

REFLECTIONS ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL: GOD'S ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY

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Overview and Introduction

The book of Daniel is divided into two clear divisions: chapters 1-6 and 7-12. The first half concentrates on the stories of Daniel and his three friends and how they remain loyal to God even as those among the early exiles to Babylon during the reign of king Johoiakim of Judah. God delivered the king of Judah into the hand of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and the latter carried off some articles from the temple of God along with some exiles (which include Daniel and his three friends). The second half is a series of apocalyptic visions about the rise and fall of succeeding empires with a subsequent focus on a series of Antichrist figures, with an elaboration on Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) of the Seleucid rulers and a final focus on God's judgement on the Antichrist, the enemy of God, and the inauguration of God's final glorious kingdom in the future.

It is important to recognise that this book highlights the sovereignty of God over His people Israel, over kingdoms, empires and kings and also over the history of mankind. Although the king of Judah was subdued by the king of Babylon, it was God who gave His people over to Babylon and to exile because His people had disobeyed Him and indulged in idolatry and false worship. His people and the surrounding nations might have concluded that the God of Israel was no match for the gods of the Babylonians; God demonstrated that He was still the sovereign God when He manifested His power and glory in the lives of Daniel and his three friends, covering the reigns of Babylon and Medo-Persia during the lifetime of Daniel, and Greece and subsequently Rome in the visions, dreams and prophecies revealed to Daniel and king Nebuchadnezzar. Also, God worked in such a way that Nebuchadnezzar himself had to acknowledge the greatness of the God of Israel; king Belshazzar was humbled before God when the writings appeared on the wall when he and his household drank wine from the goblets taken from the temple in Jerusalem; king Darius saw the miraculous way God delivered Daniel from the lions and declared that the God of Daniel is the living God who endures for ever. The visions and prophecies given to Daniel point to the future triumph of God over His enemies, even those who are formidable and supported by the evil one, and this culminates in the resurrection of the dead, with those who are with God to everlasting life and those who rebel against Him to everlasting contempt.

God's manifestations of His sovereignty in the lives of Daniel and his three friends and also His rulership over kings and empires caused such a great impact that Israel, after 70 years in exile, when she returned to Jerusalem, no longer resorted to idolatry as before. Even the return was allowed by the decree of king Cyrus, and the name of king Cyrus was mentioned by prophet Isaiah years before. The Lord Jesus Himself referred to Himself as the "Son of Man" in Daniel chapter 7 and Daniel was himself noted by his contemporary prophet Ezekiel as one who could be coupled with godly men like Noah and Job.

What is obviously clear in Daniel is the declaration that God almighty is sovereign over His people and over human kings, rulers and human history although circumstances may not appear

to be so. The greatest of man and kings have to 'bow down' before the king of kings; no man or supernatural being can dislodge God from His throne. Although God's working may be 'hidden' and not seen in an obvious manner, He is still in control and He wields His power over all to fulfil His glorious purpose. Although Daniel and his three friends were outstanding godly individuals, the book is primarily about the great almighty God who works in various circumstances, various peoples, various individuals to bring about His great plan and to manifest His glory and honour to all, even to those in the heavenly realm. That is not to belittle the exemplary lives of Daniel and his three friends but their faithfulness and godliness must be seen in the light of God's favour and working in their lives. The exile of God's people must also be seen in the loving discipline of God on His people and it demonstrates not only His love but also His holiness and His wrath against sin and rebellion.

Kings and rulers are placed in power and allowed to rule and to conquer with His permission and according to His great overall purpose; those who think they can usurp His power would come to a grievous end.

The book of Daniel helps us to see these same principles in our own current contexts. The people of God might be persecuted and 'laid low' by rulers and despots; yet His people must not lose sight of His sovereignty and His sitting still on the throne in heaven. Men may do their worst against God and His people and think, in their pride and arrogance, that they are in control but they would have to 'bow down' before the throne of the almighty in God's own time and according to His plan and purpose. Ungodly men may feel that they have the upper hand against God's people but they must realise sooner or later that it is God who allows them, for the moment, to be in such a position. Before long, they would face His judgement and His wrath whilst His people would be vindicated. Circumstances may appear desperately discouraging and depressing; but this book should help us to hold our heads high and to continue to affirm God's goodness and sovereignty over all situations in our lives and in the lives of His people. Like Habakkuk, we can still declare: "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to tread on the heights...yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour".

Chapter One

The chapter begins with "the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" and the former became a vassal to the latter. Daniel and his three friends were among the hostages taken to Babylon in this first phase of the exile. They were from the royal family and nobility and together with other young men, they were trained to serve in the king's palace. It was apparently the policy of the Babylonians to 'assimilate' these able young men to serve the king and thus ensure that the nations subdued by them remain under their control and influence. The young men had their names changed; they were trained in the language and literature of the Babylonians and the king even assigned them a daily supply of his food and wine for three years of training to prepare them to serve him in his palace.

What is prominent in this chapter was Daniel's resolve not to defile himself with the food and wine of the king. Together with his three friends, Daniel wisely persuaded the guard of the official appointed over them to test them for ten days with vegetable and water and to see the result. The end result was that they were healthier than those fed on the royal food and wine and they impressed the king subsequently with their wisdom and understanding when they were presented to him.

What is striking is that although Daniel was just a youth, he was determined not to defile himself. It was an expression of loyalty and faithfulness to God and a resolve to be 'holy' for God, even at this tender age. Daniel was familiar with God's instructions to keep the 'food law' and not to be defiled by food probably offered to idols. It was a stand that could have got him and his friends into trouble but Daniel also demonstrated prudence and wisdom in handling this situation. We must remember that they were exiled into a foreign land, away from their families and loved ones; they could not worship God in the temple in Jerusalem and perhaps, many of those exiled in this first phase must have been wondering how was it that their God could not protect them from the Babylonians and they had to leave everything behind and adapt to a new culture and be immersed in a foreign and 'hostile' environment. Despite all these, it was remarkable for these young men to exhibit such faith and confidence in their God. Notice that it was written that God delivered king Jehoiakim into the hand of the king of Babylon and it was God who gave wisdom and understanding to these young men, demonstrating vividly the sovereignty of God in all these events. It was actually God who was orchestrating everything to manifest His sovereignty and glory; it was not a case of 'misfortune' affecting Daniel and his three friends but God preparing them to be spearheading His purposes in a hostile environment. From the young men's point of view, it could have resulted in despondency, discouragement and disillusionment; for many of us, such 'negative' development and happenings in our lives often cause us to descend into such a state, accompanied by complaints, grumbling and self-pity - not so for Daniel and his three young friends!

Daniel was also influenced positively by the life of king Josiah and the ministry of prophet Jeremiah. King Josiah's reign saw the re-discovery of the Book of the Law, the repair of the temple and the institution of the great national Passover. Jeremiah's steadfast ministry in the midst of great opposition must have had made an impact on Daniel. In all likelihood, Daniel knew from Jeremiah's ministry that God would be punishing His people by using Babylon and in the subsequent chapter in Daniel, we saw Daniel praying for the return of the exile after 70 years in accordance with Jeremiah's prophecy. This illustrates to us the importance of making a positive influence and impact on the lives of young individuals by our own witness and testimony. The lives of king Josiah and prophet Jeremiah must have taught Daniel to be bold and courageous for God's sake and Daniel's faithfulness in keeping God's instructions was 'built' and consolidated over his young days. We may not realise that some young "Daniels" are observing our lives and service before God and we may be influencing them for 'good' or for 'bad' development in their subsequent lives.

