

## **Chapter Nineteen**

### **God Rules: Ezekiel, Daniel**

The two prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel are found back to back in our English Bibles, and the men who wrote these prophecies were contemporaries during the days of the exile of Judah and Israel. Ezekiel, the older of the two, was carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar after his first invasion of the land of Judah, when King Jehoiachin was taken captive. Ezekiel was a young man of 25 at the time, on his way to becoming a priest when he reached the required age of thirty. His apprenticeship was rudely interrupted by the siege of Jerusalem and his consequent capture and exile.

Daniel likewise was carried to Babylon when but a young man. He was of the royal line of Israel and recognized as a promising young prince of the royal family. He too was taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, but in another group from that of Ezekiel. Doubtless the two young men knew each other, although no record is given in Scripture of their acquaintanceship. In one reference Ezekiel does refer to Daniel, along with Noah and Job, but otherwise the record is silent about what must have been a continuing friendship between them.

There is no question but what Ezekiel is the most colorful and unpredictable of the prophets. One writer calls him "the wildest man in the Bible." To this unusual young man is granted weird and wonderful visions of the majesty and mystery of God; nothing of a similar nature is found anywhere else in the Bible. He is shown the glory of the Lord in such cosmic proportions that language fails to describe it accurately, and he resorts to strange and even bizarre symbolism to depict what he sees. Further he is given strange assignments by the Lord to act out, in bizarre fashion, the messages he is asked to convey to the people.

Though his prophecy is written in Babylon, by means of visions and trances he returns frequently to Jerusalem and describes much of what is happening in the hidden areas of the Temple in that city. The message, therefore, is addressed not only to the exiles in Babylon, but includes also much direct exhortation to the Jews who remained in the land of Judah. Without a doubt he is one of the most gifted and effective communicators of unpleasant truth to be found among the prophets.

#### **Lamentations, Warnings and Woe**

The prophecy opens dramatically with a shattering vision of the glory of God, seen amidst the desolate surroundings of the refugee camp of Jews, beside the Grand Canal which is called the River Chebar. The vision came from the north and took shape as a great fiery burning cloud from the midst of which emerged, first, four strange living creatures, each with four faces and four wings. The four faces were those of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. This detail seems to parallel the vision of John in the book of Revelation, chapter 4, where he saw four living creatures before the throne of God; the first like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with the face of a man and the fourth like an eagle. It is apparent that these creatures, whatever else they may be, are always connected with the majesty of God and represent qualities in the character of God. The face of a man pictures intelligence and understanding; that of an ox symbolizes servitude and sacrifice; the lion is the king of beasts and stands for sovereignty and supremacy; the eagle is a heavenly creature, and represents transcendent power and omniscient vision.

It has been pointed out by others that the four Gospels present exactly these same qualities in Jesus Christ. He appears first in the Gospel of Matthew as King, like a lion in the kingdom of beasts, sovereign over all. In the Gospel of Mark He is the Servant, the humble and sacrificing ox. In the Gospel of Luke He is the Man, intelligent, insightful, understanding all of life. In the Gospel of John He is clearly represented as Deity, containing in Himself the life of the heavens, and giving it in sovereign grace to all whom He calls.

Further, Ezekiel saw in his amazing vision a strange combination of great cosmic wheels which seemed able to go in all directions at once. This is generally taken to symbolize the processes of the government of God. In the center of the square formed by the living creatures, there was something that burned like coals and flashed like lightning. Perhaps it is not surprising that UFO enthusiasts have seen some justification for describing this as a visit of spacecraft to earth, containing four spacemen whose helmets appeared to Ezekiel as the four faces he describes

But Ezekiel saw something far greater than the mere visit of non-terrestrials. Seated on the throne which was on the burning platform was one who was the "likeness of the glory of the Lord," wrapped in a rainbow of dazzling and exquisite colors (see 1:26-28). The details given of the living creatures and the great wheels are symbolic expressions of aspects of the Great Being whom Ezekiel saw on the burning platform. The creatures "had the form of men" (1:5) which suggests the divine desire to work through humanity as the chosen vessel of God's self-revelation. Their straight feet speak of stability in the Lord's work. The burnished color is a reference to purity. The hands under their wings graphically describe the practicality which must go with heavenly endeavors. Their wings suggest mobility, and the covering of their bodies, modesty. The fact that "each went straight forward" (1:12) indicates great sense of purpose and integrity. Yet they went "wherever the spirit would go" (v. 12) which describes availability. And their appearance as lightning speaks of tremendous activity. In all this Ezekiel was being shown that God moves in the human world through His created beings, but in such a way that His service is both demanding, exhilarating and terrifying, and like nothing else man can ever engage in.

The fact that the great wheels, full of faces, could move in four directions simultaneously is a vivid description of omnipresence. Their great size and awesome power is descriptive of omnipotence, and their rims full of eyes pictures divine omniscience. Before this marvelous vision, Ezekiel fell on his face, fully aware that here was something far beyond his ability to comprehend and, least of all, to employ to his own advantage. Thus his prophetic ministry began, as Isaiah's, with a humbling and yet energizing vision of the mystery and majesty of God engaged in His awesome ministry in the world.

Though Ezekiel seems to be shattered by the vision of the glory of the Lord, he is not left to lie on his face in the dust of the ground. He heard a voice speaking to him, addressing him as "Son of man" (2:1), and commanding him to stand upon his feet, and when he did so he felt the Spirit entering into him and the commission was given to him to minister to the people of Israel, regardless of whether or not they would receive his word.

