" for Nebuchadnezzar and an event which all the chief officers of the land were commanded to attend—including Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Fail to Bow... Pay the Price

Here we catch a glimpse of Nebuchadnezzar's political acumen and get a dramatic preview of the activities of the Antichrist to come. The king knew he had to keep certain conquered peoples under his thumb at all times, and what better vehicle than native religion to promote the power of the state? Nebuchadnezzar knew that whatever officials saw that day on the plain of Dura, they would take back to those captives under their jurisdiction.

Apparently Daniel was somewhere else in the realm on business for the king, since he was not present at the unveiling of the golden image. In fact, Daniel is not even mentioned in this chapter. For the first time in our story, his three friends are on their own. But because Daniel had exerted such great moral and spiritual influence on his companions, compromise with foreign gods was out of the question.

However, these three faithful Hebrews would pay a terrible price for not bowing to the image. King Nebuchadnezzar would try to have them killed, picturing an approaching day when the Antichrist carries out the same penalty on those who refuse to bow to his image and reject his mark, 666. At first reading this passage simply appears to be a provocative piece of biblical history. Closer observation, however, tells us that this story speaks to where you and I are today—and where we are quickly headed.

For instance, during the Tribulation hour, the Antichrist will make an image of himself (Revelation 13:15), and anyone who will not worship that image will be killed, even as those who refused to bow to the image of Nebuchadnezzar were threatened with

destruction in a furnace of fire. The only difference between the two events is magnitude. The Tribulation hour will be a time when fire engulfs the earth. Revelation 8:7 says,

"And the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up."

Revelation 9:18 tells us:

"By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone."

Accompanying all this mayhem will be the Antichrist, who says, "If you don't worship me and my image, you're going to die." Revelation 20:4 says,

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image."

Matthew 25:31-46, however, declares that there will be multitudes who will survive the seven-year period without taking the number. I'm not sure how, but they will persevere, just as the three Hebrew children ultimately survived their trial by fire.

Nebuchadnezzar-Picture of the Antichrist

So the statue on the plain of Dura was more than just an image of a king. It graphically represented the king's continued rebellion against God-just as the Antichrist will become the definition of rebellion against the Almighty. The image also indicated that the king was egocentric, offering his image to the people as a symbol of self-deification. Again, there are Antichrist implications (Daniel 11:36).

Politically, Nebuchadnezzar needed a strong, unifying force to continue to bring together the disparate tribes and nations that fell to the power of Babylon. In short, Nebuchadnezzar's purpose was to institute a totalitarian regime, and this was one way to galvanize the people's attention and allegiance. What better description can we find in Scripture of the political prowess of the Antichrist to come!

Not surprisingly, when the word went out that this was "bow down" time, the officials, governors, and whoever else had managed to get to Dura that day paid obeisance to the king right on cue. Imagine the scene. Nebuchadnezzar was so fully in control of this grand event that he even had it choreographed. When the conductor of this desert orchestra of cornets, flutes, harps, sackbuts (stringed instruments), psalteries, and dulcimers lowered his baton, it was time to fall to one's knees. And that's what the masses did: They looked at the great statue, and they fell down to worship. Why not? To

remain standing in defiance of the king's order would mean certain death in a fiery furnace.

Three Young Men Who Refused to Compromise

No exceptions to the king's rule would be tolerated. Now, once again, Daniel's three friends had to make a decision. They knew the Scriptures, and I'm sure their minds were racing to the first two commandments of Moses they'd memorized years before from the Book of Exodus:

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:3-4).

For these three Hebrew children that was all they needed to remember. It was no longer a dilemma. They had always obeyed the law of God. Daniel served under six kings and always honored them—even when their point of view differed with some of his own opinions. But on the question of allegiance to the God of Israel, Daniel never compromised.

Early on, his three Hebrew friends had also refused to compromise. Rather than worry about incurring the wrath of an earthly king, their greater concern was that they not subject themselves to the wrath of their living God. Now, once again, even as they had earlier refused to eat the rich food from the king's table, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to sacrifice their respect for God's law on a pagan altar.

Wherfore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews.

They speake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever.

Thou O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image.

And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee, they

serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

The people who bowed to the ruling powers had a problem with our three Hebrew friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Jealousy and a large dose of anti-Semitism were factors in their dislike of these foreigners who had been given lofty positions by the king. Undoubtedly, some of these threatened Chaldeans snatched on Daniel's companions, and before long, word of the Hebrews' insubordination was passed on to the king. Their charge: rebellion against the king and the law of the land. And what better proof of the allegation than the fact that the young men had remained standing before the image while Nebuchadnezzar's minions lay flat on their faces in worship. Get the furnace ready for three young Hebrews.

Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded them to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sack but, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Spiritual Fortitude

Mission accomplished. When Nebuchadnezzar heard of the acts of the rebellious young Jews, he flew into one of his typical rages, demanding that these alleged traitors be brought before him. But to his credit-and perhaps the first crack in Nebuchadnezzar's

becoming more compliant-he asked Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego if they'd really done this dastardly deed, perhaps secretly hoping the report was not true.

King Nebuchadnezzar didn't take the Chaldean's word at face value. He left the door open for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to take the trip out to the plain of Dura again and make amends for their unpatriotic actions-or lack of action. All they would have to do would be drop to their knees when the desert orchestra struck up its opening number once again.

I can almost hear Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego saying, "O king, we really don't want to go out there to Dura again. Because even if we did, we would not bow to the great gold statue. It's not that we don't respect you, it's just that you are not God, and we bow only to God." Spiritual guts! That's the best phrase I can think of. Intestinal fortitude and courage born of spiritual integrity, all of which translated into a resounding, "No, king, we just can't do that." And with their final refusal, they told the king they were prepared to be led into the fiery furnace.

We Christians today need to appreciate the resolute spirit of these young men: They were not arrogant before the king. The Hebrews did not equivocate or evade the issue. They spoke their minds as children of God. How many times have we kept our allegiance to Jesus under wraps, saying, along with Peter, "I never knew the man!"? Not so for these young men. They spoke the truth without fear, knowing what would happen if the king refused to change his mind.

These three young Hebrews were prepared to abide by the rules, even if it meant suffering as a consequence. Only God knows how many millions of other faithful followers throughout history have gone to their own "fiery furnaces" or "lions' dens" for their faith-including the torture and persecution that continues to exist throughout our world today for all modern-day Shadrachs, Meshachs, and Abed-negos.

The die was now cast. The young Hebrews admitted that they were guilty as charged. They felt no need to justify their position because they knew God would protect and defend them. But note one of the most amazing verses in this entire passage: But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (3:18). Imagine the maturity and faith of three young men who could say, "King, even if our God does not deliver us from your fiery furnace, we still will not serve your gods or worship your desert statue. We just will not do it!"

Just One More Miracle, God

They knew their God was a God of miracles, and I'm confident that their minds quickly raced back to how Moses had led the children of Israel through the Red Sea, and how tens of thousands of the children of Israel walked through on dry ground, without one of them dying. If God could do that kind of miracle then, why not another miracle now!

Later, the apostle Paul would write in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." That was the courageous spirit of the three Hebrew teenagers. Each time I read this passage, I'm overwhelmed at the bold faith of Daniel's friends. It's my earnest prayer that you and I would trust our God enough to be just as faithful were we to find ourselves in a similar situation.

Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

Just like a chameleon, Nebuchadnezzar changed his tune from the earlier conciliatory "let's give them one more chance" to his usual uncontrollable rage as he sent the three Hebrew men to their death in the furnace, now heated seven times hotter than usual.

The king had perhaps expected that the determined, Hebrews would strike a deal. After all, what's a little thing like bowing down to an image if the only alternative is burning to a crisp in a furnace? But the king was wrong. Again: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in no mood for deal-making. I'm sure those who were eavesdropping on this tense palace discussion also may have expected some form of compromise to emerge, but there would be no compromise when it came to things of the living God.

Here was a king before whom the nations trembled, and to whom rulers of the known world willingly gave homage... and now three young Jewish upstarts had the audacity to just say no! The king probably wanted to save their lives from destruction, but he'd painted himself into a political corner with his incontrovertible decree, a manifesto that was as immutable as any law of the Medes or the Persians. The king found himself with no choice but to heat up the furnace.

More Than Just a Bible Story

Again, this is more than biblical history. This is a dramatic picture of Jewish people and Gentile converts. The Bible reminds us that millions will be saved during the Tribulation hour. Revelation 7:14 says,

"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

They will be going through the seven years of Tribulation, which the body of Christ, the Church, escapes via the Rapture (Revelation 4:1). On the other hand, 144,000 Jewish evangelists will proclaim the message of the coming Kingdom, and millions of Jewish and Gentile converts will somehow survive, though rejecting the mark of the beast.

So just as Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace be made seven times hotter for the three Hebrew children, so the seven-year period of Tribulation will be a hot, volatile period in which millions of God's newly born-again children will be placed in the fire of an anti-God atmosphere. But I repeat-multitudes of Jews and Christians will somehow miraculously survive, though rejecting the mark of the beast (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 25:31-34).

DANIEL 4:1-3

1. *Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.*
2. *I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me.*
3. *How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.*

After the events in this chapter occurred, an apparently docile King Nebuchadnezzar issued a proclamation declaring he had finally learned his lesson: that indeed the most high God was in control of a realm greater than his own-a Kingdom that will last eternally, dominating earthly powers for generations to come. This decree was written by the king himself, his regal attempt to tell an entire nation of the great God he had now come to honor and respect.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

5. *I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace:*
6. *I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.*
7. *Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream.*
8. *Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof.*
9. *But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying,*
10. *O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof*

11. *Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great.*
12. *The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth:*
13. *The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof and all flesh was fed of it.*
14. *I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven;*
15. *He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches:*
16. *Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth:*
17. *Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him, and let seven times pass over him.*
18. *This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.*
19. *This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee.*

We have now arrived at the latter half of the king's reign, and some twenty-three years have passed between chapters three and four. Nebuchadnezzar has been a successful warrior abroad for most of his career, and he is now spending the remainder of his life in relative ease at his palace in Babylon. Chapter four could probably be called Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual biography. But just as leopards are not known for changing their spots, so the king remained a proud man and would later have to pay the price for forcing his subjects to worship his great gold image on the plain of Dura a generation earlier. The score would soon be evened, as we shall see as the drama of this chapter unfolds.

