

1 NOVEMBER

Daniel 12:4-13

You shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance

The Lord told Daniel to seal the book containing all the words that had come to him in his visions (4). Stuart Olyott comments, 'The old Persian custom was that once a book had been copied and publicly circulated, one copy was sealed and placed in the library. This was so that future generations could read it. It is important to note that was only done once the book had begun to enjoy a wide readership' (DARE TO STAND ALONE, page 163). The things that God revealed to Daniel were to be made known not only to his own generation, but also to those who were to live afterwards.

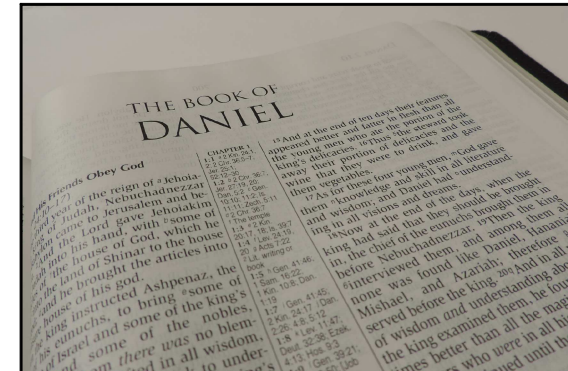
Daniel saw *two others* (angels), one on each bank of the river Tigris (cp. 10:4). 'The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river' is the Lord Jesus Christ (6; cp. 10:5). One of the angels asked, him when these things would take place. He replied that the Antichrist would dominate only for a limited time. When evil is at its strongest, it will be destroyed for ever: 'All these things shall be finished' (5-7; cp. 7:25). We must beware of dogmatism in interpreting the vision; even Daniel did not understand its timescale (8). No one can be sure of the meaning of the 'days' in verses 11 and 12.

The Lord had words of comfort for Daniel who had remained faithful throughout his long life: 'But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days' (13). This chapter encourages us to persevere, to be brave and faithful in troubled times. We cannot take any earthly possessions with us to glory but we will not need them. For God's people there is *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven* (1 Peter 1:4). **Even better, we shall see our King in his beauty and splendour, and we will be with him for ever. Hallelujah!**

*How vast the treasure we possess!
How rich thy bounty, King of grace!
This world is ours, and worlds to come;
Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home.* (Isaac Watts)

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



October 2018

Bible readings from Daniel

Some to everlasting life, some to shame

Daniel's vision concludes with a revelation of what will happen in the last days before the end of the world.. Before the return of Christ *there shall be a time of trouble* such as never previously known. In all this suffering, when evil appears to have triumphed, the archangel Michael stands watch over the people of God (1). Many Christians will be slain, just as were godly Jews in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, but they will be delivered – not from death but out of death.

The names of God's people are written in a special book (1: cp. Luke 10:20). On the day of judgment at the end of the world those whose names are not written in that book will be *cast into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:12,15). When the Lord Jesus comes again, everyone who has ever lived will be raised from the dead (2; cp. John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15). This will be a day of great separation. *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt* (2; cp. Matthew 25:31–46; 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10). The word '*many*' does not mean that some will not be raised. It is a Hebrew way of pointing out that the number of those involved is vast. The Bible teaches us that all will be raised at the last day.

There are rewards for faithful witness (3). Who are these wise people who *turn many to righteousness*? They are those who understand and instruct many (11:33), often at great personal cost. They shone as lights in dark times and by their witness turned many to righteousness. They *shall shine like the brightness of the firmament ... like the stars forever and ever* (3). It is a costly business to be faithful to God in difficult and evil times. **Where do you stand? On which side of the divide will you be on the day of resurrection?** Will you hear the wonderful words of the Lord Jesus, '*Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*' (Matthew 25:34)?

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The people who know their God shall be strong

Antiochus Epiphanes returned from Egypt with great plunder. In 168 BC he engaged in another campaign against Egypt but he did not enjoy the success of his previous campaigns. *But it shall not be like the former or the latter* (28–29). He reigned from 175 to 164 BC ('Epiphanes' means 'Illustrious', but people called him 'Epimanes' which means 'The Madman'). He tried to destroy the Jewish religion and he desecrated the temple by replacing the altar of burnt offering with a pagan altar (30–31). He won over some treacherous Jews with flattering words; these Jews renounced their faith (*'those who do wickedly against the covenant'*, 32). He made the people attend pagan ceremonies and those faithful men and women who refused were murdered. Some were slain by the sword or burned alive (33–34).

God has his faithful people in evil times, *The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits* (32). There were also at that time people who understood, who instructed many, teaching them the Word of God. The rebellion of the Maccabees was successful and the temple was cleansed and re-consecrated in 164 BC.

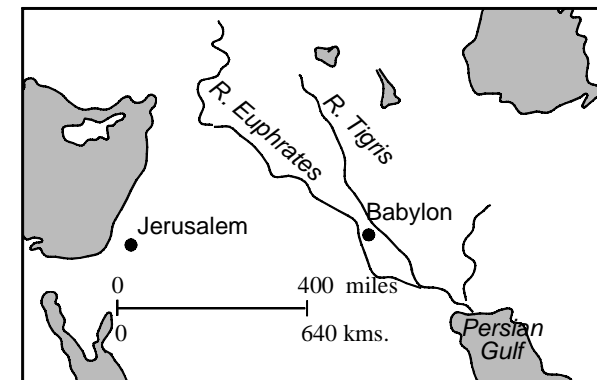
Another *'vile person'* (21) is described in verses 36 to 45. These verses cannot refer to Antiochus who did have a regard for certain gods. The reference is to the Antichrist who was spoken of in chapter 7. He will oppose God (36–38) and conquer all before him, Edom, Moab and Ammon, traditional enemies of the Jews (41), no longer existed and must be understood metaphorically here, as those who are the enemies of God's people. The Antichrist and all our enemies will be destroyed at the return of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:8–12). *He shall come to his end, and no one will help him* (45).

In these evil and confusing days we need to know God if we are to do exploits for him. We need to have discernment and understanding if we are to instruct many. It is those who know God who will triumph in suffering, in persecution and even in death. **How well do you know God?**

DANIEL

In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah (605 BC) many young Jews of royal or noble descent were taken captive into Babylon. Daniel and his three friends were among these captives (1:1–7). Daniel held influential positions for over 60 years in the empires of Babylon and Persia. The Lord Jesus called him *'Daniel the prophet'* (Matthew 24:15). He prophesied of the fall of the Babylonian empire and of subsequent Middle-East events until the coming of Christ into the world, of the rise of the Antichrist, and of the second coming of Christ. Though Daniel served great earthly kings, the truth emphasised in his book is that the Lord God is absolutely sovereign over all the nations of the world (eg. 4:34–37). We will not understand God's word to us through the book of Daniel if we fail to see his sovereign hand at work throughout its pages.