Suddenly as Ezekiel stands there, a hand appears out of nowhere, holding a scroll with writing on both the front and back. The words written were described as "lamentations and mourning and woe" (2:10). To the young prophet, who must have been unnerved by all he had seen thus far, the command is given: "Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel" (3:1). In obedience, Ezekiel opened his mouth and ate the scroll and found it was in his mouth as sweet as honey. The Lord was impressing upon Ezekiel the fact that assimilation of the divine Word may appear unpalatable and even repulsive at first, but when actually obeyed, even the "lamentations, warnings and woes" become sweet to the taste. The prophet must allow the awesome truth of God to sink into his being and permeate his whole humanity so that his will would be nerved by something more than human energy; but the sweetness of God's truth would carry him through the ordeal ahead. He was then clearly told that the people to whom he would go would have hard faces, strong foreheads, rebellious looks and bad attitudes; but he would be made equally strong that he might stand against them.

Then, amidst the whirring of the wheels, the great vision departed and Ezekiel found himself still among the exiles along the River Chebar, where he sat overwhelmed in silence for seven days. Thus the amazing ministry of Ezekiel began, amidst a further warning from Jehovah that he was to be a watchman over the house of Israel and must be faithful to his task at his own peril.

In chapters 4-7 the unique ministry of warning continues in a series of symbolic acts by the prophet. Without speaking audible words, in a series of four charades the prophet describes what is about to happen to Jerusalem. First he draws on a brick a picture of the siege of the city. Then at the command of the Lord he lies

upon his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days. Each of the 390 days stands for a year and depicts the length of Judah's trouble, and the 40 days imply 40 years of punishment which would be visited upon her. The third sign was that of the prophet's own food which was to be nothing but bread and water indicating the famine and desolation which would accompany the destruction of Jerusalem. Finally he took a sword and sharpened it as a razor, cut off his hair and beard and divided it into three parts: the first to be burned, the second to be hacked to pieces with a sword and the third to be scattered to the wind, indicating how a third of the people of Jerusalem should die by siege another third killed in battle, and the remaining third taken in exile to the four winds of the heavens.

These actions were followed by strong messages of denunciation and exhortation to the people. It was all to the end that they would know that God is God and able to fulfill His divine Word.

Chapters 8-12 are devoted to an extended vision which began as the elders of Israel sat in the prophet's house in Babylon and waited in silence for his prophetic utterance. Suddenly the prophet seems to be caught up by the hair of his head and finds himself transported in vision to Jerusalem. Standing in the court of the Temple, he is permitted to see the hidden idolatries going on in secret places within the Temple conclave, and at the very gate of the altar he is shown the "image of jealousy" (probably a foul sexual symbol which the people of Israel were worshipping) which arouses God to a terrible jealousy.

Next he sees 70 elders worshipping creeping things and loathsome beasts, and the women of the Temple court weeping for the Babylonian deity, Tammuz, the god of vegetation and fertility. Finally, in the inner court of the Temple the prophet saw 25 men, with their backs turned toward the Temple, worshipping the sun.

In response to this corruption, the prophet is charged to call those who had charge of the city to draw near. In response six men immediately appeared, armed with weapons, and a seventh, clothed in linen with a writing case at his side. They were charged to pass through the city and slay the inhabitants, but the man with the inkhorn was to put a mark on the foreheads of those who mourned the abominations which were committed. During this holocaust of destruction the Shekinah glory of God was seen to move from the holy place to the threshold of the Temple, and the cherubim of God's glory again appeared to the prophet as he had seen them by the River Chebar. The man with the inkhorn was commanded to pass between the whirling wheels and gather coals of fire and scatter them over the city. The Shekinah glory then moved from the court of the Temple to a place beyond the eastern gate. By this the prophet is informed that the ultimate catastrophe is to have God withdraw from His people.

Finally the prophet is shown a group of 25 men, led by the princes of Israel, who are plotting revolt against Babylon and declaring that they must free Jerusalem for it is a boiling pot doomed to destruction. Filled with the Spirit, the prophet declares to them that flight will not avail them anything for they will be destroyed at the borders of Israel.

While he was prophesying, one of the princes suddenly died and Ezekiel fell on his face and cried: "Ah Lord God, wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" (11:13). In answer a gleam of hope is given him, for God promises the day will come when He will Himself take out the stony heart of flesh from His rebellious people and give them instead a new heart and a new spirit within them. Then the glory of the Lord lifts from the city and rests upon the Mount of Olives to the east, a clear foreview of the day when Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah, would leave the Temple courts, pronouncing judgment upon them, and make his way across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, from which, after His crucifixion, He would ascend to the glory of the Father. In chapters 12-14 the prophet again teaches by means of a series of symbolic action interspersed with messages of doom. First he enacts the part of a refugee by carrying only an exile's baggage from his own house. After denouncing the false prophets and prophetesses among them, Ezekiel warns that God will not accept mere lip service for repentance, but judgment cannot be stayed apart from a true turning to Him. Using various parables and metaphors, the prophet describes in stark and bitter words the fate of Israel because of her idolatrous harlotry and her base ingratitude to the God who has tenderly cared for her and loved her. She will be like a harlot stripped, humiliated and destroyed before those to whom she had given herself in wild abandonment. Further warning is given that no escape from judgment can be achieved by reliance upon Egypt or other powers around, nor can any refuge be found in the self-righteous argument that the present generation is suffering for the sins of their forefathers. But like Jeremiah, Ezekiel himself is greatly affected by

what he pronounces, and in chapter 19 he utters a beautiful allegorical dirge to mourn the downfall of Israel.