Daniel-Consistent in Courage

Once again, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that caused him great anxiety. By now, he seemed convinced that the old guard of magicians, astrologers, and wise men would not have the necessary skills to interpret his latest dream, so he brought in a new group of seers, "all the wise men of Babylon," not just those from the palace. This time, he didn't play games by asking them to tell him his dream and give him the interpretation. He told them the dream immediately. Still, even the wisest in the realm were at a complete loss for an interpretation.

I've always wondered why he didn't bring Daniel in immediately instead of going through the frustration of working with supposed wise men who never seemed to be able to deliver. Eventually, Daniel (Belteshazzar) was brought before the king, taken away momentarily from his busy life as judge and prime minister of the realm.

Nebuchadnezzar now knew that only a supernatural being could interpret his latest anxiety-ridden dream, and he seemed confident that Daniel was the man to give him the answers he needed.

Trees = Power

As described in the passage above, the king's latest dream was about a luxuriant tree of great height, with branches heavy with enough fruit to sustain the lives of many. But then a holy "watcher" descended from heaven and commanded that the tree be cut down, leaving only a stump in the ground. To a king who was already paranoid about losing his kingdom, this dream was one more in a painful series that indicated neither time nor the God of the Hebrews was on his side. Let's look at this dream and its various components as they relate both to biblical symbolism and to final end-time mysteries.

Throughout the Word of God, trees represent kingdoms and powers. Two examples:

1. The cedar tree usually refers to the nation of Lebanon (1 Kings 4:33) and
2. The fig tree speaks of Israel (Joel 1:7; Hosea 9:10; Matthew 24:32).

Nebuchadnezzar did not know it at the time, but the great tree that reached to heaven represented him and his vast empire. Babylon was a powerful tree-a mighty kingdom that had refused to bow its head to anything but a lifeless Marduk and the other Babylonian gods. But it was an abusive power, filled with the pride of an arrogant king who had crafted a golden image and made his subjects bow to it. Because of the king's arrogance, God would cut the tree representing Nebuchadnezzar's great power to the ground, but enough would remain (the stump) to indicate that it was still alive enough to undergo seven years of testing, a graphic picture of the seven-year Tribulation hour-a time we are rapidly approaching.

Twenty-One Judgments

During those seven years of trouble, according to the dream, the king would be stricken down. He crawled about on his hands and knees, disheveled, a mad monarch forced to eat grass as an animal. His hair probably grew to where it touched his back. His fingernails were like bird claws.

There was a time when skeptics argued that such a situation was not plausible. Raymond Harrison recited a personal experience with a modern case similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar, which he observed in a British mental institution in 1946. He found a man who was mentally deranged, had claws like a bird, with matted hair hanging all the way to his feet. Furthermore, the man's diet was grass, which he ate while crawling on all fours. The disease was given a name: Boanthropy, or Zoanthropy.

Medical records prove this malady does, in fact, exist-and is the same disease, or the equivalent, that Nebuchadnezzar experienced in his dream and life. This state of mental derangement would last for seven years, representing the duration of the Tribulation, that terrible time on earth when millions who insist on honoring a false god will go through judgments destined to inundate the world.

How many judgments will there be during these perilous days? Twenty-one! Each of them is listed in Revelation chapters six to eighteen.

Here are just a few: Revelation 6:2 says the Antichrist appears on a white horse; verses 4 to 8 tell us there will be three other riders. The red horse depicts peace being removed from the earth with the cataclysmic judgments of war annihilating one-third of the world's inhabitants; verse 5 says the rider on a black horse causes mass starvation; and verse 8 gives us the dramatic picture of a rider on a pale horse that causes myriads of diseases, eliminating another one-fourth of the human race; in verse 9, we see yet another judgment, where millions are slaughtered for honoring the name of God and for declaring their allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ; verse 12 speaks of the judgments in the heavens:

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood."

The judgment described in Revelation 8:1 is so terrible that it unleashes the other fourteen judgments, causing an unusual silence in heaven for about the space of half an hour.

The angels, knowing what is coming, are so stunned as they contemplate the future that there is a holy hush in the presence of God. This day is rapidly approaching, and the Book of Daniel is the prophecy through which these end-time mysteries are now being unsealed. In chapter two, we saw the future kingdoms clearly delineated, and now we know that most of Daniel's prophecy has already happened. There is only one part of the prophecy yet to come: the stone smashing the feet of the image- Christ's glorious return to establish His millennial reign for one thousand years upon the earth (Revelation 20:4).

This is all going to take place soon. But before it does, there will be the Tribulation period, pictured by the example of a mentally deranged, animal-like king, who crawls on the ground eating grass for seven years. Once again, a desperate king turns to his foreign friend and counselor for the interpretation of his dream. And again, what Daniel is about to tell the king is not good news. But Daniel remains courageous, refusing to dodge the issue. God has given Daniel the interpretation, and he is prepared to speak the mind of God freely before King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel's Response to the Dream - Daniel 4: 19 - 27

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.

Even though Daniel had been given divine truth directly from God, it still was not easy for him to express those thoughts to the king. He stood there astonished, virtually unable to speak for one hour. Then we see a small crack in the king's pride as Nebuchadnezzar becomes compassionate toward Daniel, telling him not to let the dream or its interpretation get him down. The king seems to be stiffening his upper lip; since he's been in a similar situation before with Daniel, he's probably gearing himself up to hear an interpretation that may not be favorable.

Essentially Daniel says, "O, king, I've got bad news for you." It's always difficult to bring bad tidings to a friend or a colleague, and Daniel, a trusted servant of the king, must have felt great pain in his own heart. Yet, he remained courageous and spoke the Word of God, even though it was a terrible confirmation of what God would do.

Speaking the Truth in Love

Comfortable or not, it is always the role of the believer to speak the truth in love. Just as a doctor is obliged to cut out a cancer if he is to fulfill his role of worthy physician, so we are compelled to speak the truth of God's Word with compassion. God says that we must warn people of the wrath to come, or their blood will be on our hands. It's the same message Paul communicated to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2:

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

This is what Daniel did once again. The prophet of God was not afraid. He had been given a message from God, and he would deliver it. Daniel was prepared to stand firm in his convictions. Even in a direct one-on-one situation with the king, Daniel did not hesitate to say, "Thus saith the Lord."

Daniel's Interpretation of the King's Dream

The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth;

Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation:

It is thou, O King, that art grown and become strong; for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.

And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven time pass over him.

This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king.

That they shall drive thee from men and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.

Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable into thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility.

The first piece of discomforting news for Nebuchadnezzar was that he was, in fact, the tree. It was a big, strong, sturdy tree, providing food and sustenance for all, seemingly invincible. But Daniel's message was that this power could not last forever- a recurring theme, and one you'd think would now be settling deep into the king's heart. As the tree in the dream, Nebuchadnezzar would literally be "cut down to size," with only a stump remaining: alive but ineffective. He would one day be revived, but only after a terrible mental sickness had afflicted him.

Here I must submit that God is not only a God of irony, but also one of considerable humor. You'll recall the passage where Nebuchadnezzar determined to make his great

image all gold because he believed that nobody was ever going to defeat him. When he made that decision, he essentially was saying to Daniel, "Look Daniel, I really don't care what you told me about all that gold, silver, bronze, and clay . . . my statue is going to be all gold. Period!"

So what does God do as He gives Daniel the interpretation of the tree dream? He says, "By the way, King, I want you to notice something about this tree- which is you. There are a couple of things on the bottom you need to know about, like a little band of brass and iron!" I have a feeling this irony was not lost on the king as he probably said to himself, "Come on, not that brass and iron stuff again!" God was saying, through Daniel, "King, the secret I've revealed to Daniel, which you accepted at the time, is going to happen; whether you like it or not, the ' brass and iron are still major players in your ultimate demise."

The "Watchers" Among Us-Today!

And who was telling the king about his future? The "watcher" and the "holy one"-angels, sent to do the bidding of their Father. These watchers see all and tell all-to God. They are all around. They protect you, and they protect me. You'll remember when Jesus was on earth He said, *"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matthew 26:53).A legion in the Roman army consisted of a group totaling seven thousand soldiers. Hence, twelve times seven thousand, or eighty-four thousand angels, would appear instantaneously at the word of Jesus Christ if He requested help.

These were angels who would come from the "third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2). That's so far into space it's mind-boggling. However, here's an attempt to describe the third heaven and the distance God's elect angels travel, coming from that location to earth. The atmosphere, troposphere, stratosphere, mesosphere, ionosphere, and exosphere are all part of the first heaven and reach upwards into the first six hundred miles of space. The second heaven begins at that point and is so astronomical that it's practically impossible to comprehend.

Recently astronomers discovered a new quasar some fourteen hundred billion light years from earth. How far is that, you ask? Well, light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles per second. This produces a total of six trillion miles annually and is called a light year. Thus, the second heaven extends upwards into space some fourteen hundred billion times six trillion miles. Beyond that is the third heaven-the heaven of heavens- God's throne. It's from this seemingly immeasurable distance that these "watchers" and "holy ones" brought Nebuchadnezzar his message of doom in the dream.

When we read a detailed history of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, we see how proud the king was of his great accomplishments, among them a nation he had fashioned into a peaceful shelter and granary for all-full of nutritional abundance. Because of his superb administrative abilities, no one in Babylon would go hungry. Now that great tree of

plenty would be destroyed.., and there, again, was this annoying little band of brass and iron.