The captive Jews asked, *'How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a foreign land?'* (Psalm 137:4). Daniel and his three friends did *'sing the LORD'S song in a foreign land'*. They remained faithful to God in a hostile environment and in the face of death. What was the secret of Daniel's great spiritual strength? He was a man of prayer (2:17–23; 6:10–11; 9:20–21) and one who knew his Scriptures (9:2,11,13). He knew God and his life testified to the truth of the words, *'The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits'* (11:32).



Outline of Daniel

29 OCTOBER

Daniel 11:1–28

1. Faithful Witness in a Hostile Environment (chapters 1 to 6)

Daniel's captivity and preparation for royal service	1:1–21
Nebuchadnezzar's first dream interpreted	– 2:1–49
Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace	– 3:1–30
Nebuchadnezzar's second dream interpreted	– 4:1–37
Belshazzar's feast and the fall of Babylon	– 5:1–31
Daniel in the lions' den	– 6:1–28

2. Daniel's Visions and Prophecies (chapters 7 to 12)

Vision of the four beasts and the Son of Man	– 7:1–28
Vision of the ram and the goat	– 8:1–27
Daniel's prayer and prophecy of the seventy sevens	– 9:1–27
Daniel's Final Vision	– 10:1 to 12:13

- His vision of God (10:1–21)
- The King of Persia; then Alexander and the division of his kingdom (11:1–4)
- Wars between kings of north and south (11:5–20)
- Antiochus Epiphanes and the Antichrist (11:21–45)
- The end of the world (12:1–3)
- The conclusion of the prophecy (12:4–13)

For further reading, I recommend the following books:

Stuart Olyott – Dare to Stand Alone, published by Evangelical Press.

Dale Ralph Davis – The Message of Daniel, published by
Inter-Varsity Press.

In his place shall arise a vile person

The Lord now says to Daniel, *'I will tell you the truth'* (2) and he goes on to give him a picture of the future, already written in his eternal books (10:21). The verses in our reading today contain a detailed prophecy of the rise and fall of kingdoms in the period between the Old and New Testaments. The historic details are so accurate that unbelieving Bible scholars refuse to believe that Daniel could have written these words. They allege that they were written after the events occurred because they do not believe that God miraculously reveals the future in prophecy.

The fourth king of Persia was the great Xerxes (2) and the *mighty king* was Alexander the Great of Greece, who died at the age of 32. His kingdom was eventually divided into four parts (3–4). Verses 5 to 20 describe various conflicts between the king of the South (Egypt) and the king of the North (the Seleucids based in Syria). For a more detailed explanation of these verses, read 'Dare to Stand Alone' by Stuart Olyott. The king destroyed *not in anger or in battle* (20) was Seleucus Philopater who only reigned for a few weeks before disappearing mysteriously, probably assassinated. He had planned to seize the funds of the temple in *the glorious kingdom* (Israel).

In his place shall arise a vile person (21). This was Antiochus Epiphanes (see notes on chapter 8). His first campaign against Egypt is spoken of in verses 25–26. Ptolemy, the Egyptian king, failed to overcome Antiochus because of treachery among some in his own army. These kings later met, but lied to each other at the same table (27). Antiochus returned home but his heart was moved against the land of Palestine (*'the holy covenant'*; 28). He was a cunning, cruel and evil man who hated and persecuted the Jews. In their terrible suffering God may have seemed to be absent, but he was working out his purposes. All these events came at God's *appointed time* (27,29) and what he determines shall be done (36). **History is HIS story and his purposes never fail! This is our great confidence in these days when many nations and individuals are bent on evil.**

O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong

Daniel was so overwhelmed by his vision of the Lord Jesus that his strength was drained from him. He fell prostrate to the ground and sank into a deep sleep (8–9). The Lord spoke to reassure the elderly prophet saying, ‘*O Daniel, man greatly beloved.*’ He touched him so that he was raised to a crouching position on his hands and knees. The Lord then told him to stand upright and said, ‘*Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words*’ (10–12).

The Lord revealed to Daniel that there had been a conflict in the heavens and that the prince of Persia had withstood him for twenty-one days, when the archangel Michael had come to fight alongside him (13,21). Michael is shown elsewhere in the Bible as the one who commands God’s angels (Jude 9; Revelation 12:7). The prince was not Cyrus, the Persian king, but an evil, supernatural personality behind the gods of Persia. It was this evil one who had stirred the Persian authorities to support the opposition against the small group of exiles who had returned to rebuild Jerusalem (see Ezra chapter 4). Daniel had prayed for God’s help and a great spiritual battle had followed.

We too are engaged in spiritual warfare! *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:10–18). Satan has been conquered by our Saviour who loved us and who gave himself for us. We can resist the devil knowing that he will flee from us (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8–9). We also have the help of angels (Psalm 24:7; Hebrews 1:13–14). An angel (‘*one having the likeness of a man*’, 18) touched Daniel and strengthened him. The Lord encouraged Daniel saying, ‘*O man, greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!*’ (19; cp. 11; 9:23). **Christians too have a great encouragement to pray knowing that God will hear us because we too are ‘greatly beloved’ (see Romans 8:32).**

The Lord gave ... God had brought ... God gave

Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon in 605 BC and invaded Judah the same year. He plundered Jerusalem of its treasures and took many captives to Babylon including Daniel and his three friends. Jehoiakim continued to reign over Judah as a puppet king for the next eight years. Daniel chapter 1 shows that God is absolutely sovereign. The Hebrew verb, ‘nathan’, meaning ‘to give’, is used three times in this chapter in relation to the activity of God (2,9,17).

God is sovereign over the nations. We see this in the decline of Judah. He had favoured that nation and had sent godly prophets to bring them his Word, but they rebelled against him. He brought disaster upon them because of their wicked ways. *The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his* (Nebuchadnezzar’s) *hand* (2). Wicked Jehoiakim deserved to be punished, yet Daniel and his friends were godly young men. They too suffered, being taken from their homes and country. God was with them however. *Now God had brought* (Hebrew = ‘had given’) *Daniel into the favour and good will of the chief of the eunuchs* (9). God is sovereign in every circumstance in our lives, good or bad. *As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom* (17).

We are now witnessing increasing wickedness and decline in the western world. The shadow of terrorism and uncertainty hangs over us and there is apprehension as we face the future. People in other countries face conflict, poverty and natural disasters. **Christian, are you filled with fear and anxiety? Oh, Remember that God is sovereign and that he is wisely working out his purposes! Be determined with his help to be brave like Daniel and his friends, and to shine in the darkness.** Who knows how God may be pleased to bless you and use you as you honour and obey him?

