

DANIEL - PART 1
Small Choices, Big Consequences
Dr. Derek Morris

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| Preaching passage: | Daniel 1 |
| Subject: | What happened to Daniel when he purposed in his heart to honor God even in small choices in his life |
| Complement: | God honors him. |
| Exegetical idea: | When Daniel purposed in his heart to honor God even in small choices in his life, God honored him. |
| Homiletical idea: | God always honors those who honor Him. |
| Purpose: | To challenge my hearers to purpose in their hearts to honor God even in the small choices of their lives with the blessed realization that God will honor them. |

Introduction

One of the first songs that I can remember singing as a child besides “Jesus loves me” was this one: “Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm and dare to make it known.” In the next few weeks, we are going to study about the life and ministry of Daniel—a gifted young nobleman, prisoner of war, government official, prophet of the Most High God. From the book that bears Daniel’s name, we will learn powerful lessons about how to live well and how to finish well.

Now, I realize that some have rejected the authenticity of the book of Daniel. The first attack came from a 3rd century neoplatonic philosopher named Porphyry. He claimed that the book of Daniel was a forgery, written 400 years after Daniel’s life. In other words, it was a counterfeit, a work of deception, written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, in the 2nd century BC. How was it possible that any man could write with such accuracy about events that had not yet taken place? But Porphyry clearly had an agenda of his own. He is described by secular historians as a violent opponent of Christianity and defender of paganism. This attack on the book of Daniel was taken up in the 19th century by liberal German scholars. They echoed the

sentiments of Porphyry that the book of Daniel was a forgery, a work of deception, written in the 2nd century BC during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

But before the time of the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes, who oppressed the Jews in the 2nd century BC, resulting in the Maccabean rebellion, before that time the book of Daniel was already included in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Those Jewish scholars clearly recognized the book of Daniel as authentic, long before the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The 1st century Jewish historian, Josephus, also recounts that when Alexander the Great brought his conquering armies to Palestine in the 4th century BC, the high priest Jaddua went out to meet him with the book of Daniel. The high priest showed Alexander the Great that his military conquests had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier by the prophet Daniel. And Ezekiel, a contemporary prophet of Daniel during the time of the Babylonian captivity of the 6th century BC, refers to the prophet Daniel in his book (Ezekiel 28:3). Most important of all, Jesus recognized Daniel as a true prophet of God, and referred to his book as authentic and authoritative (Matthew 24:15).

So I urge you to reject the liberal hypothesis that the book of Daniel is a fabricated work of deception and counterfeit, and rather receive it for what it is—the Word of God, written by a prophet of God under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. I believe the inspired testimony of the apostle Paul when he declared that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). I believe the inspired testimony of the apostle Peter who declared that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

So let us receive this book as the inspired Word of God, written by a prophet of God. And it is my prayer that when we come to the end of our journey, we will all say, “Dare to be a Daniel! Dare to be a man of God, a woman of God, who is willing, if necessary to stand alone for God. Dare to have a purpose firm, and dare to make it known!”

Daniel was born between 620-625 BC. His autobiography doesn't tell us much about his family, except that he was a young nobleman of the tribe of Judah. The 1st century Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us that Daniel was part of the royal family, a relative of king Zedekiah of Judah. We are given no information about Daniel's parents, but it seems clear that they were servants of the Most High God. They named their son, Daniel, which means God is my judge. And they poured their lives and their unfailing love into their son during his early years. That is the only way that we can explain his strength of character and purpose in later years.

When Daniel was still a teenager, probably 16-18 years of age, the feared tyrant Nebuchadnezzar marched south toward Jerusalem. It was the summer of 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar's army had already defeated an Egyptian garrison at Carchemish, and now the Babylonian soldiers were preparing to encircle the city of Jerusalem like a deadly noose. King Jehoiakim had foolishly turned away from dependence on the God of heaven and had made an alliance with Egypt. But where the Egyptian allies now? It was only a matter of time, and Jerusalem would be forced to surrender.

I have tried to imagine what thoughts were racing through Daniel's mind on the day that he heard that the city walls of Jerusalem had been breached. He had heard of the brutality of the Babylonians. Undoubtedly, he expected a swift and merciless execution. But instead, he faced a more terrible fate. He was seized, along with a select group of other young noblemen, publically

humiliated, and taken off as a prisoner of war. Were these young men just hostages? I don't think so. Nebuchadnezzar's strategy is recorded in Daniel 1:3-4. "....."

Nebuchadnezzar had a strategy for subduing the nations that he conquered. He would take the young leaders from that conquered nation, the cream of the crop, the best of the best, and he would take them back to Babylon to indoctrinate them. If you were listening carefully, you may have inferred from Daniel's account that some time between his capture and the beginning of his indoctrination program, it is very likely that Daniel was castrated. He, and the other young men who were with him. Why else would they be put under the care of Ashpenaz, the master of the eunuchs. It's true that some scholars argue that point. "Why," they ask, "would Nebuchadnezzar select young men in whom there was no blemish and then castrate them?" But Nebuchadnezzar was more ruthless than rational. These young men belonged to him, and he demonstrated his power over them.

Now, I've never been castrated. So I don't know exactly what that would feel like, physically and emotionally. But I'm guessing that it would be a devastating blow for a young man in the prime of his youth. It would be so easy to just curse the Most High God and wish to die.

Toward the end of August, 605 BC, while Nebuchadnezzar was still in the vicinity of Jerusalem, he received word that his father Nabopolassar had died. He immediately gathered an elite group of bodyguards and took the dangerously dry but much shorter route home across the Syrian desert. A cuneiform tablet, now stored at the British Museum, records that Nebuchadnezzar arrived back in Babylon on September 7, less than two weeks after the news of his father's death had reached him. There was no time to waste. He needed to claim the throne

and leave no opportunity for a contender to take his place.

Nebuchadnezzar left orders for the rest of his army still in Jerusalem to bring the prisoners back to Babylon along the trade routes. That was a journey of at least 8 weeks—north from Jerusalem on the mountain road to Samaria, along the sloping shores of the sea of Galilee, between the twin mountain ranges of Lebanon, and then turning southeast at Carchemish, and following the river Euphrates the remaining 500-600 miles to the great city of Babylon.

There was plenty of time during those 8 weeks of marching to weep and to grieve. I imagine that Daniel also had his moments of anger. “God, why did you let this happen to me? I’ve always honored you. I don’t deserve this!” You know, some people think it’s a sin to be angry with God. And perhaps there are times when anger is expressed toward God inappropriately. But I am convinced that God can handle our anger. His love is stronger than our hurt and our confusion.

I imagine that after Daniel had recovered from his initial shock and anger, he began to recall stories that he had heard as a child. Stories told to him by his loving parents. Perhaps he recalled the story of another young man who was taken captive 1200 years earlier. He was also a prisoner of war, But unlike Daniel, this other young man’s war had occurred in his own family. Sold as a slave by his brothers to Ishmaelite traders, Joseph had ended up as a servant to Potipher, captain of the Pharaoh’s guard. Daniel knew the story well. Joseph was far away from home. No one knew him there in Egypt. But Joseph purposed in his heart to honor God.

Daniel thought about the similarities between Joseph’s story and his own. In Egypt, Joseph had gained the respect of his new master. In fact, Potipher trusted Joseph to oversee his entire household. And just when things were going well, Potipher’s wife tried to seduce him.

But Joseph purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Joseph purposed in his heart to honor God. It was true Joseph ended up in prison. But that wasn't the end of the story. Because God always honors those who honor Him. Did you hear what I just said? God always honors those who honor Him. One way or another. And Joseph was delivered from prison and became a great leader in Egypt. I imagine that as Daniel thought about the story of Joseph, he purposed in his heart to honor God, just like Joseph.

Perhaps Daniel also remembered the story of another prisoner of war during the time of Elisha the prophet. Daniel didn't know her name. She was simply referred to as the Israelite maid. She had been taken to the household of Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria. But even though she was far away from home, that young girl purposed in her heart to honor God. She did not forget the LORD God of heaven. And when her master Naaman was struck down with leprosy, that young Israelite girl was not ashamed to bear witness of her faith in the God of heaven. She told her master's wife about the prophet of God. And as a result of that testimony, her master went on a journey of faith and returned home healed! As Daniel reflected on that story, he noticed that this young Israelite girl had also purposed in her heart to honor God, and God honored her. Because God always honors those who honor Him.

Somewhere on Daniel's journey into exile, he made a life-changing commitment: he would honor God in every aspect of his life—even in the small choices of life. When he arrived in Babylon, Daniel was put under the care of Ashpenaz, the chief of the eunuchs. Daniel continues his account in Daniel 1:5. “.....”

Nebuchadnezzar's strategy was simple. He planned to reprogram his young captives. They were given Babylonian names and immersed in the culture and lifestyle of the

Babylonians. It would have been so easy to just fit in. Forget about the God of heaven. No one would ever know.

But Daniel gives this testimony in his autobiography. Daniel 1:8 “.....” Some might think that this was a minor issue. Why make a big fuss about food and drink? But Daniel had purposed in his heart to honor God. He had purposed in his heart not to defile himself. And so, instead of feasting on the delicacies from the king’s table and drinking the king’s wine, Daniel requested a simple diet.

Was this a choice about clean and unclean foods? Perhaps. Had these delicacies been offered as gifts to the gods? That’s possible. It certainly wasn’t just about choosing the healthiest diet. Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Eating and drinking at the king’s table would hinder him from making healthy choices in other areas of his life. Daniel purposed in his heart to honor God.

The consequences of his decision could have been fatal. Any act of defiance could be interpreted as treason, a crime punishable by death. But Daniel decided that it was more important what God thought than what people thought. It was more important what God said than what people said. The food and wine at the king’s table was inappropriate. So Daniel requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

We read on in Daniel 1:9-14. “.....” The word translated “vegetables” literally means “things sown.” Daniel was requesting a simple vegetarian diet. Did Daniel really think that ten days would make that much difference? I’m not sure. But I have no doubt from what the rest of the book tells me that Daniel took this situation to God in prayer. We’ll learn later in his autobiography, that Daniel had set times of prayer, morning, noon, and night.

But he also prayed at other times. When he faced the challenge recorded in chapter 2 of his autobiography, he didn't wait until prayer time to gather his friends for prayer. When he was in the lion's den, I'm sure that he prayed all night! Any time is prayer time!

I imagine Daniel calling out to God. "LORD God, I want to honor you even in the small choices of my life. I've been given 10 days to demonstrate that this nutritional plan works. Help me, LORD!"

And Daniel's autobiography records in Daniel 1:15, "....." Now I'm sure whether Daniel and his 3 friends looked that much healthier, or whether the other young men who were eating at the king's table looked worse. Probably it was both! But whatever the reason, the evidence was enough to convince the steward that Daniel's nutritional plan was working!

Daniel records that as a result of this decision to honor God in this small aspect of his life, God did more than bless him with good health. Read on with me in Daniel 1:17.

"....." This small choice to honor God had big consequences. Better health. Better academic performance. And most important of all, Daniel was called to speak for God, called to be a prophet of God. Those who met Daniel would recognize him as one in whom the spirit of God dwells.

And at the end of the 3 years of training, Daniel gives this account, in Daniel 1:19-20. "....." As I read this first chapter of Daniel's autobiography, I was impressed that even small choices to honor God have big consequences because God always honors those who honor Him.

Later in his book, Daniel prophesies about the Messiah who is to come. He is the One who will most fully demonstrate a steadfast commitment to honor God. He said, "I have come

down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me.” Jesus sought to honor God in every choice that He made. Big and small. In the wilderness, when Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread, to save Himself from starvation by His own power, He purposed in His heart to honor God and trust in God to deliver Him. On the pinnacle of the Temple, when Jesus was tempted to jump off and bring attention to Himself as Messiah, He purposed in His heart to honor God rather than presume upon God’s mercy. On the mountaintop, when Satan tempted Jesus with an easy way out, Jesus purposed in His heart to honor God and worship only His Father in heaven. In Gethsemane, when Jesus agonized in prayer and longed for some other way to save His lost creation, He purposed in His heart to honor God and suffer death for our sake, even death on a cross.

And His commitment to honor God, even in the small choices of life, had big consequences. Not only was salvation provided for all who believe, but also God the Father has highly exalted Jesus and given Him a name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. God always honors those who honor Him.