Here's an interesting footnote of history. Nebuchadnezzar often took his military campaigns into the great forests and woods of Lebanon and had become infatuated by the great cedars there. We also read that the king so loved the cedars of Lebanon that he cut many of them down with his own hands. Now that which the king loved would be cut to a mere stump in the ground, meaning that he would soon be removed from office and forced to live away from the palace as a mentally incompetent vagabond, scratching the earth for food as an animal. How long would he be forced to live like this? Until he acknowledged that the true God in heaven was sovereign ruler over the kingdoms of earth.

An Invitation Is Extended

As any good preacher would do after a powerful sermon or illustration, Daniel gave his friend the king an opportunity to repent of his evil ways. Up to that time, Nebuchadnezzar had been immensely cruel to thousands of his subjects, especially during his massive building campaigns (Habakkuk 2:11-13). So, Daniel did not flinch on his interpretation of the dream. There would be no promise that the king would escape from the wrath to come. But Daniel did indicate that perhaps-just maybe- almighty God might extend the king's era of tranquility if he would repent of his terrible acts of oppression, engage in acts of righteousness, and demonstrate a greater degree of mercy to the poor in Babylon.

The Realization of the Dream

Daniel 4:28 - 33

All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar.

At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.

The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.

And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until

*thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men,
and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*

*The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon
Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat
grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of
heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and
his nails like birds' claws.*

It's now a year later, and God has been patient with Nebuchadnezzar. Despite his earlier bent toward believing in the God of the Hebrews, the king remained stubborn, pretending he was an earthly ruler who would reign forever. Even as he hoped that his friend Daniel would be wrong, the prophecy began to be fulfilled. At the tragic moment when the king finds himself on the verge of a mental breakdown, he begins to engage in a sort of lonely soliloquy about his exploits as ruler of Babylon.

He was probably strolling on the roof of his palace as he spoke-grounds that covered a six-mile area-surveying his great city and all that he had done to make it one of the ancient wonders. His royal chest filled with pride as he boasted of accomplishments never done by others.

Yes, he had done some amazing things and was undoubtedly the greatest kingdom builder in ancient times. He had built two enormous temples and seventeen ornate religious shrines. His Hanging Gardens of Babylon were without equal, something the Greeks later declared one of the Seven Wonders of the World. He had constructed the famous Ishtar Gate-magnificent with its carved bulls and four-legged dragons etched in high relief. With the assistance of hand-picked engineers, he had designed and created amazingly intricate hydraulic systems that carried water effortlessly up from the Euphrates River to his gardens high above the city-gardens that housed some of the most exotic plants and trees of his day.

But as he reveled in his kingly accomplishments, the voice from heaven finally came, even as Daniel had prophesied one year earlier. It was finally over. Payday had arrived. At that moment, the king realized even the best laid plans of kings and men are as dust. The mills of God may grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine.

Surely and firmly judgment falls when people refuse to glorify God by taking full credit for their worldly accomplishments. Again, this is the scenario of the seven-year Tribulation period-a time in history when the greatest sin will be committed by another king-the infamous Antichrist, who will magnify himself above God (Daniel 11:36). God despises and judges such arrogance. That's why Proverbs 16:18 declares, "*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*"

The Message of a Frog

As I was preparing this chapter I reminded my wife, Rexella, of a little story that speaks straight to this issue of pride. Once there was a little frog sitting on the ground. He watched forlornly as he saw the great birds of the sky flying overhead. Oh, *if I could only fly like the eagles I would be extremely happy*, he thought. Well, one day, two of the eagles were on the ground. The frog approached them, saying, "Say, I wonder if you two fellows would do me a favor. I've got this long stick, and if you'd just put it in your beaks, I could hang on to it, and we could fly through space together. I've always wanted to fly."

The eagles agreed to the strange request, and slowly they lifted the frog from the comfort of his lily pad, up into the unfamiliar but exhilarating sky above, the frog hanging on to the stick for dear life. Before long, the other frogs turned their heads skyward and in disbelief-unable to see the stick-saw their little green friend ascending farther and farther into space. His friends on the ground began to praise this stunt saying, "What genius thought of doing this?" The frog's ego at this point got the best of him when he shouted, "I-I-I did." By doing so he lost his biting grip on the stick and plunged to earth in a humiliating landing.

My friend, we can do absolutely nothing on our own-no more than that frog could fly without some help from his friends. All we do and have are gifts from God. So the next time you are tempted to say, "I did it all on my own," I hope you'll remember the story of the frog-and that you'll then quickly recall the pride of Nebuchadnezzar, a man who had accomplished great feats to make a name for himself but who, in the process, refused to give God the credit. As a result, he paid the price. He fell, even as Satan did, through pride (I Timothy 3:6).

Nebuchadnezzar's Response to the Message of the "Watcher"

Daniel 4: 34 - 37

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him,

What doest thou?

At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned

unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

His reason now restored after his period of derangement, King Nebuchadnezzar swallowed his pride and raised his humbled eyes toward heaven. After his terrible experience as a mad monarch scratching out an existence as an animal, now he was finally willing to honor the true King of heaven. He recognized that all God's works were true and that those who live out their days in pride will be humbled beyond recognition.

What brought Nebuchadnezzar to this realization? It wasn't a miracle. When he saw the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace without a hair singed or a piece of clothing carrying the smell of smoke, and the fourth man in the furnace with them, and their walking out unscathed—that didn't make him a believer. In Nebuchadnezzar's case, it took the sickness of a deranged mind to bring him to his senses, and what a conversion experience he had. The truth we have seen again and again in this chapter is highlighted in Paul's writing to the church at Rome:

"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Romans 6:17).

The message? There is hope for all.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, we read,

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

But praise God, the apostle doesn't stop there. In verse 11 Paul continues,

"And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

The good news is always followed by even better news, that none of us needs to be what we once were. There is hope for us all—just as there was hope and an opportunity for restitution for King Nebuchadnezzar. Yes, he paid a great price for his transgressions, just as you and I will always pay a heavy toll when we turn our backs on the foundational

principles that God has ordained. True repentance means turning "about face" and heading in God's direction. When we do this, we no longer will want to do the evil we once did. Now, after all the fighting, kicking, and screaming Nebuchadnezzar did to distance himself from the one true God, he finally realized that he was the problem, and that his own sinful pride was the issue.

It took crawling around as an animal for a year to make him realize that he needed to square himself away with the true God. Nebuchadnezzar's conversion changed him from the inside out. Yes, it's a great, historically accurate story. But the deeper, underlying message of Nebuchadnezzar's narrative- and his dream-is that this is all simply a precursor of the shattering events yet to come: seven years of Tribulation where unbridled humans will set themselves up as New Age gods, living unholy, prideful lives and worshipping seducing spirits, even when the obvious handwriting of warning begins to appear on the wall-the intriguing story and subject of chapter five.

Don't Look Now, but There's Something on Your Wall

DANIEL 5:1 - 4

Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.

Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.

Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them.

They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

Another title for this chapter could be "The World's Wildest Party," hosted by playboy millionaire Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, and number two in command in Babylon. It was a drunken orgy where the women were in abundance and the wine flowed like water-a graphic example of "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." With one small correction: They would not die tomorrow; they would be attacked, defeated, and murdered that very night by stealthy troops already assembled deep beneath the city.

Before we slip into the celebration to see what was really going on, let's look at the man Belshazzar. Who was he? What were his credentials? It's important to note that for many years, liberal interpreters of Holy Writ pleaded their case that there was no such person at all. Scholar Ferdinand Hitzack, in 1850, said that no one by the name of Belshazzar had ever existed, and therefore the Book of Daniel was a farce.

However, just four years later, J. G. Taylor was on an archeological dig in southern Iraq where he dug up artifacts that contained sixty lines of cuneiform-a system of writing used for a number of ancient Near Eastern languages from c. 3000 B.C. until the first century A.D. Primarily a Mesopotamian system, cuneiform was inscribed on clay, stone, metal,

and other hard materials. This was a key discovery for Taylor and the Christian world, because one of those sixty lines of cuneiform prayed for the health of Nabonidus, and his son Belshazzar.

In 1924, Sidney Smith did some excavating of his own in the region and he, too, unearthed an artifact that stated Nabonidus gave the kingship to his son Belshazzar. Again, liberal Bible scholars do not have a position at all. In fact, those who wish to appear foolish need only to suggest that the Bible has errors in content, history, or personnel. The answers may not be immediately observable, but the truth will always emerge, even as it did in the case of Belshazzar, whom some say was a phantom. Nabonidus was a great military warrior, always away on a mission to add territory and subjects to his mighty Babylon, and always returning with the booty and spoils of the conquered. In his absence, Babylon was left in the control of his son, Belshazzar. And when the cat's away, we know what the mice do: They play and play and play-as if there were no tomorrow.

And that's where we pick up our story-and perhaps the wildest party ever held in Babylon. This was no little soiree in a small drawing room with a few guests. The hall for the festivities was enormous-176 feet long and 56 feet wide. Some of the dinners held in that room had as many as ten thousand guests, with the largest banquet in history having an invitation list of 69,800 people. That's a lot of folks, and I'm sure that much of the celebration had to be celebrated outdoors. This is the enormous physical environment of chapter five. Big party. Big spenders. Big orgy. Big trouble!

The problems started when young Belshazzar made the mistake of using the holy vessels that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar stole from the temple in Jerusalem. As far as we know, Nebuchadnezzar committed no sacrilege with these hallowed temple vessels-to his credit. But Belshazzar? He could not have cared less. He wanted to drink, and he didn't care into what kind of cup his servants poured the brew. Imagine the scene: Young Belshazzar is in charge of the affairs of state, but tonight he figures it's time to have a party. He goes over the guest list, and probably says, "Well, with Dad out of the country on another campaign, this is my night to howl."