*Sovereign Ruler of the skies,
Ever gracious, ever wise;
All my times are in thy hand,
All events at thy command.*

(John Ryland)

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself

The Babylonians handpicked certain Hebrews to be trained with a view to oversee Jewish affairs in their administration. Daniel and his three friends were among those chosen to undergo three years of special training so that they could serve the king of Babylon (5). They would be given the finest education available in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's plan was to thoroughly brainwash the cream of Jewish youth, initiating them into the pagan customs and culture of his country. He wanted every trait of their own religion and culture to be removed – they were to become Babylonians. Their Jewish names which included in them the name of Jehovah ('El' and 'Iah' or 'Jah', the latter two being shortened forms of 'Jehovah'). Daniel became '*Beltshazzar*' (7) which means 'Keeper of the hidden treasures of Bel' (one of Babylon's gods; cp. Isaiah 46:1). **The Babylonians removed Jehovah from their names, but they could not remove him from their hearts.**

The trainees were a privileged class who enjoyed delicacies from the royal kitchen, but such food and drink was dedicated to the gods of Babylon. To eat that food was to be identified with pagan worship *but Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies* (8). The stand taken by Daniel and his friends took tremendous courage; Bible commentators suggest that Daniel was only about 14 years of age at that time.

Have you purposed in your heart not to defile yourself with the dreadful enticements of our permissive society? Do your friends, neighbours or work-mates recognise that you are a Christian, a happy person who does not need the vain, passing pleasures of sin to give you joy? Are you making a stand for God in your place of work or where you study? Let people accuse you of narrow-mindedness, intolerance or even bigotry but you must always remain faithful to the Lord. **Never compromise your Christian principles in the name of tolerance. Don't just admire Daniel; follow his example.**

A great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves

The Lord gave Daniel a vision in the third year of Cyrus, the Persian king. This vision warns of conflict and suffering (1; cp. margin reading:– '*The message was true and of great conflict*'). The vision covers world history in relation to God's people (14) from the time of the Persian empire right through to the end of the world.

Cyrus had decreed two years earlier that the Jews could return to their land to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Daniel had not joined the returning exiles, perhaps on account of his age. Though he was old, he was not too old for fasting and earnest prayer (1–3). We are not told why Daniel was fasting, mourning and praying but it could have been because so few Jews had grasped the opportunity and challenge to go back to their land. The majority were content to remain in Babylon. Daniel would also have heard of the opposition that the exiles encountered on their return to Jerusalem (see Ezra 4:1–5).

The prophet was by the banks of the River Tigris when he had this vision. He first saw a man clothed in great splendour and full of majesty (4–6). The apostle John had a similar vision (see Revelation 1:12–18). It is almost certain that the man seen by Daniel was the Lord Jesus Christ. He appeared to men on a number of occasions during Old Testament times long before he came as a baby to Bethlehem (these appearances are known as 'theophanies').

The men with Daniel did not see the vision, but they felt the awesome presence of God. *A great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves* (7). The sight of the Lord Jesus Christ when he comes again will be terrifying to those who do not know him. The day of judgment will be a fearful time for those who are not saved (cp. Revelation 6:14–17). **Are you looking forward to Christ's return or are you dreading it?** If you are indifferent to this momentous event, beware. If you live in dread of it, come to Christ now for salvation, repenting of your sin and submitting to him. He will then accept you and save you.

Messiah shall be cut off

Daniel was still praying at evening time when the angel Gabriel came to him. The angel told him that the Lord had heard him from the moment that he had begun praying. Gabriel assured Daniel that he was ‘*greatly beloved*’ (20–23). The elderly prophet had been thinking about the seventy years and the end of the Jews’ exile in Babylon, but the Lord revealed that there was another ‘seventy’ in his plans for Jerusalem. The ‘*seventy weeks*’ (literally ‘seventy sevens,’ 24) have been the subject of much disagreement between Christians since the time of the early church fathers. We must beware of trying to calculate dates by manipulating these ‘seventy sevens’.

Gabriel revealed that the ‘seventy sevens’ are divided into three periods. Until the coming of Messiah there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (25). After the first seven weeks of the seventy *the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times* (25). This almost certainly refers to the time of Ezra and of Nehemiah. There is no prediction of events to take place during the second period of sixty-two weeks.

The prophecy then speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘*Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself*’ (26). Many Christians believe that the seventieth week of this chapter comes at the end of the world, but this cannot be possible because Gabriel told Daniel that the Messiah was to be cut off after the sixty-ninth week (that is, during the seventieth week). Isaiah also prophesied of Christ, ‘*For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken*’ (Isaiah 53:8). His perfect sacrifice for sinners brought an end to the need of animal sacrifices for sins (27; cp. Hebrews 10:11–18). The Jews rejected their Messiah and the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the sanctuary in AD 70 (26). The Lord Jesus had warned that this would happen (Matthew 23:34 to 24:35; Luke 23:27–31). **All who reject him will be ‘cut off’ for ever and suffer eternal separation from God (John 3:36; 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9). We reject this great salvation at our peril (Hebrews 2:3).**

God had brought Daniel into ... favour and good will

The sovereign Lord honoured the brave and principled stand of Daniel and his friends. We read, *Now God had brought Daniel into the favour and good will of the chief of the eunuchs* (9). This man Ashpenaz (3) had been charged with the welfare of the trainees and he was understandably concerned that the spartan diet suggested by Daniel would have an adverse effect upon their health. If this were to happen, his own life would be in danger (10).

God had brought Daniel into the favour and good will of the chief of the eunuchs. The man agreed to Daniel’s request that they be allowed to eat just vegetables and drink water for a trial period of ten days. Following this period of testing Daniel and his three friends looked far healthier than all their companions who were eating from the royal table. They were then allowed to continue their chosen diet.

The Lord richly blessed Daniel and his friends: *God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams* (17). When the three years’ training were completed, they were interviewed by the king as were the others who had been chosen for training. Nebuchadnezzar thoroughly questioned them to test their suitability for royal service. They were not only better than the other young men, but *in all matters of wisdom and understanding* they were far better than any of the occult practitioners and advisers used by the king (17–20). Stuart Olyott writes, ‘As a result, each of the four found himself in a high position where he could use his influence for God. The Lord could trust them with such promotion because they had demonstrated at base level that, come what may, even when in personal danger, they would remain true to him’ (DARE TO STAND ALONE, page 23). They were determined to make their stand for God and he honoured them. **We are never the losers for honouring God in our lives (cp. 1 Samuel 2:30).**

*How blest is life if lived for thee, my loving Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give, such perfect gladness can afford.*

It is a difficult thing that the king requires

The first verse appears to contradict chapter 1, verse 5, but the three years of training could be seen as portions of three years (see Edward Young's INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT on Daniel, page 356, Tyndale Press, for Babylonian reckoning of time-spans).