We need to learn from Daniel and his three friends to view life from God's point of view and to learn well from God and Godly individuals even from a young age. We also need to learn to look to God for wisdom and prudence in varying circumstances as well as to be courageous and loyal to God despite the 'hostile' circumstances affecting us in life.

Chapter Two

The chapter begins with king Nebuchadnezzar having dreams which troubled him greatly. He summoned all his wise men which included magicians, astrologers and sorcerers to tell him what his dream was and then interpret the meaning of the dream. All the wise men requested the king to tell them his dream and they would then interpret it; however, the king insisted that they were to tell him what his dream was to prove that they were genuinely able to give him the correct interpretation of the dream. Of course, the wise men explained that no one could carry out such a request and ironically, they exclaimed "No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among human beings". They obviously were not aware that there was and is the true God who could meet the request of the king.

The king was so angry and furious with their response, and he ordered all the wise men to be executed; Daniel and his friends were thus implicated as they were among the 'wise men' in the court of the king revealed in the earlier chapter. Daniel, in wisdom and tact, requested for time from the king to meet his request; he was given that permission and Daniel 'recruited' his friends to pray and to ask God for mercy so that they might not be executed with the rest of the wise men.

God revealed the dream and the interpretation to Daniel and his friends; Daniel was then brought before the king and he was able to tell the king what the dream was and its interpretation. The chapter ended with the king acknowledging the God of Daniel as the God of gods and he promoted Daniel. At Daniel's request, his three friends were also promoted in the kingdom.

Before we look at the dream and its interpretation, let us consider what we can learn from the response of Daniel and his friends. We are aware that they were among those in the first deportation to Babylon when king Jehoiakim became a vassal of king Nebuchadnezzar. They had to leave home, the temple in Jerusalem and learn a new language, a new culture in a hostile foreign environment. And apparently, things were getting a bit better when they had to face another crisis - this time their lives were in danger and execution was impending. Daniel turned to God for mercy and, in prayer, requested God for the revelation of the dream and its interpretation. Before that, he acted wisely and with tact, and requested time from the king through the king's officer. Facing a crisis, Daniel continued to trust God and sought the like-minded friends to pray together to God. When God answered their prayers and revealed the mystery of the dream, Daniel's response was one of praise and thanksgivings with affirmation of God's omnipotence, wisdom and sovereignty. It is a wonderful reminder of how we should face crisis and stressful circumstances in our lives and how we should always be grateful and thankful when God shows His mercy and grace towards us. Perhaps, Daniel was calmly aware that a crisis can provide an opportunity to trust God and to see God working in the situation; it was also an opportunity to respond in a way that would glorify and honour God. Is this how we look at and respond in a crisis in our lives? Whether it be a dangerous situation, a time of persecution, an illness, whatever God allows in our lives, we need to look to Him and to affirm

our confidence in Him as the perfect, good and wise God. Also, in dependence on Him through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we can look at it as an opportunity or a test to refine our Christians character; during the terrible plague years ago, when the dying were abandoned by their own families, the believers stayed back and nursed the sick and dying. Some of them also succumbed to the disease but their powerful testimony and their love for strangers caused a great turning to God and the gospel.

Daniel shared some similarities with Joseph; both were able to interpret dreams and both were careful to give the credit to God almighty and not claim the credit for themselves. In that way, they truly gave God the honour and caused even unbelievers, including foreign kings like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge the true God in some ways. It is pertinent not to claim the glory which belongs to God alone, even in our Christian ministry.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue and its interpretation revealed that beginning with the kingdom of Babylon, kingdom after kingdom would arise and fall, but finally the kingdom of God, seen as the rock cut out of the mountain, would 'destroy' all the other kingdoms and remain and endure for ever. God was revealing the history of the world, culminating with the establishment of His kingdom which will last after all the other kingdoms were 'crushed' by God's kingdom. Although it was revealed through a dream to king Nebuchadnezzar, the reality was to be revealed to God's people through the interpretation of Daniel. It shows that God is the Creator of all things, including mankind and the nations, and as sovereign over them, He will someday overcome their rebellion and fallenness and bring them under His gracious dominion. It is God who will be exalted and glorified and all the nations and kingdoms will be judged and reclaimed as His worshiping subjects.

Daniel was just one of God's people, in a certain period of time, at a certain juncture in the outworking of God's eternal plan and although Daniel might not fully comprehend all that God was doing, he could rest assured that he could trust God unconditionally to sovereignly undertake all situations in his life. For us today, the kingdom of God has come with the first coming of the Lord Jesus and this kingdom would be fully established after His second coming. In the meantime, we can go through all situations and crisis with the full assurance that God is in control and if we respond faithfully, we can experience His peace and even His joy in the midst of challenges in our lives. We can maintain an eternal perspective and cling to our hope (a certain one that is exercised with faith in the sure future) with confidence and steadfastness.

Chapter Three

This is the familial chapter that recorded king Nebuchadnezzar setting up an image of gold and summoning all his officials to come to the dedication of this huge image. His command was that all nations and peoples of every language, at the sound of musical instruments, would fall down and worship the golden image he had put up.

The complaint came from some officials that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not comply with the king's command and the king was furious on hearing this. He summoned these three friends of Daniel and gave them an opportunity to respond to his command he had instituted but Daniel's three friends refused to comply. Their response was one of steadfast refusal to worship the image and they were prepared to be punished for this even if God were not to deliver them from the punishment to be meted.

The king became even more furious and he ordered the blazing furnace, reserved for punishing those who disobeyed his command, to be heated seven times hotter and to throw these three individuals into the furnace after they were bound and tied up.

Then came the wondrous deliverance from God for Daniel's three friends; the king saw four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed and the fourth person looks like a son of the gods. The three men were asked to come out of the furnace and when they examined them, they saw that the fire had not harmed them and their clothes were not scorched and there was no smell of fire on them.

This caused the king to praise the God of these three Hebrews and to acknowledge the faith of the three men. The king then decreed that anyone who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would be cut into pieces and their houses would be turned into piles of rubble. The king also acknowledged that no other god can save in this manner.

The situation was one where Daniel's three friends were commanded to worship an idol set up by the king and any refusal would result in being burned to death in a burning furnace. Their courageous refusal and the stance they took demonstrated their immovable faith in the God of Israel; they believed that God could deliver them if He would, but they also were prepared to die if God were not to deliver them, rather than to worship any idol. We must recall that the northern state Israel was conquered by Assyria and Daniel and his three friends were among the first deportation from the southern state when king Jehoiakim was subdued by king Nebuchadnezzar. 2 Kings 17 outlined that God's people persisted in idol worship and worshipped the idols of the people in the land of Canaan despite God's sending of prophet after prophet with warning after warning for them to repent. Although this chapter focused on the northern state Israel, the same holds true for the southern state Judah. King Solomon himself, known for his wisdom, also sinned greatly in this area when his many concubines caused him to worship the gods of the land. In the light of this, the response of Daniel's three friends was even more remarkable; here, it was not an issue of voluntarily worshipping idols despite God's command and warning but a refusal to worship an idol in the face of impending threat and

death for not conforming. The faithfulness of Daniel's three friends as well as Daniel in other contexts must have had made a tremendous positive effect on those deported to Babylon as well as those who still remained in Jerusalem. It is no wonder that after the 70 years of exile, those who returned no longer turned to idolatry but became essentially monotheistic as a nation. God was working in Daniel and his three friends to demonstrate His sovereignty and His majesty; no king or nation can usurp Him from His heavenly throne and His people had to learn to worship Him only after they had failed miserably to do so even though God extended His mercy and grace to them over and over again.

