

# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. Jan./Feb. 1971, page 3)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 1. Exile from Zion

He walks on to the stage a youth, with life just opening out before him, already an exile from his native country, doomed to attain manhood's estate in an alien and unfriendly land, far from the Temple of God and all that Temple represented. When at length the curtain drops, we see him still on the stage, an old man and full of days, too aged and infirm to join the procession of rejoicing men and women wending their way back to the land of their fathers, there to rebuild their Temple and worship their God in His appointed way. During the long years of a life spent alternately in prominence and seclusion, in honour and neglect, he maintained inflexible faith and a constant passion for the restoration of his people to their own land; when at last the fruition of all his hopes appeared he was too old to share in the home-going! Nevertheless he died content, knowing that God would remember him and, in the resurrection life, grant him his heart's desire. For the intervening time he left on record, as his legacy to all who in after times would come to know God, a narrative so thrilling in its adventure and so stimulating in its sterling faith that it has been the inspiration of thousands who in their own day and generation have endured the fires of persecution and withstood opposition to righteousness.

The Book of Daniel is full of vital interest to the student of prophecy and to the earnest believer who seeks strength and encouragement for faith. Its vivid stories, of heroic deeds dared by stalwart believers in God, and of the mighty arm of God stretched out on their behalf, never grow old and will never die. The revelation of things to come, given to Daniel by means of visions and dreams, have proven themselves beyond all doubt to be "visions of God". They have occupied the attention of students all through the twenty-four centuries which have elapsed since his day. Less than two hundred years after his death, if the historians are to be believed, Jaddua the High Priest of Israel showed the prophecies of Daniel to the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great, explaining to him how his own career of conquest was foreshadowed in those prophecies. Now in this twentieth century Christian students still scan the ancient words to gain some clue to the significance of present-day events, and take assurance from them that the days of the Kingdom cannot be much longer delayed. But what is of greater importance is the insight this remarkable book gives us into the personal lives of men; the stimulus to faith and constancy which is afforded by the stories of loyalty, fortitude and Divine deliverance which have made the book to stand out in the Old Testament as a record of marvellous achievements against a background conspicuous for its gallery of remarkable men. The lad Daniel, making his way by sheer force of character and unswerving loyalty to the highest office in an idolatrous and materialistic land; the proud pagan king Nebuchadnezzar, arrogant in his might, at length utterly abased and humbled before God; his effeminate grandson Belshazzar, ignominiously slain in the midst of unheeding revelry; the three servants of God who were prepared to suffer a cruel death rather than deny him; Nitocris, the royal daughter of Nebuchadnezzar who grew up with Daniel, never espoused his faith yet turned to him for enlightenment when the mysterious hand wrote the doom of Babylon upon the banqueting room walls; the jealous courtiers who plotted the death of Daniel but themselves fell into the pit of their own contriving; these characters stand out vividly against a background which tells us more about the life and customs of ancient Babylon than any other single book now in existence.

Daniel and his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were boys together at the time, about six hundred years before Christ, when the Kingdom of Judah was declining to its fall. The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, inhabiting the northern part of the land, had already gone into captivity, over a century earlier. Now it was the turn of Judah, the kingdom of the two tribes. Jehoahaz, king of Judah, had been deposed by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt, and Jehoiakim placed upon the throne. He had reigned only a little over two years when the dreaded Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, not yet sole king, for his father Nabopolassar was still alive, had invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was forced to renounce his allegiance to Egypt and become the vassal of Babylon. As surety for his good behaviour, the Babylonians took some of the aristocracy and nobility of Judah back to Babylon as hostages, and these four lads, either of royal blood or related in some definite way to the royal line of the kings of Judah, were taken among them.

It was a common practice of the Babylonians thus to take into the royal court of their own land selected members of the younger relatives of vassal kings. The idea was to train them in the ways and ideas of the conquerors so that eventually they might become trustworthy rulers over the conquered peoples from whom they had been drawn. Daniel and his companions found themselves thrown into the society of many other lads of their own age in the king's court at Babylon, taken from other countries which the Babylonians had overrun and conquered. Nabonidus, the father of Belshazzar, was a son of the High Priest of the Moon god at Haran, where Terah the father of Abraham died, and he had been taken captive in the same way as Daniel and ultimately rose to become the husband of Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, Nitocris, and, by virtue of that marriage, the last but one king of Babylon. Belshazzar, their son, was the last king.

Daniel could hardly have been less than eighteen years of age when he was taken to Babylon. Nabopolassar died in the next year and Nebuchadnezzar became sole king. Two years later Daniel stood before him and interpreted his dream of the great image (Dan. 2:1). The term "children" (Dan. 1:4) in the original Hebrew has the meaning of youths or young men, a different word being employed when the meaning is limited to a child; the word used allows for any age up to twenty-four or so.

Jeremiah was living at Jerusalem at that time and had been for twenty years past. He was well known in Court circles and the lad Daniel must have been well acquainted with him. They had probably often talked about the judgments which Jeremiah so consistently predicted would surely come upon the nation. His message and preaching must have had much to do with the early development of those four young men who showed so soon afterwards what sound training they had received in things pertaining to God.

Ezekiel, too, was a lad of seventeen at this same time but since his home was, in all probability, by the Dead Sea he and Daniel may not have met. It was not until eight years later that Ezekiel in his turn was taken captive to Babylon. Two other prophets who also lived and prophesied at this same time were Obadiah and Habakkuk, but there is no evidence to indicate whether or not they and Daniel ever came into contact. It would seem, however, that Daniel kept in touch with the older prophet, Jeremiah, and had obtained copies of his writings as the years passed by, for when in Dan. 9:2 we are told that Daniel understood by the books of Jeremiah that seventy years were to mark the limit of the Exile he refers to a prophecy that Jeremiah uttered in the first year of Zedekiah (Jer. 29:10) by which time Daniel had been in Babylon eight years.

So it came about that one day a little procession could have been seen making its way out of the Damascus Gate on the northern side of Jerusalem. First, a detachment of Babylonian

soldiers, stepping smartly along the highway, their coats of mail gleaming in the sunlight. Behind them, a line of chariots, each containing five or six passengers, chiefly bearded Babylonians, but in some of them Jewish youths. After these came heavy waggons, lumbering along with their loads of treasure, of gold and silver vessels, taken from the Palace and the Temple. Finally, another detachment of soldiers. Daniel and his friends were leaving their native home for perpetual exile in a strange and idolatrous land. Never again were their eyes to look upon that wonderful Temple which Solomon had built more than three centuries earlier. They could not have known, at that moment, that only another nineteen years were to elapse before that glorious edifice was to sink down in the destroying flames and lie, a desolate mass of rubble, while Israel expiated her national sin in a foreign land.

As the little procession left the Damascus Gate and the city walls behind, it passed a little rocky eminence on the right hand side of the road. Daniel's eyes may have lighted upon in as the chariot rattled past. He little dreamed that the Messiah for whose coming he was in later life so ardently to pray must one day in the then distant future suffer and die upon a cross on that little hill. The soldiers, elated at the prospect of soon getting back to their own land and homes, had no idea that long after their own city and nation had vanished into the dust, soldiers of another empire would gamble for a robe at the foot of that hillock. So the land of Judah was left behind, and for something like thirty days the little party travelled, through Samaria and Syria, along the great high road that led to Carchemish on the Euphrates, and then, turning southward, and following the course of the river as it flowed serenely across the flat Babylonian plain, come at last in sight of the great city Babylon.

Daniel could not have failed to reflect that he was retracing the very steps of his forefather Abraham, in the reverse direction. This was the road by which Abraham had come from Ur of the Chaldees, following the river Euphrates past Babylon and up to Haran, and, when his father Terah was dead, down through Syria into Canaan. Abraham, obeying God's call, had left the luxury and glitter of that pagan land for the simplicity and purity of a pastoral life in the place to which God had led him. Here had he lived and died, his son Isaac lived and died, and the twelve tribes of Israel grown into a nation. Now this young lad was called upon to leave the hills and valleys, the tree-clad mountains and rushing streams, the vineyards and olive-yards, the orange groves and pomegranates, of this hallowed country where God had put his name and planted his chosen people, for a land of great and luxurious cities, gigantic temples and magnificent palaces, wide rivers and straight-cut canals, busy with the trade and commerce of many nations. Instead of the chaste and dignified worship of God Most High he was to witness every form of debased idolatry, the allegiance and reverence of the people given freely to images of gold and silver and wood and stone—objects that could neither see, nor hear, nor speak. Like his friend and teacher, Jeremiah (10: 4-5) he might say of their idols "They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not; they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good". Abraham was called to come away from this place and be separate from the unclean things: Daniel was called to go back among them. Surely the ways of God are mysterious and past finding out! Daniel must have wondered what purpose God could have in sending him to such a place, what usefulness a life spent in these surroundings could have for him. And as the towering walls of the world's greatest city loomed up before him the lad's young heart must have been lifted to God in earnest supplication that, in the unknown life which he must now face, his faith and loyalty might never give way.

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## 2. The Land of Shinar

When, in later years, Daniel committed to writing his recollection of how the treasures of the House of God in Jerusalem had been carried into the land of Shinar and deposited triumphantly in the treasure house of Babylon's idol-temple his heart must have been heavy with the recollection of that sad day. He began his narrative with that incident; it stood out to him as the commencement of a life spent away from Judah and all its hallowed memories, a life given to serving God in a strange land, yet, because he was serving God and because he has no other will in life but to serve God in His way and at his bidding, a life of supreme content. The golden vessels of the Lord were in pagan hands and defiled by their residence in a heathen temple, but he remembered the words of the prophet Isaiah and took comfort in the sure knowledge that one day those vessels would come forth again and be restored to their own place. *"Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing"* the elder prophet had cried in the ecstasy of his vision. *"Go ye out of the midst of her. Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord"* (Isa. 52:11). That had been nearly two hundred years before Daniel's time, but the lad knew that the words would surely come to pass, and the bitterness of seeing the sacred vessels profaned by the sacrilegious touch of unbelievers was mitigated by his realisation that God had not cast off his people forever; He would surely come to deliver. And before Daniel died he was to see that faith vindicated.

It was probably not without design that Daniel used the ancient term "land of Shinar" to describe the country of his captors rather than "land of Babylon" by which it was more familiarly known in his own day. "Shinar" was the name it bore in those early days soon after the Flood when Nimrod established the first empire there, and impious men built a great tower "whose top should reach unto heaven". The tower was still there and Daniel probably saw it as he entered into the city. The name "Shinar" was associated in his mind with rebellion against God and apostasy from God and defiance of God, and in the book he was to write he would have all the world to know that this land and city which had been the scene of his life's work was one that stood for everything that God hates. Neither its wealth nor its magnificence blinded him for one moment to the fact that it was under Divine condemnation—the city of God's curse.

That thought might have been of some comfort to him as he watched the treasure-waggons turn aside at their journey's end and pass through the gateway into the courtyard of the great Tower, in the treasury of which the sacred Temple vessels were to repose for seventy long years, until a then far-off day when the impious Belshazzar was to lay careless hands upon them to grace his drunken revels, and so doing to lose his kingdom and his lire. But Daniel could not foresee that at this time. Now he gazed from his chariot at the stately buildings of the Temple of Marduk, the god of Babylon, set in the midst of wide gardens and paved terraces. He saw the four massive gateways, each flanked by two huge bronze serpents, gleaming red in the sunlight, and must have remembered how that it was by means of a serpent that sin came into the world and man apostasised from God, and that here he was in the very midst of a worship that perpetuated that apostasy. His eyes followed the waggons bearing the vessels of God's Temple across the wide courtyard that surrounded the tremendous seven-staged building which towered into the heavens behind the Temple. He knew what that building was without being told. It was the famous Tower which godless men

had commenced to build in the days when the world was young and the memory of the great Flood had scarcely faded from men's minds. "Go to" they had said *"let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, that we be not scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth"*. (Gen. 11:4). God had come down to see the city and tower which those men were building, and he had frustrated their design and scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth. But later generations had gone on building the city, and their kings had each added his contribution to the tower, and now as Daniel gazed upon it he saw it soaring six hundred feet into the sky, the highest building men had ever built or would ever build until this modern day of sky-scrapers should exceed the height they had attained. He saw the staircases hugging the sides of each successive stage and the terraces surrounding the top of each stage. The scintillating light at its summit held his attention and right up there he could see the solid gold sanctuary to Marduk, the god to whose honour this great tower was dedicated ... The chariot rolled on and Daniel could see the tower no more. "Etemenanki" the Babylonians called it, "The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth," and they claimed that it was going to stand as long as the world endures; but into the lad's mind there must have come something of the words of Isaiah, *"And Babylon the glory of Kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah ... and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged"* (Isa. 13:19, 22). He was travelling now along the royal road which led from the Temple and the Tower to Nebuchadnezzar's palace, "Ai-ibursabu", it was called, a name meaning the "Processional Way" and along that road the idolatrous processions of the worship of Babylon's false gods often passed. The lad looked down upon a gleaming white limestone road with pavements of white and red veined stone slabs on each side, flanked by high walls of glazed enamelled coloured bricks, sculptured in the form of lions, white lions with yellow manes and yellow lions with red manes, on alternate light and dark blue backgrounds, all seeming as if themselves marching toward the great palace which could be clearly seen in the distance. From his elevated position in the chariot Daniel could see over those glaringly ornate walls into the straight streets and small houses of Merkes, the artisans' and industrial part of the city, and then, looking forward, the place which was to be his own home and that of his three companions, the palace of the great king himself.

Even when judged by modern standards, the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar can truthfully be described as colossal. Only about one third of it has been excavated as yet, but enough is revealed to show that the building, or rather range of buildings, was something like a quarter of a mile square, flanked on one side by the river Euphrates and surrounded on the three other sides by wide canals so that it was virtually a fortress. Here lived the king and his family, the officers of his Court, many of the priests and wise men of Babylon, distinguished captives taken as hostages in similar fashion to Daniel and his companions, and a host of servants, guards and soldiers, anxious, in abject obedience, to carry out the wishes of this great king who was rapidly making himself master of the world.

The chariot rumbled over the bridge that spanned the Libilgalla Canal, sped a hundred yards, turned left and passed through a lofty double archway into the East Court of the palace. The horses came to a standstill and a group of soldiers stepped briskly towards the travellers. Thus the four Hebrew captives reached the end of their journey.

It was the intention of the king that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah should receive three years' schooling in the ways and the learning of the Babylonians and then become personal attendants on his wishes in his court. They were not the only ones to be thus treated; Nebuchadnezzar had taken lads from other conquered countries for a similar

purpose, and therein lay the first trial of faith that was to befall the four Hebrews. Cast daily into the company of youths of their own age but brought up in different and idolatrous surroundings, their impressionable young minds could very easily be diverted from the faith and the code of conduct they had learned, sullied with the standards and the outlook of the pagans, and so spoiled in great degree for the life of usefulness for God which would in other circumstances be theirs.

It speaks well for the unknown teachers who instructed these four boys in their earlier years in Judah that they showed not the slightest trace of being influenced by their surroundings. It was the order of the king that they should be given the rich foods and wines habitually used at court; this doubtless included refinements and luxuries of all kinds normally enjoyed by those upon whom the king's favours were bestowed. "*But Daniel purposed within himself that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank*" (Dan. 1:8). So he made request, on behalf of his three companions beside himself, that they might be permitted to refuse these rich viands and subsist upon plain fare. Pulse and water is specified in verse 12, but this might very reasonably be extended to include any kind of vegetarian food and non-intoxicating drinks. The principal thing in Daniel's mind appears to be the fact that to partake of foods and drinks from the king's table might well involve eating and drinking that which had been offered to idols, or poured out as a libation, or in some way associated with idolatrous ceremonies, and Daniel was determined to have nothing to do with such things.

The official to whose care the four lads had been entrusted was, not unnaturally, rather dubious about assenting to this request. If the thing became known, and the lads appeared to suffer in health in consequence of this rather Spartan diet of their own choosing, his own head would be endangered. Royal justice was administered in an arbitrary and summary fashion in the Court of King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel showed considerable tact in proposing a ten days' trial on the understanding that he would abide by Melzar's judgment of the results at the end of that time. The bargain was struck, and at the end of the ten days the four Hebrews were manifestly so superior in general health and appearance to their companions—who anyway had probably been making full and not too wise use of the royal favours so freely granted, with the obvious result—that no further objection to their preferences in the matter of food was raised.

This was the first stand for principle and the first victory. It might seem to revolve around a comparatively trivial matter, and from one point of view so it did. But it was the starting-point from which much greater things were to proceed. The lads who obeyed their consciences, not fearing the wrath of the king, in so trivial a thing as daily food, were as grown men to withstand a more vital assault upon their faith, to the extent of facing, without fear, what seemed to be the prospect of certain death in a fiery furnace.

So their education in the "*learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans*" (ch. 1:4) was commenced, a course of study that was to last three years. What that learning was has been revealed to us in these latter days by the multitudes of inscribed clay tablets, treating of almost every conceivable subject, which are now in the possession of scholars and distributed through the world's museums. The term "Chaldeans" in every book of the Bible except Daniel refers in a general sense to the people inhabiting Babylonia, but in the Book of Daniel it is used to denote a certain class of men within the nation, men who formed a kind of quasi-religious society which preserved the ancient lore and traditions of the past. The priests, the historians, the archaeologists—for there were archaeologists even in Babylon, delving into the relics of civilisations as much older than their own as is theirs than ours—all were

members of this caste of the Chaldeans. They held the highest positions in the land and wielded immense power. The priesthood's possession of the national records, extending over many thousands of years, enabled them to construct an elaborate system of omens and portents by means of which they claimed the ability to forecast future events. The art of astrology played a large part in their practices, and their knowledge of astronomy was by no means inconsiderable. The Tower of Babel had been used as an observatory for thousands of years—when Alexander the Great captured Babylon in 324 B.C., the scientist Callisthenes, who was with him, found records of astronomical observations in the library of the Tower going back to the year 2200 B.C. During all those centuries the priests had kept watch on the stars and planets from the top of the six hundred foot high Tower, and recorded all that they had seen.

These were the men under whose supervision Daniel and his companions pursued their studies. One of the leading subjects was sure to be history and Daniel would have been taken back to the early days of the empire, long before Abram left Ur of the Chaldees. It is almost certain that he perused the Babylonian accounts of the Flood and Creation, and compared them with the more accurate accounts of the same events in the Book of Genesis. He must have spent much time learning the five hundred signs of the Babylonian alphabet, and gradually become expert at reading the literary treasures in the great library of the Temple of Marduk—a library which still lies sixty feet below the sand and has so far defied all the archaeologists' efforts to penetrate into it. It is fascinating to reflect that he may have come across records which had been written by his own ancestors when they lived in this land, Abram, Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu. More than one record from their days, though not from their hands, now reposes in one or another of the world's museums.

Many of these tablets could be understood only by a few scholars among the Babylonians themselves. The spoken and written language of Babylon in Daniel's day was not that of ancient Babylon. In saying that Daniel was to learn the "tongue" of the Chaldeans it is plain that he was to study the ancient languages, Sumerian and Akkadian, which were spoken in the days of Abram, and in the dim centuries before Abram's day when the first descendants of the three sons of Noah were peopling this land, building its cities and creating the civilisation which endured for something like three thousand years. Probably no Hebrew since Moses had been able to read those ancient languages, the mother tongues of the sons of Ham and the sons of Shem, and in learning them Daniel probably found entry to a written revelation of the deeds of his nation's remote ancestors which coloured all his future outlook and was very probably left on record by him for the enlightenment of later generations in Jewry. Much of the later Jewish stories of early days, not derived from the historical books of the Bible, may have had their origin in Daniel's researches in Babylon.

Daniel's interest in the ancient history of this land which had been the birthplace of his own race would probably be equalled by that which he manifested in its religion. Not that Daniel was in the least degree likely to anticipate the example of some modern Christian leaders and proclaim that "there is good in all religions", and on that—measurably true—statement proceed to admit the world's false gods to a place of equality with the only true God. Daniel knew that the gods of Babylon were sham, the creations of men's minds, but he must nevertheless have reflected on the manner in which the originally pure faith possessed by Noah and his sons had become corrupted into an "image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. 1:23). It is perfectly obvious to those who accept the Biblical story of the Flood that there was a clear and accurate knowledge of God amongst men immediately following that event, and that the

faith which Daniel found when he came to Babylon must have been corrupted through the centuries from that one-time pure faith. Joshua is authority for the statement that Israel's fathers dwelt in old time beyond the flood (i.e., the river Euphrates) and served other gods (Josh. 24:2) so that even at that early day the falling away had extended to the Abrahamic line. And we also know that the worship of the "Most High God" prevailed in Canaan at the same time, and evidence of this is to be found not only in the story of Melchisedek in Gen. 14:18-20, but in that of Abimelech king of Gerar, between Canaan and Egypt, who was also a true worshipper (Gen. 20:1-10) and in the discoveries made at Ras Shamra on the coast of Syria in 1930, when a whole library of tablets was found that gave testimony to this worship.

So, at the end of three years, their education was complete, and they were brought in before the king. But that education was not only, and not even principally, in the "learning and tongue of the Chaldeans". During those same three years, we are told in ch. 1:17, "*God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams*". What a vivid picture that simple sentence paints for us; four earnest young men giving themselves in all sincerity to the reception, by the power of the Holy Spirit, of the wisdom that is from above. How God taught we are not told, but can there be much doubt that it was in the communing and reasoning together of four young hearts, poring over the sacred Scriptures which were to them the guide of life, the Old Testament as we have it as far as the Book of Isaiah and no farther, earnestly seeking enlightenment from above? In all their enforced studies in the ancient lore of Babylon they found time to devote to the wisdom from on high which is the noblest science and the best instruction. Now in their very early twenties they stood forth equipped as few men ever have been equipped to spend a life in useful service for God at a time when the needs of the Divine Plan called for such consecrated service in the face of opposition and ruthless persecution.

So they stood before the king; "*and in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm*".





# DANIEL IN BABYLON

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## 3. The Dream of the Image

King Nebuchadnezzar was in thoughtful mood. His deeply religious turn of mind and almost passionate yearning for the approval and blessing of the gods rendered him singularly receptive to dreams, considering them, as was the custom in those days, messages from the other world, revelations of the powers of heaven. There are sufficient examples in the Old Testament to make it abundantly clear that God has from time to time revealed Himself to his servants the prophets and patriarchs in this fashion. Many of the ancients—idolaters—firmly believed that their own deities communicated their wishes in the same manner so that the idea was by no means confined to the relative few who served the one true God. Additionally, the Scriptures give several instances in which God disclosed his purposes in the same way to men who were not his avowed followers, so that there is no reason for rejecting the idea that certain noteworthy dreams of unbelievers may have been inspired directly by God for his purpose.

Such was the case in this present instance. The King, awaking from his sleep, recalled an impressive dream, and the more he thought about it the more he felt that it was no ordinary dream. That it held a message for him he felt sure; but who would interpret the symbolism of the dream and reveal to him its message? That was the problem which occupied the king's mind.