Nebuchadnezzar was lying on his bed thinking about the future (29) when he fell asleep and had a strange dream. He woke up was so troubled that he could no longer sleep. He decided to put his magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and wise men to the test. They were to describe the dream itself and then interpret it. If they were successful, he would bestow great honour upon them, but if they failed, he would kill them (5–6). They protested that they would need to be told the dream if the king wanted an interpretation, saying, '*It is a difficult thing that the king requires, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh*' (11) The angry king saw that they were frauds and he ordered their execution (5–13).

Commenting on verse 11, Dale Ralph Davis asks, 'Now think: Why does the biblical writer want you to hear that? ... their words are a confession of the failure of paganism. Daniel himself reinforces their words in verse 27... because there is a God in heaven – and in Babylon! – who reveals mysteries (28).

By depicting the helplessness of paganism the writer wants to say: "Don't you see? Paganism is nothing but a religious cul-de-sac. It can give no sure word from outside." By contrast then – and in the light of the whole chapter – he is saying that life is a dead-end street without a God who discloses what the future holds. He is telling exiled Israel that there is no need to be awed by paganism, despite its trappings and splendour, for it is nothing but empty and dark' (THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL, page 43).

Christian, bring your praises to God for saving you from your sins, from the darkness and helplessness of being lost and without him.

O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act!

Let us learn from Daniel's prayer:

- There is reverence. Though Daniel had enjoyed great experiences of God, he was not casual in his approach to the Lord. He prayed, '*O Lord, great and awesome God*' (4). Reverence is an essential element in true worship because we adore God when we are gripped with a sense of overwhelming awe and wonder. Jehovah is *the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy* (Isaiah 57:15).
- There is confession of sin. Daniel came to God confessing his own sin and that of his people Israel (20; cp. Isaiah 6:1–5). Almost every verse from 5 to 16 contains a confession of sin. We should be aware of our own sinfulness and confess our sins to God. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).
- There is supplication (pleading). The word '*supplications*' ('*pleas*') is mentioned five times in this chapter (verses 3,17,18,20,23); Supplications are earnest and humble petitions coming from an awareness of God's righteousness and of our own unworthiness. Daniel prayed, '*We do not present our supplications before you because of our righteous deeds, but because of your great mercies*' (18). We must plead with God on the basis of his '*great mercies*' when we bring our requests to him. Daniel prayed for God to cause his face to shine on his sanctuary and on Jerusalem (17–18). He wanted to see the Jews restored to their land and the temple and the city rebuilt.

Pleading involves a sense of urgency. Though Daniel is reverent in his praying, the tone of his prayer is urgent: '*O Lord, hear! O Lord forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for your own sake*' (19). Our prayers are often lifeless and lacking in expression, faithless and dead! Let Daniel's prayer challenge us to lay hold on God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18).

Then I set my face toward the Lord God

Daniel was taken captive to Babylon in 605 BC and he lived to see the collapse of the Babylonian empire in 538 BC. He was now about eighty-two years old. He remained faithful to God throughout his long life. He was a great man of prayer and who searched the Scriptures. Though much of the Bible had not been written in those days, Daniel searched what Scriptures were available to him.

In the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede (537 BC), Daniel was reading the scrolls of Jeremiah's prophecy (1). When he was a boy, Daniel may have heard the prophet in Jerusalem. He realised from Jeremiah's prophecy that the Babylonian captivity would be for seventy years had been fulfilled (see Jeremiah 25:8–11; 29:10–14). Daniel had prayed throughout his exile in Babylon facing Jerusalem (6:14) but he now realised that the way would soon be open for the people to return to his beloved city.

The promises of God's Word stirred Daniel to pray. He had regular times of prayer but this was to be a special season of prayer with fasting and mourning. He wrote, *'Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes'* (3). The Lord soon answered Daniel's prayer. Within a few months Darius had gone and King Cyrus decreed that the Jews could return to their homeland.

We will be looking at Daniel's prayer tomorrow and learning from it. Notice that he had a resolve and determination to pray. *Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer.* Without prayer we are very weak. With prayer and God's Word to feed us, we will be strong. **When did we last 'set' our faces toward God in prayer?**

*Restraining prayer we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.* (William Cowper)

He knows what is in the darkness

Daniel and his three friends were in grave danger because they were on the king's death list (13) as they were among the wise men (1:20). Daniel requested that the king give him time so that he would be able to tell him the interpretation of the dream (14–16).

Daniel and his friends then sought God in prayer, confident that he would hear and answer them (17–18). The Lord revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel, who *blessed the God of heaven* (19). He was grateful that God had granted mercies to him and he worshipped and praised the Lord (20–23). Read this prayer over and over again and meditate on all the wonderful attributes of God mentioned here. We are encouraged to pray because God is infinitely wise and powerful (20).

We are again reminded that he is sovereign over the affairs of nations: *'He removes kings and raises up kings'* (21). * He works powerfully and mysteriously in raising up governments and bringing them down according to his wise purposes. God will bring down evil tyrants in his good time. Let us always remember this, and pray fervently for Christians who are persecuted by evil regimes and for the suffering church.

Look at the words of verse 22: 'He knows what is in the darkness.'

Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'You can walk into the future with a God like that – who shows you that history is going toward his unshakable kingdom and who assures you that even though you have many personal uncertainties you follow a God who knows what is in the darkness. So you keep going with hope and without fear' (THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL, page 45).

Let us worship God and be encouraged!

* Read Margaret Clarkson's great hymn, 'O Father, you are sovereign'.

But there is a God in heaven

Daniel praised and thanked God for answered prayer before seeking an audience with the king through Arioch, the captain of the king's guard (14, 23–24). Notice how Arioch claims the credit for finding the man who could interpret the king's dream, though this was not strictly true (25; cp. verse 14–15).

Nebuchadnezzar asked Daniel if he was able to make known to him the dream and its interpretation. He reminded Nebuchadnezzar that the occult diviners had been helpless to rise to his challenge, '*but there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets*' (26–27). The king's wise men had said that the gods do not dwell with flesh (11), but the God of heaven can be known! Can you imagine the king's astonishment as Daniel revealed his very thoughts and the circumstances which led to him having the dream (28–29)? Daniel was careful to point out that it was God who had given the dream to the king and that it was God who had revealed its meaning (30). We must never point men to ourselves, but to the Lord.