My brothers and sisters, there are many lessons to learn from the life of Daniel. But one lesson is this: God honors those who honor Him. Even small choices to honor God have big consequences. Because God honors those who honor Him.

As we continue our journey in the weeks ahead, studying the autobiography of this great man of God, will you choose with me to purpose in your heart to honor God even in the small choices of your life? Will you purpose in your heart not to defile yourself, even if people all around you are defiling themselves? Will you dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone, dare to

have a purpose firm and dare to make it known?

DANIEL - PART 2
There is a God in Heaven
Dr. Derek Morris

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| Preaching passage: | Daniel 2 |
| Subject: | What Nebuchadnezzar and his court learned as a result of Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream |
| Complement: | that there is a God in heaven who is active in history and who will eventually establish His eternal kingdom on earth. |
| Exegetical idea: | When Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Nebuchadnezzar and his court learned that there is a God in heaven. |
| Homiletical idea: | There is a God in heaven who is active in history and who will eventually establish a kingdom that will never end. |
| Purpose: | To encourage my hearers to believe that there is a God in heaven who is active in history and who will eventually establish His eternal kingdom on earth. |

Introduction

The great prophecy of Daniel chapter 2 is one of the most startling prophecies in the whole Bible. This prophecy has been used by the Holy Spirit of God to turn many skeptics into believers in God. Today, we are going to examine this great prophecy and then hear a testimony from someone whose life was changed by this powerful word of God.

- I. PowerPoint presentation of Daniel Ch 2.

- II. Testimony of someone who became a believer

This great prophecy of the book of Daniel had a life-changing impact on a young high school student in Bakersfield, CA. I have invited her to share her story with us today. She happens to be our new Forest Lake Church Bible Instructor, Brandy Lewis!

- I. Did you grow up in a Christian family?
- II. What was your family's attitude towards Christianity and the Bible ?
- III. How did you hear this great prophecy of Daniel 2?
- IV. What was going on in your life that caused you to be willing to listen?
- V. What impact did this prophecy have on your life?

Conclusion

Thanks, Brandy, for sharing your testimony. The Bible is more than man's words about God. It is indeed God's Word to us. Daniel was right. There is a God in heaven, and He is active in the world. He is active in history. He is active in the lives of men and women. Unbelievers like King Nebuchadnezzar. And men and women of God like Daniel.

No matter what the atheist tells you, there IS a God in heaven. No matter what the skeptic tells you, there IS a God in heaven. No matter what the Devil tells you, there is a God in heaven. And that God who rules in heaven above and the earth below is active in history and will eventually establish His eternal kingdom on earth. I want to be part of that eternal kingdom. Don't you?

In our next sermon on the book of Daniel, we will discover that the God of heaven will deliver all those who call upon His name. Let us pray.

DANIEL - PART 3

Standing for God

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Daniel 3
Subject: What God did for the three Hebrews who refused to bow down to the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up and were thrown into a fiery furnace
Complement: He delivered them.
Exegetical idea: God delivered the three Hebrews who refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image and were thrown into the fiery furnace.
Homiletical idea: **God will deliver all those who stand for Him.**
Purpose: To remind my hearers that God will deliver all those who stand for Him and to encourage them to stand for God, no matter what the cost.

Introduction

The first verse of Daniel chapter 3 is rather shocking. Just a few verses earlier, at the end of Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has declared to Daniel, "Surely, your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings." (Dan 2:47) He has been shown an image of gold, silver, bronze, iron, iron and clay. He has been told that the only kingdom that will last forever is the kingdom that God will set up.

And now, at the beginning of Daniel chapter 3, we read, "King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon." What is the matter with this man? Does he have Alzheimers? Is he losing his short term memory? Has he so quickly forgotten that his kingdom is only the **head** of gold? Not the whole image. Why is he acting this way?

Well, let's begin by stating that we are not given an exact date for the events of Daniel chapter 3. It's obviously later than the events recorded in Daniel 2, which are at

the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. But how much time has passed. A few months? A few years? A few decades? From my study, I have come to the conclusion that the events recorded in Daniel chapter 3 occurred approximately 8-10 years after the dream of Daniel chapter 2. Here's the evidence. In 1956, a cuneiform clay tablet at the British Museum was translated which yielded some important information about the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. (Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings (626-556 BC) in the British Museum, by Donald Wiseman). This clay tablet recorded a serious uprising in Nebuchadnezzar's army in December 594 BC. That was the 10th year of his reign. According to the record of this clay tablet, Nebuchadnezzar crushed the revolt and, I quote, "slew many of his own army. His own hand captured his enemy."

This rebellion in December 594 BC may have been the catalyst that caused Nebuchadnezzar's decision to order all of his officials to gather in Babylon, on the plain of Dura for a demonstration of loyalty.

Let's pick up the story in Daniel 3:1. "....." Some have wondered about the dimensions of this image. It's obviously very tall. 60 cubits. You may be interested to know that the numeral system in Babylon was based on the number 60. It's called the sexagesimal numeral system, and it originated in Sumeria in around 2000 BC. It's from this numeral system, based on the number 60, that we get 360 degrees in a circle, 60 minutes in an hour, 60 seconds in a minute.

So it makes sense that this golden image on the plane of Dura would be 60 cubits tall. Now a cubit is the distance from your elbow to your finger tips. So 60 cubits

is about 90 feet tall.

Ninety feet_ That's tall. But wait. The golden image is only 6 cubits or about 9 feet wide. 90 feet by 9 feet. That's a ratio of 10:1. That doesn't sound right. That's like making a model of a 6' tall man and making it only a little over 7 inches wide. 10:1? If that ratio for the human form was correct, I should only be 6.5 inches wide. I don't think so_ An average human form is more like a ratio of 3.5:1, not 10:1.

So is this golden image more like an obelisk as some scholars suggest? Perhaps. But there is another option. This golden image may actually have been mounted on a tall platform, with a total height of 90 feet. The actual image would have been 9 feet wide and, to be proportionate, perhaps 30-35 feet tall. That's still as tall as this sanctuary. And set on its base, it would stand 90 feet above the plain_ I'm told that there are date palms on the plains surrounding Babylon that can grow to almost 90 feet. So the head of this huge golden image is up among the tree tops_

Daniel records that this huge golden image was set up on the plain of Dura. The word Dura means "walled place" and suggests that this plain was in close proximity to the city of Babylon, where all could witness this demonstration of loyalty to king Nebuchadnezzar.

Let's read on in Daniel 3:2. "He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up." Notice. This is not primarily a religious ceremony. Religious leaders are not mentioned. Just government leaders.

This makes sense in the light of the recent rebellion in Nebuchadnezzar's army.

If representatives of Nebuchadnezzar's government came from near and far, that would mean that King Zedekiah of Judah was also present on the plain of Dura that day. And the prophet Jeremiah records in Jer 51:59 that King Zedekiah did indeed make a trip to Babylon in 594/593 BC. This trip would have been right after Nebuchadnezzar crushed the uprising in his army. Do you see the pieces of this story coming together?

Reading on, in Daniel 3:3-6. "So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: [5] As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. [6] Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

The command is clear. When the music plays, bow down in an act of obedience and loyalty to King Nebuchadnezzar. The penalty for disobedience? Death. In Daniel 3:7, we read, "Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up." Everyone bowed down_

Well, almost everyone. Read on, in Daniel 3:8-12. “At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. [9] They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, _O king, live forever_ [10] You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, [11] and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. [12] But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon--Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego--who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up._

Only 3 individuals in that massive crowd of government officials refused to bow down. Only three. The astrologers referred to them by their Babylonian names-- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These were none other than Daniel three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Only these three refused to bow down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Which means that King Zedekiah of Judah was bowing down. He should have been willing to stand for God. He knew the commandment about not bowing down to an idol. He knew that one should only the God of heaven was worthy of worship. But King Zedekiah bowed down.

And where was Daniel? Did he bow down too? I believe that we can say with certainly that Daniel did not bow down. But where was he? Was he off on royal business? I doubt it. Was he sick that day? Possibly. Did the King give Daniel an excused absence because he knew of Daniel’s loyalty, and also of Daniel’s conviction

to worship only the God of heaven? That's what I think is most likely. But that's a question we'll have to ask when we meet Daniel in the kingdom of heaven_

Everyone present on the plain of Dura that day bowed down to the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Including Zedekiah, king of Judah. Everyone, that is, except for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Now, about 8 years have passed since Nebuchadnezzar interviewed these three young Hebrews, along with their friend Daniel. And while Daniel has been serving in the court of the king, these three Hebrews have been serving the king in less direct ways. Perhaps King Nebuchadnezzar has forgotten the names of Daniel's three friends. Remember, at first, they were called Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

So when the king hears that three of his officials have refused to bow down to his image, he is furious. He is reminded of the uprising that he has just dealt with in his army. Such an act of rebellion must be dealt with, and swiftly. We can read of Nebuchadnezzar's response in Daniel 3:13-15. "Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, [14] and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?

There's something strange here. Why did Nebuchadnezzar ask a question of these three rebels? Why didn't he execute them immediately? I'll tell you why. I think he recognized them. "Oh. These are Daniel's 3 friends. I remember them now." But now Nebuchadnezzar has a problem. He is surrounded by onlookers. All of the other

government officials are watching . Nebuchadnezzar must deal with the situation in a decisive way. And yet he doesn't want to kill Daniel's three friends. And so Nebuchadnezzar decides to give them a second chance. Now that would not have made any sense at all if he hadn't recognized them. Would it?

And so Daniel records these words of Nebuchadnezzar, no doubt reported to him by his three friends. Nebuchadnezzar said, "Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?_"

I want you to notice how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego respond. They have given careful thought to what they will say. There is nothing impulsive about their response. I have no doubt that they have been in prayer, in preparation for this moment. They remembered how the God of heaven gave wisdom to Daniel when they were facing an earlier threat of death. And I'm certain that they have been praying again. Listen to their response to the angry monarch, recorded in Daniel 3:16-18. "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "_O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. [17] If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. [18] But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up._"

Now, Scripture records, Nebuchadnezzar's attitude toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego changed. "He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual." I don't even think that's possible_ A normal charcoal-fueled brick kiln, like those that were common in and around Babylon, would fire bricks at around 800-900° F. You can't increase the temperature to seven times hotter—5,000-6,000° F_ But Nebuchadnezzar isn't thinking rationally at this point. He's saying, "Turn the heat up to the maximum setting_" And it was hot_

Listen to what happened next—Daniel 3:20-23. Nebuchadnezzar "commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. [21] So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. [22] The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, [23] and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace."

The furnace was so hot that the soldiers burst into flames. Either that or they were killed by the superheated air. Oh, but I love to read what happened next. Nebuchadnezzar may have forgotten the words of Daniel eight or nine years earlier. But he is about to be reminded that there is a God in heaven. Isn't that right, brothers and sisters? There is a God in heaven. Satan may rage. He may roam around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to destroy. He may use heathen kings to try to accomplish his purposes. But there is a God in heaven_

And Scripture records in Daniel 3:24-16, “Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, ‘Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?’ They replied, ‘Certainly, O king.’ [25] He said, ‘Look, I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.’

[26] Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, ‘Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out. Come here.’

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire. At this point, all of the government officials are gathering as close as they dare. They notice that the fire had not harmed the bodies of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The hair of their heads was not singed. Their robes were not scorched. There was not even the smell of fire on them.

The crowd of government officials, and soldiers is amazed. And as they stand there, gazing at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Nebuchadnezzar exclaims, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants. They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. [29] Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

Perhaps Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remembered the words of Lord spoken through the psalmist Asaph, over 400 years earlier: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor Me.” Their greatest joy that day was not the fact that Nebuchadnezzar promoted them to higher positions in the province of Babylon. Their greatest joy that day was not even that they were delivered out of the fiery furnace. Their greatest joy that day was that they were able to honor God by standing true to Him_

And they knew, deep in their hearts, that God always delivers those who stand true to Him. Sometimes He delivers us out of the fire. Sometimes He delivers us through the fire. Sometimes he delivers us after the fire. But either way, God always delivers those who stand true to Him.

Some years ago, I heard a true story that moved me to tears. It happened in what was then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. One day, some freedom fighters came to a village and ordered all of the villagers out into the center of the village. They took one man, brother Abel, and ordered him to renounce his faith in Jesus. “Say, ‘Down with Jesus.’” Brother Abel said, “I cannot say down with Jesus_” And so they began to beat him in front of the crowd of onlookers.