Again the elders of Israel come to the prophet and sit before him, confident that God will preserve His chosen people from harm without judgment. Again, in chapters 2~24, the prophet speaks in the plainest of language to describe the vileness of Israel's sin. Under the figure of two lewd sisters Oholah and Oholibah, representing: Samaria the northern kingdom and Judah the southern kingdom, the prophet describes the lust of Israel for pagan idols and the foulness of their worship under terrible terms of harlotry and lewdness. For this, judgment upon the nation is inevitable but in the days of their terror and despoliation the people shall at last know that the Lord is God.

So in chapter 24 the word of the Lord came saying, "The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem" (v. 2). To illustrate this graphically to the people the prophet is told that the Lord is about to take the delight of his eyes away from him at a single stroke, and yet he was not to mourn or weep or let his tears run down (see v. 16). This was immediately fulfilled for Ezekiel says: "So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded" (v. 18). So also the Temple, the delight of Judah's eye, would be destroyed, and yet the people were not permitted to mourn its overthrow but were carried away into exile to pine away and groan to one another.

### **Judgments Against Foreign Nations**

In chapters 25-32 there is a series of judgments pronounced against foreign nations which are guilty of crimes against the people of God. Since Israel could not sin with impunity, neither could other nations escape the wrath of God. But though this is true, there is also a parallel principle found throughout the Scriptures that the enemies of God cannot overthrow His purpose of redemption and salvation. There will ultimately be a restoration of the people of God and every promise of glowing beauty and prosperity will be fully carried out, not by the wisdom and power of men but by the grace and mercy of God.

Seven nations are thus submitted to the judgment of God. Four of them, Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia, are dealt with briefly and quickly. Each of the four gloated over the punishment of Judah and Israel and took advantage of their downfall. For this reason they are to be given over to avenging marauders.

Tyre and Sidon are dealt with at much greater length especially Tyre. The sin of Tyre is that of godless materialism, but she too finally expresses rejoicing over the downfall of Jerusalem, and her expectation of enrichment from that overthrow. But God will shatter her false security, bringing up many nations against Tyre and reducing her to a barren rock and a village of fishermen. This prophecy was fulfilled with absolute accuracy of detail. The prophet pictured Tyre as a great ship that would be wrecked by the wind and seas, and ultimately sink into oblivion. The prophecy ends with a message directed to the prince of Tyre, who is evidently the reigning king, and a further lamentation against the king of Tyre, who is a supernatural authority of terrible evil, whose instrument the prince of Tyre was. Commentators have rightly seen this as a description of Satan, for the prophet describes his original appointment by God and the nature of his sin, which began when a terrible pride was found in him and murder became his method.

Chapters 29-32 are devoted to a description of the coming overthrow of Egypt as the principle foe of the people of God. The two great superpowers of Ezekiel's day were Babylon and Egypt, and these two giants were continually struggling for dominance. In a series of seven oracles against Egypt, the prophet makes plain that the battle for world dominion would end in disaster for Egypt and even the power of mighty Pharaoh cannot prevent the destruction of Judah nor the scattering of her people among the nations.

In this prophetic series Nebuchadnezzar is named as the instrument of God's judgment on Egypt, "the great dragon of the Nile." Egypt is also depicted as a great cedar, spreading her lofty boughs of influence among the nations, yet the great tree will be cut down and left broken upon the land to the consternation of the people of earth. Thus, finally, Pharaoh, mighty as he is, will join other nations who have lifted themselves in pride and arrogance and shall lie with them among the uncircumcised of the earth in the Pit of Sheol.

For years, Ezekiel's call was to be a predictor of disaster; but at last in chapters 33-39 he is permitted to become the proclaimer of God's restorative grace.

## Renewal and Reunion

Chapter 33 contains the news of the fall of Jerusalem, which came to Ezekiel through a refugee from the city. Before this, Ezekiel is newly commissioned as a watchman to Israel, since he is to begin a new task as the messenger of hope. The limitations on his speech are removed and he prepares to proclaim the message of renewal and even of reunion of the nation. When the exiles saw that his prophecies of the overthrow of Jerusalem had come true he became immediately the sensation of the nation. Curious crowds gathered to hear him, but for the most part their hearts remained untouched by the message of grace. To them the prophet still gives words of warning of God's ultimate judgment.

Then, at the command of the Lord he speaks to the shepherds of Israel, that is, the rulers of the people. They are charged with exploiting the sheep and feeding only themselves. But these false shepherds would be relieved of their duties and replaced by a Good Shepherd. God Himself would come to them and be their Shepherd-King, ruling His people with mercy and justice, providing to the very weakest, refuge and protection.

The fulfillment of this beautiful promise would begin with the gathering of Israel upon its ancient hills in Palestine. The land itself would be restored to productivity and prosperity, and the mountains of Israel would experience the blessing of God, in contrast with the Mount of Seir (Edom) which was still to suffer under the judgment of God. As God had once promised, He would put His Spirit within His people and remove from them their stony hearts and give them a heart of flesh. The fulfillment of these promises began with the restoration of Israel from the exile in Babylon but stretched on through the centuries to follow to the time of the coming of the Messiah, the Good Shepherd, and on through His first appearance to the very end of the age, when at last, after long years of further exile, the nation Israel would be restored to its land in penitence and mourning and would then experience the total fulfillment of God's promise.

