

notes on
DANIEL
Vol. I

Andrew C. Phiri

NOTES ON DANIEL

Volume I
(Chapters 1 to 6)

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This is a publication of Reflections on Faith. It is presented to you with the prayer that the message contained herein will inspire you to walk more closely with the Lord as you await the coming of His Kingdom, which shall live and abide forever and ever.

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*“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father
which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy
kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in
heaven”*

(Mat.6:9-10)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>		9
<i>Introduction</i>		13
DANIEL 1	Taken into Captivity	20
DANIEL 2	Dream of a Great Image	35
DANIEL 3	Testimony of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah	70
DANIEL 4	Dream of a Great Tree	87
DANIEL 5	Belshazzar's Impious Feast	104
DANIEL 6	Cast into the Lions' Den	125
<i>Appendices</i>		140
<i>Index</i>		150

To

the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the
truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known
the truth
(2 Joh.1:1)

Preface

To understand end-time Bible prophecies, the book of Daniel is an essential starting point. Much of what is revealed in the book of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*—a book containing crucial insights for end-time believers—can only be properly understood through a prior comprehension of Daniel’s prophecies. This book, *Notes on Daniel*, offers a verse-by-verse exposition of the book of Daniel.

The prophet Daniel was among the Jewish captives taken to Babylon during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. His gift for seeing and interpreting visions quickly elevated him to prominence in Babylon, though he remained humble and true to his divine calling. The astounding accuracy of his prophecies led the people of the East to revere him as one “*in whom is the spirit of the holy gods*” (Dan. 5:11). He was regarded as possessing wisdom and power surpassing all others in the council of Wise

Men—a body comprising astrologers, Chaldeans, magicians, and sorcerers. Nebuchadnezzar so revered Daniel that he referred to him as “*master of the magicians*” (Dan.4:9).

The authority and power of Daniel’s words reverberated through time. Seven centuries later, King Herod and the nation of Israel were shaken when some Wise Men arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “*Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him*” (Mat. 2:2). The shock is understandable: Daniel foretold the rise of four world empires beginning with Babylon—the empire of his time—followed by Persia, then Greece, and finally the Roman Empire. His visions concerning the third empire, Greece, included astonishing details about its eventual division under four rulers after the death of its great leader. Today, who does not know of Alexander the Great and his four generals—Seleucus, Cassander, Ptolemy, and Lysimachus—who divided the empire after his demise?

One of Daniel’s prophecies went so far as to detail how, from one of these four kingdoms, a ruler would rise to oppress the Jews and desecrate their temple. As any student of ancient Jewish history may know, it was from the Seleucid dynasty that the evil ruler Antiochus Epiphanes emerged. Believing himself to be a manifestation of deity, he desecrated the Jewish temple precisely as foretold. Even more remarkable was the

prophecy's specificity: the period that Antiochus desecrated the temple—2,300 days—had been explicitly stated in Daniel 8:13–14!

Yet, the most profound prophecy in Daniel concerns the coming of “*one like the Son of man*” (Dan. 7:13). This ruler would not arise from earthly royal lineage but would descend from heaven “*with the clouds of heaven*” (Dan.7:13). His rise to power would not be by human hands but, as it were, “*a stone...cut out without hands*” (Dan.2:34). Unlike all earthly kingdoms, the Messiah's kingdom would never end (Dan.7:14). This will be the Kingdom of God—a restoration of the Perfect Will of God governing the earth (Mat.6:10). In Daniel, we not only find an indication of when the Messiah—destined to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords—would appear, but also a precise timeline: “*After threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself*” (Dan.9:26).

About 2,000 years ago, during the time of the foretold fourth empire, a great prophet appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Mat.3:1–2). His message shook the nation of Israel and made people to wonder: Would “*the stone cut without hands*” and “*the Son of man coming with clouds*” soon appear? So great was the anticipation stirred by John's message that there “*went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan*” (Mat.3:5). Yet how many understood that, before the Son of Man could

come with the clouds of heaven, He must first be “*cut off*”? Had the Jews fully comprehended the book of Daniel, they would have recognized the Messiah. Tragically, many Gentiles today remain just as unaware of vital prophecies such as the Seventy Weeks and the dispensation of the Seven Church Ages.

This book is presented to you with the prayer that your understanding of end-time prophecies will inspire you to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness above all else (Mat.6:33). May the knowledge of truth prepare you for the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. That is the true Kingdom, and its majesty and glory shall abide forever— “*To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen*” (Jud.1:25).

Introduction

In the beginning, when mankind rebelled against the way of truth and righteousness, to pursue his own path, God let him wonder off to allow him to fully partake the fruit of his way – *“For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices”* (Pro.1:29-31). Mankind was deceived by *“the prosperity of fools”*, a prosperity whose ecstasy and sensual pleasure is only for a moment; its end is void of true peace and joy - *“For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them”* (Pro.1:32).

As the human population increased through time, different nations emerged with all sorts of abhorrent practices which desecrated the sanctity of life – burning babies as sacrifices, having intercourse with animals and abusing the poor and weak in the

communities. All the while, it seemed that God's work of creation had become subject to vain man. Yet it is God who allowed creation to be subjected to "vanity", in the hope of restoring those who would be wise enough to realise, repent and acknowledge that man's free will was always meant to be entrusted to God's Perfect Will. "*For the creature*" Apostle Paul wrote, "*was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope*" (Rom.8:20). What hope? The hope that wisdom would *begin* in some hearts. That is the wisdom which entails having an awakening experience, to know that God is the source of all goodness, joy and love. It is simply foolish to abandon the good way He has provided. Indeed, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*" (Pro.9:10a).

In His mercy and love God was determined to reconcile the world to Himself. He called one man, Abraham, to separate himself from his kindred and embark on a journey that was to take him to a land where God would establish a righteous nation through which He would begin the redemption of humanity. "*Get thee out of thy country*" God said to Abraham, "*and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee*" (Gen.12:1). Later Abraham begat Isaac and Isaac begat Jacob. God changed the name of Jacob to Israel. Israel begat twelve sons. The sons reproduced and increased in number, becoming a nation.

Many years later a prophecy once told to Abraham about how his descendants would become slaves was fulfilled (Gen.15:13). The Egyptian empire enslaved the Israelites for 400 years. However, the Israelites later experienced a mighty deliverance through the ministry of Moses, a prophet of God. God manifested to the Israelites and gave them His commandments. He promised to take them to the land He had promised Abraham. In that land God would first drive away the pagan nations and give a place to Israel.

Israel was to never adopt any evil ways of those nations. This chosen nation received this solemn warning: *“When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch”* (Deu.18:9-10). They were to separate themselves from all the evil ways of the neighbouring nations. God’s actions toward Israel were not driven by favouritism or arbitrary disdain, but by His righteous resolve to purge the land of Canaanite abominations that defiled creation and provoked judgment. *“Because of these abominations”* He told the Israelites, *“the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee”* (v.12).

Israel was being called out of the darkness of the world as a starting point for the redemption of the

world. The nation was to follow the good way of the Lord. God promised them the joy of life as long as they gave heed to His Word. God also warned them that if they returned to sin, they would once again fall into bondage: *“The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known”* (Deu.28:1,36-38).

Many years later Israel became a strong nation under the leadership of King David. King David lived faithfully for God. When he died, his son, Solomon succeeded him. King Solomon was faithful before God in his early years of kingship but he later married many foreign women who introduced him to paganism. *“For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites”* (1 Kin.11:4). The Lord God declared to King Solomon, *“thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant”* (1 Kin.11:11). This prophecy came to pass after the death of Solomon.

All that was beginning to happen was a paradox: a people chosen of God and highly favoured, like the first parents of mankind, rejected the good way that sustained them and began to indulge in wickedness.

This was like a person choosing to drink filthy water from a cistern when yet there is good clean water available. Many years later Jeremiah prophesied: *“...my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water”* (Jer.2:11-13).

The successor of King Solomon, King Rehoboam, lacked the wisdom to lead a nation. Arrogance and repressive tendencies made him fall out of favour with the people. The people rebelled against him and crowned Jeroboam as king (1 Kin.12:20). Thus, the nation split: the northern kingdom ruled by Jeroboam consisted of ten tribes. The southern kingdom ruled by Rehoboam consisted of only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. The northern kingdom is what continued to be known as Israel with Samaria as its capital, and the southern kingdom was Judah with Jerusalem as its capital.

A number of kings who reigned in Israel and Judah were evil. God was patient with them for many years. Occasionally, righteous kings would rise and guide the nations in the way of the Lord. It came a time when so much sin occurred and gross darkness filled the nations that the prophecy of dispersion took course. Israel was the first to be taken into captivity, by the Assyrian

empire, in 657BC, and later, around 524BC, Judah suffered the same fate.

As for Judah, prophecies had been spoken about its captivity, one by Isaiah and another by Jeremiah. Isaiah said to Hezekiah, the then king of Judah, *“Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon”* (2 Kin.20:17-18). A hundred years later the prophet Jeremiah also prophesied and specified the number of years that the Jews would be in Babylonian captivity – *“And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years”* (Jer.25:11).

It came to pass in 524BC when the king of Judah tried to rebel against Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar sent his armies to besiege Jerusalem. They destroyed the city including the temple and carried away the Jews as captives. Among those taken into captivity was Daniel.

Daniel was a prophet. His heart was continuously burdened for the restoration of Israel. He often prayed and fasted. After living many years in Babylon, he became eager to see the fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy years. Through Jeremiah God

had promised saying, *“it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations”* (Jer.25:12). God was so gracious to Daniel that He revealed many things to come. Daniel wrote the visions and to this day we can read them in his book. The visions contain important information about things that have been and things which are to come.



Kingdom of Israel in the north and Kingdom of Judah in the south

1.

TAKEN INTO CAPTIVITY

Chapter One of the book of Daniel recounts how Daniel and his three friends - Mishael, Hananiah and Azariah - found themselves captives in Babylon. Today we do not see the name Babylon on the world map because over a period of time names of places and their political activities change. However, it is well known that Babylon used to be in that region of the world we know today as Iraq.

In ancient times the Greeks called the region Mesopotamia.¹ The term means “between the rivers.” As shown on the map below, the two rivers were Euphrates and Tigris. The term “Fertile Crescent” is also used to describe Mesopotamia, and it aptly captures the nature of the land. The region regularly experienced flooding from the two rivers, and the

¹ The region was also known as the “Land of Shinar”.

floodwaters deposited rich clay soil throughout the area, making the land fertile and highly attractive for agriculture. As a result, the region consistently drew both immigrants and invaders. Over time, a powerful empire emerged—Babylon—and a formidable ruler arose who subdued the surrounding smaller nations, bringing them under his control. The nation of the Jews was not spared in Babylon’s conquests.



Fertile Crescent

The city of Babylon was situated around the Euphrates River (see map above). However, its power extended over much of the Mesopotamian region. When Daniel and his three friends were among the captives taken to this power-centre of the then world, they were fortunate to be among the chosen few to be trained in the sciences and administrative systems of Babylon. This was both a blessing and the

beginning of some life-threatening trials. In the end, however, their faith and testimonies triumphed.

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim”

The book of Daniel opens with these words:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.

Critics have found fault with facts presented in this verse. They have argued that Daniel 1:1 clearly contradicts Jeremiah 25:1.

Daniel 1:1 states, “*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.*” This differs from the account in Jeremiah 25:1—which critics often regard as more historically reliable—which reads, “*The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.*” On this basis, the book of Daniel has been dismissed by some as historically inaccurate. However, as will be shown shortly, this reflects an eagerness to find error where none exists. A simple consideration of the relevant facts reveals no contradiction between the two accounts.

Consider this simple illustration of two persons, *Peter* living in Zambia and *John* in

Singapore. The two are communicating by telephone: Peter picks up the phone and calls John. At the end of their conversation Peter writes a note in his diary stating that the communication with John happened at 9 AM. John records 3 PM. Many years later an investigator in Zambia reports that the record of John is unreliable because “the communication happened at 9 AM, not 3 PM”. The mistake made by the investigator should be obvious; his investigation is only based on the written details of “3 Am” and “9 PM” without considering the six-hour time difference that separates Peter in Zambia and John in Singapore. Critics of Daniel 1:1 have made the same blunder: It is important to be aware that during the time of Nebuchadnezzar, Judah was once under the control of Pharaoh Nechoh of Egypt. It is this Egyptian king who actually put Jehoiakim into power, as his vassal ruler over Judah (2 Kin.23:34-35). It was in the third year of Jehoiakim that Nebuchadnezzar *went* from Babylon. This was during (but towards the ending of) the third year of Jehoiakim. Before Nebuchadnezzar could reach Jerusalem, he got into war with Pharaoh Nechoh (recorded in Jer. 46:2). By the time the war ended, with Nebuchadnezzar emerging victorious and proceeding to lay siege to Jerusalem, Jehoiakim was in his fourth year of his reign. Thus, to Jeremiah, living in Jerusalem, the Babylonian king came in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, and for Daniel living in Babylon, it was in the third year of Jehoiakim when Nebuchadnezzar

had left to besiege Jerusalem. An interesting thing to note is that Daniel actually used the word “*went*” in Daniel 1:1. The English translation of the King James Version Bible used the word “*came*”. In Hebrew the word used is “*bo*” which also means to “*go*”. This is more accurate, as it is only natural for Daniel—living in Babylon at the time he wrote his record—to describe events from his own perspective. So, for Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar “*went*” (i.e., left Babylon), and for Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar “*came*” (i.e., entered Jerusalem).