It began to rain heavily, and so they took brother Abel and locked him in a building near the center of town. While brother Abel was there alone in that building, I’m sure that he was talking to his heavenly Father. He was alone, but he was not alone. Because the Lord declares, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” “Be strong

and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them, for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” The Son of God was with brother Abel in the midst of his fiery furnace just as surely as He was with Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego in their fiery furnace. Brother Abel was not alone. And while brother Abel was there in that building, he wrote a note to his son.

When the rain stopped, the freedom fighters returned. They dragged brother Abel back into the center of the village. “Say, ‘Down with Jesus_’” they demanded_ “I cannot say, ‘Down with Jesus,’” was brother Abel’s reply. So they shot him three times in the head and he died in a pool of blood. He chose to stand for God, no matter what the cost. Even if it meant death, like it did for John the Baptist, and Stephen the deacon. Brother Abel had made up his mind, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that he would stand for God, no matter what the cost. And whether God delivered him from the freedom fighters, or not, he knew that God would ultimately deliver all those who stand true to Him.

The note that he had written to his son was later recovered. This is what brother Abel wrote. “My son, I have prayed for you all of my life.” And then brother Abel quoted this text: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.”

I have never forgotten that story, even though I heard it many years ago. I pray that I never will forget that story. Or the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I don’t want to be like King Zedekiah, bowing down to the pressure of the moment. Fitting in with the crowd. I want to stand for God. How about you? I want to settle that

now, so I don't have a great struggle when the crisis comes. I want to be able to say like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, "The decision has already been made. I'm going to stand true to God." And we can stand afraid, we can stand with joy in our hearts, because we know that God will deliver all those who stand for Him.

And on that great resurrection morning, Shadrach, and Meshach and Abednego, and brother Abel, and by God's grace you and you and me, we will all rejoice together and give thanks to the God of heaven that He delivers all those who stand true to Him.

DANIEL - PART 4
The Healing of an Egomaniac
Dr. Derek Morris

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| Preaching passage: | Daniel 4 |
| Subject: | What happened to proud Nebuchadnezzar after seven years of acting like a beast |
| Complement: | he humbled himself and recognized the God of heaven as the supreme ruler of heaven and earth |
| Exegetical idea: | After seven years of acting like a beast, proud Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself and recognized the God of heaven as the supreme ruler of heaven and earth. |
| Homiletical idea: | Stay humble before God. (It's not all about you. It's all about God.) |
| Purpose: | To remind my hearers that we are not the center of the universe. God deserves our worship and praise. |

Introduction

It's unfortunate that Lindsey Jacobellis will probably not go down in history as winning the silver medal in the women's snowboardcross at the 2006 Winter Olympics. Jacobellis will more likely go down in history as losing the gold medal. Just before the finish line, leading the next snowboarder by more than 100 yards, Jacobellis took a tumble after an apparent show off move during her last jump. Though she quickly got back on her feet, that few second delay allowed time for the Swiss snowboarder to pass her and capture the gold. Now, it's not my intention to give Lindsey Jacobellis a hard time today. She is an outstanding athlete. To win a silver medal at the Olympic games is a tremendous accomplishment. Only time will tell whether this 20 year old from Vermont has learned a lesson in humility.

I was taught a lesson in humility some years ago. I was at the airport in Portland, Oregon, preparing to fly home to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Not long before my plane was preparing to board, I heard my name on the intercom. I don't like those intercom announcements. I have a hard time understanding what they're saying! : "Will Derek

Morris.....immediately!” But this one was clear! When I showed up at the ticket counter, I was told that my flight to Atlanta was over-booked. Would I be willing to take another flight through Cincinnati? They would fly me FIRST CLASS, and then connect me with another flight home to Chattanooga. I would get home at about the same time. Well, that sounded good to me! The flight to Cincinnati was wonderful. A brand new plane, on its way to Paris, France, via Cincinnati. Wide leather seats in 1st class. Great service. Warm face cloth to freshen up. Gourmet menu. By the time I got to Cincinnati, I was strutting off the plane like I was really somebody!

My connecting flight to Chattanooga was on a little crop duster prop plane. I was sitting in the back seat, right next to the bathroom. I smelled the toilet chemicals the whole way home. Oh, how the mighty are fallen! The wise man Solomon declared, “Pride comes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” I learned a lesson in humility that day!

We all have times when we need to be reminded that we are not the center of the universe. Life isn't all about us. We all need a lesson in humility once in a while. And the individual that we are going to study in our message today was no exception. In fact, he really needed to learn a lesson in humility. His name? King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. His story is recorded in Daniel chapter 4.

This testimony, written not by Daniel, but by the king himself, is divided into four sections: a dream, an interpretation, a decree, and a deliverance!

First, the dream. Nebuchadnezzar had another dream, and he was troubled! In Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar was troubled because he couldn't remember his dream. In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar is troubled because he can remember his dream. He tells us the content of his

dream in Daniel 4:10-17. “These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. [11] The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. [12] Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

[13] "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. [14] He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. [15] But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. " 'Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. [16] Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.

[17] " 'The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.' “

That was the dream. And Nebuchadnezzar tells us, in Daniel 4:5, “I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.” So he calls his wise men. I’m not sure why he didn’t call Daniel first. After all, Daniel was ten times wiser than the rest of them. But king Nebuchadnezzar called the other wise men first. And Nebuchadnezzar tells us in Daniel 4:7, “When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me.”

Now I'm not convinced that they couldn't interpret it. I think that they didn't want to interpret the dream. It was bad news!

So finally, the king called Daniel. Why do we always wait 'til last to listen to a word from the Lord? Why do we put ourselves through such difficulty and heartache before we seek the Lord's counsel? But finally, king Nebuchadnezzar calls for Daniel. And after the king has told Daniel the dream, Daniel is troubled too. Nebuchadnezzar tells us, in Daniel 4:19, "Then Daniel (also called Belshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him." Daniel is terrified, just like Nebuchadnezzar. The same word is used in the Aramaic. And Daniel is not only terrified. He is greatly perplexed. Astonished in the KJV. The word means "speechless, stunned." So much so that the king tries to calm his counselor! "Belshazzar," the king said, "do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." And Daniel answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!"

So what was the meaning of the dream? Nebuchadnezzar records Daniel's interpretation in Daniel 4:20-27. "[20] The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, [21] with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air-- [22] you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth. [23] "You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven;

let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'

[24] "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: [25] You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. [26] The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. [27] Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

I'm sure that the events of that day left a deep impression on the king. He certainly knew that he demonstrated a prideful spirit. Here is an example of one of his declarations:

I have made Babylon, the holy city, the glory of the great gods, more prominent than before, and have promoted its rebuilding. I have caused the sanctuaries of gods and goddesses to lighten up like the day. No king among all kings have ever created, no earlier king has ever built, what I have magnificently built for Marduk....May the way of my life be long...may my name be proclaimed for good at all future times.

Wow! He certainly thought highly of himself! Wouldn't you agree? Perhaps after this dream, recorded in Daniel 4, and his conversation with Daniel, king Nebuchadnezzar acted less haughty for a while. At least in public. But his heart remained unchanged. The narrative changes now to the third person, an ominous warning that Nebuchadnezzar is about to lose his sanity. We read in Daniel 4:29-33, "Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of

the royal palace of Babylon, [30] he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" [31] The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. [32] You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." [33] Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird."

History records other instances of individuals acting like animals. The condition is called lycanthropy (wolf-man syndrome) or boanthropy (ox-man syndrome). It's a mental condition where an individual thinks that he or she has turned into an animal, and begins to act like an animal. According to this testimony of Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar acted like an animal for seven years. Someone might ask, "Is there any record of this period of insanity in the cuneiform tablets of Babylon?" And that's a reasonable question. The answer is, "No! And Yes" No, there is no direct reference to Nebuchadnezzar's mental disorder. But should that surprise us? There was no CNN back then! And I'm certain that the truth of Nebuchadnezzar's condition was kept quiet around the palace.

There is perhaps an indirect reference to Nebuchadnezzar's mental disorder on a cuneiform tablet stored at the British Museum that was translated in 1975. The cuneiform tablet is badly damaged, but here are some phrases that are decipherable: "Nebuchadnezzar

considered...his life appeared of no value to...he does not show love to son and daughter...family and clan to do exist...his attention was not directed towards promoting the welfare of Esagalia...he weeps bitterly to Marduk.” (British Museum cuneiform tablet 34113/4) This cuneiform tablet may contain the clearest, though indirect, reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s state during those seven years.

Which raises another question? Who took over the leadership of the kingdom for the next 7 years? Why didn’t the kingdom disintegrate? After all, Nebuchadnezzar was out of the picture. And some scholars date this occurrence near the end of Nebuchadnezzar’s life. Why didn’t the kingdom just fall apart during this seven years of mental disorder? Do you want to hear my opinion? I think that Daniel held things together. Daniel prayed for wisdom, as he had earlier in his life. And Daniel demonstrated his loyalty to the king by leading the government during this time of insanity.

If the story ended there, it would be tragic indeed. But there is a time of deliverance! I’m so thankful that in the midst of the insanity of this life, we can always remember that a time of deliverance is coming! Aren’t you thankful for that?

And Nebuchadnezzar experienced that deliverance. Listen to his testimony, recorded in Daniel 4:34. “At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored.” When he lifted his eyes toward heaven, when he recognized who God was, and who he was, the madness was over. His understanding returned to him. And the result was twofold: First, he gave praise and glory and honor to the God of heaven rather than directing all of the praise and glory and honor to himself. We read on in Daniel 4:34-37, “Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion;

his kingdom endures from generation to generation. [35] All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" [36] At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. [37] Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

Nebuchadnezzar also gave praise and glory and honor to the God of heaven at the beginning of his testimony, recorded in Daniel 4:2-3. “[3] How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.” Notice—not MY kingdom is an eternal kingdom. Not MY dominion will endure from generation to generation. But, His kingdom is an eternal kingdom. HIS dominion will endure from generation to generation. Nebuchadnezzar has humbled himself before God. He is giving all of the praise and glory and honor to the God of heaven.

The Lord healed this pagan egomaniac. And I want you to notice that Nebuchadnezzar was also kinder to everyone else. Listen to his opening words in Daniel 4:1, “King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world:

May you prosper greatly!” That doesn’t sound like the old Nebuchadnezzar who was always threatening to cut people into pieces and turn their houses into piles of rubble, does it?

Nebuchadnezzar is kinder now. He has learned a lesson a lesson in humility. And he is not only

giving the God of heaven all of the praise and all of the glory and all of the honor. He is also kinder to those around him. And isn't that how it should be? When we humble ourselves before God, we also show humility in our interactions with one another. We are not haughty or arrogant. Isn't that how it should be?

If I could sum up Nebuchadnezzar's testimony in one sentence, it would be this: Stay humble before God. Stay humble before God. Remember who God is, and who you are. And we have a perspective that Nebuchadnezzar never had. We have seen the supreme revelation of God's glory and grace, the supreme revelation of God's mercy and love, in the gift of His Son Jesus to save us all. Doesn't He deserve all of the glory? Doesn't He deserve all of the honor? Doesn't He deserve all of the praise? Let's learn a lesson from a Babylonian king and stay humble before God.

I can still vividly remember the day of the oral defense of my doctoral thesis at Andrews University. Believe it or not, the date was April 1! That's right. April fool's day. And I almost made a fool out of myself! I was excited. I was nearing the glorious conclusion of years of disciplined study. But I needed a lesson in humility that morning. I needed to be reminded that it's not all about me. That morning, April 1, I opened my Bible to read. I had been reading through the book of Jeremiah, and I came to these words. You can call it a coincidence, if you want to. But I know that this was no chance occurrence. This was the word of the Lord for my life at that very moment. This is what I read: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord..."

Did you hear that word from the Lord? Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom! Don't

be a fool, Derek, and start thinking that it's all about you! Stay humble before God. For God abases the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that he may lift you up in due time.

Look around us. We are blessed beyond measure, aren't we? We have gifts and talents beyond what we deserve, don't we? But let's not allow these blessings go to our heads. Give God all the praise. Give God all of the glory. Give God all of the honor. Let us stay humble before God. He is the One who is God of heaven above and the earth below. Not us. Stay humble before God. He is the One who created us, and not we ourselves. Stay humble before God. He is the One who redeemed us at a infinite cost when we could not redeem ourselves. Stay humble before God.