It is also a demonstration of what it means to trust God in the face of a crisis and danger. Notice that Daniel's three friends did not assume that God would rescue them; neither was there presumption on their part that all would end 'well' for them from the world's point of view. However, they clung to their confidence in God to do what He deemed fit and as far as they were concerned, whatever God allowed was in line with His perfect wisdom and love. All that mattered to them was not to compromise their faith in God and to put God to shame in the situation. It was a manifestation of a life of worship of God whatever the circumstances, a life lived through the enabling of God and one dedicated to the honour and glory of God whatever it takes. This is in line with the 'heroes' of the faith written in Hebrews 11; they trusted God when they overcome; they trusted God when they were tortured and put to death - theirs was a life of faith and a life lived with the hope of journeying to a city not made by hands but the everlasting city of God in the new heavens and new earth.

Christians are called to be pilgrims on this earth; we are citizens of heaven and adopted into God's family. On this earth, we are just passing through; this world is not our home - it is temporary (like a tent) and it would pass away. We are saved, being saved and will be ultimately saved when we reached our "promised land". The Lord Jesus Himself told us, "In this world you will have trouble (tribulation). But take heart! I have overcome the world!" (Jn 16:33).

In the book of Revelation we are told, "For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death"(Revelation 12:10(b) - 11). Before the second coming of our Lord Jesus, there would be a time of great tribulation when anti-Christ, the false prophet and the devil would seek to win over various ones to their cause and to install false worship of the false trinity; only those who belong to Christ and who remain faithful and true, even in the face of death, would triumph over evil and bring honour and glory to God by their uncompromising worship of the triune God even in persecution, suffering and death. The response of the three friends of Daniel is in one sense a 'prototype'; it shows us how we ought to respond when we are called to deny the one true God and to worship a false god.

It is important in the face of testing and tribulations to respond according to the Word of God; in that light, we are to cling to His Word and to depend entirely on Him and not to rely on our own wisdom or to allow fear and doubt to 'cloud' us. Harken to the Word of the Lord to

Jeremiah: "If you have raced with people on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?" (Jeremiah 12:5(a)). For those who seek to be faithful to God, God's answer to Jeremiah when he complained of the difficulties and danger he faced as God's servant is so very relevant; if small crises 'break' you and cause us to flee in fear and murmurings, how then would we fare when we have to face the 'enemy' in the great tribulation and when even our lives and all that we have are laid on the line?

Chapter Four

This chapter covers Nebuchadnezzar's dream and also subsequently his greater appreciation of the God of Israel when his dream came true and he became mad for failing to take heed to the warning in the dream and recognising that his kingdom was in fact God's gift rather than his own human achievement. His praising of the God of Israel materialised after he recovered from his insanity.

The king was deeply troubled by his dream and it was Daniel who interpreted the dream and advised the king to correct his ways to prevent the dream from taking place. However, the advice and warning were ignored by the king and he took credit for his achievements and kingdom and suffered the consequences.

This chapter reveals and confirms God's sovereignty over history and His desire also to relate with non-Israelites. It renounces arrogance and pride that exalt human achievement at the expense of praise and appreciation of God who gives the power to achieve in the first place. Daniel told king Nebuchadnezzar that the latter must acknowledge that God alone gives kings power or he will become like an unknowing beast - this took place subsequently and only when the king confessed that God lives forever (4:34), rules forever (4:34) and rules justly (4:37) that he regained his senses.

The chapter also confirms that God who sustains, reveals and delivers is also the God who humbles the proud. God rules kings as well as exiles, wise men and commoners. Everyone lives under the Lord's scrutiny and no one escapes from His knowledge and judgement. Every human being is totally dependent on the one Nebuchadnezzar calls the Most High and King of heaven.

Knowing that the God in heaven is our father, as believers, should increase our joy, wonder and appreciation of our privilege at being His children. Though God is Lord over all, He always has time for us; He always give His full attention whenever we call on Him or cry out to Him in our prayers. Isaiah reminds us that God dwells in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit (Isaiah 57:15); this same God chose to become the Father of insignificant and sinful creatures like us, sinners who are contrite in repentance and humble in fleeing by faith to Jesus for refuge. We see here how important humility is for those who seek to know God and how God hates and disregards the proud as seen in Daniel 4.

Pride and arrogance lead to self-worship a form of idolatry seen in king Nebuchadnezzar who attributed his achievements to his greatness and glory. God would judge kings and nations and also individuals who exalt themselves as if God had not given them what they possess. It is God who creates, who gives breath, delivers, is holy, is sovereign, is just and lives forever. No idol or king or individual or even spiritual being has the characteristics of the only one true God and so none deserves worship. In Daniel, the exile makes God's universal reign more evident due to the witness of Daniel, his three friends and the remnant. The book of Daniel also

teaches that no matter how careful the faithful may be, they will still suffer for being who they are and believing as they do. This danger forces the faithful to trust God as they wait for final deliverances from the exile that sin has caused.

The deepest problems of individuals always involve: the meaning of life and death, the mastery of self, the quest for value and worthwhileness and freedom within, the transcending of loneliness, the longing for love and a sense of significance and peace. In seeking these, many have pursued the path of self-achievement, believing in yourself, getting recognition, status and ultimately self-worship, a form of dangerous idolatry.

In contrast, Jesus said, "Peace (shalom) I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). Shalom indicates total wellbeing and happiness: it starts with peace with God, sin forgiven, guilt gone, person accepted. It also means peace with yourself if God has forgiven you the terrible things you have done - you can have peace with yourself now that you have peace with God. You can also have peace with your circumstances: if the Lord of circumstances is at peace with you, you can therefore be sure that He orders and controls circumstances for your good. However, the peace Jesus offers is only for those who are humble enough to repent and to fall before Him in contriteness - it is for those who realise that God does not need your wisdom and self-achievement to receive His gospel message; the cross appears foolish to man, yet it is the wisdom of God for those who humble themselves to receive the peace of God. King Nebuchadnezzar had to eat grass and become like a beast to humble himself before he acknowledged the God of Israel. In his self-worship, he missed seeing that it is only God who rules and gives dominion to whom He pleases.

Pride and arrogance would not bring you to God and Christ; the devil, in his pride, desires to be God, Those who follow him also seek to build their own kingdoms. Only the kingdom of God will last forever; only the meek and humble can approach the great and mighty God and enter into the kingdom of God.

The book of Daniel stresses that God's sovereignty over history includes an ability to know and rule the future. God is involved with human events that occur in time, yet he is in no way bound by time. God is the One who will guide history to a just conclusion and the One who rewards and punishes persons after death as well as before death.

We can take heart that even though we may not see justice here on earth, God, the great and high judge would just righteously and justly ultimately. He would bring down the proud and arrogant and give grace to those who humble themselves before Him. Humility and contriteness must continue to be nurtured in the lives of believers throughout their pilgrimage on earth; spiritual pride can destroy our relationships with God and His people. If there is only one thing you can take away from Daniel 4, it is "Humble yourself continually before the great and mighty God and cling to His perfect love and goodness throughout your walk and service on earth" - this is the path to 'shalom' and this is the way to total wellbeing before God and men.

Chapter Five

After the death of king Nebuchadnezzar, three kings followed before Nabonidus came to the throne. Belshazzar, the son of Nabonidus, became co-regent with this father when his father was away. This is the Belshazzar in Daniel 5.

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them, even as Babylon was surrounded by the army of Medo-Persia. Somehow, Belshazzar was confident that the city of Babylon was impenetrable and the banquet might have been given to boost the morale of his officials. He ordered his men to bring the gold and silver goblets taken by king Nebuchadnezzar from the temple in Jerusalem and he, together with his nobles, wives and concubines, drank wine from them; at the same time, they praised the gods and idols of Babylon.