And howl he did, starting by desecrating the Jewish temple vessels-goblets that told the story of God's redemption through blood. Hebrews 9:22 says, "*Without shedding of blood is no remission [of sins].*" The Jews also believed that blood makes an atonement for sins (Leviticus 17:11). These were holy utensils, not everyday cups and saucers. But Belshazzar ordered them to be filled with booze of all descriptions, much to the delight of his pagan friends who drank, laughed, and danced the night away. But no party lasts forever, and this one would be especially short-lived. Belshazzar would pay dearly for his sacrilege.

Booze was about to become a problem for the young ruler. Have you noticed in the age in which you and I live, that liquor is no less a problem? More than half of all our automobile accidents are alcohol-related. Booze has destroyed more families than anyone can imagine. Drinking has ruined careers, crippled relationships, and left otherwise sane people mentally incompetent. The warnings about alcohol have been in the Bible for thousands of years, and I think it's important to quote a few verses to indicate what God thinks about the issue.

What God Says about Strong Drink

Proverbs 20:1 says,

"Wine is a mocker strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

Proverbs 23:29 reads,

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine."

That's why Proverbs 31 commands:

"Look not on the wine when it is red."

Juice was called wine. The writer of Proverbs said that when the wine turns red and ferments, don't look at it!

It's also the message of Proverbs 23:20,

"Be not among wine bibbers [drinkers]."

Habakkuk 2:15 says,

"Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also."

The judgment of God is upon those who drink, upon those who get drunk, and equally, upon those who serve strong drink to others to get them intoxicated. First Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21 state that no drunkard can enter the kingdom of heaven unless he repents of this sin and turns to God.

Well, with that fusillade of verses on what God thinks about wine and strong drink, we note that Belshazzar was not only inebriated as he sat there on his elevated platform, surrounded by his many concubines who encouraged all-night drinking bouts with the guests, but he also added sacrilege to indignity by drinking his kingly brew out of precious vessels of redemption-goblets and temple-ware that represented eternal salvation. To top it off, he and his guests *"drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone"* (Daniel 5:4). During this orgy, God was watching the scene from the portals of heaven, and He was not pleased.

And we will pick-up our study next week with the handwriting on the wall.

The Handwriting on the Wall

Daniel 5:5 - 9

In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof.

Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.

What would you have done if you'd come to the king's palace for a night of revelry and debauchery and all of a sudden God crashed your party? I have a feeling that most of the guests were so blitzed that they may have thought they were seeing things. Some probably thought, "This is cool.., look. . . a hand writing on the wall. This Belshazzar guy really knows how to promote magical entertainment. Wow, we didn't know we were going to have a night of illusions to accompany the wine."

But Belshazzar had not arranged this particular distraction, and, apparently, he had enough of his wits about him to call the party to an unceremonious halt as the disembodied hand appeared and began writing a message on the plaster wall. The message was clearly written-a warning of the judgment to come because of the desecration of the temple utensils designed to honor *Yahweh*, the God of heaven.

The King James version says that "*his knees smote one against another*" (5:6). That means Belshazzar was so scared that his knees were knocking. The party was now history, and Belshazzar probably wasn't the only one who wished it had ended an hour earlier. The passage says he was pale. I imagine that you and I would have turned a strong shade of white also.

So once again, the wise men were summoned. This time, not to interpret a dream, but to attempt to analyze this disembodied hand writing on the wall. I imagine the sorcerers and magicians may have said among themselves, "Belshazzar's drunk again and is only hallucinating." However, as the soothsayers entered the dining hall, they were stumped because the handwritten message was inscribed indelibly on the wall. Furthermore, they didn't know how to interpret what they were seeing. That's when panic set in, that is, until the queen mother, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar stepped forward and reminded Belshazzar about a man named Daniel in the kingdom who was pretty good at figuring out this sort of thing.

The Queen Mother Remembers Daniel

Daniel 5:10 - 12

Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed:

There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers;

Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.

The queen mother is basically saying, "You'd better listen to Daniel because your grandfather really lifted him up, respected him, and used him on more than one occasion to handle situations like this." She knew that Daniel had "the spirit of the holy gods" in and upon him and because of it had the answers. Daniel was around seventeen years old when he was first brought to Babylon from Jerusalem, and now he was approaching his mid-eighties.

During this entire time in captivity he kept the power of the Holy Spirit on him-and the queen mother knew it. How did Daniel keep this power upon him during his years of service in Babylon? By spending time in God's precious Book. Daniel knew the Scriptures, and remained profoundly touched by God's Word in the pagan land to which he had been brought so many years earlier. Later, Peter would write in 1 Peter 2:2,

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby."

That was Daniel's secret then, and it is the source of our strength today as we move swiftly to the end of the age and to the final unsealing of the end-time mysteries. Daniel lived on his knees before God, and when one lives like that-from teenage years to becoming a senior citizen-that person will be such a Spirit-filled being that even the enemies of God will sit up and take notice. Daniel understood the secret of life, and therefore, whenever called on to speak God's truth to a perverse generation of Babylonians, he was ready with a fitting-and correct-word from God. Is Daniel your model today?

Daniel Comes before Belshazzar

Daniel 5:13 - 16

Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?

I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee.

And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof but they could not show the interpretation of the thing:

And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.

By now, I'm sure the party had come to a screeching halt- and I would think more than a few of the guests had sobered up rather quickly. Who wouldn't-a disembodied hand writing on a plaster wall has that effect on party animals. They probably called him killjoy Daniel. But this senior citizen was just as sharp and alert as the day he was spirited away from Jerusalem to Babylon with the other Jewish captives. He knew who he was and Whose he was. He could not have cared less about the king's offer of a purple robe and a gold chain. What value were such temporal rewards to him?

As modern Christians, it seems that we often get confused on this issue. We all like to be rewarded for the good things we do, often asking, How much am I going to get for doing this? Who's going to notice me if I do this good deed? But this is not the way of Christ. Hebrews 13:5 says,

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

This is the spirit we must maintain during this end-time hour, but it is not the present spirit of Christendom. If one were to study any Bible concordance on adultery, fornication, or licentiousness, and then look up the word *covetousness*-he would discover that immorality and materialism run neck and neck. They are that close in God's sight.

God hates the sin of loving money and an obsession with material possessions as much as He hates the sin of immorality.

Daniel Admonishes the Young Ruler

Daniel 5:17 - 24

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour:

And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this;

But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

Now, after waiting for Belshazzar to stop talking-probably babbling out of sheer nervousness-Daniel begins to speak. I can see him in my mind's eye: strong, erect, courageous, with all of Belshazzar's guests wondering what on earth is happening. This was supposed to be a fun evening at the palace. But instead, it had become "sermon time," and Daniel took advantage of his captive audience by talking about his relationship with Belshazzar's grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. He was giving Belshazzar a refresher course in the life of the former king. He pulled no punches. There was no revisionist history here. Daniel told it like it was, and his poignant message was:

"Nebuchadnezzar genuinely learned his lesson when one day he called on the only true God for mercy. But you, young man, have not yet gotten up to speed, and you're going to pay big time for throwing this wild orgy and for desecrating the sacred utensils set apart for temple worship." This was the sermon to an unhumbled heart, addressed to a man who was drinking out of God-honoring vessels to gods that could neither see nor hear. That's what idolatry was all about then, and that's what worshipping other gods is about today.

God Versus the gods

King David said in Psalm 115:4-8,

"Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them."

Daniel is saying the same thing to Belshazzar: "Look, it's just a piece of wood covered with some metal. You made it with your hands. It can't see, hear, talk, move. . . and yet you worship it. Won't you learn from the example of your grandfather Nebuchadnezzar? He paid a terrible price, eating grass like an animal and wandering around insane. But even after knowing this story, you still remain unconvinced of God's power. Because of your unbelief, you took the vessels from God's house and made a mockery of the utensils representing redemption."

Shame on You, Belshazzar!

I'd call that an earful, and Belshazzar had little choice but to sit there and listen patiently to Daniel's lecture. But the prophet wasn't finished with his scolding. He concluded by saying that the young ruler, too, would pay a dreadful price for his wicked, reprehensible deeds, because God promises to bring every work into judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Daniel Interprets the Handwriting

Daniel 5:25 - 28

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Take another snapshot of the occasion. The party revelers have slowed down. No more dancing or drinking at the moment. The orchestra has played its last tune, and the cavernous hall is now silent as Belshazzar and his guests wait for Daniel's interpretation of the words written on the wall by a disembodied hand, words which in Aramaic appeared as *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*.

The reason for repeating the word *Mene*—"your days are numbered"—is that the Medes and the Persians were, at that very moment, waiting to make their move into the city to subdue it, so there was a *Mene* for each one—one for the Medes, and one for the Persians. They were already assembling beneath the city walls, gathering for the attack, just as God predicted the event on a plaster wall for all at the party to see.

Then Daniel turned to the word *Tekel*—meaning "you are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting." Belshazzar was lacking in everything: in morals, in integrity, and in the fear of God. He had done nothing to honor or glorify the one true God. Here, God engages in the kind of irony He so often has used in the Book of Daniel by changing the word *Upharsin* to *Peres*—just a few vowels away from the word Persia. He said that not only will the kingdom of Belshazzar be divided, but right at this moment, one of those enemies—Persia—was but a spear's throw away.

While the foolish young ruler and his irreverent guests had been drinking themselves into oblivion, the "predicted ones" were almost in the hall, weapons poised to murder the brash young ruler.

Belshazzar's Response

Daniel 5:29 - 31

Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a

proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.

And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

It was a Babylonian Pearl Harbor. A sneak attack. Just as American soldiers would be ill-prepared on that fateful day in Honolulu on December 7, 1941, so great a devastation was about to come to Babylon. How the two great armies made their way into the city is a military stratagem worthy of explanation.