So let us say, with the Psalmist David, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make it's boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together!" That's a lesson that we can all learn from a Babylonian king.

DANIEL - PART 5
Handwriting on the Wall
Dr. Derek Morris

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| Preaching passage: | Daniel 5 |
| Subject: | What happened to Belshazzar when he desecrated the sacred vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem |
| Complement: | he came under the judgment of God, his kingdom was taken from him, and he died. |
| Exegetical idea: | As a result of desecrating the sacred vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem, Belshazzar came under the judgment of God, his kingdom was taken from him, and he died. |
| Homiletical idea: | Belshazzar’s tragic story doesn’t have to be your story. |
| Purpose: | To remind my hearers God will show mercy and forgiveness to all those who call upon His name. |

Introduction

Have you ever seen the handwriting on the wall? I’m not talking about the playful scribble of a child who is practicing with a crayon. Not that kind of handwriting on the wall. Or the colorful graffiti that is common in many urban areas. Not that kind of handwriting on the wall. I’m talking about a different kind of handwriting on the wall. A boyfriend notices that his girlfriend is always “too busy” when he calls or tries to plan an activity with her. And he tells one of his buddies at his after-school job, “I can see the handwriting on the wall!” A company announces that it is about to lay off dozens of employees, and one of its most recent hires says to her work associate, “I can see the handwriting on the wall!” There isn’t actually any literal handwriting on the wall! But that boyfriend and that employee are getting a sense of what is about to happen. The handwriting is on the wall!

As far as I can tell, that expression, “the handwriting on the wall” comes from the story in Daniel chapter 5 that we are going to study today. This is the fifth episode of our study of the

book of Daniel. And in Daniel chapter 5 there actually is some handwriting on a wall. And that supernatural event is so terrifying to the man who sees it that he turns as pale as a sheet. His knees begin knocking together. Then he collapses on the floor. All because of some handwriting on the wall. Daniel chapter 5 - it's a tragic story indeed, and there is an important lesson for each one of us.

If you brought your Bible with you today, I invite you to open it to the book of Daniel, chapter 5. Now, look back to the last verse of Daniel chapter 4. Who is that last verse of Daniel chapter 4 speaking about? Now read the first verse of Daniel chapter 5. Do you notice anything strange or unusual? There is an abrupt jump from the testimony of King Nebuchadnezzar to the story of someone named King Belshazzar. No transition. No connecting sentences. Just an abrupt jump.

We read in Daniel 5:1, "King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them." And immediately we have a lot of questions. Who is Belshazzar? How much time has passed between the events of Daniel chapter 4 and the events of Daniel chapter 5?

We know that Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC and we know that the events of chapter 5 occurred in 539 BC. October 12, 539 BC, to be exact. That's a span of 23 years. So at least 23 years has passed, and perhaps up to 30 years. Other monarchs have ascended to the throne of Babylon, and the power of Babylon is now waning. In fact, only hours remain until the head of gold will be replaced with the chest and arms of silver, just as God had revealed more than 60 years earlier to King Nebuchadnezzar.

So many years have passed between the end of Daniel chapter 4 and the beginning of

Daniel chapter 5. At least 23 years. Perhaps as many as 30 years. But who is Belshazzar? He is described as King, but the name Belshazzar is not found on any of the cuneiform tablets that record the kings of Babylon.

For many years, liberal critics and hostile atheists have denied the historical accuracy of this chapter. They maintained the “King Belshazzar” never existed. After the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 BC, he was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach. He only lasted for 2 years and was assassinated by his brother-in-law. The brother-in-law died became king, but he died four years later. His young son was assassinated by conspirators, one of whom, Nabonidus, seized the throne. Nabonidus was the last recorded king of the Neo-Babylonian empire. So who is Belshazzar? He isn’t even mentioned in the list of kings. Are the critics correct? Is this book the work of a poor historian writing hundreds of years later?

A crucial piece of evidence is found in Daniel 5:7 and again in Daniel 5:29. In the midst of a desperate situation, Belshazzar makes this decree: “Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the **third** highest ruler in the kingdom.” Do you know why Belshazzar only offers to bestow the honor of third highest ruler in the kingdom? Because he isn’t the absolute monarch himself. He is the second highest ruler.

Careful research has revealed that Belshazzar was the oldest son of Nabonidus, the last recorded king of Babylon. In 1861, a cuneiform tablet was translated which contained a prayer of Nabonidus, asking the gods to bless his son Belshazzar. History also records that King Nabonidus spent most of his time away from home, particularly at the oasis of Tema, in North Arabia. Nabonidus made his oldest son Belshazzar co-regent in 553 B.C, leaving him on the

throne as “king” of Babylon. The Aramaic word translated “king” has several shades of meaning, and doesn’t necessarily mean an absolute monarch.

Belshazzar, son of king Nabonidus, was #2 in the kingdom of Babylon. But as co-regent with his father, it was certainly appropriate to refer to him as king. Unfortunately, Belshazzar wasn’t much of a king. While his father Nabonidus was fighting military campaigns in defense of his kingdom, Belshazzar was partying back home. Just two days before the events of Daniel chapter 5, Belshazzar’s father, king Nabonidus was defeated by the advancing armies of Cyrus, king of Persia. And what was Belshazzar doing? Planning another party.

Let’s pick up the story in Daniel 5, starting with verse 1. “King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. [2] While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. [3] So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. [4] As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.”

Belshazzar was desecrating the sacred vessels taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem. He was deliberately mocking the God of Israel. And as he and his guests lay around in a drunken stupor, Scripture records in Daniel 5:5, “Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. [6] His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.”

Why was Belshazzar so terrified? You say, "I'd be frightened if I saw the finger of a human hand writing in the plaster of a wall!" And I'd be frightened too. But I want to suggest that Belshazzar's terror is related to his deliberate mocking of the God of heaven. He knew the testimony of Nebuchadnezzar that the God of Daniel was the God of heaven above and the earth below. But Belshazzar was deliberately turning away. No! He was doing more than turning away. He was deliberately mocking Daniel's God.

And when the finger of a human hand began to write on the wall of the banquet hall, Belshazzar was terrified. His knees began to knock together. He collapsed to the floor. Even before the handwriting had been interpreted, he knew that he had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. The handwriting was on the wall, and the judgment against him was certain.

We read on in Daniel 5:7, "The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, 'Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.'"

There is the admission that he is not sole king, but rather co-regent with his absent father Nabonidus. The story continues: "Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. [9] So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled. [10] The queen, (or queen mother) hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "O king, live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale! There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father--your father the king, I

say--appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners.

Now here was have another problem. Nebuchadnezzar was not Belshazzar's father. Belshazzar's father was Nabonidus. So what is going on here? Two possibilities. The Aramaic word can also be translated ancestor. Some have suggested that Belshazzar's mother was the daughter of King Nebuchadnezzar. Listen to her testimony in Daniel 5:12, "This man Daniel, whom the king called Belshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means." She seems to be well acquainted with Daniel, doesn't she? It may be a correct assumption that she was a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. That would make Nebuchadnezzar Belshazzar's grandfather. His ancestor.

It is also possible that the term "father" is used figuratively, just as Elisha calls Elijah his "father". In other words, the queen is saying to Belshazzar that Nebuchadnezzar was the one who went before you--your forefather.

You choose which option makes the most sense. I happen to believe that Belshazzar was a descendent of Nebuchadnezzar, most probably his grandson. And yet, when he should have been defending the kingdom, he is getting drunk and deliberately mocking the God of heaven.

Belshazzar listens to the counsel of the queen. We read in Daniel 5:13. "So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? [14] I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. [15] The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. [16] Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If

you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

Notice Daniel stern response. Daniel 5:17 "Then Daniel answered the king, 'You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else.'" Doesn't that sound a little stern to you? Keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else! Why is Daniel so stern? Because Belshazzar has been deliberately defiant. He has deliberately mocked the God of heaven. He cannot buy his way out of this one.

But Daniel does offer the interpretation to the handwriting on the wall. "Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means. [18] O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. [19] Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. [20] But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. [21] He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes. [22] **"But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.** [23] Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the

gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. [24] Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. [25] "This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekel, parsin.

I can only imagine that Belshazzar is getting paler by the minute. He's not partying now. He is not mocking the God of heaven now. He has set down the sacred golden vessel that he filled with wine. He's still staring at the handwriting on the wall as Daniel continues: " "This is what these words mean:

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

[29] Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

Why did Belshazzar do that? Daniel had clearly stated that he wanted to reward. What did Daniel desire? Repentance. The same desire that he had for King Nebuchadnezzar. But no word of repentance is recorded. No contrition. No recognition of his foolishness. And the story of Belshazzar ends with these tragic words: "That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain." And Xenophon, the Greek historian, confirms that the king of Babylon was killed when the Persian soldiers entered the city of Babylon that night.

What a tragic story! What a waste! Belshazzar lived close to one of the greatest prophets of God of all time. But Belshazzar refused to listen to God. He not only turned a deaf ear to the voice of God. He deliberately mocked the God of heaven.

Is there any grace in this story? Is there any good news? Yes, there is! Have you ever asked yourself why God wrote a message on the wall of that banquet hall? The Persian armies were on their way whether there was handwriting on the wall or not. So why did God write a message on the wall that night? Let me suggest two reasons. God was wanting to catch the attention of many who were in that banquet hall. He wanted everyone present to know that there is a God in heaven. The word spoken by His prophet Daniel was true. The head of gold was about to be replaced by the chest and arms of silver. God was giving those present an opportunity to repent of their sins and to trust Him as the God of heaven above and of the earth below. You see, God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. That is why, over 500 years later, God sent His only Son, born of a virgin, to live in our midst, and to die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

We all have a choice to make. Will we accept His mercy and grace, or suffer the consequences of our rebellion? Belshazzar's story is a tragic one, but it doesn't have to be that way for you. You have another option. You can either be weighed in the balance and found wanting. Or you can be weighed in the balance and found wanting a Savior! And the good news is that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved! He is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to Him. Belshazzar's tragic story doesn't have to be your story. You can choose to be weighed in the balance and found wanting a Savior. Choosing a Savior. Having a Savior. And then you don't have to stand around terrified, shaking in your shoes, with your knees knocking together. Oh no! You can look forward with joy to the return of our soon coming King. You can read the handwriting on the wall, you can see the signs all around that the coming of King Jesus is near, you can know that the rock of Daniel chapter 2 is about to

come blazing through the skies, and you don't have to be afraid. Because you have a Savior.

If someone asks you today, "Why are you so cheerful, after studying such a tragic story in Daniel chapter 5, you can tell them, "Belshazzar's tragic story doesn't have to be my story!" Belshazzar's tragic story doesn't have to be your story! While there is still time, we can call upon the name of the Lord God of heaven. And let the entry be made in the books of heaven: Weighed in the balances, and found to have a Savior!

I appeal to you today: Listen when God speaks to you. Listen to His Word. Listen to His prophets. Do not deliberately turn away. Do not mock the God of heaven. The handwriting is on the wall. Your life is uncertain. And so is mine. The kingdoms of this world will soon become the kingdom of our God. Receive His mercy today. Belshazzar's tragic story does not have to be your story. You don't have to be weighed in the balances and found wanting. You can be weighed in the balances and found to have a Savior!

DANIEL - PART 6

Faithful!

Dr. Derek Morris

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| Preaching passage: | Daniel 6 |
| Subject: | What happened after Daniel was thrown into the lions' den for continuing to honor God |
| Complements: | God delivered Daniel from the lions' den king Darius honored the God of heaven. |
| Exegetical idea: | When Daniel was thrown into the lions' den for continuing to be faithful to God, God delivered Daniel from the lions' den and king Darius honored Daniel's God. |
| Homiletical idea: | The LORD God is faithful. |
| Purpose: | To testify to the faithfulness of God and to encourage my hearers to trust in God! |

Introduction

Peace be multiplied to you! I am Daniel, prophet of the Most High God. I'm sitting here amazed at what just happened! King Darius the Mede just issued a decree honoring the God of heaven. Listen to his declaration:

To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:

Peace be multiplied to you.

I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom
men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

For He is the living God and steadfast forever.

His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed,

And His dominion shall endure to the end.

He delivers and rescues

And He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth,

who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions!

What an amazing decree. It's true! The God of heaven did deliver me from the power of the lions! Unfortunately, not from the smell of the lions! But I'm not complaining. Even the smell of my garment is a testimony that I was delivered from certain death by the power of the living God!