A colossal, towering image, of a man; almost certainly a warrior dressed in the style of a Babylonian soldier. King Nebuchadnezzar was himself a soldier; as a young man he had led the armies of Babylon into the field against Egypt, Elam, Assyria—all the traditional foes of Babylon—whilst his father, Nabopolassar, rested from his own military exploits and administered as king the affairs of the country which he had successfully freed from the Assyrian yoke. Now in his own turn, although his military career was by no means over, Nebuchadnezzar was enjoying a brief respite of peace, and it was while he was at home in Babylon planning the great building works for which he is famous that the dream of the image came to him.

No ordinary image this—the head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver; the body and thighs of copper; the lower legs of iron; the feet's iron mingled with soft, yielding, wet clay. An impressive sight, but built upon a foundation which threatened to go to pieces at any moment; nevertheless while it stood, the image proudly surveyed its surroundings as though commanding reverence and allegiance from all who beheld.

Then came action. A mass of rock, not man-made, no carefully carved monolith bearing the impress of human labour and ingenuity, but rugged and massive as if torn out from its parent mountain by the hand of God himself, came bearing down on the image. No human hands guided it; the power by which it travelled was invisible and irresistible. Even as, fascinated, the king watched, the mighty mass of rock struck the image on its feet—the feet of iron and clay. The colossus trembled, swayed, and crashed to earth with a fall that smashed it to pieces. Fragments of gold, silver, copper and iron lay in inextricable confusion over the plain.

That was not the end. With the strange inconsequence of dreams the fragments went on breaking up, dividing into smaller and ever smaller pieces, until as fine dust they were caught up by the wind and blown away. Soon there was nothing left of the image, nothing to show

where it had stood or give any evidence that it had ever existed—nothing but the dry sandy plain of Babylonia.

Now the rock itself started to grow. Before the king's amazed eyes it steadily increased in size until it filled his whole field of vision, covering the plain in every direction as far as eye could see. He saw it encircle and swallow up his own capital city of Babylon; he saw it reach southward to the sea, and northward to Assyria with its capital city of Nineveh. He watched it as it extended its spread over the lands of his old enemies, Hittites and the Amorites, the Great Sea in the west and the empire of Egypt in the south-west. His gaze followed it as it covered lands and peoples he had never heard of and did not know existed, and when it had finished growing he saw that it had become a great mountain that filled the whole earth. All peoples, nations and languages had their homes and their lives on its slopes and under its shadow. No wonder the king was in a thoughtful mood.

It is highly probable that Nebuchadnezzar had been cogitating seriously on the possible fate of his empire after his own death. He was now a man of between thirty and forty years of age, happily married to a wife he loved, and the father of three small children. He was firmly established as monarch of the world's leading nation and he had great plans for that nation's advancement. He had made Babylon the strongest power in the Middle East and although vigilance was still needed there was no real danger from the only other great power, that of Egypt. Nineveh had been destroyed a few years previously and the power of Assyria was broken for ever. Persia as a rival had not yet emerged on the scene. He was busy organising and administering the empire his father and he had created and initiating ambitious schemes of building, irrigation and road-making. He was an Oriental despot and given to violent bursts of temper, but he was an educated man and a wise and enlightened ruler. He must have known how many times in past history individual men had built up just such edifices only for them to crash in ruins after the builder had gone the way of all flesh. Perhaps the great king had been thinking about the future of all that his hands were fashioning and in that frame of mind was receptive to this dream that God sent.

God did send it; there is no doubt about that. As that man lay sleeping on his ornate bed in the magnificent palace beside the flowing Euphrates, our God was setting in motion a chain of revelations that have had lasting effect on the lives and thoughts of men. The dream of the image was but the first of a sequence of messages that have made the Divine Plan clear to God's servants from that day to this, and given assurance to all who would know what God is doing to bring to an end the reign of evil, and reconcile man to Himself.

So in the morning the king did the expected thing; he summoned his professional interpreters of dreams to his presence to demand an interpretation of the dream. According to ch. 2:2 they constituted a formidable assortment; there were "the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans". They all came in and stood before the king.

Later on Daniel was to find himself at the head of this motley collection and it will be necessary presently to examine their credentials a little more closely. For the moment, however, suffice it to say that the "magicians" were exorcists of evil spirits, the "sorcerers" utterers of incantations which constrained the gods to do things for men which in the ordinary way they would have declined to do, the "astrologers" were occultists who professed to have communication with the spirit world, and the "Chaldeans" a senior caste of wise men who specialised in both astrology and astronomy, issuing predictions something after the style of the present-day "Old Moore's Almanac". It was from this heterogeneous assemblage of the "wisdom of this world" that the king expected to obtain the interpretation of his dream.

Perhaps he did not really expect it. He started off by demanding that his advisers give him first a detailed account of the dream itself, and afterwards proceed to the explanation. The company was thrown into considerable confusion. The great king was certainly in a difficult mood this morning. They had come into the royal presence with their usual serene confidence and glibly recited the customary formula "O king, live for ever; tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation". That would be easy enough; it was merely a matter of applying the rules of the art and the king was generally perfectly satisfied.

On this occasion he was not going to be so easily satisfied. Perhaps he had an instinctive feeling that this would prove to be a most important dream and he ought to be sure that he got the correct explanation. Perhaps—for king Nebuchadnezzar was a long-headed man—he already suspected the veracity of his counsellors and determined to put them to the test. If they really did get their interpretations from the gods, who knew all things and saw into the depths of men's minds, then logically they should be able to get the details of the dream as well. Their ability to do the one would convince him of their authority to do the other.

Rather helplessly, they made their plea a second time. "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it". This was worldly wisdom in its extremity; faced with a problem the solution of which was vested only in the power of God they must needs admit defeat. Despite the royal anger and the threat of an immediate and ignominious death they could do nothing else but admit that there was none on earth who could meet the king's wishes; none but the gods, "whose dwelling is not with flesh".

So in the last resort these men had to confess that they were not messengers of the other world at all; they had no Divine authority and no other-worldly enlightenments. Presented with the demand that they prove their claims they stood before the king and the world, admitted imposters, and in his rage and fury at having been tricked the king commanded that the entire fraternity be put to death.

This might be the right place in which to correct a common misconception to the effect that the king himself had forgotten his dream and wanted the wise men to recall it to his memory. The idea is based on Nebuchadnezzar's words in ch. 2:5 "The thing is gone from me," but the king did not mean that at all. He was talking to the wise men and after their first refusal to repeat to him the dream he used a phrase which was common to autocratic potentates asserting the irrevocable nature of their dictum. The full text is "*The thing is gone from me; if ye will not make known to me the dream with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces and your houses shall be made a dunghill*". The first sentence is equivalent to saying "The word, or decree, is gone out from me and will not be revoked". It was the fixity of his purpose to slay the wise men to which he was referring. From that moment their doom was sealed unless the dream was told. There is little doubt that the king remembered the dream all right; he wanted to find out if the wise men could discover it independently.

At this point Daniel really comes into the limelight. He is still only a youth, in his very early twenties, but already he has attracted the favourable notice of the king by his bearing, discretion and knowledge. Unfortunately that same learning has put him and his three companions into one of the categories involved in the arbitrary sentence of death just uttered by the king, so that Arioch the captain of the palace guard was soon on the spot to arrest the four youths in order to carry out the royal command. In response to Daniel's enquiry he unfolded the whole story, and Daniel knew immediately that the time had come for his life's work to begin. There was no hesitancy or uncertainty in his mind; there is no suggestion in the narrative that he went first to God asking why this calamity should fall upon them or pleading with him to save their lives. He knew, as it were instinctively, that God was in this

thing and that he was the agent of God and must needs be ready for service. He went straight to the king and declared that given a little time, he would tell to the king his dream and its interpretation.

It is not likely that he literally walked into the king's presence with his request. It was not usually so easy to obtain an audience with the great man, and vs. 26, describing the entry of Daniel with the interpretation, does not read as if the king had held previous personal conversation with him on the matter. It is more likely that the request was made, and the permission obtained, through a third party, probably the captain of the palace guard, who was already intimately involved in the progress of this matter.

Daniel's next action is of close interest to us. He gathered his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, and bade them join him in united prayer before God for the revelation of this secret. There is surely something very significant here. Daniel was already perfectly confident that God would reveal the truth to him; his request just made to the king shows that. Why then did he not make personal solitary supplication to God; why deem it necessary to bring his three friends into the prayer circle? It could not be lack of faith in God's willingness to listen to one voice, or his being more likely to grant the petition if made by four men simultaneously. Was it that Daniel realised a certain value in the practice of prayer that made the petitioner himself more receptive to the inflow of the Holy Spirit of God; that earnest and reverent prayer of itself tends to break down the barrier of materialism that always lies between us and God, and so makes our "receptiveness," so to speak, stronger and more vital? Did he, then, follow-out the implications of that principle, realise that the greater degree of solemnity and urgency induced by the fact of a number praying together, and the feeling of joint-participation, itself constituted a further factor bringing his own spirit still more in tune with the Divine Spirit? The clarity of the message he expected to receive from God must obviously depend upon the degree to which he himself was able to shake off the trammels of earthly-mindedness and enter into the "secret place of the Most High". That must surely have been helped in no small degree by the fact of corporate prayer in unison together, and so the co-operation of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah was a definite factor in Daniel's attainment of a mind so opened to the Holy Spirit that he could clearly understand the details of the interpretation he was presently to repeat to king Nebuchadnezzar.

This is an important truth for us too. Some Christians quite sincerely "see nothing in prayer meetings". Yet those who consistently conduct or attend such meetings almost invariably testify to real spiritual benefit received. It may well be that failure to engage in frequent corporate prayer in the understanding and expectation that each individual thus participating will thereby be brought into closer fellowship with God has resulted in a loss the magnitude of which cannot easily be appraised.

It was now Daniel's turn to dream. "*Then was the secret revealed to Daniel in a night vision*" (2:19). The details of the dream are not related, but it is evident that they were sufficiently explicit to give Daniel the knowledge he desired. But there was no immediate running off to the king with the answer, even though the threat of death was still hanging over his head. There was something much more important to be done first. He solemnly and reverently returned thanks to God. It is a wonderful prayer, this paean of praise whereby Daniel ascribed all might and power to the giver of the revelation. "*He changeth times and seasons; he removeth kings and setteth up kings; and revealeth the deep and secret things.*" Only after he had thus acknowledged the source of his enlightenment did he proceed to the palace to impart the information for which the great man was eagerly waiting.

It is related of that great Christian statesman of a past century, Queen Victoria's Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone, that whilst engaged in his private devotions on one occasion he received an imperious and urgent summons to the sovereign's presence. He continued in prayer as if nothing had occurred and waited on the Queen an hour later. Her Majesty was highly aggrieved at being kept waiting and demanded an explanation. "Madam, I was engaged in audience with the King of Kings" replied the old man, and the Queen, it is said, bowed her head in acknowledgment.

Such a story is hardly likely to be reenacted in this generation, but good it is to take heed of these examples of godly men who placed God first in all their affairs even to the extent of risking the displeasure of some earthly potentate.

Thus it came about that a probably greatly relieved captain of the palace guard came bustling into the royal presence with the welcome news that he had ready a man who would comply with the king's conditions and give the interpretation of the dream. Arioch almost certainly would be feeling that this was a most fortunate ending to the whole episode; the character of his royal master was so unpredictable that it was quite on the cards he himself might, later on, be blamed for the too literal execution of the command; possibly, too, the friends of the condemned men would find some way, eventually, of taking their revenge on the servant where they had small chance of doing so on the master. In the meantime he did his best to divert a little of the credit to himself; "*I have found a man of the captives of Judah*" he told the King "*who can make known to the king the interpretation*". He must himself have had confidence in Daniel's ability, to have risked his own reputation in so confident a statement. Good it is for any of us if the unbelievers among whom our daily lives are spent come to have confidence in the veracity of our words and soberness of our judgment even though they will not accept and share our beliefs. Quite evidently Arioch knew Daniel well enough implicitly to accept as true his statement that he could give the king the interpretation. "Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay" counsels the Apostle; this is an ideal we all do well to set before ourselves.

Now brought into the king's presence, Daniel hastened to disclaim any superior wisdom inherent in himself. "Art thou able to declare the dream, and make known the interpretation?" demanded the great man. The youth before him, in a speech which is a model of restraint and dignity, first reminded him that the soothsayers, the astrologers, the wise men of Babylon, with all the boasted powers of the gods behind them, had been quite unable to interpret the dream. Then with a modesty which must have sounded strange in that Babylonian court, he proceeded to disown any claim to superior wisdom of his own in the matter. But there is a God in heaven, he went on, and that God is directly interested in the affairs of this empire of Babylon, and wields overall control of its destinies, and in his inscrutable wisdom has now intervened to instruct thee. King Nebuchadnezzar, what shall befall this empire in the last days. It was a masterly approach; no wonder the king was interested; and the quiet ring of authority in the voice of this youngster could not but have impressed a man who himself knew what authority meant.

So Daniel told the dream, and as he recounted the details his listener knew that he was speaking the truth. This young man before him could only have obtained this knowledge from the God he worshipped. The king had revealed to no one his dream and it could have come to Daniel from no other source than above. He settled himself more comfortably on his throne to hear the explanation.

That explanation is common knowledge to every Christian student of prophetic matters in these days; to the king it was completely new. The head of gold pictured he himself and

his empire, ruling over the nations and supreme over all. The empire of Babylon was founded long before the days of Abraham and suffered many vicissitudes and disasters through intervening years, but it was Nebuchadnezzar who raised it to the zenith of power and extended the city of Babylon to its widest extent. We speak of Babylon as the first “universal” empire; the expression is true only in a limited sense in that Babylon exercised sovereignty only over the lands of the Middle East, the Bible lands. The far extent of the wider world was only dimly known to the Babylonians and no thought of suzerainty over the great civilisations that then existed in China, North-west India and Southern Arabia ever entered their heads. Trade with all those lands was transacted by Babylon but Nebuchadnezzar’s armies never pursued their career of conquest to such places. Greece and Rome both flourished in the days of Nebuchadnezzar but neither were ever subject to him. The “head of gold” ruled over the peoples known to the Old Testament and that was all that as intended.

This empire must one day come to an end. How long it was to endure Daniel did not say and it is certain that he did not at that time know, but one day it would fall and be superseded by another empire, one symbolised by silver. We know that empire to be that of Persia; Daniel lived to see that part of the prophecy come to pass. He himself eventually served the kings of Persia. In point of fact the “head of gold” was destined to survive only twenty-three years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar himself. Cyrus the Persian in 538 B.C. captured Babylon and added it to the rapidly growing Persian empire. Then in 332 B.C. Alexander the Great of Greece in turn overthrew the power of Persia and the copper part of the image took the centre of the stage. Finally in 66 B.C. Greece fell before the might of the iron kingdom, Rome, and potential world domination left the Middle East and settled in Western Europe, there to remain until the “Time of the End”.

Thus Daniel led up to the climax of the dream, the coming of the Messianic kingdom upon earth. These four empires, all built by fallible men, were destined each to have its day and then pass away. The fifth kingdom, built not by man but by God, shall endure for ever. After it has broken down and ground to pieces every vestige of the earlier empires it will extend its sway until all peoples everywhere shall acknowledge its power and live contentedly under its jurisdiction. God had admittedly given the kingdoms of the world and their subjects into the hands of one great king after another but all this was only for a limited time. A day is to dawn when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. There had been many earlier prophets to speak of the glories of “that day” when God turns to speak peace to the nations and effect the reconciliation to himself of “whosoever will”; when the graves open to yield up their dead and the whole human race be called to walk the “highway of holiness” to perfection of life. Daniel was the first to relate this blessed time to the earthly kingdoms of history, to give a sequence whereby the “watchers” and the students might place it in connection with history as it is known. Wherefore we in our day, beholding with our own eyes the progressive collapsing and inevitable end of the present development of the feet of iron and clay, the last vestiges of that political system which once was Rome, have this confidence and evidence that the days of the Kingdom are at hand and cannot be much longer delayed.

These words had the ring of truth, and an astute man like Nebuchadnezzar could not fail to realise the fact. We are told that he fell down and worshipped Daniel—probably much to the surprise of his assembled Court. Of course he did it in symbol of homage and reverence to the God whom Daniel represented. The king’s conversion was sudden but whole-hearted, like most of his actions. “Your God is a God of gods and a lord of kings”. In those few words he elevated Daniel’s God, not to a position of absolute pre-eminence over all the gods of

Babylon, as is often mistakenly supposed, but to a position of equality with them. “Your God is a God of gods”—that is, a God worthy to be a consort of gods. There is no evidence that Nebuchadnezzar had lost his faith in his own gods, only in the wise men who claimed to represent them. In fact, the extant inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar show without a doubt that he was faithful to Marduk the god of Babylon for at least the greater portion of his life; but here he evidently acknowledged the power of Daniel’s God and also the integrity of Daniel’s credentials as a representative of that God. In token of that recognition he bestowed high honour upon the man who had interpreted his dream.

Daniel was made a chief ruler in affairs of State; his three companions also were promoted to high office. Honour and wealth were at their command, the plaudits and flatteries of men, and every attraction the luxurious world of Babylon had to offer. The time had now come when the value of the earlier training and self-discipline to which these young men had been subjected was to be put to the test.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

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The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 4. Master of the Magicians

Something like twenty years elapsed between the respective events of the second and third chapters of Daniel, the king's dream of the image and the casting of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah into the fiery furnace, twenty years of which the Book of Daniel says not a word, but a period crowded with important happenings and incidents in the story of Israel. During that time Judah became finally free from the dominion of Egypt and subject to Babylon, Jehoiakim king of Judah died and after the short three months' reign of Jehoachin was replaced by Zedekiah. The king of Babylon besieged and captured Jerusalem, laid the land desolate and took the bulk of the people captive, thus completing the "carrying away into Babylon" which marked the end of the Jewish monarchy. Ezekiel the priestly prophet commenced his ministry amongst the exiles and saw the first of those glorious visions which culminated many years later in his wonderful foreview of the Millennial Temple that is yet to be. Obadiah and Habakkuk both gave voice to their prophecies in Judea. Jeremiah continued his work and was finally taken into Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem, and died there. Cyrus the Persian, before whom the might of Babylon was eventually to crumble away, was born. All these things happened during this twenty years which lie between Chap. 2, and Chap. 3, and Daniel does not so much as mention any one of them.

He was about twenty-one years of age when he stood before King Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted the dream of the image. At the time of the burning fiery furnace incident he was probably just entering his forties. During the interim he steadily advanced in favour with the king and in power, honour and influence. According to Chap. 2:48, in consequence of his interpreting the king's dream, "*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.*" Later on, in chap. 4:9, Daniel is referred to by the title "Master of the Magicians." These expressions indicate that the Jewish youth had become, next to the king himself, the most important and influential person in the land. Such sudden accession to a position of power from a humble origin may appear strange and improbable to our Western minds but it was by no means an uncommon thing in the court of an Eastern King. Joseph was summarily exalted by the Pharaoh of Egypt in just the same way; Haman was deposed and Mordecai raised to take his place by Ahasuerus of Persia, as related in the Book of Esther. Classical historians record plenty of similar instances in ancient times, and there is no reason to question the integrity of the story on this account.

The titles used make it clear that Daniel had been elevated to the position of what we would call Prime Minister of the land, and in addition constituted titular head of all the Babylonian priest-hoods and learned men. It is as though he combined the offices of Prime Minister, Archbishop of Canterbury, and President of the Royal Society all in his own person. At twenty-one years of age it was a situation calling for a most unusual degree of wisdom and discretion. The sequel to the story shows that Daniel possessed both in ample measure.

This is an aspect of the Babylonian captivity which is not always appreciated. It is customary to think of the hapless Jews going to servitude and slavery in a strange land, at the mercy of ruthless captors and bereft of the consolations of their own religion. "*By the waters of Babylon we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered thee, O Zion.*" "*How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?*" That may well have been the heart attitude of those to



whom Jerusalem and Judea and the worship which could only be offered in the hallowed land meant more than anything else in the world. But it is not likely that the captive Jews were badly treated. The story before us shows that God, although He had fulfilled His word and removed them from their own land in punishment for their apostasy, nevertheless marvellously provided for their well-being in the land of their captivity. Daniel was virtual ruler over all domestic concerns in the whole realm, and he had as his lieutenants other three of their own countrymen. Surely this quartette, able to decree more or less as they pleased, saw to it that their own people were at least fairly treated compared with the rest of the population. The term “province” in chap. 2:48 means “realm” or “empire”; the “whole province of Babylon” denotes the entire realm over which King Nebuchadnezzar had control, and the fact that during the major part of his reign he personally led his armies in the field and was necessarily absent from his capital city for long periods makes it fairly certain that Daniel was to administer on his behalf and watch for his interests in his absence.

The first use that Daniel made of his new appointment was to urge upon the king the advisability of some delegation of authority. The import of verse 49 is that his three friends, now known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, were put in charge of the detailed administration of day-by-day matters, “set over the affairs of the province of Babylon,” whilst Daniel himself remained in daily attendance on the king himself for the discussion of important matters. “Daniel sat in the gate of the king.”

So for a span—probably for a large part of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign—the empire was ruled by a “cabinet” of which at least the four leading members were Jews. It was during these forty years that the empire expanded to its greatest extent and its wealth and magnificence reached their peak. Secular historians ascribe the honours for this to King Nebuchadnezzar, on the strength of his many inscriptions, in which he takes all the credit to himself. One wonders how much of this prosperity was in fact due to the wise and just administration of the four Jews who must of necessity have borne a large share of the responsibility for what was achieved.

That fact poses a question. What were these men doing, helping to build up a system which God had already condemned and against which the prophet Jeremiah, still away in the homeland of Judea, was pouring forth his most passionate denunciations? What kind of service to God was this which resulted in the establishment, more firmly than ever before, of an utterly idolatrous and corrupt system which God intended to destroy? Was it, that like Jonah at Nineveh, God gave Babylon a last chance to repent? True enough it is that Babylon became a means in the Lord’s hand for the chastisement of Israel but Babylonians as well as Israelites were the creation of God’s hands and even with that debased nation it must have been true that God *“hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn you from your evil ways, and live ye.”* Just as Nineveh had forty years grace by the preaching of Jonah—and by reason of her repentance earned a remission of the threatened overthrow for something like two hundred and fifty years, for Jonah preached about B.C. 850 and Nineveh was not overthrown until B.C. 612—so in Daniel’s day Babylon had forty years’ opportunity to profit by the righteous administration of men of God, and mend its ways. There is a cryptic word in Jeremiah’s prophecy which can only be understood if something like this was indeed the case. *“We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every man into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven.”* (Jer. 51:9) It is a historical fact that during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, when according to the Bible Daniel and his friends administered affairs of state. Babylon prospered and ruled the nations unchallenged. It is also a historical fact that directly Nebuchadnezzar was dead, and they were ousted from their

positions, the decline and fall of Babylon set in. A succession of five kings over a period of only twenty three years, the Persian enemy hammering at the gates; then the dramatic fall of Babylon so eloquently portrayed by Jeremiah fifty years before and Isaiah nearly two centuries before. These are facts of history which cannot be disputed, and the logical conclusion is that Daniel and his friends were in the positions they occupied by the will and providence of God. Having been thus appointed they did right in exercising to the fullest extent, in harmony with the principles of Divine law, the earthly powers with which they had been entrusted. The fact that they served a pagan king and ruled an idolatrous people made no difference to that. They let their personal light shine, they did not at any time compromise their own principles or beliefs, and they did with their might what their hands found to do.