Here's how the Medes and Persians won the day. Babylon was built on the Euphrates River, with a huge wall-like fort surrounding it. It was so formidable that no one could scale it. To ensure even greater security, the moats around the walls were filled with water, so enemies would have to swim across and through those deep waters if they were to have any chance at approaching the city wall. With these precautions firmly in place, the Babylonians lived with a strong sense of security. But they didn't count on the military cunning of the Medes and the Persians under their rulers, Darius and Cyrus. The two enemies of Babylon put their heads together and figured out a way to enter-and capture-the city.

First, they blocked off the flow of the Euphrates River until the water around the city dried up. They then waited until the moat was dry, stepped into it, dug a trench under the wall, and in full battle gear marched through the underground canals into the city-while Belshazzar's orgy was in full swing. It was an enormous military success. That night-only moments after the handwriting had appeared on the plaster wall-the troops entered the hall and killed Belshazzar.

This story has given rise to some compelling verse by an unknown poet who has written:

Babylon

Pause in this desert! Here, men say, of old
Belshazzar reigned, and drank from cups of gold
Here, to his hideous idols, bowed the slave,
And here - God struck him dead!
Where lies his grave?
'Tis lost! - His brazen gates? His soaring towers?
From whose dark tops men watch the starry hours?
All to the dust gone down! The desert bare
Scarce yields an echo when we question "Where?"
The lonely herdsman seeks in vain the spot;
And the black wandering Arab knows it not.

No brick, no fragment, lingers now, to tell
Where Babylon (mighty city!) rose and fell
O city, vast and old!
Where, where is thy grandeur fled?
The stream that around thee rolled
Still rolls in its ancient bed!
But where, oh where art thou gone?
O Babylon! O Babylon!

The giant, when he dies,
Still leaveth his bones behind,
To shrink in the winter skies,
And whiten beneath the wind!
But where, oh where are thou gone?
O Babylon! O Babylon!
Tho liv'st - for thy name still glows
A light in the desert skies;
As the fame of the hero grows
Thrice trebled because he died!
But where, oh where art thou gone?
O Babylon! O Babylon!

Before the attack, Daniel was rewarded with his promised clothes of scarlet and gold jewelry, but Belshazzar had little time to enjoy the presentation. God's judgment on the wickedness of the young ruler was swift and complete, and Darius the Mede took the kingdom at sixty-two years of age. It was the end of an era-as Daniel had prophesied years before to Belshazzar's grandfather.

But our story is not yet half told. There is still more excitement and palace intrigue to come as we see a devilish plot developing to destroy Daniel, even as he continues to pray fearlessly at his open window to the God of the Hebrews. Daniel, courageous under any Babylonian administration, remained brave and in full compliance with the laws of his God, even when it meant being thrown unjustly into a den of hungry lions. This kind of spiritual courage eventually led him to the ultimate in prosperity, the engaging subject of chapter six.

Preferred above Princes But not without Lions

Daniel 6:1 - 3

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom;

And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first; that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.

Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

Recently, I was telling a friend that I was going to do a major exposition on the Book of Daniel, and he said, "Oh, that's about Daniel in the lion's den." I replied, "Yes, but there's much more to the book than that." It appears that just about everyone knows this story. Unfortunately, for many, that's all they know about this mysterious book that provides information on multiplied end-time events that only now, in our generation, are being unsealed-something we'll investigate in greater depth when analyzing chapters seven through twelve.

But we're getting a bit ahead of our story. First, some background. Daniel had now served under six administrations as a faithful, wise, competent counselor-all the more remarkable since he was a Jew, a member of that reluctant group of captives brought from Jerusalem to Babylon, and one who never really fit into this foreign culture. Daniel was a survivor because God gave him the strength and the courage to stand up for his faith. And now, in chapter six, we're going to see that strength tested once again.

For anyone to serve six political administrations is a tremendous feat. That's one of many reasons I admire Dr. Billy Graham and the enormous respect he has earned as counselor and friend to so many United States presidents. That's a long, impressive history of relationships with our nation's top leaders. It was also a long time for Daniel.

For this man of God it had all started with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who ultimately lost his kingdom when Babylon was handed over to the Medes and the Persians that fateful night when Belshazzar was preoccupied with wine, women, and song. Then the handwriting began to appear on the wall and the Medo-Persian conquest occurred as the new leaders immediately executed three thousand political prisoners, including all of Babylon's princes and presidents.

However, as you'll recall, at the last moment of his life, Belshazzar made Daniel the third in command. Imagine this scenario if you were Darius or Cyrus, leaders of the Medes and the Persians: You conquer a nation, rape and pillage virtually everyone and everything in sight, you kill all the country's key leaders-yet despite your best efforts at assuming complete control, there is still this person, Daniel, who is number three in the kingdom-and who seemingly can't be eliminated. Why wasn't he killed with the others? Why was Daniel, of all people, left to survive and to become a nuisance to the new administration?

The only answer I can give is that God always sets up those He wants elevated. God had a plan for Daniel's life, and now even the new kings-Darius and Cyrus-find themselves appreciating Daniel and his administrative abilities, so much so that they make him a president in their kingdom. So, Daniel was one of the three appointed heads of state-at eighty-five years of age.

Daniel 6:4 - 9

Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.

Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God

Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live forever,

All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counselors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.

Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree.

In actions that demonstrated the depth of their anti-Semitism, the Gentile administrators compelled to work with Daniel were determined to find a way to put this man down once and for all. How could they tolerate the presence of a Jew in such a high position—one greater than their own? That was the rub. So they pulled Daniel's file. I can just see them scouring the official records looking for just one act of impropriety, for some minute administrative error.

Perhaps they'd find that some unaccounted for, under-the-table money had changed hands. Perhaps Daniel had been derelict in his duties earlier on, but no one had caught the mistake. They searched to the point of exhaustion, only to end their quest unsuccessfully. As much as they hated to admit it, Daniel was apparently as good as everyone said he was.

The only thing they could find wrong with him was that he served God. What a marvelous indictment, and would it not be wonderful if our detractors were to say the same thing about you and me? But it will only be said about us as we remain people of the Book who live on our knees in devoted worship to our heavenly Father. It's what Luke says as he reminds us of the words of Jesus,

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

That's our choice: We can either pray or faint. It's either one or the other, and Daniel never stopped praying. Because of this, his fellow administrators figured they'd finally discovered the smoking gun they were looking for, and that's when their treachery began. Today we might call it "bootlicking"-cozying up to someone from whom we might want a favor or some special arrangement. This is what Daniel's "friends" did by going to Darius with their newly-hatched scheme to catch Daniel in the act of praying. It's important to realize that it was not just a few who plotted against Daniel.

Remember, there were 120 princes and three presidents-the first of whom was Daniel. That means there were 122 government servants under the Medes and the Persians who had turned against Daniel. The vote was 122 to 1. How could any politician survive those odds? And it all started with a vile, dirty little sin called jealousy. You might say, Well, I don't go out and get drunk; I don't commit adultery; I don't steal; I have never murdered a person... but if your heart is filled with envy, that not-so-small sin will remove you from the presence of God eternally unless repentance occurs. Galatians 5:19-21 reads,

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envying, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

God's Word is constantly reminding us to check out our hearts, and find out if we are envious of the position, wealth, or appearance of others. Daniel didn't compare himself with the Smiths and the Joneses of his day, and neither should we. Daniel had higher goals, and his message to us is that if we are to truly know God, we, too, must have goals and objectives that reflect our love for the Savior. Meanwhile, Daniel's enemies got their way as they pushed through a decree that promised a den filled with lions for those who worshipped any god other than the king. What a fool-proof idea.

Finally, they would get this Jew who had been elevated to such a lofty position of leadership. Yes, a den of lions. That would surely do it. Not even a praying Daniel could extricate himself from those hungry beasts. Something else: They reminded the king that when a decree is signed, it is an irrevocable law of the Medes and the Persians. The king knew this, but because of the pressure of virtually his entire administrative staff, he complied with their wishes, signing the document on the spot.

Daniel 6:10 - 15

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his

chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

Then thy came near and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of and God or man within thirty days, save of thee O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, not the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.

Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.

These verses are a mini-treatise of what true friendship is all about, even though it may seem to be expressed in a context we might not expect. Here is a powerful king, Darius, who has signed a decree under considerable duress, now only to be made aware that his friend, counselor, and confidant, Daniel, has been "caught in the act" of praying to the God of the Hebrews. I've seen some Christians "scratch their eyebrows" as they bowed their heads and intoned a quick prayer in a restaurant, hoping that no one would see them praying before eating their food. Not Daniel. No secretive scratching of Jewish eyebrows for this saint of God.

Daniel knew the decree had been signed, and that his life was on the line. Yet, he continued to pray three times a day, as was the Jewish custom, and not just pray, but pray before an open window! He wanted everyone to know what he was doing and to whom he gave his allegiance as he bowed his head humbly toward Jerusalem, not toward, the headquarters of the Medes and the Persians.

Matthew 10:32-33 reminds us that,

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

It was true in Daniel's day, and it is true in ours. God doesn't put much stock in would-be believers who quietly "scratch their eyebrows" for fear of being caught in the act of praying.

Later, Jesus added,

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

While the first six chapters of Daniel are more historical and devotional, do not forget that the essential content of Daniel- seen more graphically in the last six chapters-is about the return of Messiah, the coming again of Christ, a moment in time when Jesus will remind us that if we have been ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us. It cuts both ways.

The crown hangs forever heavy on the head of any ruler, and this night the head of Darius was heavy indeed. He realized he'd been tricked by his own staff just so they could get their man. The problem was that their man was also Darius's man- but for completely different reasons. Darius loved Daniel. It didn't matter that Daniel was a Jew in exile, that he was well up in years, or that he continued to worship the God of Father Abraham. Daniel was his friend, and Darius loved him.