The sins of Israel

During the reign of Josiah, there was great hope that the Jews would return to the faith of their forefathers. Previously, the nation had degenerated into idol worship. So terrible was the situation that even worship vessels dedicated to the pagan god Baal had found their way into the Jewish temple. Upon reading words from the Book of the Law—which had been lost but was now found—the young king Josiah instituted aggressive reforms to restore the people to true worship: “*the king commanded Hilkiyah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel. And he put down*

the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven” (2 Kin. 23:4-5). The record of Kings states that “*unto him [Josiah] was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart”* (2 Kin.23:25). Sadly, however, Josiah’s reforms were short-lived. He reigned for 31 years, and after his death, his son Jehoahaz was made king. Unlike his father, Jehoahaz ruled with wickedness and disregard for righteousness. He ruled for only three months before Pharaoh Nechoh dethroned him, appointing Josiah’s other son, Eliakim, to rule in his place. Pharaoh Nechoh changed Eliakim’s name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was equally evil and showed no regard for the Word of God. He ruled as a vassal king under Pharaoh Nechoh.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim—as previously explained and as foretold by Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 25)—Nebuchadnezzar overcame Pharaoh Nechoh and proceeded to besiege Jerusalem. Daniel documented the tragic events that unfolded:

2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.

Yes, God had delivered His people into the hands of a Gentile ruler. This event teaches us an important lesson about our relationship with God: He did not choose Israel because they were a superior race, nor did He choose them out of mere favouritism. Time and again, when they broke His covenant, He allowed Gentile nations to gain the upper hand over them. At this point in Daniel, we read that God even allowed the Babylonian king to take the vessels of the temple. This shows that no matter how consecrated those vessels were, they became vain when the hearts of the people were not consecrated. What mattered more to God was the vessel of the human heart. God's holiness is not preserved in man-made objects, but in the heart of man. When the heart becomes full of iniquity, even the vessels used for worship—such as musical instruments or other sacred objects—become vain. Like Paul admonished, *“the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (2 Tim.2:19).

No matter how iniquity may flourish, there are always people of God somewhere who stand for what is right. When judgment comes, God always protects them. This is what happened to Daniel, Mishael, Azariah and Hananiah:

³ *And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the*

princes;

⁴ *Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.*

In these verses, we see the political strategy Nebuchadnezzar may have employed to effectively subdue kingdoms. From the defeated nations, he selected young, intelligent men who could be educated in the sciences and administrative systems of Babylon. As we can see in the next chapters of the book, he used these men to rule over various regions of his immense empire. During their training these men were to be well taken of.

⁵ *And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.*

Being young, they should have been easy to re-school. Scholars suggest that Daniel and his three friends were likely teenagers when taken into captivity in Babylon. Shielded from the daily struggles of typical captives, winning their loyalty should have been simple. But it was not—the devoutness of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah was both sincere and firm. *Sincere*, because even when they were in a

foreign environment—far removed from fellow believers—they still lived faithfully before God. This is not the case with many: some refrain from sin not out of true righteousness of heart, but simply because they lack the opportunity to be in an environment where no one would catch them in acts of sin. As for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, they were so firm in their faith that even when their names were changed to those of pagan gods—Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, respectively—they did not abandon their true identity in Yahweh:

⁶ Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:

⁷ Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

Living in Babylon was quite unpredictable for the four men—at one moment, a celebration; at another, the anxiety of who might be killed next.

First test of faith

Many people become so excited by the blessing that they fail to recognize the trial embedded within it. Daniel and his friends were experiencing a rare privilege. After the Babylonian invasion, some Jews remained in the devastated city of Jerusalem, while others were taken into captivity. However, for Daniel,

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, their faithful lives seemed to be rewarded—they were specially chosen to study in Nebuchadnezzar’s royal academy. Yet that very privilege came with its own test. Among the royal treats was the serving of Gentile meats and wines—items forbidden in the Judeo faith. Would not the youthful men have taken this to be an extension of the blessings they were already experiencing? Had God not permitted them to partake of the meats, seeing He was the one who had provided the favour?

There is often a thin line between a blessing and a temptation. Many fail to spot that line to remain within the safe boundary of obedience to God’s Word. Likewise, there is a thin line between truth and error, between integrity and compromise. It takes a discerning eye to see where the streak of light ends and darkness begins. It is for this reason that Saint Paul admonished believers, saying, “*Ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh*” (Gal.5:13). Sadly, many Christians today—in their conduct, worship, singing, and dressing—have gone past grace into disgrace. This was not so with Daniel and his three friends. They purposed never to defile themselves.

⁸ But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Fortunately, Daniel must have had a gentle and likeable demeanour, which caused him to find favour with the prince of the eunuchs—who was charged with overseeing the affairs of the students:

⁹ Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

However, the behaviour of the four young men appeared odd to the prince. Their decision to abstain from the rich and delicious foods deeply concerned the prince. If they appeared frail before the king, he would be held accountable for failing to care for them properly. Babylon was not like modern democratic societies where human rights take centre stage; such negligence could incur a brutal penalty—execution by beheading! The prince of the eunuchs objected to their request:

¹⁰ ...I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

The four men's abstinence was not merely a religious gesture to a fictitious deity; they served the living God, who could protect them from danger. They believed that even if they ate only vegetables and drank water, Yahweh's favour would rest upon them, preserving their countenances. They requested to be

tested with a simple diet for ten days, after which they would be examined. This was done, and at the end of the days, their faith triumphed!

¹¹ *Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,*

¹² *Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.*

¹³ *Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.*

¹⁴ *So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.*

¹⁵ *And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.*

¹⁶ *Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.*

Soon afterwards Daniel's life and that of his friends would be dramatically changed, from being Jewish captives to rulers. During their three years of study Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah excelled in their studies. God endowed them with knowledge and the skill of understanding. Daniel had a special gift of seeing visions and dreams.

¹⁷ As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

At the end of their three-year course, the four men came out distinct, ten times better than all other students. Daniel and his friends were wiser than the astrologers, sorcerers, and soothsayers of Babylon. These were esteemed professions in Babylon, and those who rose to such ranks were called Wise Men. Babylon had its own educational standards to qualify individuals for this status. However, God had His own standard of judgment. He endowed Daniel and his friends with exceptional wisdom, bringing them into favour with the Babylonian king.

¹⁸ Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁹ And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

²⁰ And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

As later events in the book reveal, it was God's will for Daniel to rise to a high position of authority in

Babylon. His prophecies became renowned and revered throughout that region of the world. Hundreds of years later, some Wise Men saw a star—a sign of the coming of Him who would rule the world, as foretold in Daniel’s prophecies. They travelled to Jerusalem to witness the long-anticipated fulfilment. If only the Jews had paid closer attention to Daniel’s prophecies, they might have recognized the time of the arrival of their long-awaited Messiah.

Daniel lived up to the first year of King Cyrus, but his prophecies went on getting fulfilled:

²¹ And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

Chapter 1 Summary

Taken into Captivity

- The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem during the reign of Jehoiakim, fulfilling prophecy and bringing the temple vessels to Babylon as symbols of conquest (Jer.25:8-11).
- Among the Jewish captives were four young men—Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—chosen for their intelligence and appearance to be trained in Babylonian sciences, language, and administrative systems. This privilege came with special royalty provisions.
- Though young and held captive in a foreign land, Daniel and his friends remained steadfast in their faith, refusing to partake of the king's meat and wine, which were prohibited by the Torah.
- God granted them exceptional knowledge and wisdom. Daniel also had a gift of interpreting visions and dreams.
- The accuracy of Daniel's prophecies made him become highly respected, with later Wise Men referencing his writings in connection with the coming of a world ruler (the Messiah).
- Daniel continued to serve and prophesy in Babylon until the first year of King Cyrus, with his prophecies continuing to be fulfilled.

2.

DREAM OF A GREAT IMAGE

Life, in serving the king of Babylon, would at times be quite unpredictable. One didn't know what next thing the king would demand, and what punishment awaited the failure to achieve what was required.

A strange demand by the King

The magicians, astrologers and soothsayers should have made a good fortune out of interpreting the king's dreams. Note that mental activities—thoughts, dreams, assumptions—cannot be objectively assessed. They are not empirical material that can be proven. This creates space for people to freely speculate and presume. Thus, a person's dream, for example, can be interpreted differently by different people. Each

interpretation would be subject to an individual's perceptions and influences, and the resulting failure to disapprove subjective interpretations provides immunity to the liar. However, one day a strange case occurred in Babylon. The king had a strange and troublesome dream which he forgot upon waking up. Next, he demanded for the Wise Men to reveal the dream and interpret it. For the Wise Men to reveal what was deeply buried in his subconscious—a matter he had neither told nor whispered to anyone—would constitute the ultimate test of the truthfulness of their professed divine callings.

¹ *And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.*

² *Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to show the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.*

³ *And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.*

⁴ *Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.*

⁵ *The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof,*

ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill.

⁶ But if ye show the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore show me the dream, and the interpretation thereof.

What an outrageous penalty! The Wise Men attempted to negotiate with the king, urging him to reconsider the matter, but their appeal only incensed him further. It became clear to the king that the men were devoid of true divine power.

⁷ They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it.

⁸ The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me.

⁹ But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can show me the interpretation thereof.

Knowing that no amount of trickery would work, the Wise Men spoke plainly to the king:

¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can

show the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean.

¹¹ *And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.*

By saying that “*there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh*”, the Wise Men unwittingly prepared ground for Daniel to be soon revered as one “*in whom is the spirit of the holy gods*” (Dan.5:11).

The Wise Men were right: only God can truly see and reveal what lies within a person's mind. Even the so-called “mind readers” can merely infer from speech, body language, and emotional cues. Satan, likewise, can only act on what we disclose. Though he may cast thoughts our way, he cannot penetrate the inner realm of our minds. As Daniel reaffirmed to the king: “*The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets*” (Dan. 2:27–28).

Decree given for the Wise Men to be destroyed

If the Wise Men had been offering divine interpretations and guidance over the years—receiving gifts and honour for their counsel—and now failed a true test of their supposed divinity, had they not been

deceiving the king all along? Apparently, they had amassed wealth through deceit. Nebuchadnezzar resolved to kill them and destroy their homes. “*Ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill*” he warned (Dan. 2:5). When it became clear that the Wise Men were helpless and made no attempt to reveal the matter, a decree was issued to proceed with their arrest and execution.

¹² For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

¹³ And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.

If Daniel and his three friends were killed, they would die together with the now infamous Wise Men of Babylon who were now frowned upon as liars. But would God “*destroy the righteous with the wicked*” (Gen.18:23)? The Wise Men were exposed to have been deceiving the king with false interpretations; they earned their living through deceit and manipulation. When the moment of the true test of their divine powers arrived, they failed the test. It was time for Daniel and the three men to pray. But how could they have the time to wait on the Lord when the urgent decree had already been given and the men were being sought after? Daniel used wisdom to request for time to pray over the matter and assured the king that the

dream and its interpretation would be revealed.

Prayer for Revelation of the Dream

Daniel and his three friends devoted themselves to seeking the mercies of the Lord in prayer. Together, they asked God to reveal the secret.

14 Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon:

15 He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel.

16 Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation.

17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:

18 That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

There is power when believers jointly seek the Lord over a matter in prayer. Even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had desired for the disciples to pray and watch with Him on that fateful night in Gethsemane (Mat.26:38-44). When believers gather to sincerely lay a matter before the Lord, God hears and speaks. God

heard the prayer of the four men.

Dream revealed to Daniel

Four men prayed, but the revelation came only through Daniel, who had the gift of “*understanding in all visions and dreams*” (Dan. 1:17). That is how God often works: a group may intercede, but the answer is entrusted to a vessel equipped to receive and steward it. Yet, having the gift did not make Daniel more important to God than the others.

Upon receiving the revelation, Daniel rejoiced and glorified God saying:

¹⁹ Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

²⁰ Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

²¹ And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

²² He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

²³ I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of

thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

It is important to note that the extent to which God can use a person through a gift is determined by their faithfulness and humility in handling it. After receiving the revelation of the mystery, Daniel made the matter known to the king, emphasizing that it was by the providence of God—not by his own wit or ability:

²⁴ Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation.

²⁵ Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation.

²⁶ The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?

²⁷ Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king;

²⁸ But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king

Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these;

²⁹ *As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass.*

³⁰ *But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.*

Purpose of the Dream

Note, first, in verse 30 above, that the vision was revealed to preserve the lives of Daniel and his three companions. These men served the true God, and He shielded them from the calamity that was about to befall the Wise Men. God distinguished them from the others who practised pagan rituals.

Secondly, the revelation came in response to the persistent thoughts in Nebuchadnezzar's mind. In verse 29, we read that his dream was triggered when, before sleeping, he pondered deeply about "*what should come to pass hereafter.*" As was typical among Gentile kingdoms, nations contended for power and dominance. At this time, Babylon had risen to great prominence. But how long would this exalted state endure? What would be Babylon's fate? Could this

seemingly impregnable empire defy history and reign forever?

These questions may have troubled Nebuchadnezzar on the night of the vision. Were his concerns stirred by reports or rumours of revolts and wars? Such unrest was common in empires built on conquest and oppression. A key truth to note is that God does not only answer spoken prayers; He also responds to silent petitions and inner turmoil. Does not Scripture assure the believer that He is “*able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*” (Eph.3:20)? The answer to Nebuchadnezzar’s questions came through a dream. Daniel revealed the dream saying:

³¹ *Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.*

³² *This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass,*

³³ *His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.*

³⁴ *Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.*

³⁵ *Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was*

found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

³⁶ *This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.*

This was the interpretation he gave:

³⁷ *Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.*

³⁸ *And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.*

³⁹ *And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.*

⁴⁰ *And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.*

⁴¹ *And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay.*

⁴² *And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.*

⁴³ *And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.*

⁴⁴ *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

⁴⁵ *Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall*

In verses 37 and 38, the head of gold was identified as Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian empire. It was described as a mighty kingdom that ruled the known world. Daniel explained that it was God who gave the Babylonian king this power. But how could this be? Did God establish the kingdom of a pagan ruler? What is more, in the prophecy of Jeremiah we read God saying, "*And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant*" (Jer.27:6); how could a pagan ruler be God's "servant"?

