

George Philip Bible Readings

Book of Daniel

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1:1-2

We are given a clear indication of the date of the events of this story; the circumstances and atmosphere in which the story develops; and right from the start it is made plain that these events were in no way accidental. God was in them. The circumstances of the reign of King Jehoiakim are recorded in 2 Kings 23:36-24:6 and 2 Chronicles 36:5-8. The third year of his reign was 605 BC. Some thirty years previously there had been revival and reformation within the nation of Judah, under the influence of good King Josiah (2 Kings 22-23), but the renewing of the spiritual life of the nation had come too late and did not go deep enough to stop the decline (2 Kings 23:26-27). Things had reached such a point of godlessness that no change of direction was possible. God had spoken His word of judgment. The next king, Jehoahaz, set the pattern of evil and his reign lasted a mere three months (2 Kings 23:31-34), when the nation fell under the sway of Egypt. Jehoiakim then became king, set on the throne by the king of Egypt, and his reign lasted eleven years. He too did evil in the sight of the Lord. In the third year of Jehoiakim's reign, when he tried to assert himself, the king of Babylon came, invaded the land, and besieged Jerusalem. As a result, in the year 605 BC the first batch of Jews was carried away captive to Babylon and among them were Daniel and his friends. A second wave of deportation took place some eight years later and then finally, in 586 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed and the kingdom of Judah ceased to be. The reason for the death of the nation is given in 2 Chron. 36:15-16. The people, favoured so long, spoken to in so many ways by a succession of prophets, and dealt with in such longsuffering patience by God, finally fell because they refused to listen. There is a lesson here for every generation, a lesson expressed solemnly in Hebrews 2:1-4; 4:1-2.

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1:1-2

We must be quite clear that the increasing predicament of the nation and its final collapse had a spiritual cause. It was not the result of international politics nor of the interplay of economic forces although these were and always are involved. The key to the situation was the rebuke and disciplinary judgment of God on His own people who had forgotten, denied and refused Him in His every word of warning, instruction and pleading. When they would not listen to God's words, however loudly they were spoken, then they had to listen to and learn from God's disciplines. At a certain point in history God shook this nation by something the people were quite sure would never happen to them. The nation was invaded, the holy city of Jerusalem was breached and the cream of the young people was carried away to live and serve in a pagan country. But even that did not restrain, let alone cure, their spiritual complacency and moral degeneration. Yet at the same time the new era of God's purpose was being prepared for in Babylon, through people such as Daniel, who resolved (1:8), who "purposed in his heart" (AV), that he would be true to God as apparently he had been even in the midst of the spiritual decline of the nation. There came a time when the main exile had taken place that the Jews mourned deeply over what had happened to them. In Babylon (Psalm 137:1-6) they began to appreciate the spiritual blessings and privileges of being God's people only when all had been lost. But it took then a long time to get back to anything like spiritual health again. The lesson here is clear: spiritual privileges can be taken away from us by God, if that is the only way He can bring us back to Himself. There is another significant element in the background of the story that we must look at tomorrow.

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1:1-2

To what extent are we able to discern the hand of God in situations that seem at first to be totally negative? We are told that the king of Babylon took the holy vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem and put them into the treasury of his god. He could have destroyed them. But in the providence of God they were preserved safely through all the years of exile and, in due time, by the orders of another pagan emperor, these vessels were released and taken back to Jerusalem. Read the story in Ezra 1:1-11. But there is another evidence of the overruling providence of God preparing the remnant of faith to cope with disaster and to carry the work forward into the future. Read Jeremiah 1:1-12 and see that, at a certain point in the reign of Josiah, Jeremiah's ministry began. That means that for some twenty years before the start of the story of Daniel, Jeremiah's great ministry

had been going on. We often speak of Jeremiah having no converts, and certainly his ministry did not stop the rot in the nation. But it may well have been through Jeremiah's ministry that young men such as Daniel learned faith. They must have had a good, solid, comprehensive grounding because, when the time came, these young folk were ready to stand. Evangelically speaking, in our generation we may be failing our young people by feeding them on superficial ministry and by demanding too little of them in terms of commitment in service and especially in prayer. With society developing, as it is, in darkness and decadence, young Christians need to be prepared and trained for war. Who knows but that they may have to face and cope with a Daniel-type situation in which the whole religious and spiritual life of the nation collapses. Daniel and his companions were ready when the challenge came. But spare a thought for Jeremiah who had the experience of what we might call his whole Youth Fellowship being taken away in one sudden crisis. Perhaps it was these young people, and they alone, who had gathered with Jeremiah to pray! Jeremiah's ministry went on for another thirty years and in the end he was taken to Egypt. He never got to go to Babylon where he might have been thrilled to see the long-term fruit of his ministry. Of course, all ministry must be carried out in faith. The results are with God and we must trust without seeing.

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1:3-7

When young believers are moved away from home influence and from their home church it is a time of significant testing for them. They need to be prayed for because they will face all the pressures of the influence and atmosphere of a world that is far from sympathetic to Christian faith and life-style. Daniel and his friends discovered almost at once that the "world" in which they found themselves was not neutral. The battle for their *minds* and their *souls* began in earnest. Their story tells us a great deal about how to live the life of faith in a materialistic, godless environment. A comprehensive process of education and "brainwashing" began and they were brought into the most affluent human situation, the kind of living conditions that many would envy. They were to have everything, and this was the king's command. The king of Babylon knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted God eliminated from the consciousness of these young men of capacity and potential. They were given Babylonian names in an attempt to blot out from their thinking the fact that they were Jews, members of God's chosen people. Now, if we forget who we are: men and women who are in Christ and who belong to Christ; if we forget where we have come from, redeemed from brokenness, bondage and death by the costly redemption that is through Christ; and if we forget that we are called to be God's people and to share His glory, then we will soon lapse into a way of life that has no clear Christian marks to it (Eph. 2:1-7,19; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Cor. 6: 19-20; 1 Pet. 5:10). The influence of the world will always seek to condition us, and that is why we must have the resolution and the determination to refuse to be squeezed into the world's pattern of thinking (Rom. 12:1-2). We must keep clearly in our minds that the world is not neutral. Statements of spiritual truth such as those found in 1 John 2:16-17 and 1 John 5:19 have to be taken seriously.

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1:3-7

We cannot live the life of faith by contracting out of the world into some kind of Christian ghetto where we think our spirituality will be safe. We are called to be *in* the world but not *of* it (1 Cor. 7:31) and to shine as lights in a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:14-16). To do this we need to be well taught in the things of God and to be aware of the reality and the carefully planned stratagems of Satan who is the inspiration behind the people, things, activities and influences that are set to take us away from God and to limit, if not to frustrate totally, our service for God. We need to learn to use the armour provided by God and to recognise that we are not battling against mere human influences (Eph. 6:10ff). It seems that right from the start Daniel was aware of what the king was planning. The young people with leadership potential were first subjected to a process of involvement in a particular way of life of which the rich food and wine were but symbols. The objective was to get Daniel's way of life to be so much like that of a godless Babylonian that people would assume he had abandoned commitment to his God. Think of it this way. From our way of life, our hobbies, pastimes, the things that take prior place in our allocation of time, energy and money, would people realise that we are Christian believers committed to following Jesus? Along with the pressure for involvement the king instituted a process of education which was simply brainwashing. The course was to last three years and they were to learn the language of Babylon so that their conversation would have nothing of God in it. They were to learn the

language of Babylon, the philosophy of paganism and an interpretation of history that was without God and without any element of redemption or eternity. This is exactly the process that is going on in our own generation through newspapers, radio, television and the popular weekly magazines, especially some shocking ones produced for the younger generation. The battle for the minds of people begins in Primary School and the results are seen in the general blasphemy of Christ's name, the absence of standards of morality and of any real sense of right and wrong. The hymn-writer was right on target when he wrote, "Thou art in the midst of foes, watch and pray." Check up on your attitude to life, because that determines your actions.

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1:8-16

Here we see both Daniel's resolution of heart and also evidence of the grace of his personality, because the chief steward agreed to his suggestions. We do not know how many took this strong line of faithfulness to God. Perhaps Daniel was criticised for being narrow and extreme and possibly causing the authorities to look with disfavour on all the others. Daniel did not shout or make a fuss; he did not organise a protest march, go on strike, or organise a petition. He simply decided that there was to be nothing between him and God. If God could not bless it, then he did not want to have it. If it was not contributing to his life of faith and obedience then it had no place. If there was a danger that something might take him away from God or compromise his testimony, then he would do without it. No doubt other Jews, including older people, would tell Daniel he would lose friends if he took God as seriously as that, and he would certainly not "get on" in the world. Of course, it depends which world you want to get on in: this temporary world or God's eternal world. Keep in mind the story Jesus told in Lk. 12:13-21 about the man who got on so well that he lost his soul! We can imagine Daniel and his friends praying together about the course of action they were taking, and it must have been a thrill of encouragement when the chief steward agreed with their plan. It is always a thrill when we get indications that God really is with us. The stand they took was costly but these fellows turned out to be the healthiest and happiest humanly and spiritually. The story will go on to tell how Daniel went on like this, growing in grace and fruitful service, till he was an old man. How many Christians are really past their spiritual best by their early twenties or thirties?

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1:17-21

It had taken only ten days for it to become evident that God was with these young men in a particular way. This is not surprising because God honours those who honour Him (1 Sam. 2:30). That does not necessarily mean that everything works out smoothly because, as the New Testament teaches, there are times when we are given the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ and the Gospel (Acts 5:40-42). We shall read later how Daniel ended up in the den of lions and his friends experienced the fiery furnace. But the point here is that because these young men stood before God (that was the hidden part of their lives), they ended up standing before the king and finding themselves in significant secular positions of work in a godless society. No doubt those who warned Daniel and his friends that they would not "get on" would then be rather jealous of how well they had got on. People may well have criticised Daniel and his friends for compromising their spiritual identity by associating with and working for a godless king. We do not know how much of Jeremiah's ministry the young men had known but God certainly made clear to the Jews, in anticipating their going into exile, that they had to accept and come to terms with their new situation, not rebelling against it, but humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God by which they had been led to their new situation. We are told in Jer. 29:1-11 of a letter sent to the exiles some eight years after Daniel went to Babylon, and it may well have been that Jeremiah preached the same wise counsel earlier in his ministry. There are times when we must accept the inevitable, but we accept it in faith, not unbelief; in hope, not in despair; and to co-operate is not necessarily to compromise. Later in the story Daniel was God's man in God's place at God's time. It takes more faith to humble oneself and to wait upon God than to rebel.

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1:17-21

Note very carefully the clear emphasis on God's activity and blessing. The young men prospered in their studies and got a good grasp of Babylonian philosophy, law and administration. They may not have realised just how

significant this would prove to be in their lives when their time of study was over. But we are also told of a particular spiritual endowment given to Daniel in respect of visions and dreams. This too was to prove significant in the near future. The next important thing to note is how Daniel and the others excelled in the area of royal advice, and this probably stirred in the Babylonian advisers of the king a resentment against these Jews who were putting their jobs and favoured positions in danger. Success that comes to us because of God's blessing is not always appreciated by others. Take an example: ministers of the Gospel who refuse the discipline, cost and unpopularity of exercising a thorough expository ministry of the whole Word of God can be critical and jealous to the point of hatred when they see the fruit of such ministry in other places. In this first chapter of Daniel the main elements of the story have been mapped out. From this point everything flows, and Daniel's ministry went on until the first year of Cyrus (538 BC). That means Daniel's ministry in Babylon lasted sixty-seven years. To be of significant use to God for that length of time you need to be sure of God, sure you are in God's place of appointing, and sure of God's sovereign providence. The foundation for that kind of certainty was laid in the early days of Daniel's life of faith. Too many young people leave it too late before they begin to be serious about God and about their spiritual commitment.

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2:1-11

The events of chapter one are dated in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign and in the following year we have this new story. That means it was not long before Daniel was brought right to the forefront of a critical situation. We begin to see just what a ruthless king this man was. Politically he was powerful in the international situation. In the domestic situation he was a total dictator, wealthy, well fed and normally a good sleeper. Then he began to have a succession of dreams, which seemed to be nightmares, and they troubled him greatly. Part of the problem seems to have been that he could not quite remember just what the dreams were (3-5), and he began to suffer from insomnia, no doubt because he was afraid to go to sleep. He was haunted by his dreams and became increasingly insecure to the point of being quite paranoid (5,9). First he offered bribes, then he uttered threats, but these magicians, enchanters and sorcerers (2), on whom the king had always relied for insights and guidance, were quite powerless in this situation. There is no mention so far of Daniel and his colleagues, whom the king had already found to be more skilled and capable than the others in wisdom and understanding (1:20). Perhaps it was the magicians themselves who had sidelined Daniel and his friends, holding to their position as senior and long-serving officials of the king. We do not need to think these magicians had real powers of insight, nor do we necessarily deny that they had some occult power. Whatever powers or capacities they had were being shown to be totally ineffective and they were forced to admit that there was an area of power, a realm of spiritual reality, that they knew nothing about (11). That God was at work in this situation cannot be doubted even though He is not mentioned until v.18. God's Spirit was at work in the king's dreams, but that does not mean there is spiritual significance in every dream. Some dreams for example are simply the result of wrong food eaten too late at night!

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2:12-16

In our land we know nothing of this kind of totalitarian disposing of people who have done no wrong. But in the past our nation has known times like these and today many nations still experience this kind of ruthless political power and persecution. How we should give thanks to God for Gospel privileges, blessings and heritage! We take too much for granted and that may be an ominous indication of how badly we are prepared for what may yet come. In Daniel's early years he had known the evils of society and had learned the need for authentic as opposed to sentimental faith. How much Daniel knew about the king's dreams and his threats we cannot tell. Perhaps he was taken aback when soldiers came to arrest him along with all the other wise men. But a man who walks with God knows something of the peace of God which passes understanding (Phil. 4:4-7), and we see him here acting with great poise, calm, wisdom and discretion. There was neither panic nor presumption. His first concern was to ascertain the facts of the situation. He wanted to know what he was dealing with. Daniel's character must have been known to the captain of the guard who had to carry out the execution, and Daniel must have built up something of a respectful relationship with the man because he was given the information he needed and also was given time and opportunity to make an appeal to the king. There is a lesson here on how we ought to treat people in the on-going business of life. If we ride roughshod over them, if we ignore them, if

we constantly confront them, giving the impression that we prefer to be antagonistic rather than peaceable, then when there is a genuine crisis they are not likely to listen to us or be patient with us. We must build up relationships, not in order to make use of people in due time, but because we give them value as people, even though they may be very different from ourselves. Daniel had access to the king, and the king listened and communicated. Perhaps he just knew Daniel could be trusted.

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2:17-23

Keep in mind that the lives of these four men were in real danger. Daniel was manifestly the leader but he had no wish to be independent. He needed and he wanted the fellowship of his friends to share in bringing this crisis to God in prayer. We spoke yesterday of Daniel's free access into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar and we see today how aware he was that he also had free access into the presence of God. Of course, these young men, busy with high-ranking civil servant posts, had maintained their walk with God and their life of prayer, and without hesitation they took the matter to God. They came boldly to the Throne of Grace (Heb. 4:14-16) and their prayers were answered. Think of the circumstances of this small prayer meeting. The four men faced the fact that they might soon be executed. They had been brought suddenly face to face with evil in a frightening form. But they were also aware of God. Their eyes were on God. Their hope was in God. Looking back over their preservation in the time of exile, their vindication by God in the issue of taking a stand against the food regime (1:8), and their sustaining by God throughout the process of indoctrination, they knew they had good grounds for trusting God. The command always is, "Have faith in God" (Mk. 11:22), because in all things God is at work in and for those who are His people (Rom. 8:28). Read and savour the doxology of praise and worship that ended the prayer meeting. We are not told how long they prayed. Perhaps they used few words, aware that long prayers can deaden a prayer meeting, especially when the prayer is more a quoting of Scripture than either heart felt worship, thanksgiving or petition.

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2:17-23

There is a book entitled, "Your God is too small" and there is a hymn which begins, "Workman of God, O lose not heart, but learn what God is like." These thoughts are a good introduction to Daniel's prayer which we must ponder because our concept of God undergirds and inspires both prayer and life. God is the unchanging God who abides the same yesterday, today and forever. Wisdom belongs to Him and He is never baffled or uncertain, always having the might or power to carry out His purposes. He rules the changing seasons, and it is in His sovereign providence that kings and kingdoms rise and fall. He is the One who enlightens and instructs those who desire to be so enlightened. He brings out into the open deep and mysterious things, and nothing and no one can take refuge in darkness because the dark and the light are alike to Him. Daniel rejoiced in the God of his fathers. Think how we thrill to sing, "Hail, Abraham's God and mine!" Daniel gives thanks to God for the way in his own life he had been given wisdom and strength to cope and finally he gives thanks for answered prayer. What a God we have! The whole Bible declares again and again that all might, majesty, power and endless praise rightly belong to God. He is the One ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored. He is the God who works all things according to the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11) and who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think (Eph. 3:20-21). We need to learn to thrill more at the thought of the God we have. It is this great and glorious God whose ear is attentive to our prayers and who answers our prayers, although not always as quickly and obviously as He did here for Daniel. But then, Daniel needed an instant answer. It was indeed a matter of life and death.