In all that there may well be a lesson for us to-day. All too often the argument is advanced that because of the inherent corruption of the world around us, Christians should withdraw from all participation in its affairs, especially in regard to the occupation of positions of influence or authority. It does not always follow; it may be that the inscrutable decrees of God require that we or at least some amongst us, take up some such position and administer it as did Daniel in his time, and Joseph before him "*Ye are the salt of the earth*" said Jesus, but He surely never intended us to assume the salt was not to be used. We can only be the salt of the earth if we are fulfilling, in society, the function which salt fulfils in food. "*In the world, but not of it*" says the Apostle. Some Christians are neither of the world nor in it, and that fact is not likely to stand them in good stead when the time comes for our Lord to determine who, by intimate acquaintance and experience with the needs and failings of fallen humanity are to be appointed to the work of leading men back to God.

As "chief of the governors of the wise men" (ch. 2:48) and "master of the magicians" (ch. 4:9) Daniel became the official head of the entire Babylonian priestly system, which itself controlled every branch of knowledge and learning practised in the land. He was supreme High Priest of the nation. Religious worship, education, the compilation and care of the national records, were all under his control. The temples, the schools, the libraries, all were his responsibility. All this, too, whilst he was still in his twenties. It was in the third year of Jehoiakim that he was taken to Babylon at probably about eighteen or nineteen years of age. He received three years' training before appearing before the king early in the sixth year. Nebuchadnezzar's father died at the time of the Battle of Carchemish, which was in Jehoiakim's fourth year, and this was the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar's sole reign (Jer. 25:1). That must have been towards the end of Jehoiakim's fourth year so that Nebuchadnezzar's "second year" (Dan. 2:1) in which he dreamed of the image, would extend nearly to the end of Jehoiakim's sixth year. Hence there is time for Daniel's three years training to have been completed and several more months to elapse before he again stood before the king and interpreted the dream. There is no need to imagine, as some do, that "second year" in Dan. 2:1 is an error and casts doubts upon the accuracy of Daniel's account. (Some commentators on this account suggest that ch. 2:1 is a copyists error for "twelfth year" but there is no evidence whatever for this.) The incidents of Daniel's life and all the events connected therewith can only be made to fit together on the basis that, as the Book of Daniel indicates, he attained his eminent position before the king thus early in life.

Daniel was now Supreme Pontiff—official Babylonian title "Rab-Mag"—of all the religious systems of Babylon. This is the title which was afterwards taken over by the Popes of Rome and Latinised into "Pontifex Maximus". As such he controlled the magicians, sorcerers, soothsayers, astrologers, wise men and Chaldeans, in addition to the priests of the various and many gods of Babylon. Each of these orders had distinct and separate functions;

thanks to modern research and the discovery of abundant written records it is possible to-day to form a tolerably correct picture of what these men were and what they professed to accomplish.

The “magicians” (*khartumin*) were men whose office was to repulse and exorcise demons and evil spirits by means of spells and incantations. They carried wands of office and were popularly supposed to have the power of working miracles. If the crops failed, a man’s cattle died, or a whirlwind blew a house down, the magician was called in to exorcise the demon who was thus venting his spite against the unfortunate family concerned.

Closely allied to these were the sorcerers (*kashaphim*) who were utterers of magic words having the mystic power of persuading the gods to grant favours to their devotees. The man who desired some natural advantage, such as the gift of children, or the removal of an offending neighbour, sought the services of the sorcerer, who would know just what secret magical words to utter to constrain the appropriate god to perform the required service.

The “soothsayers” (*gazrim*) of Dan. 2:27 were diviners who professed ability to pronounce upon the probable outcome of any human circumstance by the aid of laws which they alone understood. If a new venture was to be undertaken or the king proposed to launch a new war, the soothsayer was consulted in much the same way as some people go to fortune-tellers to-day. The selected dignitary had several means of arriving at his conclusions, a favourite one being the inspection of the liver of an animal sacrificed for the purpose. (An example of one of these soothsayer’s “stock-in-trade” is now in the British Museum. It is a baked clay model of a sheep’s liver marked out in fifty squares. In each square is inscribed the portent for that particular spot.) In the divining ceremony, the liver from the sacrificed animal was examined and if any spot was diseased or showed some abnormality the portent for that particular spot was pronounced as an omen for the venture or project under review. Reference to this form of soothsaying in Daniel’s own time is made in Ezek. 21:21, where we are told that the king of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar) uncertain which of two ways to take, “looked in the liver”.

Next come avowed occultists, the “astrologers” (*assaphim*) of Dan. 1:20. The term is a mis-translation. These men held communion with evil spirits with the object of gaining information not obtainable in any other way. Their methods and practices were the same as those of spiritists in every age.

The “wise men” (*khakamin*) of Dan. 2:18 and elsewhere were really the medical fraternity. Disease and sickness was popularly considered to be the work of demons and hence magical practices to drive out the evil spirit responsible was a large part of a physician’s stock-in-trade. Prayers and incantations to the gods also came in for attention. Nevertheless true medical knowledge was not altogether lacking, and the medical works which have survived show that a very fair understanding of many diseases was the rule; the names of over five hundred medicinal drugs have been identified in the Babylonian pharmacopeia. Their more intimate contact with the common people brought them into more immediate touch with many everyday problems and hence, as is often the case with medical men today—or at least was the case before the advent of the Welfare State with its nationalised “Health Service”—the local medical man was considered an important and knowledgeable member of the community whose standing and authority in any matter of civic or social interest was undisputed.

Chaldeans (*kasdim*) was the name originally given to the primitive people of the land and in any other part of the Bible preserves this sense. In the Book of Daniel, however it is limited to a certain class of men within the nation; men who formed a kind of quasi-secret

society which preserved the lore and traditions of the past, and exercised power and influence behind the scenes—a kind of “Hidden Hand”. This caste of Chaldeans was the senior of all the orders of society which have just been described.

On the purely religious side Daniel must have had a bewildering array of gods and goddesses, each with their temples and priests, with which to contend. First of all came the Babylonian Trinity, Ea, god of the sea and supreme god; Anu, god of heaven; Bel or Marduk (one is the Semitic and one the Sumerian name for the same god) god of the earth. Marduk was the son of Ea, was known as the “Wisdom of Ea”, and was supposed to have created the earth and man upon it—a notable anticipation of the later Scriptural presentation of the Son of God Who is also the Word or Wisdom of God and by Whom all things were made. The chief goddess was Ishtar, Queen of Heaven (Ashtaroth to the Syrians and Venus in classical mythology). Another important deity was Sin the Moon-god, patron deity of Ur, Abraham’s birthplace, and incidentally the source of the name Mount Sinai and the Wilderness of Sin through which Israel travelled at the time of the Exodus. Both mountain and wilderness were named in honour of the Moon-god.

Then came a number of lesser gods, seven messenger-gods or “archangels”, an indeterminate number of “Watchers”, three hundred spirits of the heavens, three hundred spirits of the earth, then angels and demons, good and evil, innumerable. One can imagine Daniel at times in earnest conversation with King Nebuchadnezzar, telling him of the hollowness and falsity of all this mass of superstition and corruption, and endeavouring to turn his mind to the glory of the one incorruptible God, in whom all men live, and move, and have their being. (Acts 17:28.)

Why did Daniel accept, such a position, when every instinct of his being must have risen in protest at the sights he would inevitably witness and the ceremonies he must needs allow. The answer is simple. God had called him to this position, and he was able to discern enough of God’s purpose to know that God is all-wise and that some definite reason lay behind that call.

The very fact of his high position was sufficient to release him from any necessity to condone or attend the idolatrous ceremonies. There were many faiths in Babylon—one for every god—but Daniel, as chief, was above them all. Who can doubt that, in all the majesty and dignity of his exalted position, he prayed with his windows open towards Jerusalem daily, as is recorded of him at a later time in his life (Dan. 6:10). Who can doubt that he assembled for worship with his fellow-countrymen of like faith in some plain, dignified building where God was worshipped in spirit and in truth. The known character of Daniel is sufficient guarantee to us that his official position only served to show up the more prominently to all men the faith that was in him and to give glory to the God he served.

Nebuchadnezzar had already admitted Daniel’s God to a place among the gods of Babylon. Moreover, he later on publicly proclaimed Him as being the greatest and most powerful of all gods (Dan. 3:29 and 4:35). Hence Daniel could with perfect propriety profess the worship of the God of heaven just as other notables might select Bel, or Nebo, or Nergal, as their own deity. The officials of the court, and the common people too, would not be likely to quarrel with the personal views of a man so high in favour with the king as was Daniel; and neither would the priests of the various temples, while the king lived. They would of course bide their time until a king more favourable to the native priesthood should ascend the throne.

It might have been, then, for twenty years or more, that the lad, now grown to middle age, administered his charge with loyalty both to his God and to his king. Beholding, as he did,

every day, the sensuousness and idolatry of the God-dishonouring system in which his life was being spent, he must often have cried out in his heart *“How long, O Lord, how long?”*

But the ways of God require slow ages for their full accomplishment, and it must needs be that for many weary years more the mystery of iniquity would and still continues to work, until in God’s own time comes the day when *“the law of the Lord shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”* and the Lord as it were arousing Himself at long last, shall *“take away the veil that is spread over all nations.”*



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. Sept./Oct. 1971, page 108)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 5. Ordeal by Fire

The story of the three Hebrews who were cast alive into a fiery furnace on account of their refusal to fall down before a pagan idol is one of the classics of Biblical literature. The miracle is so apparently marvellous that men have not hesitated to put the story down as a figurative presentation of Israel's faithfulness to the one true God in all the afflictions suffered at the hands of her Greek and Roman oppressors. But the story in Daniel is older by far than the empires of Greece and Rome. It bears within itself the evidence of its own authenticity. This thing really did happen. These men really were cast into a burning fiery furnace, and did come out unscathed.

The third chapter of Daniel records the story. It does not give any indication as to when it happened. It is probable, however, that this was after Nebuchadnezzar had ended his wars with Egypt and turned to the city-building and other peaceful pursuits which occupied the last twenty years of his reign. In that case it would be after the dream of the great image which had been the means of Daniel's advancement, but before the king's madness. It must have been after Daniel had been elevated to the position of Chief of the Magicians, for only so could he have been exempt himself from the obligation to do homage to the Image.

A great many stirring things had happened since the previous event, the dream of the image, recorded by Daniel. Between chapters 2 and 3 lie some twenty momentous years. About five years after the dream came the death of Jehoiakim and the carrying away of many Israelites into Babylon, as described in 2 Kings 24, Jer. 22:18 and Jer. 36. It was at this time that Ezekiel, a young man of twenty-five, was taken there and lived among the Jewish captives at Tel-Abib. Jehoiachin began his three month's reign and because of disloyalty to the king of Babylon was taken to that city and imprisoned until the death of Nebuchadnezzar. Eleven years later came the final catastrophe. Zedekiah, also disloyal to his suzerain, who all this time had, as the "head of gold", held the Divine commission of rulership over the nations, saw the Babylonian armies lay siege to Jerusalem for the last time. This was the final taking into captivity; the city was taken and the Temple demolished. The Book of Lamentations was written to commemorate this disaster in Israel's history. Obadiah and Habakkuk prophesied at this time, both in Judea. Jeremiah was in Judea also, and in disgrace with king Zedekiah and his court for his continued insistence that God required them to submit to the Babylonian conqueror. Jeremiah's loyalty to God brought him recognition from an unexpected quarter. According to Jer. 39:11, when the city was at last captured, "*Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do to him even as he shall say to thee*". Jeremiah eventually went to Egypt and died there (so far as is known. The thesis advanced by some to the effect that he afterwards made his way to Ireland and ended his days in the Emerald Isles rests upon arguments which have no place in this treatise). One wonders if Nebuchadnezzar's concern for Jeremiah was inspired in the first place by Daniel, who, away in Babylon, must have remembered his old friend and teacher and used his influence with the king to ensure his safety.

This third chapter is written in a style quite unlike that of the rest of the book. There is a fulsomeness and exaggeration in the use of the words, a grandiloquent and somewhat monotonous repetition of phrases, which is not at all characteristic of the reverent, straight-

forward literary style of Daniel. This story reads for all the world like the native Babylonian literature of which so many examples are still in existence. It might be that here we have the Babylonian official record of the happening, originally written in cuneiform characters on a clay tablet, and copied from the official archives by Daniel for incorporation in his book. There is a strong argument here against the assertion of those critics who brand the book as a kind of “historical fiction” written several centuries after Nebuchadnezzar’s time.

We do not know the precise nature of this image of gold which the king set up in the plain of Dura. It has been suggested that it was a replica of the metallic image seen previously in the dream which Daniel interpreted. That is improbable—had it been so, the king would have been much more likely to have constructed it of the four metals he saw in that dream, gold, silver, bronze and iron. There is greater reason for thinking that it was an image of Nebuchadnezzar’s favourite deity Bel. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus says that there was a golden image of Bel forty feet high in the Temple at Babylon, and Herodotus also mentions a similar image. Such images were usually hollow, for the ancients were expert at casting hollow statues in metal. The sixty cubits height of the Biblical image is equivalent to an English measure of fifty-five feet, all objects of gold being measured by a special cubit of a little under eleven inches, and since the width is given as six cubits, or five feet six, and the height of a human figure of that width could not exceed about twenty-five feet, it would seem that the figure was placed upon a lofty pedestal so that it could be seen at a distance, and Daniel records the full height.

It is thought that the Plain of Dura was on the south side of the city, alongside the river. Such a site for this colossal statue would render it a prominent object to be seen by seamen and travellers as they came up the river from the sea, creating an impression something like that now afforded by the sight of the statue of Liberty at the entrance to New York Harbour. In this fashion Bel, the patron deity of Babylon, would be honoured in the eyes of all men in front of his own city. The proclamation to “all peoples, nations and languages” to fall down and worship at the sound of the music must be understood, of course, as applying only to the vast concourse of people attending the ceremony. Since Babylon always held numbers of people from other nations, gathered there in connection with their trading enterprises, the proclamation was literally true.

The sun blazed down from the clear sky upon a vast crowd embracing members of almost every known nationality on earth. Native Babylonians, city dwellers and country labourers, rubbed shoulders with captives from other lands, Jews and Syrians and Elamites, free-roving sons of the desert, Arabs and Sabeans, traders and merchants from Phoenicia and India; an assemblage of black and brown, yellow and white skins, the whole making a colourful mass of humanity. Near the image stood governmental officials and the various orders of priest-hoods, amongst the former being the three Hebrew men who, according to Dan. 2:49, had been appointed to positions of authority in the realm of Babylon. In all that vast concourse there were two, and two only, who were not expected to bow down when the signal was given. One was Nebuchadnezzar, the Head of the State, and the other was Daniel, the Chief of all the priesthoods and wise men. According to the Babylon mythology, these two men between them represented the heavenly powers, and would not be called upon to participate in an act of obeisance which was incumbent upon all others.

The dedication ceremony proceeded; the herald cried his announcement and, doubtless after a long succession of prayers and incantations in which the priests of all the leading gods had their part, the climax of the ritual was reached. Music rose upon the air and the whole vast concourse, taking its cue from the officials near the image, prostrated in adoration. It

must have been a peculiarly gratifying moment for the king, for Nebuchadnezzar is known to have been especially interested in the introduction of public congregational worship amongst his subjects—a thing unknown in previous times.

Three remained standing—three men, who although high in rank in the national government, would neither serve that country's gods nor worship the image the king had set up. It is evident that their defection had passed unnoticed by the king—three men in that vast assembly could easily have gone unperceived—but others were on the watch. Some of the Chaldeans, men of the priestly caste, jealous of these three Jews' position and resentful of their scorn of the Chaldean gods, saw their opportunity and quickly acquainted the king with the facts. It is noteworthy that they added a crime which was not included in the herald's announcement. "They serve not thy gods ..." It is here that we perceive evidence of the king's growing pride and arrogance, which later was to plunge him into such terrible humiliation. He would brook no opposition to his demands, and, we read, "the form of his visage was changed" against these three who had dared to flout his will.

It is not necessary to assume that the dedication ceremony was broken off whilst the three men were being dealt with. Probably the complaint itself was made when the ceremony was over and the crowds were beginning to disperse. The complainants could hardly have left their places to accost the king at a time when he was the central figure in an important religious ritual. We can imagine, therefore, the subsequent scenes being enacted within a smaller circle composed of Court officials, priests and the military guards.

The option was brutal. The three Hebrews could either bow down and worship at the sound of the music, or be cast alive into the furnace: "*And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?*" (vs. 15). The passionate and ungovernable nature of the king is well displayed in these few verses. By contrast the calm declaration of the threatened men is inspiring. "We are not careful (i.e. we are not possessed by anxiety) to answer thee over this matter." If God wills to deliver us, He will do so; and if He wills not to deliver, we are his servants. We will not worship.

So they were bound in all their official robes and insignia of office and cast immediately into the burning fiery furnace; and the heat thereof was so great that the men who cast them in themselves died from the flames and heat to which they had perforce exposed themselves.

The furnace was probably one that was normally used for the smelting of iron or copper from crude ore, differing very little from a modern blast furnace. The extraction and working of metal goes back very far in the history of man, the Bible telling us that it was practised by the ante-diluvians, for Tubal-cain, of the race of Cain, in the eighth generation from Adam was the first man to work in copper and iron (Gen. 4:22). The blast furnace, in which metallic ore is smelted by intense heat in order to extract the pure metal, is a very old invention and relics of such furnaces dating back two, three or four thousand years have been found in Mesopotamia and India, and were evidently in use in Egypt, for they are depicted on certain tomb wall paintings there. Reference to Egyptian blast furnaces is made in three places in the Old Testament (Deut. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer. 11:4). They were built of thick brick walls faced with clay treated so as to withstand the intense heat, with an opening at the top through which the flames and heat escaped, and another opening at the bottom closed by a door, through which the molten metal ran out into prepared moulds, and the clinker and refuse could be periodically removed. Huge bellows worked by a number of men provided a forced air draught to maintain the high temperature. The fuel used was charcoal, or more probably coal, for timber was not plentiful in the Euphrates plains, whilst coal was, and is still, easily worked from surface seams in the northern mountains.



An indication of the extent to which such furnaces were then in use is afforded by the fact that when Khorsabad, a suburb of Nineveh, was excavated during the nineteenth century, a stock of one hundred and fifty tons of iron ingots ready for working up into articles of commerce was discovered. They had lain there since the destruction of Nineveh in Nebuchadnezzar's own day. There is in existence also a clay tablet invoice from an unknown Babylonian blacksmith of several centuries before Abraham, setting out his account for the forging of certain bronze weapons.

The accuracy of the narrative is very striking here. The furnace was heated to seven times its usual heat. One can picture the bellows men straining at their levers and blowing up the white-hot mass to a temperature far exceeding the usual. From the top of the furnace, probably fifteen or twenty feet above the ground, the flames streamed out with a deafening blast. The Scripture says "they fell down bound into the midst of the furnace". They were carried up to the platform around the top and thrown into the yawning opening, falling down to the bed of burning fuel beneath. But, say our translators rather quaintly, "*because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men*" who cast them in. Either they were overcome by the excessive heat at the furnace mouth, and fell in after their victims and were destroyed, or, what is perhaps more likely, the flames streaming out ignited their clothing and they were burned to death before help could be brought.

The lower door had evidently been opened and the king had stationed himself at a respectful distance in order to observe the execution of his sentence. What he did see gravely disturbed him and he rose up from his seat in some agitation. He had expected to watch three bound bodies fall into the fire from above and be quickly consumed. He saw, instead, four men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire—and, said he in a hushed tone to his courtiers, who evidently were not placed so that they too could see into the furnace, "*the form of the fourth is like to a son of the gods*".

It is a pity that our translators rebelled at this piece of unadulterated paganism and rendered this phrase "the Son of God", using capital letters into the bargain, so that the English reader instinctively thinks of our Lord Jesus Christ, and pictures His presence with the three Hebrews in the fire. Nebuchadnezzar knew nothing of Jesus Christ—and, at that time, very little of the true God. The Hebrew phrase is "a son of the gods" and by this term the king meant one of those guardian spirits in Babylonian mythology who were thought to be the especial messengers of the gods in their dealings with men. No wonder that he was awe-stricken. The very action by which he had sought to demonstrate his personal loyalty to the gods had been reproved by them, and a special messenger sent to preserve alive the three men he had condemned to a cruel death. That was the interpretation king Nebuchadnezzar must have placed upon this amazing happening. And in a swift revulsion of feeling he called to the three men to come forth from the furnace. So they came forth, climbing out through the open door as though no furnace raged within, and stepped up to where the king stood, without so much as the hair of their heads singed, or the smell of fire upon them (vs. 27).

How the story must have run like wildfire through the Jewish communities in Babylon and at Tel-Abib, fifty miles to the south, where the prophet Ezekiel was conducting his own mission. What a wave of renewed confidence must have swept over the exiles as this great manifestation of the power of their God was added to the signs and wonders which had gone before. The king's decree must have followed very quickly, proclaiming penalties upon any who spoke against the Most High God, the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, for, said the decree somewhat wonderingly "*there is no other God that can deliver after this sort*" (vs. 29).

Some twenty years after this stirring happening, Ezekiel, by the river of Chebar fifty miles away, saw that glorious vision of the Millennial Kingdom so wonderfully symbolised in the description of the great Temple with its river and trees of life (Ezek. chaps. 40-48). There is something very fitting in this contrast between the massive image, symbolic of the pomp and majesty of this world and its false gods, with all men bowed down before it in abject homage, and the saintly prophet of God, quietly sitting upon his mountain, viewing the calm beauty of that coming kingdom which shall never pass away or be destroyed. The image of Bel has long since crumbled into dust and been forgotten and no man now knows what it was like, but the glowing words of the prophet live on, and before our mental vision there stands out plainly the vista of that fair city whose name shall be "The Lord is there" (Ezek. 38:45). "*So shall all thine enemies perish, O Lord, but the name of the righteous shall endure for ever.*"

There is a New Testament parallel to this story. It is enshrined in the imagery of the Book of Revelation, where the seer tells of the whole world united in the worship of another image, the "Image of the Beast". All who do not worship the image, he hears, are to be put to death. The only ones to refrain from such worship are the "servants of God", who have been "sealed in their foreheads". In the outcome, as in the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, there is intervention from Heaven. A Rider upon a white horse comes forth and gives battle to all the powers of evil, and the Image, now branded a False Prophet in the eyes of all men (compare Rev. 13:14-18 with Rev. 19:20) is cast into the fiery lake and destroyed. There are various detailed interpretations of all this symbolism but the main tenor of the vision is commonly agreed. In the end of the Age there will arise to challenge the incoming Kingdom of God a final and supreme system of power to which nearly all the world will ignorantly give support, the only exceptions being those who have been "sealed" with an intelligent understanding of the Divine Plan, particularly as regards the significance of these events, and who are earnest and devoted disciples of the Master. These will pass through fiery experiences and may suffer loss and even death but even so will emerge spiritually unscathed. And in the next scene they are shown as riding forth behind their Leader and Captain to establish upon the ruins of that system of which the image has been the head a new one based upon love and righteousness, speaking peace to the people and ruling the nations with a shepherding rod. The final defeat of the enemies of righteousness at the end of this Age is shown here, and we can as readily accept the assurance of Divine intervention in the world's extremity at this time as the fact of Divine intervention on that momentous day in the time of King Nebuchadnezzar.