May I share my story with you? I'm an old man now, as you can see. I have long since passed my 80th year. So I have many stories to tell. Let me begin with my most recent adventure. When the kingdom of Babylon was overthrown by the armies of King Cyrus, I wasn't sure what would happen next. The Medes and the Persians were crushing all who opposed them. Few prisoners are taken. Especially old men like myself. But God showed His faithfulness to me. Not only was my life spared, but God granted me favor in the eyes of king Darius the Mede who was installed as ruler in Babylon.

Darius was a good man, though a little young and inexperienced. He was only 62 at the time! That's young compared to me! But he had a teachable spirit. And he demonstrated good organizational skills. He set 120 satraps over the kingdom. He also appointed three governors to oversee the 120 satraps. And to my surprise, king Darius asked me to serve as one of those three governors. Me. Daniel. I was shocked! I wasn't part of his court. I wasn't a Mede or a Persian. I was associated with the kingdom that had just been overthrown. But king Darius recognized that the Spirit of the LORD was upon me. And so he asked me to serve as one of his chief government officials.

I determined that I would serve king Darius faithfully, and so bring honor to the God of heaven. And God blessed my labors. Much more than I deserved. In fact, it reminded me of the

time when I first came to Babylon. I determined to honor God at that time also, even in the small decisions, like the food that I ate. And God gave me wisdom far beyond my natural abilities.

Well, it was happening again, even though I'm an old man now and my mind isn't quite as sharp as it used to be! But God was blessing labors in the service of king Darius. In fact, king Darius was even considering making me the chief of the three governors. That's when the trouble started. At least, that's when I became aware of the jealousy and envy of the other governors and satraps. They began to watch my every move. They couldn't understand why I would serve king Darius with such devotion. "Daniel must have a secret plan," they thought. They judged me by their own motives, imagining that I was as greedy and power-hungry as themselves.

Meetings were called. Unofficial meetings, of course, and I was not invited. I suspected what was going on, but I chose to allow God to defend me. He has always been faithful to me. Always. When I heard that the other governors had used flattery to convince king Darius to hastily sign a strange decree, I sensed that this decree was somehow an expression of their jealousy and envy. And I was right. The decree stated that no one would be permitted to make a request of any god or man except king Darius for 30 days.

These jealous rulers had learned something about me from their spying. It is my practice to devote myself to prayer three times a day: in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. I commune with the God of heaven. This decree forced me to make a choice. Would I continue to honor God and be faithful to Him, or would I compromise to save my own life? This was the test.

As I thought about the situation in which I found myself, I was reminded of another situation that happened many years ago to my three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They also faced a test on the plain of Dura. I was absent that day. But I rejoiced when I heard that they had chosen to remain faithful to God. And God was faithful to them. In the midst of the fiery furnace! God was with them. And He was faithful to them.

Now, I faced a similar test. Lions instead of fire. An old man instead of young men. But the test was the same. Would I continue to be faithful to God? The decision was clear. It was a decision that I had made as a young man when I was about to be taken captive by the army of Nebuchadnezzar. My parents knew that they would probably never see me again. We prayed and wept together. They reminded me of my name: Daniel. God is my judge. And they encouraged me to be faithful to God.

I've noticed that once you've made that decision, life becomes less complicated. You don't always have to ask, "Will I be faithful to God in this situation?" You've made up your mind. That's what my three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah told king Nebuchadnezzar. "We've already made up our minds. We don't need a lot of time to reconsider our decision. We've made up our minds that we will be faithful to God.

And now, many years later, I was facing my fiery furnace. And I rejoiced that my decision was clear. Be faithful to God! And so I continued to commune with God in prayer, three times a day! I actually prayed all through the day, but these were my special times of communion with God. I knew that spies were watching me. And I knew that soon the accusations would come.

I felt bad for king Darius when he realized that he had been trapped by these devious,

power-hungry rulers. He tried to cancel the decree, but they would not let him. It was a law of the Medes and the Persians which cannot be revoked. So I was taken to the lions' den. The lions were normally used for hunting, as you probably know. Lion hunting was the sport of kings. But the lions' den was also a quick and easy way to dispose of any trouble makers. And at least in the eyes of the jealous governors and satraps, I was a trouble maker.

There were two ways to access the lions' den: a ramp, down which the lions would be driven, and an opening in the roof, through which food would be dropped. It was much too dangerous to bring food through the main entrance to the lions' den. Any servant carrying food for the lions would become part of the meal! So the food was dropped through an opening in the roof of the den. And last night, I was the food!

As I was dropped into the pit, I could hear the lions roaring. They knew that it was feeding time. It was like falling down into a grave. This was a place of death, and I knew that only a miracle of God could bring life out of the grave. But I was determined to honor God whether in life or in death.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, my body struck the cool, damp earth. I waited for the lions to pounce. But there was no movement in the lions' den. Perhaps the lions were just waiting for the right moment to attack me. The last words that I heard that night came from the mouth of my distressed king Darius: **“Daniel, your God whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.”**

Isn't that amazing? A pagan king said that! I recorded his words so I would never forget them. **“Your God whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.”** That confession brought joy to my heart! I already knew that God would deliver me, one way or another. Just

like Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. And however He chose to deliver me, I was determined to be faithful to Him. But right there, in the midst of my test, I rejoiced to hear the confession of king Darius. “Your God whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.”

His words reminded me of the word of the LORD given through the Psalmist, hundreds of years ago. The LORD, the Most High God, gave this promise: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you. And you will honor Me.” “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.”

Perhaps you’re wondering what happened to me in the lions’ den. Well, obviously, I survived! The lions didn’t eat me! The LORD sent an angel, one of His heavenly messengers that excel in strength, and that angel shut the lions’ mouths! It was completely dark down in that lions’ den. I could hear the heavy breathing of the lions. At times, I could even feel the warmth of their breath. And even smell their breath! And many other smells as well!

I didn’t sleep that night. Not because I was afraid. I was actually filled with a wonderful peace. The prophet Isaiah was right when he said, “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You!” I didn’t sleep for two reasons. I was excited to see that God was going to do! He had come down to meet with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the fiery furnace! I didn’t want to sleep through something like that! But I also stayed awake because I was praying for king Darius. I could only imagine how he was feeling. I told you, he is a good man. I was praying that God would use this time to bless king Darius and to speak to his heart.

King Darius didn’t sleep either. He was pacing back and forth. Half mad, half sad! Very early this morning, when the first rays of dawn could be seen through the cracks by the

opening of the lions' den, I heard the sound of footsteps. Someone was approaching the mouth of the den. It didn't sound like a soldier. Who was out there? My question was soon answered! I heard a grieving king cry out, **“Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”**

I had to smile. Not just because the king had come. But because of his words. Servant of the living God. With joy in my heart, I cried out:

O king, live forever!

**My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths,
so that they have not hurt me.**

The king was overjoyed! And I was also filled with joy. King Darius ordered ropes be brought and that I be lifted up out of the lions' den. When our eyes met, I could see tears in his eyes. I sensed a closeness to him that I had never experienced before. He smiled and look straight into my eyes: “Daniel, servant of the living God!”

But then his countenance changed. He looked towards to governor's rooms, and then he summoned his personal soldiers. “Go! Seize those men who plotted against Daniel. Throw them, and their wives and children into the lions' den.”

I turned away in sadness. I did not desire vengeance or retribution. But I realized that these government officials would not escape the wrath of the king. I heard later that, when they were thrown into the lions' den, the lions overpowered them, crushed their bones, and devoured them before they reached the bottom of the den. Their evil deed not only cost them their lives, but also the lives of their wives and children. That brought even greater sadness to my heart.

But in the midst of that sadness, I am also rejoicing because of the faithfulness of God. I

told you at the beginning of my story: God has always been faithful to me. I don't know what the future holds. But this much I know: God is faithful. He has been faithful to me all of my life. And He will not leave me now. God is faithful. And I will honor Him.

What test you are facing in your life right now? We all face trials, don't we? They are not of God's making. They are the work of the enemy. But whatever trial you face, remember that God is faithful. He will be faithful to you. Don't turn away when you need Him the most. Stand true. Stand strong. He will never leave you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage. Do not fear or be afraid. For the LORD our God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

I am reminded of the word of the LORD through the prophet Jeremiah: "Through the Lord's mercies, we are not consumed because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, says my soul. Therefore I hope in Him."

I rejoice today that God is faithful! When people around you are unfaithful, God is faithful. Even when those closest to you are unfaithful, God is faithful. And if there are times when because of inward weakness or outward pressure, you are unfaithful, God is still faithful. I rejoice today in the faithfulness of God! Don't you? And I pray that whether in life or in death we would always remain faithful to Him.

For He is the living God and steadfast forever.
His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed,
And His dominion shall endure to the end.

DANIEL - PART 7
Tampering with God's Law
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Daniel 7
Subject: What power would emerge out of the ruins of the fourth beast
Complement: a little horn kingdom that would speak against the Most High, make war with the saints of God and seek to change times and laws.
Exegetical idea: A little horn power would emerge out of the fourth beast that would speak against the Most High, make war with the saints of God and seek to change times and laws.
Homiletical idea: **Share the truth in love.**
Purpose: To remind my hearers to share the truth in love.

Introduction

There are some messages that are difficult to deliver. God instructed the prophet Nathan to deliver a difficult message to his king. I'm sure that Nathan loved King David. But God had directed him to tell King David a story about a man who committed a terrible crime. Then the prophet Nathan looked straight at the king and declared, "You are that man!" That was not an easy message to deliver.

Jesus had a difficult message to deliver on His way to Calvary. As He was leaving Jerusalem, he noticed that women were mourning his suffering and imminent death. Jesus loved those daughters of Jerusalem. He had prayed for them. But he had a difficult message to deliver to them. "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children." Jesus prophesied the calamity that would befall them. That was not an easy message to deliver.

The message that I am going to deliver today is a difficult one. It would be easier to avoid it. To leave it unsaid. But as we make our way through the book of the prophet Daniel, I would be an unfaithful witness if I remained silent on the message of Daniel chapter 7. My

prayer is this: that I would share the truth in love.

Jesus Himself had warned that false teachers would come. “Watch out for false prophets,” Jesus said. “They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” The apostle Paul had this to say about those who would turn people away from the truths which Jesus had taught: “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. [30] Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” Acts 20:29-30.

The prophecy of Daniel chapter 7 predicts such an apostasy.

(Begin slide presentation)

The year is 553 BC. Daniel is now almost 70 years old. Fifty years have passed since the vision of Daniel 2. The events of Daniel 5 and 6 are still in the future. And God gives Daniel another dream. We pick up the story in Daniel 7:2.....

The prophecy that God had revealed to Daniel made him feel sick. Not just that one world power would be succeeded by another. Daniel had already received such a message in the vision of the huge metal man, recorded in Daniel chapter 2. What made this message so difficult was this: a power would arise out of the fourth world power that would speak against the Most High, would persecute the saints of the Most High, and would seek to change times and laws.

And this message is still difficult for many to hear. I remember a father in northeastern Pennsylvania who was attending some meetings that I was conducting in Sybertsville, Pennsylvania. This man, Eddie, was a welder. He car-pooled with another young welder named

Tim Goff. In fact, they had started to study the Bible together. And when we started the meetings in Sybertsville, Tim invited his friend Eddie to attend. I remember the evening that this difficult message of Daniel chapter 7 was presented. Like Martin Luther, Eddie had grown up in the church. It was all that he knew. His young daughter who had been killed by a school bus was buried in that church's cemetery. He faithfully attended church each week. And when he heard the message of Daniel chapter 7, it made him sick. He thought that he was going to vomit. I learned that day that we need to be sensitive how we present truth of God's Word. Don't just crash into people's lives and dump truth in their laps. Share the truth in love. Ask for wisdom when and how to present difficult messages from God's Word. That's been my prayer this week. I want to share the truth in love.

Pastor Barbara remembers the time when she first heard the message of Daniel chapter 7. Like Martin Luther and Eddie, Barbara had grown up in the church. Her family was actively involved in church life. I've asked Barbara to share her thoughts and feelings as she listened to the difficult message of Daniel chapter 7.

(Barbara comes forward and shares her story in a semi-structured interview).

Barbara. I understand that you grew up actively involved in church.