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 was terrified and he ordered the wise men of Babylon to interpret the writing but none was able to. The king even promised to reward whoever was able to interpret by appointing him as the third ruler in the kingdom. The queen appeared and reminded the king that Daniel was able to interpret dreams and solve difficult problems. So Daniel was summoned. Daniel refused the reward offered by the king and he rebuked the king for his arrogant behaviour before interpreting the writing on the wall. And Daniel's interpretation came to pass the very same night.

King Belshazzar was guilty of sacrilege by mocking the God of heaven and earth. He drank from the holy vessels taken from the temple of Jerusalem by king Nebuchadnezzar and praised his many gods instead of acknowledging the one true God who holds his life in His hand. Belshazzar was in fact 'belittling' the holiness of the Almighty by defiling what were regarded as holy by God and His people. This is indeed a very serious transgression; we will recall how the sons of Aaron died when they offered unholy fire before God in the tabernacle and how Uriah, in seeking to prevent the ark from toppling from the cart, touched the ark and was slain. Even the prophet Isaiah, and Daniel later on in the book, became weak and unable to lift themselves before the appearance of God in His awesome holiness. The high priest of Israel, was only allowed to enter the holy of holies once a year on the day of atonement and even then, he had to enter after burning sin offerings for himself and the nation. There was also the possibility of him being slain in the holy of holies if he did not carry out all the necessary instructions before entering.

This is a sober reminder for us as believers not to take God and His holiness for granted. Although the Lord Jesus, as our mediator, has opened the way into the presence of the Father, we are to continually honour God as the holy One and not be irreverent to the Almighty. As a people of God collectively, as a church, we are regarded as the temple of God, and individually, we are also noted to be God's temples as the Holy Spirit dwells within us. The temple of God

has to be holy for the holy God; defiling the temple in any way is in fact 'belittling' and mocking the holiness of God. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, explained that "the body, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body". He further reminded the believers that our bodies are members of Christ and we need to honour God with our bodies. Using our bodies and our faculties in any way that dishonours God is tantamount to defiling what is regarded as holy by God. Apostle Peter also wrote, "But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:15).

Daniel's curt and apparently disrespectful reply to king Belshazzar and his rebuke following this response were probably due to his disgust with the way the king had treated the God of Israel. Daniel's concern for the glory of God made him rebuke the king for not humbling himself even though he knew what happened to king Nebuchadnezzar and how God the almighty dealt with the latter. Daniel was not interested in the reward promised by king Belshazzar and he told the king to keep the reward for himself. Do we, like Daniel, seek the honour and glory of God instead of the transient reward the world can offer? Are we 'jealous' for God and His holiness? The Apostle Paul had a kindred spirit with Daniel and he was jealous that the people of God were deserting God for a different gospel. To the Galatians, he wrote, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6). So upset was Paul that he exclaimed, "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified...Have you experienced so much in vain - if it really was in vain?(Galatians 3:1,4).

If we live our lives carelessly and adhere to a false gospel and depend on false assurances that all is well when our lives clearly displease God and put His name to shame, we are, in effect, sinning in the same manner as king Belshazzar. Do not be presumptuous; like king Belshazzar, the judgment of God would come about in our lives.

So the writing appeared on the wall, in all likelihood, from the fingers of God. We are reminded of another king who defied the God almighty; Pharaoh refused to let the people of Israel go even after his own magicians acknowledged that the appearance of the gnats was due to 'the finger of God'. Pharaoh hardened his heart and his own firstborn was killed and he and his army were drowned in the sea. The judgement of God can be very serious.

In the case of king Belshazzar, the inscription was:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

The words were Aramaic, a language widely known in the Gentile world. Mene could mean "numbered" or could refer to a 1 1/4 pound weight called mina. Tekel could mean "weighed" or could refer to a 2/5 ounce weight called a shekel. Peres (the singular of Parsin) could mean "divided" or a "half shekel" or a "half mina". Without a context, the words by themselves seem meaningless. But Daniel interpreted the meaning of the words:

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

Tekel - You have been weighed on the scale and found wanting.

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

That very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty two.

Babylon was the greatest kingdom at that time before she was defeated by Persia. It was however God who numbered the days of the reign of Babylon. The king of Babylon commanded a great empire but it was God who weighed the king on the scale and found him wanting. His kingdom seemed so strong and the city of Babylon appeared so impenetrable but it was God who divided the kingdom and gave it away.

Are we overwhelmed by individuals who seem so powerful and untouchable and who continue to defy God and the people of God? The Antichrist would be such an individual in the last final days but we are told that he would be destroyed just by the pronouncement from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. Kings and kingdoms may appear to be so powerful but the King of kings would dispense with them when their time is up. We need to observe the history of the world and know that God alone would triumph and none can stand up before His judgement. We need not fear and we need not be 'cowed' by such individuals, for their time to go down is already numbered by God. God sees all things and He weighs all things and would judge accordingly.

The relevant questions we need to ask ourselves are: 1) Do we number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom? The time would come for us to depart from this world; have we used our time well to serve and honour the living God? 2) Are we very conscious that God would weigh our actions and our deeds and would we be found wanting even though we profess to be the children of God? Remember that God looks at the heart and there is nothing that is hidden from Him. 3) Would God take away His approval from us and would we end up with His rebuke and displeasure?

Consider these soberly even as we look at the lives of kings and great kingdoms. Daniel, a 'fugitive' and one in exile, was acclaimed by the angels as one highly esteemed by God. What makes the difference?

Chapter Six

Daniel in this chapter was serving in the Medo-Persian empire under Darius. King Darius appointed 120 satraps to rule the kingdom, and overseeing the satraps were three chief ministers of which Daniel was one of them. Daniel so distinguished himself that the king was planning to set him over the whole kingdom.

Jealousy and envy reared their heads among the satraps and other chief ministers and they sought to find grounds to accuse Daniel in his conduct in government affairs but found none as Daniel was a man of integrity and he was trustworthy without any tinge of corruption. They then plotted to find ground for accusation against him in relation to the law of God in his life.

The familiar story unfolds with the plot to persuade the king to issue an edict that prevented anyone from worshipping any god or human being for thirty days; only the king should be worshipped during this period of time. The accusers were aware that Daniel would continue to pray to his God and they went as a group to discover him doing so. They then had grounds to pinpoint to the king that Daniel disobeyed the decree and should be thrown to the lions' den, as stipulated by the edict. Although the king subsequently realised the plot and was distressed, yet he could not change the edict, for this was according to the law of the Medes and Persians. We all know the rest of the story and even the children in the Sunday School are familiar with the story of Daniel and the lions; God miraculously delivered Daniel from any harm and the accusers and their families were killed instead by the lions.

As we consider this wonderful historical event, are there lessons and principles for us to receive as God's people in this generation?

In the book of Daniel, we have learned the wondrous sovereignty of God over kings, kingdoms and individuals, even in the face of adverse circumstances, and when events seemed to indicate that God was no longer in control. Complementary to the sovereignty of God, we notice the faithfulness of His people demonstrated in the lives of Daniel and his three friends. God so worked in their lives such that those in exile and those in Jerusalem, as well as foreign kings and their subjects, recognised the greatness of the God of Israel manifested in the ways He delivered His people and subjected even kings to His authority. In this regard, God's intervention in delivering Daniel from the lions would cement this truth and reality, and also cause Darius to acknowledge the God of Daniel.