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2:24-30

We see again the quiet composure and wisdom of Daniel in approaching the king through the appropriate channels. Daniel was quite sure, not only that God had given him the interpretation of the dream but that God would have prepared the king to listen. Keep in mind the suspicion and jealousy the other "wise men" had regarding Daniel and note that Daniel made no attempt whatever to score points against them, nor to use the situation to gain favour with or rewards from the king. It must have been a temptation. There always is such temptation in the business and political world to advance our own cause. In answer to his question (26), Daniel

did not immediately speak words of comfort or encouragement to the distraught king. In pastoral counselling we can limit the help given by reassuring a person too soon. Nebuchadnezzar had to be made aware of the fact that he was dealing with God and being dealt with by God. This was not a merely human problem of psychological tensions causing bad dreams. Daniel made plain that this whole situation was far outwith the capacity of mere men, or magicians, or godly prophets. But there is a God in Heaven who speaks and gives indications regarding the future, sometimes pressing in the message by way of dreams even if the recipient is unwilling to remember the dreams. The king was left in no doubt that he was ignorant of and unaware of the God of Heaven, whereas Daniel knew God. It was the future that Nebuchadnezzar was worried about. He was a king of a great and powerful empire, from Egypt to the Euphrates, and most people would think of him as totally secure, with nothing to worry about. But already in the north the kingdom of the Medes and Persians was growing. Thus far they were friendly, but for how long? The king wondered just what might happen and when. The world of international politics is always uncertain and potentially explosive. It is a happy person who knows that God Himself is his or her refuge and strength. That can give deep and dreamless sleep!

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2:31-35

It is little wonder that a succession of nights with this same dream frightened the life out of the king. Even when he could not sleep his mind was going over and over the elements of the vision (2:28). He had managed to blot out the picture but the disturbing effect remained. When Daniel began to tell the king what he had seen in his dream there was a great, self-effacing spirit manifest. It was as if God's servant was saying, "Don't think about me. Think about God." The dream had to do with kingdoms as Daniel would go on to explain. But first we have to note the decreasing value of the metal components: gold, silver, bronze, iron and finally feet of clay. The whole structure of the image was impressive and frightening but it had feet of clay. Then there was the stone cut by no human hand, a power outside human experience, capacity, achievement or control. This stone smote the image of the kingdoms of the world, crushing them to dust which was whisked away by the wind. Then the stone, which spoke of a kingdom other than a human kingdom, grew and became a world-filling mountain. It is not hard to see in all this that the decisive power in world history does not lie in the hands and in the control of any worldly kingdom, no matter how great or glamorous it may be. Power belongs to God and to God alone. Sometimes human kingdoms rise to great heights of culture and achievement. Sometimes kingdoms degenerate into gross sensuality and moral perversity as described for example in Rom. 1:21-32. But it is God who decides their limits and God who brings them to judgment. Read Psalm 2. Read also 2 Thess. 2:1-10, where the frightening rise of evil lawlessness is dealt with by the breath of God's mouth. Human nature can be so proud of and assured in its achievements. But the truth is, "Our little systems have their day; they have their day and cease to be." (Tennyson)

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2:36-45

We see great confidence in Daniel as he begins to explain to the king the meaning of the dream. Keep in mind that he had already set the whole issue in a spiritual context in relation to the God of Heaven (28), the God Nebuchadnezzar did not believe in. It had been made clear to the king that God had been speaking to him and that he had failed to recognise this and had failed to understand and respond. The king was being made aware that there was a God with whom he had to deal (Heb. 4:13) and, although he was a great man with a vast powerful empire he was deeply worried. He had been told what his dream was and, no doubt, it all came flooding back with brilliant recollection, increasing his agitation. Consider v.36 and the statement "we will tell the king". Standing before this mighty king, feared by the nations because of his power, we see a group of four young men, for whom Daniel was spokesman. Daniel had taken with him his faithful "prayer partners" (2:17-18). We should not think of this public prominence as a reward to the friends for their spiritual faithfulness but rather see an indication of the humanity of Daniel, servant of God, called to take such a prominent role. No-one knew how the king would react to the interpretation of the dream. His power was total, and he might well have reacted in rage and had the man of God imprisoned or executed. We have examples of this kind of reaction later in the stories of the fiery furnace and the den of lions. Daniel needed human support as he carried out God's commission, and his friends did not fail him. Think how Moses needed the physical presence and spiritual support of his partners in the work of intercession when spiritual battles were being fought and won (Exod.

17:8-13). Think also of how our Lord Jesus Christ took His three close friends into His confidence in Gethsemane, asking them to watch with Him so that, even in the work that only He could do, He would not be totally alone in a human sense. His friends let Him down. Daniel's friends stood with him. They did not stay at home to pray.

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2:36-45

Daniel's words in v.37-38 were a true description of the power and the glory of the Babylonian empire. The king's triumphs were known and acknowledged by enemies as well as friends. But Nebuchadnezzar had to be told that this mighty achievement was not his own. It had been given him by God. That truth may not have registered immediately because for the king, as for many, the idea of "God" was a rather vague one - "Somebody up there likes me." The statement, "You are the head of gold" would have appealed to the king. Babylon was indeed magnificent. Right through the Bible, from the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 to the references in Revelation 18:1-3, Babylon has represented the world kingdom of Antichrist. Its evil nature, inspiration, and objective were not always evident and not necessarily crude and cruel. Evil can be magnificent in culture, economics, science, literature and achievement. But greatness, if not yielded in submission to God, has no permanence. This was made devastatingly plain to Nebuchadnezzar in the words, "After you shall arise another kingdom" (39). After that there would be a third kingdom and after that a fourth. The king was made aware of the relentless rolling forward of history and the picture was of a process of degeneration: gold, silver, bronze, iron, clay. The successive empires might grow in terms of the spread of their territory, as indeed they did, but all of them were doomed to fall before, and give way to, the kingdom that is the work of God. We really have here a marvellous picture of the sure and sovereign providence of God ruling over, directing and controlling the whole course of world history. When we see kingdoms rising and falling, some rising with terrifying power and cruelty, and some falling with a rapidity and a disintegration that makes us gasp, we need to remind ourselves for our comfort and encouragement that power belongs to God and to God alone (Ps. 62:11 AV).

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2:36-45

As he listened to Daniel, the king may well have been thinking that his power had crushed and humiliated the proud nation of Judah, the people who had always boasted that they were God's chosen people. What he did not recognise was that he was being used as God's instrument to discipline God's people; to restrict them so that their sins and idolatry could do no more harm to God's name and God's work; and to refine them, purging idolatry from their system, so that a future generation could again carry forward God's purposes of salvation. When Babylon's empire had fulfilled that purpose it would no longer be relevant and would pass into obscurity. At this stage the identities of the succeeding kingdoms were not given and, while we may speculate, we must not be distracted. Nor must we ever try to work out a detailed timetable for the fulfilment of biblical prophecies. The words spoken by Jesus during His earthly ministry and spoken also after His resurrection and before His ascension should provide sufficient caution (Mk. 13:28-33; Acts 1:7). However, various commentators point out that when Daniel was speaking, the rising power of the Medes and Persians was seen as a possible threat to the dominance of Babylon. The Greeks were a crowd of warring factions, yet to grow into a great power. Rome was then just a village on the River Tiber but would become a mighty world power in the time of our Lord Jesus Christ. As time passed these empires emerged, took their power for a season and then passed away. They seemed permanent but it was not so. Some who read these notes recall the days of Hitler's Third Reich, which boasted it would last a thousand years. It damaged the world, but it is gone. The Colossus of atheistic Communism which terrorised the world has disintegrated since the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. What of the power of militant Islam? What of the power of Materialism? What of the ravaging kingdom of sensuality? All that is contrary to God must fall under the judgment of God. Power does belong to God alone.

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2:36-45

Focus now on v.44-45 and the theme of God setting up His kingdom which shall stand forever. Of course, a kingdom has a king, and we could well think of the King of Kings riding into Jerusalem to set in motion the

process which; in the Cross, would finally conquer the whole world kingdom of evil (Mk. 10:32-34; 11:1-10). The earthly story of that King is set in the context of the phrase in our passage “in the time of those kings” (44), and we have a similar indication of historical context in Lk. 2:1-2; 3:1-2. If we then read Gal. 4:4 we are again brought to see the exact timing and perfect administration of God. We must not ever lose this sense of the sureness of God and the sureness of the issues, even when, as far as we can see, the powers and kingdoms of evil seem to be carrying everything before them. Today’s verses make plain that the kingdom of God and all its work are in God’s good hand and will never be in the hands of anyone else. Nebuchadnezzar was being shown in no uncertain terms that the powers of the world, in their human and devilish forms, cannot stand against the will, purpose and plan of God. Jesus made it perfectly clear to His disciples, for their encouragement, that He would build His church and the gates of Hell would not and could not prevail (Matt. 16:18). We must never think of God’s church as being on the defensive. However much churches and denominations are rocked back on their heels by the pressures of finance and unbelief, God’s church goes forward and all the powers of evil cannot stop it. This is what Nebuchadnezzar was being taught. But, was he learning?

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2:46-49

Nebuchadnezzar’s immediate reaction seemed to indicate an acceptance of the message of the dream and an attitude of repentance towards God. But first impressions are often deceptive and in the next chapter we see the king reverting to his former arrogant self-confidence. That the king got a severe fright is beyond question but that is not the same as coming to faith in God. In a sense, in the succession of dreams and the interpretation given by Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar had a religious experience that moved him quite deeply but which did not capture his will or change his attitude to life. In his offering of incense to Daniel (possibly equivalent to a mention in the “Honours List”) and in his reference to Daniel’s God as “God of gods” , the king was showing his continuing ignorance of the one true God. He was honouring Daniel’s God with a place among the respected gods of Babylon. His reaction to the interpretation of his dreams was one of impulse, and was essentially emotional rather than spiritual, but at least it caused him to think about God. That can be the start of something more significant. But events will soon show that the king very quickly forgot his dreams, his fright, and his sudden bout of spirituality. But then, we all tend to do that. Something shakes us, and our prayer life bursts into activity. Then when the emergency is over, we can so easily forget God. We need to make sure we are truly listening, believing and responding when God speaks to us; as He is always speaking when we meet for worship, when we hear His Word and when He deals with us in our circumstances. Daniel was not distracted by the king’s apparent “conversion”. He kept his head cool and clear, and when he was given a place of political administration he not only saw the hand of God in this, he saw the need for continuing help and support and he asked for his three friends to be appointed as his colleagues. Daniel was the kind of believer who thought things through clearly, and was immensely practical.

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3:1-7

We raised the question as to what extent or on what level Nebuchadnezzar was impressed and moved by the interpretation of his dream, and we have now a clear indication of the answer. The king had listened but he had heard only what he wanted to hear, or at least he remembered, as many people tend to do, the part of the “sermon” that appealed to him. After all, Daniel had said, from his God, that Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold in the marvellous image (2:38). That was something the king wanted everybody to see and to acknowledge. This golden image was an expression of the total, self-centred, self-idolising pride of a ruthless man. It was a celebration of who he was (or thought himself to be) and an expression of what he had accomplished as a significant world figure, even though he had been told in clearest terms that his position and power were his only by the providence of God and for the purposes of God (2:37). But now, in complete contrast to his apparent worship at the end of the previous chapter, we see that God was not in all his thoughts (Ps. 10:4 AV). Right through today’s verses, and beyond in v.12,14, there is the emphasis on the idol Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and the whole country was called to see, to acknowledge and to worship this man. No dissent was to be allowed and any hesitation about bowing down was to be regarded as total treason and would be punished by hideous death. This is the spirit of totalitarianism. All must bow to the State, or to the Party, or to the Peer Group, or to Social Convention, or to the Trade Union, or to the manipulative friend, or to

the demanding partner or parent. Failure to bow brings out the ruthless reaction. It is often a deep-seated insecurity that causes people to act in this way and to demand evidences of love and loyalty that are totally unreasonable, and will never be enough.

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3:8-12

We spoke earlier (in the notes on 1:17-21) of how jealousy and resentment would have stirred in the hearts of many because of the favours shown to Daniel and his friends, and that jealousy would have increased because of the success of the Jews and their promotion, recorded in 2:46-49. We cannot tell how long had passed since the beginning of the story of Daniel, nor how many years may have elapsed between Chapters 2 and 3, but some people can nurse their anger and resentment for a long time, waiting for the opportunity to strike. The opportunity came in this scheme by the king to institute one compulsory form of religion for the whole nation. It was a plan of “brain-washing” similar to that in 1:3-5. People ambitious for power do not want people to have the freedom to think or act, and therefore a system of control is devised. Certain Chaldeans took note that certain Jews were not present at the “worship” of v.7. Note the phrase “some astrologers”. The accusers would be known, although not named. Their actions were deliberate, their intentions were malicious and they named the three Jews. They may not have had much love for Nebuchadnezzar or respect for his policies, but their hatred for these Jews was dominant. It is interesting that there is no mention of Daniel, only of his three friends. Perhaps they calculated that it was not yet “safe” to accuse Daniel who, after all, was the undoubted leader of the group, their example and their inspiration. Perhaps the clever plan was to bring down the lesser men and in that way discredit the leader and accomplish his downfall. The same technique is adopted by those who refuse the Gospel and the authority of Scripture. They seldom come out into the open and declare themselves unbelievers. They prefer to criticise, as extreme and unbalanced, those who stand by the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The Devil is boringly the same in his devices. It is strange that we are so often taken in by him.

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3:13-15

Keep in mind that we are dealing with a ferocious attack by an evil and powerful man against the people and work of God. The furious rage of the king is typical of proud people who feel their power is threatened whenever they are disobeyed or contradicted. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who held prominent positions in the king’s administration, must have had a great sense of evil and of crisis when they were hauled before Nebuchadnezzar. This situation was not simply one of the “fiery darts” from the evil one (Eph. 6:16) but rather an example of Satan as a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). The question in v.14 “Is it true?” may indicate that, by the time the three men were actually before him, the king had calmed down a bit and was wondering if these men who had proved their trustworthiness really were guilty. On the other hand he may have been asking if this decision they had made was deliberate, decisive, or open to adjustment. The king’s threats were real: not just of losing their jobs but their lives. The religious setting of the challenge and the powerful conditioning of the music must have heightened the sense of evil and of crisis. Possibly Nebuchadnezzar, believing that every man has his price, felt fairly sure that the three men would back down and that he would not have to carry out his threat and so lose good civil servants whom he knew he could trust in a way that he could not trust others. But the threat was there and it was public. The threat of the unbelieving world is always the same: “Toe the line, or you are out.” The encouraging call of God’s Word is always, “Be not conformed to this world . . .”(Rom. 12:1-2).

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3:16-18

The message here is simply that we have good cause and every ground for trusting absolutely the God who for love of us and our salvation spared not even His own Son but delivered Him up to the Cross (Rom. 5:6-11; 8:31-39). Whatever fires of experience we may be called on to go through, there will be with us the One who went through the deepest of fires when He took our sins in His own body on the Cross and paid their price so that we might be forgiven (1 Pet. 1:18; 2:24). Today’s verses are of deep emotional and spiritual significance to the writer of these notes. They were the text given by God for the first sermon I preached in Sandyford after my Induction in October 1956. Facing an unknown future and aware of both the difficulties and the demands of the

situation I had been called to, the affirmation, “Our God is able” was comfort and encouragement and has proved to be a sure rock to stand on down through the years. The study of these verses as part of the story we leave until tomorrow. Consider the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died; remember that it was God Himself who laid on the Saviour the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:4-6). Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. That is exactly how the young men felt in the face of the king’s threat. They were God’s men and their God was able to deliver. He is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25 AV); able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think (Eph. 3:20); able to make all grace abound (2 Cor. 9:8); able to subdue all things to Himself (Phil. 3:21); able to help those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18); and able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless in His presence with joy, for Him and for us (Jude 24). Our God is able. Why should we doubt or fear?

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3:16-18

The three young men faced a great challenge. They could have conformed to an “inevitable” situation, saying that God knew their hearts were true and that this “ceremony” really meant nothing. But, of course, their testimony and their witness would have been compromised. Although it is not stated, there are grounds for believing that many, perhaps most, of the Jewish exiles conformed for the sake of their lives and their families. There are times when we have to yield and submit, even though we will be misunderstood and criticised, but there are times when we must stand our ground regardless of the cost. These young men stood and affirmed that their God was able to deliver them, and that their first loyalty was to their God not to Nebuchadnezzar. They went further, affirming their faith that God would in fact deliver them from the fire and from the power of the king. But then they added the words “But if not . . .” Was that a weakening of their faith? Was it doubt creeping in? Was it a case of “hedging their bets” in case their prayers were not answered? It was none of these things. It was in fact their faith stating with clarity and humility that even the strongest faith does not know always and in detail just exactly how God will act. After all, God’s ways are higher and better and surer than ours (Isa. 55:8-9). Faith will never assume it knows all that God is doing and will do in any given situation. That would be to live and walk by sight not by faith. And, if we did know all in detail, then there would be no need for faith. Faith will never presume it knows exactly how God will work. God does indeed move in mysterious ways His wonders to perform, and His ways are indeed past finding out (Rom. 11:33). These young men of faith declared that they were sure of God for the present and the future and, however things did work out, they would trust God and leave the issues to Him.