But now his friend was about to be thrown into a den of lions-and it was all his fault. Love-real love-seeks to overrule even the strictest, most binding decree. But, in this case, not even Darius's friendship with Daniel would be enough to save the day or the man. He had signed the proclamation. He had bowed to the pressure of putting himself in a position to be worshipped. Now, he would pay the consequence by losing his dear friend.

That evening, the kingly head tossed and turned, unable to sleep. Darius wished he could undo his terrible decree, but it was a law that could not be altered. An eighty-five-year-old saint and friend was about to be devoured by hungry lions, and that's all Darius could think about throughout the long, painful night.

Daniel 6:16 - 18

Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God who thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting, neither were instruments of music brought before him; and sleep went from him.

Darius found himself between a rock and a hard place. He had to do the deed, and Daniel was brought to what all assumed would be his imminent death. But note what the king said in verse 16, "*Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.*" What a vote of confidence for Daniel. Darius was rooting for his friend Daniel and was praying that his God would see him through the disastrous ordeal. But would it be enough to spare Daniel the pain and physical destruction of his body?

Many people have asked me, "Why did Darius use a lion's den when the fiery furnace was still in existence?" This is because the Babylonians-the former rulers-made it their practice to use a furnace as the primary vehicle to execute dissidents and enemies, as they'd attempted to do with the three Hebrew children. But now, under a new administration-the Medes and the Persians-this was not the appropriate means of execution. Here's the reason.

The Medes and the Persians gave their allegiance to a religion called Zoroastrianism, and they worshipped the fire god, Atar. For them to use fire to execute their enemies would be to desecrate their teachings, putting them on the verge of religious sacrilege. Their alternative to fire was a large den of ravenously hungry lions, not the cage of sleepy beasts we might see lying about when we visit the lion section of a local zoo. This lion's den was an immense square cavern carved out of the ground to about the size of a large home. In the middle of the cavern was a partition with doors.

From above, the workers could manipulate the doors to make them open and close. When they wanted to clean the den, they would jump down on the one side in safety because the lions were held back by the partition. When they wanted to throw raw meat-or their screaming enemies-to the hungry beasts, they would do just the opposite. Now, it was Daniel's turn to be lowered to the floor of the cavern below. The lions were hungry, pawing at the partition, ready to eat whatever would be placed on the other side of the door. We can only surmise what was in Daniel's mind as he waited for the panel to open.

With the stone on the den now firmly in place-sealed by the king and then again by his officials-the drama was ready to unfold. Apparently Darius did not choose to see what he feared might be the inevitable. Instead, he returned to his palace where he spent yet another sleepless night. The usual dancing girls, animated orchestra, rich foods, and night of revelry were canceled. Instead, Darius fasted-praying, in his own way, for the God of the Hebrews to put His cloak of protection around his friend.

I'm OK, O King.

Daniel 6:19 - 23

Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in hast unto the den of lions.

And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel; and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live forever.

My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouth, that they have not hurt me: foreasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

Perhaps you've had a loved one who was sent to the hospital emergency ward. You prayed all night for his or her recovery. But you've received no word. All night you wondered, worried, and prayed for the one you loved. Then, early the next morning, you jumped into your car and rushed to the hospital to check on the person for whom you cared so much.

Well, that's how Darius must have felt when he rose from his bed at the breaking of dawn the next morning. He didn't stay around for his usual bath or breakfast, or to be waited on by his servants. He had only one objective: to go to the lion's den and check on the condition of his friend. I can almost feel his heavy breathing as he made the trek from his sleeping chamber to the large cavern where the lions were kept. Would Daniel be alive? Or would there only be a few scraps of bones?

When he arrived at the den, his voice cracked and trembled as he cried out, "*Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?*" The time between the king's cry and Daniel's response must have seemed like an eternity to Darius. Then, the king heard what he wanted to hear-what any friend wants to hear about a friend in trouble-that he was all right. The score was:

Daniel-1
Lions-0

It's no accident that the writer of the Book of Hebrews would later write about this victorious deliverance when he stated: "*Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions*" (Hebrews 11:33). God had indeed paralyzed the mouths of what may have been as many as two hundred hungry lions, and Daniel's life was spared. Picture the scene: A king and his friend are reunited, as Daniel is pulled back up through the opening in the cavern. The prayers of both men were heard as God again venerated Daniel's loyalty, faith, and allegiance.

Keep the Lions Handy - and Hungry

Daniel 6:24

And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.

The wheels of justice moved swiftly that day as the king commanded that all 120 princes, two presidents, and their families be rounded up and brought to the cavern. The law of the Medes and Persians stated that whatever punishment was meted out to a leader, his family would also experience. So if we consider an average family of the day to be four persons, there could have been as many as five hundred individuals dropped through the ceiling into the lion's den, where the beasts-thwarted from having a good meal the night before- ripped their prey to shreds. Some, in fact, were killed mid-air since the verse says,

"the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den" (6:24).

No more would Darius be subjected to their jealousy and rage. The punishment they'd designed for Daniel was now their own undoing. By also killing his leaders' families, the king had eliminated the possibility of reprisals, and even potential assassination attempts on himself.

These were not toothless lions as some have suggested. They were the same beasts that had simply skipped a meal to be used to destroy the jealousy-filled conspirators against God's prophet. The message of this passage? Be careful not to attack the prophets of God-God's duly ordained ministers. Psalm 105:15 says,

"Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

It is your duty and mine to obey God, and to give honor and respect to those who declare the word of truth. Some of today's "lions" waiting to devour God's servants may not be of the four-legged variety, but they, too, will surely pay the price if they demonstrate by

their actions that they are failing to live in obedience to God's warning about His servants.

A New Proclamation Is Issued

Daniel 6:25 - 28

Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Zoroaster and Atar, the god of fire, could not do the job. The lions couldn't do what the enemy had set them up to do.

Treachery born of avarice had not won the day. It was the living God who again stepped in and reminded the Gentile establishment that enough was enough. I've always wondered why Darius did not fall on his knees and get converted right there on the spot. Perhaps he did, and we just do not have the written account. But I have a sneaking suspicion that as he made his decree for all his subjects to serve Daniel's God, in his heart he may have said, "My beloved Daniel, I want your God. I want a God in my life who can paralyze the mouths of two hundred hungry lions. I want a God to do what Zoroaster and Atar cannot do. I want a God who is faithful and true, and not subject to human whim.

Have you ever been there? Where all your best laid plans, investments, manipulation of people and events have simply not given you what you really wanted from life? I'm sure we've all had those experiences. That's why we must remember that there comes a time when only the Holy Spirit can do the job. Jesus said, in John 6:44,

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

This is one of the key messages of this chapter. You see, this is more than simply a story about Daniel in a den of hungry lions. It's a narrative of God's enormous power, great love, compassionate mercy, overwhelming friendship, and the timeless reality that He will always have the last word in every situation-lions present or not. These first six chapters are prologue to the great prophecies yet to come-simply reminders that earthly kingdoms will always come and go, but the kingdom of God is an eternal one, the warm-up message for what we will now begin to analyze in chapters seven through twelve, the prophetic portion of the Book of Daniel.

Note to the reader: As we prepare our hearts to hear the message of God in chapters seven through twelve, it's important to remember that Daniel often spoke of visions and dreams that he encountered later in his life. Some he received prior to the events of chapters five and six; at least one was received later.

Daniel 7:1-14

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters.

Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.

And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.

The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it.

And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh.

After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it.

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and

stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns.

I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.

As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

We are now going to move away from the historical material that we encountered in chapters one through six and plunge into the exciting depths of Daniel's prophetic material, starting in chapter seven. Daniel's end-time dream in this chapter consisted of symbols of real events to come-mysteries we are now able to unravel. In many ways, chapters two and seven of the Book of Daniel are similar in that they portray the most comprehensive pictures of history to its conclusion.

Chapter two depicted Nebuchadnezzar's dream concerning the great statue with a head of gold down to its feet and toes of iron mixed with clay-a prediction of how the Babylonian

empire would be destroyed by Medo-Persia, followed by the conquering superpowers of Greece and Rome. Chapter seven refers to these identical empires in the form of beasts, indicating that within the final revived Roman Empire there will be many problems during the course of its restoration. In fact, one major challenge after another can already be observed within the framework of the European Union presently taking shape.

To the extent we saw unity in chapter two, we see diversity in chapter seven. But regardless of the message, the single most exciting thing that you are now reading is the fulfillment of Daniel 12:4, which says,

"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

The Book of Daniel was designed to be a mysterious, closed, sealed book until the time of the end, but at the time of the end the Holy Spirit would enlighten people to expound this great portion of God's Word. This is now our assignment, and you are privileged to have a ringside seat as we begin to unravel the mysteries so long alien to anyone's understanding.

The Times of the Gentiles

The Jewish people controlled Jerusalem until 586 B.C. Then, according to Daniel 1:1, Nebuchadnezzar and his troops marched into the Holy City and took its inhabitants back as captives to Babylon. It is important to remember that this single historical event marked the beginning of what is known as "the times of the Gentiles." An important caveat was spoken by Jesus in Luke 21:24 when He said,

"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Jesus was saying that Jerusalem would remain under Gentile control until the time of the end. Isn't it fascinating that from June 5 through June 10, 1967-as a result of the Six-Day War-the Jews took back Jerusalem and have been in control of the Holy City ever since? Even though we are still in the era called "the times of the Gentiles," this remarkable historical reality reminds us how close we are to the time of the end. How can we say this with such certainty? In Zechariah 14:2-4 God states:

For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of

battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

This entire scenario began with Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and ends when Jesus Christ returns to take Jerusalem back from the Gentiles. We are extremely close to that time when such an event takes place. Here's why. The Gentiles could not take Jerusalem from the Jews until the Jews controlled the city—which happened in 1967 after 2,553 years of Gentile dominion. According to Jesus, the generation who lives to see this event will be alive for the battle to recapture Jerusalem by the Gentiles plus observe Christ's return.