However, it may be in order to look closer and deeper at the valuable principles we can mine from God's treasure house. The first is to recognise the fact that the adversaries of Daniel could not find any fault in Daniel's conduct in his work as one of the chief ministers. We have noted that Daniel was highlighted by the angels as one highly esteemed by God; here we see that even the 'enemies' of Daniel could not fault him in his work and conduct. And the only way they could find grounds to accuse Daniel was in relation to the law of God in his life. Even here, the accusation was levelled on the ground that Daniel continued to pray to God three

times a day despite the edict by the king. It was not a moral failure; it was in fact his faithfulness to continue to pray and to worship God, even if it means that his life would be in danger, and certainly Daniel was wise enough to know that the accusers were seeking to harm him in this respect.

We may be amazed at how God delivered Daniel from the lions but we may miss why He did it, and also the quality of the life of this servant of God. Even king Darius recognised that Daniel continually served his God and a pagan king was so impressed with the life of Daniel that he was truly distressed that he could not save Daniel; he was so disturbed that he did not sleep well and he did not partake his food or welcome any form of entertainment the night before. The king got up very early and rushed to the lions' den to see whether the God whom Daniel served was able to deliver him.

We must pause and ponder; many would be amazed at the miraculous way God delivered Daniel but we must not forget that there is much to learn from Daniel with regard to a life of godliness and holiness. Daniel was one among many godly individuals who was given the privilege to have a vision of the future with a glimpse of the end times and the resurrection and final judgement. Although he could not fully understand all that was shown to him, he in fact had a glimpse of the role of the Messiah and His final glorification with His people.

Even as a young man, Daniel did not want to defile himself with regard to the food law and here under Darius, Daniel was probably in his nineties, and yet he continued to seek his level best to honour God in his conduct at work and in his communion with, and worship of the living God. Although Daniel had demonstrated that rewards and positions were not what he desired, yet he was responsible to be a good worker and a positive testimony, even in a hostile environment. It is no wonder that God was pleased to use the life of this servant of His to make a positive tremendous impact not just on the kings of Babylon and Medo-Persia, but also on the lives of so many in many generations after. The Lord God honours those who honour Him.

Notice also the ugliness of the sins of jealousy and envy. These caused the adversaries of Daniel their lives as well as the lives of their families. Of course, behind all these was the great adversary, Satan himself, who sought to snuff out the witness of God's servant and the work of God in the various kingdoms. The Lord Jesus Himself warned us that the world would hate us just as it hated Him; true believers must always enter the kingdom of God 'through much tribulation' (Acts 14:22). If we are faithful and true servants of Christ, the world will certainly hate us, as it hated our Master. No consistency of conduct, no kindness of character, will exempt a believer from the world's dislike, so long as he lives. It is foolish to be surprised at this; it is a mere waste of time to murmur at it. The Lord Jesus added, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hated you" (1 John 3:13; John 15:18,19). Like Daniel, we must learn to persevere and not to compromise our worship of God and our loyalty to Him, even at a great cost. We must not underestimate the impact of the testimony of such a life! Human nature is so made by God that its fulfilment, contentment and freedom become realities only as we learn to love, worship and serve our Maker. As the saints of old used to say, "There is

no happiness without holiness; only holiness brings full joy" (psalm 16). Daniel's life was a great testimony of this truth.

But let us guard ourselves that we ourselves will not be guilty of jealousy and envy, and that at the expense of fellow believers. The Pharisees were so concerned that their positions would be endangered when they saw the miracles of Jesus and the adulation of the crowd that they failed to recognise the Messiah and the Son of God. Somehow, jealousy and envy took hold of them and their legalistic formalism took precedence, and they ignored the truth and compromised the motive required for the right words and responses to the Lord Jesus. As believers, we too can succumb to the voice of jealousy and envy; let us be warned that the adversary constantly seek to 'whisper' into our ears the negative thoughts and feelings which seek to harm our fellow brethren who seek to do the will of God. There is a need for pure motives to do the right thing and God constantly look at our hearts and our motives to evaluate our lives and ministry.

Chapter Seven

From Daniel 7, the genre takes on the form of an apocalypse. There are certain features of apocalypse. The root of apocalyptic is the Old Testament prophetic literature, concerned with coming judgement and salvation. Often, apocalyptic came about either in persecution or in times of oppression; it looks exclusively forward to the time when God would bring a radical end to history and bring about the triumph of good and the final judgement of evil.

Apocalyptic literature is usually presented in the form of visions and dreams and its language is symbolic with hidden meanings; at times the images take the forms of fantasy rather than reality but they are communicating prophecies and revelation to God's people which may not be obvious to those to whom the meanings were not meant for, but with interpretation of the images by God and His angels, they communicate hope and encouragement for God's people that God would triumph over evil and grant victory and deliverance to His people, culminating in His glory and praise.

Looking at Daniel 7, we see Daniel being given a dream and a vision; it was a vision which caused Daniel to be deeply troubled and he had to be given the interpretation of the meaning of the dream and vision. The first part of the vision and dream seems to parallel chapter 2 of Daniel - it gives a glimpse of the various kingdoms which would arise one after another; chapter 2 depicts this in the statue seen in a dream by king Nebuchadnezzar whereas here in the apocalyptic vision, Daniel saw strange creatures, one arising after another from the sea. In Daniel's vision, however, he saw the fourth beast which appeared most terrifying with ten horns and one horn in particular, before which three horns fell, appeared most imposing and this horn waged war the holy people of God and defeated them. This must have caused Daniel to be most troubled in spirit.

Two scenes then appeared. In verse 9, God, called here the "Ancient of Days" assumes His position on the throne and begins to judge; God takes power from the arrogant beasts and then prepares to give authority to another. This God is timeless and eternal; the image of whiteness and fire indicates the purity of God and His holiness.

Second, the scene presents God giving the final kingdom to one "like a son of man" (verses 13-14). THE "SON OF MAN" is a heavenly being who is capable and worthy to receive the very kingdom of God and to govern it. It reminds us of the scene in Revelation 5 where the Lamb of God is the only one worthy to open the seals. He, the 'Son of Man' is capable of ruling without the arrogance of the earthly kings depicted in Daniel.

Jesus uses the term "son of man" repeatedly in the gospels to refer to Himself and He utilises this title when speaking of His power to judge or of His reception of the kingdom of God (Matthew 10:23,24:27, 24:37, 25:31; Mark 13:26; Luke 17:22,30 and John 1:51). Jesus views Himself as the one to whom God will give the right to judge human beings and the kingdom itself; He also refers to the fact that the 'son of man' must suffer (Matthew 26:24;

Luke 22:22). When Jesus receives the kingdom, He will share it with "the saints of the most High (Daniel 7:18,22). The saints however will suffer persecution before the kingdom is given and will triumph only when the day of the Lord appears and God destroys the work of Antichrist (referred as the little horn which wages war against the saints and defeated them). Antichrist will speak against God and oppress His holy people as well and try to change the set times and the law. God's people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time (the 3 and 1/2 years or 42 months mentioned in Revelation).

Daniel 7 paints a picture of the history of mankind which will be 'rocked' by a great tribulation with Antichrist seeking to be God and the people of God being persecuted and defeated before finally triumphing when Jesus comes again and destroys the devil, the Antichrist and the false prophet. The end would indeed be victory but the interim would see sufferings and tribulation for God's people; the call is to persevere and to overcome (as revealed in Revelation). Daniel was given the privilege to see all these and yet not understanding the details.