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3:19-25

The quiet but assured faith of the young men and their manifest courage in refusing to yield to his threats enraged Nebuchadnezzar. It is quite amazing just how often this king lost his temper. He must have been basically very insecure! The extremity of the king’s anger is an indication that there was something demonic or devilish about his reaction against manifest faith in God. This is something that we must be prepared for, especially as our own generation becomes more and more godless and blasphemous. After all, Jesus warned His disciples that faith and obedience in the world would meet with tribulation. Of course, He also made plain that He had overcome the world and all its powers (Jn. 16:33). Try to imagine the thoughts and feelings of these three men as they were led to the blazing furnace. They were in exile and had been away from their spiritual home in Jerusalem for quite a number of years. But they had sought out each other, stuck together and prayed together. That is an important attitude to life when you find yourself in a new and different society, especially where there is indifference and opposition to the things of God. This is why every Sunday and every Prayer Meeting is so important. None of us know when we will have to live without these supports, protections and encouragements. They had known the temptation to compromise but they had stood out against it. What were they thinking now? Had they regrets about taking such a clear stand for God? No! They were ready. What were they thinking? They would be sure that Daniel, and perhaps others they knew nothing about, would be praying. What a comfort it is to have a praying church behind you in a crisis (Acts 12:1-16). Perhaps these men, grounded in Scripture, were thinking of and holding fast to God’s promise in Isaiah 43:1-2. There are all sorts of fiery trials to go through and we are told in 1 Pet. 4:12-19 not to be taken by surprise but to entrust ourselves to God.

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3:19-25

It seems very likely that these three men of faith are the ones referred to in Heb. 11:34. The story makes plain that Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and agitated by what happened but there is no indication that the three men were perturbed at all. Indeed in the midst of the fire they are seen free from their bonds and enjoying safe and sweet fellowship with a man whom the king described as a son of the gods. These three men had served God, not just believed in Him, in their ordinary lives. God had trusted them to go into the fire, and now they found that their God had come to them to stand with them in the midst of the flames. Some commentators see a parable in this story, showing how the men were set free from their bonds in and by the fire. The Psalmist speaks of sore affliction in this way in Ps. 119:67,71. Nebuchadnezzar no doubt believed in many different gods and at one stage was glad to add Daniel's God to their company. But he had no understanding at all of a God who cares so much for His people and values them so highly that he is prepared to come down to them in even the most adverse circumstances. But this is the glory of the Christian Gospel. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). And Jesus promised to be with His disciples all the time, in all places, and for ever. However much the king knew or understood about God the fact that his evil murderous scheme had been frustrated made it very plain that he had gone against this God. He had fought against God, and had lost (Acts 5:38-39). Find a hymn book and read the hymn that begins, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent word".

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3:26-30

As a punishment for standing against his express commands the king had ordered these three men to be executed by cremation but there had been miraculous intervention by God. It was the king himself who called on the men to come out from the furnace. He was quite sure they were still alive, and they came out as they had gone in, dressed for the occasion as if they had been going to a celebration (21). It was a perfect deliverance, not a narrow escape. God who was indeed able, had delivered them. The king was mightily impressed by the miraculous event and reacted accordingly with all sorts of promises. Of course we have seen already that Nebuchadnezzar was fickle with his promises and his high and holy thoughts were not likely to last very long. It is a phenomenon we still see, for example, in pressurised evangelism where the thrill and the emotion of the moment causes some people to make all sorts of decisions. But real faith is to be tested and proved in the cold light of ordinary days and circumstances. The king seems to have acknowledged publicly that the God of these young men had countermanded him. He did not react in anger but issued a decree which, at least for a season, gave the people and work of God's kingdom a real protection. There was the usual ferocity in the king's warnings (29), and extreme fluctuations of attitudes, actions and words are never a good sign. There was no indication that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to learn more about God, no indication of a personal repentance about what he had done so ruthlessly, nor any softening of heart. He did what came naturally to him: he promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and this, no doubt, increased the anger and jealousy of those who resented the presence of men of faith in their society. We can be quite sure there was great thanksgiving among the faithful, praying people of God in Babylon. No doubt there were also those Jews who felt that this kind of taking a stand for God so publicly was simply going to make life harder for them. Attitudes and reactions are often a good indication of whether we are going with God or against Him.

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4:1-3

Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon for forty-three years and it was about half way through his reign that the final exile of the Jews took place. By that time Daniel had been in Babylon for eighteen years. That means we must keep in mind, as we read these stories, that a considerable spell of time is involved. It is difficult to pinpoint the dates of specific events, and we know little about the second half of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. We do not know when the madness spoken of in this chapter (4:16) took place or how long the "seven times" lasted, whether it was weeks, months or years. We do not know if the great pronouncement of today's verses came right after the events of the previous chapter or after some years. Clearly the witness of Daniel and his friends, and the signal deliverance of the young men from the fiery furnace, had made an impression on the king, and at first it seemed

to have been a profound impression. He had been in contact with and involved in a manifestation of God's mighty, saving and delivering power. There was no way he could deny the miracle. Nebuchadnezzar spoke with sound words and uttered profound theological truth about God. But not all who speak true religious words are right with God. Jesus made that very plain in Matt. 7:21-23. A careful reading of today's verses reveals a man who was very aware of himself, his position and his importance. He made the signs and wonders of God place him in a very good light, forgetting that most, if not all, of God's dealings with him were in terms of rebuke and humbling. But the king spoke truth that we all need to grasp for our comfort and encouragement. God's kingdom is indeed everlasting, from generation to generation. Nothing can shake, hinder or contradict it. God does indeed cause His will to be done on earth even as it is in Heaven. This is fact, not a pious hope.

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4:4-12

There is an amazing contrast between v.4 and 5. Nebuchadnezzar felt totally secure, at the peak of his power, with no political or economic worries. He was at ease at home, and he was prospering. But life can be very uncertain and he had a dream which made him afraid and caused him great alarm. He still felt himself to be in a position to handle the situation and his decree summoned all his magicians and astrologers. There was no sign of his turning to the great and Most High God whom he had spoken of in v.1-3. His "impressions" of God had not broken him away from his earlier, godless superstitious attitude to life. It seems to have been as a last resort that he called Daniel into his presence. He referred to Daniel by the pagan name he had been given, named after the idol god that really was the basic "faith" of the king. Describing Daniel as a man in whom "the spirit of the holy gods" dwelt makes plain that Nebuchadnezzar had learned very little about the truth of the God of salvation. He had learned some of the religious language and he had been impressed by the character, integrity and capacity of some of the believers in the God of salvation, but that is not the same as coming to faith. This is what happens to some people from a worldly background who start coming to a biblical and evangelical church. They "fit in" and enjoy the experience but, when a crisis comes, their reaction, expressed in words, makes plain they are nowhere near real faith. Their speech betrays them. Read v.9 carefully. If the king had this kind of regard for Daniel, who had interpreted his previous dreams, why was he so long in seeking his spiritual help? Sometimes our true spiritual and moral condition is revealed by the kind of people we go to for help. Many people would rather have a worldly answer to their fears and problems than a Christian and a spiritual answer. If we trust someone's person, integrity and spiritual ministry, why do we not seek their help?

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4:13-18

Read in from v.10 and try to picture the tree Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. It was glorious, expansive, reaching to heaven, seen and admired to the ends of the earth, and it was the source of blessing to the human and animal kingdom alike. We can imagine the king enjoying the start of the dream because he would think it was a symbol of his person and his great empire. Then the dream began to go wrong in a most alarming way. There appeared a watcher, a holy messenger from Heaven, someone who had obviously been scrutinising the whole progress of Babylon's rise to power and the exercise of that power. The thought of God watching can be alarming or very comforting, depending on whether or not we are doing right by God. The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth (2 Chron. 16:9), and at times the Lord comes down to the dark streets of "sin-city" to investigate and to deal with wrong (Gen. 18:20-21). In the dream the heavenly messenger cried aloud, obviously in rebuke, and instigated a process of stripping down the tree. Poor Nebuchadnezzar was seeing what he thought was his fine achievement torn down. The stump of the tree was to be left, indicating that there was hope of a new life to come. Then in v.15 there is reference to a band of iron, and at once it becomes clear that the dream was indicating a person to whom devastating and humiliating things were to happen. The man was going to be bound or shackled by a dreadful breakdown in which he would live and act like a beast. Little wonder the king was terrified. We too are solemnised. But we must remember that the king had often acted like a savage, ravenous, ruthless beast in relation to the people of God and to many others. This man needed to be humbled and, having been deaf to what God had been saying to him, God now had to speak very loudly.

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4:13-18

We must grasp clearly and surely the truth of v.17 in order that we might see the purpose of God in His dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, and that we might be deeply reassured by the truth of God's sovereign power over the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires. The following verse (18) makes plain that the king was somehow deeply persuaded that this vivid and disturbing dream had a message that came from "above", from "heaven", and that it had great significance concerning his person and his future. Now, it is important to be aware that God does speak to us significantly regarding our lives and our careers. Both when we are gathered for worship, sitting under the preaching of God's Word, and also when we are reading our Bibles and praying at home, we must be "tuned in" to God. At the same time we must be very wary of "sudden" messages, impulsive decisions and changes of direction, especially if these changes are radical. There is an enemy who always seeks either to lead us astray or to hold us back from obedience. There is wisdom and safety in doing what the king did. He sought the advice and guidance of a man whose spiritual wisdom and integrity had been proved and demonstrated. Seeking advice and clearer understanding is not a denial of spirituality but rather a confirmation of it. If the advice confirms what we ourselves have been thinking, then that is safety. If the advice runs contrary to what we have been thinking and feeling, so that we think and pray again, that too is safety. To a man very aware of his power and position and achievements the statement in v.17 must have been searching and disturbing, not least the phrase "the lowliest of men". Place, power, prominence and success, as the world measures success, are not necessarily any proof of quality. It is all too easy to become over aware of our personal achievements and we need to remember that, but for the grace of God, things might have been very, very different.

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4:13-18

Following the closing comment of yesterday's note we do well to read the story Jesus told of the man who by his own efforts, had made a great success of his life, as he thought. In Lk. 12:13-21 it is made plain that the man's calculations had been made on a totally false basis. Again, when we begin to think too much about ourselves and our achievements we need to remember that this "self" spirit is like that of Satan himself (Isaiah 14:12-15). We need to be reminded that power, and the administration of it, belong to God and to God alone (Ps. 62:11AV). God not only allows the rise of evil powers, He causes both the rise and the fall of earthly powers and He works His sovereign will in and through the fluctuations of history. Nebuchadnezzar's power held the world in awe and fear but it did not cause God any concern at all. The king had no real permanence, no matter what seemed to be. The dream spoke of the stripping away of his glory, the radical changing of his circumstances, the disintegration of his health and personality, and his total humbling. We sing too lightly at times, "Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show." (Newton). Apart from having our lives hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:1-4) we have nothing that is sure. There is a message in this dream to all who in any way bear rule and authority in the affairs of the world and the church. The mightiest structures built independently of God have no foundation and will collapse like a pack of cards when God sees they have served their purpose, which spiritual purpose people may never be aware of at the beginning or the end. But there is wonderful comfort here for those who look to God in faith and who seek to live their lives to please Him. There is no need to fear worldly power, no matter how vast and evil it seems or operates. God rules, and His will is being done on earth as it is in Heaven. It cannot be otherwise, and both time and eternity will reveal it to be so.

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4:19-27

There are similarities and differences in the two men of our story, Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. In relation to this dream, both men were disturbed and dismayed (5, 19), but not in the same way. Both men had a sense of awe because they knew they were in a situation being dealt with by God. The king was worried in a worldly, carnal, self-interested way, but Daniel was dismayed because he was aware he was God's messenger in a solemn and significant issue. We have emphasised Daniel's godliness, spiritual calibre, trustworthiness and obedience to God but he was still human. It was not easy for him. He did not take spiritual service "in his stride", but knew the sense of weakness and trembling that Paul spoke of in his letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:15-16). Daniel was perplexed for a long time (RSV), for a time (NIV), for one hour (AV). It seems the understanding of the dream did not come immediately and his burden of heart became evident to the

king. Who can ever tell what costly exercise of heart is experienced by those who must speak God's Word, especially when it is a solemn word? Perhaps this is one reason why some ministers evade the sobering elements of the Gospel message and never in fact speak of judgment. But faithfulness to God and to people means we must keep back nothing that is profitable and needful (Acts 20:20, 27). At first the king was confident, to the point of complacency, seemingly having no suspicion of what was being spoken to him by God. This insensitivity to the voice of God is something that can creep in upon us even when, or especially when, we are accustomed to hearing God's word preached, expounded and applied. If we do not respond with the obedience of faith the whole message of the Word begins to register less and less (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:12-15; 4:1-2). The king had taken little real notice of what God had been saying to him in past years. Make sure you are listening to God, and answering.

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4:19-27

In v.19 Daniel's answer to the king was a preparation for bad news. He wished the message applied to the king's enemies, not to the king. The details of description are slightly fewer than in the king's account but v.22 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar had reached the zenith of his power. Controlling the eastern end of the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, sweeping down to the Persian Gulf and round again to Egypt, he was indeed mighty. But the king was reminded that behind the earthly scene there is another, spiritual kingdom whose servants are active to carry out the will of the God whose power is limitless and whose government is perfect in righteousness. This is something we forget. We sing sometimes of the hosts of God that camp round the dwellings of the just, but in practice we often forget and we act as if we alone were active in doing and defending the work of God. Ponder such references as 2 Kings 6:11-17; Zech. 6:1-7; Judges 5:19-20; Heb. 1:13-14; Ps. 34:7; 91:11; Dan. 6:22; 7:9-10. Think of the words of Jesus as He faced the evil crowd who had come to arrest Him in order to kill Him. One of the disciples lashed out in a mixture of fear and love but Jesus pointed out that there was an army of angels close at hand, ready to be commanded (Matt. 26:51-54). It is difficult to be dogmatic about the exact nature of the collapse or disintegration of Nebuchadnezzar, his "breakdown", or about the length of time involved. In v.25 "driven from among people" could indicate that the public would know nothing of the king's apparent insanity and that his strange behaviour would be seen only by those who guarded and looked after him. There was no suggestion of any political "coup" to steal his power. And, since v.26-27 indicate the possibility of recovery and restoration, perhaps we should think of the gracious kindness of God in allowing this dark experience of the discipline of a proud, bad man, to be in private. God humbles, but He does not go in for humiliation.

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4:19-27

One of the astonishing things in the Bible is to see the longsuffering patience of God with the wickedness of sinners, and to ponder the lengths to which God will go to bring the sinner to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). In v.26 it was made plain to the king that there was indeed hope for his future, provided this dream and its message convinced him that Heaven rules. He had to be persuaded about the absolute sovereignty of God and the need to humble himself under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. 5:6). Of course, it is vital for all of us to remember that there is a God with whom we have to deal and to whom we must give account. Daniel's appeal, made in God's name, in v.27 makes plain that what is called for is not simply assent to a sound, biblical statement of doctrine. Faith that is true, that humbles the heart before God, is essentially practical and the king was called on to break off from his sinful way of life and to show righteousness and mercy in all his dealings with people in the future. This was quite a challenge to a man who had been notoriously cruel, self-willed and heartless in his military conquests. But it is a change in the way of life that authenticates a professed conversion. One last thing we must note carefully is in Daniel's words that there may still be prosperity in the future (cf. Amos 5:14-15). We must not *assume* that God will forgive and restore. We must never presume upon God's love and mercy. His forgiveness is astonishing, as Isaiah 1:18 makes plain. That there is forgiveness to those who repent at the last desperate moment after an evil life is clear from the story of the dying thief (Lk. 23:39-43). But there is such a thing as passing "beyond redemption", with the call of mercy so often refused that it is no longer heard. But even within forgiveness there is the possibility of being laid aside as of no further use in God's service (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

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4:28-33

The dream and the explanation of it spoke of very solemn and important things to Nebuchadnezzar but they seem to have made little or no impression. God had spoken very plainly and in a very personal way but the king's reaction seems to have been to regard it all as "just a sermon" from Daniel who, though capable and trustworthy, was obviously "extremely religious". Think just how quickly our thoughts about and our reactions to a sermon can evaporate, so that we go on with life as if God had not spoken to us. The parable of the sower and the seed has clear application here (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23). A whole year went past during which the king's attitude was unchanged. He was totally self-absorbed and self-congratulatory (30). Wherever he looked he saw evidences of his own achievement and magnificence. God was not in all his thoughts (Ps. 10:4 AV). There was no fear of God before his eyes (Ps. 36:1; Rom. 3:18). He was his own man, and had need of no-one, or so he thought. In the very moment of his proud self-confidence he was humbled to the dust. The kingdom of Babylon did not collapse but the king was shown to be, in himself, a pathetic, broken shell of a man. Now, keep in mind what has been emphasised three times in this chapter, in v.17, 25, 32, and will be repeated in 5:21. This is not just an emphasis on the solemn but comforting doctrine of the sovereignty of God but a reminder that all we are and all we have that is of worth, use and permanence comes from God and from God alone. The only things we can really claim as our own are our sins. We have never any grounds for being proud of ourselves or our service. Apart from the grace of God we can do nothing (1 Cor. 4:7; John 15:4,5).