The Four Beasts

Daniel dreams about four winds and four beasts—all which represent the same four powers we read about in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, along with the ten toes of iron mixed with clay—a description of the revived Roman Empire, a regrouping of nations I believe to be the European Union. The fourth beast has ten horns, similar to the ten toes on Nebuchadnezzar's image: again, symbolic of the restored Roman Empire.

The four winds blowing upon the sea indicate trouble—and all these nations near the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea, and the Mediterranean have indeed experienced troublesome times throughout history. However, only when the European Union ultimately produces the Antichrist will the world truly know what real trouble is. It will be nothing like the nuisance these nations have been prior to this time in history. Isaiah 57:20 states,

"But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

Now let's look at the four beasts and indicate what each represents. Beast number one—a lion with the wings of eagles—is the same power that was described in Nebuchadnezzar's dream as the "head of gold"—the Babylonian empire. The wings of the lion suggest that it is a swift beast, with the ability to conquer great nations with its mighty armies. But as its wings are "plucked," the kingdom begins to deteriorate, even though there remains a hint of Nebuchadnezzar's humanitarianism. Since verse 4 makes reference to this first beast "being given a man's heart," you'll recall that this is the manner in which Nebuchadnezzar closed out his days after his conversion experience—compassionate, docile, and caring for his subjects.

Beast number two is a bear that raises itself up on one side, holding three ribs in its teeth—conceivably representing Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt—a hungry beast, and capable of gorging itself. Following the pattern of Nebuchadnezzar's image, this second beast is a symbol of the Medes and the Persians, with Darius ruler of the Medes and Cyrus the

Persians. Ultimately, however, the Persians demonstrated greater strength because of their massive armies, and, as a result, the bear "lifted itself up on one side," indicating Persian political and military superiority, all borne out by historical fact.

Beast number three is Greece, a leopard with four wings and four heads. The wings picture the speed of Alexander the Great and his enormous armies, reckoned to be the swiftest in the known world. Alexander conquered one and one-half million square miles of the globe, stretching for more than eleven thousand miles from Greece in the west to India in the east, a man who, even after his many conquests, is said to have wept because he felt he had no more worlds to conquer.

Beast number four is Rome-a terrible beast with enormous power to maim, crush, and kill. So violent is this beast that no animal on earth can represent it. Its iron teeth are similar to the toes on the image composed of iron mixed with clay as observed in Daniel chapter two. Its ten horns are a graphic description of the final revived Roman Empire-fulfilled in 1981 when Greece became the tenth nation to join the European Union.

Some people ask me, How can these things be? How can you be so certain that your interpretation of Daniel's dream is correct?

First of all, the nations are mentioned by name in Daniel 1:1, 8:20, 8:21, and Romans 1:7. These empires cover a period of 676 years. Adding scholarship to the truth of God's Word, a prophet by the name of Esdras wrote in 90 A.D. that there was little doubt that the fourth beast was Rome. Add to these the research insights of Drs. Gabelein, Scofield, Bultima, Ironside, Barnhouse, DeHaan and other evangelical scholars, and the evidence mounts that the only possible meaning of the symbolic fourth beast is Rome itself. Specifically, Dr. Harry Ironside, pastor of Moody Memorial Church, said there will arise a great confederacy of nations springing forth from an old Roman Empire that will become the devil's last trump card.

The Plot Thickens - and Will Get Thicker

It is only within the last century that God has been unsealing the mysteries of this book and Daniel's dream. While the significance of the first three beasts is relatively easy to interpret because of its solid basis in historical fact, the ten toes (Daniel 2:41-42, 44) and the ten horns (Daniel 7:7, 20, 24 and Revelation 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12, 16) must now be addressed in some detail.

To do this, we need to go back to the year 1947 when Benelux came into power: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg-the first three horns on the terrible fourth beast, and the first three nations of what presently comprises the European Union. In 1957, France, Italy, and Germany joined the confederation, making it six, with the Treaty of Rome ratifying this amalgamation. In 1973, Britain, Ireland, and Denmark joined for a total of nine. Then, on January 1, 1981, Greece joined the group to make it ten in number.

At this point many evangelicals were elated, making the assumption that all the members of the group had finally been assembled. However in Daniel 7:8, 20, and 24 we read that the confederation will grow to thirteen. This has already taken place: Numbers eleven and twelve who joined the EU were Spain and Portugal, coming into the confederation in 1986. Then with the arrival of Austria into the movement in 1996, the EU grew to thirteen.

But this is only the beginning. Eventually the fourth beast becomes a world empire-the New World Order, something we are already beginning to witness. Daniel 7:23 states that he shall devour (or engulf) the whole world. Revelation 13:7 adds:

"Power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."

No longer is this fulfillment of prophecy something you and I read about in the Book of Daniel alone, but it is also the subject matter for the correspondents and editors of the pages of your daily newspaper: Prophecy is being fulfilled in black and white each day for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

The Little Horn

Now let's look at the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8. Who and what is it? What is its influence? Martin Luther said that this little horn is the New Testament Antichrist of the future, and I agree. This little horn's appearance was not for an earlier period in history, but for the end time of Daniel 12:4. Why? Because this little horn-the Antichrist-arises at the last day out of this grouping of ten nations. Since the European Union is now in place, there is little question that the Antichrist can-and will-arise soon.

The Beast Speaks

Verse 11 says the little horn, or beast, speaks, and his words are great. This event takes place during the Tribulation hour when the little horn, the infamous Antichrist, finally arises and comes to power. Revelation 13:5 and 6 add,

"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven."

The Antichrist blasphemes God almighty and eventually calls himself God, but at a great cost to this "beast" because Jesus Christ will destroy him with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8). However, there is even more devastation ahead as the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire burning with fire and brimstone (Revelation 19:20). Furthermore, when Satan is cast into the lake of fire one thousand

years later, the beast and the false prophet are still in existence-proving that the fires of hell do not annihilate anyone, as some cults teach (Revelation 20:10).

And what about the other beasts in Daniel's dream? When do they have their dominion taken from them? This is a fascinating question, and an important one. The Medes and the Persians destroyed Babylon; Greece destroyed the Medes and the Persians, and Rome destroyed Greece. Their kingdoms and powers were taken away. Yet, the passage tells us that they still exist because all their customs and cultures were passed on to each nation that conquered them, meaning they are all still with us in some way. Remember that the old Persian Empire is today's Iran and Iraq. Would you not agree these two nations are still with us, continuing to create havoc in the area and around the world with their commitment to regional conflict and international terrorism?

The Son of Man and the Ancient of Days

In his dream, Daniel had a vision of one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. This prophecy is about to happen because the term *Son of Man* is definitely the Messiah and the Savior. Let's investigate further. The term *Son of Man* is the precise one Jesus used repeatedly to describe Himself. Matthew 8:20 says,

"And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

Matthew 24:30 tells us,

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Now the Ancient of Days-Yahweh-presents the kingdom to His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the moment when the stone cut out without hands smashes the feet of the image in Daniel 2:45. This announces the return of Christ because He is the stone or rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). Then comes the tremendous battle we read about in Revelation 19 when Christ comes on a white horse (v. 11) and the armies of heaven follow Him (v. 14). Verse 19 says,

"And I saw the beast [the Antichrist, the little horn], and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him [Jesus] that sat on the horse, and against his army."

But they do not prevail. This is the time when the prophecy of the stone smashing the feet of the image is fulfilled. It's all over for the world powers at this point because Jesus

Christ has arrived to set up His Kingdom. However, as the Lord appears, the armies of the revived Roman Empire attempt to stop the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:19-21). Psalm 2:1-6 pictures this final battle:

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

This will be the great climax, that moment in history when Gentile dominion ends, and when Jesus Christ is seated on the throne of David. Luke 1:32-33 says, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." After the thousand-year reign of Christ, the earth is purged and Christ is recommissioned and rules eternally upon earth (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). That's why Ephesians 3:21 adds, "*Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*"

We will continue our study with Daniel's response to the vision.

Daniel's Response

15. *I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.*
16. *I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things.*
17. *These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth.*
18. *But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.*
19. *Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast, which was diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet;*
20. *And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows.*
21. *I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them;*
22. *Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.*

23. *Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.*
24. *And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.*
25. *And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.*
26. *But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end.*
27. *And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*

Daniel Is Confused

Daniel had no one to help him understand what he had been dreaming, so God provided a messenger to interpret the dream on His behalf-the angel Gabriel. The message of chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar's dream, had been so clear and unified, whereas now his own dream was filled with diversity, the edges of his understanding ragged, all because he was dealing with four terrible, vile beasts-not an immense one-piece image of gold, silver, and bronze-but a diversity of four beasts acting out their beastly nature in fits of anger, violence, and conquest.

Then, suddenly, something exciting happens in verse 18 where the saints of the most High take the Kingdom. This is when Jesus Christ returns, and, as we have already stated, the stone smites the feet of the image, placing Christ and His saints in control. They are the ones who return with Jesus-individuals who missed the terrible seven-year period of Tribulation because they were called up in Revelation 4:1.