Millions follow the advice of astrologers and occult practitioners today. Their advice is useless (cp. 1:20) and they are instruments of Satan to deceive and lead many to hell. We need to be faithful like Daniel so that people may know by our witness that *there is a God in heaven* whom they can know through Jesus Christ. We need to tell them about the Lord who dwells with his people.

We should not be anxious about the future because the God of heaven holds our future in his hands (Psalm 31:15; Matthew 6:25–34). Christian, are you burdened with worry and cares? Think of all those cares that weigh so heavily upon you and remind yourself, '*But there is a God in heaven.*' **That makes all the difference!** He will never fail you nor forsake you. Cast your care on him because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). Are you facing problems which seem to have no solution? Oh, remember that *there is a God in heaven*. Let us worship him and make our requests known to him with joy and expectation!

But he shall be broken without human hand

Gabriel and the archangel Michael are the only two angels named in the Bible. We meet Gabriel in this chapter and Michael in chapter 10. Daniel was seeking to understand the meaning of the vision when suddenly he saw standing before him *one having the appearance of a man*. He then heard a man's voice commanding Gabriel to explain the vision to Daniel. The voice must be that of the Lord Jesus Christ whom the angels worship and whose commands they obey. By now Daniel was lying prostrate on the ground in a very deep sleep. Gabriel touched him and stood him upright and went on to explain the vision (15–19).

The vision refers to several 'horns' which represent kings and their kingdoms. Gabriel describes the little horn (Antiochus Epiphanes) as a king *having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes*. He would be mighty in power, cunning, deceitful and arrogant. The Lord revealed that Antiochus would destroy many including *the holy people* (23–24). When fearsome tyrants like Antiochus Epiphanes strut and spread terror, what comfort is there for the people of God? Tyrants have their power from God. They are not invincible and the Lord will deal with them in judgment in his good time. Gabriel explains that Antiochus *shall be broken without human hand* (25). God always has the last word!

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was also visited by Gabriel (Luke 1:19). After the birth of John he prophesied about Christ, soon to be born of Mary, saying that God '*has raised up a horn of salvation for us*' (Luke 1:69). **The Lord Jesus will destroy every 'horn' that dares oppose him and his people. They are nothing to him and soon vanish from the scene of history, but he remains for ever. Let us be encouraged!**

He cast truth to the ground

God gave Daniel another vision in the third year of Belshazzar's reign in which he was transported to Shushan (Susa) the capital of Persia. In this vision he was by the River Ulai (1–2). We are not left to speculate about the identity of the animals in this vision. The ram with the two horns pushing westward, northward and southward represents the Medo-Persian empire (3–4,20). The male goat with a prominent horn between his eyes which came from the west and which broke the horns of the ram and conquered it represents the Greek empire (5–7,21). The large horn speaking of Alexander the Great, its first king (21), was broken off to be replaced by four horns. After Alexander's death, the Greek empire eventually broke up into four kingdoms (8, *'four notable ones'*), one of them, Syria, being ruled by Seleucus.

From Syria *came a little horn which grew exceedingly great* (9). This little horn should not be confused with the little horn of chapter 7 which represents the Antichrist. Here the little horn refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, one of the later Seleucid kings of Syria. He engaged in military campaigns in the south (Egypt) and east (Elymais and Armenia) before invading Canaan (*'the Glorious Land'*, 9). Antiochus Epiphanes persecuted the Jews (*'the host of heaven'*) and opposed God himself (*'the Prince of the host'*). He desecrated the temple and stopped the daily sacrifices. *He cast truth down to the ground* (10–12). Daniel saw an angel asking how long this appalling situation would be allowed to continue (13). Another angel replied that it would be for 2300 days and that then the sanctuary would be cleansed (13–14). These days come to some six years and four months. The persecution under Antiochus lasted from 171 to 165 BC. The temple was re-consecrated in 164 BC following the Maccabean revolt.

When evil men *cast truth down to the ground* and prosper we cannot help but ask, *'How long?'* (cp. Revelation 6:10). Many a suffering saint has asked that question, **but truth will not languish for ever. God reigns and is in control, wisely working out his wonderful purposes!**

The God of heaven will set up a kingdom

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that God had made known to him by the dream what would happen *in the latter days* (28). These latter days cover the period from Christ's birth in Bethlehem to the end of the world (eg. Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; 1 Peter 1:5,20; 1 John 2:18). The meaning of the dream has great relevance to us.

Daniel described the great and awesome image that the king had seen in his dream (31–35). The image had a head of fine gold which represented Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom (38). The chest and arms of silver were the Medo-Persian empire which followed on from Babylon but never achieved its glory. The belly and thighs of bronze describe the Greek empire (39). This was followed by the Roman empire, with *legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay* (33,40–43). The Roman empire was divided between east and west and eventually into ten smaller kingdoms (the toes).

The stone which shattered the feet of the image and grew to the size of a mountain (34) speaks of the coming of Christ into the world during the rule of Rome and of his eternal kingdom. *The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed* (44). **We are not being allowed to forget that God is sovereign.** All earthly kingdoms will disappear into the dust, but we belong to an everlasting kingdom (2 Peter 1:11). The kingdom of heaven is not an earthly, political kingdom but its citizens are found throughout the whole world. We may feel that Christians are a despised minority but let us remember that we have an everlasting inheritance (1 Peter 1:4). The future is ours in Christ!

Nebuchadnezzar, amazed at the accuracy of Daniel's description of his dream, *fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel* (46). Think of that! The great despot, the powerful ruler, bowing before the servant of God. He was now convinced that there was no one like Daniel's God (47). Daniel and his friends were promoted to high office (48–49). **The Lord's song was sounding out in a foreign land (Psalm 137:4)!**

They do not serve your gods

The experience of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego illustrates the truth of 2 Timothy 3:12: *All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*. It was common practice for Assyrian and Babylonian kings to erect great statues of themselves. The image of Nebuchadnezzar stood 90 feet high and 9 feet wide (a cubit is eighteen inches or just under half a metre). Daniel's three friends were among the important people summoned to the dedication of the image (2,12).

Nebuchadnezzar had already acknowledged the greatness of God (2:47) but he was still a proud idolater. He ordered that all those present at the dedication should fall down, prostrating themselves and worship the image when the orchestra played (4–6). This was not a problem for most people; some Jews had even forsaken God to worship idols. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were different, however (12). They would not eat food offered to idols (1:7–8) and they would certainly not worship one. They considered that it was more important to please God than to please the powerful king of Babylon (cp. Acts 5:29). When everyone fell on their faces, they remained standing.