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4:34-37

This is the third time we have an account of Nebuchadnezzar's "spiritual" reaction to disturbing experiences (2:47; 3:28-29). Some commentators see a progress and a deepening in his attitude and regard today's verses as indicating a true spiritual conversion. We really have no means of assessing the reality or otherwise of his apparent profession of faith. Time would tell, but we have no record of the succeeding years of his life. If we look back to 4:1-3 and then link right on to v.34ff. it seems that we have the king's own testimony as to what happened to him and how he reacted. That the king had had a profound religious experience could not be denied. If we ask what caused Nebuchadnezzar to lift up his eyes to heaven we can answer only that it must have been the work of God's Holy Spirit. It seems that even in his deeply disturbed state, when his behaviour was more like that of an animal than a man, there was something of a seeking after the God he had heard about from Daniel. The description of God in v.34-35 should thrill our hearts. It is truth indeed. This is the God who is our rock and refuge and in whose good and strong hand the issues of our lives rest safely. This is a God to trust and to submit to gladly, and if the king had come to that stage then he was blessed indeed. But in v.36 there seems to be a reaffirmation of Nebuchadnezzar's own personal position and pride. All he had lost he had got back on a greater scale. This is what God does, as the story of the Prodigal Son tells (Lk. 15:11-24), and as the prophet Joel promises (Joel 2:24-26), and as the prophet Hosea holds out to the penitent (Hos. 14:1-2, 4-7). The king's words in v.37 are true and well spoken. But it is often the case that even as we rejoice in God's blessing that gives us a new surge of life, we forget the God who has blessed us.

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5:1-4

The scene is set briefly but vividly. Belshazzar, not a blood relative of Nebuchadnezzar in spite of the word "father" in v.2, was possibly acting as "king" because the man who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar was absent due to illness. It seems true that, in his case, power corrupted, and this feast was a display of wealth, power and indulgence. The description we have is of drunkenness, immorality, decadence and blasphemy. In our generation we have had "raves", "love-ins" and a variety of occasions organised and calculated to shock. It was so with Belshazzar, his lords and his companions. The reference to Nebuchadnezzar seems deliberate in the narrative to introduce the contrast between him and this drunken king. Belshazzar knew of the seemingly religious and spiritual end to the previous story and he made a point of showing that he cared nothing for things religious. The presence of people such as Daniel in the kingdom meant that the king knew full well the spiritual principles, scruples and convictions of the Jews. The king knew the stories of the power of God and God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, but he not only shut his eyes to the truth of God, he decided quite deliberately

and publicly to blaspheme the God of Heaven. This is the significance of taking the dedicated vessels plundered from the Temple in Jerusalem and using them in a drunken feast. It is not hard to imagine the kind of songs they sang as they praised their idol gods. Note the decline or degeneration of the gods: from gold down to stone, cf. Rom. 1:21-23. In our own generation we are experiencing the stirrings of this kind of spirit. In radio, television, quality and popular newspapers and magazines, there is an increasingly contemptuous denigration of all things Christian. Islam is not spoken of thus, but Jesus Christ is still despised and rejected. It is a significant sign of the times!

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5:5-9

It is one thing to make ribald mockery of a God you do not believe in but when that God comes right into the situation, confronts you, and acts in a way that gives you the fright of your life, it is a different story. The word “suddenly” is meant to shock. We do not know if some heavenly voice thundered or if it was simply that a “strange” spirit of apprehension took command of the whole party and reduced it to trembling silence. God said, “Enough!” and everyone present, from the brash cowardly king down, became aware they were in the presence of and being confronted by a power they did not understand, could not control, and which terrified them. Every eye was fixed on the hand that was writing on the wall. The drunken babbling was silenced. The faces flushed by drink were blanched white. Fear showed on every face and limbs trembled with apprehension. Now, we must recognise that it is indeed an awesome experience to find yourself suddenly, without warning, and without time to prepare, in the immediate presence of God, especially when God is asking for an explanation as to why you are living your life in a certain way. There is almost a foreshadowing here of the day of judgment when people stand before God and the books are opened (Rev. 20:11, 12). What can sinners say on that day when they know they have refused the Saviour? What will believers say on that day when all must give an account to God (Rom. 14:10-12)? Note finally that the king reacted to crisis in a way that made perfectly plain that he was in fact a God-less man. He looked for deliverance from the world of mere men and from the agents of the occult. Nebuchadnezzar, even if we query the depth of his reaction, did in fact turn to and cry to God.

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5:10-12

It seems quite significant that the queen, whether Belshazzar’s mother or wife, had not been present at the riotous feast. Obviously past events had made an impression on her and she spoke with confidence and assurance about Daniel and about the spirit that dwelt in him. To what extent she had come to real personal faith in Daniel’s God is not clear but she certainly thought of Daniel as a man who knew his God and who had been used by God to deal with significant crises in the life of the royal family. She had obviously taken far more notice of what Daniel had been saying than Belshazzar and the crowd of his drunken, pleasure-loving friends did. The queen spoke with wonderful grace and conviction, “rubbing it in” to the king and his friends that their faces were ashen white. Whether she was aware of it or not, she was in fact God’s instrument to lead this situation into its next stage. Of course, a great part of her composure, assurance and clarity stemmed from the fact that she had not been part of this drunken feast. Had she been part of it she would not have been so clearly aware of the fact that God was speaking. Her detachment, her non-involvement, her declining the invitation (perhaps even the order) to attend, all constituted her testimony. From outside the bad situation she came in with the message of hope to a frightened company. The crowd knew she was not “one of them” and all the people must have been impressed with her assurance. The lesson here is plain. Part of our Christian witness in our own godless, worldly and indulgent generation consists in refusing certain invitations, refusing to be drawn into what may be regarded by many as an acceptable way of life. The plea that “everybody does it”, that “it is accepted nowadays”, and that “Christians must show themselves to be the same as other people” has no validity. Christians are a people separated unto God and their way of life should show this to be so (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)

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5:13-17

After the queen’s intervention Belshazzar seems to have recovered his composure and his address to Daniel has the sound of a pompous man “speaking down” to the preacher who, after all, was not “one of them”. Without

being aware of it, the king made it plain that he had no excuse for his blatant unbelief and his ignoring of God. In v.14 he admitted he had heard of Daniel and of Daniel's ministry in relation to Nebuchadnezzar. The queen's words were not his first knowledge of the man of God. He would, without question, have heard of Nebuchadnezzar's great pronouncement in 4:34-37. Belshazzar was a man who was without excuse for his unbelief, his indulgent way of life, and his contemptuous blasphemy in relation to the vessels of the Jewish Temple. The king showed his total materialistic attitude further in offering great promotion and wealth. All the king's "friends" may have "had their price" but it was not so with Daniel. There is great dignity in Daniel's words in v.17, and they may well have stabbed the king's conscience, making him aware of the kind of man he had become. That there was a sternness in Daniel's attitude and words cannot be denied and we may contrast v.17 with 4:17 where there was a real note of appeal. There was no such appeal in relation to Belshazzar. Perhaps as he spoke to Daniel the king was still suffering the effects of alcohol and the dulling of his senses because of his whole way of life. Sin has a deadening effect and can rob people of all awareness of God. It may well have been that Daniel was already aware that there was no hope for this man. He was already lost in relation to God.

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5:18-28

Daniel rehearsed the background story of Nebuchadnezzar, speaking of his well-known rise to magnificence of power, which had been accomplished with a considerable degree of ruthlessness (19). But, as Daniel pointed out, that rise to power could never have been apart from the sovereign purpose of God (18). Many people find it hard to accept that God is involved in the rise of evil nations and empires, but Scripture is quite clear about this. The powers that be are ordained by God (Rom. 13:1-4 AV). God's ways are past finding out and at times we can discern only the faintest indications of His working (Rom. 11:33; Job 26:14). But Scripture is also clear that all the developments of world power are constantly under the scrutiny and control of God and the time came when Nebuchadnezzar's apparently invincible empire was cast down. He forgot God. His heart became proud. He no longer served God's purpose and he was dealt with (20). In our own generation think how suddenly and unexpectedly the great Berlin Wall collapsed and the vast structure of Communist Russia and Eastern Europe disintegrated. Think of how many had prayed for so long that the evil empire of unbelief might be dealt with. In God's time prayer was answered. Keep in mind that there was a remnant of faith among the Jews in Babylon, even though Daniel and his friends are the only ones whose names we know. In our own lives and Christian service, never forget the hidden company of faithful people who pray for us and go on praying down the years. The basic lesson the king had to learn was stated in v.21 b, as it had been stated to Nebuchadnezzar in 4:17, 25. Three things were then said to Belshazzar, and these we consider tomorrow.

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5:18-28

In the light of all he knew, the king had refused to humble his heart before God. In fact, he had chosen to defy God and to make his rejection of God public in the shameful use of the vessels of the Temple for a drunken feast (22-23). The second charge against the king was that he had used the life that God had given him for his own ends. The words, "The God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified" (AV) present a very deep challenge to every one of us. A children's (?) hymn has these verses:

"Tis Thou preservest me from death
And dangers every hour;
I cannot draw another breath
Unless Thou give me power.

"My health and friends and parents dear
To me by God are given;
I have not any blessing here
But what is sent from heaven.

"Such goodness, Lord, and constant care
A child can ne'er repay;

But may it be my daily prayer
To love Thee and obey." (Taylor)

Jesus said we should become like little children and we do well to be as realistic as that hymn indicates. What are we doing with the lives, capacities and opportunities God has given us? Are we using them for ourselves or for God, to whom our lives rightly belong? We are not our own. We are bought with a price, and it is our bounden duty to glorify God in our bodies not just in our spirits (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Rom. 12:1-2). To present our bodies, to give our lives freely to God, is our spiritual worship, or, as the AV reads, "Our reasonable service." To live to glorify God is not "First Class Honours" in spirituality. It is the least we can do in response to the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20).

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5:18-28

In a variety of circumstances, when we speak of the writing being on the wall we recognise that things have gone beyond the point of remedy. This was the truth about the king and it was the hand of God that wrote the message for all to see. It is a solemn thought. In respect of the story of our lives we need to make sure that we live in relation to God and the Gospel in a way that will not leave us with regrets.

"The Moving Finger writes; and having writ
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a word of it." (Fitzgerald)

The apostle Paul had the same view of the importance of the lives we live when, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he penned 1 Cor. 3:10-15 and 2 Cor. 5:6-10. In v.24-27 we have the third and final words spoken to the degenerate king. Just exactly what the words meant to the king as they appeared we cannot tell, but Daniel gave their meaning without delay. The king's days were numbered: a fact of life that we must all recognise, as Ps. 90:9-12 makes plain. We are not *entitled* to seventy years and God may shorten or extend them as He will. It is sad if our time ends and we have reached only the stage of having good intentions about being serious in the things of God. In respect of his person and life the king had been weighed and found wanting. Whatever he thought about himself, it was God's evaluation that mattered. The final word made plain that the great kingdom he had inherited, with all its privileges and possibilities, and in which and for which he may have expended great effort, was in the process of disintegrating and disappearing. The king would be remembered as a man who accomplished nothing and who, in fact, brought something great down into ruin.

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5:29-31

We need the last thought of yesterday's note to lead us into this final picture in the story of Belshazzar. He had been told that the kingdom was being taken from him, and we do well to ponder the words of Jesus in Matt. 21:43, words spoken to people who were sure they were permanent custodians of God's work and will. Having heard God's sentence upon him the king immediately fulfilled the promise he had made in v.7, even though Daniel had declined the reward in v.17. This may have been a gesture of bravado on the part of the king as if he was trying to impress his colleagues that he did not take this "God business" very seriously. He may have been trying to impress Daniel, suggesting he had repented and would be guided by God's prophet in the future. He may have been asserting himself in that having given his word twice (7, 16) he would keep it. The fact remains that Daniel, who had declined the reward and the office that went with it, now seems to have had to accept it. Certainly in the next chapter Daniel is a leading figure in the political scene of Babylon. We have no grounds for suggesting that Daniel simply changed his mind and grasped at promotion. That would have been a contradiction of his character. It must have been that Daniel discerned the good hand of God, and the sure and sovereign providence of God, setting him in the place and position he needed to be in to be God's servant in days to come. We know Daniel was a man of prayer, and he will certainly have prayed about the changes and developments of his working life. This is something we should all be doing, especially in respect of changes of jobs, where we will buy houses, and when and with whom we should start romantic relationships. To have God's seal right at the beginning and on every development is the source of spiritual peace, joy, hope and

effectiveness. Note with amazement that the last act of the discredited king was to confirm Daniel in the place of God's appointment, ready for the future.

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6:1-5

This chapter brings us to the familiar story of Daniel in the lion's den. In fact, it is the story of Daniel's integrity and his private prayer-life, together with a reminder that faithfulness to God and commitment to service will inevitably lead to spiritual warfare. The whole of the Daniel story makes plain what God can do with a life given over to Him in faith. Keep in mind that in his youth Daniel had learned well from the ministry of Jeremiah, not least the truth of the great faithfulness of God (Lam. 3:22-27). Keep in mind also, as the story will later reveal, that Daniel was a man who, as he grew older, studied ever more eagerly in the Word of God (Dan. 9: 1-3ff). We should not be surprised that this man became an influential figure in the public life of a godless, materialistic nation. Nor should we be surprised when we come to learn of the regular pattern of prayer that was at the heart of his life. Nor again should we be surprised that he met jealousy and bitter opposition that led to malicious planning against him. All who follow Christ and serve Him must take seriously what the Master said: "They persecuted Me, they will persecute you" (John 15:18-20). "You will be hated and ostracised, and in the world you will face tribulation" (John 16:2, 33). "They hated Me without a cause" (John 15:25). Daniel had "got on" in his career and he had proved himself. But his circumstances were not easy and the atmosphere among his senior colleagues was tense. We are in the realm of big business and political activity and the reason for Daniel's significant appointment was that the king should suffer no loss. Daniel was a man who could not be bought or corrupted (4-5). No doubt that meant in government administration over which he supervised there would be no cheating with expense accounts, no private payments for placing contracts, no salting away of money in foreign bank accounts. We can understand why Daniel was resented. He was a thorn in the flesh of worldly men. Daniel's life was in accord with the New Testament pattern (Phil. 1:27-30; 2:14-16; Acts 20:17-19). Make sure people have no grounds for pointing the finger!

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6:1-5

Daniel is a great example to all of us, and his life is both a challenge and a rebuke. Darius the king, who suffered from vanity and who was in many ways a shallow character like his predecessors, recognised that there was a spirit of significant quality about Daniel (3). He saw that there was something about Daniel that was not evident in his other advisers. He may not have seen that this stemmed from Daniel's spiritual commitment to God but he saw that this man was indeed different from others. There was an inescapable testimony about Daniel, who was a man who spoke spiritual truth in God's name *at the right times*. Daniel's critics, who were godless and unprincipled men, saw very clearly that the whole of his life was based on and stemmed from his faith in and his commitment to his God (5). Keep in mind that Daniel was no longer a young man. Some commentators suggest he was anything from 65 to over 80 years of age at this time. It may have been that the other "executives" were much younger men who were impatient with and resentful of the old man who was such a curb on their inclinations and ambitions. Our story began with the youthful Daniel, full of enthusiasm. He dared to take a stand and dared to make it known. There is a kind of youthful Christian enthusiasm that does not last, but the "real thing" stays the course and in old age still stands firm and is as vital and lively as in earlier days, and far more deeply committed and assured. Those who wait on the Lord do renew their strength and their youth (Isa.40:28-31). Too many contract out of spiritual service too soon. Read Ps. 92:12-15 and remember that youth needs the example, inspiration and encouragement of age. Of course, as we grow older we need to be able to speak as Samuel did (1 Sam. 12:1-5) and as Jesus did (John 8:46). We should have nothing to hide.

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6:6-10

Darius and Daniel are shown in total contrast. The king knew the quality and integrity of Daniel and trusted him completely. But when the deputation of the presidents came with their manifest flattery he reacted in total stupidity. He may have felt fear at the possibility of a coup to topple him from the throne. Perhaps he was the kind of man who, to take the easy way out of a situation, would say and agree to anything. It may be that he

thought nothing much would result from this public honouring of his kingly person and he certainly never expected this to recoil on Daniel. Perhaps the silly man just did not think at all. There are many like him, who speak and act on the impulse of the moment and then begin to think when it is too late. Note carefully that Daniel, the man trusted and to whom the king owed so much over a long spell of time, was never consulted. How stupid some people can be. They either never ask advice or they ask the wrong people. When Daniel knew the document had been signed he knew exactly what to do. It is here that we see the spiritual calibre of the man. His life was in immediate danger but he had no need to make any adjustment to his way of life, or to his devotional life, or to his walk with God. Read v.10 and see that Daniel acted quite deliberately. He had served the Lord through thick and thin all the years of his life and he had no intention of denying Him now. When Daniel heard, there was no panic. He did not ask, "Why should this happen to me after all my years of faithfulness to God?" He did not go to remonstrate with the king. He went, as he always did, to His God. He worshipped and gave thanks and he prayed. In his old age he was about to have the privilege of suffering for the sake of the name of his God (Acts 5:40-41).