Chapter Eight

In the third year of King Belshazzar, Daniel had a vision. To recapitulate, from Daniel 7, the presentation takes on the genre of apocalyptic literature. Such a presentation is the product of an oppressed society; the grotesque pictures of evil and the anguished cries for salvation are often encountered in apocalyptic literature but hope is at the distant future. This often involves eschatology, and the hope is one that is sure of God's final judgement and deliverance.

We need to note that prophecy in the Bible by God's prophets can be characterised by 'peaks' or 'telescopic' features. For instance, the prophecy of an Antichrist figure who would commit 'blasphemy' and desecration of God's temple is fulfilled firstly by Antiochus IV of the Seleucid empire in 167BC, then by the Romans in AD70 (as prophesied by Jesus in Matt. 24) and subsequently further in time by the eschatological Antichrist during the great tribulation in the end-times. Antiochus IV can be said to be a prototype or antitype of the actual Antichrist (the ultimate symbol of human rebellion) who shall appear at the end times. Taking note of this, we can then understand that at times, description of Antiochus in some passages may actually be referring to the eschatological Antichrist, and then back again to Antiochus.

Going back to Daniel 8, Daniel's vision of the ram and the male goat was interpreted by angel Gabriel, the ram referring to the kings of the Medo-persian empire whilst the male goat refers to the king of Greece.

Cyrus built an empire that lasted for approximately two centuries. Persian power gradually declined and the Greeks, led by Alexander in 333, encountered the Persian arm under the leadership of Darius III in the battle of Issus in Asia Minor. The Persians were no match for Alexander's army, and Darius fled. The end result subsequently was the Greek forces overran the Persians, and Darius himself was assassinated after the battle. However, at the age of 33, Alexander, after establishing an empire of unprecedented proportions, died in Babylon and his kingdom was divided into four under his generals - the resulting kingdoms were Thrace, Macedonia, Ptolemaia, and Seleucid,

The Ptolemies and the Seleucid rulers fought for centuries over Palestine until finally, at the battle of Paneion in 200 BC, Antiochus III defeated the Ptolemaic general Scorpis and inherited Palestine. Antiochus IV, the seventh ruler of the Seleucid empire, was known as the 'master of intrigue' - he is described in Daniel 8:23-25 and he is the object of the prophecy in Daniel 11:21-45. Antiochus IV, as a result of a bribe, manipulated the high priesthood by inserting Jason in that office, hence replacing the legitimate occupant Onias. Allied with the powerful Tobiad family, Antiochus IV aggressively promoted Hellenistic culture. Even Jason turned out to be too traditional for the Tobiads and Antiochus and was finally replaced as high priest by one Menelaus who was an ardent Hellenist. In 170 B.C., though, Jason returned with an army of a thousand men, while Antiochus was concluding a successful war against the Ptolemies in Egypt. When he returned in 169, he devastated Jerusalem and the temple. He then

systematically tried to purge native religious customs out of Judah. In 167 he put an altar dedicated to Zeus in the temple - an act that was known in Daniel 11:31 as the 'abomination of desolation'. At this point, the Maccabean revolt began and subsequently, Lysias, the regent of Antiochus (who was away at war with the Parthians) had to conclude peace with Judas of the Maccabees and withdraw the abominable decrees in 165BC. Judas marched to Jerusalem, the temple was solemnly cleansed and worship of God restored - an event commemorated by the Feast of Hanukkah. However, the Maccabean success was followed by persecution of Jewish minorities in cities of mixed population. The so-called war of the Maccabees or Maccabean revolt resulted in much sufferings and death among the Jews and lasted for about three and a half years (1260 days or 42 months), This figure quoted in Revelation denotes an intense period of persecution and suffering for God's people.

What is remarkable is the detailed accuracy of prophecies recorded in Daniel that matches the historical accounts. Daniel saw the vision; it was interpreted to him but he was not in a position to understand all the details but God revealed accurately to Daniel what would take place.

The arrogant, God-denying sovereignty of man will be overturned so that God might reign The people of God will eventually prevail despite all apparent evidence to the contrary.

Chapter Nine

The chapter begins with Daniel, in the first year of the reign of Darius, turning to God in earnest prayer, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, for God's mercy for His people in exile.

Notice that Daniel included himself with the people in their sins and rebellion against God and His law; he acknowledged that they deserved God's punishment and judgement, for they had acted wickedly and had not listened to God's prophets whom God had sent again and again to them - yet without their proper response and repentance time and again. Daniel's posture was one of asking the Lord God for mercy and forgiveness for the covenant people of God. It was in order for the leader (like king David and king Solomon), the priest, the prophet (like Samuel) and the judge to intercede for the people of God, and here, Daniel was taking on this role for the sake of his people and humbly including himself among those who had disobeyed God and deserved the exile.

Daniel's earnest prayer began when he perceived from the Word of God to prophet Jeremiah that the exile would last for 70 years, and he realised that the 70 years were then coming to an end. Although God had shared this through Jeremiah, Daniel did not take it for granted and he did not act presumptuously. He was conscious that repentance and earnest prayer were in order to plead for God's mercy and forgiveness for the return of the exiled.

It is helpful to note that effective and definite prayers are often tied up with illumination from the Word of God - not only did Daniel pray according to Jeremiah's prophecy, he also called upon God to act for His name's sake and for His own glory, a fact which is revealed in Scriptures.

Real prayer centres on the hallowing of God's name and the doing of His will. It purifies the heart; it purges our attitudes and motives; it melts down all the self-centredness, self-sufficiency and self-reliance. In God's eyes, motivation is primary in prayer; He looks not only on the outward behaviour but also on the heart and any motivation that exalts itself will render our prayer and work rotten at the core. Daniel fulfilled all these positive features - no wonder God sent angel Gabriel swiftly to him at the time of the evening sacrifice to give him understanding and to respond to his prayers. Gabriel affirmed that Daniel was greatly loved by God because of his life of devotion to God and his humble and sincere disposition before God. This is in line with what Apostle James wrote: "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5: 16(b)).

From verse 24 to verse 27, the prophecy of the seventy weeks or the seventy sevens is addressed. This remarkable section declares that a definite period of time has been decreed by God for the accomplishment of the restoration of His people from bondage. This period - when it begins and when it ends exactly is not something agreed by all commentators - there are different schools of thought.

The word which is usually translated 'weeks' is more accurately rendered 'sevens'. It means a period divided into sevens, the precise length of this 'besevened' period is not being stated. The word in Hebrew may be paraphrased 'a period of sevens, in fact, seventy of them'. The revelation of this decreed period has direct reference to Daniel's prayer. The time of exile is almost ended, what then lies in store for Daniel's people and Jerusalem. The answer - a period of seventy sevens has been determined in which their salvation is to be accomplished. As the period of exile is 70 years; the revelation of a period of seventy 'sevens' would therefore mean 70x7 years.

The seventy 'sevens' have been determined for the purpose of bring about six results - three negative and three positive. The negative result to be obtained is the abolition of the curse which separates man from God. The nature of this curse appears in the use of the words transgression, sin and iniquity: to put an end to sin, to finish the transgression and to atone for iniquity. This implies that a necessary sacrifice will be offered, upon the basis of which iniquity will be forgiven.

The three positive results are described: to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet and to anoint a most holy place. The everlasting righteousness is to be brought in from without i.e. from God through the Messiah. Both vision and prophet will be sealed - this implies that the method of revelation through vision and prophet would cease for the Messiah would be the great prophet. To anoint a holy place has reference to the enduing of the Messiah with the Spirit of the Lord; it may also indicate that the physical temple is no longer relevant – God would dwell in His people through Christ – the people of God would constitute the new temple of God; Jesus the Messiah would Himself be the new temple. All these six results to be accomplished are all Messianic - pointing to the coming of the Messiah who would accomplish all these six results.