When did you first hear the difficult message of Daniel chapter 7?

How did that message affect you?

How has your experience affected the way that you share this truth with others?

What are hear you saying , Pastor Barbara, is that we need to share the truth in love. We need to be sensitive to the feelings of others, and ask for wisdom to know when and how to present difficult messages from God's Word. Thank you for sharing your testimony today.

I remember the Sabbath that Raphael Gonzalez came to our church in Allentown, Pennsylvania. I wish that I could share his entire testimony with you today. It's recorded in a book entitled "A Brand From The Burning." Father Gonzalez was a Jesuit priest, ministering in Guatemala. One day, he was given a copy of a book called The Great Controversy. It wasn't given to him by some obnoxious person who was totally insensitive to his feelings. It was given to him in love. He wasn't supposed to read it, because it didn't bear the imprimatur, but Father Gonzalez came under deep conviction of the Spirit of God. This book contained a clear explanation of the message of Daniel chapter 7. Father Gonzalez testified to me that every question that he had from 15 years of training within the church, every question was answered in that book.

When I met Raphael Gonzalez, he was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. And he continued to share the truth in love. He realized that there are many sincere followers of Jesus who have not yet heard all of the truths of God's Word. And we need to share the truth in love.

I have brought some copies of the book that Father Gonzalez read—the book that God used to change the course of his life. Perhaps our study today has raised a lot of questions in your mind and you're thinking, "I need to study this topic more carefully." I would invite you to take a copy of The Great Controversy and read it for yourself. Don't take it and dump it in

someone else's lap, totally insensitive to their present situation. Don't run off and rent a billboard and post a message that will offend and hurt sincere followers of Jesus. Share the truth in love. Will you do that? The message of Daniel chapter 7 is an important one. But remember this: Share the truth in love.

DANIEL - PART 8

Yom Kippur

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Daniel 8
Subject: What will happen after 2300 days
Complement: the sanctuary will be cleansed.
Exegetical idea: After 2300 days, the sanctuary will be cleansed.
Homiletical idea: **God will deal with the sin problem!**
Purpose: To remind my hearers that God will deal with the sin problem.

Introduction

Have you ever worked on a puzzle and you just couldn't figure it out? One of our sons made this puzzle at family camp many years ago. You are supposed to get the ring free. I worked on this for a long time, and finally got the ring off. Unfortunately, I had absolutely no idea how I did it! Then I couldn't get it back on again! So I had to screw off the post to get the ring back on! By that time, my head was hurting! I just couldn't figure it out!

That's how the prophet Daniel felt, and worse, after he had received the vision recorded in chapter 8 of his book. His head hurt! Listen to Daniel's testimony, recorded in the last verse of Daniel 8. "And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it."

And I must confess that as I have been studying this past week, I have felt astonished by the vision myself! I don't understand it all. And my head has hurt too! But I have cried out to God to help me. And I ask you to pray as I speak and as we listen. Call upon Me, the Lord says, and I will answer you and show you great and marvelous things which you have not known."

Now let us consider this vision that caused Daniel's head to spin? When did Daniel receive this vision? According to Daniel 8:1, this vision came in the third year of the reign of

Belshazzar. The year was 551 BC. That was 2 years after the vision of Daniel 7. If you remember from our last message in this series, in the first year of Belshazzar's rule as co-regent with his father Nabonidus, 553 BC, Daniel had a dream about four animals that came up out of the water: a winged lion, a lop-sided bear, a four-headed winged leopard, and a nondescript beast with iron teeth. The winged lion represented? The great kingdom of Babylon, just like the head of gold in the vision of the huge metal man in Daniel chapter 2. The lop-sided bear with 3 ribs in its mouth represented...? Medo-Persia, just like the chest and arms of silver in Daniel chapter 2. The four-headed winged leopard represented...? Greece, just like the belly and thighs of brass in Daniel chapter 2. And the fierce nondescript beast with iron teeth represented...? The Iron Monarchy of Rome, just like the iron legs of the image in the vision of Daniel chapter 2.

Then we noticed in the vision of Daniel 7 that a little horn that came up in the midst of the ten horns of the nondescript beast and that little horn spoke pompous words against the Most High and persecuted the saints of the Most High. Some of us were startled to discover that this little horn power was our own Christian church which apostatized and turned away from the truth of God's Word.

At the end of Daniel chapter 7, a heavenly messenger offered Daniel this word of hope: Daniel 7:26-27. "But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion to consume and destroy it forever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him!"

That's good news! What do you say? But Daniel was still greatly troubled. Two years have passed. The year is now 551 BC. Daniel receives another vision from God. But instead of

4 animals, he only sees two. And instead of strange composite beasts, he sees common animals, a ram and a goat. And when Daniel records this vision, he uses Hebrew rather than the Aramaic of Daniel 7.

Notice that in this vision Daniel sees himself at the citadel of Shushan, or Susa. This fortress was located 230 miles east of Babylon. “Why is that important?” you might ask. Susa would become one of the wealthiest capitals of the Persian empire. Remember that fact as we pick up the story in Daniel 8:4. “.....” Does this ram with two horns, one higher than the other, remind you of one of the four beasts in the vision of Daniel chapter 7? You’re right. The lop-sided bear! And notice that this ram pushes westward, northward, and southward. In other words, it’s coming from the east. And that is exactly what Medo-Persia did. Pressing westward and northward and southward. In Daniel 8:20, a heavenly messenger confirms that interpretation. “.....”

Does anyone have an idea why, in this vision of Daniel 8, the Lord passes over the kingdom of Babylon, represented by the head of gold in Daniel chapter 2 and winged lion of Daniel chapter 7? Perhaps because the Babylonian kingdom is already disintegrating, soon to pass off the scene in 539BC. But perhaps there is another reason, which will become clearer as we continue our study.

Notice what happens next. Daniel 8:5-8. “.....” What kingdom came from the west, moving so quickly that it’s feet did not even touch the ground? You’re right. The kingdom of Greece. Just like the winged leopard of Daniel chapter 7. And who do you think the notable horn between the goat’s eyes represents? Alexander the Great! But notice the prophecy in Daniel 8:8. “.....” When the goat kingdom became strong, at the zenith of its

power, the large horn was broken. Alexander died. And four horns grew up in its place. The four horns that grow up on this goat remind us for the four heads of the winged leopard of Daniel chapter 7. And a heavenly messenger confirms that interpretation in Daniel 8:21-22.

“.....”

But then the vision shifts. Instead of giving us a parallel to the fourth fierce beast of Daniel 7, the prophesy of Daniel chapter 8 shifts ahead to the activity of the little horn power. Look with me at Daniel 8:9-14. “.....” Some Bible scholars suggest that the little horn power of Daniel 8 is a weak Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes. Son of Antiochus the Great, this Syrian king attempted to Hellenize Palestine and after being humiliated during a military campaign in Egypt, Antiochus Epiphanes expressed his frustration by desecrating the Temple in Jerusalem in 168 BC. He even sacrificed a pig to Zeus and forbade the practice of Judaism. This desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem resulted in a violent Jewish uprising, led by Judas Maccabees. The author of the books of 1st and 2nd Maccabees identified Antiochus Epiphanes as the little horn of Daniel 8 that desecrated the sanctuary. This interpretation was also held by Josephus, in the time of Christ, and by many church fathers. According to the books of Maccabees, Temple worship was restored after 3 years and 10 days, in 165 BC. That’s approximately 1100 days. To make the little horn prophesy of Daniel 8 fit, scholars suggest that the 2300 days in Daniel 8:14 is actually 2300 evenings and mornings, or 1150 days. That’s close to the amount of time that the Temple was desecrated during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes.

But there are problems with this interpretation. Even if you reduce the 2300 days to 1150, it still doesn’t accurately fit the 3 years and 10 days of Temple desecration under Antiochus Epiphanes. It’s close, but it doesn’t fit.

But the problems with this interpretation get worse. The Hebrew expression evening-mornings in Daniel 8:14 refers to complete days, as in the account of creation in Genesis 1. And why would a period of 2300 days, a little over 6 years make Daniel speechless and make his head hurt? But if Daniel understood the words of the holy one in Daniel 8:14 as a time prophecy which uses the principle of a day for a year, then the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 stretched for 2300 years, down to the time of the end. That would make your head hurt!

But the greatest problem with interpreting the little horn of Daniel 8 as Antiochus Epiphanes is the fact that Jesus, almost 200 years after Antiochus Epiphanes, spoke of the abomination of desolations spoken of by the prophet Daniel in connection with the little horn power as still in the future. In Matthew 24:15, we read, “.....”

The little horn power of Daniel 8 is not an obscure Syria king, Antiochus Epiphanes. The little horn power of Daniel 8 is the same little horn that emerges from the ten horns of the fierce nondescript beast with iron teeth of Daniel 7.

Let’s go back and reconsider the words of Daniel 8:9-12. “.....” Out of the “one” refers not to one of the four horns of the Greek kingdom, but “one” of the four winds of heaven. How do we know that? Because the word for winds in Daniel 8:8 is feminine, and the word “one” in Daniel 8:9 is also feminine. And if you notice the directions that this little horn grows, it is coming from the west. The location of Rome, and the Christian church which found its center in Rome. The words that follow here in Daniel chapter 8 remind us of the little horn power described in Daniel chapter 7. Daniel 8:10-12 “.....”

The expression “grew up to the host of heaven” reminds us of the story of the Tower of Babel. The builders of the Tower of Babel sought to exalt themselves rather than to humble

themselves before God. They sought to put themselves in the place of God rather than be submissive to the will of God. This little horn power trampled truth to the ground. Psalm 119:142 tells us the “Your law is truth.” This is the same little horn power of Daniel 7 that sought to change times and laws. It also took away the daily, referring not just to the daily sacrifices, but the daily ministry of the priest, representing the ministry of Jesus on our behalf. It tells us in Daniel 8:11 that this little horn power “exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host.” The Hebrew word there translated “prince” is the technical term for the High Priest. By taking away the ministry of Jesus and replacing it with a man-made system of works and religious obligations, this little horn power spoke pompous words against the Most High.

And Daniel is undoubtedly wondering, “How long until this desolation end?” How long until God deals with this problem? And then the prophet hears two holy messengers talking to each other? One of them asks the question that is on Daniel’s mind. “How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?” And then the other holy messenger, recognizing that his is also Daniel’s question, turns to him and says, “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”

Another holy one had spoken in Daniel chapter 4 when judgment was declared on King Nebuchadnezzar. Now a holy one speaks of a cosmic judgment: “Unto 2300 days and then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”

Now those words may not mean much to us. But they meant something to Daniel. Even though Daniel did not understand the vision, he understood that the cleansing of the sanctuary was a clear reference to Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur was that special

day, once a year, when sin was dealt with. The sanctuary was cleansed. **(SLIDE #1)** Perhaps that is why God chose to use the ram and the goat in this vision. Both the ram and the goat were used in connection with the greatest Jewish yearly festival—Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement. While sacrifices were offered every day as an atonement for sin, pointing forward to the Lamb of God who would come and take away the sins of the world, while those sacrifices happened every day, a special work of atonement occurred on Yom Kippur. It happened on the 10th day of the 7th month, during our month of October. On the 1st day of that month, the priests would blow the trumpets. **(SLIDE #2)** That was a call to prepare for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. All those who had not confessed their sins by Yom Kippur would be cast out of the camp. On the 10th day of the 7th month, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place **(SLIDE #3)** and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifices before the Ark of the Covenant. This was a time of cleansing not only for individuals but for the sanctuary itself.

Some have suggested that the word cleansed is a poor translation of the Hebrew word tsadaq, used in Daniel 8:14. It's true that tsadaq can be translated to set right, to restore, or to make righteous. But the idea of cleansing is clearly implied. The Rabbis who translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, a work which we call the Septuagint, they translated the Hebrew verb tsadaq with the Greek verb katharizo. That's the same verb that the apostle John uses in 1 John 1:7 when he declares that "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." And that same verb is used again in 1 John 1:9 where we are told, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to CLEANSE us from all unrighteousness."

This time prophesy in Daniel 8:14 is referring to a time when sin will be dealt with and cleansing will occur. This time of cleansing and judgment was portrayed each year in the Jewish

festival of Yom Kippur. Listen to the description of the Day of Atonement, in Leviticus 16:30. “.....” And just as the believer was cleansed and the earthly sanctuary was cleansed on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, so the day is coming when a final cleansing will occur. There will be a final dealing with sin. And that brings me hope today. Because it tells me that this old sinful world will not go on forever. A day is coming when God will deal with the sin problem. A day is coming when God will make all things new. A day is coming when God will create a new heavens and a new earth.