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6:6-10

Prayer is such a fundamental part of Christian life and service that we must stay with these verses. Some seem to regard prayer as something weak or at least as "not doing anything" in the service of the Gospel. Nothing could be further from the truth. The words "As he had done previously" signify the basic pattern of Daniel's life right from the time he was a teenager (1:8-9; 2:17-18). The pattern was set then for private prayer at the heart of his life, and we cannot imagine there being any gathering for corporate prayer without Daniel wanting to be there. Right through the New Testament there is the call to consistent and continuing prayer, not least in the great spiritual warfare passage in Eph. 6:10-20. Two examples from the early church are instructive. Read Acts 12:1-5 and 16:11-13. In answer to crisis and in a new move of evangelism into pagan territory, the gathering for prayer was the key factor. All who read these notes, especially teenagers and young people, but including all ages, should consider to what extent they can be counted on to be part of the prayer life of their home congregation. It has always amazed me that the questionnaires sent out by missionary societies and other organisations when recruiting new people do not seem to enquire if the candidate is part of the prayer life of the congregation. It seems to be a fact of experience that in the many prayer meetings that have emerged in the life of the church in the past forty years, the average age of those who can be depended on to be there is getting high. Will prayer meetings disappear simply because the faithful are growing old? Some must be found to stand in the gap for the nation and for the work of the Kingdom (Ezekiel 22:30). God still says, "Who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8).

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6:11-15

Evil men are usually very dedicated to their work and so it was here. The ruthlessness of evil is clear. The deliberate planning of evil is clear. These evil men made sure they went in a group to spy on Daniel so that as a group they could make their protest to the king. Their hatred of and objection to Daniel may not have been in respect of his religion, but rather in relation to his unimpeachable integrity which stood in the way of their advancement politically and financially. It may well have been that these men saw in the situation the possibility of deposing the king and taking over the government of the nation. In v.13 we have the usual stirring of anti-semitic prejudice. Just how long this whole scheme took to formulate, to bring into action, and to bring about the formal accusation against Daniel we cannot say. Whether it was slow or swift, the king was obviously lulled into a false sense of security and, when the officials came with their dossier of evidence to prove that Daniel, this well known public figure, had deliberately and consistently disobeyed the king's edict, Darius was shattered. He never intended this kind of result when he signed the edict. But at the critical time he had not thought through the consequences of his action but had simply succumbed to the flattery of his officials. Darius used all his political and legal skills as well as his kingly power to find a way out of his predicament that would not cause public unrest. Like many a politician he had to try to keep his "seat". But he failed, because his and Daniel's enemies knew the law and forced the king's hand. The lesson we have to learn concerns the subtle and persistent operation of evil people and of the evil spirit behind them. We do well to remember that in Christian life and service we are indeed in the midst of foes. The Devil watches and waits for his next opportunity (Lk.

4:13) and he also watches to see which individual he can conquer (1 Pet. 5:6-9), so that by that person he can attack God's work.

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6:16-18

When our pride has made us say and do stupid things, and when the wellbeing of God's people and God's work has been put in peril, it is not a bad thing that our sleep-pattern is disturbed. Of course, at the same time we must remember that the Devil is an expert at stealing the peace of faithful believers, keeping them awake night after night with thoughts racing and getting nowhere because there is in fact nothing that can be done. In that kind of situation we must simply commit the matter to God and leave it. When there is something wrong that needs to be put right and which can be put right, then God by the Holy Spirit convinces and persuades, but He does not torment. It is the Accuser who torments; and his activity must be discerned, resisted and refused. The king carried out formally the sentence of the decree, and, with words that were amazingly gracious, had Daniel cast into the den of lions. The sealing of the den meant that no-one could interfere, and there is an echo here of the story of the sealing of the tomb after Jesus was buried (Matt. 27:62-66). If Daniel's God were to act in deliverance it would be manifest to all that it was God's doing and there would be a publicly known testimony to the God who saves His people. The king went to his room and wanted to be left alone. We would like to think that in the night hours he pondered what he had been taught about Daniel's God and also that he expressed, in whatever way he knew, his repentance regarding his foolish yielding to the flattery of his civil servants. We cannot be sure about this, but it is significant, as we read tomorrow, that at daybreak he was on his way to the den of lions. It must have been a disturbing thing for the king to spend a whole night thinking that he had been guilty of fighting against the living God. We need to be very careful what we do, especially when we are acting on impulse or in prejudice (Acts 5:33-39).

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6:19-24

Keep in mind the atmosphere of evil and the natural apprehension Daniel must have had as he waited to be arrested, sentenced and cast among the lions. He knew the hideous suffering and death that awaited him. There is no indication that he had assurance from God that all would be well, but he left himself in God's hand. If this was the way he had to go, if his work on earth was over, then let it be so. Let God's will be done. We must see very clearly that Daniel was not spared the lions' den but was delivered in it and from it. Paul gives a similar testimony in 2 Timothy 3:10-11. Then Paul recognised that his time had finally come and he accepted it from God (2 Tim. 4:6-9). Daniel was now an old man but he still had work to do and he was still, spiritually speaking, ready to be used. We should note the development of the king's grasp of the reality of Daniel's faith. In v.16 he expressed the hope that Daniel's God might deliver him. In the morning, greatly distressed, he went to what he assumed was Daniel's grave, and spoke words of question and appeal to Daniel. Did he really expect Daniel to be still alive? It is a fascinating story. Unbelief is always baffled by the activity of God. Daniel spoke in a clear, unruffled voice. He seemed to have had a good night's sleep. His testimony needed very few words. He declared his personal faith in the words, "My God", and simply related the facts. God had shut the mouths of the lions and Daniel had been quite safe. Then rightly Daniel testified that he had done no wrong against God or the king. Daniel was set free, and the basic comment made was simply that he had trusted his God. Of course, the mouths of lions, especially human lions, and sometimes Christian lions, are not always shut. Sometimes God's saints are torn to pieces by evil words and actions. Paul's words in Phil. 1:19-26 are a good ending to this study.

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6:25-28

We should have noted at the end of yesterday's passage just how swiftly and totally evil men were brought to judgment. Why evil was allowed to go so far we cannot tell. Was there no other way for the king to be influenced spiritually and for Daniel's security and continuance for future service to be secured (28)? We must learn not to fear evil, nor to be unsettled by it, even when it seems evil is triumphing. At the Cross it seemed even to the disciples that evil had won the day, but they were wrong. When the Jerusalem church was persecuted at the time of Pentecostal revival, it seemed the Devil had succeeded in spoiling a great work of

God. But it was not so. By the persecution, the fire of revival burning so brightly in Jerusalem was scattered far and wide to start many other revivals. Evil must always serve the will of God and the Devil rages in activity because he knows his time is short (Rev. 12:7-12). When evil has served its purpose its end is swift (Ps. 2:1-6; 2 Thess. 2:1-8). There is a solemn warning from God in 1 Chron. 16:22 when He says, “Touch not the Lord’s anointed, and do my prophets no harm.” All sorts of people may quote that warning as they defend their own persons and actions, but the Lord knows them that are His (2 Tim. 2:19). We may feel that the judgment on the evil men and their families was very grim but when we have truly faced the fangs and fury of evil we begin to understand. With sober joy we must see in this story how the deliberate, planned actions of evil men having been allowed a frightening measure of success led to the situation in which the dynamic core of evil was exposed and judged. Daniel was set free to minister without hindrance for the instruction and preparation of God’s people, as the time for their liberation and return to Jerusalem drew near. The end of the chapter points right on to the time when Cyrus of Persia was to be God’s anointed servant to set God’s people free (Isaiah 45:1-6).

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6:25-28

Some commentators speak of the deliverance from the sealed den of lions as Daniel’s resurrection from the dead. Apparently the den of lions was the common means of execution of criminals just as crucifixion was the method of the Romans in Jesus’ day. If we follow this line of thinking, then Darius had experience of the God who raises the dead and that led to his gloriously theological statement in today’s verses. To what extent this was a truly personal statement of faith and to what extent this changed and directed the life of Darius we cannot tell. But we can rejoice in the truth of the king’s words, which are very similar to those of Nebuchadnezzar in 4:34-35. There was no such public statement from Belshazzar at the end of chapter 5. It is instructive to consider the varied reactions and responses made by those who are exposed to the Word of God and influenced by the mighty works of God. People can be impressed and even thrilled, without necessarily coming to faith. It is suggested by some that Daniel himself had quite a lot to do with the wording of the king’s decree and if so, then we have a statement of the doctrinal basis on which Daniel grounded his life of faith and service. He would certainly think of himself as alive from the dead and kept by the power of God through faith. It is all very New Testament in its emphasis (1 Pet. 1:3-7). To be persuaded that God is indeed the living God, active in the affairs of the world, is a great inspiration and encouragement in the business of Christian life and service in an evil world. The NIV in a footnote identifies Darius with Cyrus and if that is so, then we may begin to see indications of why Cyrus was sympathetic to the God of the Jews. God does indeed work in wonderful ways. It is such a pity that we are often so slow to notice that He is there.

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7:1-14

We come now, with a degree of apprehension, to the very difficult section of the Book of Daniel. In chapters 1-6 we have read historical narrative, the story of what was going on in a certain geographical area of the Middle East with the Jews, God’s particularly chosen people, in exile and disgrace in the land of Babylon. We have seen in Daniel and his friends the life of faith in the context of, and over against, the godless materialism and idolatry of the nation. In a variety of ways we have been taught the lesson that it is God and God alone who rules in the kingdoms of the world. All this has been spoken of in the early chapters in easily recognisable terms but now, by way of very colourful and disturbing visions, we are shown that behind the developments of the earthly situation there is in fact a mighty spiritual conflict being worked out. We have to see behind, and working through, evil men and empires the dark powers of the Devil, and at the same time we must be totally assured that it is God and God alone who rules, directs and determines on the spiritual dimension. The issues are never in doubt. The gates of hell cannot and will not prevail (Matt. 16:18 AV). But we must always be clear that our basic battle is not with flesh and blood, our own or that of others, but against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:10ff). It will help us if we recognise that in Christian life and service we are in fact engaged in a conflict which is accurately described as “Kingdom against Kingdom”. This is expressed with vivid simplicity in 1 John 5:19, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one”. In the first half of Daniel we could easily recognise kingdoms with powerful kings and politicians, but now we are shown pictures of beasts and this may indicate we are to think of the ferocity and

depravity that lie behind human activity. Now, lest we feel discouraged at the thought of such difficult studies, read v.13-14 and recognise that the sovereign, powerful and glorious One who stood with the young men in the furnace and with Daniel in the lions' den is in the midst of all we now read.

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7:1-14

This vision was given to Daniel in the first year of Belshazzar. That means he saw all of this, and was alarmed by it (15) before the incident of the “writing on the wall”. What Daniel was given to see was a moving, not a static, picture which portrayed a developing situation. The dream and visions were given him by God. He was not hallucinating, and he wrote down the account of what he had seen. As we study, keep in mind the terms and images used in science fiction novels and in films, to indicate that there is more to life than just the material things around us. Daniel would have been very aware of the evil possibilities of Belshazzar's reign and now he was compelled to look beyond the nation and his own generation. He saw the great sea, greater than the Mediterranean Sea which awed people by its stretching into the far distance. Daniel was being made to look out on the sea of the wide world of nations and became aware that it was the winds of Heaven, powerful and strong, that were stirring the waters. As a result of the activity of Heaven (remember that the most high God rules in the kingdoms of men) four great beasts emerged from the sea of human activity. They had been there all along and it was God's activity that drew them into the open. Think of how the presence of Jesus drew the demons out into open activity! The first three beasts, although grotesque, clearly resembled recognisable animals, but the fourth beast was beyond recognition and was terrible in its cruelty. That these “monsters” represent emerging and succeeding world empires is generally agreed but when it comes to identifying them there is argument, and sometimes very fanciful and dogmatic interpretations. Those who want to go into detail should consult commentaries and do so with care lest they get totally confused. The beasts which represent successive empires emerged by the stirring of Heaven and their orders were given to them. Their power was not their own. These are the facts we must grasp for our comfort and encouragement.

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7:1-14

There are things which are and always will be beyond our understanding and this calls us to live by faith. As time passes, and as we are able to handle it, fuller truth may be revealed to us (John 14:26; 16:4, 13) but at times it is best that we should not know too much (Acts 1:7). Daniel was fascinated and puzzled by the grim beast with ten horns and then there appeared a little horn which swiftly disposed of three of the ten horns. This little horn was “human” with eyes and with a mouth speaking great things. We will read more of this little horn in v.24-25. But here in the vision, scarcely having had time to think of the meaning of the beasts and horns, but no doubt having been disturbed by the sense of power and evil, Daniel began to see thrones being set (9). He saw the “Ancient of Days, pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise” (Hymn, O worship the king). The scene is one of brightness, power, glory and there is a sense of assurance, even peace compared with the surging of evil powers seen earlier. Daniel may have been aware that he was seeing what he had in fact spoken of and described in the doxology which he may have written for Darius (6:26), and for Nebuchadnezzar (4:34). This was not something new, it had simply been brought into sharp focus for Daniel to see. This is something we need to remember, a fact of life that becomes the source of great assurance: the executive throne of God. This is a reminder we need again and again lest we ever think we are alone, or that we are in charge of things in the face of spiritual conflict.

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7:1-14

We are being taught to look to and to live by the things that are unseen and eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). Daniel saw the throne of God. Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up (Isa. 6:1). Jeremiah saw the Lord watching over His Word (Jer. 1:12). Ezekiel also saw the throne and the dynamic power of wheels within wheels (Ezek. 1:15-17, 26). In Revelation, John saw the One who opens and shuts doors and also saw the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 7:9-12). With his eyes focused on the Throne, Daniel heard the boasting words of the small but mighty horn, and saw in a moment the beast destroyed and the other beasts losing their kingdoms, although allowed to live on. The picture again developed (the camera angle changes) and Daniel saw one like a

son of man, truly human, presented to the Ancient of Days and being invested with a glory and a kingdom so that all peoples should bow to him. Whatever this meant to Daniel it must have signified the victory of God over all evil. For us, when we read of evil being overthrown and of a Son of Man taking His place in the presence of God and being given a name to which all must bow, we cannot but think of the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, His resurrection and exaltation, and His receiving the name above every name (Phil. 2:5-11). In our modern day we would expect there to be a video of this “ film”, vision, or visual aid and we would play it over and over so that we might grasp more and more clearly what we were seeing and so be able to understand it better. The pictures would alarm us as to the reality and power of evil, and would then comfort us with the awareness that evil is as nothing in the hand and in the presence of God. It is this impression rather than detailed interpretation we should be left with.

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7:15-22

It is comforting to know that Daniel was both disturbed and bewildered by the vision (15,28), but he asked questions and continued to ponder the vision and to seek what God was saying to him through it. When we struggle with these difficult chapters we too must look for God’s message to us in our generation and our circumstances. Daniel was told that the four beasts represented four kings or kingdoms emerging out of the human situation. Presumably four successive kingdoms are meant and we who have seen the rise and fall of the Nazi and Communist empires should be able to understand this. We do well to wonder just what kind of mighty and sinister kingdom may yet emerge in our own lifetime. That Islam is an increasingly powerful and influential factor in world history cannot be ignored. Neither can we ignore the tendency in our age for everything to have a world-dimension: world bank, world trade, world population concerns, world weather patterns, world travel. The kingdom of “ the world” is a factor which Christians ignore at their peril because we are told plainly that the whole world order is in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). The atmosphere and attitudes of the world are contrary to, not encouraging of, true Christian faith and discipleship (1 John 2:15-17). Jesus was speaking of the “ world” when He made plain that we cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24 AV). Daniel seems to have been reasonably satisfied with the explanation of the first three beasts but was still troubled by the identity of the fourth terrible beast. Before he could ask about this He was told in v.18 that the saints of the Most High would receive and possess the kingdom for ever. Already it had been stated that the Son of Man was to receive power to rule the kingdom (13-14). It is not clear if Daniel grasped the truth that God’s believing people are in a very real way related to and involved in the great triumph of the Son of Man. When we pray, “ Thy kingdom come,” do we realise we are, in Christ, part of that kingdom for ever (Rev. 1:5-6)?

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7:15-22

Daniel’s question about the fourth beast, which was fierce, cruel, powerful and destructive in its activities, seems to indicate that he was more concerned with and impressed by the reality of evil than with the glory and power of the throne of God (13,14). This is a mistake we often make. Evil presses in on us very insistently, seeming to be everywhere and working in an unhindered way. We need to be reminded about God in His sure sovereignty, which is often not obvious and must be grasped by faith. We need to keep in mind the fact indicated in v.2: that it was the “winds of heaven”, that is, the ordered activity of Heaven, that caused all the developments on earth. This does not mean that God is held responsible for all the cruel empires of the world and their activities. But it does mean that none of these empires operates independently of the sovereign control of God, even though we may not be able to discern or understand what God is doing or why He is doing it. Keep in mind that in v.9-10 we were told that the dark powers of the world were coming to their time of judgment. There is such disagreement about the exact identity of the “ horns” , which seem to be developing kingdoms, that we do not seek to give them names. What we must grasp is that among the evil kingdoms there arises another “ horn” , which does not seem to belong with the other ten on the head of the terrible beast. What we may have to see here, and it is a comforting thought, is that there is definite division within the kingdom of evil and, as Jesus said in another context, a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand (Matt.12:25,26). This final “horn” may indicate the emergence of Antichrist, the man of lawlessness spoken of in 2 Thess. 2:1-12, who will be dealt with in a swift, summary way by Christ the Lord. Again, there is a practical lesson for us. If

we are Christ's people in the world, then the powers and persons of evil will make war against us. It is inevitable. But the victory is sure.