As stated earlier, there are different schools of thoughts about the period, when it begins and when it ends exactly. The traditional interpretation entails less difficulty and does justice to the language of the text.

The seventy sevens serve as a symbolic number for the period that has been decreed for the accomplishment of the Messianic salvation (verse 24). In verse 25, we are told that that two segments of time elapse from the issuing of a word from God to rebuild Jerusalem until the appearance of Christ. After these two segments have elapsed, the Messiah will be cut off by and Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed by the Roman armies of Titus. The Messiah will cause the Jewish sacrifice to cease by means of His death, and He will do this in the midst of the seventieth seven. As a consequence, the temple will be destroyed, and the destruction will continue until the end appears which has been appointed by God. The precise point of termination of the period of seventy 'sevens' is not revealed. The emphasis is not on the beginning or end of the period but rather on the results which the period has been set apart to accomplish.

We see therefore that the answer to Daniel's prayer is not just about the exile returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple but the answer stretches to the time the Messiah would appear and fulfil His mission for God's people. The abomination of desolation would be seen again when Titus desecrated the temple and destroyed it, as prophesied by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24.

So, even after the return from exile, the people of God would continue to face much sufferings until the second return of the Messiah who would bring about an end to evil, institute judgement and establish the new heaven and new earth. God's timetable and plan for His people is not over yet; He would bring all these about in His own time according to His perfect wisdom and in His own way.

Chapter Ten

The chapter begins with Daniel in a state of mourning for three weeks. Daniel was at this point an old man; he had not returned with the people who went back to Jerusalem. Nonetheless, Daniel was very concerned for his people and the state in Jerusalem; perhaps he was distressed that there were many who did not opt to return from exile and the temple and city were still in disarray. He was also probably concerned with the prophecy that his people would still have to undergo much sufferings and trouble in the future.

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while standing on the bank of river Tigris, Daniel had a vision of an angelic being; the vision was so terrifying to those with him that they fled whilst Daniel himself became very weak with no strength left in him. Some commentators thought this was a theophany (an appearance of Christ in His pre-incarnate state); others felt that this was probably an angel as he needed help in his battle against a demon, from angel Michael (which Christ as God would not have needed),

Three times, Daniel had to be strengthened by the touch of an angel to be able to receive the communication from the angel sent to him to reveal what was to happen to Daniel's people in the latter days.

The angel first of all revealed that the prince of the kingdom of Persia (probably a powerful demon) withstood him to prevent him from coming to Daniel and he had to be helped by one of the chief princes, Michael. He also revealed that the prince of Greece (another demon) would be coming to battle against him subsequently and here again, he would receive help from Michael (one of the chief angels).

Here we are given a glimpse of the heavenly realm and the principalities and power in this realm.

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Behind all these forces and power is the evil one, Satan himself, with all his schemes.

We see how even the angels of the Lord do not find it easy to overcome them and the battle can be long and drawn. No wonder Apostle Paul enjoined the believers to put on the whole armour of God and to pray in this fight. Daniel himself, one beloved of God, had to pray fervently and over a long period before receiving God's messenger and message for His people.

We need to be aware that the schemes of the evil one includes deception, direct temptations, persecutions and the sowing of fear and discord among God's people. He has his demons working for him and he uses the negative influence and temptations of this world to cause Christians to go astray; he also knows the weaknesses of the flesh and indwelling sin among

believers and he is crafty enough to exploit and manipulate these areas to gain his ground. The enemy is also 'conversant' with the Bible and he is an expert in distorting the truth and teaching in the Scriptures to cause many to 'fall in battle'. We need to be vigilant against our adversary "the devil who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:5(b)).

When we see wrong teachings and theology being promoted by charismatic individuals who claim to be from God, we can be sure that the devil and his demons are behind it all; when we notice the rise of jealousy, envy, dissensions among God's people in the church, he is also at work; when we see God's people adopting worldly methods in Christian service; when we see God's people under bondage of sin, pornography, materialism and worldly pleasures, he is definitely involved with his minions. The only problem is, often, God's people are not conscious of the spiritual battles and warfare going on in the spiritual realm; we only perceive what we can see in the physical realm.

Of course, we must not fall into the trap of concluding that everything that goes wrong is of the devil; often than not, it can be due to our own wrong choices and failures - we must not be so taken up with 'spiritual attacks' that we see evil 'behind every bush' and we become spiritually 'paralysed' and so fearful that we actually ended up as spiritual casualties even before the real battle begins.

A prayerful stance, a vigilant spirit and a discerning attitude are needful; we must depend on the Lord God and His Holy Spirit (implying that prayer is essential and a wholesome understanding of the Bible is indispensable) to fight the battles.

We must however realise that God has won the victory through Christ at Calvary; "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him (i.e. Christ)" (Colossians 2:15). In a sense, the war is over at the Cross, but the battles and skirmishes continue as the devil knows that he has limited time and he refuses to admit defeat. Our part is therefore "to take up the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:13). We are to defend our ground of victory, secured for us by the Lord Jesus and therefore to stand as 'more than conquerors through Him who loves us'.

The book of Daniel records for us the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms and the revelation that God's kingdom would finally triumph over all and last forever. We notice that the rulers of the earthly kingdoms became proud with their achievements in warfare and their accomplishments in victory; they became so proud that they desired to be worshipped and to be gods of their own making. But they had to be humbled and to acknowledge the sovereignty of the one true God over the 'sovereignty' of human rulers. But note also that behind the power of these rulers and earthly kingdom is Satan himself, who rebels against God and wishes to be God himself. He is the one who marshals human rulers and human kingdoms to rebel against God so that he could establish his own kingdom and rule. He is the one behind who uses rebellious human rulers and human authority to 'side with him' to achieve his ambition - we see that this would finally be revealed in the final battle between the 'false trinity' (comprising of Satan, the false

prophet and Antichrist) and the triune God before the 'end', revealed in the book of Revelation and also prophesied to a certain extent in the book of Daniel.

From the garden in Eden, man, manipulated by the evil one, has been rebelling against God and wanting to be god of this world. The history of the world has been characterised by kingdom after kingdom, ruler after ruler, who sought to be worshipped and to be god.

The book of Daniel affirms the presence of God's faithful people who refuse to defile themselves by breaking God's law; they give God the glory for their achievements; they prefer to die rather than commit idolatry and they refuse to compromise their devotional habits under pressure. Daniel's visions assert that the people of God will triumph because their God rules the future. It is not possible for God's people to be defeated, for their God, the only God, is sovereign. God not only rules the future; He rules each individual's future and He rules the future of each nation and His Church.

God is the one who creates, reveals, saves, judges and rules -from the garden of Eden in Genesis to the day of the Lord in Revelation - and He would usher in the new earth in the new heaven where He would rule in glory with His people, and there would be final liberation, restoration and re-making of the world, the cosmos, and the complete elimination of evil.

Chapter Eleven

This chapter gives a most detailed account of history - it covers events occurring from approximately 529 to 164 B.C. and also describes many things which will yet transpire during the future tribulation. The amazing thing is that Daniel wrote it all down in 540B.C.