To demonstrate how this would be accomplished, Ezekiel is once again seized by the mighty Spirit of the Lord and transported to a valley full of dry bones. Surveying this desolate scene, the prophet must have been startled to hear the Lord say to him: "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord" (37:4). But when he began to preach to the bones, a remarkable thing occurred: The preached word held such power that the bones began to shake and rattle everywhere in the valley, clicking themselves together until whole skeletons appeared everywhere. While the prophet watched, sinews came upon them and flesh covered them, followed by skin, so that the valley was occupied by corpses, lying perfectly formed yet unliving.

This time Ezekiel is told to preach to the wind, and on doing so the wind blew upon the corpses and they sprang to life, a great living army.

As if this great and amazing sight were not enough to restore hope to the people, the prophet is told to take two sticks, marking one Judah and the other Joseph, standing for the northern kingdom. These he joined together in his hands so that they appeared to be one stick; and when the people inquired what this meant he told them the purpose of God was to reunite them as a single nation. All this would come to pass under the coming great Shepherd that would appear to Israel, and the people shall know: "My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore" (37:27, 28).

But all this was not to happen without further tribulation to the people of Israel. Chapters 38 and 39 are given over to a detailed description of an assault from the far north upon the land of Israel after the people have been restored to Palestine. The great enemy who now appears is no longer Babylon, but "Go", of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" (38:2). Much controversy has raged among the commentators as to the identity of this new enemy. Gesenius, one of the greatest of the Jewish authorities, identifies Gog as Russia, translating the words "chief prince" as more properly "the prince of Rosh" and Meshech and Tubal. Meshech and Tubal have been identified as ancient forms of the names Moscow and Tobolsk. Thus the great enemy of Israel in the last days is identified as Russia and her satellite nations.

The prophet is told to describe the great enemy as coming out of the north against the land of Israel at a time when its people dwell in security. They will be brought upon the mountains of Israel as a great armed horde advancing like a storm covering the land. But though this fearful host seems to threaten the very existence of the restored nation, nevertheless God intervenes in direct combat and the great army is destroyed upon the mountains of Israel by a terrible rain of hailstones, fire and brimstone from heaven. So great will be the slaughter that it will take seven months to cleanse the land and bury the corpses.

This final restoration of Israel to the land is to be accomplished by the pouring out of God's Spirit upon the house of Israel. It will leave them a people dwelling securely, with none to make them afraid, and then shall all the nations know that the Lord their God has not only sent them into exile but brought them again to be a people and a nation once more. The apostle Paul clearly has this picture in mind in his great prediction of the future of Israel in Romans 11.

The closing chapters of Ezekiel's vision 40-48, constitute one of the most dramatic predictions in all the Bible and one which has been a continuing puzzle to the commentators.

The prophet is caught up once again by the Spirit of God and in vision is taken to a high mountain overlooking the city of Jerusalem. Historically, at the time of this vision Jerusalem had been lying in ruins for some 14 years, but in his vision the prophet sees no longer a city in ruins but a city of beauty and order, dominated by a great new Temple which is the center of the worship of God. To aid the prophet in understanding his vision, an angelic being appears with a measuring rod in his hand. Throughout the vision he measures everything that is seen and reports the measurement in precise detail to the prophet. The symbolism of measuring is a way of underscoring the definiteness of the vision as something real and not imaginary, and also its divine ownership as something God will bring about and not man. It is a symbol which is used also in Zechariah's prophecies in the Old Testament and John's visions in the book of Revelation in the New Testament.

In chapters 40-42 the prophet is taken on a tour of the outer courts of the Temple and then the inner courts, being shown not only the great altar of sacrifice but the chambers for the priests, the decorations of the holy place and the great courts which surrounded the Temple on all sides. All of this is carefully measured and the measurements noted with precise detail.

Chapter 43 records an event which must have been of great encouragement to Ezekiel's heart, for he records: "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with his glory" (43:2). That cloud of shining Shekinah glory entered the Temple by the eastern gate, and as the prophet watched, the glory came into the Temple and filled the whole Temple.

The chapter continues to describe the worship of the people and the sacrifices which were performed by the priesthood in that day. There are certain noticeable differences from the pattern of sacrifices offered in the Temple of Solomon as well as those offered in the Temple of Herod in our Lord's day. Though the Passover reappears, there is no mention of the Day of Atonement or the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).

Much controversy has raged over the meaning of these omissions and of the significance of animal sacrifices being again offered after the one sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. Those who see this vision as entirely symbolical of spiritual realities for the people of God today have no difficulty here, but those who hold to a literal temple to be rebuilt for the millennial kingdom find it somewhat embarrassing to explain these. They may however be viewed as purely memorial in character, much as the Lord's table is to us today.

Following the return of the glory of the Lord to the Temple, the prophet is shown a river of water which flows from underneath the threshold of the Temple toward the east. As it flowed, it deepened and widened in dimension. When the prophet was bidden to enter it, it was ankle deep; then reentering further downstream, it was knee deep; 1,000 cubits further it was deep enough to swim in. As he and the measuring man came back along the bank of the river the prophet saw many trees growing. He was told that wherever the river flowed everything it touched would live. The leaves of the trees were to be used for the healing of the nations, and their fruit would be for the people's food.