"*At that time*" says Daniel (12:1) "*shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation ... and at that time thy people shall be delivered.*" Daniel's reference is to Israel's expected King-Messiah, standing up for the overthrow of all evil and the restoration of Daniel's people, and finds its fulfilment in the long promised Second Advent of Jesus Christ, in the midst of a great time of trouble "such as was not since there was a nation". Jesus used the same expression when talking about his Second Coming. There may be some very definite prophetic truth, therefore, in the sight which met the startled eyes of the Babylonian king. There may—nay, will—come a time in the final phase of this great distress which is now upon all nations when the great men of the world, the kings, politicians, financiers, industrialists, confident that they have given the death blow to the forces which are heralding the New Order of Christ's Kingdom, will say "Did not we cast *three men bound* into the midst of the fire?" And the multitudes submissive as ever, will reply "*True, O King*". Then will those kings and politicians and financiers and industrialists tremble exceedingly as they look into

that fiery furnace of the world's trouble and they will say *"Lo, we see four men, loose, ... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God"*.

And at that breathless moment in the world's history the kingdoms of this world will pass under the sovereignty "of our Lord, and of his Christ", and men will know without any possibility of dispute that the Son of God has returned in the glory of his Kingdom.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. Nov./Dec. 1971, page 135)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 6. A King's Madness

King Nebuchadnezzar was now at the zenith of his glory. The "head of gold" had become the conqueror of the nations. He had seen three successive Pharaohs of Egypt, the rival nation, pass into death—two of them struck down by his own hand. Pharaoh-Necho died at the time of Jerusalem's downfall in Zedekiah's day. His successor, Psamatik II (not mentioned by name in the Bible) was slain when the Babylonians invaded Egypt in Nebuchadnezzar's twenty-third year (Jer. 52:30 and 43:1-13). Pharaoh-Hophra had just perished, also at the hands of the victorious king, and his successor, Amasis, held the throne of the Pharaohs only as a tributary to Babylon. Egypt had become, as Ezekiel said it would become (Ezek. 29:14) a "base kingdom"—and in actual fact it never regained its former greatness. The proud city of Tyre, after a siege of thirteen years, had been forced to capitulate. The Assyrians were no more, and their mighty city of Nineveh was a mass of broken down ruins. The Ten Tribes were scattered in the wilds of Armenia, spreading slowly outwards, and the remnants of Judah dwelt to the south of Babylon. The Holy Land lay a desolate waste.

For seven or eight years now the great king, having measurably pacified his widely spread empire, had been devoting himself to the erection and adornment of the wonderful buildings for which both he and the city became famous. Temples and palaces, roads and canals, parks and gardens, all grew quickly under the inspiration of his fiery enthusiasm. It is to be feared that the cost in terms of human suffering was great, for all these huge works were executed by hordes of labourers little better than slaves. Every street corner and public square boasted statues and sculptures executed in stone or bronze; the temples and public buildings were adorned with richly painted representations of historic events in Babylonian history and mythology; the libraries were replete with books dealing with every conceivable subject—inscribed clay tablets which have proved to be the most imperishable of all written records. The king's own passion for recording all his actions and his feelings toward his gods, taken together with the vivid intimate pictures given us by Daniel, make Nebuchadnezzar better known to us than any other king of antiquity.

Picture him now, a little above sixty years of age, in his own domestic circle, with the Median wife whom the historian says he dearly loved, and their family. Avil-Marduk (who succeeded him as king—the Evil-Merodach of Jer. 52:31), Nitocris, the mother of Belshazzar (Dan. 5:10) and another daughter whose name is not recorded. Daniel on his frequent visits to the great palace beside the river must often have talked with the queen and her children, and as he talked he would notice with growing apprehension the changing disposition of the king—feverish exultation and pride in his achievements, forgetfulness of the great miracles wrought by the God of Heaven Whom he had once been so ready to acknowledge, his increasing devotion to the service of Bel, the deity of Babylon. The incident of the fiery furnace was some ten years in the past; the dream of the great image more than thirty years; and the visible evidence of his work, crowned by the mighty temple which his own enthusiasm had done so much to complete, was steadily driving the nobler impulses from his mind. Daniel knew what the inevitable end must be, and without doubt he talked to his sovereign upon many occasions with warnings of the inevitable fall that follows great pride.

Megalomania, they call it nowadays. In Nebuchadnezzar's case the disordered condition of his mind brought on a fearful malady of the brain in which he imagined himself to be a wild

beast. Yet the blow did not fall until in the providence of God a marked opportunity for repentance was given.

It must have been in the very year that his last enemy, Pharaoh-Hophra of Egypt, had been overthrown and slain, that the strange and terrible dream came to the king. The account is to be found in Dan. 4. It is related by the king himself, and bears every mark of having been written under the king's direction in recognition of the lesson he had been taught. He was at rest in his house, and flourishing in his palace—fitting description of his cessation from active warfare and devotion to the adornment of his city. He saw in his dream a great tree, the greatest that the earth had ever seen, and it gave shelter to all the birds and beasts of the earth. There came a “watcher” down from heaven. In Babylonian mythology there were seven “watchers” who were the messengers of the gods, corresponding somewhat to the seven archangels of Jewish traditionary thought. The watcher decreed the cutting down of the tree and the scattering of its fruit and the binding of the forlorn stump with a covering of bronze, fixed with iron clamping rings, to protect it from further damage, until seven times should pass over it, and the living should know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.

In the days of Babylon dreams were considered to have great significance, and it would be a comparatively frequent occurrence for the interpreters to be called before the king to explain the visions he had seen during the previous night. Once the dream was related, an explanation could easily be given in such words that, whatever the outcome, the interpreters would be tolerably sure to preserve their reputation. It is therefore a little surprising to find that in this instance the wise men declined to interpret the dream. A possible reason for this refusal is hinted at in verse 7 of chapter 4, which contains a significant statement by the king. He says, not that they could not, but that they did not, make known to him the interpretation. It is true that in verse 18, when repeating the matter to Daniel, he says that they were not able to make it known, but the impression one has is that this very shrewd judge of men had formed the opinion that the interpreters could have hazarded an interpretation if they wanted to but abstained from doing so for reasons of their own and pleaded ignorance as excuse.

Nebuchadnezzar was probably right in his surmise. The change in his disposition was becoming manifest, and others beside Daniel would be perceiving the impending disaster. Daniel was still chief of the wise men; it might well be that these officials, shirking the duty themselves, left it to their chief to tell the king the truth.

So in the ordinary way, his subordinates having retired, Daniel came in before the king to hear the dream. One can sense the king's relief of mind, in verses 8 and 9, confident that Daniel could and would give him the truth of the matter. The king's own religious views were still warm towards the gods of Babylon and he still credited Daniel with possessing the “spirit of the holy gods”. Daniel, when he heard the details of the dream, was silent and dejected for a long time. It could not have been that he had not foreseen this; he must have known the meaning of the dream as soon it was related; what oppressed Daniel was his realisation that the blow had fallen. The decree had gone forth, and all the glory of a man whom he respected and admired was to be humbled to the dust.

It is in the 19th verse that we have evidence of something almost approaching affection in Nebuchadnezzar's feeling for Daniel. Observing his faithful Minister's distress, he exclaimed “*Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee*”. He was prepared to forego the explanation in order to save his friend distress of mind. This is a very different aspect of the man from that displayed when as a ruthless autocrat he ordered three

men to be cast into the burning fiery furnace, and signed an order for the execution of the wise men of Babylon on a momentary impulse. Even in the midst of that haughtiness and pride which was rapidly driving him to madness, this proud monarch cherished feelings of respect and concern for Daniel. How profound must the influence have been which the latter's integrity and loyalty had exerted upon the heart of this pagan king through the years!

The words gave Daniel his opening. Gently, but firmly, he told the king the import of the dream, and added his own earnest counsel "*Wherefore, O king, let my reason be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity*". Perhaps he had in mind the story of Nineveh of nearly three centuries before, how that they repented at the preaching of the prophet Jonah, and how God repented of the evil which He thought to do, and did it not. Long and earnestly must Daniel have pleaded with the great man, recalling those days in his early life when he had acknowledged the power of the God of heaven, and seen His hand outstretched to save Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace. Daniel would have recalled the king's dream of the great image, and reminded him how that dream had been fulfilled in his rapid conquest of the then known world. But it was all quite evidently of no avail; the sequel shows us that the king remained unrepentant. And so the blow fell.

"*All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking upon (see margin) the great palace.*" It would seem from the use of that word "upon" that this scene took place in the park which has become known as the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon", one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Because Nebuchadnezzar's queen missed the forests and mountains of her native Media, the king had caused to be built within the palace precincts a miniature stretch of wooded hills. Three successive tiers of brick arches, built like three great viaducts piled one on top of another, were erected and covered with earth, so disposed as to make hills and valleys. Upon this foundation the park was laid out, with grass, shrubs and trees, pathways and terraces, and artificial streams which were supplied from the River Euphrates far below by means of some kind of water-raising device. Reared up high above the roof of the palace, commanding a magnificent view of the city, this park with its tree-clad hills appeared from a distance to be suspended between heaven and earth, from which fact it has become known as the "Hanging Gardens". There was no more likely place than this in which the king might be walking when the dread calamity came upon him.

"*And as he walked, he spake, saying "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?" (vs. 20.)*

The words were spoken, and they could not be recalled. Retribution, swift and sure, came out from the outraged holiness of God. "*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 ... 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 eagle's feathers, and his nails like bird's claws.*"

Vivid, life-like words—the testimony of an eye-witness! Who wrote them? Who walked with that magnificent man in those beautiful gardens, looked down with him upon the glorious buildings stretching far below for miles towards the horizon, followed with the eye the silver ribbon of the river as it entered the city precincts, skirted the palace, passed through the dock basin with its ships from Arabia and India, and beyond the massive ramparts to lose itself in the distant fields? Who gazed with him upon the scintillating golden sanctuary at the summit of the great Tower, set like another sun against the blue heavens, six hundred feet above the city; and then, horror-stricken, saw the light suddenly go out of those piercing eyes,

the fine, intelligent face reshape its lineaments to the form of an imbecile, the upstanding figure drop down upon hands and knees, the commanding voice at which kings and warriors had trembled begin to utter strange sounds, grotesquely imitating the beasts of the forest? Who was it sought in vain to restrain those strong hands as they tore the princely raiment to shreds and began grubbing at the roots and herbs of the soil; and then, failing, ran in frantic haste to summon assistance?

It might have been Daniel. It might have been Queen Amytis. There is a familiarity about the usage of the king's name in verse 33 which seems more fitting coming from the queen than from Daniel. It might well be that this most interesting document enshrines the testimony of three people, and that verses 28 to 33 are from the hand of the Babylonian queen.

In any case Daniel would be very quickly on the spot. There was very little that could be done. The physicians would doubtless be trying their cures and the magicians busy attempting to exorcise the demon that had taken possession of the king's person. The sorcerers would be feverishly uttering and muttering their incantations to the same end. Daniel would not interfere. The king's family and his ministers would expect the customary treatment to be given. All was of no avail. Finally the soothsayers would come forward and pronounce the verdict of the omens they had examined; and probably, being wise after the event, would hazard the opinion that the gods had afflicted the king in consequence of some great offence, perhaps insufficient attention to the service of the gods, or even—if Daniel happened to be out of earshot—in displeasure at the king's interest in a foreign god and a foreign Chief Minister. It is hardly likely that the native priesthood would let slip such a golden opportunity of impressing upon the king's family the significance of this act of the great god Bel!

Nebuchadnezzar continued in this state for seven years. It is true that secular historians do not make any reference to this happening. Berosus, the Babylonian historian who was a priest in the Temple of Bel at Babylon some two and a half centuries later, and who had access to all the records when writing his history, does refer vaguely to some strange mystery connected with the end of Nebuchadnezzar's life. One or two other cryptic allusions are met within the works of other writers, but nothing that can reasonably be said to confirm the Bible account. Nor is this surprising. Nebuchadnezzar was himself a member of the secret caste, the Chaldeans. The whole episode, if generally known, was likely to bring the fraternity into disrepute. Even although the priests may have exploited it within the king's family circle to warn the youthful Avil-Marduk against his father's predilection for the Hebrew's God, they would be anxious to suppress the general circulation of the story, and since the historical records of the nation were in the charge of the priests, it is tolerably certain that they took good care to keep private anything of a derogatory nature.

The story as we have it in Daniel 4 bears all the evidences of truth. There is the king's own account of the dream which predicted the disaster, vs. 1-18, to which is added the testimony of his Minister as to their subsequent conversation. Next to this comes the account of the actual happenings, by an eye-witness (28-33) probably Queen Amytis, and finally the king's own acknowledgement of the justice of the infliction and of the omnipotence of God (34-37). It is highly probable that we have here an official document, prepared by the king after his recovery, and intended to place on record for all time his consciousness of his great sin and the mercy of God.

So far as history goes, the last eight or nine years of this king's life are blank. There is nothing recorded concerning him. It would seem that he did not live long after his recovery, probably no more than a year. During his affliction he would be well guarded from harm—in

all probability those same Hanging Gardens which he had built in the day of his pride became the place of his wanderings. There he could roam at will, dwelling with the animals and birds with which it had been stocked, drinking at its streams, sleeping at night in its arbours or on its grassy slopes, free to indulge his disordered fancy but in no danger from wild beast or human enemy. And then, one morning, as the rays of the rising sun lightened the sky and the birds gave their voice in chorus, that unkempt figure crawled forth from its lair with eyes a little less wild; perhaps with face turned up to heaven in mute entreaty; and in a little while *“I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes to heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever”* (vs. 34). *“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”* (vs. 36).

So long as the king lived, even although imbecile, no move could be made to replace him. The queen probably governed as regent, with the aid of Daniel as Chief Minister. Berossus plainly states that in fact she did do so, assisted by her counsellors. The affliction was looked upon as from the gods and their will must not be interfered with. The kingdom must needs wait, either for the king’s recovery or his death. Upon the return of his reason, therefore, he was quickly re-established in his accustomed place, restored to the circle of his family, presiding once again over affairs of state, wielding once more the majestic power of the “head of gold”.

But this time there was a difference. The last verse of chapter 4 shows us an utterly humbled and chastened man. The words are majestic and striking. *“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.”*

They are his last recorded words. The Scriptures tell us no more about King Nebuchadnezzar. They leave him where we would fain have him left, in humble submission to the One eternal God, a better man for the experience.

Was this conversion a lasting one? We do not know. It is worthy of note, however, that these words of his are not only the last the Scriptures records; they are also the last words of his in any records so far discovered. The extensive and voluminous inscriptions written by the king or at his instigation concerning himself and his works stop short about ten years or so before his death. At that time he is still a devoted adherent of the gods of Babylon and a faithful servant of Bel. But this word in Daniel 4, coming from the pen of the king himself, is by ten years the latest personal testimony history can offer. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary we may perhaps be justified in concluding that at the very end of his life Nebuchadnezzar came to see something of the glory of the One true God, the emptiness and vanity of the idols of Babylon, closing an eventful life with more of true peace than perhaps he had ever known.





# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. Jan./Feb. 1972, page 7)

The story of a  
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## 7. Historical Interlude

Three years after Nebuchadnezzar's recovery from his seven years' insanity, his long reign of forty-three years reached its end. He died at probably about seventy-five years of age, and with his death came the change in Daniel's circumstances which marks the division in the narrative. Up to Chapter 4 the story is set entirely in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, during which time Daniel was Chief man in the kingdom. Now, at about sixty-three years of age, Daniel stood by while his royal master's son, Avil-Marduk, ascended the throne, and from that point until the accession of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, the Book of Daniel is silent. When the narrative is resumed, in the first year of Belshazzar, with Daniel's dream of the four great beasts and the coming of the Ancient of Days in Judgment (Daniel Chap. 7) the prophet is no longer chief political Minister of State. He is a private citizen and, as evidenced by the story of Belshazzar's feast, practically unknown to the king and probably to the leading men of the realm. Daniel spent forty years in the limelight, ruling the affairs of the empire of Babylon; then he spent nearly forty years more in measurable obscurity, his good works for the nation forgotten, his wisdom and counsel ignored. But it was during that latter forty years that he had those wonderful revelations from on high which have given the book which bears his name the title of "the Revelation of the Old Testament." The second half of Daniel's life, spent in obscurity, has meant far more to succeeding generations than the first half, stirring though the events of those earlier days are to us as we read them.

In order to fill in this gap in the Biblical narrative we turn for a moment to the records of the tablets. So many thousands of these tablets have been unearthed, many of them dated, that the history of Daniel's Babylon is better known to scholars than that of England in the days of King Alfred. There are dated tablets in the British Museum for every year of the reigns of every king from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar so that the chronology of the period is no longer a matter of dispute.

The great king's son, Avil-Marduk, by all accounts a weak-willed man of no principles, reigned only two years, his reign being characterised by lawlessness and impiety. Jeremiah mentions him once, when in Jer. 52:31-34 he says that in the thirty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, "Evil-Merodach (the Hebrew form of Avil-Marduk) King of Babylon in the first year of his reign" released him from prison and dealt kindly with him. But at the end of two years, one of Nebuchadnezzar's military commanders, Neriglissar, husband of Nebuchadnezzar's eldest daughter, murdered Avil-Marduk and on the basis of his own royal marriage ascended the throne.

Neriglissar (a Greek form of the name) is mentioned in Jer. 39 under the native spelling, Nergal-Sharezer, as having been present at the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in the days of Zedekiah. At that time, according to the Jeremiah account, he occupied the position of Rab-Mag, or master of the magicians, a title which the Book of Daniel indicates afterwards passed to Daniel. Neriglissar reigned three years only, was not particularly conspicuous, and died peacefully at Babylon. He left one daughter, Gigitum, whose marriage contract to a high Court official, Nabushum-ukin, now reposes in a glass case at the British Museum, and a youthful son, Labasi-Marduk, who succeeded him on the throne and after nine months was killed in a palace insurrection.

By this time it is probable that Jehoiachin was dead, but somewhere in Babylon there must have lived his grandson Zerubbabel, the child who at the time of the Return from Exile, now only about twenty years distant, was destined to be the officially appointed Governor of the new Judean state. Zerubbabel figures prominently in the books of Ezra and Zechariah. He was the man who wielded civil power among the people re-gathered to Zion without a king. And somewhere in Babylon there played also another child, Joshua the son of Jehozadek, the legal High Priest of Israel during the captivity, a High Priest without sacrifices, for the sacrifices could be offered only at Jerusalem. Joshua became the first High Priest of regathered Israel, and he too figures prominently in the books of Ezra and Zechariah. So in the time of obscurity which lies between the early and the latter parts of the Captivity, between Daniel the Statesman and Daniel the Seer, we discern dim shadows of those who were to lead God's people after Daniel and all his generation had passed away. That of itself ought to be a sobering thought to us. We experience our own day of service for God and serve with our might while we have strength and opportunity, and then sometimes make frantic efforts to perpetuate the work we have commenced. All the time there is no need; God makes his own arrangements for the continuation of his work, and while our own generation is beginning to lower the torch He is already preparing, perhaps in another place that we wot not of, those who are to do his work in the next generation.

That of itself does not justify our relaxing our efforts in the vineyard we have tended maybe all our lives. Sometimes the new work and old work must progress side by side for a space. "He must increase, but I must decrease" said John the Baptist, speaking of Jesus and the new, greater work He was to do. A goodly company of God's stalwarts have seen their sphere of activity diminish as life draws on, and happy are those who can continue in unabated certainty and confidence despite the decreasing response, all the time that they can find a hearing ear or reverent heart anywhere. Daniel stayed in Babylon and saw visions which have enlightened every generation of the Church, even whilst his younger compatriots, Zerubbabel and Joshua, were actively engaged, away in Jerusalem, laying the foundations of the restored Jewish state.

Returning to Babylon and its Palace intrigues, so like those of any court in any country, then or since; the death of Labasi-Marduk left the way to the throne open to Nabonidus the husband of Nebuchadnezzar's younger daughter Nitocris. Nabonidus was a son of the High Priest of the Moon-god at Haran, the city in the north to which Terah emigrated with his family from Ur of the Chaldees, and from which Abraham set out "not knowing whither he went" to go to Canaan. Nabonidus as a youth had been brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar at about the same time as Daniel himself, and was one of those with Daniel intended to be trained in the wisdom of the Chaldeans. As such he would be included in the young men mentioned in the first chapter of Daniel. The two must have been well acquainted at the start and must have been well known to each other throughout life. When one remembers the high favour in which Daniel had stood with the great king, the fact that his fellow-exile Nabonidus married into the king's family evokes the surmise that Daniel himself might quite likely have had the opportunity, in earlier years, of becoming joined to the royal family by marriage and so eventually ascending the throne of Babylon. He would obviously have been the king's first choice in preference to Nabonidus. If such a proposal ever was made in fact, another evidence of Daniel's sterling allegiance to God is afforded. He would serve faithfully in the place where God had placed him but he would make no alliance with the "people of the land". We can well imagine that to be his attitude.

Nabonidus was a better archaeologist than king; his devouring passion was the collecting of relics of the civilisations that were as much older than his own time as his time is older than ours. After reigning five years, the growing aggressiveness of the Persians under Cyrus demanded a younger man—Nabonidus, like Daniel, was about seventy-five years old by now—and that led him to associate with himself his son Belshazzar as joint king. This event marks what the Book of Daniel calls the “first year of Belshazzar the King”. Nabonidus retired to his museums and archaeological studies, his daughter Bel-shaltinannar was appointed High Priestess of the Moon-god’s Temple at Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham’s birthplace, and Belshazzar, at probably little more than twenty years of age, became the real ruler of Babylon. At this point the Book of Daniel takes up the story again, after a silence of some twenty-five years.