Let us reflect on the relationship between God, Satan, and the political systems of the world. Understanding that will enable us to know how Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant.

God, Satan and Political Systems of the World

Whatever God permits—even when instigated by Satan and seemingly opposed to God's ways—will ultimately serve His purpose. No one can draw a circle, anywhere in space or time, vast enough to exclude God. Whatever man or Satan does can never occur outside the scope of God's foreknowledge.

In possessing foreknowledge, and in His unwavering commitment to the triumph of righteousness and truth, God always orchestrates events so that all things ultimately serve His divine purpose. Thus, when a person or thing fulfills that purpose—whether the entity is good or evil—it may, in that context, be referred to as God's servant. Declared by the Lord through Isaiah—“*I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things*” (Isa.45:7)—we see that even a pagan king like Nebuchadnezzar was raised up by Yahweh to fulfil His sovereign design in the overthrow of Jerusalem. For that reason, God called Nebuchadnezzar “*my servant*” (Jer.27:6).

Keep in mind that man's political systems were never the result of God's perfect will. He permitted them because of man's disobedience—allowing him to partake of the fruit of his own choosing: “*For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD. They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices*”

(Pro. 1:29–31).

Even in the chosen nation of Israel, although there were at times good-hearted and God-fearing kings (albeit few), it was never God's perfect will for the nation to be governed by political rulers. The system of monarchy in Israel began when the people coveted the political structures of the Gentile nations. Previously, the nation had been ruled by prophets and judges.

It was during the time of the prophet Samuel that the people approached him, saying, “*Give us a king to judge us like all the nations*” (1 Sam. 8:5). Concerning this carnal demand, God said to Samuel: “*Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them*” (1 Sam. 8:7). Next, God warned that ego and greed—vices inherent in fallen mankind—would lead kings to abuse their power: “*He [a king] will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots... And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants*” (1 Sam. 8:11–18).

Are these things still not happening today? Modern democratic systems promise “rule by the people”. Democracy is defined as a system of government in which power is vested in the people, either directly or through elected representatives. This system positions

leaders as servants of the public. However, the actual implementation of democratic principles, especially in Africa and other Third World regions, reveals substantial shortcomings. Far from what it promises, *democracy* seems more of *demon-crazy*.

The so-called ‘servants’ in democracy wield so much power which they use to abuse their people. They live and dine in beautiful houses whilst a significant number of their populace live in deplorable conditions. Their life knows no ‘cost of living’; they have free food, free transportation, free housing, and huge emoluments which aren’t reflective of the poor economic conditions of their countries. It is these men in power who appoint judges to manage their country’s justice system, and as expected there can never be a true sense of accountability for what they do. Strangest of all is the fact that the lavish lifestyles of these men are financed by the tax contributions of the poor masses.

On the other hand are the ‘masters’. When they fall sick, they cannot access proper medical attention in the available hospitals and health institutions. With no money to afford quality services, they are left with no option but to endure their circumstances. However, when the ‘servants’ fall ill—having misallocated resources and neglected essential economic development—they cannot rely on their own underfunded healthcare systems, which lack even basic facilities. Instead, they possess the means to fly

to developed countries—using taxpayer money—to receive superior medical care. Many do not limit themselves to medical visits; they also vacation abroad and send their children to foreign institutions for education, clearly demonstrating their lack of confidence in the very systems they govern. Despite having the power to reform and strengthen these institutions, their greed prevents meaningful change, leading them to exploit rather than develop the resources their people desperately need.

African political men are powerful and rarely accessible to the ordinary citizen. They are concealed and soundproofed from the pleading whine of the poor, shielded by the thick walls of their opulent offices and residences. The one time they become easily reachable—even offering a handshake—is when they reappear as humble servants, seeking votes to secure another term in office. This sad state of affairs clearly shows that the gains once celebrated at the dawn of independence have been squandered by men who relish the sweetness of power, the very power once wielded by the imperialists they had so vehemently opposed.

Well, enough about the filth and sins of the black politician. To portray the white politician, I would have to borrow the language of a hymn: to recount his transgressions—from the transatlantic slave trade and the First World War, through Hitler's Nazism, the Holocaust, and the Second World War, to South

Africa's apartheid system—if the sky were a scroll stretched from end to end, and all the oceans ink, and every man a scribe by trade, and every stalk on earth a quill, the oceans would run dry!

Whilst the Earth spins on its axis, the politics of the world revolve around dishonesty. This plays well into the Devil's hands. Yes, Satan owns the political systems (kingdoms) of this world. This he made clear when he said to the Lord Jesus, “*that [the power of the kingdoms of the world] is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it*” (Luk.4:6). Once in a blue moon, men of integrity do rise, but more often it is one in a million. For this reason, the believers' prayer remains: “*Thy kingdom come*”. One day, God's kingdom shall surely come, and it will rid the world of all its filth.

Interpretation of the Great Image

Daniel explained that the huge image depicted different empires that would rise in the world. The characteristics of the different empires were portrayed by different minerals – *gold* for Babylon, *silver* for Medo-Persia, *brass* for Greece and *iron* for Rome.

An important aspect of material quality in Nebuchadnezzar's dream-image is the progressive loss of corrosion resistance, descending from gold, the most resistant, to iron, the least. This decline is mirrored by a degradation in material purity: the head was pure gold, followed by the breast and arms of

silver—also a pure metal, though “*inferior*” to gold—then bronze, an alloy, and finally a mixture of iron and clay. It is worth pausing here to reflect on the prophetic significance of these material properties.

Materials of the Image

Daniel explained that just as silver is inferior to gold, so too would the kingdom that succeeded Babylon. But “*inferior*” in what sense? Metals can be compared across various characteristics—density, value, strength, and more. Yet, as earlier stated, one particularly striking distinction among gold, silver, brass, and iron lies in their varying degrees of corrosion resistance.

Corrosion is the gradual deterioration of a metal caused by its reaction with the environment. When a piece of metal is rusting, some parts of its substance are breaking away from its form and thus it gets disfigured and smaller in size. Gold is more resistant to corrosion than silver, silver is more resistant than brass, and brass is more resistant than iron. Iron is therefore the most susceptible to corrosion. All this is similar to what characterised the stability of the different empires that rose and fell through time: In Babylon the king had absolute monarchy power, firmly holding everyone, including subdued kingdoms, under his will and rule. After defeating Babylon, Persia rose to prominence. Like Babylon, Persian rule was not based on consensus or democratic decision-making,

but on the absolute will of the monarch. However, Greece was quite different.

Greek society cherished democratic values and independent living. Greece consisted of various city-states, each governing itself with its own laws and customs. This decentralised system may have been further necessitated by the geographical separation of different settlements. During one battle with the mighty Persian forces, the *Battle of Salamis*, Greece's democratic approach to politics proved useful. Its victory in the battle was a turning point in the Greco-Persian Wars. Some details about the Battle of Salamis would enlighten us more on why the Grecian empire in Nebuchadnezzar's dream was represented by an alloy, instead of a pure metal.

The Battle of Salamis

This battle occurred about 480 years before the time of Christ. When Persia was set to launch a naval attack on Greece, its king – Xerxes – had been cautioned by an ally. Although Persia was the most powerful empire at the time and all prospects seemed to be in its favour, Xerxes was advised against naval warfare with the Greeks as they had superior naval strength. Xerxes ignored the advice and went ahead to launch the attack. On the other end, the fleet developed by the Greeks was a result of different participants contributing to discussions about the best strategy to be adopted for naval warfare. Different city-states joined efforts to

fight for the survival of their democratic ideals. Let us call Greek's democratic method an *alloy approach*.

The Battle of Salamis is often described as a struggle between the democratic Greek city-states and the monarchy system of the Persian Empire. The victory in this battle was a turning point for Greece; it was the beginning of its rise and the decline of the Persian Empire. So great was the impact of Greece's alloy approach that Rome, which arose after the demise of Greece, incorporated it into its system of political and military administration. The alloy approach — a mechanism by which disparate entities work together to achieve greater strength — reduces corrosive tendencies; that is, the tendency of groups to break away from a system in pursuit of independence or alternative alliances. *Alloying* reduces political corrosion. Thus, while corrosion resistance decreased in chronological sequence from gold to silver and from silver to brass, alloying itself became a new means of bolstering a nation's power.

Be aware that there was quite a difference in the way the Greek states and the Roman Empire administration operated: The Greek states comprised independent entities, each with its own laws, army, and system of governance. The states engaged in conflicts as well as alliances. The Roman Empire, on the other hand, consisted of provinces that functioned more as administrative units controlled by a centralized system. The empire was characterized by a hierarchical system

with Rome at the top governing all the other provinces. This bore a semblance to the *pure-gold* system of Babylon and the *silver* system of Medo-Persia. However, after the fall of the empire in 476 AD, what had started out as an iron empire disintegrated into separate kingdoms. Some kingdoms were as strong as iron and others as weak as clay. Although attempts were made to form alliances through royal intermarriages, no true unity could be achieved. This situation was as the interpretation had foretold: “*And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay*” (Dan.2:42-43).

Succinctly, here was Daniel’s interpretation of the colossus:

(a) Head of Gold

As earlier explained, this referred to Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. It had grown to be the most powerful empire in the world. It subdued many Mesopotamian nations and tribes, among them Persians and Jews.

(b) Breast and Arms of Silver

Once regarded as impregnable, mighty Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian Empire. The Medes and Persians

were once insignificant tribes in Mesopotamia. Living under the supremacy of mighty Babylon, they endured much abuse and oppression. In time, however, there arose a man of exceptional courage and wit—Cyrus. Against all odds, he ascended to great power, and Babylon, once unconquered, lay subdued beneath his formidable reign. Historical records indicated that the first significant act carried out by Cyrus, upon rising to power, was the liberation of the Babylonian slaves. The decree granting the Jews freedom to return to their land and rebuild the house of God is found in first chapter of the book of Ezra.

The Medo-Persian empire had successfully subdued Babylon, Egypt and other territories in the region. The empire had been ruled by a succession of great ambitious kings. These kings had a strong defence system of always ensuring that the empire was not vulnerable to defeat. However, prolonged peace and security led to complacency among subsequent leaders. They became preoccupied with luxurious lifestyles, the accumulation of wealth, and material pleasures. This obsession with opulence became so pervasive that historians note even slaves were adorned in splendid robes, reflecting the empire's shift from military vigilance to decadent excess.

(c) Belly and Thighs of Brass

Although renowned as formidable, Persia's growing complacency emboldened its enemies to

strike. During this period, King Philip of Macedonia and Greece was building a great army for conquest. However, Philip's military planning and investments only laid the groundwork for his son Alexander's historic achievements.

Philip was assassinated before he could implement his war plans against Persia. Alexander, at only about 20 years of age, became the new king of Greece. This was not an ordinary young man. Tutored by the world-famed philosopher, Aristotle, and armed with bravery, wit, and extraordinary leadership skills, he took on Persia.

When Alexander's army met the Persian forces, they were vastly outnumbered. Yet they possessed courage and hope. True to that hope, the Persian army—though larger—lacked an able commander. The persistence of Alexander's troops unnerved their opponents. In time, Alexander conquered Persia, and Greece rose to dominate the world. That was the “*belly and thighs of brass*”.

As with the previous empires, a time came when the Grecian empire declined. Greece gave way to the Roman Empire.

(d) Legs of Iron and Feet mixed with Clay and Iron

The Roman Empire was vast, stretching from modern-day Great Britain to Syria. Rome ruled conquered nations with an iron fist of suppression and abuse. In Rome, wealth and power were achievements

greatly desired by the people. Nations which were subdued by Rome became its provinces. The nation of Judah was one such victim. It was besieged and annexed during the time of Pompey.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

About 63 years after Pompey had besieged and annexed Judah, Jesus Christ was born. This was sometime in 4 BC. When He was 30 years old His ministry began. It forever changed the course of history.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Gospel began to sweep through Jerusalem like a storm. Its proclamation—that Jesus Christ was the Messiah—proved controversial, leaving many Jews confused and prompting resistance against what they perceived as a strange cult. Yet the testimony of the Christians was overwhelming: the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the sick were healed, and the demon-possessed were delivered. These were the very works Jesus had performed during His ministry. Thus, the miracles stood as compelling evidence that, although Jesus could no longer be seen physically, He was alive and working through His followers.

The elders of Judaism were deeply disturbed by the message of the Christians. First, it appeared to contradict the traditional teachings of Judaism. Second, it accused them of having killed the Messiah—who had risen from the dead—and whose

power was now evidenced by miraculous signs. A fierce persecution ensued, led by Jewish leaders determined to halt the spread of Christianity. Strangely, it was as though the blood of the martyrs was the fuel for the Gospel flames, which rapidly spread across the country and beyond its borders. Then, all these events took an even more shocking and dramatic turn: a renowned persecutor, seasoned scholar, and respected religious leader was converted!