Finally he was shown a vision of the entire land of promise itself, divided among the 12 tribes, with the Temple in its midst and a special provision made for the Levites, the priests, and the prince.

The vision closes with the designation of the gates of the city and the simple yet sublime name given to the entire city: *Jehovah Shamah* which means "Jehovah is there."

It is a most wonderful and fitting termination for this marvelous vision of Ezekiel. The prophet had been shown the essential glory of God and the greatness of His majesty, and had also seen, in clearest vision, the vile and reprobate sin of the people of Israel. He had beheld the glory of God departing from the city because of these sins, but had lived to see it, in vision, restored by the grace of God, with the people living in purity, harmony and safety under the arching promise of the words, "The Lord is there" (48:35).

The vexing question of whether Ezekiel's temple is one of literal construction yet to appear in the last days, or merely symbolical representing the realities of the New Covenant experienced by God's people today, has been a question debated for centuries. Certainly no such building has ever appeared in history as of this date. But it is clearly futile to demand an either/or choice between these two views. It is much more likely that, as we have seen before, both are true. Ezekiel's temple is indeed a symbolic picture of the relationship of a living God to His people today, living under the New Covenant with its intimacy of communion and availability of power and blessing.

But it is surely not wrong to see it also as a precise and detailed revelation of a temple which will yet be built in the city of Jerusalem at the time when God fulfills all His great promises to the people of Israel and makes them once again the head of the nations of earth. In that day all that is now experienced by faith in the believing heart shall be visible to the eye of any observer. Then shall Ezekiel's great city of promise be seen as John the Seer saw it in Revelation 21:2: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

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## DANIEL

To be a godly teenager is a tough assignment in any period of history. To continue to be a godly teenager when exposed to pressure from a world system committed to pagan philosophy, is to make the assignment infinitely tougher. But to begin as a teenager in such an environment and yet rise to a position of high honor, despite several changes of government and at the frequent risk of life, is to fulfill the toughest assignment of all. Yet that is the story of the book of Daniel.

Like Ezekiel, Daniel was carried captive to the land of Babylon from his native country of Judah in one of the early deportations under Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, were royal princes of the tribe of Judah, and are described in the first chapter of Daniel as "youths without blemish, handsome, and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to serve in the king's palace" (1:4). These splendid young men serve as a continual example to the youth of any age of the possibility of standing true to principle in the midst of great pressure, and of drawing upon the invisible help of God to remain faithful against all odds.

The central figure of the four is Daniel, whose personal history is traced through four changes of dynasty in the first six chapters, and whose visions of remarkable scope and content are given to us in chapters 7-12.

### Counselor to Kings

Chapter 1 records the initial test to which the young men were subjected as they were set aside for special training for service in the government of Babylon. They were assigned a three-year course of indoctrination involving a change of names to indicate their new loyalties--a change of food, and a change of language. They made no objection to the change of names or language, since these were necessary to participate in governmental affairs. But they did object to the change of food, for the diet required foods forbidden to the

Jews. Courteously, Daniel asked the prince of the king's eunuchs to permit a 10-day test of vegetables and water, and when this change of diet produced no ill effect, but rather enhanced their health, full permission was granted to abstain from the rich foods the king had ordered for the remainder of their three years of training. At the end when they were presented to the king, they were found to be 10 times better than any of the other young men from Babylon, also in training.

In chapter 2 Daniel is in trouble again. This time not of his own making. He and his three friends became involved in a situation in which their own lives were at stake, but they were innocent victims of something over which they had no control. The story centers around King Nebuchadnezzar who dreamed a dream which troubled him greatly, but which he could not understand. In the early morning hours he summoned his magicians and counselors and demanded of them that they not only tell him the meaning of the dream but tell him what the dream itself was. Though they objected that this was a most unreasonable demand, Nebuchadnezzar informed them that if they could not comply with his request they would all be hacked to pieces and their homes destroyed.

We would never have known of this ancient incident were it not that the demand the king made included in its scope Daniel and his three friends. When they learned of their danger, Daniel, through the king's captain, Arioch, obtained an interview with Nebuchadnezzar, asking for time to discover and interpret the dream. When his request was granted he went immediately to his friends and the four of them took themselves to prayer, asking God to reveal the information they so desperately needed to know.

That night in a dream the secret was revealed to Daniel, and in gratitude he blessed the God of heaven in a hymn of beauty and wonder. When he was brought into the king's presence he took great care to inform all that it was the God of glory who had given him the interpretation and not his own wisdom.

Daniel then described the great image of a man which the king had seen in his dream. The head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze and the legs were of iron, with its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As the image stood complete a great stone appeared, cut by no human hands, and fell upon the image's feet and broke the entire image into pieces, which were then blown away by the wind so that no trace could be found. But the stone grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The prophet then informed the king that he and his kingdom of Babylon was represented by the head of gold. He would be succeeded by another empire, represented by the chest and arms of silver, which history records was the Medo-Persian empire. A third kingdom, represented by the belly and thighs of bronze, would then appear, and this was historically fulfilled in the Greek empire under Alexander the Great and his successors. Then the fourth empire, represented by the legs of iron and the feet of iron and clay, would come into being. Historically, this could be nothing else than the Roman empire which was divided into two segments, the eastern and western empires, symbolized by the two legs of the image; then culminating at last in a 10-kingdom empire, indicated by the 10 toes.