No longer, though, do we see the stage set with the glory and pomp of the royal court, Daniel the statesman, the king’s right hand man, administering and ruling the kingdom. No longer do we hear of mighty acts of faith and noteworthy miracles attesting to all beholders the all-powerful sovereignty of God. There is a difference. We see a darkened stage, the serene light of the moon shining through a window on the form of an old man, head buried in prayer, eyes poring over books, a recumbent form in the quietude of sleep seeing visions of God. We hear messages from another world telling of great events yet to transpire. We glimpse angels coming and going, bearing revelations and mysteries which that same old man is to be the means of leaving on record for all those who in after days would know the things which God is planning to do in the world of men. So it came about that in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, fifty-six years after Daniel first entered the city in which he was to spend his life-time of exile, this faithful servant of God, who had walked step-by-step with God during all those fifty-six years, began to experience the series of revelations which crowned his life’s work. Like John on Patmos two and a half millenniums later, he saw and recorded “things which must shortly come to pass” to the abiding blessing of all who were to come after.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. March/April 1972, page 39)

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## 8. The Beginning of Visions

The seventh chapter of Daniel begins what is virtually an independent book — the book of visions. The first six chapters are histories; they relate events that took place during the space of some seventy years from the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign to the beginning of Cyrus' reign—all the time of the first universal empire, that of Babylon. Chapter 7 goes back some seventeen years, to the first year of Belshazzar the last native king of Babylon, and tells of the visions which came to the aged prophet and have been of such surpassing interest to every generation of "watchers" from that day to this.

At this time Daniel was about seventy-four years of age. His old master and friend, King Nebuchadnezzar, had been dead for eleven years. He was no longer chief of the wise men of Babylon; all his official ranks had gone and he lived as a private citizen, almost certainly among his own fellow-exiles in some residential quarter of the city. His only friend at court was probably Queen Nitocris, younger daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, wife of Nabonidus the reigning monarch, and mother of Belshazzar, who this very year had been promoted to joint-rule with his father. The voice of Ezekiel had been silent for twenty-one years so that although he was only Daniel's age, we do not know whether he was alive or dead. So far as the Book of Daniel itself indicates, the prophet was alone, and in solitude recorded for future generations the vivid vision-pictures with which we as prophetic students have become so familiar.

Here then in the first year of Belshazzar Daniel slept and dreamed. In earlier years the purposes of God had been conveyed to the mind of the great king by means of dreams—the dream of the great image, the dream of the great tree, and Daniel had been employed as the agent in making known to the king the meaning of the dreams. From those dreams we have our first understanding of the Divine arrangement of Gentile Times followed by the setting up of the Kingdom of God. Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome; these are the four successive empires, from Nebuchadnezzar's day to our own, succeeded by the incoming and all-conquering Kingdom of God, pictured by the manlike image of gold, silver, copper and iron. The "Seven Times" during which the tree of the dream was to be bound with iron and copper has been held by many to indicate in symbolic language the duration of those Gentile Times; without embarking on the hazardous seas of chronological speculation it can certainly be admitted that the mystic number 2520, which is the equivalent of symbolic "seven times" is a significant one in the succession of periods which make up human history as it is punctuated by events momentous from the standpoint of the Divine Plan. It cannot be denied that the cycle of 2520 years, from the inception of the "head of gold" empire brings us just about to the present day when it is patent to the most casual observer that the feet of iron are about to collapse into the sea of burning flame and so go into utter destruction, just as is indicated under other symbols in the vision of Daniel 7 which we are now about to examine. We have therefore already a direct connection between the days of Daniel and our own day as the beginning and ending of an epoch in the outworking of God's purposes leading directly to the inauguration of the greatest epoch of all—the Kingdom of God upon earth.

The king's vision was one of human pride and achievement—a colossal image of a man, towering up into the skies. Daniel's dream was of something very different—a manifestation of beast-like forces begotten of chaos, striving together for mastery, and finally disappearing

before the superior power of the Lord from Heaven. There are therefore important lessons for all Christians to be learned from the pictures that flickered across the prophet's sleeping mind on that quiet night in ancient Babylon so many thousands of years ago.

Detailed interpretations of the dream, both Historical and Futurist, are legion and there is no intention here of adding to the number. In a treatise which is descriptive of the life of Daniel in Babylon such detailed interpretation of prophecy would not be altogether in place. But because this treatise is a life of Daniel in Babylon something of what it meant to Daniel and his people at that time, is most decidedly in place, and upon that background the prophetic students may, if they will, proceed to elaborate their interpretations.

*"I saw in my vision by night", says Daniel, "and, behold, the four winds of heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another ..."* (Ch. 7, v. 1). The account goes on to describe the first beast as like a lion with eagles' wings, rearing up on its hind legs in the endeavour to walk as a man, and, too, having a man's heart. Then came a second, like a bear, in a recumbent position, but with one foreleg flexed as though in the act of getting up. Thirdly, a leopard with four heads and four wings, and finally, a beast so alien to all known animals and so terrible in its aspect that Daniel was hard put to it to find words sufficiently descriptive.

The life of the four beasts was brief. There came a great appearance in the heavens, the setting of celestial thrones and the coming of the Most High for judgment; the arraignment of those beasts before him and their condemnation and destruction in the fiery flame. Then the sequel; the advent of a mighty one, the Son of Man, to receive the kingship of earth and rule over it in a kingdom which should never pass away. Four beasts, born of chaos, doomed to destruction, are succeeded by an everlasting kingdom. Taken in conjunction with the earlier vision of the great image, the application and the meaning almost immediately suggests itself.

Daniel had lived in Babylon for more than fifty years, the greater part of his life. He was thoroughly versed in the history, the mythology, and the folk-lore of the Babylonians. He had been Chief of all their wise men, their priesthoods and their philosophers. It would not be surprising therefore if the "background" of his dream, or as we might say, the "setting", had a distinctly Babylonian flavour. In such a manner the meaning and application of the dream would be much more readily grasped by those devout Jews in Babylon who were to be the immediate recipients of this Divine revelation.

The four winds "strove upon the great sea". That expression goes right back to the beginning of Babylonian mythology. The old stories of creation told of a time before the gods had made man, or the solid earth that was man's home, when all was chaos, a dark and dismal abyss in which the winds and waters raged and howled, and nothing had any shape or form. That chaos was personified by the Babylonians and pictured as a terrible monster named Tiamat. When the time of creation drew near, Bel-Marduk the life-giver, the Son of Ea the God of the sea, came forth with his arrows of light to overcome and slay Tiamat and turn the dark chaos into the ordered earth illumined by the light of the sun, preparatory to creating man upon it. All of which, of course, can be traced back pretty clearly to the original truth expressed in Genesis, "In the beginning the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said 'Let there be light' and there was light." And the subsequent work of creation was carried out by One "without whom was not anything made that was made" the only-begotten Son of God.

The Hebrew word for “deep” in Gen. 1:1 is “tehom” which is the Hebrew equivalent of “Tiamat” and is directly derived from that Babylonian word.

So Daniel saw these four beast-like creatures emerging from the darkness and confusion of chaos and of evil. They were not from God; they did not have their origin in the heavens; they came from the earth and from the basest elements of the earth, and because they were thus born of chaos they must sooner or later meet the powers of heaven in mortal conflict, and be overthrown. That at least was the first fundamental truth Daniel drew from this vivid dream.

The first beast was like a lion with eagle’s wings, a familiar creature to Daniel. There were many such in Babylon. Stone lions with eagles’ wings and usually with human heads stood guard at every palace gateway and temple portico. There are two standing at present in the British Museum. Walls, buildings and gateways were adorned with sculptured reliefs of the same creatures. The winged lion was the symbol of Babylon, just as Landseer’s lions in Trafalgar Square are the symbols of Britain. Daniel, seeing that creature in his dream, knew at once and without any doubt that he was looking upon the symbol of the world-empire that had been pictured in the “head of gold” of the image—the empire of Babylon.

But this lion was standing, rearing itself up on its hind legs like a man, whereas the winged lions of Babylon are usually pictured standing on all fours or recumbent. That, too, must have suggested something else to Daniel’s mind. When the lions or other creatures of Babylonian mythology were pictured as rearing up on two legs it was because they were fighting an enemy. So with the lion of Daniel’s dream. It had a man’s heart, the sagacity and intelligence of a man—maybe the outstanding soldier whose skill and sagacity established the empire, Nebuchadnezzar—but it was fighting for its life all the time and eventually it went down before its foes.

Daniel saw that happen in the dream. The A.V. is not quite correct. Vs. 4 should read “I beheld till the wings were plucked *wherewith* it was lifted up from the earth ...” Daniel lived to see the wings plucked.

The second beast was a bear, a beast alien to Babylonian mythology, for there were never any bears in Babylonia. Bears are creatures of the wooded mountains and the land of the two rivers has no mountains and few trees. Here was an alien power which “raised up itself on one side.” That part of the picture would be familiar to Daniel, for the sculptures of Babylon did show animals with one foreleg bent in recumbent position and the other straightened as the beast “rose up to the prey.” So, eventually, Persia, the land of mountains and of bears, the silver breast of the image, sprang upon Babylon, Egypt and Lydia, and devoured them, just as the bear in the vision devoured the flesh from the three ribs it carried in its mouth.

Daniel could not have known, by his own unaided knowledge, what was prefigured by the four-winged and four headed leopard, the third beast of his dream. Very possibly though his mind was enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so that in some dim way he was able to see into futurity and sense something of the swiftly-moving armies of Greece which spread the third empire so rapidly over the four quarters of the world, and when it had reached its widest limits at the death of Alexander the Great, became divided into four realms under four heads. It remained for later historians to show how accurately the march of events fitted the circumstances of the dream.

Then came the fourth beast, “dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth ... and it had ten horns.” This beast was evidently unlike any known earthly animal and its aspect was such as to strike terror into the beholder. This was the beast which figured most prominently in the Divine judgment shortly to come, and with that hint as to

its continued existence right up until the time of that judgment it is not surprising that most students think of Rome, the successor of Greece in world rulership, destined to rule until the Son of Man should come in the glory of his Kingdom and sweep away every vestige of man's rule from the earth. According to Daniel, this beast more than them all was the enemy of God's saints and made war against them; this, said the angel, shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth and shall not only prevail over the saints but shall speak blasphemy against the Most High and prevail during the mystic period of trial and persecution, the time, times and half a time, the twelve hundred and sixty days which always betokens oppression, persecution and testing of the faithful, in God. One wonders if this strange and terrible beast which Daniel saw in his vision was in fact the dragon or serpent of Babylon, the mysterious *sirrussu*, whose form is so often seen on the sculptures of that ancient city. That was a creature like nothing known in Nature. The four bronze serpents guarding the gateway of the Temple of Bel-Marduk in Babylon were *sirrussu*. More than anything else that mythical creature symbolised the power of evil and the archangel of evil, the Devil himself, and when in the Scriptures the dragon or the serpent is mentioned it is always this strange and terrible beast that is in mind. From Daniel to Revelation there is the same idea made prominent; the dragon of ancient Babylon is manifest in that great power which for twenty out of the twenty-five centuries of Gentile Times has wielded its crushing iron rule over the nations and persecuted the saints of God.

But this was not the end of the dream. The forces of heaven were moving to judgment and away in the celestial realm the outraged holiness of God was ready now to sweep back into the oblivion of chaos all these beast-like systems which for so long had usurped his domain.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. May/June 1972, page 57)

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## 9. The Ancient of Days

*"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit."* (Ch. 7, vs. 9).

One of the most pregnant sentences in the whole of the Bible! Into those few brief words Daniel infused all the longing and all the hopes and all the faith which had sustained him through so many years. One day God would arise in judgment, and then all for which the righteous had waited would be theirs. The long captivity of man to the dominion of sin and death, his long submission to oppressive evil powers, would be at an end, and the saints of the Most High would possess the kingdom, and rule in equity and justice for ever and ever.

This, the second part of the dream, leaves the actors in the first part still standing on the stage. The four beasts are still there; the fourth, strange and terrible, the latest to rise, dominating the other three certainly, but all four are still there. And now Daniel perceives a gathering tumult in the heavens. The sable curtain of night is lightening; a vivid golden radiance is banishing the blackness. The dark night-clouds turn dimly red and then break out suddenly into blazing cascades of fire, pouring down upon the earth and swelling into a fiery river which threatens to bear away all obstacles in its course. From above that plunging, leaping curtain of light there appears a waving field of white, an army of angels, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousands upon ten thousands, winging their way fast to earth, growing more clear and more perceptible as each second passes. Then the roaring of the thunder, the vivid, searing lightning, and behind those speeding angels a majestic Appearance before which Daniel must have prostrated himself in reverence and awe; he knew well that no man look upon the face of God, and live. But presently a calm, heaven-sent confidence took hold of him and he looked up to see the Ancient of Days, in all the dignity of kingly power and all the purity of his awful holiness, seated upon his Throne of judgment. The Time of the End had come and the Judge was in his place, the Assizes of Heaven about to begin.

In those first few seconds before the vision passed again into the movement of action Daniel had time to see that there were other, lesser, thrones surrounding that upon which was seated the Supreme Judge, the Ancient of Days. It is not so stated in verse 9, but implied by later verses, (18 and 22), that those thrones were occupied by "the saints of the Most High" waiting to take their destined place in the whole sequence of activities and events that was to be associated with this imminent judgment. The force of this aspect of the vision is obscured by the usual English meaning of "cast down". *"I beheld till the thrones were cast down"* says the Authorised Version, and it is usually tacitly assumed that Daniel referred to the fall of earthly thrones and kingships at this Time of the End in consequence of Divine judgment. That is not what was intended. The term "cast down" in the original has the significance of being set down or placed firmly in position. This usage appears in the English word "cast" for making solid, firm objects from fluid materials, as in the case of "cast" iron, an object made solid by "casting" from molten metal. The reference here in Daniel 7 is to judicial seats as in Psa. 122:5, "For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David" and Matt. 19:28, "Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." There is no suggestion anywhere in the Scriptures that the angels are assessors in the judgment; in the vision they are attendants upon the Ancient of Days but not occupants of the thrones, and the only reasonable view we can take of the vision is that Daniel



saw the “saints of the Most High” seated in the presence of God and ready to play their own destined part in the drama of judgment. That fact should help considerably in placing the time of the fulfilment of the vision.

But as yet the saints on their thrones had no part to play. The focal point of the vision shifted again to the earth, to the earth before the Throne, where stood the four beasts of the vision. The books were opened and the judgment began; the fourth beast, the terrible, unnatural one, was first condemned, and before Daniel’s fascinated eyes was slain and its body cast into the blazing river which still cascaded down from the glory of God and ran, a fiery torrent, away into the darkness of oblivion. The other beasts were not slain immediately; they were deprived of their dominion, but “their lives were prolonged for a season and time.” Now this expression as it stands can be productive of misunderstanding, as though these three beasts were granted a kind of indefinite lease of life, whereas the truth is the reverse. The word “prolonged” in the Hebrew means to assign or cut off to a determined length. The expression “season and time” in the A.V. is based on the old English expression “till a time and tide”, which was a phrase indicative of a fixed and irrevocable point of time which could by no means be exceeded (hence the English proverb “*Time and tide wait for no man*”). What Daniel tells us in verse 12, therefore, is that the fourth beast was slain at once and the other three, after being deprived of their dominion, sentenced to die at a certain fixed time not stated but already determined in the mind of the Judge.

Again the prophet’s eyes turned heavenward. Somehow or other he realised in his dream that now was to come an important event in the sequence of happenings which he was witnessing, for at this juncture (verse 13) he repeats the expression, “*I saw in the night visions*” as though to mark this point with some special indication. Looking back at his words from the standpoint of our later Christian knowledge, the significance of this stage in the symbolism is clear enough, for in lifting up his eyes to heaven, Daniel saw “one like the Son of man” coming “with the clouds of heaven.” That expression is so familiar a one to Christians that we immediately think of the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ for the dual purpose of gathering His Church, and setting up the earthly Kingdom which is to be the desire of all nations: and that, not unnaturally, is the interpretation which is usually and immediately placed upon this verse in Daniel 7. The application seems so obvious that several discordant features are often overlooked, and it may come as somewhat of a shock to realise that the usual interpretation is not quite so fitting as is thought.

In the first place the saints are already, in the vision, seated on their thrones of judgment in the presence of the Ancient of Days, observing the execution of judicial sentence upon the four beasts, and this *before* the “Son of Man” appears with the clouds of heaven. In the second place this “Son of Man” coming with the clouds of heaven, does not descend to the earth but is brought into the presence of the Ancient of Days, to receive a royal investiture, and a kingdom. And in the third place—and this is important to a right view of the vision—the expression “the Son of Man” in the A.V. is not a correct rendering of the original. Daniel actually said that he saw “one like a son of man”, i.e. one like a human being, in contrast to the Deity above and the beasts below: this man-like being, then ushered into the presence of God and awarded the kingdom of the earth. The translators, reasoning back from their New Testament theology, rendered “*the Son of Man*” instead of “*a son of man*,” forgetting that in Daniel’s day the phrase “Son of Man” as applied to the Messiah was completely unknown and could have had no possible meaning.

Daniel, then, saw a man coming with the clouds of heaven, as contrasted with the raging sea which only brought forth beasts. Daniel and his people had no knowledge of the Messiah,

no conception of a Son of God who would exercise all power in heaven and earth as the active agent of the Father's purposes. The prevalent understanding of the Kingdom was that God Himself would intervene and destroy evil nations and all evil, and exalt His people Israel. It was for this that Daniel looked and prayed, and in the vision of the Ancient of Days he must have found his expectations fully realised.

This addition to the vision, therefore, this introduction of another being, one like an earthly man and yet coming from heaven, to receive and administer the Kingdom, started a new line of enquiry in Daniel's mind. This was something he had not thought of before. Like others nearly six hundred years later he must have asked himself "Who is this Son of Man?" That is probably the reason for Daniel's admission at the end of the account (vs. 28) "*As for me, Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me ... but I kept the matter in my heart.*" He began to perceive that there was going to be more in this question of the fulfilment of God's promise to overthrow evil and introduce everlasting righteousness than his studies in the Scriptures had until then revealed to him, and, devoted student that he was, he gave this new development serious thought.

We have the advantage, now, of seeing why the vision entered into this aspect. It was on the basis of this chapter and the picture of the relationship between the "Ancient of Days" who awarded the Kingdom and the "Son of Man" who received the Kingdom that our Lord assumed and used the title "Son of Man". It could have come from no other source and the Jews were aware of that fact. (The use of the same expression in the Book of Ezekiel is not in the same category: the Almighty habitually addressed Ezekiel as "Son of man" in allusion to the fact that he was, in fact, a human being, with no prophetic or symbolic implication whatever. The suggestion sometimes made that in the New Testament the Greek phrase is "the Son of *the* man" referring to Jesus' natural descent from "*the* man", Adam, is based upon misapplication of Greek grammar and does not deserve to be taken seriously.) When Jesus proclaimed himself to be "the Son of Man" all who heard him would instantly connect his claim with the vision of Daniel and understand his words accordingly. This is very clearly shown when in answer to the High Priest's question at his trial, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?", he replied "*I am; and thou shalt see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*" (Mark 14:61-62). That was the statement and the claim that sealed his fate: he had declared that he was the One seen by Daniel in the vision.

That the Jews of Daniel's day and immediately afterwards clearly perceived the vision to teach that one who in some manner was associated with men and made like man, yet a heavenly being, would thus stand in the presence of God and receive from His hands the Kingdom, is very evident. The Book of Enoch, written several centuries after Daniel's time, has much to say about the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days and that is a good guide to Jewish thought. The coming of the Son of Man to execute the Divine will in the days of the Kingdom was an accepted part of Jewish theology in the days of Jesus.

We are left, then, with the plain fact that in Daniel the coming of the Son of Man "with the clouds of heaven" takes place *after* the Ancient of Days has pronounced judgment on the beasts and *after* the "people of the saints of the Most High" have taken their places on their thrones to observe the execution of that judgment. As the chapter proceeds, we find that the kingdom, and dominion, is given to the "Son of man" and to the "saints" simultaneously. Both receive the kingdom: both rule and exert authority in association the one with the other.

In the reality it must be accepted therefore that New Testament references to the coming of the Lord in the clouds of heaven (such as Rev. 1:5; Matt. 16: 64 etc.) must generally refer to a time after the Church has been gathered and after the kingdoms of this world have fallen and been destroyed. They must refer to the latest and most spectacular phase of the Second Advent, the commencement of the reign of Christ and the Church and His revealing to all mankind, the time that is sometimes spoken of as “the Kingdom in power.” The appearance of one like a Son of Man in Daniel’s dream symbolises the last event in the series of events which characterise the transition from the kingdoms of this world to the Kingdom of God, the period of the Second Advent.

So the vision ended where all such visions ought to end, in the light and glory of the Kingdom. The four wild and terrible beasts had been destroyed and obliterated; the raging sea had disappeared. As with John in Revelation “there was no more sea”. In its place the powers of heaven had taken control of earth and the light and glory of the Son of Man irradiated the whole world and gave promise of the peace and joy that was to be. There is quite a close connection between this vision of Daniel 7 and that later one of the Apostle John in Revelation 19 and 21 in which, after the destruction of the beasts of the earth, the kings and their armies, and the disappearance of the sea, the New Jerusalem comes down to earth with the glory of God and of the Lamb to enlighten it.

There the ancient prophet left the matter. For two more years we hear nothing of him until, in the third year of King Belshazzar, he dreamed again. But this time the dream was not of distant golden days but of things near at hand. The empire of Babylon was nearing its end, and it was meet that Daniel be instructed in the events that were soon to come.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. July/August 1972, page 81)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 10. The Beginning of the End

It was two years after Daniel's dream of the four world-empires, in the guise of four ravenous wild beasts, that the aged prophet's eyes were opened again. Perhaps it was the quickening tempo of political events around him that sharpened the old man's faculties and enabled him to apply himself more devotedly to the leading of the Spirit. For more than ten years past the name of a military leader, Cyrus of Anshan, descendant of the kings of Elam, had been familiar to him as it was to all dwellers in Babylon. Cyrus with his armies was rapidly bringing all the lands of the Middle East into subjection to the rising power of the Medes, who with the Babylonians had destroyed Assyria some hundred years previously and in the days of Nebuchadnezzar had ranked as a friendly power to Babylon. Queen Amytis, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, was herself a princess of Media. But Nebuchadnezzar had been dead now for thirteen years and Queen Amytis was destined to follow him only a year after this particular vision of Daniel, and Cyrus had ambitious designs on Babylon. His army was engaged in the siege of Sardis, capital of Lydia, the only power beside Babylon which remained unsubdued, and Daniel, astute politician that he was, must have known that Babylon's turn could not be much longer delayed.

So it is not surprising that in the eighth chapter of Daniel we are taken right into the centre of the happenings which were to transfer the sovereignty of the world first from Babylon to Medo-Persia, and then from Medo-Persia to Greece. This vision and this prophecy is one of the easiest in the whole of the Bible to interpret for the reason that its application is given by the revealing angel in terms of the plain names of the countries concerned. The correspondence with history is so marked that there can be no doubt about the matter. The factor that requires a little more thought, and yet is of greater importance than the interpretation, is the question: of what value is this strictly "history-book" prophecy to us? But that question can be looked at after we have considered the vision itself.