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7:23-28

We have here the final elaboration or explanation of the vision of the fourth beast. It has been introduced by the two-fold truth about the saints experiencing warfare and at the same time receiving the kingdom. We could think of that in terms of, "Today the noise of battle, the next the victor's song". But we should also think of the battle and the victory being ours at one and at the same time. After all, we stand *in* the victory of Christ and from there we fight our battles. Again, without trying to identify the particular historical kingdoms, we take note of the nature of the final, evil kingdom, which seems to be different from anything known before (24). It is blasphemous - one of the increasingly evident aspects of society in our generation. There is not only unbelief but an open contempt of all that pertains to God. This evil power not only persecutes, but wears down the dedicated people of God (25); he oppresses God's saints. Look back to v.21 where it says the evil horn prevailed over the saints. There is no doubt that at times we are defeated, and successive blows can and do demoralise to the extent that we can be side-lined in terms of active service. We can even feel that we are "finished" in terms of service and even life, as Paul did and confessed in 2 Cor. 1:8,9. But faith must refuse to allow defeats to win the day. Read the words in Micah 7:8. The third description of the final horn is in terms of his pride causing him to think of himself as "god", and taking on himself to change the times and the laws, a right that belongs to God and to God alone (Dan. 2:21; Acts 1:7). The final note of our passage is to the effect that evil's reign is strictly limited (25b); evil's end in judgment is certain; and the kingdom of God and of His people is for ever. Note very carefully that after this astonishing vision and amazing spiritual experience, Daniel kept it to himself. Among his immediate contemporaries he did not try to gain a reputation for spirituality.

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8:1-4

It is now the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. Two years have passed since the last vision and, no doubt, Daniel had often pondered the significance of all that had been shown to him. The prophet would have been aware of the trends in society and the increasing godlessness of the king's person and influence. He would, as a man of God, have been exercised as to what was happening and what would yet happen. No doubt many of us feel the very same way today. In this situation (and remember Daniel was a man of prayer), God gave a vision. We could be tempted to say, "Why another vision?" After all, even the interpretation of the last vision left many detailed questions and applications unanswered. Why did God not just spell it all out, explaining what everything meant? That would have limited the message of the book of Daniel to his own generation. Daniel would have been "in the know" about what God was doing and was about to do, but who would that have benefited? Would the Jews in exile have listened and believed? Would they have been able to take any action by way of response? The fact that God spoke in this way means it was the right and necessary way for Daniel's generation and for succeeding generations to grasp principles, whereby history can be understood and God's people can be prepared to stand firm, to witness and to serve. If we are to cope we must know what to expect. There is an optimism that is sentimental and has no ground in fact. We would like to think that the horrid evils of society will go away, but they do not. In the vision Daniel knew exactly where he was geographically. We are not told if he saw parallels of interpretation between this vision and the former one. The ram that he saw is explained later (20) but here it is seen as a power expanding its regime in every direction. Such a picture arrests the attention at once, and compels everyone to think about it.

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8:5-14

As we go through the chapter we find various kingdoms and empires named but there is no mention of the kingdom of Babylon. It was virtually finished as a world power, as Daniel will eventually make plain. The writing was indeed on the wall for Babylon (5:24-28,30-31). The two horned ram is identified as the kingdom of the Medes and Persians (20), one part of the coalition being bigger than the other. Now we are shown the one horned goat, swift and ferocious, with no one able to withstand its territorial ambitions. It swept across the kingdoms in the way that Hitler's divisions swept across Europe. This goat represented the Greek empire (21).

History records that Alexander the Great, who was king in his early twenties, spread this Greek empire far and wide. It is said that Alexander, at one stage, wept because there were no more nations to conquer. But that empire did not last. In the vision there emerged four horns, four sections, headed up, as history tells, by four generals who took over from Alexander. Then from one of the four conspicuous horns there emerged a little, or insignificant-looking, horn, whom the commentaries identify as Antiochus Epiphanes. He was a man of no great character whose advance was by way of cunning and deceit (25). He extended his power as far as the glorious or beautiful land, Palestine. History speaks of him as the man who thought of himself as a god, who trampled on the Jews (the stars 10). He blasphemed God (the Prince of the host) and stopped the God-appointed worship of the Temple in Jerusalem. In different ways he deliberately and provocatively profaned the Temple. All this happened, as history records, far beyond the time of Daniel. Why then was it all told to Daniel? It was all written down so that later generations of Jews living through these events, and we in our day, might be taught and prepared. We must read the passage again tomorrow to learn further lessons for our encouragement.

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8:5-14

Keep in mind that the identification of the various kingdoms was not given to Daniel until later in the vision. We have anticipated. Even at this stage in the vision Daniel would have known he was “seeing” world powers of evil rampaging and seemingly carrying all before them. The picture of the sanctuary of the Prince of the host being profaned and overthrown by this evil horn that prospered (12) must have shocked the prophet deeply. Then he heard a conversation between two “holy ones” (13) and he was reminded that behind the surging developments of world affairs there is another dimension, another world, another level of power and administration. We also need to be reminded of this when the sheer ferocity of evil presses in on us so much that we actually forget about God. That is something we must never do! In verses 13-14 we must not think that in the heavenly discussion there is any uncertainty. This conversation was for Daniel’s benefit and for ours. The time allowed to evil to manifest its evil and so to make plain the need for its judgment is strictly limited, and then all that belongs to God will be restored. We are not concerned to calculate the time signified by 2,300 days (evenings and mornings), save only to say that God’s timings are always perfect. We have this same emphasis in Rev. 9:13-15. There is nothing uncertain about God’s working. However much the Devil and his agents rage and storm we must always remember that their time is indeed short, even though it may seem long to us. It is from this standpoint of God’s sovereign and absolute control that we must view and seek to understand the movements of history.

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8:15-27

In v.5 Daniel was considering, seeking to think through the significance of what he was being shown. This same emphasis on understanding is found in v.15-16 and the angel Gabriel, who appeared as a man, is instructed by a man’s voice to explain things to the prophet. But who can instruct the angel Gabriel except God Himself? And the voice of God was a human one. This must have had, in some measure, a calming and reassuring effect on Daniel. But at the same time, as the angel drew near, Daniel seems to have been overcome, such was his awareness of being in contact with heavenly messengers and activity. The angel then touched Daniel, and we need to realise that at times gentle and seemly physical contact is useful in order to make people be at peace so that they can listen to and take in what is being said. Being “overcome” is not necessarily a spiritual condition. It seems to have been when the angel referred to “the time of the end” that Daniel felt overwhelmed and quite out of his depth. Think how perplexed and disturbed most of us feel when we are made to think of the end of the world. We are afraid to think just what that will mean. But Daniel was told that the vision was about the end of the “indignation” (v. 19 RSV). The following verses (20-25) put names to the various kingdoms that would succeed one another, and the picture is one of the terrible build up of the operations of evil reaching full measure (23), especially in opposition to godliness (24), and in defiance of the Prince of princes (25). The picture is indeed alarming, but we must grasp the final statement of v.25. It will not be a human hand, but God Himself who will break the power and dominion of evil (Rev. 11:15-18). There is no doubt about the issue. There never is. Power belongs to God and to God alone.

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8:15-27

Daniel may well have been puzzled as to why he was being shown and told all these things when, in fact, most of them would happen long after his life was over (26). Of course, he had a ministry to exercise among the exiled Jews in Babylon who would in turn teach their children and their children's children (Deut. 4:9,10). This is one very important aspect of bringing up our children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord", as we promise when our children are baptised. We fail the younger generation if we do not provide them with the spiritual principles by which they should address themselves to life in a grim world where evil rages. In studying Daniel, we are being taught spiritual understanding and this is very practical, because it concerns confidence in God, in His power, providence and clear purposes which give us the anchor we need for life. There are truths we are being taught which we may not need in our immediate situation but which we need to think through and store up in mind and heart because we will need these truths in days to come. We have this pattern of preparation shown in our Lord's teaching of His disciples in John 14-16. Read John 14: 25-29; 16:1-4. Whatever is being preached, we should be eager to learn, storing up truth to be used in days to come. Daniel was sobered by the revelations given regarding the elemental conflict between evil and the people of God. He was overcome physically, mentally and emotionally and had to stay in bed for some days. There is an indication here of how costly it is for those who are in the front-line of spiritual warfare. Daniel still did not understand, even though he was aware of deep spiritual issues, but after a few days he went back to his normal, secular work in the godless atmosphere of Belshazzar's kingdom. True spirituality does not contract out of real life.

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9:1-2

We have already seen that Daniel was a man of consistent prayer (6:10) and now we see him as a man who made it his business to study God's Word, the books of God's law and those books of the other prophets' ministry already in writing. Part at least of Jeremiah's ministry was in written form in spite of the attempts of evil men to destroy the manuscripts. The Word of God has a great capacity to survive all the attempts made to silence it, and that is a comfort and encouragement in our own generation when so many, in the name of "scholarship" and "intellectual integrity", deny it, and when others, in the interest of their own life-style, suppress and dismiss it (Rom. 1:18). There is a very simple way of understanding Jesus' words about His Word not passing away (Matt. 24:35). We must have confidence in God's Word and approach it from faith rather than from doubt. After all, God watches over His Word to perform it (Jer. 1:12 RSV) and has declared that His Word will accomplish what it is sent to do (Isa. 55:10-11). Think of preaching and witnessing in terms of sending God's good Word on its way to do its work. Of course, we must pray for the on-going work of the Word, as Eph. 6:18-20; Col. 4:2-4; and 2 Thess. 3:1 make plain. Note that Daniel, who had experienced such amazing revelations by way of visions, had not in any way stopped being a Bible student. This needs to be emphasised. Whatever "the Spirit is saying to the church" it will never be different from or independent of the God-breathed Scriptures.

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9:1-2

No-one is quite sure of the identity of this Darius nor of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) his father, who is mentioned also in Ezra 4:6 and Esther 1:1. This is the same Darius as in 5:30-6:3. He took over at the age of sixty-two, when the kingdom of Babylon collapsed. Some people identify him with Cyrus, under whose reign the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:20-23; Ezra 1:1-4). It may be that the age of Darius is given to indicate that his reign was short and soon gave way to that of Cyrus. In 6:28 the two kings are spoken of as either sharing a kingdom or following each other closely. In today's verses we are given a strict point of time. It was in the first year of Darius that Daniel was led to pray the great prayer that we are about to study. This sets Daniel's prayer "habit" recorded in 6:10 in a clear context. It makes us think that the whole incident of the lions' den was indeed a work of Satan to bring intercessory prayer for the nation, and for the future development of God's purposes of salvation, to a premature end. The Devil will go to any lengths to stop individuals praying and to stop churches praying. We are not, and should not be, ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:11), nor of the fact that he operates as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). These facts should make us all pause to consider our weekly programmes and our clear priorities. Studying in the books, Daniel became increasingly aware of the

purposes of God and the promises of God and, as his mind was engaged, his heart burdened and his spirit quickened within him, he began to pray. No doubt he read Jer. 25:8-13; 29:10-14. If we think of the desolations of Jerusalem beginning with the first phase of the captivity when Daniel himself was carried to Babylon (606 BC), then with the death of Belshazzar (539 BC) and the accession of Darius, the seventy years of discipline and exile were nearly over. The dates make plain that Daniel was now at least in his eighties, and he was still a man of prayer.

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9:3-19

It almost seems wrong to divide up and to study in detail the words a godly man poured out in prayer, but there is a great deal of spiritual instruction and encouragement to be grasped. The fact that God's clear purpose had been stated did not make Daniel assume it would just happen. It made him pray, not least praying that God's people would be spiritually awake, eager and ready for the day of God's opportunity (Ps. 110:3 AV). There is a suggestion in Haggai 1:2-3 and Zech. 1:12-13 that there was uncertainty among many as to when exactly the seventy years would come to an end, and uncertainty often leads to sluggishness and a "just wait and see" attitude. Daniel saw no clear signs, politically speaking, of the possibility of a return to Jerusalem and so he turned, or "set his face" to the Lord God. Right through the prayer there is the emphasis on the LORD GOD, the covenant name of God. This is something we need to remember when we pray. God has made promises to His people and, having promised, He is faithful to His promises. Not even the faithlessness of His own people will move Him from His commitment to be their God, the God of their salvation (2 Tim. 2:13). Daniel may well have been studying Jeremiah 25:8-13; 29:10-14 and his spirit was stirred within him. He became deeply aware of God; of God's dealings with His chosen people because of their sinfulness and unfaithfulness; and of the fact that a new, significant and demanding stage of God's dealings was drawing near. As a mature man, with years of spiritual ministry behind him, Daniel was pondering the possibilities for the future and it was this that made him pray the way he did. We believe God has plans for the future. We believe the future is in God's safe and sure hand. But will the older generation carry the work forward or will they die in faith, not having actually shared in the next stage (Heb. 11:13-16)? Have the middle-aged generation learned from the errors of their fathers so that there is a new balance and commitment? Do the younger generation have the spiritual knowledge, commitment and stamina to step into the front line of the work? These were some of the thoughts that must have made Daniel pray.

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9:3-19

Aware that God's future plans were opening up, Daniel was supremely aware that the vital thing was that the people should be right with their God and in fellowship with Him in the obedience of faith. Starting in v.3 we see the deep earnestness of Daniel. Then we see that he knew *his* God in a personal way, and his heart went out to his God, great in faithfulness, awesome in holiness and wonderful in love (4). Basic to the whole issue and explaining the sorry predicament of God's people in their humiliation and lost testimony is the fact that they had sinned. But note particularly that Daniel identified himself with the people to whom he was prophet and intercessor. He numbered himself with the transgressors, as Jesus was to do in later redemption history. Daniel said "we have sinned" not "they have sinned". Note in v.5 the number of words used to describe the nature and extent of the sins of the people. Note especially the emphasis on turning aside and refusing to listen. They had not been a people deprived of true spiritual ministry nor had they been without tokens of God's rich mercy and blessing. But they had been casual. They had sat lightly to the ministry of the prophets. No doubt they had felt that they knew it all and could point back to long years when they, more than any others, had been given godly ministry. But read 2 Chron. 36:15-17. Such was their lack of response that God took away from them all their blessings and removed them physically from all that they valued. In v.7 Daniel confessed that it was both right and necessary for God to judge His people in this way. If He had not done so, the nations would have had grounds for thinking that faith and obedience did not matter. When Daniel used the word "treachery RSV" (unfaithfulness NIV/ trespass AV) in v.7 he was speaking of "double-dealing" with God. That is dishonour to the holy name of God.

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9:3-19

Did Daniel pray on his own, pouring out his heart in intercession, or were others present? If there were others, how did they react to someone praying like this? Would they be as much aware of God as Daniel was? This was no stringing together of religious phrases. This man “prayed in his prayer”, speaking to God from his heart (cf. Jas. 5:17 - literally, “he prayed, praying”). We have similar accounts of private prayer in John 17 and also in our Lord’s praying in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46). In v.7 Daniel referred to God’s righteousness, and this is something we hold to when we are baffled by experience and are not sure what to ask in prayer (Gen. 18:25). In v.8 the shamefaced confusion of God’s people exposed in their failure is the theme. In v.9 it is God’s mercy and forgiveness that is the glorious theme. In v.11 it is made clear that God had warned His people about the consequences of disobedience and the blessings of obedience, so that they were without excuse. That is the theme of chapters such as Leviticus 26, where at v.40 there is recorded God’s gracious promise of forgiveness and in v.44,45 God’s promise that in spite of all, He would remember them. In today’s passage at v.13, there is the recognition that the long years of discipline still had not brought the people to an attitude of penitence and prayer. How true this is to experience! When things go wrong we can linger a long time in self-pity, feeling sorry for ourselves, instead of seeking God’s explanation and, if explanation is not given, then seeking God’s grace to learn and to cope with the future. Remember that this man Daniel had stood firm with God and for God in an alien land where he had been slandered and persecuted for his faithfulness. We do well to listen to him as he prays.