Up to this point most commentators are agreed in interpretation, but much disagreement arises over the meaning of the 10 toes and the mingling of iron and clay. All commentators agree that the great stone which broke the image in pieces represents the kingdom of Christ and the rule of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. However the fulfillment of the dream seems to picture the second coming of Christ rather than the first, so that in some sense the fourth kingdom of the Roman empire is seen to continue in history until the end of the age. Many Bible teachers, therefore, teach that the final form, represented by the 10 toes, will reappear at the close of the age as a national confederacy under the leadership of the beast of Revelation 13, the final world dictator. Further prophecies in Daniel seem to confirm this interpretation and link closely with the vision seen by John in the book of Revelation.

At any rate, when King Nebuchadnezzar heard Daniel's interpretation he fell upon his face and did homage to Daniel, making him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and appointing his three friends as fellow administrators with him.

In chapter 3 the story reverts to the personal history of the young Israelite men in their attempt to live godly lives in the midst of pagan Babylon. Perhaps in prideful distortion of the identification of Nebuchadnezzar as

the head of gold in his dream image, the king erects a great image made wholly of gold and sets it up on the plain of Dura, commanding the worship of the entire people of the land. When Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, under their new names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, hear the command of the king they refuse to give homage to the image; when the report of this was brought to Nebuchadnezzar he fell into a great rage. Summoning the young men into his presence, he warned them that if they refused to obey his edict they would be cast into a great, burning fiery furnace and consumed alive. Their answer is a model of courage and faith. They said: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up" (3:17,18).

This is a clear instance of the problem created when the law of the land runs contrary to the command of God. But these young men recognized that no human government has the right to command the worship of any people, and rather than compromise their consciences by some outward conformity, they boldly committed themselves to God, submitted themselves to the punishment which the king devised, and were thrown into a furnace which had been heated seven times hotter than usual.

But in the furnace they found a new freedom, for only their bonds were burned, and when the king looked into it he saw not only the three men he had cast in, but the form of a fourth whom he recognized to be the Son of God. Thus, in the words of Hebrews 11 "through faith they quenched the violence of fire" (see Heb. 11:33-34), and gave continual encouragement to all those who, like they, are called to live in a secular and sensuous age which is able to bring great pressure to conform upon those who seek to walk with God. The threat of losing popularity money, friends or position is often like a fiery furnace which we fear to face, but if we truly believe the unseen God who is able to deliver, we too can count on Him to bring us safely through the fires of persecution and pressure to a greater position of honor and influence, as these young men experienced.

The opening chapters of Daniel are clearly the story of how one brave and godly young man with his three companions so influenced the mightiest king then on earth that the king ultimately became a humble believer in God himself. This story is completed in chapter 4, which opens with the edict of King Nebuchadnezzar to all the peoples, nations, and languages of the earth to worship the most high God whom he has discovered. He then gives in detail the account of how his great pride was humbled and he was brought at last to faith in the living God.

Again it began with a dream which alarmed him and which he called his astrologers and magicians to interpret. But once again it is Daniel (who here is called by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar) who gives the interpretation. This time the king told the prophet what he had seen. He had seen a great tree growing in the midst of the earth whose top reached the heavens, but by angelic power it had been cut down and stripped of its leaves and fruit, with only its stump left in the earth until seven years had passed.

Because Daniel immediately saw the interpretation of the dream as it applied to the king, he was reluctant to give the interpretation, but in loyalty to the truth he informed the king courteously that the king was the great tree and that he would be removed from his throne and driven out from among men to live among the beasts of the field, eating grass like an ox, until the seven years had ended. Daniel then urged the king to break off his sins and practice mercy and righteousness that the sentence might at least be delayed.

But at the end of one year, as Nebuchadnezzar gloated in pride over the beauty and greatness of Babylon which he felt he had made, he was suddenly seized with mental cloudiness and lost his reason so that he was indeed driven out from men, living as an animal in the fields. When his reason at last returned, Nebuchadnezzar recognized the God of heaven and upon being restored to his kingdom he praised God who was able to humble the proudest of men.

The next scene, in chapter 5, occurs in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Belshazzar. This man who for a long time was not known to history has now been discovered to be the grandson-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar; he was made a co-regent for a portion of the empire of Babylon.

On the occasion of the annual feast of the gods, Belshazzar invited a thousand of his lords and their wives and concubines to the palace. At this time the city was under siege by Cyrus, the Persian emperor, whose attacking

army was led by one called Darius the Mede. The licentious feast of King Belshazzar reached its height when he called for the golden vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and the king and his guests drank wine from the vessels, praising their pagan gods in deliberate blasphemy of the God of Israel. Immediately a supernatural hand appeared and wrote upon the plaster of the wall certain Persian words. As in the reign of his grandfather, the wise men of the kingdom were unable to interpret the meaning and Daniel, by now an old man, was called in. With boldness he rebuked the king for his licentious ways and his persistent refusal to recognize the true God, and interpreted the writing as indicating that God had numbered his kingdom, weighed it as to its value and determined to divide it among the Persians.

That very night, as history records, two Babylonian deserters led Persian invaders under the wall of the city where the Euphrates River had been diverted, and the defending garrison found itself attacked from within. That same night the king was slain as the Persian troops raged through the city.