According to chap. 8, verse 2, Daniel was "*at Shushan the palace in the province of Elam*". It is fairly obvious from the text that he was there only "in the spirit," not literally. Elam and Babylon were virtually in a state of war at this time and Daniel could hardly have been in the capital city of the enemy. He might very well have been a visitor in his earlier years when the two countries were on friendly terms; official business might well have taken him thither, so that it may not be at all strange to think of him seeing, in his dream, surroundings which were already familiar, and realising, perhaps for the first time, that here was a future stage for later acts of the Divine Plan when Babylon had ceased to be a power in the hands of God. Shushan eventually became the capital city of Persia, and was the home of Queen Esther and the scene of the events narrated in the Book of Esther, some seventy years later on.

The vision itself was a vivid and clear-cut one, easily remembered because of its simplicity and restrained symbolism. A ram, having horns of unequal length, the higher coming up last, was butting its way irresistibly west, north and south—obviously therefore coming from the east—until it stood supreme and none challenged its authority. For a moment Daniel saw it thus, and then beheld a furious he-goat bearing one great horn advancing from the west, charging the ram, casting it to the ground, and stamping upon it. So the he-goat in its turn stood supreme.

Now the great horn was broken and in its place there grew up four smaller horns; but the force and power of the goat was not the same; it was spent. Then there appeared, budding out from one of those horns, a little horn, a little horn which began to wax greater and greater, turning itself toward the east and the south, and towards the land which was always in Daniel's heart, the land of Israel. With that thought the background of the vision changed, and Daniel realised that the horn was some strong power that would arise; he saw that power reaching up to heaven as though to challenge God in His own domain, and tearing down some of the stars from heaven, and stamping upon them.

Now Daniel was in the land of his desires, standing in the holy city Jerusalem, and beheld the Temple of his longings, rebuilt and purified, the morning and evening sacrifices offered in their due order by the appointed priests according to the law of Moses, the fulfilment of all that he had waited and sought through so many long years. Here, at last, was the answer to his prayers. And he watched until that godless power revealed itself a ruthless despot which led its followers to bring to an end those morning and evening sacrifices, to profane and defile the holy Temple, to destroy and cast down all that was sacred to the One God, and persecute and slay those who maintained their loyalty and their faith.

So the prophet's hopes and short-lived joys were dashed as he saw the fair vision of Zion's glory crumble again into the dust and ashes of a ruined Temple and scattered people, as his fellows in Judea had seen it happen in reality forty years before. But that was all in the past, and God had promised that He would restore Israel and dwell again with them in the Holy place; this vision spoke of the future, and declared the heart-breaking truth that after that restoration had become an accomplished fact and Israel had been delivered from captivity, the forces of evil would again prevail. With what painful intensity must Daniel have listened for the answer to the angel's question (vs. 13), "*For how long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?*" For what further long period of time must the desolation of the sanctuary and the oppression of God's people persist, before the final consummation of eternal glory for Israel? It was a gleam of hope; the desolation was not to be for ever; and Daniel listened anxiously for the answer.

*"Unto two thousand and three hundred evening-mornings; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."*

Two thousand three hundred omissions of the daily morning and evening offerings of the sacrificial lamb. After that the oppressor's hand would be lifted, the profaned and defiled Temple be ceremonially purified and re-dedicated and then the worship of God be resumed without let or hindrance. That was the message to Daniel and that the end of the vision proper. At that point the revealing angel came forward to explain to Daniel what it was all about.

*"The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia."* That is a plain, categorical statement admitting of no argument. The higher horn, which came up last, is plainly Persia. Media as an empire came into existence at the death of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in 711 B.C., when the Medes revolted from Assyrian domination and established themselves as an independent kingdom under Deioces. Persia owed its rise largely to Cyrus more than a hundred and fifty years later, but in fact Persia did not become the acknowledged dominant factor in the Medo-Persian partnership until the time of Darius Hystaspes, the third king after Cyrus. Hence "the higher came up last." Daniel was perfectly familiar with the political set up of the nations in his own day and he would readily grasp the significance of this part of the vision. Next he was brought face to face with something that

was still two centuries future, the overthrow of the Persian empire by Greece. *“The rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between the eyes is the first king.”* That king is known in history; he was Alexander the Great, who led the Greeks into Asia round about the year 330 B.C. and subdued every nation in his path to the frontiers of India—and died at Babylon on his return journey a few years later. Thus was the great horn broken, even as the prophecy foretold, and the empire built up by Alexander in those few years was divided between four of his leading generals. *“Now that being broken, whereas four (horns) stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.”* Continued strife between contending leaders, ambitious for power, was resolved at last in the formation of four separate kingdoms something like twenty-two years after Alexander’s death. Macedonia passed into the control of Cassander; Thrace; to Lysimachus; Syria, Judah, Babylon and Persia, to Seleucus, and Egypt to Ptolemy. Israel was sandwiched between Syria in the north and Egypt in the south and her fortunes were heretofore bound up with these two contending powers. On this basis is built the further prophecies in Daniel picturing warfare between the “king of the north” and the “king of the south.”

Up to this point this vision follows and amplifies both Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great image and Daniel’s dream of the four wild beasts, but whereas those dreams only showed the succession of four empires, gold, silver, copper, iron; and lion, bear, leopard, and strange beast, this vision gives certain distinctive details of the second and third empires and distinguishes them by name. In verse 22 of chap. 8 therefore we are brought in history to about the year 300 B.C. by which time the contending factions in the break-up of Alexander’s empire had settled their differences and the four kingdoms were more or less firmly established.

Now the revealing angel ceases to use definite names. The “little horn” which came out of one of the four horns is defined as a fierce king who will arise “in the latter time” of these four kingdoms and will be manifested as an enemy of God and a defiler of the sanctuary, but at the end he “shall be broken without hand,” and it is here that possible interpretations vary. The most natural understanding of the expression *“in the latter time of their kingdom”* would appear to be the virtual ending of this four-kingdom set-up and its replacement by the fourth empire of prophecy, Rome, the iron of the image and the strange beast in Daniel’s dream. In point of fact three of the kingdoms —Macedonia, Thrace and Egypt—were all absorbed by Rome during the century before the birth of Christ. Of the fourth, Syria and the terrain west of the Euphrates were added to the Roman Empire at the same time but the eastern provinces of the “king of the north”—Assyria, Babylon, Persia,—never did become part of Rome, but merged instead into the not inconsiderable empire of Parthia, the one great power Rome never did subdue. Parthia in turn disappeared before the Saracen armies early in the Christian era. It would seem therefore that the “little horn” in the “latter time of their kingdom” (the four-kingdom quartette), must have arisen during that century or so during which Rome was pressing inexorably upon them.

If this be conceded, there is not much doubt that Antiochus Epiphanes, the greatest oppressor of the Jews ever known, who ruled Syria and Judah round about the year 170 B.C., is the “fierce king” to whom the angel referred. Prophetic writers have described his conduct in such detail that there is no need to repeat it here; the Jews themselves have never been in any doubt as to his place in this prophecy. Antiochus launched a furious persecution against Jewish worship; he plundered the Temple and desecrated it by offering a sow upon the Brasen Altar; this was the defilement from which the sanctuary was later to be cleansed. Plenty of calculations exist interpreting the two thousand three hundred days as the literal

number of days—about three and a half years—during which the Temple was to lie defiled. It is a fact that the cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus in 165 B.C. was approximately three and a half years after its defilement in 168 B.C. The two thousand three hundred “evening-mornings”—repetitions of the evening and morning sacrifice—is equal to eleven hundred and fifty literal days, and this was approximately, but only approximately, the interval between defilement and cleansing. So far as can be discovered from the histories of the period, the actual time was about eleven hundred and ninety-two days.

That is the natural and most obvious interpretation, carrying the prophetic thread to within two centuries of the First Advent, and no farther. Other systems of interpretation identify the “little horn” with Rome, with the irruption of the Turkish power from Central Asia, with Mahomet and the Moslem religion, with the Papacy, and so on. These presentations will not be examined here. Suffice it that Daniel perceived from this vision the probably very unwelcome truth that even though Israel be delivered from the power of Babylon and Jerusalem be restored, the days of Israel’s darkness were not ended; trouble and distress were yet to be their lot because of renewed unfaithfulness and apostasy. The end of all evil and the time of the kingdom were still a long way off.

The realisation came slowly. Even yet Daniel was not permitted to perceive the detail of wars and rumours of wars which were to fill the long Gospel Age and terminate in a time of trouble which had not been since there was a nation. That was reserved for his final vision, the one that is recorded in his tenth to twelfth chapters, and that vision was vouchsafed him something like fifteen years after the one we are now considering. Slowly, throughout the whole of his long life, Daniel was brought to realise that the ways of God, sure and unchangeable though they be, require for their accomplishment what seems, to the mind of man, long and sometimes weary terms of years. One little human life is a very short span in the vast time-scale of the Creator’s outworking purpose.

Perhaps that is the real lesson for us in Daniel chapter 8. Whether the little horn is descriptive of Antiochus or Mahomet, or of both; whether the mystic 2300 represents literal days or symbolic years, or only evenings and mornings, half-days, is all of very little consequence compared with the great central truth embedded in this chapter. The downfall of the Gentile powers which oppressed Old Testament Israel, the return of the captives to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of their Temple and their city, would not of itself abolish evil and bring in everlasting righteousness. Righteous zeal and true worship would flourish again, but it would flag and fade. Apostasy and iniquity would certainly return, and with it the distress and oppression which under Israel’s covenant was the logical and inevitable consequence. Again must the rod of the Lord be wielded, and whether that rod be Antiochus the scourge of Israel or Mahomet the scourge of Christendom matters little, for the principle is the same. Both Daniel’s people and all the world must needs wait for two great things, both of which are necessary to bring in the golden age for which Daniel longed. One is the First Advent and the other the Second Advent. In visions yet to come Daniel was destined to see each of those great events pictured, and only with both of them accomplished facts did he at last see the glad vision of resurrection.

So it must be with us. We have been privileged, as Daniel was never privileged, to realise the work of the First Advent in the past and completed. We are privileged to know that we live in the days of the Second Advent but we do not see the work of that Advent completed—in fact it is scarcely begun. Like Daniel, we still do not know “how long.” Blessed are we if, again like Daniel, we rest firm in our conviction that, though it tarry, “it will surely come, it

will not tarry.” Even though, still like Daniel, we are destined first to “rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.” Daniel died in Babylon without ever seeing that for which his heart had waited his whole life long; we, like so many of our forebears in the past, may have to do the same. Happy we if, notwithstanding that, we are found steadfast in faith until the end.





# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. Sept./Oct. 1972, page 99)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 11. Belshazzar's Feast

The Feast of Belshazzar is one of the best-known incidents of Scripture to the man in the street. This pagan orgy, interrupted at its height by the mysterious fingers of doom writing their dread sentence on the wall of the banqueting hall, presaging utter disaster soon to come, has gripped the imagination of men in every age and in every land to which the story has penetrated. To such an extent is this true that the expression "the writing on the wall" has passed into a popular proverb, and nowadays many men use it habitually to describe the foreshadowing of events soon and certain to come perhaps without even knowing from what source the expression is derived.

The seventeenth year of the reign of Nabonidus and the twelfth year of his son Belshazzar's joint reign with him was destined to see the end of the Babylonian empire, the "head of gold" of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The armies of Cyrus had been abroad in the land for six years past and were now fast closing in on the doomed city. Nearly two centuries previously the prophet Isaiah had foreseen this day and spoken of this man by name. *"Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him ... I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives ... he is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure ..."* (Isa. 44:28 and 45:1-13).

Although, in the days of Babylon, Persia was still an obscure province in the powerful empire of Media and owed allegiance to the kings of the Medes, yet for twenty years before Babylon's fall Cyrus the Persian had been steadily making himself the most powerful figure in the kingdom and by his military prowess had become in fact if not in name, the virtual ruler of Media. The second year of Belshazzar, when Daniel saw the vision of the two-horned ram, the greater horn coming up last, representing the kings of Media and Persia, commenced only a few months after Cyrus had waged successful war against Astyages the king of Media. Although Cyrus left a semblance of royalty to the defeated monarch, he was the real ruler from then on. As time passed, the victories of Cyrus reduced every country except Babylon to subjection, and the young king Belshazzar was left increasingly to guard the city of Babylon whilst his father Nabonidus led his armies in the field against the Persian invader.

Daniel lived in the city during this period but evidently no longer held any kind of official Court office or rank. He was merely a private citizen. Belshazzar, not more than twenty years of age at his accession, was surrounded by an entirely different class of advisers. Historians describe him as weak, dissolute and licentious, and the story of the feast bears out that description. Daniel, comparing this youth's character with that of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, probably realised that even from the natural viewpoint the kingly dynasty of Babylon had had its day and could not stand for much longer against the disciplined energy of the invaders. Knowing how the outcome had already been prophesied by both Isaiah and Jeremiah in past years, and revealed to himself in more recent times, he must have waited calmly for the inevitable climax.

That climax came in the year 538 B.C. The Babylonian troops in the field were defeated and Nabonidus besieged in Borsippa, fourteen miles from Babylon. One of Cyrus' generals, Gubaru, marched swiftly to Babylon and laid siege to the city. And at that crucial time in the fortunes of the empire Belshazzar the king chose to hold a State banquet.

*“Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father (grandfather) Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein ... they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.”* (Ch 5, v. 1-4).

Small wonder that Babylon fell so easily, when the man to whom had been entrusted its defence so dissipated the crucial hours. The enormous main hall of the royal palace shone with a blaze of light, the scintillating radiance from its many lamps illuminating the sculptured walls and the rich hangings. At the long tables sat the many guests, the nobility and gentry of Babylon, careless of the future, intent only on indulging themselves to the full in the encouragement offered them by the gay youth who was their king. Up on the dais, at the richest table of them all, sat Belshazzar himself with his Court favourites and his wives and concubines, leading the revels into ever wilder scenes of excess and debauchery. In a final gesture of profanity he ordered the sacred vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem to be brought before him, to be defiled by liquor drunk to the honour of the false gods of Babylon.

The order given, the feast proceeded. The Temple of Bel-Marduk, the god of Babylon, in which those vessels had been placed by Nebuchadnezzar sixty years before, was nearly a mile from the palace and the messengers might well have had some difficulty in persuading the custodian priests to surrender their treasures. It might have been an hour later that they returned with their burden, an hour during which the silent, relentless Median soldiers steadily continued surrounding the city.

So the cups and flagons which once had ministered to the worship of God in his own Temple at Jerusalem were set out in that godless assembly and made the instruments of a wild orgy in which every false god known to the Babylonians—and they were many—was praised and venerated. The chaste craftsmanship which had been consecrated to the touch of holy priestly fingers became sullied now by the grasp of hands steeped in every kind of vice and immorality. And Heaven, looking down, uttered its decree: “This is the end.”

*“In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote against the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.”* (Vs. 5).

The exactitude of Scripture is a constant marvel to the reverent mind. The remains of the Great Hall of the Royal Palace of Babylon are still there for anyone to inspect—ruined walls about four feet high enclosing a room a hundred and fifty feet long by fifty feet wide, the floor covered with the rubble and broken brickwork of the ruined building just as it has lain there for thousands of years—and mingled with the rubble there are pieces of white plaster, plaster which once covered those walls, the plaster mentioned in this verse, upon which those mysterious fingers wrote that fateful message. All who were present at that feast have long since returned to their dust; the empire which was theirs is no more; the glory that was Babylon has utterly passed away; but the white plaster upon which the cryptic message appeared that night in the year 538 B.C. lies still under the ruins, mute witness to the integrity and accuracy of the narrative we are following.

What deathly hush must have silenced that riotous assembly as the eyes of all present followed the king’s terrified gaze to the point high upon the wall where those fingers from another world deliberately traced their message. The brightly burning lamps cast the full brilliancy of their light upon the spot; this was no optical illusion, no trick of shadow and flickering flame. This was reality; there really was something up there, inscribing words of

mysterious import. What could it mean? What strange intervention of the gods was this? Faces that a few moments ago had been flushed with wine now took on an unnatural pallor. Women who had been impudently flaunting their charms now drew their robes tightly around them and shivered. And still the hand wrote on.

“MENE; MENE; TEKEL; U-PHARSIN”. The strange inscription stood revealed in its entirety. The hand was gone, but the characters remained, incised deeply into the plaster, written in the wedge-shaped cuneiform characters of Babylon. *“Numbered; Numbered; Weighed; Divided.”* The words themselves were simple, everyday words; it was the circumstances of their appearance which affected the superstitious pagan king so that his *“countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.”* Perhaps, at last, he began to recall the stories he had been told of the marvellous happenings that had taken place in the days of his royal grandfather, when the Most High God intervened to save his servants from the fiery furnace, and made the proud king like unto a beast, and restored him again a chastened man. Perhaps, too late, he thought of the Median army outside the city, and of his own father in their power. He looked again at the mystic writing, and shivered.

The customary routine was put into operation. Before long, that motley assembly, the astrologers, the wise men, the soothsayers, were all trooping into the hall to go through the familiar rigmarole. This particular problem should have been well within their province; the explanation of a few words that no one else present could understand would normally have been easy work for these gentlemen. But on this occasion the usual glib exposition was not forthcoming. Verse 8 says that “they could not read the writing,” but this can hardly mean that they failed to comprehend a few Babylonian words written in Aramaic. Their normal educational level would have been quite equal to that. What is more likely the meaning of the phrase is that they could “make no sense” of the words themselves and, feeling that there was something behind this occurrence beyond their own understanding, preferred to have nothing to do with the matter. And that put King Belshazzar into a greater panic than he was in before.

It would seem that the hubbub and confusion into which the feast had degenerated came to the ears of the queen, and she made it her business to come in person to the banqueting hall (verse 10). This queen was the wife of Nabonidus, who was the true king at the time, their son Belshazzar having been associated with his father twelve years earlier and given the title of joint king. Nitocris was the younger daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and it was by reason of her marriage to Nabonidus, who was not of royal blood, that the latter became king. In the days of her childhood she would of course have been closely acquainted with Daniel, some fifteen years her senior, as he attended on her royal father, and the glowing eulogy of Daniel’s wisdom and understanding which is accredited to her in verses 11 and 12 indicates that Nitocris had by no means lost her esteem and respect for her father’s one-time Chief Minister.

Belshazzar eagerly accepted his mother’s advice, and Daniel was summoned to the palace. For more than twenty years he had been out of public life, and by now was evidently quite unknown at Court. This much is evident by the form of the king’s greeting to Daniel when the aged prophet now about eighty-four years of age at length entered his presence. The first panic had probably subsided, but there would certainly be considerable anxiety mingled with the interest with which the assembled company looked upon this grave and dignified man of God, now standing in their midst.

Did Daniel's mind go back to that other scene in this same hall, nearly forty years earlier, when it had been his stern duty to proclaim the imminent judgment of God upon a previous king of Babylon, to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the tree, followed by his royal master's seven years of madness? But that judgment had been lifted and the king restored to his former glory. This time there would be no restoration; the disease was incurable; this was the end. The hour of doom had struck, and Babylon must surely fall.

The king offered honours to Daniel if he could interpret the writing; he should be "the third ruler in the kingdom" (verse 16). This is another unwitting testimony to the accuracy of the narrative, for Nabonidus was first and Belshazzar second in the kingdom, so that to be the third was the highest honour Belshazzar could offer. Quietly and respectfully Daniel indicated that he did not need gifts and rewards as inducement; he would, unconditionally, make known the interpretation. But before doing so, Daniel had something else to say.

*"O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father (grandfather) a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour ..."* In measured tones the prophet recapitulated the glory and power that had come to King Nebuchadnezzar, and then told how that when his heart was lifted up in pride, he was deposed, and driven from among men and made to dwell with the beasts, until he learned his lesson and knew that the Most High is the ruler of men and disposer of the affairs of nations. Then came the tremendous accusation *"and thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this ..."* There was no excuse of ignorance; Daniel found no redeeming feature in the position. The king was guilty, and it remained but to pass sentence. It is significant that when Daniel interpreted the dream of the tree to Nebuchadnezzar he put in a plea for repentance and change of conduct; *"it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity"*; but to Belshazzar he addressed no word of hope or advice. He knew that the Divine decree had gone forth and could not be recalled, and he spoke in the light of that knowledge.

Now he turned to the mystic words, still showing up sharp and clear in the lamplight. He needed no supernatural guidance to understand their import and he did not have to retire to prayer to ask for the interpretation. Daniel's vision of the four world empires pictured by four wild beasts was twelve years in the past and during all those twelve years he had seen the enemy pressing more and more heavily upon Babylon. He knew the inherent weakness and corruption of Babylon and that Nabonidus, a rather indecisive man of over eighty years of age, and Belshazzar, a weak and dissolute monarch, were totally incapable of defending the empire against the active and war-like Cyrus. He knew that the enemy troops were outside the city, and the mysterious words glowed with meaning as he looked upon them.

MENE—measured. *"God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it."* The word in Babylonian commercial usage meant to measure an article and cut it off to a determined length or size, or to measure out an agreed sum of money to conclude a bargain. Here, on this fateful night, the empire of Babylon, the "head of gold" of the image, had run its full length and was to be cut off without compunction.

TEKEL—weighed. *"Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."* A personal word to the king, that Daniel had only to look around him at the evidences of the orgy which had been so abruptly interrupted, and reflect that this man should by right have been actively engaged in the defence of his city, to find the right words which fitted this part of the inscription.

PERES. Most readers are puzzled by the appearance of "peres" as the fourth word in vs. 28 when in vs. 25 it is given as "upharsin." The explanation is that "peres" is the singular form of the word of which "pharsin" is the plural. The "U" in front of "pharsin" is the conjunction

“and”, so that the inscription literally read *“Numbered, Weighed and Divided.”* The word “peres” means “division” and the plural form “pharsin” by a play on similar sounding words could be made to sound like the word for “Persians.” Hence Daniel was able to say on the basis of this word *“Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”*

It was probably pure superstition which led Belshazzar immediately to honour his pledge to make Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom. He had flouted and dishonoured the Most High God and now that very God had caused this message to be sent him, this message of immediate and irretrievable disaster. Perhaps if he honoured the prophet of that God and restored him to the position he had occupied in the days of Babylon’s glory, when all nations rendered submission and tribute, the threatened disaster might even yet be averted. It might be that something of that nature was in the king’s mind. We do not know. We only know that even while these things were being done and said in that brightly lit magnificent palace, the warriors of Media and Persia had gained access to the city in the darkness and were making their way through the streets, ruthlessly beating down such feeble resistance as was being offered by the citizens.

It is said by some scholars that the Hebrew expression in vs. 30. *“In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain”* does not demand that his death occurred on the same night as the feast, but only that it was at a time not too far remote. On the other hand, Herodotus and other historians declare that Babylon was captured at a time when the city was given over to feasting, and that Gubaru, the general who actually captured the city—for Cyrus was some distance away at the time—made his way to the palace and slew the king with many of his courtiers. It is very probable therefore that after Daniel had retired from the banqueting hall, and the company had begun to disperse, a swarm of armed men burst in and the last scene of the drama was played out to the end.