In Revelation 19:11-14, when Christ returns on that white horse, we discover that the armies in heaven follow Him-a picture of the Church returning to earth. Jude verse 14b says, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints." They had no way of saying millions, billions, or trillions in the first century, so they used the term *tens of thousands*. But there is also the group of saints-the 144,000 Jewish messengers (Revelation 7:4-8)-who preached the gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 24:14). You see, not only will many Jews be converted through mass, worldwide efforts of evangelism, but multitudes-yes, millions-of Gentiles will also be saved, many of whom are put to death for loving the Word of God. Revelation 20:4-5 speak of this treachery:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in

their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

The saints are coming from heaven. Those who have died during the tribulation are then raised from the dead (Revelation 20:4). The Jews in Daniel 12:2 who "*slept in the dust of the earth*" also awaken, while Gentiles who died for their testimony also arise. Now we have saints from heaven, tribulation saints who were brought back from the dead, Jewish saints who also were resurrected, and saints who are still alive on earth at Christ's return who somehow escaped the death penalty for rejecting the "mark of the beast" (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 13:15-18). They will all rule and reign with Jesus Christ, giving further credence to the passage, "*If we suffer, we shall also reign with him*" (2 Timothy 2:12a).

The European Community-Antichrist-and 666

While general concern may have reigned in Daniel's mind regarding much of the dream, there seemed to be a special confusion regarding the fourth beast. Daniel had a reasonably adequate understanding of Babylon, the Medes and the Persians, and Greece, largely since they already existed within his own time frame. But this next beast-Rome-and the revived Roman Empire-would come centuries later, and he could not, in his day, know anything about this mystery without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit concerning end-time events. This was the empire with the two legs and ten toes, and the animal with ten horns that was a composite of all the others.

Ten toes and ten horns. Try though he might, Daniel could not grasp their meaning. Yet now, twenty-five hundred years later, you and I are on the edge of watching such mysteries unfold as the European Union flexes its international muscles, preparing the world community for the advent of the Antichrist. During the terrible Tribulation hour, the Jewish people are primarily the saints against whom the Antichrist prevails. Jeremiah 30:7 says, "*Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble.*"

Jacob is another name for Israel (2 Kings 17:34). We find that when Satan is cast to earth he becomes extremely angry when he realizes his time is exceedingly short (Revelation 12:12). For this reason, he makes every attempt to obliterate the Jewish race (Revelation 12:13). He persecutes the woman who brought forth the man-child-that woman is the Jewish virgin, Mary. The Son that came from her is that man-child, and this Antichrist is trying to get rid of all those who came forth from her, as well as millions of Gentiles. Both groups find salvation during the Tribulation hour (Revelation 7:14). These are the ones who have come out of the Great Tribulation and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb.

At this point of time the Antichrist will call himself God, and the false prophet sets up an image of him to worship. The Bible says in Revelation 13:15,

"And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed."

He says, "Bow down and worship this image of me and take my mark '666' or you will lose your head" (see Revelation 13:15-18; 20:4). This is that period of time when the Antichrist will prevail over the saints. But to reiterate the good news, the Lord Jesus Christ ultimately returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16) and defeats the Antichrist and his hoards (Revelation 19:19-21; Psalm 2:1-6).

Good news indeed! At that crucial moment in history, almighty God says, "How dare you think you can stand against me and my Son as I present Him to the world as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. You lose..., because I now set up my King upon the holy hill of Jerusalem!"

We will continue our study in Daniel in our next newsletter.

The Reign of the Antichrist

Before we close this chapter, it's important to review the activity of the Antichrist for the eighty-four months that he appears on earth. His reign begins when he makes a peace contract with Israel and the nations. Daniel 9:27 says, "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." The Hebrew word for *week* in the above passage is *shabua*, a time period of seven years, or eighty-four months.

In the midst of the week or *shabua-after* forty-two months-he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease. His first item of business is to make peace with Israel, an agreement he honors for three and one-half years. At that point, however, Russia begins its march southward to Israel to break the peace contract that the Antichrist originally made with Israel. Then Gog and Magog (Russia) go up against the land of unwalled villages when Israel is at rest (Ezekiel 38:11).

We know that since she became a nation in 1948, Israel has neither been at rest nor at peace. Soon a peace program of seven years duration will be contracted. But it will be short-lived. Russia ruins it. During this battle the Antichrist comes to his end (Daniel 11:45). Yes, he actually dies, but Revelation 13:3 says, "his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered [marveled] after the beast." In other words, the Antichrist is resurrected. He comes back to life. That's why everyone marvels at him, literally standing in awe of his great political prowess and enormous ability to move the minds and hearts of people globally.

To the world, he appears to be like Jesus, returning to life. It's at this point he magnifies himself above every God (Daniel 11:36) and exalts himself above all gods to a deluded and deceived world (2 Thessalonians 2:4). He literally says, "I am God." Today, as you watch an acceleration of the New Age movement and its "I am God" philosophy, crystals, shamans, chants, and channeled messages that permeate every segment of our society—even entering the church of Jesus Christ—be aware that this global satanic activity has already proved instrumental in preparing the way for this great deceiver to set himself up for worship (Revelation 13:15), a time when he literally "wears out the saints" (Daniel 7:25). This activity takes place through to the end of the seven years when Jesus Christ ultimately returns and destroys the evil one with the brightness of His glory, casting him into the lake of fire where he remains forever and ever (Revelation 19:20).

Daniel's Reaction

28. Hitherto is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart.

When his dream had been explained by the angel Gabriel, Daniel felt a sorrow of heart, for he now began to understand what would one day happen to his people, the Jews. His dream had helped him catch a glimpse of the terrible times of persecution that would fall upon them. He was rightly disturbed and confused because he was not totally privy to understanding the great blessings—the rest of the story—that would ultimately come to his people—blessings we will discover as we continue to unwrap the sealed mysteries of the time of the end, even as we see Daniel's humanity surface when he is physically and psychologically devastated by the vision he sees in chapter eight.

We have come to the close of the section that addresses God's rule over the Gentiles. To help you understand where Daniel is emotionally at this point, I'd like you to put yourself in his position for a moment. You have just dreamed something tantamount to a nightmare in chapter seven that has unnerved you. You fainted; you became anxious—so fearful that you needed help to interpret what you experienced. Now, you are taking your agitation and dismay to the next practical level by asking yourself:

If three more Gentile kingdoms, as suggested by the dream, are supposed to arrive on the scene to dominate the world after Babylon, what will be the fate of my people, the Jews, during that period of time? How long will their trials last? What will be the end result?

These vexing questions are coursing through Daniel's mind, but still, he has no answers.

But God never leaves His people in a state of confusion. For that reason, God begins to provide Daniel with specific revelations that relate to the future history of His people. With that brief background, we now spend the remainder of the book reviewing these revelations, giving special emphasis to interpreting the prophecies that address "the time

of the end"-predictions that not only relate to Israel during the latter days, but also speak to you and me-Jew or Gentile-today.

DANIEL 8:1-14

1. *In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared unto me, even unto me Daniel, after that which appeared unto me at the first.*
2. *And I saw in a vision; and it came to pass, when I saw, that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai.*

The year is 551 B.C. Daniel sees himself at the Palace of Shushan, a city in Persia about 230 miles east of Babylon and 120 miles north of the Persian Gulf. Daniel makes it clear that this vision took place before his troubling dream in chapter seven. What we are about to learn is that the vision Daniel now sees again projects him into the future when the superpower Medo-Persia would rule the then-known world-a partial rerun of what Daniel has already learned in earlier dreams.

3. *Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.*
4. *I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great.*
5. *And as I was considering, behold, an he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes.*
6. *;And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power.*
7. *And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand.*
8. *Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven.*
9. *And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land.*
10. *And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them.*
11. *Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down.*
12. *And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practiced, and prospered.*
13. *Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the*

transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?

14. *And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.*

New Symbolism-Same Message

Daniel's been here before. The difference is that in this vision the symbols have been changed. Just as the bear appeared in chapter seven as rising higher on one side, so, in similar fashion, there is now a picture of one of the horns of the ram rising higher than the other, indicating again the dominance the Persians exercised over their partners, the Medes. So far, this is not new information, but this reiteration does not diminish the significance of the drama.

The ram with the two horns standing before the Ulai River again represents Medo-Persia and corresponds to the arms and breast of silver we saw in chapter two and to the appearance of the bear in chapter seven. Historically, this is 100 percent correct, as we would expect. It's God's Word. We know that the symbolic, protective force of the Medes and the Persians was a ram with a sharp horn. Not only that, but the Persian ruler, when engaging in foreign military expeditions, proudly wore the head of a ram on his head as a symbol of his enormous power.

Now the ram goes into action, lowering its fierce head and butting at prey to the west, north, and south. Ultimately, as our history books tell us, Medo-Persia laid waste Babylonia, Asia Minor, and Syria to the west; Armenia, and the area of the Caspian Sea to the north; and then conquered Ethiopia and Egypt to the south. Symbolized by a ram, the Medo-Persian Empire butted up against virtually every nation and principality in sight and soon became the greatest power on the face of the earth.

So far, this is more of a confirmation of Daniel's earlier dream than anything else, and such confirmation continues as we now see the nation of Greece symbolized by a goat, the equivalent of the brass stomach and thighs of Nebuchadnezzar's image in chapter two, and the leopard with wings in chapter seven. So fleet of foot is this goat that when it runs its feet do not touch the ground—an apt description of the awesome power of the swift, far-reaching campaigns of the Greco-Macedonian army.

Suddenly, however, the vision provides us with additional, detailed information, more than we saw in Daniel's earlier dream. Greece is not only the goat, but now we see a great horn appear between its eyes, a symbol of Greece's first great monarch, Alexander the Great. There had not been a military strategist the likes of Alexander in the annals of history. Son of the great militarist Philip of Macedon and student of Aristotle, Alexander, in the course of his short life, conquered one and one half million square miles. While in power, he was revered by all as a young king with singular skills and enormous intelligence, amazing the world with his military prowess.

His crowning victory came with the destruction of the once-invincible Medo-Persian empire in less than a three-year interval- 334-331 B.C. But he did not live long. He died of malaria and syphilis at age thirty-two, lamenting that there were no more worlds to conquer. During the final years of his life, Alexander spent as much time indulging his passion for sex, immoral conduct, and alcohol as he did in destroying his foes. In the end, Alexander's true enemy lay within.