And we will all rejoice when the sin problem is finally dealt with, won't we? No more death. No more sorrow. No more crying. No more pain. The former things will be passed away! But you say to me, Pastor Derek, what about my loved ones who aren't ready to meet Jesus face to face? What about them? Go and tell them that before the final work of cleansing is complete, they can call upon Jesus. There is still time. Call upon Jesus, believing that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Believing that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Believing that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Tell your loved ones and friends to call upon Jesus while there is still time. Because everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

So how much more time do we have before God finally deals with the sin problem? When will that great Day of Atonement begin? And even more important, when will it end? Because, once the judgment is complete, the declaration will be heard, “He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him be righteous still. He who is holy, let him be holy still.” And then, there is no more time to be saved.

In our next study, as we consider Daniel chapter 9, we will discover when this great time prophesy of the 2300 days begins, and when it ends. I hope you'll join us for that study from the book of Daniel. But more important than that, I hope and pray that you will allow Jesus to cleanse you from all sin, that you will receive Him as your personal Savior and Lord, so when the final work of cleansing and judgment is complete, you will not be filled with fear. Rather, you will be filled with hope. And filled with assurance. And when the sky catches fire, and rolls back like a scroll, you will look up with joy and welcome our glorious King, Jesus Christ our Lord!

I hope that you don't leave church today with your head hurting. This is a complex study, and there is much that, like Daniel, we don't fully understand. Don't worry if you can't figure it all out. This we know for sure: sin will not run rampant forever. A day is coming when God will deal with the sin problem once and for all. So trust Him today. Let Him cleanse you from your sin today. And then let us look forward to the day when God will deal with the sin problem once and for all and He will make all things new!

Appeal:

As I was speaking about cleansing from sin, perhaps someone here came under conviction that you need Jesus to make you clean today. I want to invite you to allow Jesus to make you clean. Perhaps some of you thought of a loved one or friend who needs that cleansing today. I want to invite you to pray for that person right now. Pray that God will use you to share the love of Jesus with that person while there is still time. And then let us rejoice that sin will not run rampant forever. A day is coming when God will deal with the sin problem once and for all.

Then there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. And there shall be no more pain. And a voice will be heard from the throne saying, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

DANIEL - PART 9
Almost Home
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Daniel 9
Subject: Why Daniel earnestly sought the Lord in prayer when he sensed that Jeremiah's prophecy was almost fulfilled
Complement: because he longed for the day when he and his people would return home.
Exegetical idea: Daniel earnestly sought the Lord in prayer when he sensed that the seventy years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah was almost over because he longed for the day when he and his people would return home.
Homiletical idea: **We're almost home!**
Purpose: To show that prophecy has been fulfilled and that we are almost home!

Introduction

Some years ago when our two sons will still young enough to want to go with us on vacations, our family took a 9000 mile road trip around the United States. We visited many historic sites and national parks. On our trip, we drove through torrential rains, got caught in a snowstorm, took cover from golf-ball sized hail, and saw the biggest tornado of our lives! It is was eventful journey! By the time we had traveled 8900 miles or so, we were ready to go home! Typically children are the first to ask, "Are we there yet?" "When are we going to be home?" But after 6 weeks on the road, even the parents were asking the same question! "When are we going to be home?"

Daniel and his exiled people had been gone from home from much more than 6 weeks. It was more than 3,500 weeks. Daniel had been a teenager when he was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar's army. Now Nebuchadnezzar was dead, and Daniel was an old man. Thirteen years have passed since the vision of Daniel 8. And this has already been an eventful year for the aged prophet Daniel. He has seen the fulfillment of the first part of the prophecies of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. Babylon has been replaced by Medo-Persia. He has also been thrown into a

lion's den and miraculously delivered. And he has received a copy of the testimony of the prophet Jeremiah, where Jeremiah clearly prophesies that the exile will only last for 70 years. (Jer 26:11, 29:10). And that 70 years is almost over! Undoubtedly, Daniel is also asking himself the question, "When will we be going home?"

And so the aged prophet Daniel began to cry out to the Lord God in prayer. We can read his prayer at the beginning of Daniel chapter 9. Daniel 9:3-6. "....." What a great man of God! What a humble leader! Daniel identifies with the waywardness of his people and makes a heartfelt confession. And the LORD God responds to Daniel's prayer. In a startling way. It ought not to surprise us that God does respond. After all, the Lord had declared through a contemporary of Daniel, the prophet Jeremiah, "Call upon Me and I will answer you. And show you great and marvelous things which you have not known." So it ought not to surprise us that the Lord God responds to Daniel's prayer. But the details of God's response are quite startling. Look with me in Daniel chapter 9:20-23a. "....."

Now I don't know where heaven is located, the place where God sits enthroned. The closer stellar nursery to earth is the nebula of Orion. That's a place in our universe when stars are born. Here's a picture of the nebula of Orion that was taken by John P. Gleason just a few months ago.

The Great Nebula in Orion, an immense, nearby starbirth region, is probably the most famous of all astronomical nebulas. Here, glowing gas surrounds hot young stars at the edge of an immense interstellar molecular cloud only 1500 light-years away. In the above deep image, faint wisps and sheets of dust and gas are particularly evident. The Great Nebula in Orion can be found with the unaided eye just below and to the left of the easily identifiable belt of three stars in the popular constellation Orion. In addition to housing a bright open cluster of stars known as the Trapezium, the Orion Nebula contains many stellar nurseries. These nurseries contain hydrogen gas, hot young stars, protoplanets, and stellar jets spewing material at high speeds. Also known as M42, the Orion Nebula spans about 40 light years and is located in the same spiral arm of our Galaxy as the Sun.

<http://antwarp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap050918.html>

That nebula is 1500 light years away. That means that it would take you 1500 years traveling at the speed of light to get to that nebula of Orion from earth. Now, I don't know exactly where the angel Gabriel was located when the command went out for him to respond to the prophet Daniel's prayer, but wherever he was, that was high-speed travel to get to Daniel's side while he's still praying! The expression in Daniel 9:21, "being caused to fly swiftly" is no exaggeration! Gabriel was flying at warp speed! What a picture of God's loving care and concern! The Lord dispatches the mighty angel Gabriel to tell Daniel that is he greatly beloved!

Now we have to stop here and note the significance of Gabriel's presence. Gabriel was sent to Daniel when he received the vision of the 2300 days, recorded in Daniel chapter 8. Gabriel is sent at times of key importance in the history of the plan of salvation. It is Gabriel who is sent to Zecharias to announce the birth of his son, John the Baptist (Luke 1:19). The prophet John the Baptist would prepare the way for Messiah. It is Gabriel who is sent to Mary, to announce the miraculous conception and the birth of Jesus, the Christ (Luke 1:26). So the fact that Gabriel is sent again to Daniel, as recorded in Daniel chapter 9, tells us that this is an important event in the plan of salvation.

And what is Gabriel's assignment? Look with me at Daniel 9:23. "....."

What vision is Gabriel referring to here? Daniel 9 records no vision. Only a prayer. So which vision is Gabriel referring to here? The vision of the 2300 day prophecy, recorded in Daniel 8. The specific Hebrew word for vision used here in Daniel 9:23, mareh, is the same word used for vision in Daniel chapter 8, when the holy one asked, "How long will the vision be?" And the answer was given, "Unto 2300 days, and then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

So let's listen to Gabriel's message, starting in Daniel 9:24. "....." Seventy weeks, or literally "seventy sevens" are determined for your people. That's 490. And it's obviously not 490 days, a year and a few months, but a time prophecy of 490 years. The prophet Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, records this year-day principle in Ezekiel 4:6. And when does this time prophecy begin? Look at Daniel 9:25. "....."

History records that there were 3 decrees that went forth in connection with the return of the children of Israel from Babylonian exile: The decree of Cyrus in 538 BC. The decree of Darius I in 519 BC, which simply confirmed the decree of Cyrus, and the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 BC. And as one scholar has observed, the fact that three decrees were needed suggests that the final decree is the one that really counted. Ezra considered them all part of one decree: in Ezra 6:14, we read, "they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia."

Now here's something truly amazing! The angel Gabriel tells Daniel that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince shall be 7 weeks and 62 weeks. That's a total of 483 days of time prophecy, or 483 years. Add 483 years from the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 BC and it takes you to AD 27, the exact year that Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at His baptism and began His ministry as Messiah. The word Messiah means "anointed", and Christ's ministry began right on time, in AD 27.

But Gabriel goes on to say that sometime after AD 27, Messiah would be cut off. That's a very strong expression in Hebrew. It implies a violent end. Let's listen to Gabriel's words in Daniel 9:26-27. "....." In the middle of that final week, or final 7 years of the 490 year prophecy, the Messiah would bring an end to sacrifice and offering. He would do that

by laying down His life as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

And it happened just as predicted. Three and a half years after his baptism in AD 27, Jesus died on the cross in the Spring of AD 31. He caused an end to sacrifice and offering. He died once and for all. No more need for lambs or goats or bulls. Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God. He paid the price for our sin. He was wounded for our transgressions, and by His wounds, we are healed. That 490 years determined for Daniel's people, the Jews, ended in AD 34. That was the time that the gospel was taken to the Gentiles. Following the martyrdom of Stephen the deacon, and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul, the gospel was taken to the Gentiles.

Every detail of the prophecy of the 490 years was fulfilled in detail, just as the angel Gabriel foretold. But we need to go back to Daniel 9:23-24. Because Gabriel's assignment is to help Daniel to understand the vision, the march of the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel chapter 8. So how does the testimony of Gabriel in Daniel chapter 9 unlock the prophecy of Daniel chapter 8? The answer is found in a key word in Daniel 9:24. Let's look at Daniel 9:24 together. There the angel Gabriel tells Daniel, "Seventy sevens, that is 490, are DETERMINED for your people. Now the Hebrew word translated "determined", chathak, is only used this one time in the Hebrew Scriptures. So how do we know what it means? Several meanings are given by translators. But this Hebrew word is used frequently outside of the Bible. Ancient Rabbis used this word as meaning "to amputate" or "to cut off."

(Take a loaf of bread and cut off a section from the loaf. Hold up the small portion of the loaf). So what is the 490 cut off from? The 2300 days of the vision of Daniel 8 that Gabriel has come to help Daniel understand! Now it would make sense that the 490 years is cut off from the

middle, or cut off from the end. The 490 year prophecy that applies to Daniel and his people is cut off from the beginning of the 2300 year prophecy. That is vitally important information given by the angel Gabriel, because it gives us a starting date for the 2300 years.

If you add 2300 years to 457 BC, you come to AD 1844. That's when the work of cleansing the sanctuary would begin. Now in the great spiritual awakening of the 1800s in America, there were some Christians who came to understand some of the details of this prophecy. And they came to the conclusion that this great time prophecy of the 2300 days would be fulfilled in 1844. To be more specific, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement in 1844, which was October 22, 1844. And I am convinced that they would correct in their understanding of the time for the conclusion of this great time prophecy of Daniel 8. One of those Christians in that great spiritual awakening was a man by the name of William Miller.

Where William Miller made a mistake was in his understanding of what would happen in 1844. Miller presumed that the cleansing of the sanctuary was a cleansing of the earth by fire. That must mean, Miller concluded, that Jesus would return in glory in 1844. Well, obviously, Miller, and other devoted followers of Jesus who held to that interpretation were greatly disappointed. Jesus did not return in glory in 1844. It was indeed a Great Disappointment.

What then was to occur starting in 1844, at the end of the great time prophecy of Daniel 8? The sanctuary was to be cleansed. The work of judgment was to begin. The final dealing with sin was to commence. How long will that time of judgment continue? We don't know. But this we do know. We're almost home! Because soon the declaration will be heard, "It is finished! Revelation 22:11-12 "....."

Some people are tempted to live in anxiety and fear, knowing that we are living in the

time of the judgment. But there is no need for fear. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, if you have asked Him to cleanse you from all sin, you can have blessed assurance and hope!

Once we have that blessed assurance, we don't have to fear the judgment. In fact, quite the opposite. We can rejoice that the heavenly judgment is even now in session. The final dealing with sin is even now in process. Are we home yet? No. Not quite. But we're almost home! Hallelujah! We're almost home.