It was a long time before Babylon perished altogether. Daniel was yet to serve first a Median and then a Persian king for a few brief years before he was in his turn gathered to his fathers. He was yet to have the joy of seeing his countrymen leave for Judea to restore their native land. Some twenty years later, long after Daniel’s death, Babylon made a final bid for independence under Belshazzar’s younger brother, named Nebuchadnezzar after his illustrious grandfather, but Darius Hystaspes the Persian king laid siege to the city and this time destroyed the towering walls which had been the city’s pride and confidence. Thus were fulfilled the words of Jeremiah, *“The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire.”* (Jer. 51:58). The river Euphrates changed its course and silted up, and the sea-going merchant vessels could no longer reach the city; two centuries later Seleucus the Greek king built his new city of Seleucia on the Tigris and the commercial importance of Babylon vanished; the citizens gradually drifted away to other homes and by the second century of the Christian era the great city which had called itself “the lady of kingdoms” was reduced to a barren waste of derelict and decaying buildings, the homes of jackals and owls.

*“How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken; how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations.”*



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. Nov./Dec. 1972, page 139)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 12. Darius the Mede

*"And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being three score and two years old."* (Ch. 5:31).

With the capture of Babylon by the Medes and Persians an entirely new life opened before Daniel. At eighty-four years of age he could reasonably have expected to spend his few remaining years in leisurely retirement; the fact that for twenty years past he had been excluded from any official part in the administration of government affairs had without doubt led him to re-organise his life so that he could give his entire time to the study and consideration of the future purposes of God. That much is clear, from the accounts we have of his visions and dreams, and the celestial visitants who came with the revelations and interpretations which have been of such interest and importance to students in every generation since. It is not at all an unusual thing for a man who has led a full and busy life in some business or occupation to hail his retirement as an opportunity for the closer investigation of Biblical truths to which he has not been able to give the attention he would have liked while the responsibility of earning a living or discharging a public office lay upon him. Daniel at the death of his king and benefactor, Nebuchadnezzar, must have felt something like that. For forty-two years he had endured the obligations of high administrative office in Babylon because he knew it to be the will of God that he should thus serve; when upon the accession of successive kings who had no use for him he was deprived of office and allowed to retire into private life, he must have hailed the change as of Divine direction and gladly betaken himself to the more continuous and diligent study of the Divine purposes. And during the twenty years or so thus spent the fruits of his devotion were manifest in the dreams and visions and their interpretations with which we are so familiar.

Now the scene was to change again. The last official act of Belshazzar the last king of Babylon was to appoint Daniel third ruler in the kingdom and therefore the highest State official next to himself. At one stroke Daniel found himself restored to the position he had occupied under King Nebuchadnezzar. Almost immediately fresh responsibility was thrust upon him. The royal decree promoting Daniel to his new position had hardly been proclaimed when Belshazzar himself was dead, slain by the Median invaders. When Cyrus, seventeen days after the capture of the city, came looking for someone who could formally hand over the civil administration of the capital and the empire, it could very likely have been to Daniel he came. Perhaps in that very hall where only a few days previously the supernatural writing had appeared on the wall, serried ranks of Median and Persian soldiers stood immovable whilst Cyrus, the invincible military conqueror, and Daniel, the gentle and yet firm man of God, transacted the formalities which even in those days, no less than in ours, marked the transfer of sovereignty from the vanquished to the victor.

What a tremendous stimulus to faith it must have been to Daniel, thus to witness with his own eyes the fulfilment of prophecy. Sixty-odd years previously he had stood in that same hall, a lad of nineteen or so, and declared to King Nebuchadnezzar *"Thou art this head of gold; and after thee shall arise a kingdom inferior to thee, ... the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."* Now he beheld the fulfilment of that prediction. The second of the four world empires had stepped upon the stage to play its part in the drama, and the Kingdom of Heaven was that much nearer.

Happy indeed we if we can see, in the vicissitudes of earthly powers, the fulfilment of prophecy, evidences of the onward progress of the Divine plan and the approaching of the Kingdom. We are not usually called, as was Daniel, to be personally closely linked with the political affairs of the kingdoms of this world. Our observation of their course can be from a much more detached standpoint and for that we can give thanks to God. It is probable that Daniel would have preferred not to have been so closely connected with State affairs in the idolatrous governments of Babylon and Persia—but he was called to that position by God and he was too loyal a servant of God to avoid the consequences of that call. Perhaps some of the more orthodox and bigoted Jews captive in Babylon criticised his acceptance of high office under the State as disloyalty to the principles of Judaism and the Law Covenant. Perhaps we ourselves, in our rigid adherence to what we hold as the principles of Christian living, may criticise another who undertakes responsibilities or obligations which we would not be prepared to accept. And perhaps, in so doing, we forget the Apostolic admonition “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.” One of the hardest lessons we have to learn is that our Master has many varied tasks to be carried out on earth by his devoted followers and He must of necessity use various individuals in different ways. We must each serve and labour in accordance with the call that is given to us without expecting all our fellow-servants necessarily to serve after the same manner.

So Daniel found a new king to serve. “*Darius the Median took the kingdom.*” Who was this Darius? It is so usual to think of Cyrus assuming control upon the fall of Babylon and immediately sending the Jews home to build their Temple that the fact of Darius coming between Belshazzar and Cyrus is often overlooked. Whoever he was, he confirmed Daniel’s re-appointment as Chief Minister of the empire, and that too requires some explanation. How comes it that a man in high office in the defeated Administration is preferred above all the Median and Persian notabilities who would in the ordinary way be considered proper choices for the control of the vanquished people? What has been called “the enigma of Darius the Mede” has puzzled many a student of Bible history in times past. This king is one of the few whose name has not yet been found in any contemporary inscription. A similar situation existed with regard to Belshazzar until toward the end of the nineteenth century, and it had been freely declared by some scholars that Daniel had invented the name of a king who never existed. Nowadays the acts and history of Belshazzar are almost as well known as those of Queen Victoria. Modern research and deduction has likewise succeeded in giving us a fair picture of Darius the Mede, at any rate sufficient to demonstrate the accuracy of the Book of Daniel.

To begin with, Cyrus was not the legal or acknowledged king of the Medo-Persian empire at the death of Belshazzar. The ruling dynasty was Median, and Cyrus was not a Mede. The Median empire had its rise a century before the fall of Nineveh, and it was the joint invasion of Assyria by Cyaxares, king of Media, allied with Nabopolassar of Babylon, father of Nebuchadnezzar, which brought about the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. and the end of the Assyrian empire. This friendship between the two kings was cemented by the giving in marriage of Amytis the daughter of Cyaxares to Nebuchadnezzar the son of the Babylonian king. Upon the death of Cyaxares, his son Astyages became king of Media. Cyrus, who was a lineal descendant of the kings of Elam, now subject to Media, was a leading general of the Persian forces in the armies of Media, for Persia also was at that time subject to Media. Cyrus had married the daughter of Astyages, and with this slight claim to royalty he rebelled against his king and in a short time became the most powerful figure in the empire. Ten years before the fall of Babylon he virtually deposed Astyages and became the real ruler, thus bringing the

Persian element much more into prominence. The Medes were still predominant, however, and Cyrus was not yet the acknowledged king. In any case he was still busily occupied subduing other nations and building up the empire.

Darius the Mede was the son of Astyages and the last legal claimant to the throne of Media. It is fairly evident that upon the fall of Babylon the Median influence in the combined empire was still so strong that Cyrus, ambitious as he was, preferred to wait until he could legally claim the title and so the Median king occupied the throne. Hence when Babylon fell at the hands of Cyrus, it was Darius the Mede who "took" the kingdom. That word is significant. It has the meaning of receiving a thing at the hands of another. A similar expression occurs in Chap. 9:1, where Darius is said to have been "made" king over the realm of the Chaldeans. Darius did not acquire the kingdom for himself; it was won for him by Cyrus.

Two years later Darius died without sons, and now Cyrus, by virtue of his marriage to Mandane the sister of Darius, had the best legal right to kingship. From now on the Persian element came to the forefront, but it was not until the time of Darius Hystaspes, the first truly Persian king, seventeen years later, that Persia took precedence over Media. The Old Testament yields an interesting confirmation of this fact. The Book of Daniel, completed by Daniel in the days of Darius the Mede and Cyrus, refers always to the "Medes and Persians", Medes coming first. The Book of Esther, describing events in the days of Xerxes, son of Darius Hystaspes, has it "the kings of Persia and Media," Persia now coming first.

Daniel, in Chap. 9:1, refers to Darius as the "son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes." Ahasuerus in the native languages concerned is the same as the Greek Cyaxares, and in the Apocryphal Book of Tobit is called by that name. The term "son" here means "grandson" as in the case, in Chap. 5, of Belshazzar, who was actually the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Josephus and all other ancient historians are definite in stating that a Median king succeeded Belshazzar and was in turn replaced by Cyrus the Persian. It can fairly be stated therefore that the "enigma of Darius the Mede" is, thanks to present century Biblical research, an enigma no longer. Once again, Daniel is proved to have known better than all his modern critics.

*"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these three presidents, of whom Daniel was one; that the princes might give accounts unto them, and that the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king was minded to set him over the entire realm."* (Chap. 6:1-3).

Three points in which the A.V. translation is inadequate have to be noticed. Daniel was not "first" of the three presidents, but one of them. He was not "preferred" above the others but distinguished himself above them; and Darius had in mind his further promotion to be the Chief Minister of the entire Medo-Persian empire. The question naturally arises; why such honours to a representative of the defeated nation?

The answer, in the first place, lies in the fact that Daniel, and his sterling worth, were not entirely unknown to the Median king. The close friendship between the Median and Babylonian kings in the days of Nebuchadnezzar must have involved Daniel in some close contact with the Medes. It was the ambition of Cyrus and his Persians which attacked Babylon, not animosity on the part of the Median kings. Very probably Darius the Mede had a closer feeling for his royal Babylonian relatives than he had for Cyrus, whom he must have regarded as a usurper, even though Cyrus was married to his sister, Queen Nitocris, mother of Belshazzar, was herself first cousin to Darius, and in earlier and happier days there must have been plenty of going and coming between the royal houses of Babylon and Media.



Darius might very well have been personally acquainted with Daniel in those days. What more natural thing, then, when he assumed sovereignty over the conquered people, to appease them and ensure peaceable submission by appointing as their immediate ruler the man who had been their Chief Minister for forty years in times past, whom he knew personally and in whom he could place confidence.

It would seem that Darius made the subjection of Babylon the occasion for a complete reorganisation of the empire. He created a hundred and twenty provinces (which by the time of Esther, fifty years later, had become one hundred and twenty seven— see Esther 1:1) and appointed a local governor over each. Above these came the three princes, of whom Daniel was one, responsible directly to the King. It would seem logical to conclude that these three princes were set over Media, Persia and Babylon respectively, Daniel being the appointed Minister for Babylon. The outstanding qualities of Daniel again marked him out for preferment and the king formed the design of promoting him to have authority over all three divisions of the empire, and at that the other officials took alarm and began to consult together to effect the disgrace of the hated Jew.

The indomitable spirit of this remarkable man nowhere shines out more brightly than at this point. At an age when most men would be considered past performing useful work for the community, he still made such an impression upon his fellows that he could be seriously considered for an administrative position that would tax the abilities of men half his age. Like Moses, Daniel's "eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." Of him it could truly be said that he was immortal until his work was finished, and although in the story we are now within three years of the time when he leaves the stage, we see him at the height of worldly power and influence, still the confidant of kings, still the object of unremitting hatred by powerful enemies, still, we may be sure, working quietly but energetically for the welfare of his own people, Israel, as yet held captive in Babylon. Here is an outstanding example of the mighty power of the Holy Spirit of God, entering into a man, inspiring him, sustaining him, rebutting all the assaults of his enemies, prospering the way before him that through him some vital part of the purposes of God might be carried out.

We do well to take the lesson to heart. There is no limit to what God can do with a man who is wholly and unreservedly consecrated to him. Such a man must be prepared to suffer with equal fortitude success and failure, prosperity and adversity, the favours of men and their recriminations, serene always in the sure knowledge that all he is and all he does is for the furtherance of the Divine plans for all creation and that in the power of the Holy Spirit within him he must go forward and he cannot fail. That was Daniel's secret.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. Jan./Feb. 1973, page 8)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 13. The Den of Lions

It was during the two years short reign of Darius the Mede that Daniel's enemies made one more—unavailing—attempt to get rid of him. The stalwart old man had survived many such plots in the course of his long life; perhaps by now he was getting used to them. At any rate there is no indication that his faith wavered in the slightest. As an example of the strength of character a firm faith in God can develop in a man's life the story of Daniel stands supreme. Never did he concede one jot or tittle to the forces of the enemy; at no time were his principles compromised. Fearless before kings, humble before God, his life reveals that combination of iron strength and dependent pliancy which made him so useful an instrument in the hand of God. We can look for no better instance among the records of faithful men upon which to model our own Christian lives. Some there were, following Jesus for a time, who turned back and "walked no more with him." The same sad sequel writes "*finis*" across the pages of many believers' lives when the discouragements of the way, the opposition of God's enemies, the attractions of other things, prove too strong for the faith and hope which alone will enable any disciple to "endure to the end." Like Israel of old, who "could not enter in because of unbelief," so do many Christians falter and fall in the wilderness instead of marching onward to enter the Promised Land. The example of Daniel's life shows what inflexible devotion to the things of God and unshakeable faith in His power and providence can do to a man who builds those things into his life's experience.

Nothing of this was in the minds of those presidents and princes who at this time were conspiring against Daniel. Unscrupulous men of the world, determined to dispose once and for all of the man who by his rectitude and uprightness was a constant threat to their nefarious ways, they hatched a plot which seemed certain of success. No ordinary methods would do; this was a man incorruptible, proof against either threats or bribes, influenced neither by fear nor greed. None of the ordinary methods of achieving their object would serve. They could not accuse him of disloyalty to the king or State, for he was manifestly the soul of integrity. They could not insinuate that he was guilty of personal enrichment from the public purse, or of taking bribes to pervert the course of justice; his private life was open for all to see. They could not impugn or malign his character, for all men knew him to be blameless and irreproachable. And in desperation at last these men said "*We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God*" (ch. 6, vs. 5). They could only hope to bring about the downfall of Daniel by making his loyalty to God a crime in itself.

So the plot was hatched. It was a simple enough scheme once the bare idea had crossed someone's mind. From its very nature it could not fail to work. Daniel's very firmness of character would be the sure guarantee of his undoing. As the details were unfolded and discussed there would be many nodding heads and covert smiles. The Jew was as good as dead already. Probably the principal contestants for Daniel's soon-to-be vacant office began to eye one another speculatively and under the cover of a spurious heartiness in discussion, began to take each others' measure for the further scramble for power which would follow immediately Daniel had been disposed of.

Agreement reached, the hand of rogues sought audience with the king, and outlined their proposal. Briefly put, it provided that for a period of thirty days supplicatory prayer should

be offered to no God or man save the king. The brief account in the sixth chapter of Daniel gives no supporting reasons for this apparently pointless piece of authoritarianism, no arguments to justify what must have appeared to be a particularly foolish and vapid decree. Nevertheless the litigants may well have made out a case for their request, and that without revealing the true purpose behind the scheme. The Babylonians were worshippers of many gods, spirits and demons, but the Persians were monotheists, worshippers of one god, Ahura-Mazda, the god of light. The argument may well have been that this thirty days' decree would have the effect of suspending temporarily the native people's customary worship and introducing them to the idea of monotheistic worship, the worship of one God. But since the god of the Persians was not well known in Babylon, why not let him be worshipped in the person of the king as his representative? Thus the vanity of Darius would be flattered and his ear lent more willingly to the proposal. The Roman emperors had Divine honours paid to them while yet living and the early Christians suffered for refusing to give homage to them as gods; here at a much earlier date it seems that the same situation was to face the saintly Daniel.

The little that is known of Darius the Mede—and that little is based entirely upon the picture of him that we have in the Book of Daniel—seems to show him up as a weak monarch. Although he was the son of an active and warlike Median king, Astyages, he reigned only as a puppet under the direction of the more vigorous Cyrus. He was not a young man—sixty-two at the capture of Babylon and he reigned in Babylon for only two years. The manner in which the conspirators put the decree before him and practically demanded his signature seems as though he was brow-beaten into signing. It might well have been that, faced with a united front of all his principal men except Daniel, he yielded against his own better judgment. It might not have occurred to him that Daniel would object to the decree; after all, Daniel himself was a monotheist, worshipping one God, and might reasonably be expected to support the general idea. Darius probably saw little difference between the one God of the Persians and the one God of Daniel, and perhaps reasoned that at any rate Daniel could not seriously object. At any rate he signed.

Of course Daniel behaved in the manner expected by the plotters. The habit of over sixty years was not going to be abrogated on account of the king's decree. Three times a day, from his earliest youth in Babylon, he had prayed with his face towards Jerusalem, no wall or door intervening, giving open testimony to his faith that one day the House of God would be re-established in that present desolate city. He must have done that when a lad in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, in full view of his pagan companions. At first they would have mocked and derided him; later they perhaps came to respect him. There may have been an occasion when an imperious summons to the presence of his royal master came to him when thus engaged, as happened once to a British Prime Minister, Mr. Gladstone, in the days of Queen Victoria. He would most surely have behaved as Mr. Gladstone did on that occasion, continuing with his prayers unhurriedly, and if then faced with an angry demand for an explanation, as was the case with that Christian statesman, returned the same answer: "I was engaged in audience with the King of kings." Daniel's enemies probably knew his history and judged rightly his behaviour. Assembling at the appropriate time, as expected, they found Daniel with his windows wide open, praying to his God, in flat defiance of the royal decree.

With what glee and triumph must the plotters have hastened to the royal palace and sought audience with King Darius. They were careful, however, to get the king irrevocably committed and to that end they first had him confirm his earlier concurrence. "*Hast thou not signed a decree ... ?*" and so on. True enough, agreed the unsuspecting king; a decree which,

once signed, cannot be revoked. That was the law of the Medes and Persians and the king confirmed his upholding of the law. Then the mask was thrown off. *“That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree which thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day”* (vs. 13).

Too late, the king perceived the trap into which he had fallen. Verse 14 says that he was “displeased with himself.” He must have realised that the one man he could really trust was now, by his own stupid action, condemned to death. He might also have reflected that he himself, deprived of Daniel’s loyalty and integrity, would be more at the mercy of these scheming conspirators than ever before. So he *“laboured until the going down of the sun to deliver him.”*

The presidents and princes were ready for this. They knew it would come. Before long they were back again, reminding the king of his obligations under the State Constitution. The king realised that there was no way out; the sentence would have to be executed. It must have been with a heavy heart that he gave the necessary orders, and the Palace guards went off to arrest the nation’s Chief Minister and bring him to the place of execution.

Verse 16 is a little puzzling. It reads as though Darius assured Daniel that his God, whom he served continually, would certainly deliver him. Whether this was an expression of faith or merely a soothing last assurance to a man he regarded as good as dead, is not clear; when he came to the den next morning he was not half so sure about it. But it was now too late for further talk. The entire company came to the den, usually a large round pit in which the animals could roam freely but from which they could not escape, approached by means of a steeply sloping tunnel from the surface. The unresisting victim was pushed down the tunnel and slid helplessly to the floor of the pit where the lions awaited him. The iron grille at the entrance to the tunnel was shut and locked and sealed with the king’s seal and those of the conspirators so that there need be no suspicion next morning that any attempt to deliver the condemned man had been made. There would, of course, be guards posted at the gate, just in case any of Daniel’s own friends should attempt a rescue during the night. These precautions taken, the party dispersed; the king, to a miserable evening and a sleepless couch, the others, to a sound night’s sleep in the satisfaction of a job well done.

Next morning *“the king arose very early”*—much earlier apparently, than the men whose scheming had created this situation. The account says that he *“went in haste to the den of lions.”* He must at least have had some glimmer of hope that Daniel’s God had been able to deliver him, or he would not have made such an early morning expedition. His faith was only very rudimentary, however; we are told that he *“cried with a lamentable voice, O Daniel ... is thy God ... able to deliver thee?”* He was by no means over sanguine, but he evidently thought that there was at least a chance.

Calm and unruffled came the familiar voice from the depths below. *“O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me ... ”*

Our God does not treat all his saints in the same fashion. Plenty of Christians were thrown to the lions in the days of pagan Rome, but God did not intervene to save them. He did intervene to save Daniel. That deliverance was for a definite purpose in the Divine Plan. Daniel yet had more work to do. The death of those many Christians in the Roman arena was for a definite purpose also, for *“the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”* Whether in life or in death, we are the Lord’s, and He will dispose of our earthly lives in the way that is good in his sight, and in the interests of his fulfilling purpose for all mankind. Only when we are all united together in the “General Assembly of the Church of the Firstborn” beyond the Vail, will we fully understand just how our apparently dissimilar experiences and varied

fortunes in this life have been wrought together by our all-wise Father to effect the great end He has in view.

As far as Darius was concerned, Daniel's reassuring words brought about a swift revulsion of feeling. "*Then was the king exceeding glad.*" Not only was he glad for Daniel's sake, but also for his own. Here was a golden opportunity to rid himself of the men whom he now realised to be a menace to his own security. Probably some of them at least were Persians, and more disposed to favour Cyrus than Darius. This was the psychological moment, while the wonder of the miracle was fresh upon the minds of the king's soldiers and servants. The king was not slow to take advantage of the chance. In the first place Daniel could legitimately be freed, since the decree merely stipulated that he should be cast into the den of lions without defining the consequences. The plotters had hardly thought that necessary. The law had been fulfilled and now Daniel could be released. The king saw to it that he was so freed without further delay. The same guards who cast him in now had the somewhat more ticklish task of getting him out. They doubtless hoped as they did so that the restored Chief Minister would not hold their action of the previous night against them when he resumed his administrative duties. With the same thought in mind they were probably only too pleased to show diligence in executing the king's next order, to the effect that they should arrest the men who were responsible for the plot against Daniel and cast them without further ado to the lions from which Daniel had so recently escaped. The summary nature of this arbitrary command would support the idea that the men concerned were taken from their beds before they had time to realise what had happened, were hurried to the pit and without further ceremony flung in. Their unhappy wives and families were treated in similar fashion—a piece of Oriental barbarity which was quite the usual thing in those days, the idea being to ensure that no descendant of the criminal should live or be born to perpetuate his name. This ferocious act is quite in keeping with what might be expected of Darius; his father Astyages was one of the most inhuman monsters of antiquity and it is not surprising to find a streak of the same characteristic in his son.

The story ends with another decree, this time without any prompting. Darius sent a command to all parts of the empire requiring that worship and reverence be paid to the God of Daniel. It need not be thought that this implied the conversion of Darius or the establishment of Judaism as the State religion. It need only mean that Darius was sufficiently impressed by the manifest power of the God of Daniel that he gave the seal of his royal approval upon the worship of that God, wheresoever and by whomsoever performed. It might well be that this incident provided the starting point for that tolerance with which the Medo-Persian rulers regarded the Jewish religion, leading only a year after this happening to the decree of Cyrus permitting the Jews to return and build their Temple, and later on for the favour they enjoyed. in the days of Nehemiah, when the city Jerusalem itself was rebuilt.