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9:3-19

In v.15 Daniel goes right back to the basic fact of his life and the life of the people. God had redeemed them and saved them out of the bondage of the land of Egypt. Think what the past would have been and what the future might become but for the saving grace of God. Such is our debt that we should be quick to acknowledge that we are not our own but bought with a price and belong by right to God (1 Pet. 1:13-19; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). In v.16ff Daniel’s prayer is grounded in the great name of the God of salvation and he seems to be praying, “O God, what you have done in the past, do again, for your great name’s sake.” Daniel is so aware that the failures of His people have cast a shadow of dishonour on God’s name. There is something deeply touching in this prayer as it reaches its full expression. Sometimes Daniel says, “O our God”, sometimes “O my God” (but not saying these words in the unthinking way many use them in our day). No doubt he was aware that perhaps the majority of the people, settled down in worldly Babylon, had no inclination to pray, and what we have here are the intercessory prayers of the remnant of the faithful. At the end of v.18 there is a clear affirmation of the basis on which we come to God in prayer. It is not in our own righteousness nor in our own name but in the name of the One through whom God’s mercy has been manifested and brought to us. It is in Jesus’ name that we come boldly to God’s throne of grace (Heb. 4:14-16). We may wonder why Daniel, the faithful man of God and the great intercessor, identified himself so closely with the sins of the people and why he seemed to feel the burden, shame and guilt of that sin more than others. The answer is expressed beautifully and accurately in the words of the hymn-writer,

“And they who fain would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.” (Twells)

Living close to God makes you sensitive indeed.

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9:20-23

Daniel never really got the chance to finish his prayer because he was interrupted by the arrival of the angel Gabriel. The interesting detail is added that it was at the time of the evening sacrifice, and this suggests that the pattern of Daniel’s spiritual life had conformed to the pattern of the Temple in Jerusalem even though he had been away from there for seventy years. Some “exiles” from Sandyford abroad tell us that they calculate the time difference so that they can pray along with us at the appointed time on a Saturday evening. This is so different from those in Glasgow who choose not to keep faith with us at the Prayer Meeting. The first thing Daniel was told was that he was greatly loved by God. It is almost as if God wanted to sweep away all mention of sins and sinning, and this is in fact what God does. In Isa. 1:18 God says, “Let us bring our reasoning to a

close. Though your sins be as scarlet they will be white as snow.” We must believe in forgiveness (and if we don’t we will for ever be distracted from praying. We must also believe the love God has for us (1 John 3:1-3; 4:9-10, 16). We must not read too much into the reference to the beginning of Daniel’s prayer, but it does seem that the very moment Daniel began to pray things were set in motion in Heaven. We have something of the same kind of incident in Acts 12:1-17. The whole church was continuing in prayer for the safe release of Peter. Their prayer was answered; Peter was at the door where the prayer meeting was being held, but they were slow to let him in. They did not believe their prayer could be answered so soon. This should not make us casual in prayer. There are times when we do stop too soon. We are being encouraged to pray, and when we pray, we are involved far more deeply than we realise in the outworking of God’s purposes. He spoke truly who said, “ The prayers of the saints are the decrees of God beginning to work.”

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9:24-27

The purpose of Gabriel’s visit was to give Daniel understanding but the prophet may well have reacted, as we may react, with total bafflement. The first reference to seventy weeks or “sevens” would certainly signify to Daniel the ordained length of the Captivity as foretold by Jeremiah. Daniel would also recognise that the seventy years were decreed by God as necessary to finish or restrain the transgression and rebellion of the people, to put an end to the sin of idolatry and to atone or make amends for iniquity. We too can grasp these truths, recognising that God, as a Father, disciplines His children for their immediate and eternal good (Heb. 12:3-11). The reference to sealing up, or bringing to an end, both vision and prophecy may indicate the coming end of this particular means of revelation, as if God was indicating the time coming when His last and final word *would* be spoken in and through His Son (Heb. 1:1-3). The words about everlasting righteousness and the anointing of a most holy place or “ the most holy one” must have indicated to Daniel something beyond even the restoration of the Jews to their own land and the rebuilding of the Temple. Some commentators list six things to be done which are spoken of in v.24, the first three negative and the other three positive. Keep in mind that this revelation was being given to Daniel in answer to his earnest prayer for the forgiveness, deliverance and restoration of his people, as God had promised. But the language used by Gabriel and the categories mentioned must have caused Daniel to sense that beyond the immediate answer to his prayer there was a fulfilment or several fulfilments which at present he could only grasp tentatively. In trying to understand prophecy we should think of viewing successive ranges of mountains with valleys between whose dimensions we cannot measure, but with significant peaks that draw attention. In v.25 there is reference to an anointed prince who was to come. That leads into tomorrow’s study.

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9:24-27

From our perspective, with the truth of the New Testament in our possession, the reference to an anointed prince to come makes us think at once of the coming of the Saviour. Daniel would, of course, know the prophecy in Isaiah 9:6-7, and also the promises running through the Old Testament of the Messiah Saviour promised by God. It seems best to think of the language of v.24, especially the phrase “ to put an end to sin” , as pointing to a time far beyond the return of the Jews from exile, when the Saviour would come. But there is the phrase “ to bring in everlasting righteousness” , which seems to point even further forward: to the coming again in glory of the Saviour at the end or fulfilment of history. The mathematical calculations of v.25-27 have given rise to a variety of interpretations in the attempt to identify dates, to give names to various leaders in history, and to see in these mysterious numbers a prediction or calculation of the exact date of the crucifixion. Of course all calculations of time are governed by the starting point and, while the reference to the going forth of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (25) seems to many to refer to the edict of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1), others would either calculate from the time when God spoke the word in Jer. 29:10 or the time in Daniel 9:23. The argument about details is so extensive, and often confusing, that perhaps we are meant to take the figures symbolically rather than literally. We have seventy sevens, and seven is often regarded as the perfect number. When Peter was told to forgive seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21-22) no one suggests that a literal four hundred and times should be counted. Completeness or perfection is indicated and that is what we must see in Gabriel’s explanation of the future course of history. In spite of the turbulence of history, in and through the various stages and fluctuations, the *perfect* purposes of God will be *perfectly* fulfilled at the *perfect* times and seasons, which are in God’s

knowledge and power, and in His alone (Acts 1:7; Mark 13:32). Daniel did not have many years of life left and what he was being told refers to the next generation, and the next, down to our generation and beyond. Terrible things happened to the rebuilt Jerusalem. Terrible things have happened to the church of Jesus Christ down through its history. But God is working out His purposes with sovereign sureness. We are involved in that working, and we believe, even when we can neither see nor understand.

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10:1-4

We are given a clear date in v.1. Two years have passed since Cyrus issued the decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-5). The passage in Ezra spoke of those whose hearts were stirred by God, but now we realise that Daniel was still in Babylon. Was he too old (over 80) to take part in the strenuous return? Was he such a vital part of the secular administration that Cyrus refused to allow him to go? Had Daniel been kept back by God to be a continuing influence for good among the Jews who remained in Babylon? At first, few were keen to take part in the initial stages of the return and rebuilding? Then as now there was a reluctance to rise to spiritual opportunity. Perhaps Daniel's main, significant work was behind the scenes in prayer. The time of year was that of the Passover (4) when the Jews recalled with thanksgiving their deliverance from Egypt, and the new beginning God had given them. The return from Babylon had been a similar new beginning. God had done great things for His people and they could scarcely believe their good fortune (Ps. 126:1-3). That was the thrill of those who returned to Jerusalem. But the new work met great difficulties, discouragements and oppositions, as the stories in Ezra and Nehemiah record (Ezra 3:12: 4:4-5). In fact, the work on the Temple was brought to a standstill (Ezra 4:24). It is not surprising that Daniel was burdened and distressed and earnest in prayer for the people and work of God. When the church is in a bad way, as it is in our own land, it is much easier to criticise, to complain and to contract out than it is to take up the work of prayer. Of course, prayer takes discipline. It calls for self-denial, as we see here in Daniel. And it calls for a clear setting of priorities. We never simply *find* time for prayer. We must *make* time. The revelation or message given to Daniel was true. He understood it, and it meant great conflict for him. The message concerned a great war. That it was spiritual warfare is beyond doubt and it is not hard to understand the conflict Daniel was aware of. As we go through the chapter we will see the picture more clearly: Daniel praying; God answering; and the Devil opposing. We will no doubt refer more than once to the fact of spiritual warfare and we do well to be familiar with Eph. 6:10-20. The battle is not with mere flesh and blood. It is with spiritual powers and persons.

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10:1-4

We must think again about Daniel himself. Right through the story we have been shown him, from teenage years to old age, to be a man of prayer. We have seen him also as a man to whom God could speak and did speak. He was a man God could trust to handle holy things. The fact that his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, is used here may indicate that in many areas of society Daniel was regarded simply as a high-ranking, trusted civil servant, a politician whose word could be trusted. Daniel may not have been recognised, even by his fellow Jews, as the significant man of God for his generation. It seems from v.1 that Daniel was instantly aware that he was being spoken to by God and that the message was not simply for his own personal good. Already Daniel may have had news back from Jerusalem about the difficulties of the new work that had been begun. He may well have been recalling from the Scriptures, which he studied so well, the long saga of complications, distractions, dangers and discontent in the years immediately following the Exodus. Think how often it is recorded that the children of Israel "murmured", criticised bitterly their human leaders, and dragged their feet instead of going forward eagerly with God. It is not hard to imagine Daniel feeling concerned and burdened for this new phase of the work. Would it prove abortive? Would attacks from enemies hinder and even stop the work? Would the early promise be fulfilled? Where was the work of God going? We do well to ask the same questions in our own generation, when we have seen and known so much significant blessing. Are there signs of well-founded advance or are there causes for concern? Daniel's concerns led him again to prayer. In v.2-3 we are told of self denial, the laying aside of anything resembling luxury or diversion. The safety and progress of the work of God and the people of God were paramount.

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10:5-9

What a vision this was! Daniel saw a man, so very different from the strange and wonderful creatures he had seen in other visions. The man is not identified but is described in the most magnificent terms. We have similar “men” described in Ezek. 1:22-28 and Rev. 1:9-19. It is difficult to say categorically what passed through Daniel’s mind because he was overpowered by what he saw and heard. Did he identify this glorious being with the one who stood with the young men in the fiery furnace (3:25, 28)? Daniel would know the many stories in the Scriptures he loved to study about God’s angels sent to guard and guide. He would possibly know Isaiah’s comforting words about the Angel of God’s Presence (Isa. 63:9). To what extent do *we* believe in unfallen spiritual beings sent from Heaven to minister to us who are the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:7, 14)? If this was indeed the time of the Passover and of God’s mighty working for the salvation of His people, would not Daniel think of the Angel of God who went before the people and stood guard over them (Ex. 14:19-20)? It is interesting that, though Daniel’s companions did not see the man, they were so aware of something heavenly or other-worldly being near that their one desire was to get as far away as possible. That says a great deal about the spiritual condition of the men. Then Daniel himself was awed, his legs grew weak. Perhaps it is only those who are truly saintly who feel the awesomeness of being in the presence of the Holy One. Isaiah was devastated at first when he saw the Lord (Isa. 6:1-5). When the heavenly messenger spoke to Daniel, his voice was like the sound of a multitude (6). Who can tell what that sound was? In Rev. 1:15 the voice was like the sound of many waters, and that could signify the thunder of a Niagara, the patter of refreshing raindrops, and the sweet sound of water over stones in a clear stream. Daniel was overcome, no doubt feeling himself in the presence of the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity (Isa. 57:15 RSV). We must not read too much spiritual significance into his fainting nor should we make this a pattern to be followed.

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10:10-14

Before Daniel could be the instrument of God to receive an important message, he had to be restored, not just to full consciousness but to full human dignity. The Lord does not want to have fellowship with us while we are crumpled and confused, on our hands and knees. He gives us far more dignity than we would give ourselves. The human kindness of God is shown in the fact that His hand was laid on Daniel, possibly drawing him to his feet. Daniel, mighty man of God though he was, needed this human touch and the human words that went with it. Think of what it meant to the lepers in the Gospel stories when Jesus actually touched them (Matt. 8:1-3). It made them feel human again and gave them some self-worth that had been denied them so long. Jesus said those who had seen Him had seen God the Father (John 14:8, 9). The first thing said to this aged saint was that God had a great love for him. This is something we forget and we need to be reminded of it again and again. After all, God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8). We need to believe the love God has for us (1 John 4:16 RSV), love whose length, breadth, depth and height simply passes knowledge (Eph. 3:18, 19). The next thing said to Daniel was the counsel repeated again and again right through the Bible: “Fear not”. We need to remember that Jesus’ words “Let not your heart be troubled,” (John 14:1) are really an order, not just advice. We are told in Col. 3:15 to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. We are told of the peace of God standing guard over heart and mind (Phil. 4:4-7) and we need to remember that, whatever form they may take and however threatening they may seem, “The waves and winds still know His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.” (Hymn - e still my soul).

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10:10-14

There are profound and encouraging things about prayer that need to be grasped in these verses. Daniel had obviously been burdened and perplexed about the seeming delay in answers to his prayers. But at least he had been expecting answers, and we do not always have this clear expectation when we pray. Indeed we are often surprised when the answers come. Daniel was told that his earnest prayers had been heard the very moment he uttered them and, as a direct consequence, this heavenly messenger had been sent to speak to him. Of course there had been delay. Time had gone past. There may have been no news of developments in Jerusalem, and lack of vital news about God’s work can be deeply disturbing. Paul knew this kind of thing and confessed that it had distracted him from his ministry (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5). We must grasp the fact that God has promised that

His ear will be attentive to our cry (Neh. 1:6, 11), that our prayers will be answered and our land healed (2 Chron. 7:12-15). But God may not act in the way or at the time we expect. His ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8, 9). Daniel had to be told that behind the scenes of human history there was being waged a spiritual war against forces that withstood the people and purposes of God. In our first note on this chapter we referred to Eph. 6:10ff and we do well to go back to these verses again and again. We need to be told exactly what Daniel was told: that when we pray we are in fact involved in the elemental battle between good and evil. People sometimes say it is difficult to pray in a prayer meeting. Of course it is. Do we expect the Devil to give up easily? The enemy must get the impression at times that we are not really in earnest. Does Heaven regard us, and count on us, as men and women of prayer? O for a praying church to pray for the nation!

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10:10-14

We must not read too much into the story but it does seem that the heavenly messenger spoke of an intense conflict (not a doubtful one) in which Michael the archangel was called to help. There is reference to Michael in Rev. 12:7-12, a passage that speaks of heavenly victory and yet of the continuing anger and activity of the Devil. It was on the basis of victory won that the heavenly messenger was sent to Daniel to reassure him that his praying was not in vain. But there is perhaps a faint suggestion that the messenger left the field of heavenly battle, that is, he was distracted from it, in order to come and speak to Daniel to ease his burden of anxiety, to confirm to him that his labour was not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58), and to prepare him for the next stage of his service. Daniel's prayers had relevance not only to the immediate situation but to the far distant reaches of God's work as it developed down the ages. There are some things that we are burdened to pray about with great earnestness that we must leave in faith with God. We may not know the significance or the answers to some of our prayers until we get to Heaven. God's ways are indeed past finding out and His purposes are on a far greater dimension than we realise (Rom. 11:33-36). We must pray in faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Time and time again God says, "Trust Me" .

“Teach me to feel that Thou art always nigh;
Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear,
To check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer.”

(Croly)

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10:15-11:1

The whole message of the glorious heavenly being was intended to encourage and strengthen Daniel, and indeed all God's people, for days to come. We are not always told everything that is happening nor are we always told clearly, because our ability to receive and to cope with knowledge may be limited at our present stage (John 16:12). Daniel's immediate reaction to the heavenly messenger was to be totally silent, and that is often a better and more hopeful reaction than precipitate speech. In the Gospels Peter was always ready to speak his spiritual confidence, often wrongly (John 13:36-38), and even when he was right he soon got things wrong again (Matt. 16:13-17, 21-23). Daniel felt totally incapable of proceeding further, being afraid of the significance of what he was being involved in. In this he was reacting just as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Moses had done (Isa. 6:1-5; Jer. 1:4-8; Exod. 3:10-11; 4:10-12). But again there was the human touch of reassurance and enablement and we are reminded of the gentleness of God's heavenly agents. In v.18 we have again the mingling of the spiritual and the human and Daniel was reminded of the fact of God's great love for him (19). Note very carefully that the spirit of v.19 is that of encouragement not challenge. There seems to be an echo here of God's words to Joshua when he stood at the start of a significant life of service (Josh. 1:1-6). Daniel said he was now ready to hear what the angel had come to tell him (19b). He was asked if he had grasped the significance of what had been said in v.12-14. Then the angel made plain to Daniel that there was an area of the spiritual battle that had to be fought by heavenly agents not human ones. Daniel must not think that even in his prayer life he was alone or that the entire battle and burden were his. There are heavenly powers that defend and fight for the people and work of God. It is when we forget this that we tend to panic (2 Kings 6:11-23).