Paul, once a fierce leader of crusades against Christians and the man at whose hands the well-known martyr Stephen was killed, gave testimony of an extraordinary experience. He recounted an encounter with a supernatural light, from which the voice of Jesus spoke to him. This moment changed Paul's mind, and from that time forward, his life became a series of events directed by the same power that had guided the disciples of Christ. Against all odds, Paul became its foremost witness, surpassing the missionary efforts of those who had gone before him. One of the places Paul travelled to in order to proclaim the Gospel was Rome.

Paul's missionary work in Rome led many pagans to turn away from idol worship as they embraced the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the years that followed, the rapid rise of Christianity drew the attention of political leaders who vehemently opposed its spread. Many Christians were killed in the most barbaric ways. Emperors Nero and Diocletian became infamous in Roman history for their brutal atrocities against

believers.

In time, a new emperor, Constantine, ascended the throne. He was sympathetic toward Christians. At a critical moment, as he prepared for war, it was said that he dreamed of a cross—signifying victory through the Christian faith. He prevailed, and as a result, elevated many Christians to powerful and influential positions. He later united Church and State, ushering in a new era of the Holy Roman Empire, during which the Roman Catholic Church wielded immense power and influence.

Disintegration of the Roman Empire

By 476 AD, due to relentless invasions by barbaric tribes such as the Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths, the mighty Roman Empire fractured into separate provinces. This collapse did not happen suddenly; it unravelled over a period of time.

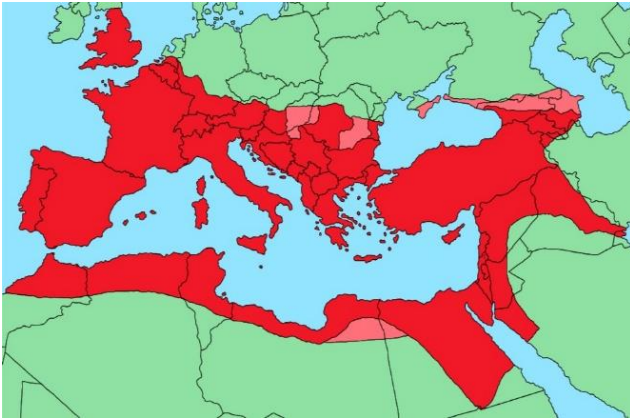
Regions of Europe that were once part of the Roman Empire include:

- *Italy*: this was the heart of the empire, with Rome as the capital and administrative centre of the imperial government.
- *France*: called Gaul in Roman times, it was a key province for trade, military, and cultural exchange.
- *Spain and Portugal*: known collectively as Hispania, played a vital role in agricultural production and Romanization efforts.

- *United Kingdom*: referred to as Britannia, specifically including England and Wales, which were heavily fortified and Romanised, though Scotland and Ireland remained largely outside Roman control.
- *Western parts of Germany*: known as Germania, although only areas west of the Rhine and south of the Danube were securely under Roman rule.
- *Austria, Switzerland, and Belgium*: these frontier regions formed part of the empire's defensive line known as the Limes, with cities like Vindobona—modern Vienna—acting as military hubs.
- *Greece*: an influential cultural and intellectual centre that contributed philosophy, art, and science to the Roman civilization.
- *The Balkans*: a strategically important area that housed several Roman legions and imperial roads.
- *Hungary and Slovakia*: part of the Danube frontier and home to Roman fortresses like Aquincum near modern-day Budapest.
- *Turkey*: the European part of Turkey, particularly Thrace, which later became home to Constantinople—renamed from Byzantium—a crucial city in both Roman and Byzantine history.

The map below shows the Roman Empire at its peak

around 400 AD (this was shortly before its fall).



Roman Empire region at its height, circa 400AD

This region of the world continues to exist today as western and mainland Europe, retaining many traces of Roman influence in its legal systems, languages, architecture, and city planning.

As previously explained and foretold in prophecy, some European nations remain stronger, while others are weaker to this day. Various attempts—including intermarriage among royal families to strengthen diplomatic ties, and alliances aimed at integrating the region into a single force—have failed. As the prophecy declares, “*the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay*” (Dan. 2:43, NIV).

Today, there is the European Union whose membership over time has been fluctuating, with some countries leaving and others joining. However,

whatever political changes occur, prophetically we know that at the time of the Second Advent of Christ, this will be the key political system God will deal with to give way to the coming and establishment of the Kingdom of God. This kingdom will live and abide forever. Note that just as Daniel saw the stone “*cut out without hands*” (Dan.2:34), this kingdom will not be established by man’s effort; it will be supernaturally ushered in by the Lord God Almighty.

A little more reflection on the “stone” will help us understand what manner of kingdom the Kingdom of God will be.

The Stone – “*eben*”, “*bana*”

Man-made kingdoms revolve around the pursuit of power and control. To rule successfully, one must possess greater resources, which are used to influence others. In such a setup, the poor often find themselves ruled and dominated by the strong and wealthy. This imbalance fuels conflict across human societies.

Wars are driven by a quest for resources, influence, and control. The more one possesses, the more powerful they are perceived to be. Some nations are gold, silver, bronze, or iron in their strength. The story of worldly kingdoms has always been one of gold contending with silver. The struggle centres on who will inherit the earth to rule and subjugate others. This ego appears to have reached its climax among today’s superpowers. Meanwhile, ‘clay nations’—both within

Europe and, by extension, those formerly colonized and still economically tethered to it—remain weak; they depend on ‘metal nations’ for survival. Yet the astonishing detail in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is this: a stone shattered the gold, silver, bronze, and iron into pieces!

A stone is a non-metallic material, much weaker than metal. However, by God’s providence it will take the humble stone to break the colossus. Just as the Lord Jesus had taught in Matthew 5:5, it will be the “*meek*” who shall inherit and rule this earth.

Now, notice the correlation between “*stone*” and “*meek*”: The Hebrew word used for *stone* in Daniel 2:34–35 and 45 is *eben* (אֶבֶן), a feminine noun derived from the root verb *bana* (בָּנָה), which means “*to build*”, “*establish*”, or “*continue building*”. Furthermore, the root *bana* (בָּנָה) is also etymologically linked to *ben* (בֶּן), meaning *son*. This suggests a conceptual tie between building and lineage. Thus, in that simple word we see what various other prophecies have spoken about the kingdom of God to come. First, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is its cornerstone and then all who believe and are born again are “*living stones*”² which are being built up to be established as a “*habitation of God*”.³ In that day when the Kingdom of God comes down to earth, Jesus Christ will not come alone; He will come with the saints. These saints are

² 1 Pet.2:5-9

³ Eph.2:22, Rev.21:3.

depicted as the Bride of Christ and as “*the Holy City, the New Jerusalem*” which is further described as “*the Tabernacle of God*” (Rev.21:3).

“Tabernacle of God” means a dwelling place of God. God dwells in the hearts of believers as the Holy Spirit. These are people who are born again and are yielded vessels to the leadings of God. They do not claim to own anything. They are dead to ego; they are meek. Such are the ones who shall be given the power to rule the world to come. They will rule by the Will of God that shall be reigning in their lives.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Worship

When Daniel finished explaining the vision, Nebuchadnezzar was so amazed that he worshipped him.

⁴⁶ Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him.

⁴⁷ The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret.

Did Nebuchadnezzar’s confession to Daniel that “*of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods*” constitute having the true revelation of Yahweh, the true and living God? Not so. Although Nebuchadnezzar was so astonished that he worshipped Daniel, he remained

ignorant concerning the true revelation of God. His pagan tendencies continued to manifest in the chapters that follow. The very act of Nebuchadnezzar bowing down to worship and offer oblations to Daniel showed how pagan he was. He was so deeply paganised and so engrossed in political power that Daniel likely never felt compelled to restrain him from offering his vain oblations.

After this incident, Daniel was promoted to a high position of authority. He also secured some positions for his three friends.

⁴⁸ Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

As we come to the end of Chapter 2, let us look at one interesting matter. Nebuchadnezzar had been told, “*thou saw ‘a great image’*”, God has “*made thee ruler over people*”, and “*Thou art this head of gold!*” The next thing we read in Daniel Chapter 3 is that Nebuchadnezzar “*made an image of gold.*” This event brought a persecution on the three friends of Daniel. A question of interest is, where was Daniel during this persecution? Did he compromise by bowing and worshipping the idol? Certainly not! Throughout the book, Daniel was a fearless man of faith and integrity. The answer much likely lies in the last nine words of Chapter 2:

⁴⁹*Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.*

Chapter 2 Summary

Dream of a Great Image

- Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream he could not recall and demanded that the Wise Men reveal and interpret it—under threat of death.
- The Wise Men admitted that only the “gods” could reveal such secrets, setting the stage for Daniel’s God-given abilities to be recognized.
- Daniel requested time to pray for the revelation. Together with his three friends, he sought God’s mercy, and God revealed the dream to Daniel.
- Daniel credited God for the revelation and conveyed both the dream and its interpretation to the king, sparing the Wise Men’s lives.
- The dream depicted a great image composed of various materials, each symbolizing a successive Gentile kingdom: the head of gold (Babylon), the chest and arms of silver (Medo-Persia), the belly and thighs of bronze (Greece), the legs of iron, and the feet partly of iron and partly of clay (Rome and the divided kingdoms).
- The metals depicted in the colossus signified the distinct attributes and relative power of each successive kingdom.
- Rome, represented by iron, eventually fractured into weaker, divided kingdoms—symbolized by the feet of iron and clay—a state that persists into modern Europe.

- Attempts to unite these kingdoms through alliances or marriages failed; the European Union today reflects the prophecy's vision of fluctuating alliances and lack of unity.
- The stone "*cut out without hands*" symbolized the Kingdom of God, which would replace all earthly kingdoms, endure forever, and have the Messiah as its ruler.
- Upon receiving the interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar worshipped Daniel, acknowledging Daniel's God as the "*God of gods*".
- Daniel was promoted to a high position, and his three friends were appointed to oversee the province of Babylon.
- In Daniel Chapter 3, however, Nebuchadnezzar was enthused to construct a golden image which was to be worshipped by all people, and this put Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in great trouble.

3.

TESTIMONY OF HANANIAH, MISHAEL AND AZARIAH

Daniel had revealed the meaning of the dream of “*a great image*”, and his interpretation of the “*head of gold*” as referring to the Babylonian king might have stirred Nebuchadnezzar’s ego. He had been told that he was a king of kings, appointed by God as ruler over peoples and nations throughout the earth—*“wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold”* (Dan. 2:38). Soon after, we read of Nebuchadnezzar erecting a large “*image of gold*” before which “*peoples, nations, and languages*” were commanded to bow down and worship. (Dan.3:1-

2,4-5). Clearly, the image was to be a symbol of his power and supremacy over Babylon and the nations.

¹ *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits⁴: he set it up in the plain of Dura⁵, in the province of Babylon.*

² *Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.*

³ *Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.*

After the image was constructed and Nebuchadnezzar had convened an assembly of high-ranking dignitaries from various nations, the decree

⁴ A cubit is 0.46 metres. So, 60 cubits = 27.43 metres, and 6 cubits is about 2.74 metres. So, the golden image was about 27.40 metres high and 2.70 metres wide.

⁵ Some researchers believe this place is located somewhere on the left bank of the River Tigris where the name Dur has been found. Julius Oppert (1825-1905), a French Assyriologist, places Dura in the south east of Babylon where a mound of Duair and a pedestal of a huge statue were found. Oppert's view carries greater evidence of both the name and remains of the statue.

took effect.

⁴ *Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,*

⁵ *That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up:*

⁶ *And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.*

This image held such significance for the Babylonian king that any show of disrespect towards it was seen as a direct affront to his person. Though it was merely inert substance, he imbued it with his essence—casting his pride and authority into lifeless form. Such idolatrous projection is not confined to ancient royalty; echoes of this behaviour resurface daily in people's lives.

Revering images

Just like Nebuchadnezzar, there are men and women today who have erected adorable 'public' images of themselves. Their opulent image may be a display of success, achievement, peace, and wealth. However, a different reality often exists in the individual's life. What one may project publicly can be very different from what they are going through in their private inner life. Away from the *image*, there is

a real person. Inside him or her is the perishable flesh and blood common to all mankind. Yes, inside him or her is a fragile life that pulsates with emotions of fear, anxiety and self-doubt. When the fate of sickness and death becomes imminent, curtains open and people solemnly behold the vanity of worldly pursuits. But the lesson only lasts a few seconds; people sob and bid farewell as the casket lowers to the ground. Afterwards the routine cycle of vanity continues. Very few people in this world live above the insanity and vain lifestyles of the masses. Like it was on that fateful day when the decree was issued to bow to the golden image, only three men resisted the command. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were determined to devote their faith only to Yahweh and this got them into trouble.

Charged with Treason

The cordial relation Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had enjoyed with the king was at stake. Rumours spread concerning the Jewish men's doctrine of not worshipping any god besides Yahweh of the Hebrews. People were displeased with the attitude and a case was raised against the three men before the king:

⁷ Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

⁸ *Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews.*

⁹ *They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever.*

¹⁰ *Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image:*

¹¹ *And whoso falleth not down and worshipping, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.*

¹² *There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*

Nebuchadnezzar was not happy with the news. He knew how respectful, prudent, and wise these men were, and so, despite his fury, he decided to have an audience with them to give them another chance to reconsider.

¹³ *Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king.*

¹⁴ *Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not*

ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

¹⁵ Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

It is important to remember here that the Jewish nation had previously revolted against the Babylonian king. It was this revolt that led to the captivity of Daniel, his three companions, and many other Jews in Babylon.