Chapter 6 is one of the most famous stories in the Bible. It is the story of Daniel in the lions' den. Darius the Mede reorganized the government of Babylon and made all the executives responsible to three presidents, of whom Daniel was one. His wisdom and judgment were so superior that the king planned to set him over the entire kingdom, but this aroused a spirit of jealousy among the other presidents and satraps. They cunningly plotted Daniel's downfall by inducing the king to sign a decree that for a period of 30 days no one should petition either God or man, save the king. Flattered by this, Darius signed the decree, making it the law of the Medes and Persians which could not be changed.

When Daniel heard of it he continued his daily act of prayer, kneeling openly before the windows which -opened toward Jerusalem. Reluctantly the king was forced to commit Daniel to the den of lions, but it was the king who spent a sleepless night. It is ironic to see how royally the prophet was kept. The king of beasts stood guard over him. The king of Persia sat up all night out of concern for him, and the King of kings sent His angel to protect him. When Darius found Daniel safe the next morning he issued a great proclamation glorifying the God of Daniel for His power and majesty.

## **Prophet of the Last Days**

Chapters 7 through 12 chronologically revert to the realm of Belshazzar, and the visions which Daniel received under his reign, and carry us forward to the reign of Cyrus the Persian and the revelations which came to the prophet during those days. Though it is not apparent to an English reader, there is another link which ties chapter 7 to chapter 2. The whole portion of the prophecy between these two boundaries appears in the Aramaic language rather than Hebrew. Aramaic was the language of Babylon, a Gentile language. Thus the section fittingly begins with a vision tracing the entire course of Gentile supremacy in the world; for Nebuchadnezzar's great dream image of chapter 2 covers the same general course of history as Daniel's vision of four beasts, found in chapter 7. There Daniel is shown a vision of four great beasts arising out of the Mediterranean Sea. The first was like a lion, the second like a bear, the third like a leopard and the fourth was a great and terrible animal with great iron teeth, different from all the preceding beasts. It had 10 horns and as the prophet watched, three of the first horns were plucked up by an eleventh horn which grew up among them, having the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things.

Immediately the vision changed and Daniel saw the throne of God and one seated upon it, before whom a stream of fire issued and thousands upon thousands of angels served Him. As he watched, one called the Ancient of Days (who is also described as Son of Man) was presented before Him and to Him was given dominion and glory over all the nations of the earth (see 7:13, 14).

The interpreting angel then announced that the four great beasts were four kingdoms which would arise out of the earth. These seem to be identical with the four kingdoms of the great dream image of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2. There the kingdoms are viewed from man's point of view as of great but decreasing value, represented by the gold and silver and the bronze and iron. Here they appear from the divine point of view as great snarling animals fighting and clashing with one another; but most interpreters agree that they represent the same kingdoms, those of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The 10 horns which appeared on the fourth beast's head apparently link with the 10 toes of the fourth kingdom in the dream image. The eleventh horn, with the eyes and mouth that spoke great things, is often linked with the great beast of Revelation 13

who appears as the world dictator of the last days and is known as the Antichrist.

Again it is made evident that all these shall fall before the might and majesty of the Son of Man who sits in judgment over the nations of earth and whose kingdom shall ultimately fill the entire earth.

Two years later, still in the reign of King Belshazzar, Daniel sees another vision, this time of two beasts. One is a ram with two horns which pushes to the west, the north and the south. While he watches a he-goat attacks the ram and overcomes him. From the one great horn on the goat grow four horns and from one of these comes forth a little horn which grows exceedingly great and attacks the Temple, eventually taking away the continual burnt offering and desecrating the sanctuary for a permitted total of 2,300 evening and morning sacrifices.

The interpreting angel Gabriel was sent to make the meaning clear. Daniel was informed that the ram was the kingdom of Medo-Persia while the he-goat was Greece with its notable horn standing for Alexander and his rapid conquests. Four kingdoms would arise after him, which history knew as Macedonia, Thrace, Syria and Egypt. The little horn which would grow from one of these was historically the Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes. He fulfilled the vision by attacking Jerusalem, entering the Temple and desecrating it by sprinkling the broth of a sow throughout the area, and erecting an image of Jupiter in the holy place. The Temple remained desolated for a little over three years, which is exactly the amount of time during which ordinarily 2,300 morning and evening sacrifices would have been offered. History records that at the end of that time the Maccabean revolt restored the sanctuary to its original function and Syrian power over Jerusalem was ended.

However, many interpreters believe that at Daniel 8:23, which begins "and at the latter end of their rule," the vision leaps over the centuries to the end of the age when a second desecration of the Temple will take place under the leadership of an individual who appears in Revelation 13 as the second beast, the false prophet. It is this desecration to which Jesus refers in Matthew 24 when He speaks of "the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (Matt. 24:15, NASB). Daniel is told by Gabriel that the vision "pertains to the appointed time of the end" (Dan. 8: 19) and though the two beasts he saw are clearly identified to him, he records that he was "appalled by the vision and did not understand it" (v. 27). Evidently this indicates that there were aspects of the vision which went beyond what the angel had identified for him.

Chapter 9 records what many consider to be the most important prophetic passage in all the Bible; for in the great prophecy of 70 weeks the prophet Daniel is given by God Himself an outline of history from his own day until the end of the age, when the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up over all the earth.

The vision began while Daniel was praying before God for the return of the people from Babylon to Israel, having been convinced by the prophecies of Jeremiah that the 70 years of exile were about to end. His prayer of confession and supplication is a moving and marvelous recognition of the majesty and faithfulness of God and the helplessness and weakness of man.