A summary of verses 1-20:

The rule of four Persian kings in verse 2:

- a) Cambyses (529-522)
- b) Smerdis (522-521)
- c) Darius Hystaspes (521-486)
- d) Xerxes (486-465) - waged war against Greece

The rise and fall of Alexander: (336-323)

(verses 3,4) with fourfold division of his empire

The focus on two dynasties out of the four: Verses 5-30

- a) Southern dynasty in Egypt under general Ptolemy (ruled from 323-283)
- b) Northern dynasty in Syria under general Seleucus (ruled from 304-281)

The various battles and alliance between the two kingdoms:- (283-164):-

- a) The alliance - Ptolemy II, son of Ptolemy I, gave his daughter Bernice in marriage to Antiochus II, the grandson of Seleucus.
- b) Two years after Ptolemy II died, Antiochus II divorced Bernice and remarried his former wife, Laodice.
- c) Laodice, still bearing a grudge, poisoned Antiochus and had Bernice murdered. She then appointed her son, Seleucus II to become king of Syria.
- d) Ptolemy III succeeded his father and invaded Syria and revenged his sister's death by executing Laodice. Seleucus II hid in Asia Minor and later in 240B.C. attempted unsuccessfully to counterattack Ptolemy III in Egypt.
- e) Seleucus II died and was succeeded by his son Antiochus III who ruled from 223 to 187B.C. Ptolemy III died and was succeeded by his son Ptolemy IV.
- f) Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV met headlong in a crucial battle in Raphia in 217 B.C. Battle was won by Ptolemy IV who apparently killed 40,000 soldiers of Antiochus III; elephants were involved in this battle.

g) In 203, Ptolemy IV died and was succeeded by Ptolemy V. In 198, Antiochus III wrestled control of Palestine from Ptolemy V at a battle outside Sidon.

h) In 193, Antiochus III gave his daughter Cleopatra (not the same one in 69 B.C. associated with Mark Anthony) to marry Ptolemy V. Antiochus hoped Cleopatra would foster Syrian interests in Egypt - he still hoped to conquer Egypt but Cleopatra turned out to be a loyal wife.

i) Antiochus III (also known as Antiochus the great) was joined by renown self-exiled Hannibal from Carthage to invade Greece in 188, but both were completely driven out of that part of the world by Rome. Antiochus died in 187.

j) Antiochus III's older son, Seleucus IV then ruled but was later murdered by his own prime minister.

Antiochus Epiphanes, also known as Antiochus IV (verses 21-35):

He was the youngest son of Antiochus III (Antiochus the great). He was a vile person and he wrestled the crown through plot, deceit and intrigue, although he was not the rightful heir. He was a cruel, Jew-hating Syrian king who occupied Jerusalem for a while, ruling from 175 to 164 B.C.

In 171, he began his blasphemous actions against the temple in Jerusalem. The greatest insult against the temple took place on December 15, 168, when he sacrificed a huge sow on the temple altar. In those days, he murdered some 40,000 Jews.

On December 25, 165 (2300 days after September 6, 171), some Jewish heroes called the Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem and the Syrian occupation ended (see Daniel 8: 9-14) - the temple was cleansed and rededicated.

From 11:36-45, most commentators believe that the passage refers to the Antichrist.

Vs 36 - He will do everything according to his own selfish will (see also Rev. 13:7; 17:13).

He shall magnify himself and malign God (see also Rev. 13:6; 2 Thess. 2:4).

He will be allowed by God to prosper during the tribulation (see also Rev. 11:7; 13:4,7,10).

He will utter blasphemies against God and will make war against the saints and to conquer them. Authority will be given to him over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship him, i.e. those who do not belong to God. He will be in authority for forty-two months - here is a call for endurance among God's people.

He will take his seat in the temple of God and proclaim himself as God; the 'abomination of desolation' would be seen again for the final time.

He will be destroyed by Christ (on Mt. Zion, in the final battle at Armageddon).

His end - thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur (Rev. 19:19-21).

Notice that Antiochus IV is a prototype(or type) of the eschatological Antichrist, demonstrating the telescopic features or 'peaks' of prophecy. Take note of some 'similarities' in the characteristics of Antiochus IV and Antichrist: - both are masters of intrigue and are great manipulators (Antichrist himself initially would win the confidence of those around); both manipulate even those among God's spiritual leaders (which may include the 'priesthood'); both are persecutors of God's people and they cause great damage and pain to the people of God; both are responsible for the 'abomination of desolation' where the temple of God is defiled and both seek to be 'worshipped'; both are defeated by God and judged finally after an intense period of suffering that affects the believers.

Daniel shared the views of other OT prophets that the day of judgement will punish the proud; God's waiting for repentance will end and God's wrath at sins against Him and human beings will be unleashed; the righteous will survive and be rewarded. The God who created the earth and human beings will judge wickedness, reward righteousness and provide a permanent eternal dwelling place for the faithful.

The call for endurance and faithfulness for God's people continues through the march of history; God's faithful must continue to choose Him, even in the midst of great trials and persecution, even in the face of physical death and sufferings.

The just shall live by faith and faith in God shall prevail over evil and wickedness. Victory is promised and eternally secure.

The words from Hebrews 10: 35-39 shall conclude this study:

"Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls".

Chapter Twelve

The last chapter focuses on the great tribulation, a time of trouble such as never been seen before (see Matthew 24:21-22) - Michael the archangel is mentioned here and he would arise to defend God's people, indicating that the tribulation is not just physical sufferings but spiritual warfare is also involved. Those whose names are in the book of life shall be delivered (does not imply no suffering or physical death) - they would be kept for everlasting life in the midst of the tribulation as they continue to be faithful to God despite the spiritual and physical pressures.

It is interesting that here in Daniel 12, the resurrection is indicated - those who die in the Lord, particularly in the great tribulation, shall arise to everlasting life whilst those who die, denying the Lord, shall arise to shame and eternal condemnation. The subject of resurrection is hardly mentioned in the OT; yet here in Daniel the subject is mentioned in some details.

A mighty angel raises both hands into heaven as he attests to the solemnity, importance and truth of this revelation to Daniel - it would surely come to pass!

Revelation 7:1-17: John the Apostle was shown a great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages praising God - and when John asked who these are - the answer is that these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation, victorious in the Lord. This may indicate that it is not only physical Israel that will go through the great tribulation but that peoples from every nation and language will be involved and given the choice to choose God or the false trinity – those who are victorious would be from many tribes and nations although many from such contexts would also follow Antichrist to his doom. We cannot afford to be dogmatic here as John the Apostle was writing in the apocalyptic genre.

Daniel wanted to know the outcome of all that was revealed - he could not understand. He was told to go his way, for the words and revelation are sealed until the time of the end; Daniel was to rest and take his stand in his allotted place at the end of the days.

But the parting message to Daniel is that the wicked will continue their evil ways and would not understand, whereas the wise among God's people who purify themselves shall understand. This will culminate in the final battle at Armageddon where the destiny of many would be decided.

Daniel was to carefully preserve his writings but all their meaning would not be revealed to him until the glorious day when he would stand alongside the righteous awaiting his inheritance (verses 4,9,13). For believers today, we have the privilege of hindsight on this side of the Cross and we may understand a little bit more than the saints in the Old Testament.

Even then, as believers today, we also may not understand all the details of the revelation; but we can be sure that God is absolutely sovereign and His plans would all come to pass, and

nothing can impede or stop what He has ordained. No ruler or king is above His sovereignty; not even the negative spiritual forces can prevent what He has determined.

When Christ comes again, we shall find that in a moment, the whole cosmos, glorious as it is in so many ways in its present form, has been remade into yet greater glory. There will be new heavens and new earth - it will be a wholly new order of things, and the word perfection will be the only word that will describe it. There will indeed be fulfilment and completion of what God has already started.

Believers, who already have been changed inside to be like the Master, will be given bodies to match; there would be the perfect expressions of the new persons we are in Christ and we would be taken from this world to glory!

Surely, our hope is a glorious hope! Surely, it is going to be worth it all!