Following this tragic episode, King Nebuchadnezzar allocated resources to a strategy designed to train and lavish royal treatment upon a select group of young captives. These individuals were later appointed as administrators to preside over territories under Babylonian rule. Clearly, beyond imparting skills to the students, Nebuchadnezzar's strategy also aimed to instil loyalty in the trainees. However, in the case of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—despite their youth, their passage through years of training and favourable royal treatment, and their eventual promotion to positions of authority—they remained faithful to God. Everything had remained calm and peaceful, so long as their conduct did not conflict with the king or his

administration. But the incident at Dura appeared to squander all the dividends of loyalty they had accrued in Nebuchadnezzar's eyes.

Of great importance to note here is that the ceremony at Dura was not merely religious; it was a calculated display designed to reaffirm and consolidate Nebuchadnezzar's influence and political dominance over the nations. Various leaders and dignitaries from different regions had been summoned to demonstrate their allegiance and reverence to the king of Babylon. What an unfortunate time and place to exhibit insubordination. The three men were immediately charged with treason and sentenced to execution by fire.

Where was Daniel?

At this juncture, one peculiar detail cannot go unnoticed: the silence of Daniel during the ordeal faced by his three companions. The record of Daniel's life reveals him to be a fearless and devout man—one who had never compromised his faith, even in the face of grave danger. Thus, we cannot entertain the notion that Daniel bowed to the image. The question then arises: where was he?

The answer seems to be implied in the preceding event, when Daniel had been greatly honoured and promoted by the Babylonian king after interpreting the dream of the great image. Daniel had requested that his three friends also be considered for promotion, and the

account concludes with Nebuchadnezzar granting the request—yet with a notable distinction: “*And he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king*” (Dan. 2:49). It is immediately following this statement that Daniel falls silent in the unfolding narrative. The phrase “*but Daniel sat in the gate of the king*” strongly suggests that Daniel’s absence at the image’s inauguration was due to his ‘sitting’—that is, attending to the king’s business—away from the location of the event. Daniel remained—he ‘sat’—in the gate of the king.⁶

While the full workings of Babylon's political administration remain unclear to us, the book of Daniel offers glimpses into a vast, complex, and multi-layered structure. Phrases such as “*the whole province of Babylon*”, “*sat in the gate of the king*”, “*the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the counsellors, the sheriffs*” and “*all the provinces*” portray an empire with extensive bureaucratic reach. It follows, then, that while Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were entrusted with overseeing provincial affairs, Daniel's designation—“*sat in the gate of the king*”—marks him as one who enjoyed the privilege of

⁶ Please note that in the original Hebrew manuscripts there are no chapters. Chapters were added by editors for referencing purposes. Thus, Daniel Chapter 2 runs continuously with Chapter 3, thus making the “*but Daniel sat in the gate of the king*” a good background to why the prophet is silent in the events that follow in the next Chapter 3.

proximity to royal authority. Whether stationed at the king's residence, administrative offices, or part of a dignitary entourage at key functions, Daniel was engaged in high-level responsibilities beyond the public spectacle.

The Three Men's Response to the Charge

When the king inquired of the three men whether the report of their disobedience was true, they did not mince their words to sound diplomatic or to save themselves from death:

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

These were men of conviction, willing to die for what they believed. Such is the way of people who know their stand in God.

The “*But if not*” Faith

The next words the men spoke were even more astounding:

¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

¹⁸ But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Clearly, the faith of the three men did not depend on the benefits they could receive from God; theirs was not a faith rooted in serving Him for reward. Sadly, many people desire heaven—not because they love God, but simply to escape hell. Yet heaven is not some kind of ‘fire insurance’. Jesus Christ is coming for those who “*love His appearing*” (2Tim.4:8; Heb.9:28). The Rapture will be the result of an intense love-attraction, compelling the Bridegroom to whisk His Bride away from earth to glory!

Thrown into the Furnace

When Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah stood their ground, the king was furious and had them thrown into an intensely heated furnace.

¹⁹ Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

²⁰ And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

²¹ Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

²² Therefore because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of

the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

²³ *And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.*

The furnace was so intensely hot that “*the most mighty men*” who had bound them and were tasked with throwing them in were themselves consumed by its flames and killed. Yet out of this persecution emerged a powerful testimony to the living God of the Jews.

Faith’s triumph

When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the flames, he beheld something astonishing:

²⁴ *Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.*

²⁵ *He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.⁷*

A shocked Nebuchadnezzar, realising that a supernatural manifestation of the mighty God—whom

⁷ See **Appendix 1**

the men served and who had protected them—was unfolding before him, approached the mouth of the furnace and called out to them.



The Three and the Fourth Man in the Fire (Dan.3:13-30)

This was no mere calling out—it arose from fear and trembling, as he beheld the power of the supernatural!

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire.

²⁷ And the princes, governors, and captains, and the

king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

What began as persecution became a powerful testimony that led the Babylonian king to acknowledge the power of Yahweh. This offers an important lesson for believers: never let adverse circumstances crush or wound your spirit. No matter how grievous the test or temptation, rest your heart in God for He “*will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore*” (Psa.121:3-8). When life throws you into a fiery furnace, be ready—like the three men—to declare that your faith will not be shaken, even in the face of death. Embrace trials as stepping stones to higher heights with God, knowing that “*the trying of your faith worketh patience*” (Jam.1:2-4).

You can also overcome

Your life in this world is like a school, where challenges serve as tests. Each person is uniquely

called and equipped to face their own trials. It is important to remember that no test or temptation comes except that which you are able to overcome (1 Cor.10:13). Greater is the One who is in you than the one who is in the world (1 Joh.4:4). In the end, you will triumph. Ultimately, you will be lifted up by the Lord.

This is exactly what happened to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego:

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

29 Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon.

The endurance of faith overcame the fiery furnace. In the end the three men were promoted to serve in higher capacities of authority. Although the king promoted the three men, it was God who made the way. As in the words of the psalmist, “*promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor*

from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Psa.75:6).

Nebuchadnezzar was merely a tool in the hand of God—a mortal man, not a deity. Sadly, despite the awe-inspiring experience of seeing the fourth man in the fire, pride remained deeply rooted in his heart. God was now about to let him learn the hard way. What followed was a profoundly humiliating experience.

Chapter 3 Summary

Testimony of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego declared to Nebuchadnezzar that God would deliver them from the fire. *“But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods”* they declared. In this, the three men demonstrated that their faith was not dependent on the benefits they could receive from God; theirs was a faith not rooted in serving Him for reward
- Sadly, many people desire heaven—not because they love God, but simply to escape hell. Yet heaven is not some kind of ‘fire insurance’. Jesus Christ is coming for those who *“love His appearing”* (2Tim.4:8; Heb.9:28).
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace for their faith but emerged unharmed, demonstrating God’s supernatural protection.
- The event astonished King Nebuchadnezzar and his officials, as not even their hair or clothes were touched by the fire.
- This miraculous deliverance led Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge the power of Yahweh, making a decree for people to honour and fear the God of the three young men.
- The episode serves as a lesson for believers,

emphasizing that trials and persecution can lead to powerful testimonies. So, you are encouraged to not let trials break your spirit.

- Endurance in faith leads to victory and elevation—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were promoted after their trial.
- Nebuchadnezzar’s recognition of God’s power was significant, but pride remained in his heart, setting the stage for his future humiliation.

4.

DREAM OF A GREAT TREE

Remember that the divine message in the dream of the colossal image in Daniel Chapter 2 was ultimately about the coming of the Kingdom of God and how it shall never be overthrown but will abide forever and ever. However, when Nebuchadnezzar was given this interpretation, his attention mainly focused on these words of Daniel: *“Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold”* (Dan.2:37-38). Nebuchadnezzar had only heard *a* message of the dream, not *the* message. “A message” of the dream was that he was the head of gold

and it is God who made him so powerful. This made Nebuchadnezzar to erect an image of gold unto which “*people, nations, and languages*” (Dan.3:4) were to bow. This was clearly meant to be a symbol of his power over the nations and languages. Notice the king’s words after he heard Daniel’s explanation of the dream – “*The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret*” (Dan.2:47). Nebuchadnezzar’s words should not be mistaken for a testimony of conversion to the true faith or a revelation of the one true God, Yahweh. The king had worshipped the God of Daniel as a “*God of gods*” merely because Daniel could “*reveal this secret*”—a feat the other gods had failed to accomplish.

Trouble for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

The golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had erected brought trouble upon Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were sentenced to death by burning, a punishment that stemmed entirely from the king’s pride and his refusal to tolerate disobedience to his decree. Nebuchadnezzar had summoned various dignitaries to the ceremony to reaffirm his authority over them. The three men were bound and thrown into the furnace. Yet, instead of hearing the cries and wailing of those being burned, the onlookers saw the men walking freely in the midst of the fire. When they

emerged unharmed, Nebuchadnezzar once again witnessed the extraordinary power of God. Still, these miracles were not enough to humble the king completely; his heart remained proud. It is important to recognize that when God reveals His power to us, humility should fill our hearts. This was not yet the case with Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was proud of his achievements and splendour, forgetting that all of it was granted by the power and permission of the Almighty God—the One who both raises up and deposes kings. The Babylonian king was destined to undergo a deeply humiliating experience to learn this lesson. In Chapter 4, he recounted this harrowing ordeal, beginning his testimony with words of praise to God.

¹ Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

² I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me.

Nebuchadnezzar had been given signs and when the signs fulfilled, they caused wonder among people.

Purpose of a Sign

A sign is a portent—something God gives to warn of things to come. It may appear in symbolic form: through a dream, a vision, a prophetic utterance, or a circumstantial occurrence. Yet God does not give a

sign to imprison a person's will, as though one were fated to say, "God said the bad thing will happen, so there is nothing I can do about it." Was it not Hezekiah who was told, "*Thus saith the LORD... thou shalt die, and not live*", but pleaded his case, was healed, and granted fifteen more years of life. A bad sign may be given to prevent someone from making imminent wrong choices: "*For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword*" (Job 33:14-18).

Nebuchadnezzar had received his warnings: the dream of the colossus, and the experience of seeing the fourth man in the fire (recall that the three men were cast into the furnace as a result of Nebuchadnezzar's pride against those who refused to obey his command to worship the golden image). Indeed, God had spoken once, then twice; and the third time, He gave the king a dream bearing an unpleasant sign. After its fulfilment, the Babylonian ruler was filled with awe. A dream that is highly detailed and fulfills precisely what was foretold is, without doubt, an experience that inspires wonder.

Observe that all of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams indicated that worldly politics, from generation to

generation, are never merely the result of human decisions. Supernatural powers influence the affairs of humankind. For this reason, the king eventually worshipped in this way:

³ How mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

What experience did Nebuchadnezzar go through for him to make this confession? It was quite an unpleasant and humiliating experience. The following was his testimony.

Resting and flourishing, and then a bad dream

Nebuchadnezzar recounted:

⁴ I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace.

Nebuchadnezzar's rest was not merely the pause of a man after a day's labour. It was a rest born of achievement and self-satisfaction—a rest grounded in the belief that he lacked nothing: "I have conquered, I have wealth, and the whole world reveres my name! I have accomplished my desires through my might and wisdom!" But one day, a troubling dream came upon him.

⁵ I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

⁶ *Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream.*

⁷ *Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof.*

The tradition of believing in magicians and sorcerers was so deeply ingrained in Babylonian culture that, despite their previous failure to interpret the dreams, Nebuchadnezzar still summoned them to interpret the new one he had received. But they failed again, and the God of Daniel was once more vindicated as the only source of true wisdom and revelation. To the Babylonians, Daniel was regarded as a “*master of magicians*”, a man in whom the “*spirit of the holy gods*” dwelt.

⁸ *But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying,*

⁹ *O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream⁸ that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof.*

And this was the dream:

⁸ See **Appendix 2**.

¹⁰ *Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great.*

¹¹ *The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth:*

¹² *The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.*

¹³ *I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven;*

¹⁴ *He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches:*

¹⁵ *Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth:*

¹⁶ *Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him: and let seven times pass over him.*

¹⁷ *This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High*

ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

¹⁸ *This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee.*

It was a strange dream indeed. The message troubled the king, and this deeply concerned Daniel. How could he tell the king that he would lose his sanity for seven years? Daniel's distress was so apparent that the king noticed it in his expression. It was clear he had something important to say, but he was uneasy about delivering the news.

¹⁹ *Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.*

Daniel continued to interpret the dream, telling the king that, like the towering tree which had grown and reached the heavens, his dominion had also become great:

²⁰ *The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth;*

²¹ *Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation:*

²² *It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.*

Greatness had made Nebuchadnezzar become proud. However, any power he possessed was actually by the permission of God (Jer. 25:9). In this dream God showed Nebuchadnezzar that the power of men on earth was simply a manifestation of supernatural forces in the heavens. As revealed in the dream, there are “watchers” (angels) in the heavens who observe the actions of man on earth.

²³ *And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him;*

There were to be “seven times” to pass over the huge cut-down tree. What did this mean? Well, this was explained by Daniel in simple words:

²⁴ This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king:

²⁵ That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

²⁶ And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.

So, Daniel explained that the tree represented Nebuchadnezzar who was to be driven from among men to live with animals. This came to pass when Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind and behaved so violently insane that he was put away from the community.⁹ He was in this situation until “seven times” passed over him.¹⁰ Like other Bible versions

⁹ Some scholars have suggested that Nebuchadnezzar’s disease was *Lycanthropy*, a form of madness where the patient becomes deluded to think he or she is a wolf or some other animal.

¹⁰ See **Appendix 3**.

have stated, seven times referred to seven years.¹¹



Dream of the huge tree (Dan.4:10-18)

It is important to note that the impending judgment on

¹¹ Clearly the unfortunate events that would befall the king being described in Daniel 4:25 would not have fulfilled in “times” of week-days but years.