Some of the Chaldeans, probably jealous of the three men, reported their defiance to the king saying, *'They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up'* (12). The enraged king had the three young Jews brought before him and issued dire warnings, but they refused to compromise their faith (13–18).

We all feel the pressure of our godless society to conform to its sinful ways but we must resist such pressures. Do you refuse to compromise truth or are you a coward when the pressure is on you? **Are you ashamed to own your Lord, or are you determined to honour him, whatever the consequences to yourself?**

*Better to stand alone with him
Than with the thousands run,
To side with truth and keep the faith,
Though justice be undone.*

(T.C. Hunter Clare)

One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven

There are similarities between this vision and those seen by John in the book of Revelation. Daniel saw the Ancient of Days being worshipped by thousands upon thousands and the books were opened ready for the final judgment (10; cp. Revelation 20:11–13). Daniel then saw *One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven* (13). Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'Jesus had no qualms about confessing his identity from Daniel 7. When the high priest illegally placed Jesus under oath and demanded he declare if he were "the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One", Jesus replied, "I am, and you [plural = Caiaphas and his cronies] will see the Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven." Jesus' reply combines the witness of Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13–14; the "sitting" of Psalm 110 refers to his ruling and waiting; the "coming" of Daniel 7 to his arrival as Judge' (THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL, pages 100–101).

Daniel was troubled by what he had seen in the vision and he asked to know its interpretation (15–16). The four beasts are four kings (or empires) but they will pass away. The saints alone are in the kingdom that is eternal. *But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever!* (18,22,27). Daniel was puzzled about the fourth beast and the little horn which grew great in power (19–20). The little horn is the Antichrist who is yet to be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3–8). He will make war against the saints and prevail against them but the Ancient of Days will put an end to him. He is coming again to destroy the Antichrist and to judge the world (26).

Let us be encouraged that we belong to the kingdom of Christ *which shall not be destroyed* (14). Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom (14,27; cp. Revelation 11:15) and he will give his kingdom to his people (27; cp. Matthew 25:34). God is sovereign over the future and over our lives. **The future belongs to us in Christ. Let us worship him and rejoice in him.**

The Ancient of Days was seated

In the first year of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel had a dream in which God gave him a vision. He saw four winds from heaven blowing upon the *Great Sea* (the Mediterranean) and stirring it up (2). Four great beasts, all different from each other, came up from the stormy ocean (3). Verse 17 tells us that they are four kings. Who are these four beasts representing four kings (or kingdoms, verse 23)? We cannot be dogmatic and godly people differ in their interpretation of the vision. The lessons and encouragements from apocalyptic visions are clear, and we should not miss these, though we may differ in our understanding of details.

I believe that the first beast (4) represents the Babylonian empire and the second beast (5), the Medes and Persians who subdued three empires, those of Babylon, Egypt and Lydia (symbolised by the three ribs between the teeth of the bear). The third beast (6) is the Greek empire and the fourth beast is that of Rome which trampled down everything before it (7). It had ten horns ('a horn' is a symbol of power in the Bible) which speak of ten kings who arise out of the Roman empire (24). Daniel then saw a little horn *coming up among them* which had a man's eyes and a mouth *speaking pompous words*. He persecutes the people of God who are given into his hand (8,24–25). He is the Antichrist, *the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God* (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

Dale Ralph Davis refers to verses 1–8 as 'The fearful face of history'. He also writes, 'Seeing this secret behind history may not keep God's people from pain but should keep them from panic; we may still be fearful but should not be frantic' (THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL, pages 98 and 101). This vision would have left Daniel in complete despair had he not seen the eternal God, *'the Ancient of Days'*, seated on a throne (9–10). **Evil and violent men are much in evidence today, but we must remember that evil does not have the last word. God reigns supreme and he cares for us. What more encouragement do we need?**

Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were not intimidated by the threats of the king, who challenged them, *'Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?'* (15). They had such faith in the Lord that they were fearless in the presence of the angry king. At that time most of their fellow Jews were idolaters and those in Babylon would have had no problem with the royal decree. God always has a faithful remnant, even in the most desperate times.

The three friends bravely replied to Nebuchadnezzar's threats, *'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from your hand, O king'* (17). The years of 're-education' in Babylon had not destroyed their faith in God. They were prepared to trust in him even if he chose not to deliver them (16–18,28). Evil men may kill us if God so permits but they cannot destroy us completely and we are not to fear them (Matthew 10:28).

The heat of the furnace was so intense that those who threw the three friends into it were themselves killed by the flames (22). **The three were not delivered from the fiery furnace, but they were preserved in it!** An astonished Nebuchadnezzar saw four men walking unharmed in the flames and he exclaimed that one of them was *'the Son of God'* (ESV translates, *'a son of the gods'*; 25) and *'an angel'* (28). Most sound Bible commentators believe that the king had seen the pre-incarnate Christ in the furnace (25). The Lord Jesus was with the three friends and he brought them through in triumph. They proved the promise of Isaiah 43:2:

***'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.'***

If you are passing through fiery trial, take heart! Nothing whatever can separate you from the love of God, because you are precious to him (Romans 8:35–39).

There is no other God who can deliver like this

The king called to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego to come out of the furnace. He addressed them as ‘*servants of the Most High God*’ (26). He recognised that Jehovah is greater than any of his idol gods. He is ‘*the Most High God*’. Nebuchadnezzar and his officials saw that the three friends had been completely immune from any effects of the flames (27). He blessed God *who sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him* (28).

The king had decreed that anyone who spoke against God would be severely punished. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego had testified, ‘*Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace*’ (17). Nebuchadnezzar now agreed and admitted, ‘*There is no other God who can deliver like this*’ and he promoted the three brave men (29–30).

Is your faith being tested? Remember that God is in complete control of all your circumstances, however trying they may be and that he is faithful (1 Corinthians 10:13). **He will never fail you nor forsake you. He is worthy of your whole-hearted trust!**

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

Stuart Olyott comments, ‘The place of unprecedented heat is also the place of unprecedented fellowship with the Saviour. Those who walk there also enjoy the assurance that they are making an indelible mark for God upon unconverted consciences. There is no fiery furnace which a man can invent that can destroy the people of God. Such furnaces, in fact, turn out to be the very means which God uses to preserve his remnant and to keep his truth alive in the world.’ (DARE TO STAND ALONE, page 49).

He believed in his God

Though Darius was convinced that God would protect Daniel from the lions, he had a sleepless night during which he fasted. The anxious king hastened to the den very early in the morning and he was overjoyed to find Daniel unharmed (18–23). Daniel greeted Darius and said to him, ‘*My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before him*’ (22). Daniel was unharmed *because he believed in his God* (23).