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11:2-4

Persia and Greece, mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, are again the theme and Daniel was being told about the immediate future. It is interesting that the instruction was now by word rather than by vision. Daniel was being taught out of the book of truth, and when the truth is written down you can go over it again and again to increase understanding. This is the whole point of Bible *Study*. On the other hand visions (and it may apply to visual aids) create an impression but, by their very nature, they are temporary. We can easily forget exactly what we saw and the tendency is to try to recall or re-create the vision. But it is God's right to give or not to give the vision. We must not try to produce it. Daniel was being told about history and although it is difficult sometimes to disentangle and grasp the facts of which king came first, who married whom, how kingdoms became united and then separated, we must never agree with the foolish man who said "history is bunk". The flow of history can seem baffling. In the last war Britain and Russia were allies, and then tense enemies for the years of the "cold war" until, so very suddenly, the Berlin wall came down. Even since then the whole of world history seems to have been in a flux of change and uncertainty. But we must not forget God. The powers that be are ordained by God (Rom. 13:1 AV). and it is God who raises up and casts down as we have been told in Daniel 4:17, 25, 32. Daniel may have had little difficulty in grasping the thought of the steady growth of the Persian kingdom, until the fourth king would feel able to challenge Greece. History records that this did in fact happen, and the fourth king spent all his resources on his ambition and then was conquered by Alexander the Great. But Daniel had already been shown that Alexander's empire would disintegrate after his death. Alexander's sons were murdered and the kingdom passed into other hands. After a lifetime of viewing world developments, Daniel may not have been surprised by any of these general trends. But he would now know that even the unexpected was safely under God's control. That is our peace.

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11:5-20

Keep in mind that this baffling passage was given to Daniel when he was already an old man and therefore its meaning, whatever that meaning is, was meant for generations after him. We are told that "there is widespread agreement on the interpretation of this section (11:5-45) among commentators of quite different schools of thought, so closely does this vision coalesce with the following outline of history". (Ferguson) In the IVP New Bible Dictionary a detailed outline of history is given. But it is in looking back over generations of history that we can see, in measure at least, how these mysterious descriptions correspond to actual kings, kingdoms and actions. It is when we read these prophecies and quickly identify figures of our own generation as being the ones described that we get into difficulty. Some years ago people would have seen references to Hitler and Stalin in these prophecies, but they are dead and gone. What then did Daniel and those coming after him make of these prophecies? There is reference to the king of the south (Egypt) and the king of the north (Syria). They seem to be in constant fluctuation, sometimes making peace, sometimes in conflict. The struggle for dominance seems to find a focus in "the beautiful land" (16) and the Jews' own land of Palestine is pictured as conquered. Of course, as chapter 10 has taught us, we must see behind the clash of world kingdoms the basic spiritual battle. The people and work of God are caught up in the chaos of world history and in that context the good and perfect will of God is worked out for the salvation of His people in every generation. It may have been that as these things were being told to Daniel he was responding in his heart saying with relief, assurance and hope, "God knows it all".

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11:5-20

Read these verses again without getting distracted by details. Do they not speak of the fluctuations of history and emphasise a real degree of uncertainty? Kingdoms rise with frightening power but are short lived, being brought down by other equally frightening kingdoms. Are we not being told that history repeats itself, not in exact form but in principle, always the clash of powers and always the emergence and activity of antichrist? Kingdoms rise, led by an individual whose ambition is to rule the world, but the plan is frustrated. Think of all the secular films made portraying this very thing, someone has the genius and power, as he thinks, to rule the world. There is always the fight between the good and evil, and evil seems to have the initiative. But it is not so. The Lord is King. God is on the throne. Ambitious, arrogant evil is being dealt with, always will be dealt with,

and will finally be dealt with and banished forever. Some who study history say that they can see no pattern at all, just a succession of inexplicable and inescapable changes. What a desolating view of life! What a hopeless prospect! We may say this chapter is totally confusing but we would also have to say that what we read in our daily newspapers is equally confusing, with all sorts of hints of the intrusion of evil into society with no one able to do anything about it. But Daniel believed in God and believed God is in control. We do not need to fear.

“Pride of man and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray his trust;
What with care and toil he buildeth,
Tower and temple fall to dust.
But God’s power,
Hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower”.

(Neander)

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11:21-35

As the mysterious “explanation” continued keep in mind that Daniel had been told that the vision was for days to come (10:14), with special reference to the future (latter days AV). We have had references to the latter days and to the time of the end in 2:28 and 8:17 and we must keep in mind that we are being made to look right beyond Daniel’s generation and our own, down through the course of history to its culmination. History, as we know it, has a terminus, a fact expressed in vivid terms in 2 Pet. 3:8-13. A completely new and different order of existence is envisaged in which all that is the fruit and expression of sin and evil will be gone forever (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5). Daniel was told about two kings, north and south, opposing powers, which in their operations would affect the experience of God’s people. Now, when we speak of the last days we need to grasp the significance of Hebrews 1:1-2, where the last days obviously refer to that section of history beginning with the birth of the Saviour. We are now living in the last days and therefore we have to visualise and understand Daniel’s visions as having a message for our day, and for the days leading on to the culmination of history in the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:9-11; Rev. 1:4-7). In Matt. 24:15 Jesus referred to the desolating sacrifice spoken of in Dan. 9:27, and in Luke 21:20 Jerusalem is surrounded by armies. Jesus spoke of the profaning of the Temple referred to in Dan. 11:31 as something yet to come. But history records that in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, who came to the throne in 175 BC by means of intrigue (21,23), the Jewish Temple was profaned. The ferocious activities of this treacherous king took many by surprise, but it is emphasised that his time was limited (24). Eventually when his political ambitions were frustrated he vented his fury against the Jews (28-31). How often history is repeated in persecution of the Jews and the desecrating of their places of worship. It has also happened to churches in the past and who can say it will not happen in the future?

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11:21-35

Whatever stage of history is being spoken of in these difficult verses, we need to take note that v.30b speaks of Jews who forsake God’s covenant and who throw in their lot with the godless, persecuting powers. In Jesus’ day the tax-gatherers were Jews who had consented to work for the Roman government and they were regarded as traitors to God and His people. It is sad when those who have claimed to be, and who have seemed to be, true believers turn their back on the faith they once professed. But it happens, and such people are often the most bitter, cynical critics of all that is evangelical. Daniel was told of such people, seduced by worldly flattery and prospect of advance, who co-operated in the profaning of God’s sanctuary. It is hard to imagine, and it is a great shock when it happens. But, the people who truly know their God stand firm and take action (32). That is, they take their stand for God and for true worship. They are the remnant of faith which God preserves for Himself (1Kings 19:18), for God does not ever leave Himself without a witness (Acts 14:17). The remnant of faith will have a witness and a ministry to others, even though at times it will cost them suffering and death (33). There is a suggestion in v.34 that the witness of the suffering saints so impressed some people that they “helped” the faithful. But worldly help without genuine faith has never helped God’s people and God’s church and it never will. Those who come to the help of the church with their winnings from a lottery will never respect or commit themselves to the faith that calls for discipleship and suffering. In v.35 there is a word of encouragement to all

who are battling and who fall. God is at work, refining and cleansing in the interest of future service. Never forget that tribulation produces patience and forges character (Rom. 5:3-5).

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11:36-45

It would be a bold person who dared to give a clear identification of the historical characters spoken of in this passage. A clue to understanding may be in the words “At the time of the end” (40), and we may be being pointed far beyond the end of Old Testament history, past the time of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, right on to the time of the end of history. The description of the power, ferocity, pride and ambition of the king spoken of in v.36-39 seems to point to someone far more evil than mere man. His self-will drives him on to think of himself as very God. There is reference to a foreign god (39) and this may suggest involvement and alliance with a person and persons whose inspiration is from a deeply evil source. If we compare a similar description in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-9 we may find ourselves thinking of the emergence in world history of the Antichrist. In 1 John 2:18 there is reference to many Antichrists, leading up to a final Antichrist. To try to make a specific identification would be speculation and we must be careful not to assume that Antichrist will necessarily be a manifestly evil character. The New Testament speaks of Satan as an angel of light, and in the Garden of Eden the Tempter (serpent) was a “shining one”, so attractive that his temptation was yielded to very quickly. We are dealing here with evil that is as fascinating as it is powerful, and the reference to fortresses (39) suggests that this evil person is almost a personification of war. At the time of the end (40) we are told of raging conflicts of war that seem to focus on Palestine the Beautiful Land (41). It is all very bewildering, not least the reference to the escape of Edom, Moab and Ammon, ancient enemies of Israel. The clear comforting note is in v.45, where we are told that this Antichrist will meet his final, inglorious end in territory that is holy. Whether this refers to Palestine or to the church of Jesus Christ we cannot tell. Jesus did affirm that the gates of hell would not prevail, and this is our comfort and encouragement when the world is dark with the clash of evil. The end of Antichrist comes with the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:8).

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12:1-4

We come now to the last section of the vision, and the explanation of it, that began in chapter 10. Much of the explanation may well have baffled us but at least we have been taught that world events can be understood and coped with only in terms of the unseen world, where spiritual battles are being fought. To try to interpret the experiences of life without reference to God, the purposes of God and the activity of God is utter folly. The sheer scope of what is spoken of in Daniel is seen in today’s verses in which we are told about the worst troubles history has seen, the deliverance of God’s people, resurrection to life and to judgment, and many being turned to faith. That last emphasis should kindle in us all a desire for the salvation of many and an expectation that God will fulfil what He has promised. As we come near the end of the Book of Daniel we will benefit if we pause to consider four main lessons. We have been made to face up to the reality of evil, human and spiritual evil, in the experience of the world. We have been compelled to recognise the inevitability of conflict, wars and rumours of wars, as Jesus said (Matt. 24:6-8), right to the end of history. We have been encouraged to prepare ourselves for the antagonism and opposition of unbelievers when they are faced with the truth of God, spoken with conviction and backed up with integrity of life, as it certainly was in the case of Daniel. Fourthly, we have been urged to centre our thoughts, faith and hope in God, recognising, rejoicing in, and comforted by His reality, sovereignty, purpose and sure providence. It is God Himself who is our refuge and strength, even when, and especially when, everything is in total upheaval. “When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.” (Mote)

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12:1-4

The imagery of Daniel’s vision has portrayed the powers of the world, secular and spiritual, good and bad, in a vivid and awesome way. It is a comfort to be reminded of the guardian angel appointed by God, Michael by name, to be in charge of God’s people. This is something we forget. We are never on our own, and certainty never in charge of ourselves or our situation. The government is always on the shoulder of one even greater than Michael (Isa. 9:6-7). These verses look ahead to immediate and intermediate history and right on to the end of

time (4) and speak of trouble such as the world has never seen before. God's people do not escape from the ravages of life in a fallen world that is coursing on to judgment, but are delivered out of it or through it (2 Tim. 3:10-11). We are told in Mk.13:19-20 that a strict limit is set upon evil for the sake of God's elect, His chosen people whose names are written in the Book of Life (Rev. 21:27). We must never lose the sense of salvation having been *secured* for us (Heb. 9:12 RSV), and of our being kept by the power of God for that salvation which will be seen in its perfection and glory in due time (1 Pet.1:3-7). We must also grasp clearly the emphasis on the word "everlasting" in its application to both life and contempt (salvation and judgment). Not all will be saved. There is a resurrection of both the justified and the unjustified, and that is the solemn background that gives great urgency to evangelism. When people read the prophecies in Daniel, and in other parts of Scripture, including Jesus' words in Matt. 24, there is a tendency to speculate as to whether the world will get better or worse, whether there will be revival or apostasy before Christ returns. The truth is that there will be both. The tares or weeds and the good wheat grow together *until* the harvest (Matt. 13:24-30). In the Epistles we read of the glorious advance of the apostolic church, grounded in biblical evangelical theology but always assailed by false doctrine from outside and inside the church (Jude 4; 2 Tim. 2:18; 1 Cor.15:12). If we are battling for the truth then we are in the authentic apostolic succession.

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12:1-4

We must ponder the fascinating words of v.3 because they seem to have an application both to this world and the world of eternity. Who are the wise, referred to also in 11:33? The fear of the Lord is the beginning and also the main part of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). In a world of turmoil and evil the wise will see to it that they stand in God and with God, refusing to be squeezed into the world's way of thinking (Rom. 12:2). They will live by and for the things that are unseen and eternal and not for the fleeting pleasures of things that are so very temporary (2 Cor. 4:18; Heb. 11:27). The wise may refer to those who receive eagerly the teaching of God's Word that makes them wise and builds them up in faith (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 4:1-2). The wise are also those who teach others by lip and by life. They shine like bright lights in the darkness of an evil, lost world (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:14-16). The verse then speaks of those who turn others, sometimes many, to righteousness, that is to rightness with God. It seems to speak of those who lead others to saving faith, and those who are so used by God should always be humbly clear that it is God who does the work. We are only servants or channels of God's gracious blessing and know full well, as Jesus said, that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Such soul-winners, such shepherds and guides of others, who in Christ are willing to let death work in them so that light and life may work in others (2 Cor. 4:7-12) will shine like the stars for ever. Some faithful and fruitful servants of God who have never been recognised or appreciated on earth will shine with glory in Heaven. Paul spoke of those who receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6-8). But these are the very people who will be the first to "cast their crowns before Him, lost in wonder, love and praise." (Wesley)

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12:5-8

Have we noticed in our studies in Daniel that this godly man discovered that the eternal world is greatly populated by well-informed spiritual executives? There was much on earth that had happened and that was about to happen that Daniel did not understand. But the heavenly agents never seemed to be in doubt at all. In the business world, whether local office or headquarters, if those in charge are confident and competent and have a concern for both the business and the workers, then a sense of confidence and peace permeates the whole working situation. We need to think of the spiritual headquarters of heaven in this way. God is spoken of as the God of peace, and that is linked with power and effectiveness, because it was the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:20-21). We must think of the confidence of God. There is no uncertainty with Him. Daniel saw two heavenly men. It is not clear whether it was one of the men or Daniel himself who asked the question in v.6. The answer was certainly for the benefit of Daniel, although we must recognise that even angels have a limit to their knowledge (1 Pet.1:10-12). The question was the common one that many in all ages ask, "When will everything work out?" The upraised hand of the angel signified the solemnity of what was to be said, and said with the sanction and authority of heaven. The details of the time were certainly not clear to Daniel, but that did not alter the fact that the times were fixed and administered by God. The phrase about the shattering of the people of God is solemn, even though it will be brought to an end

by God Himself. Perhaps it helps to think of how Jesus warned His disciples that they would all be scattered (Mk. 14:27) and how He warned Peter that Satan desired to have him, but assured him that he had been prayed for and his future service was to be preserved (Lk. 22:31-32). We could also think of the shattering and scattering of the work of God in the time of revival after Pentecost (Acts 8:1). The result of that was not tragedy, but the kindling of revival fires in many other places.

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12:9-13

Daniel had asked the angel for further explanation about the outcome or issue of all the events he had been told about by vision and in words (8). The angel's reply was significant. Daniel was told to go on his way, perhaps to get on with the work that lay immediately to hand, accepting that there are some things that must of necessity remain mysterious. The emphasis of the angel's words may have been to counsel Daniel to be at peace in mind and heart, because there are some things, perhaps many things, that he and we can understand only when they unfold as the years go past. We must not think of biblical prophecy as in any sense similar to "fortune-telling", trying to know in advance what is going to happen. That excludes the need to live, walk and work by faith. In and through all that is to come to pass in the travails of history, many will purify themselves. That is, the experiences and struggles of faith will have a sanctifying effect because men and women of faith will make right use of these experiences. As in the story of Job, no matter how horrendous life proves to be, faith will affirm that God is at work in it all for a good and glorious end (Job 23:10; Rom.5:1-5). Many will *be purified*, and this places the emphasis more on the working of God's grace rather than on the response of faith. Of course, the two go together. Over against the work of salvation and sanctification there is also the confirmation of the wickedness of the wicked. No matter what God says or does, no matter the grimness or gladness of world experience, unbelief remains stubborn in its unbelief, and the lives of such unbelievers confirm that in fact they have no place for God. But then, there is no place for them with God. In Rev. 22:10-11 we have an echo of the message to Daniel. As time gives place to eternity, unbelief and wickedness remain true to themselves and, as Jesus warned, such persons die in their sins.

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12:9-13

Leaving aside the calculations about time, and accepting that faith will gradually see more clearly, we end our studies with the promise of blessing in v.12-13. There is indeed blessing for those who wait on the Lord and wait patiently for Him (Isa. 40:28-31; Ps. 37:4,7). But waiting in faith is not in any sense indolence or escapism. For the second time in this passage Daniel was told to go on his way. He was already a considerable age and he may well have wondered just how much longer he had to serve. When we are young we assume, not always wisely, that we have many years ahead of us and in consequence we often do not take seriously the need for the commitment of faith. Many people reach old age with deep regrets because of wasted years. When many, many years lie behind us, it is wise to consider how best we should redeem and use the time that remains (Eph.5:16 AV). The words to Daniel about resting and standing in his allotted place at the end of the days seem to speak of his God-given work having been completed and his taking his place in God's eternal kingdom. Think of Jesus calling those blessed of the Father who inherit the kingdom prepared for them (Matt.25:31-34). Think of Jesus' own words testifying that the work entrusted to Him by the Father had been completed (John 17:4). Think of Paul's testimony as he faced the fact that his earthly course was finished (2 Tim. 4:7). Think of John Bunyan's words about Valiant for Truth when his life was over: "All the trumpets sounded on the other side." Perhaps we should think of Daniel in the terms of the story of another Old Testament saint: "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:22-24). Daniel seems to have been told, "Never mind the far-off issues; the step before you is clear, and that is all that concerns you. Plod along the path, and leave tomorrow to take care of itself." (McLaren). Jesus said: "Let not your heart be troubled . . .".

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