Nebuchadnezzar was not simply the result of pride hidden in his heart. Rather, his pride gave rise to actions that displeased God. As is often the case with those who are prideful, Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance may have extended to despising the poor. This is suggested by Daniel's words of admonition to the king:

²⁷ Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

Sadly, the king did not give diligence to follow this counsel. Pride still reigned in his heart. One day it happened that as he looked over the city of Babylon and noticed its beautiful infrastructure, he praised himself and his words were caught by a "watcher".

Idle words, then the fulfilment of the dream

The following is a narration of what happened to the king of Babylon on that fateful day, and the seven terrible years that followed:

²⁸ All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar.

²⁹ At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.

³⁰ The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

There is much historical evidence of

Nebuchadnezzar's architectural works. In the Britannica Encyclopaedia we find this note:

Nebuchadnezzar's main activity, other than as military commander, was the rebuilding of Babylon. He completed and extended fortifications begun by his father, built a great moat and a new outer defence wall, paved the ceremonial Processional Way with limestone, rebuilt and embellished the principal temples, and cut canals. This he did not only for his own glorification but also in honour of the gods.¹²

Scholars have suggested that even the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, may have been built by Nebuchadnezzar.

³¹ *While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.*

Words we utter are not merely propulsions of pressure coming through vocal cords. Words express the condition of the heart and also spell out its judgement. The Lord Jesus admonished that by “*every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment*” (Mat.12:36). The word “idle” in this verse is *argos* (ἀργός) in Greek and refers

¹² Saggs, H.W.F (2017) in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

to a state of being “useless” or “barren.” Surely any word that is void of truth is barren and useless. By words one can sin and that is why we are cautioned to “*study to be quiet*” (1 The.4:11).¹³

The angel continued speaking to Nebuchadnezzar:

³² And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

The dream was fulfilled exactly as it had been spoken. Nebuchadnezzar lost all the glory and respect due to a king. God reduced him to a mere animal to show that everything he possessed—including the power to reason and think—belonged to God.

³³ The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws.

After the seven years were fulfilled, reason returned to the king. When he realised what had happened to him, he came to understand that human beings hold no reputation in the eyes of God. He recognised that it is

¹³ See also Mat.5:37.

the heavens, indeed, which rule.

Restoration and worship to God

Nebuchadnezzar became humble and worshipped God:

³⁴ And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:

³⁵ And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

³⁶ At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.

³⁷ Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Thus, the king of Babylon learned humility. But would his successor follow in his footsteps?

Chapter 4 Summary

Dream of a Great Tree

- Nebuchadnezzar rose to immense power, transforming Babylon into a marvel of architecture and influence admired by many nations. His achievements, however, led him to pride, setting the stage for a dramatic humbling experience.
- God sent a troubling dream to warn Nebuchadnezzar: a mighty tree cut down, representing the king's coming humiliation.
- Daniel interpreted the dream, explaining that Nebuchadnezzar would lose his sanity and live like an animal for seven years.
- Nebuchadnezzar did not heed the warning of the dream. One day, he made a proud remark: "*Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?*" (Dan.4:30). While he was still speaking, a voice declared to him, "*The kingdom is departed from thee*" (v.31).
- The prophecy was suddenly fulfilled: Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind, was driven from society, and lived as a beast for seven years.
- One day the king's sanity returned. He humbled himself, praised God, and was restored to his throne with even greater honour.
- Nebuchadnezzar's experience demonstrated that ultimate authority belongs to God. Pride leads to a

downfall and humility can bring restoration.

5.

BELSHAZZAR'S IMPIOUS FEAST

During the time of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and carried away various temple vessels. He *“carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king’s house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD”* (2 Kin.24:13). But Jeremiah had prophesied: *“Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple”* (Jer.51:11). How did this come to be?

Nebuchadnezzar had kept the vessels of the temple aside in the treasure house of his god. With time he learnt to revere the God of the Jews. It was not so with Belshazzar, his son.¹⁴ The book of Daniel Chapter 5 opens with a great feast that was made by King Belshazzar:

¹Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.

During this feast, Belshazzar despised Yahweh and desecrated the vessels of His temple. By this act, he provoked God to take vengeance upon the temple, as had been prophesied by Jeremiah. It began when Belshazzar became drunk with that which is not meant for kings—“*It is not for kings... it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and... pervert the judgment*” (Pro.31:4-5). In his drunken stupor, he ordered the golden and silver vessels from the Jewish temple to be brought out, so that he, along with his wives and concubines, might drink from them.

²Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple

¹⁴ Belshazzar was actually a grandson to Nebuchadnezzar. Note that Aramaic and Hebrew languages do not have the words “grandson” or “grandfather” and hence the reason Daniel wrote Belshazzar as a son (instead of grandson) of Nebuchadnezzar. See **Appendix 4**.

which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.

³ *Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them.*

⁴ *They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.*

An important thing to observe here is that although the Israelites were in the wrong and God had punished them by delivering them into the hands of the Babylonians, the latter were still expected to treat their captives with care and not to misuse the temple vessels. May we learn this: when someone is being chastised by God for wrongdoing, it is not our place to take pleasure in their suffering. Be admonished, “*Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him*” (Pro.24:17-18). As for Belshazzar, he not only despised the Jews; he went further to desecrate the vessels of their temple, and it was that incident that brought judgement on him.

Seated on the throne, every man revered him as king. But then he glimpsed into the supernatural, and his heart could not contain itself—his body trembled violently. Despite the great protection of his bodyguards, that single moment made the king feel as

vulnerable as any other mortal. He saw the fingers of a man's hand writing upon the wall.

⁵ In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

Note that the fingers did not just write anywhere, but...

“Over against the candlestick”

Where there is the flame of a candlestick, there is light to illuminate—and when words are written on the plaster of the wall, they should be visible enough to be read and understood. Yet it was not so with Belshazzar. He could not comprehend the strange language of the writing.

The strange appearance of the hand terrified the king, and he became aware that the writing carried a message he urgently needed to understand. It required a spiritual man to interpret it for him. Is this not what has happened to humanity today? So much has gone wrong—morally, politically, socially, and environmentally. Scientists are presenting a terrifying picture of the planet's future, driven by the destructive works of mankind. This, combined with the ever-unstable political climate across the globe, has left people fearful and anxious—yet still unable to perceive the handwriting of judgment upon the wall.

Many people look at the events of the world but fail

to understand the warnings of God. However, from the time of the early church to this day, God has had seven golden candlesticks, to give light in every age. The purpose of the light from the candlestick is to illuminate the eyes of those who can see, to read the handwriting on the wall for their generation.

It is important to note that although others saw the writing, only Belshazzar witnessed the vision of a man's hand. When God chooses to speak to—or to judge—a person, He directs the message specifically to them. This may come through a circumstance or situation designed to arrest their attention. To others, the message may go unnoticed or seem irrelevant.¹⁵

The sight of a man's handwriting on the wall so terrified the Babylonian king that his jovial mood vanished instantly.

⁶ Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

This was great fear, and it made a king tremble in a way unworthy of a sovereign over a great nation.

⁷ The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king

¹⁵ A similar thing happened to Daniel one day when he was seated with some people: a quaking took place and other people ran away to hide. To them it was an earth quake, but to Daniel his eyes could see an angel coming down to give him a message (Dan.10:7).

spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.



Vision of the Handwriting on the Wall (Dan. 5:5-9)

⁸ *Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof.*

⁹ *Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.*

The mighty king cried? This was a man flanked by bodyguards, commanding an invincible army—horses and mighty chariots that etched tales of conquests onto the pages of history. Babylon had risen to become a world-dominating empire. One would think such a king, draped in splendour and power, was immune to fear. Yet it was not a sword, nor the roar of war, that shook him but the silent appearance of a hand!

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Kingdoms of the world thrive and triumph on the basis of possessions. The more possessions one has, the greater their wealth and the more power they wield over others. This also happens in people's personal and social lives: there are those who accumulate so much and thus increase their power. Yet, when a person is born into this world, they come with nothing and are as single as the letter "P". Then a name is given, so that one is now identified as "*I am John Phiri*". After years of schooling, John may become "*an accountant*", "*a pharmacist*", or "*a doctor*". Later on, "P" might become rich with a string of additional letters, so that the person now identifies as "*John Phiri, B.Sc., M.Sc.*,

Ph.D.” These accumulations in a person’s life can certainly be useful and good for society. However, when they begin to so thoroughly shroud a person that their true identity as the poor “*P*” gets lost, an illusion is created in the person’s mind, so that they think, walk, and live as though there is literally more weight to their being than there actually is. The illusion of power and greatness may so obsess a person that they believe they are more than those around them. They may forget that they are also a mere pint of blood. Beneath their skin are piles of flesh and bones, common to every mortal. But blessed are those who, despite whatever they accumulate in life, still do not lose sight of their true identity. Like Job, they know that they came naked into this world and will leave it the same way (Job 1:21).

The confidence of believers is not rooted in the flesh; they “*worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*” (Phil. 3:3). They realize that their spirit, concealed by the flesh, is their true identity. In that spiritual state, they are not identified as an accountant or a doctor. In that state, all that is physical becomes merely a transient piece of matter—destined, sooner or later, to decay into oblivion. Regarding physical possessions, believers may have them, yet they are still “poor”. Poor—not because they lack possessions, but because they are not attached to them. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,*” the Lord Jesus taught (Mat.5:3).

The richness of a believer lies in his connection to the great Fount of Life—the Father of all spirits: God. To Abraham, a believer, God declared, *“I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward”* (Gen.15:1). For this reason, Daniel, after being promised gifts and riches, could say to the king, *“Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another”* (Dan.5:17). But as for Belshazzar, his words after seeing the vision of the hand reveal a mind entirely obsessed with carnal identity, wealth, and power. These are the three pursuits of worldly men—and they are exactly what Belshazzar offered to whosoever could interpret the writing: *“Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom”* (v.7).

Belshazzar had glimpsed reality in a fleeting moment, and his identity, wealth, and power could not provide the strength or protection he so desperately needed. Chariots could not shield him from the fear. Power and possessions could not restore his confidence. Though surrounded by a crowd, only he saw what had happened.

In that moment, as he saw a hand write words on the wall—though surrounded by many—Belshazzar felt utterly alone, gripped by a dreadful fear that pierced his soul. In the presence of the supernatural's dreadfulness, no one can feel secure by a crowd; its power is all-searching and penetrating.

Daniel brought Before the King

During the time of Belshazzar, Daniel was no longer a prominent figure in the Babylonian government. Yet his testimonies lingered in the minds of some, including the queen of the land. When Belshazzar panicked, seeking a man with divine insight to decipher the handwriting on the wall, the queen reminded him of Daniel.

¹⁰ Now the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed:

¹¹ There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers;

¹² Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.

¹³ Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that

Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?

¹⁴ *I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee.*

¹⁵ *And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not show the interpretation of the thing.*

The king then promised a reward to Daniel if he managed to interpret the writing:

¹⁶ *And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.*

Clearly, modern ‘men of gold’ would have been quick to receive the rewards of the king. Furthermore, they would not even have truly understood the message of the writing. Prophecies of blessings and other lies would have been spoken upon Belshazzar. But Daniel was a true servant of God. He could not be deceived by covetousness or the desire for power. He looked at Belshazzar and saw the fear in him. Daniel spoke what God had revealed, no matter how unpleasant the

message was.

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

Daniel began by rebuking Belshazzar for not heeding the lessons from Nebuchadnezzar's life.

“Though thou knewest all this”

It is important to note that the fundamental sin of Belshazzar was about not learning from the life and events of his father's life:

¹⁸ O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour:

¹⁹ And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:

²¹ And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the

kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

²² And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this.

Surely, Belshazzar had been aware of the decree of King Nebuchadnezzar – “*I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort*” (Dan.3:29). At another time again, after recovering from his mental illness, Nebuchadnezzar declared, “*I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgement, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase*” (Dan.4:37). Belshazzar ought to have learned from all that had happened to Nebuchadnezzar, yet he did not. It is vital to remember that God does not strike a person with judgment without first giving a warning.

God speaks to us in many ways: through what happens to us, what happens to other people, and also through occurrences in our environment. One ought to have eyes to see and ears to hear what the Spirit is speaking. Remember Peter and how the Lord Jesus called him. He was only told to cast his net into the water and when he witnessed the unusual catch of fish, it was enough to convict his heart and make him confess, “*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O*

Lord!" (Luk.5:8). Another person might have rejoiced and mistaken the miracle for a blessing upon his business. But for Peter, the strange occurrence pierced his heart and made him feel unworthy to stand in the presence of that holy man. When the Lord commanded him to leave his trade and become a disciple, he obeyed immediately and forsook the nets. Thus, the voice of the miraculous sign called him to trust in the divine providence of God as he entered the new vocation of ministry.

On the Pages of *Time*, our Breath is in His hand

Notice what Daniel said to the king before explaining the meaning of the mysterious writing:

²³ But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.

²⁴ Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

We are on a journey through time. On this journey, we find ourselves equipped with the *ink* of blood and the *pen* of life, called to write a story upon the *pages*

of time.

As you are reading these words, think about how far you have come in life: How old are you? What story have you been writing this far? What's been the theme of your story? How many pages do you think are remaining before the covers of your book close? If now is the time for your book to close, what will the owner of the *ink* and *pages* say about your story – “waste”, “meaningless”, or “well done, my good and faithful servant”?