Darius commanded that the plotters be thrown to the lions. He then made a decree in which he proclaimed the greatness of God (25–27) and ordered that God should be feared because:

- *He is the living God.*
- *He is eternal (‘steadfast for ever’).*
- *His kingdom is everlasting.*
- *He delivers and rescues.*
- *He works signs and wonders.*

We must always remember that our God lives (26). Whatever our trials, we can be confident that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. *In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* (Romans 8:35–37). **We do not serve an absentee God! We do not trust him in vain! Hallelujah!**

The last six chapters of Daniel are very different from the first six which record the great exploits of Daniel and his three friends. In chapters 7 to 12 we read of visions given to Daniel during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. These visions are known as ‘apocalyptic’ by theologians. Stuart Olyott helpfully points out that most apocalyptic literature was written to encourage the godly in times of persecution (eg. The book of Revelation). They have similar themes – the growth of evil, God’s care for his people, the victory of good over evil, and the kingdom of God which will outlast all other kingdoms.

He ... prayed and gave thanks before his God

Daniel did not panic when he heard of the king's decree. He prayed to God as he always did (10), and his enemies reported his action to the king (11–13). Why was Daniel so ready to display the fact that he prayed to God, that it became widely known? He prayed openly toward Jerusalem as directed in Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 8:46–48). He was also witnessing to the fact that he loved God and served him. His enemies would have known of his practice of prayer to Jehovah. They came to his house to witness him in prayer to God and reported to Darius that Daniel had defied his decree (11–12).

Darius realised that he had been tricked, but he could not change his decree. Daniel's enemies were determined to see this decree enforced and Darius reluctantly gave the command for Daniel to be thrown to the lions (14–16). His attitude was so different from that of Nebuchadnezzar who had challenged Daniel's three friends, '*Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?*' (3:15). Darius recognised Daniel's unwavering devotion to God and said, '*Your God, whom you serve continually, he will deliver you*' (16).

Daniel served God continually and he esteemed prayer as such a great privilege that no one could keep him from having communion with God. *He knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God* (10). He still gave thanks before God in prayer despite the fact that he was in grave danger. **It is a sad fact that many of us do not need royal decrees to keep us from private prayer – we do not pray regularly!** We are distracted by so many things and pre-occupied with so many jobs that have to be done, that we forget our need of communion with God. If you had been alive in Daniel's day, and were under the rule of Darius, would his decree have affected your pattern of life?

*O the pure delight of a single hour
That before thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer and with thee, my God,
I commune as friend with friend.* (Fanny J. Crosby)

I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me

Nebuchadnezzar had seen God do remarkable things through the witness of Daniel and his three friends. He had acknowledged that Jehovah was the greatest God (3:28–29) but he had not yet humbled himself before the Lord. He had not turned from his sin, especially the sin of pride. We now find him making a proclamation concerning the work of God in his life: '*I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me*' (1–2).

Nebuchadnezzar was resting in his palace when God sent him a dream which filled him with fear (4–5). He saw in this dream a great tree which grew to such an extent that it reached high into the skies. This majestic spreading tree provided food and shelter for animals, birds and man. Suddenly an angel came down from heaven and ordered that the tree be chopped down leaving just its stump and roots in the earth (10–15). It is clear from verse 16 that the tree represented a man who would become like an animal. Seven times (probably months or years) would pass over this man before his reason returned. He would then know that the Most High God is absolutely sovereign and that he gives the kingdoms of this earth *to whomever he will* (17).

Nebuchadnezzar had good reason to be troubled because kings were often represented as trees in Babylonian literature. He must have had a shrewd idea that the dream was about himself. The magicians, astrologers and soothsayers were not able to interpret the dream but the king knew that God would enable Daniel to give him its interpretation (5–9, 18). By now Nebuchadnezzar had a very healthy respect for Daniel. The world may despise us for our stand for truth, but if we are Christlike in our lives they will respect us for our kindness, thoughtfulness, integrity and reliability. **Can you honestly say that the Most High God has worked for you and changed your life?**

Break off your sins by being righteous

When Daniel heard Nebuchadnezzar's account of the dream, he was so troubled and afraid that it showed on his face (19). He knew that God was warning the king that he was to be punished for his sinful pride (30,37). He was reluctant to announce the meaning of the dream but Nebuchadnezzar urged him to do so. Notice Daniel's witness to the king:

- Though Nebuchadnezzar was a wicked tyrant, Daniel loved him and was concerned for his soul. The king remembered how Daniel had said that he wished that the dream concerned not Nebuchadnezzar but his enemies (19).
- Daniel did not hold back any of God's Word. He faithfully told the truth about divine judgment for sin. Nebuchadnezzar was the great tree which was cut down at the decree of God who is *'the Most High'* (24).
- He told the king that God is absolutely sovereign over the world. He is the great King, not the Babylonian ruler. The Lord would make him mad so that he would behave like an animal. This was to teach him that *'the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he chooses'* (25).
- He urged the king to repent of his sin saying, *'Break off your sins by being righteous'* (27). Daniel told him that if he repented, the dream would still be fulfilled, but he might expect a longer period of tranquillity when his reason was restored. The evidence of gospel repentance is a holy life.

If we love the Lord, we will want to point men to Christ. **If we would be successful soul-winners, we must also have a love for the lost.** We must declare the whole truth of God's Word about sin, judgment and Christ's death and resurrection for sinners. We must urge them to repent and to trust in Christ alone for salvation. Nebuchadnezzar was won over to God not only through Daniel's witness, but because he also recognised that Daniel had a deep concern for his soul.

We shall not find any charge against this Daniel

Darius, the new king of Babylon, appointed 120 satraps (provincial governors) to govern the kingdom of Babylon. The satraps were accountable to the three governors for all their revenues. Daniel was one of these governors. Though Daniel was now old, he excelled above the other two governors and Darius recognised his honesty and integrity. The king had plans to set Daniel over the whole realm (1–3).

The other governors and the satraps were very jealous of Daniel and this drove them to plot his downfall. They sought to find some accusation against him so that the king would remove him from office. They found this very difficult, however, because Daniel was so transparently honest and faithful (3–4). Their words in verse 5 are very significant: *'We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.'* They plotted to make Daniel choose between his God and the king, knowing that Daniel would never compromise his loyalty to the Lord. They succeeded in deceiving the king with their flattery and lies. He did not realise that *'all the governors'* did not include Daniel. There is no indication that he questioned the absence of Daniel from the delegation. He signed the decree forbidding prayer to any god or man apart from himself for thirty days (7).