DANIEL - PART 10
Delivered!
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Daniel 10-12
Subject: How the great struggle between good and evil will end
Complement: The Lord will triumph and He will deliver His people
Exegetical idea: In the great struggle between good and evil, the Lord will triumph and deliver His people.
Homiletical idea: **God will triumph over evil, and He will deliver all those who put their trust in Him.**
Purpose: To remind my hearers in the midst of the great struggle between good and evil and we will be delivered!

Introduction

What a journey we've been on together these past weeks, studying the great book of Daniel! I've been blessed! Have you? Whenever we humbly and prayerfully study the Word of God, we will be blessed! The Psalmist was right when he said, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Today we come to the last three chapters of the book of Daniel: chapters 10, 11, and 12. An initial reading of these last three chapters reveals that they are actually one thought unit. Perhaps you're thinking, if these 3 chapters are actually one thought unit, why is this section divided in three? Good question! As you know, the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, were not originally organized in chapters and verses. Jewish scholars began to divide up the books of Moses into reading blocks in the 6th century BC. Modern chapter divisions for the Hebrew Scriptures appeared in the Masoretic texts between the 7th and 10th centuries AD.

A similar process occurred with the New Testament. The chapter divisions of the New Testament were the work of Stephen Langdon, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 13th AD. The

verse divisions of the New Testament were the work of several Bible scholars in the 16th AD. (Robert Estienne for the first Greek NT (1551) and William Whittingham for the first English NT). Whittingham also worked on the first English translation of the Bible, Old and New Testament, to have chapters and verses. This was known as the Geneva Bible, published in AD 1560.)

So when the book of Daniel was written, there were no chapter divisions. And is clear as we read the last 3 chapters of the book that chapters 10, 11, and 12 are one thought unit. So we need to study all three chapters as a whole.

The key character in this last section of the book of Daniel is not Daniel himself. Daniel was the key character in Daniel 6. The character in this last section of the book is not one of Daniel's friends, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They were the key characters in Daniel 3. The key character in this last section of the book is not one of the ruling monarchs, like King Nebuchadnezzar. He was the key character in Daniel 4. The key character in this last section of the book of Daniel is not a fierce nondescript beast that rises up out of the waters, or a little horn religious/political power that speaks words against the Most High and persecutes the saints of the Most High. They were the key characters in Daniel 7.

So who is the key character in this last section of the book of Daniel? He appears at the beginning of this last section, in Daniel chapter 10:5-6. "....."

What is the setting for this glorious revelation? Well, Daniel 10:1 tells us that we are in the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia. 536/535 BC. And Daniel has been mourning and fasting for three weeks. Why is he so distressed? He doesn't tell us. But we can read between the lines. The first decree granting the exiled Jews permission to return to their

homeland had been issued by Cyrus in 538 BC. Only a relatively small contingency responded to that decree, under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, prince of Judah. (Ezra 1:8). But the returning exiles encountered fierce opposition when they returned home. Hostile neighbors started rumors that the returning exiles were disloyal to the king of Persia. It was time of suspicion and turmoil. Just when Daniel thought that a new day had finally dawned, things seemed to be going from bad to worse.

As a result, Daniel is mourning and fasting for 7 times the normal 3 days of fast. He is distressed to the limit. And in his great time of need, on the 24th day of the first month, he receives a glorious revelation. Now the date, the 24th day of the first month, may not mean that much to us. But that was right after Passover. Which means that Daniel had been fasting and praying right through this most sacred festival of the Jewish year. A festival which pointed back to God's great deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage and a festival which pointed forward to God's great deliverance through Messiah who was to come.

It is in the context of this earnest seeking after God in the midst of a time of trouble that a glorious revelation is given to Daniel. Let's look again at the record in Daniel 10:5-6.

“.....”

This glorious being is referred to as “a certain man”, but he is obviously not “a man”. He is appearing in human form. But no ordinary man has a face like the appearance of lightning and eyes like torches of fire.

Who is this glorious being that appears to the aged prophet Daniel? Please notice in Daniel 10:5 that the glorious being is clothed in linen, and he is wearing a golden sash around his waist. This linen garment is the clothing of the priest, and also the clothing of the High Priest on

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The sash was also worn by the priest and the High Priest. But this glorious being is no regular priest. Or even a human High Priest. This glorious being wears a sash of gold. His body is like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.

Do you recognize that description from anywhere else in the Sacred Scriptures? Listen to the testimony of the prophet Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel. Ezekiel also describes a glorious scene shown to him in vision. **Ezekiel 1:26-28.** “.....” Do you notice that the prophet is struggling for words to describe the glory that he is seeing. It’s the likeness of this and the likeness of that! Ezekiel also speaks of lightning (Ex 1:14), and the sound of many waters (Ex 1:24).

That sounds like the glorious being who appeared to Daniel, doesn’t it? Where else in the Scriptures do we see this glorious imagery? That’s right. The book of Revelation. Chapter 1. This is exciting! Turn to the last book of the New Testament, the book of **Revelation 1:12-18.** “.....”

Who is this glorious being who appears in Revelation 1? It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, the Son of God! And it is this same Son of God, more than 500 years earlier, who appears to Daniel on the banks of the great river Tigris.

And Daniel records in **Daniel 10:7,** “.....” Why was it that Daniel alone saw the vision? And why was it that those around Daniel experienced terror and fled to hide themselves? That description of people running in fear and trying to hide themselves from the glory that was revealed to Daniel reminds me of these words recorded by the prophet John

also in the book of **Revelation 6:14-19**. “.....”

In contrast, according to the prophet Isaiah, when the glory of the Lord is revealed others will look up with joy and say, “This is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD’ we have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

Isaiah 25:9

What makes the difference? Why was Daniel open to receive this glorious revelation, while those around him ran in terror and sought to hide themselves? It was the condition of their hearts. Daniel’s heart was open to experience communion with the Almighty God. It’s true that no strength remained in him. It’s true that Daniel was shaking like a leaf. After all, He was in the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords. He was in the presence of the One who spoke the worlds into existence. He was in the presence of the One who commanded, and it stood fast! So Daniel was shaking. After his encounter with the glorious Son of God, with the sound of the Lord’s words still ringing in his ears, Daniel found himself laying face down on the ground, stunned! But he did not run in terror. He did not try to hide.

So this last section of the book of Daniel begins with a glorious revelation of the Son of God. The middle portion of this final section of Daniel’s book outlines a continuing struggle between good and evil. The great controversy continues. The main characters in this section are the king of the north and the king of the south. There have been many interpretations of the king of the north and the king of the south, described in Daniel chapter 11. For the Jews in Palestine, the king of the south was Egypt, and the king of the north was Syria. You may remember that after the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek empire was divided up among Alexander’s generals. Do you remember the four heads of the leopard in Daniel chapter 7, and

the four horns that come up on the goat after the great horn is broken in Daniel chapter 8? Well, one of those four Greek generals, Ptolemy, established his dynasty in Egypt, and his descendants became the rulers of Egypt. Another of those Greek generals, Seleucus, established his dynasty in Syria, to the north, and his descendants were the kings of Syria. During the 3rd century BC, Palestine was governed by the king of the south, Egypt. But in 200 BC, the king of the north, the Syrian King, Antiochus the Great, seized control of Palestine. It was Antiochus the Great's son, Antiochus Epiphanes, who tried to destroy Judaism, and desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. That desecration of the Temple resulted in the Jewish revolt led by Judas Maccabees.

But as you study Daniel chapter 11, it becomes apparent that the king of the south represents much more than the kingdom of Egypt. And the king of the north represents much more than Syria. The symbolism of Daniel chapter 11 illustrates that "God's people are being attacked by false religion from the north, which would include the Syrian kings, and pagan Rome, and the little horn power of Daniel chapter 7. And God's people are also being attacked by anti-theistic and secular philosophy forces from the south, which would include Egypt, and any other power that manifests anti-theistic and humanistic views.

Sometimes those forces that are anti-theistic or atheistic battle for power against those forces religious/political forces that seek to enforce false or apostate religion. And so sometimes in Daniel chapter 11, the king of the south and the king of the north contend against each other. Other times those opposing forces form an alliance in their common opposition toward the people of God. But one thing is certain. There is a continued great controversy between good and evil. And that great controversy continues, even to this day.

But that's not the end of the story. The struggles and contentions of the king of the north

and the king of the south in Daniel chapter 11 are followed by the word of hope in Daniel chapter 12. Look with me at Daniel 12:1-3. “.....” Just like the imagery of Daniel chapter 10:5-7, this passage in Daniel 12:1-3 evokes thoughts about the end of time, the time when God will finally put an end to the great struggle between good and evil.

I have a question for you in regards to Daniel 12:1. Who is Michael? He is described here at the “great prince.” His name means “Who is like God?” or “One like God.” He is described in Daniel 10:13 as one of the chief princes. He is clearly a heavenly being, because Michael comes to the aid of the heavenly messenger in Daniel chapter 10.

The author of the book of Jude tells us that Michael is the archangel, the leader of the angels. We learn more about Michael in the book of Revelation, chapter 12, beginning with verse 7. Rev 12:7-9. “.....”

Michael is the leader of the loyal angels. When Lucifer rebelled against God and became Satan, the one who opposes, Satan used his cunning and deceit to convince other angels to join him in his rebellion against God. The result was war in heaven. And Satan and those angels who had joined with him in his rebellion were cast out of heaven, having been defeated by Michael and the loyal angels.

So, at the very least, Michael, the archangel is the leader of the loyal angelic host. Would you agree? But there are some Bible scholars who are convinced that Michael is much more than an angelic being. Is it possible to be the leader of the angels and not be a created being like the other angels? Michael’s name is a cryptic clue regarding His true identity. The name Michael means “Who is like God?” or “One like God.” Could it be that Michael is none other than the Son of God? He presents himself to the angelic host in a form that they can relate to, as

Michael the archangel.

I personally hold to that view. That Michael is another name, another appellation, for the eternal Son of God. Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I am not saying that the Son of God who came to earth as Jesus, Messiah, Savior, Risen Lord, great High Priest and soon coming King, I am not saying that the Son of God is an angel, like Gabriel, or the rest of the created heavenly beings. I am suggesting the Michael, the leader of the angelic host is none other than the eternal Son of God, one with the Father and with the Holy Spirit from eternity past.

But let's remember what is most important. We've come to the end of the book of Daniel, and the conclusion is clear. God wins in the great controversy between good and evil! Did you hear what I said? God wins! God has revealed to Daniel sweeping revelations of the history of this planet in rebellion. Kingdom succeeding kingdom. Rebellion and apostasy. But when it is all said and done, God triumphs over evil. God wins! And God delivers all those who put their trust in Him. If you have read these last chapters carefully, you may still have questions about the 1290 days and the 1335 days. You may have questions about why Michael is called one of the chief princes. But this much is clear: When the story ends, God wins! God triumphs over all forces of evil, and God delivers all those who trust in Him!

I heard a story many years ago about a little girl who loved to read. She would rather read than play. She would rather read than watch television. One day she was reading a book, and she looked very sad. Her daddy asked her, "Why do you look so sad?" With a tear in her eye and a quivering lip, the little girl recounted the story in the book that she was reading. The bad guys were always beating up the good guy. It just wasn't fair. Daddy reminded her that it

was just a book. She shouldn't take it so seriously. Some time later, Daddy noticed that his daughter was smiling. There was a sparkle in her eye. Every once in a while she would quietly whisper, "Don't worry. Don't worry." Daddy was curious. Perhaps his daughter had listened to his counsel. Perhaps she wasn't taking her reading so seriously. So Daddy asked his daughter, "Are things going better now?" "Oh, no, Daddy," she replied. "The bad guys are still beating up the good guy . Things don't look too good at all! But I took a few minutes to read the end of the book, and it's all going to turn out right in the end!"

My friends, we've read the end of the book. And it's all going to turn out right in the end!" God is going to triumph in this great controversy between good and evil. We've read the end of the book. God wins! And God will deliver His people. God will deliver all those who put their trust in Him. Things may look bleak right now. The king of the north and the king of the south may be battling all around us, but we've read the end of the book. And so we can have peace in the midst of the dark valley. Because we know the end of the story. It's all going to turn out right in the end. God will triumph and God will deliver all those who put their trust in Him.