In the midst of it, while he was praying and confessing his sins and the sins of his people, the angel Gabriel, appearing as a man, was again sent to him, addressing him as "O Daniel, greatly beloved." He unfolded to him the divine calendar of prophetic events.

Seventy weeks of years were marked out, during which the people of Israel and the holy city of Jerusalem would be brought at last to full salvation and redemption. The word rendered "weeks" really means a period divided into seven. Dr. D. Douglas Young well reminds us that it is definitely misleading to study this Scripture with conventional methods of measuring time. As he put it: "We do better to think in terms of seventy periods of time, each of which is divided into seven parts." The prophet is told that the 490 years (70 times 7) would be divided into three parts. One part, of 49 years duration; a second period of 434 years, to total 483 years; and the third of 7 years only.

By the end of this entire period a six-fold program would have been accomplished: (1) the finishing of transgression; (2) putting an end to sin; (3) the making of atonement for iniquity; (4) the bringing in of everlasting righteousness; (5) the sealing up of visions and prophecy; (6) the anointing of a most holy place.

Looking back from our vantage point in history it is easy to see that the first three were accomplished by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, while the last three remain yet to be fulfilled at the second appearing of Christ.

Daniel was further told that during the first period of 49 years the city of Jerusalem would be built amidst great difficulty. The period would begin with a decree to restore and build Jerusalem, which seems to be the one referred to in Nehemiah and dates at 445 B.C.

The second period of 62 weeks of years, or 434 years, would be terminated when the "anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (9:26). The Anointed One is clearly the Messiah who was indeed cut off by crucifixion at the appointed time, and subsequently the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70 and the Temple burned and flattened. Since this was to come "after the sixty-two weeks" it would fall in an unspecified period of time between the 62 weeks and the beginning of the seventieth week which was scheduled to last for seven years.

Most Bible teachers therefore believe the seventieth week is yet future, and will be the same period of time referred to by Jesus as the "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21). Daniel is told that "the prince who is to come...shall make a strong covenant" with Israel for one week of seven years (9:26,27), but in the midst of it shall break his word and defile the sanctuary much as Antiochus Epiphanes did in 168 B.C. Many link this with the apostle Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians 2 of the appearance of a man of sin who shall exalt himself as God and shall appear in the Temple at Jerusalem, proclaiming himself to be God.

The final vision given to the prophet Daniel occupies chapters 10-12. Once again Daniel and certain of his companions were fasting and mourning for a period of three weeks. Suddenly, as with his contemporary Ezekiel, Daniel is given a vision of the glory of God and he saw one whose face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes burning like flaming torches and his arms and legs gleaming like burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like a noise of a multitude. The prophet fell into a trance and was awakened by the touch of a hand upon him and a voice addressing him. Evidently again it was the voice of Gabriel sent to interpret the vision for him.

In chapter 11 the angel gives to Daniel a long and intricate series of predicted events which would befall the people of Israel after Daniel's death. Many details were clearly predicted, and history records their fulfillment in the struggles between the Seleucid empire of Syria and the Ptolemaic empire of Egypt. After a long succession of battles and military forays, the struggle eventuates in the appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes, whose history begins with verse 21 and carries through verse 35. The details of his conflict with Egypt are clearly given and were as clearly fulfilled, and further prediction is made concerning the profaning of the Temple in Jerusalem, the taking away of the continual burnt offering, and the setting up of the abomination that makes desolate.

Beginning at verse 36, however, a personage identified merely as "the king" is introduced, who is said to "magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods." Many Bible scholars feel that this clearly identifies him with the predicted man of sin of whom Paul speaks, as well as with the second beast of Revelation 13, of whom John speaks. Daniel is told that at the time of the end the king of the south (Egypt) shall attack him, but the king of the north (Syria and possibly Russia) shall come rushing down upon him with a great army, and tens of thousands shall fall. This seems to identify itself with the invasion of Gog and Magog described by Ezekiel in chapters 38 and 39 and that identification is confirmed by the information given to Daniel that "he [the king of the north] shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him" (v. 45). This apparently describes the divine destruction which comes upon the invading northern armies by the great rain of hail and brimstone from heaven, which Ezekiel describes.

The vision continues in chapter 12 with the information that at that time Michael, the great prince who is identified with Israel, shall arise and Israel will be subjected to a time of trouble such as has never been since there was a nation until that time. This phrasing is apparently parallel to that used by Jesus when He refers to

the Great Tribulation in these words: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be" (Matt. 24:21).

Daniel is further told that this will be followed by a great resurrection from the dead, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. The prophet is then told to seal the book until the time of the end, which shall be identified by many running to and fro and a great increase of knowledge.

In answer to the prophet's request for information on how long it would take to accomplish these wonders, he is given two further periods of 1290 days and 1335 days. Though these are somewhat uncertain in their interpretation, they may refer to the duration of the Tribulation under the rule of the antichrist, and further indicate that those who maintain their faith for the period of persecution will emerge at last into a time of great universal blessing.

So the prophecies of Daniel are brought to a rather abrupt end, having unfolded many events which at our point in history have already been clearly and accurately fulfilled, yet contain many other predicted events which are yet to be brought to pass. No other predictive passages are quite as revealing until, after several centuries, Jesus of Nazareth will sit upon the Mount of Olives with His disciples gathered around Him and unfold in amazing detail the coming history of the troubled city and its ultimate fate, at the end of the age.

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