We too, must bear a clear testimony like Daniel. The apostle Paul once stated, *'I myself always strive to have a good conscience without offence towards God and men'* (Acts 24:16). Persecution for our Christian faith must never be confused with persecution on account of our own wrong-doing or folly. We may be *persecuted for righteousness' sake*, but the Lord Jesus will greatly bless us and our reward will be great in heaven (Matthew 5:10–12). You may wonder if God also rewards us here on earth when we suffer for him. The Bible gives us the answer: *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you* (1 Peter 4:14–16). **We must also learn to glorify God when we are persecuted for Christ.** We will see tomorrow how Daniel did this.

Weighed in the balances, and found wanting

The message on the wall spelled out the doom of Belshazzar and the end of his kingdom. The words ‘*MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*’ mean ‘numbered, numbered, weighed and divided’. The days of Belshazzar’s kingdom were numbered. It was finished! The king had been ‘*weighed in the balances, and found wanting*’ (25–27). Every one of his actions had been weighed by God – his proud defiance, his idolatry, his refusal to learn from Nebuchadnezzar’s experiences. All his sins had been placed in God’s balances and the scales of divine justice were weighed against him. The word ‘UPHARSIN’ indicated that Belshazzar’s kingdom was to be taken from him and divided between the Medes and the Persians.

Belshazzar was slain that very night, as the armies of the Medes and Persians, led by Cyrus, diverted the waters of the River Euphrates, draining the water that ran under the city walls. The army entered Babylon under its walls and took the city. Darius the Mede received the kingdom from Cyrus (31).

Let Belshazzar be a warning to us all! He did not humble himself before God (22). He was ‘*weighed in the balances, and found wanting*’. **If you are not a Christian, I urge you to humble yourself before God today. Repent of your sin and come to the Lord Jesus Christ for pardon.** If you continue to reject God’s offers of mercy, you too will be ‘*weighed in the balances, and found wanting*’ in the day of judgment.

*There is a time, we know not when,
A place we know not where,
That marks the destiny of man
In glory or despair.*

*There is a line, by us unseen,
That crosses every path,
The hidden boundary between
God’s patience and his wrath.*

(Quoted in ‘Dare to Stand Alone’)

He does according to his will

It appears that Nebuchadnezzar did not repent of his sin following Daniel’s announcement of coming judgment. A year later he was admiring his great building achievements (he had built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon – one of the seven wonders of the ancient world). He was full of pride (30). Suddenly, a voice from heaven thundered words of judgment (31–33). Nebuchadnezzar became like an animal and lost his reason. God humbled the proud tyrant and when his reason returned he was a changed man. **He learned that God is absolutely sovereign** (3,17,26,32,34–35,37). Ponder Nebuchadnezzar’s confession in verses 34 and 35. It is one of the greatest affirmations of God’s sovereignty to be found in Scripture. He recognised that God ‘*does according to his will*’ in heaven and on earth. His sovereign reign will never end.

Nebuchadnezzar was humbled (37). Stuart Olyott writes, ‘At last this great king is in the place where every man and woman should be. He is prostrate in the dust before God. His heart is changed, his reason is restored, and he comes back to his full manhood and former glory. He goes into eternity in fellowship with the king of heaven. That is how his conversion took place. God did it! And God did it, not by boosting him up, but by knocking him down’ (DARE TO STAND ALONE, page 59).

Be encouraged by Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony. God blessed the witness of Daniel and his three friends. Be faithful in your witness, however difficult your circumstances. Persevere in your prayers for those who seem so indifferent to the gospel. **No one is beyond the reach of God. He can save the worst sinner.** If you are not a Christian, could it be that your pride is keeping you from submitting to Christ? The Lord Jesus, God the Son, humbled himself to suffer shame, torture and death to save sinners such as you.

*Out of unrest and arrogant pride,
Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!
Into thy blessed will to abide,
Jesus, I come to thee!*

(William T. Sleeper)

Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled

Belshazzar was probably the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar (*'father'* in verse 2 can also mean *'ancestor'* or *'grandfather'*). We know from historical records that his father Nabonidus, entrusted the throne to him while he himself was away waging war in central Arabia. The name *'Belshazzar'* means *'Bel, protect the king'*. He was to learn very soon that Bel, a Babylonian god, was quite useless to help in a time of crisis.

Belshazzar had seen many proofs of God's power in his early years. He had seen the change wrought by God in the life of Nebuchadnezzar, but he had hardened his heart. Now, while Nabonidus was away fighting, Belshazzar was feasting. He had the holy vessels, which had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem, brought to the feast. He and his guests used them as *'wine-cups'*. *They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone* (2–4). Belshazzar's drunken orgy at his great feast was a defiant rebellion against Almighty God. Enough was enough; the party had to stop!

The merrymakers were filled with fear as they saw the fingers of a man's hand appear to write a strange message on the wall. The king was terrified (5–6). The wise men, astrologers and their fellow occult practitioners were at a loss to give the meaning of the message (7–8). The queen (probably the wife of Nabonidus) came into the banquet hall and suggested that Belshazzar consult Daniel (9–12).

Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished (9). This verse illustrates the truth of Nebuchadnezzar's statement, *'And those who walk in pride he is able to abase'* (4:37). **We must never allow ourselves to be intimidated by proud scorners or mockers of the gospel message.** The Lord is able to humble them and remove their pride in an instant, driving them to seek our counsel, just as Belshazzar in his desperation was driven to send for Daniel.

You ... have not humbled your heart

Belshazzar sent for Daniel and offered him great honour and gifts if he would interpret the writing on the wall. Daniel told the king that he was not interested in receiving royal gifts or rewards. He was more concerned to interpret the writing on the wall so that the king would know what God was saying to him (13–17).

Daniel reminded Belshazzar of God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar (18–21). He told him that the Most High God had given *'a kingdom and majesty, glory and honour'* to Nebuchadnezzar. God had given him his kingdom but who had visited him with judgment when his heart was lifted up with pride. Nebuchadnezzar had already confessed that God is sovereign (4:34–35), but he had not humbled himself before the Almighty. He had to be convinced *'that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever he chooses'* (21).

Daniel drove home his message to the king, *'But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this'* (22). The Babylonian king had no excuse for his wickedness, nor for his defiance of the living God. He had praised lifeless, useless idols, and he had not glorified God who gave him breath, and who was sovereign over his life (23). He should have repented long before, but he had defied God.

Those who hear God's Word and still persist in their refusal to turn from their sin are in grave danger. Belshazzar had gone beyond the point of no return. If you are not a Christian, let Belshazzar's folly be a warning to you. *Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon* (Isaiah 55:6–7).