One thing is certain: one day you will put the final stroke on your last page, the covers will close, and you will be ‘shelved’—removed from the land of the living. Yet in the vision of Saint John, “*the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works*” (Rev.20:12-13).

Surely, a day of reckoning is coming when each one will give an account of how they used the *ink* of life and the *pages* of time allotted to them by the Creator. “*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*” prayed the psalmist (Psa.90:12). The ink of blood and pages of time are not our own resources and thus prudence requires us to ask, “Why am I here and what story am I supposed to

write?"

Weighed and Found Wanting

Daniel read and interpreted the writing:

²⁵ *And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.*

²⁶ *This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.*

²⁷ *TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.*

²⁸ *PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.*

It is one thing to read about Belshazzar and how he was found wanting on the scales of God's justice, but quite another to gaze into the mirror of God's Word and reflect. Just how far are we from living the life God desires of us? Are we surrendered to His perfect will, or are we still burdened by the cares of this life like the rich young man who once approached the Lord?

In Mark 10:17–23, we read about the rich young ruler who came *running* to meet the Lord Jesus—an expression of his zeal. Then he *knelt* before the Lord, a gesture meant to convey humility. Finally, he *asked* his question: “*Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*” Like this young man, we often display zeal, exhibit humility, and offer earnest prayers to God, yet still lack the revelation of His will. Did this young man truly understand what eternal life was?

What motivated his desire for it? The sorrow he felt when the Lord told him to sell all he had and take up the cross to follow Him revealed that he valued his wealth more than the eternal life he claimed to seek. Ultimately, what one truly values is not shown by what the lips profess, but by what one does.

The rich young man was earthly-minded, bound by the cares of this world. He had the zeal to keep the commandments but lacked revelation. When he told the Lord that he had kept all the commandments, Jesus looked at him, discerned his condition, and said, *“One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”* But the young man could not endure this test. *“He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions”*. That was his true identity—not the outward show of humility he had earlier displayed by kneeling. Until one bows to the Word of God, he is not truly a believer. Until one yields to the will of God, he is not truly humble. He was a believer in *word* and *prayer*, but not in *deed*.

But those who have been enlightened by the Word of Truth are dead to the carnal things of this world – *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall*

appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col.3:1-4).

Every person should recognize that the possessions of this life are temporal. We own nothing in this world—not even our very breath, which is beyond our control. Whatever God has entrusted to our hands should be managed with a sober mind. A sober mind acknowledges the sovereignty of God and, in doing so, lives wisely.

Belshazzar, upon hearing Daniel’s words, realized the danger that awaited him. Struck by the piercing message of the prophet, he commanded that Daniel be clothed in scarlet, adorned with a golden chain around his neck, and proclaimed him the third ruler in the kingdom. However, that very night, Belshazzar was slain by the Medes and thus ended the kingdom of Babylon:

²⁹ Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰ In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.

³¹ And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

It was the end of an era and the beginning of a new one, that of the Medes and Persians. It may have been a sudden and unexpected change of events when the

once mighty Babylon fell, however, Daniel had already foreseen all these events. In the first year of Belshazzar he had a vision of four beasts,¹⁶ and in the third year, he had seen the vision of the Ram and the Goat which detailed how the Medo-Persian empire would become great but would later be overcome by another kingdom with a notable and great ruler but who would later die and four new rulers would rise in his place.¹⁷

¹⁶ see Daniel Chapter 7 in Volume II of *Notes on Daniel*.

¹⁷ see Daniel Chapter 8 in Volume II of *Notes on Daniel*.

Chapter 5 Summary

Belshazzar's Impious Feast

- Nebuchadnezzar had previously seized treasures from the temple in Jerusalem. The seized treasures included golden and silver vessels.
- Prophet Jeremiah had foretold that the Medes would take vengeance against Babylon for desecrating God's temple (Jer.51:11).
- One day Belshazzar—a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar—hosted a grand feast and commanded that the gold and silver vessels seized from Jerusalem be brought in for himself, his wives, and his concubines to use. This act of sacrilege provoked God's judgment, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy.
- Belshazzar saw a supernatural hand write a mysterious message on the wall, terrifying him. None of the king's wise men could interpret the writing.
- Daniel interpreted the mysterious message. He explained that Belshazzar's pride and misuse of the temple vessels had brought about God's judgment; the king was weighed in balances and found wanting; his kingdom would be divided among the Medes and Persians.
- That very night, Belshazzar was killed and the kingdom fell to Darius the Mede. This marked the sudden end of Babylon and the rise of the Medo-

Persian empire, as Daniel had foreseen in earlier visions.

- Important lesson: although the Israelites were in the wrong and God had punished them by delivering them into the hands of the Babylonians, the latter were still expected to treat their captives with care and not to misuse the temple vessels. When someone is being chastised by God for wrongdoing do not take pleasure in their suffering: *“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him”* (Pro.24:17-18).
- The story teaches lessons about humility, the danger of pride, respect for what is sacred, and the certainty of divine judgment.

6.

Cast into the Lions' Den

The kingdom of Darius had successfully overthrown mighty Babylon and now began to enforce a new administration in the region. By the time of the reign of Darius, the empire had grown so large, stretching from eastern Europe to western Asia, covering the Indus Valley and portions of northern Africa.

In order to effectively govern such a large region, Darius subdivided the empire into 120 administrative provinces.

Daniel as President

Each of the provinces had a manager called a *satrap* or prince. So, there were 120 princes in total who managed the affairs of the kingdom.

¹ *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom.*

The 120 satraps were in turn overseen by three senior officials called presidents. The presidents ensured satraps were accountable and worked correctly to sustain the economic prosperity of the kingdom. Among the three presidents, Daniel was the most senior and the most preferred because an excellent spirit was in him:

² *And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.*

³ *Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.*

Although Daniel held a privileged position, it was not easy working within the administration of King Darius. Everything the presidents and satraps did had to align with the king's decrees and policies. To this end, a network of roads had been meticulously constructed to ensure the timely delivery of royal orders. King Darius also maintained an intelligence service composed of men who spied on those serving him—including the highest officials. These agents were known as “the king's eyes and ears”. This information should help us understand the fearful

situation Daniel found himself in when he was appointed the senior president.



The Behistun, a UNESCO heritage site in Iran, depicts Darius the Great punishing conspirators¹⁸

The “*damage*” mentioned in Daniel 6:2 refers to loss—such as that which may result from financial mismanagement, dishonesty, or theft. Clearly, the administration of the Medes was astute in matters of accountability, particularly in their business affairs. That Daniel was entrusted with safeguarding this accountability offers an important lesson for believers: whether in business or spiritual work, integrity and sincerity should be the hallmarks of our character.¹⁹

¹⁸ Image Credit: Image Credit: Korosh.091, Wikimedia Commons.

¹⁹ cf. Eph.6:5-8.

In politics, presidents of countries are often addressed as “Your Excellency”. This title does not reflect an individual’s virtuous lifestyle but simply acknowledges their high rank. Similarly, a parliamentarian in a Commonwealth country is addressed as “Honourable”, regardless of whether the person is moral or immoral. As for Daniel, he was endowed with honour by virtue of his “excellent spirit”. His excellency did not originate from external recognition or titles conferred by others, but from within—a heart filled with integrity and sincerity.

Malice

With the immense responsibility of presiding over 120 princes, Daniel must have led a busy life, constantly attending to various queries and reports. This required close collaboration with the other two presidents. It is important to note that these officials were not believers, and their work might have been difficult under the leadership of a man marked by high integrity.

Although Daniel possessed an excellent spirit—gentle in demeanour yet firm in matters of accountability—his personality likely clashed with that of his colleagues. They worked alongside him, but with the hidden intent of finding fault to raise an accusation against him. Eventually, they found a way to conspire against Daniel, resorting to the empire’s legal system to implicate his religious devotion:

⁴ *Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.*

⁵ *Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.*

⁶ *Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever.*

⁷ *All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God²⁰ or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.*

And so the decree was issued: anyone who prayed to any god or man—except the king—for thirty days would be cast into the den of lions. Daniel's faith was being tested once again. Though King Darius held great respect for him, wicked men had plotted the scenario to make Daniel appear disloyal to the Median king. The wicked men conspired against Daniel by exploiting the kingdom's rigid legal system, knowing that once a decree was sealed, not even the king could

²⁰ In the New King James and other versions "God" is in this verse correctly stated with lowercase *g* – "god".

revoke it:

⁸ *Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.*

⁹ *Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree.*

King Darius was unaware of the trap being set—but he would discover it only when it was too late.

Mizrah

Daniel remained steadfast in his faith; he continued to make his supplications before God despite the new statute that forbade people to do so. Observers saw him through the windows of his house, persisting in his prayers just as he always had.

¹⁰ *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*

¹¹ *Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.*

By praying while facing toward Jerusalem, Daniel—a captive in a foreign land—was observing Mizrah. This is a practice among Jews living in the diaspora, who face east (toward Jerusalem) when praying. It is rooted in Solomon's prayer at the

dedication of the newly built temple:

“And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive... If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near. Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives... and pray unto thee toward their land... Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause” (1 Kin.8:30, 46-49).

This became the practice of faithful people wherever they were. Even Jonah, whilst in the belly of the great fish that swallowed him, made effort to pray towards the east: *“I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple”* (Jon.2:4).

From his teens into his eighties, Daniel stayed devoted to God's promises and prayed for the Jews' deliverance. A lot of people had known of his devoutness and the wicked men were confident their conspiracy would work because of this uncompromising devotion. They did all this to an innocent and harmless man. But God watches over His own. When you are found in such a situation, let this

be your prayer: “*Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity*” (Psa.141:9).

Into the Den of Lions

The men conspired and passed judgement on Daniel:

¹² Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

¹³ Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.

¹⁴ Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

¹⁵ Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.

¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and they brought

Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

¹⁷ *And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.*

Yes, “*the king sealed it with his own signet ... that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel*”, but there was a higher judge—God—who was about to overturn what man had purposed. This incident so distressed the king that he fasted that night. The king had found himself a victim of a conspiracy. Things had to be done according to the decree. Words had been decreed, and they had to be obeyed. To all other onlookers and hearers, Daniel had defied the words of the king and hence was condemned. But God does not judge after the sight or facts of men: “*he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears*” (Isa.11:3).

¹⁸ *Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him.*

¹⁹ *Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.*

The Miracle

What made the king rush early in the morning to check

the den? Surely, no one expected Daniel to have survived. Though the king might not have been a believer, as he fasted and anguished over Daniel, God worked on his heart—prompting him to go in faith and see if Daniel had been spared. What he found became a resounding testimony, still recorded today in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures.

²⁰ *And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?*

²¹ *Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.*

²² *My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.*

²³ *Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.*

God was the judge of Daniel and His judgement required that “*Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in*

possession” (Pro.28:10). That was exactly what happened to the people who had conspired against Daniel:

²⁴ And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.

What began as persecution against Daniel’s faith ended as a testimony—a witness to Yahweh as the living God. This should encourage us: even in difficult and unfavourable circumstances, our lives must consistently bear witness to the Truth we stand for.

²⁵ Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

²⁶ I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

²⁷ He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

²⁸ So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Chapter 6 Summary

Daniel in the Lions' Den

- Darius the Mede became ruler after the fall of Babylon, establishing 120 provinces overseen by satraps and three presidents.
- Daniel was the most esteemed president because of his excellent spirit. Daniel's integrity and faithfulness led to jealousy from other officials, who conspired to trap him by convincing Darius to issue a decree forbidding prayers to any god or person except the king for thirty days.
- Despite the decree, Daniel continued his daily prayers toward Jerusalem, as was the Jewish custom (*Mizrah*). He was seen by the conspirators.
- The officials reported Daniel to the king, who—bound by the law of the Medes and Persians—was forced to throw Daniel into the lions' den.
- King Darius spent a sleepless night fasting, anxious about Daniel's fate.
- At dawn, Darius hurried to the den and joyfully discovered Daniel was unharmed. Daniel explained that God had sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths in recognition of his innocence.
- The conspirators and their families were punished by being thrown into the den, where they perished.
- Darius issued a decree honouring the God of Daniel as the living, eternal God whose kingdom would never be destroyed.

- Daniel prospered under the reign of Darius and Cyrus the Persian.

The Stone Shall Strike

From the Promised Land to Babylon,
Exile breathed its shameful song.
Tempting dainties laid in spread
Yet faith refused the trade for bread.

Chorus

*The Stone shall strike, the proud shall fall,
A kingdom rises over all.
The fire refines, the faithful stay
God's Word endures when thrones decay.*

Lowly ones stood set apart,
God unveiled His sovereign art.
To the king, a dream was shown:
Gold would fall to clay and stone.

The meekness of a Stone prevailed,
Empires cracked, their glory failed.
On Truth's firm Rock the faithful stood
Not for reward, but for the good.

"Our God will save us from the flame"
"But if not, We still believe" they proclaimed.
Bound and cast, yet undismayed
The Fourth appeared within the blaze.

Nebuchadnezzar bowed in awe,
Seven times his pride was purged.
"You are the Most High," he cried,
"There is none like You," he testified.

Weighed and found wanting, man was told,
Oh, that I could be emptied to be filled with Your will
To You I surrender my all
May Your kingdom reign in my heart

ACP, September 6, 2025.

“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen”

I Timothy 1:17

APPENDICES

1. Son of God

“*The Son of God*” in Daniel 3:25 is a mistranslation. More accurate renderings in other Bible versions state, “*the fourth looks like a son of the gods.*” Unfortunately, the mistranslation has been used by Trinitarian theologians to erroneously claim that the fourth figure seen by Nebuchadnezzar was Jesus Christ, pre-existing as the Son of God prior to His birth in Bethlehem around 4 BC.

Jesus Christ did not pre-exist. It was *the Word*—which was in the beginning and through which all things were created—that pre-existed. This Word, the visible expression of the invisible and *holy* Spirit of God, came to dwell in Jesus Christ at His baptism (Luk.3:22).

By fully yielding to the authority and guidance of the Spirit, Jesus became the vessel through whom God freely and fully manifested His will (Heb.10:5–7; Joh.4:34). In this way, Jesus became the expression of God (Joh.1:14; 1 Tim.3:16; Col.2:9), and through that, inherited the name of God. Whatever pertains to the Word—which was present in the beginning as the visible expression of the invisible God, and through which all things were made (Heb.1:1–4; Col.1:14–16; Joh.8:56–58)—is thus rightly ascribed to Jesus. This therefore is the mystery of the godliness of Jesus Christ: “*God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the*

Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim.3:16).

2. Difference between “*Dream*”, “*Vision of the night*” and “*Vision*”

A dream occurs when a person is asleep, during which their consciousness is inactive. A vision, on the other hand, occurs when a person is aware of what is happening—typically while awake. However, it is possible for someone to experience a vision while asleep. For it to be properly called a vision, it must be a kind of spiritual dream in which the observer (i.e. the dreamer) is aware of being in a state of sleep. This can be referred to as a “*vision in a dream*” or simply a “*vision of the night.*” Conversely, a pure dream is one in which the observer is unaware that they are asleep—that is, their consciousness is entirely inactive.

3. Erroneous interpretation of the “*Huge Tree*” and “*Seven Times*” dream by Jehovah Witnesses

Jehovah’s Witnesses have offered a dubious interpretation of the phrase “*reached unto the heaven*” (Dan.4:20). Strangely, despite the interpretation being demonstrably flawed, it remains a central pillar of their eschatology. Daniel, in unequivocal terms, interpreted the tree as referring to Nebuchadnezzar: “*It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy*

greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth” (Dan.4:22). Yet the Witnesses present a contradictory explanation, claiming: “The tree stands for rulership and sovereignty far grander than that of Babylon’s king. It symbolizes the universal sovereignty of Jehovah, ‘the King of the heavens’, especially with respect to the earth.”²¹ This error leads to another: they assert that Jehovah’s kingdom was centred—or represented—in Jerusalem. Thus, to determine when the tree was “chopped down,” they look for a historical moment when Jerusalem fell: “God himself had such sovereignty chopped down and banded in 607 B.C.E. when he used Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem” (p.95).

Regarding the “*seven times*”, the Witnesses deduce that seven years, expressed in days, total 2,520 days—assuming a prophetic year consists of 360 days. They then convert these days back into prophetic years (based on Eze.4:6–7), concluding that 2,520 days equal 2,520 years.²² Counting from 607 B.C.E., this calculation leads to the year 1914. The Witnesses were enthusiastic about this number. Their founder, Charles Taze Russell, boldly predicted that Christ would return in 1914. The prophecy failed. Yet the major error was

²¹ Pages 94-95, *Pay Attention to Daniel’s Prophecy*, 1999 Publication.

²² In prophetic study (eschatology), converting literal time of *days* to *years* is acceptable. Converting years to days is suspicious. But doubly converting the resulting days back to years is dubious and ludicrous!

not merely the failed prediction, but the misapplication of the tree to Israel rather than to Babylon, as Daniel clearly stated.

The failed prophecy should have prompted a re-evaluation of the interpretation. Instead, it was rebranded into a new teaching: that in 1914 “the appointed times of the nations were fulfilled, and God gave rulership to ‘the lowliest one of mankind’—Jesus Christ” (p.97). This mirrors the Adventist movement’s failed prediction of Christ’s return in 1844. Rather than repenting and abandoning the error, interpretations evolved and were cleverly reframed.

I have, on three occasions, engaged senior Jehovah’s Witness elders with the question: “What authority or exegetical criteria allows one to change an interpretation already plainly given in Scripture (in this case, Daniel said the tree was Nebuchadnezzar) to another completely different interpretation (that the tree refers to Jehovah’s kingdom in Jerusalem)?” On all three occasions, the response was a cold deferral: the topic would be addressed “next time” during a future Bible study. Regrettably, “next time” has now stretched to 26 years at the time of writing.

Now, is it truly so difficult to see that the phrase “*reached unto heaven*” simply meant that Nebuchadnezzar had risen to immense power over the known world? In matters of authority and influence, we often use the term “*rise*” to express greatness. As Daniel explained: “*It is thou, O king, that art grown*

and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven” (Dan.4:22). The concept of rising in power is naturally illustrated vertically—i.e., heavenward. To interpret “*reacheth unto heaven*” literally would be akin to claiming that Nebuchadnezzar’s proclamation to “*all people... that dwell in all the earth*” (Dan.4:1) reached every living human on the planet. Or that Cyrus’s declaration that God had given him “*all the kingdoms of the earth*” (Ezr.1:2) included every existing realm, even those in distant China. Similarly, the statement that on the day of Pentecost there were “*devout men, out of every nation under heaven*” (Act.2:5) cannot be taken to mean every country in the modern world. Clearly, such expressions are idiomatic and not literal.

4. Daniel and the Critics: The Case of Belshazzar

Daniel Chapter 5 opens with the mention of Belshazzar: “*Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.*” Critics once challenged the legitimacy of this name. In 1850, German scholar Professor Ferdinand Hitzig confidently argued that “Belshazzar” appeared nowhere in secular history and was therefore a figment of the biblical writer’s imagination. He claimed that while the Bible presents Belshazzar as Babylon’s last king, all known ancient records identified Nabonidus as the final monarch. If the Bible is truly inspired—as it claims, “*All scripture is given*

by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim.3:16)—then its integrity was seriously challenged. However, just four years later, a rebuttal emerged from an unexpected source—not theologians, but archaeology. But first, why the harsh criticism?

The Book of Daniel has long fascinated scholars and critics alike. Its prophecies are so precise and detailed that some have accused the author of writing history disguised as prophecy. To the rationalist mind, the supernatural is inadmissible, and so the prophetic nature of Daniel must be explained away. This scepticism is not new. We find its roots in Porphyry.

Criticism of Daniel predates Hitzig. The Roman philosopher Porphyry of Tyre (c. 234–305 AD) was a prominent critic. He authored *Isagoge* (“Introduction”), a philosophical work that served as a foundational textbook for nearly a thousand years.

During a time of fierce Roman persecution against Christians, believers found comfort in Daniel’s prophecies, interpreting the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom foretold in Daniel’s visions. Seeing how the previous three empires had been accurately predicted, they held firm hope in the prophecy’s fulfilment.

Porphyry responded by denouncing Daniel as a forgery. In his work *Against the Christians*, he argued that the book was written during the reign of Antiochus

Epiphanes of the Seleucid dynasty—after the events it supposedly predicted.²³ According to Porphyry, Daniel’s prophecies about Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece were merely historical accounts disguised as foresight. Porphyry also attacked other biblical narratives. For instance, he challenged Genesis, claiming:

The world, according to Moses, was created at a certain time, and has from its commencement existed from a period far short of ten thousand years. The world, however, is without a beginning, in consequence of which there have been from all eternity, many configurations.²⁴

Saint Jerome, a notable Christian scholar, rose to defend the faith. Using Scripture, theological reasoning, and historical evidence, Jerome refuted Porphyry’s claims. Interestingly, just as modern science has disproven Porphyry’s argument for an eternal universe,²⁵ archaeology has similarly discredited his attacks on Daniel.

²³ There are interesting things to be explained about Antiochus Epiphanes and how he fulfilled prophecies. See this in Volume II of Notes on Daniel.

²⁴ Arguments of Celsus, Porphyry, and the Emperor Julian against the Christians. Available online:
<http://www.universaltheosophy.com>

²⁵ There is now irrefutable mathematical and cosmological evidence of the beginning. See my book *Why I Believe God Exists: Discourse on the Scientific Evidence* (Available on Amazon).

A Stone Cries Out

Let us now return to the case of Belshazzar. Hitzig's confident critique was abruptly silenced in 1854 when a Babylonian clay tablet was unearthed in Ur. The tablet contained a prayer from King Nabonidus for his son—Belshazzar. This discovery was profound. It echoed the words of Jesus: *“If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out”* (Luk.19:40). Indeed, the Nabonidus Cylinder cried out loudly in defence of Daniel's authenticity. Displayed in the British Museum, the cylinder reads:

As for me, Nabonidus, king of Babylon, save me from sinning against your great godhead and grant me as a present a lifelong of days, and as for Belshazzar, the eldest son – my offspring – instil reverence for your great godhead in his heart and may he not commit any cultic mistake, may he be sated with a life of plenitude.

This event teaches a vital lesson: the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Critics may not see or hear what they do not wish to acknowledge. Even when evidence is loud and visible, a closed mind remains deaf and blind. Following the cylinder's discovery, some critics scrambled to save face. British scientist and photography pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot argued that the Belshazzar mentioned was likely just a child—not a king.



The Nabonidus Cylinder on display in the British Museum

However, further archaeological finds in Iraq revealed that Belshazzar served as co-regent while Nabonidus was away from Babylon. Still, critics persisted. They argued that Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus, not Nebuchadnezzar, as Daniel claims. Yet history revealed that Nabonidus had married Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter—making Belshazzar his grandson. Please note that Hebrew and Aramaic lack specific terms for “grandson” or “grandfather,” which explains Daniel’s use of “son”.

Now, is it not curious that critics accept other biblical books as authentic historical records—books that themselves affirm Daniel’s legitimacy—yet reject Daniel? For instance, Ezekiel and the Gospels are widely accepted, and both reference Daniel. Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, wrote: *“Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness”* (Eze.14:14, 20). Some argue that Noah and Job were

ancient figures, making Daniel's inclusion anachronistic. But this misses the point: the verse emphasizes righteousness, not chronology. Ezekiel further confirms Daniel's identity: "*Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee*" (Eze. 28:3). This clearly refers to the prophet Daniel, known for wisdom and interpreting secrets (see Dan. 1:17; 2:47; 5:12).

Finally, the Gospel of Matthew—an esteemed historical record—quotes Jesus affirming Daniel's prophecies: "*When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place...then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains*" (Mat. 24:15). Here, Christ not only acknowledges Daniel's existence but validates his prophetic authority.

INDEX

- Alexander 57
- alloy approach 54
- Alloying 54
- Appendix 1 80, 92
- Appendix 4 105
- argos* 99
- Aristotle 57
- army 54, 57, 79, 101
- astonied 80, 94, 110
- astrologers .. 32, 35, 36,
42, 92, 108, 113, 114
- Azariah ... 5, 20, 26, 28,
31, 32, 40, 70, 79
- Babylon 20, 22, 23, 35,
36, 39, 40, 42, 55, 56,
66, 67, 71, 74, 83, 92,
98, 99, 101, 104, 109,
122, 125, 147
- bana 63
- Behistun 127
- Belshazzar 5, 104, 105,
106, 110, 114, 115,
116, 121, 122, 123,
124, 144, 147
- Beltshazzar 28, 42,
92, 94, 113
- Blessed are the poor in
spirit* 111
- born again 64, 65
- Bride of Christ 65
- Bridegroom 79
- Christ .See Jesus Christ
- commandment 79
- confession 65, 91
- cornerstone 64
- corrosion 52
- David 16
- decentralised 53
- decree... 37, 39, 40, 73,
74, 83, 85, 92, 93, 96,
116, 129, 130, 132,
135
- desolations 19
- dream of the great
image 36
- eben 63
- ego 65
- Eliakim 25
- Euphrates 20, 21

- evidence 71, 98
- faith 22, 66, 73, 79, 82,
83, 85, 86
- fiery furnace 82
- fire.. 15, 79, 80, 81, 82,
85
- furnace 72, 74, 75, 78,
79, 80, 81, 83, 85
- Hanania 20
- hell 79, 85, 118
- Hezekiah 18
- Holy Spirit..... 65,140
- humble 64, 89, 101
- humiliation 86, 102
- idle 99
- intermarriages 55
- Iraq 20
- Jehoiakim 22, 23, 25
- Jesus Christ 40, 58
- Jonah 131
- Josiah 22, 24
- Judah 17, 18, 19, 22,
23, 25, 28, 42, 58, 104,
114, 132
- King David..*See* David
- Lycanthropy* 96
- magicians... 32, 35, 36,
42, 92, 113
- Mesopotamia 20
- Mishael 20
- Nabonidus..... 147
- Paul..... 26
- persecution.. 66, 82, 86
- Pharao-Necho 23
- Philip, king of Greece
..... 57
- Pompey 58
- pride..... 72, 86, 90, 98,
101, 103, 115, 116
- prominence 52
- promotion 76, 83
- protection..... 85
- Rapture 79
- Rehoboam..... 17
- revealer of secrets* . 65,
88
- righteousness 13, 98
- Salamis, battle of... 53,
54
- satraps..... 126
- seven times 79, 93, 95,
96, 100

- Shinar25
- signs89, 135
- Solomon 16, 17, 104
- Son of God 64, 80, 140
- soothsayers.35, 42, 92,
108, 113
- Tabernacle of God...65
- temple vessels104, 123
- testimony.....91
- Tigris20, 71
- tree..93, 94, 95, 96, 97,
102
- trials 22, 82, 86
- Trinitarian theologians
..... 140
- vassal 23
- four beasts..... 122
- ram and goat 122
- visions of my dream* 92
- Will of God..... 65
- Wise Men .. 34, 36, 37,
38, 39, 68
- Xerxes..... 53