To Christians it is just one of the many examples in history where God shows us all his power to deliver, when deliverance is in accord with his will and his Plan. This story shows us that God *can* deliver; whether in any given case, or in our own case, He *will* deliver, rests again upon the needs of his Plan and his designs for us personally. Those of us whose lives are given over completely to serve him and be used by him would not have it otherwise; for He knoweth best.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. March/April 1973, page 37)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 14. The Seventy Weeks

The Persian conquest of Babylon made very little difference to the normal life of the city. The comparative ease with which the capital had fallen, with little destruction or loss of life, meant that the citizens merely exchanged a Babylonian ruler for a Persian, Cyrus. The commercial life of the city went on as usual; merchant vessels from Africa and India still came up the river to the quays of Babylon; caravans of goods still traversed the high roads from Syria and Egypt. The government was in the hands of the Persians, but the life of the nation went on much as before. It was not at the capture of Babylon by Cyrus that the vivid prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah relating to the doom of the wicked city had their fulfilment, but twenty years later, when Darius Hystaspes the Persian king laid siege again to the city and demolished its walls. In the meantime Daniel was faced with the situation that the power of Babylon was broken, apparently for ever; Cyrus the Persian was quite evidently the coming man, and Cyrus was the name of the man in Isaiah's prophecy who should let go the captives and restore the worship of God at Jerusalem. Small wonder that Daniel went to the sacred books to discern what he could of the purposes of God.

*"In the first year of his reign (Darius) I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereby the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."* (ch. 9 vs 2.)

An old man of ninety sat reading, as he had read hundreds of times before, words that were penned when he was a lad of sixteen or so. His whole life had been lived in expectation of an event which, even as a boy, he knew could not come until he himself was ninety years of age; whatever may have been the hopes and beliefs of his fellows as to their deliverance, Daniel himself had known all along that he was destined to spend the rest of his life in Babylon. That Return from Exile which he so ardently desired for his people would not come until he himself would be too old to share in it.

\*[Nearly seventy years previously, in the third year of Jehoiakim King of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar had besieged Jerusalem, made Jehoiakim tributary, taken the sacred vessels from the Temple and carried them, with Daniel and his fellows, into Babylon. In the following year the Babylonian king broke the power of Egypt at Carchemish and thenceforth was the undisputed master of Western Asia. In that year Jeremiah uttered the message against Judah recorded in his twenty-fifth chapter, and it is that message to which Daniel referred. The Divine sentence had gone forth against the guilty people; from that third year of Jehoiakim when they became tributary to Babylon and their Temple treasures went into an idol sanctuary, they were to serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (Jer. 25:11). At the end of the seventy years the power of Babylon was to be broken. Until then all nations were to serve Nebuchadnezzar, and his son, and his grandson, *"until the very time of his land come"* (Jer. 27:7) a prophecy which was fulfilled in a most remarkable way, for his son Evil-Merodach (Jer. 52:31) and his grandson Belshazzar both reigned and then the kingdom came to an end. Daniel, after the death of Belshazzar and the transfer of sovereignty to the Persians, realised that the time had expired.]

What were his thoughts as his eyes scanned the familiar words and his mind went back to those days of long ago? Was there a measure of sadness that so few of his own generation remained to share his realisation of hopes fulfilled? Daniel must have been getting a rather

lonely man. His old friend and mentor, Jeremiah, was of course long since gone to his rest, buried somewhere in Egypt. Of his three companions in exile, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, nothing is known since the incident of the fiery furnace, nearly forty-five years in the past. Quite likely they too were dead. Ezekiel the prophet and Jehoiachin the captive king were almost certainly at rest with their fathers. The up-and-coming young men who were marked out as leaders of the nation when the Return to Jerusalem could be effected were two generations later than his own. But there was no jealousy and no repining. Daniel knew he could have no part in the stirring days of the Return himself, but he knew that prayer was vitally necessary before that Return could become a reality and so he betook himself to earnest and urgent prayer on behalf of his beloved people. And the consequence of that prayer was the revelation of a time prophecy so obviously and accurately fulfilled that it set the seal upon Daniel's book and stamped the study of time prophecy with Divine approval.

It is impossible to read Daniel's ninth chapter without realising just how the saintly old man poured out his heart's longings to God. Here are the hopes and dreams of a lifetime, the faith that knows God is faithful, the insight that perceives the only obstacle to be unbelief, the conviction that God will surely hear, and act, because He is God, and God cannot lie. What He has promised, that He will surely perform. Every acknowledgement of God's constancy and faithfulness is made, and with that a full and frank admission of Israel's guilt. There is no evasion of the issue; Israel reaped what she had sown; deserved what she had got. But because God is good, and because, with all their faults, Jerusalem and her people are called by God's name, Daniel besought his liege Lord to return, and relent, and execute his great purpose in delivering Jerusalem. *"We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies."* Could any of us in these favoured days of spiritual understanding come more closely to the true nature of Divine forgiveness? Could any one of us come any nearer to the heart of the Father? It was to that last heartfelt appeal the Father responded. Once more a heavenly being of high rank and greatly honoured in the courts of heaven was charged with a mission to earth. We know very little about conditions beyond the Veil, the everyday life of the celestial world, but that it is a place and condition of ceaseless activity is evident. Gabriel was no stranger to the world of man and he had visited Daniel before. If one asks the question whether there truly does exist an angelic personality bearing the name Gabriel, entrusted at times with Divine commissions to men, the answer can only be that the Bible gives us no ground for disputing the fact. This "seventy weeks" prophecy could only have been revealed from heaven; Daniel asserts that it was told him by a visitor he knew from former experience to be Gabriel, the messenger of God. Five hundred years later the same personality appeared to Mary the mother of Jesus, again with a message of great import, this time to announce the fulfilment of that which he had predicted to Daniel. Although Gabriel is not mentioned by name anywhere else in Bible history, it is very possible that he is the one concerned in other appearances of an angelic being to men—to the Apostle Peter in prison, perhaps, or to Paul when he was told he would be brought before Caesar.

*"Whiles I was speaking in prayer",* Gabriel came. *"At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth, and I am come to show thee"* is the assurance of the heavenly visitor. So quickly may prayer be answered; so near to us is that celestial world where God's will is done as one day it will be done on earth. "Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear" says the Lord through Isaiah. Sin is a separating influence which puts God far away from us; prayer is a magnetism which brings us at once very near to God.

So the story of the seventy weeks was unfolded. "Weeks" is, as is usually well known, a mistranslation. The proper rendering is "seventy sevens" where "seven" is "*hebdomad*," a

unit, especially a unit of time. There is not much doubt that Daniel was to have his understanding of Jeremiah's seventy years linked up with a greater seventy,—seventy sevens, in fact—leading up to the greater development of God's Plan, which would, eventually, bring to fruition all Daniel's hopes.

\*[The seventy years of Jeremiah were literally fulfilled, several times over. The primary decree was that not only Judah, but the nations round about, were to serve the king of Babylon seventy years and then the power of Babylon would be broken. (Jer. 25:11-12.). During that period the penalty for resistance to the Divine decree of subjection was conquest, destruction, desolation. True to the promise, from the third year of Jehoiakim when Judah passed under Babylonian domination to the Decree of Cyrus was seventy years. Likewise the period from the destruction of the Temple in the eleventh year of Zedekiah to the completion of Zerubbabel's Temple in the sixth year of Darius Hystaspes was seventy years. Small wonder that Daniel, having lived through the first-named period, looked now for the restoration of Judah, and hence for Divine enlightenment as to the next development in the outworking of the Divine Plan.]

*"Seventy sevens are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city"* (ch. 9 vs 24) to accomplish seven different aspects of our Lord's work at his First Advent. Gabriel recited them in order; while he recited, Daniel must have listened in growing awe as he realised that greater and still unplumbed depths of the Divine purposes were being revealed.

*"To finish the transgression."* Our Lord's Advent was timed to come when Israel had "filled up the measure of their fathers." (Matt. 23:32). The period between Daniel and Jesus brought Israel's guilt up to the brim and abundantly demonstrated their unworthiness of the promise.

*"To make an end of sins."* Jesus did that by yielding his own life an offering for sin, a Ransom for All, to be testified in due time. (Isa. 53:10. 1 Tim. 2:5-6.).

*"To make reconciliation for iniquity."* This is the atonement which Christ made, pictured in the Tabernacle ceremonies by the offering the blood of the sin-offering on the "mercy seat" or propitiatory in the inner sanctuary, a "covering" for human sin.

*"To bring in everlasting righteousness."* The Apostle Paul explained this when he spoke of justification by faith, the gift of God to all who accept Jesus as Saviour and trust in him alone for salvation and reconciliation with God.

*"To seal up the vision and prophecy."* The more correct rendering is "vision and prophet" and the sealing is in the sense of ratifying. The Father himself ratified both the vision and the prophet who brought the vision, when He declared from Heaven at the time of Jesus' baptism "This is my beloved Son ... hear ye him."

*"To anoint the Most Holy."* This refers to the consecrated things of the temple, especially the altar of burnt-offerings, and can well apply to the final work of the First Advent when Jesus, glorified, anointed his disciples with the Holy Spirit of Power, sending them forth after Pentecost to commence their great work of witness.

Gabriel told Daniel (vs 25-27) that this great period of seventy sevens was to be divided into three sections of seven sevens, sixty-two sevens and one final seven. In that last seven great happenings were to transpire. Most momentous of all, Messiah would be cut off "but not for himself." No, He died for others, for men, that they might live. In the middle of that "seven" Messiah would bring to an end the "sacrifice and oblation," those literal offerings and sacrifices demanded by the law to give Israel a ritualistic righteousness. He made an end of that Law, nailing it to his cross. Never again could those offerings have any validity in God's sight, for the reality had come. Then Messiah was also to "confirm the covenant with many



for one seven.” True to that word, the covenant of favour to Israel which precluded Gentiles from entering the “High Calling of God in Christ Jesus” was continued throughout three and a half years more until it came to an end with the acceptance of Cornelius, the first Gentile fellow-heir. Because of “the overspreading of abominations, he shall make it desolate” even as Jesus declared, weeping over the city but declaring nevertheless “your house is left unto you desolate.” Then, finally, “the people of the prince that should come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary” and that word was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Here is a clear outline of the light and shade, the glory and the tragedy, of the First Advent. Daniel must have perceived that all this meant great distress for his people even though it also included the fulfilment at last of the Divine promise. Naturally enough, therefore, the question must have come to his lips as it did to the disciples of Jesus half a millennium later, “How long?”; “When shall these things be?”

Daniel realised at once that the seventy sevens were sevens of years. He was already aware of Jeremiah’s period of seventy years, now fulfilled, but this was a greater period, seventy sevens. Four hundred and ninety years; that was the vista which now appeared before the prophet’s wondering mind.

The starting point is given in terms of an easily recognisable political event. “*From the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince ...*” (ch. 9:23) were the angel’s words. Daniel did not live to see that event. He did come to know of the decree issued by Cyrus king of Persia in the first year of his reign authorising whosoever would of the Jews in Babylon to return to Judea and rebuild the ruined Temple. Some forty-nine thousand returned under Zerubbabel but their initial enthusiasm soon waned and the work languished. The royal edict was reiterated sixteen years later in the second year of Darius Hystaspes, third successor of Cyrus, and in consequence of the missionary zeal of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah at that time the work was resumed and in another four years the Temple was completed and dedicated. But the city around it was still desolate, its walls broken down and its gates just as they were left when Nebuchadnezzar’s soldiers burned them with fire nearly a century previously. No authority or permission had as yet been given “to restore and build Jerusalem.” Next came the reign of Xerxes, and then his son and successor Artaxerxes I, who in the seventh year of his reign, some seventy years after the decree of Cyrus, sent Ezra the priest to take offerings and treasure for the rebuilt Temple and to govern the little Jewish colony, but even then no word or command or intimation regarding the rebuilding of the city and its walls.

Thirteen years later, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, a royal commission was awarded Nehemiah the Jewish patriot to proceed to Jerusalem for the express purpose of rebuilding the city, its houses, walls and gates. At this time Jerusalem was still in ruins; the impulse of Nehemiah to go there sprang from a report on its condition brought to him in this sane year. Its walls were still broken down, its gates burned with fire, and the houses not built. Here, it would seem, is the starting point of the prophetic period. Sixty-nine sevens from this point, four hundred and eighty-three years, to the appearance of Messiah, and one more seven for the completion of all that his Advent was to mean to Israel; this was the gist of Gabriel’s intimation and Daniel knew then that the consummation of Israel’s hopes was still very far away.

Looking back on history, we ought to perceive very clearly the fulfilment of this time prophecy, for Messiah has come and we know when He came. It was in the autumn of A.D. 29 that Jesus of Nazareth stood by the waters of Jordan to be baptised by John as a prelude to his ministry on earth. There, at that time, He became the Messiah the Prince. Three and

a half years later “*in the midst of the seven*”—the last seven—He caused “*the sacrifice and the oblation to cease*” by his death on the cross. By the end of that seven the special standing before God which Israel had enjoyed since Sinai was abrogated, and the Gospel was extended to all nations. The seventy weeks had ended.

Unfortunately the starting-point cannot be located in history so precisely. The Persians did not produce any reliable historians of their own; the Greek historians of the time are confused and contradictory when it comes to Persian happenings. In consequence there is dispute as to the precise date of the twentieth year of Artaxerxes with a possible variation of sixteen years, 454-438 B.C. Herodotus, Ctesias, Thucydides, Ptolemy and Josephus between them have set later historians, chronologists, and commentators alike a problem which has occupied the thoughts and pens of many a writer during the latter part of this Age. But for the present purpose accuracy to a year is quite unnecessary. The important thing is that this “seventy weeks” back from the ministry of Jesus must in any case have commenced within ten years or so of whatever date eventually turns out to be that of Artaxerxes twentieth year. Ten years in five hundred is a quite close margin of error and as we look back upon this fulfilled prophecy, we can only marvel at its exactitude. Small wonder that modern critics decry the whole thing and endeavour to suggest other and earlier starting points for the prophecy so as to bring its termination in the days of the Maccabean revolt, assigning all these eloquent phrases to the petty doings of a lot of apostate High Priests and princes in Israel. We can only say “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes”.

The division, in verse 25, of the sixty-nine sevens into two periods of seven and sixty-two is not further elaborated on by the revealing angel. Seven sevens, forty-nine years, from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes must end at some time between 406-390 B.C. This point of time is notable for a number of events momentous to Israel.

Darius II, son of Artaxerxes, died 405 B.C. With his death the favour shown by successive Persian kings to Israel since the days of Cyrus came to an end. Upon the accession of Darius’ successor, Judea lost its status as a province and was added to the province of Syria; thus commenced the Syrian oppression of Israel which became so terrible an affliction a century or so later.

Nehemiah, the last governor of Judea, died probably between 413 and 405 B.C., Ezra a little earlier.

Malachi, the last Hebrew prophet, flourished during the last seven years of Nehemiah and died, it is estimated, very soon after the patriot’s death.

The canon of the Old Testament was completed.

Thus, at the end of the first “seven sevens”, the period of the Restoration, all the favour shown by the Persians to the Jews, all the rebuilding and re-establishment of the nation, all the fervency of the latter prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and the reforming zeal of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, all that had been accomplished during that stirring time, came to an end, and the nation entered upon a new and bitter experience which progressively worsened, with only occasional periods of intermission, until the conquest of Judea by Titus in A.D. 70, and the great Dispersion among all nations began. Even that was foreseen by the heavenly visitant; “*the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary*” he said (ch. 9:26). That prediction was fulfilled to the letter.

Daniel must have had much to think about when his visitor had gone. The city of his fathers, and the Temple the glory of the city, were to be rebuilt only to be destroyed again. Would the Lord never fulfil his promise to plant Israel and not pluck them up again? Long and earnestly must the aged prophet have cogitated over the problem; the ways of God are

often dark and mysterious, and men comprehend them not. But for Daniel there was more to come; he was yet to be given the final vision, which assured him that despite all these disasters all would be well at the last.

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\* Pastor Russell regarded the prophecy of Jer. 25:11 to be 70 years for the land, which should rest because of Israel's neglect of the Jubilee ordinances. During these 70 years Israel and even some other nations would serve Babylon. But the duration was not mandated for servitude, of which they had served even other nations before and after, but rather *"Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths."* Lev. 26:34. In Dan. 9:1, 2 during the first year of Darius, just prior to Cyrus, Daniel recognized the prophecy nearly complete to *"accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."* Pastor Russell saw this fulfilled from the desolation of Jerusalem with Zedekiah's 11th year and extending to the amnesty decree of Cyrus in 536 allowing the return to Jerusalem including the Temple vessels. This last Biblical chronology link of 70 years reaches to Cyrus and 536 B.C. according to 2 Chronicles 36:17-23 and B:42, 51 and numerous other considerations of the point.

Some twenty years before Jerusalem was burned, Nebuchadnezzar came against Egypt and Judah in the 4th year of Jehoiakim. Still this two-tribe kingdom continued with the remaining years of kings Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Explanations that begin the 70 year prophecy of Jer. 25:9-12 earlier with Jehoiakim's 4th year and ending with the decree of Cyrus, has the 70 years measuring with *servitude* to Babylon, of which the *desolation* would only be the last part of it, being 50 years.

Likewise viewing the prophecy beginning with deporting the population and desolating of Jerusalem, yet continuing another 20 years after the Cyrus decree until the completion of Zerubbabel's Temple regards the 70 years to extend beyond the return to the land of which the desolation is presumed to be only the first 50 years.

Views of the 70 years that leave only 50 for the desolation, essentially abrogate the 6,000 year tabulation on B:42 and require a redefinition the components for Bible chronology or extending a 6,000 year end date.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. May/June 1973, page 51)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 15. Until The End Be

There is something heartrendingly tragic in the spectacle of an old man deprived, at the last, of the fruits of that for which he has laboured zealously and perseveringly through a long life. It happens in everyday affairs and Christians are not immune; it happened to stalwart men of God in Old Testament days. Moses led the children of Israel forty years through the wilderness toward the promised Land, but he was destined to behold that fair goal only with his eyes and never himself to set foot in it. Samuel, serving his God and his country from childhood to old age, welded a disorganised rabble of tribesmen into a nation, gave them a rule of justice and organised government, and died in obscurity leaving the fruits of his work to be reaped by King David. The aged priest Simeon, leader of the tiny band that in the days just prior to the First Advent “looked for deliverance in Jerusalem” lived just long enough to take the Babe in his old arms; but he was laid aside in death before the glory of the Messiah was revealed to the believing in Israel. So it was with Daniel. Taken from his home in early youth, he lived his whole life in an alien land, passionately looking forward to the day when God would relent and set the captives free, restoring again the glories of the beloved city—but when at last the time did come he must perforce, like Moses, see his fellows go with rejoicing into the promised land, knowing that he could never go with them. Daniel had done more than any man to keep alive the knowledge of God and hope in His promise; he had interceded with God on behalf of his people; in political life he probably did much to make the Return possible, but he himself was left out of its realisation. Two years after the Restoration, we find him still in Babylon, quite definitely now waiting for the end. Daniel was one of those of whom the writer to the Hebrews afterwards spoke when he said “these all, having received a good report through faith, received not the promise.” Like many another faithful warrior for God, he was laid aside to await his reward in a better day.

Two years after the capture of Babylon by the Medes came the Restoration. The Median dynasty was at an end; in Cyrus the Persian dynasty began. The change was marked by an unexpected toleration of all the subject peoples' native religions; the favour shown the Jewish captives in allowing them to revive the Judean state and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem was only one of several such concessions granted by the Persian king to the varied peoples under his rule. Clay tablets of Cyrus have been discovered in which he speaks of his intention to rebuild various of the idolatrous Temples in much the same language that he used in his famous decree to the Jews as recorded in the first chapter of Ezra.

Daniel must have seen the jubilant company set off for Judah with mixed feelings. There would have been quiet joy that at last the promise of God was fulfilled and the Captivity was ended; the Temple was to be rebuilt and the worship of God in his own city restored. But there was something lacking; the throne of the Lord was not to be established in Jerusalem and no king of David's line would sit in regal power on Mount Zion. Zerubbabel, of the line of David and legal heir to the throne, was leader of the Restoration only by appointment of Cyrus and he was nothing more than the Persian governor of Jerusalem, responsible to Cyrus for the good behaviour of the people. Joshua of the sons of Aaron was the legitimate High Priest and fully authorised to administer the rites of his sacred office, but even with the Temple rebuilt there was still a vital deficiency; the Ark of the Covenant was not there and the Most Holy was empty. This is not the real triumph of Israel, Daniel must have reflected

sadly as the joyous shouts died away and the long procession disappeared in the distance. There was still much to transpire before the good promises of God can be fulfilled. So he betook himself again to study and prayer that he might continue to be a faithful vehicle of the Holy Spirit in making known to the sons of men the things that God purposed to do.

Life in Babylon went on much as before. The pioneers away in Jerusalem attacked their task with enthusiasm at first and then drifted away to their own interests and the building of the Temple was neglected. Not much news got back to Babylon for communications were slow and difficult, and in any case most of the Jews who remained in Babylon had done so because they were not greatly interested in the rebuilding of Judea. They had mostly been born in Babylon and the land of Judah was a foreign and unknown country to them. Daniel probably had little in common with the Babylonian Jews; they were not his kind: but there were almost certainly a few remaining in the city whose hearts were in Judea but whose circumstances for one reason or another forbade their participating in the Return and with these Daniel would have found a common bond of interest and friendship. So for two years more he studied and pondered until at last another and a final revelation of God's future purposes was impressed upon his mind.

He was in the country, on the bank of the River Tigris, when he saw the vision. The Tigris flows, at its nearest, some twenty or more miles from Babylon and it is evident that for some reason Daniel had either temporarily or permanently left the city. It might be that he possessed a country retreat at that spot and had gone there to meditate quietly during the three weeks of mental stress to which he refers in Chapter 10. Perhaps, on the other hand, he had for the last time retired from the active administration of affairs of state—he was now about ninety years of age—and had secluded himself in some quiet country or riverside spot calmly to await his end. At any rate it was by the swiftly flowing waters of the river which divided Babylonia from Persia that he perceived the glorious angel descending to meet him and was struck speechless and helpless before the magnificence of that glory.

Ezekiel tells of seeing such a vision; so does Isaiah. Saul of Tarsus had the same experience, on the Damascus road. The fact that such manifestations are not the lot of Christians to-day is no argument against their reality to those faithful men of old time who did see them, nor the verity of their accounts. Something more than the natural sense of sight is necessary and all men do not possess that something more. The men with Saul of Tarsus saw nothing; it is significant though that a nameless fear seized upon them and they ran and hid themselves. The young man with Elisha could not see what the prophet saw, Heaven's forces passing and repassing on the mountains around them for their protection, until Elisha prayed that his eyes might be opened. Sights of heavenly things can only be impressed upon the human mind by the Holy Spirit, and only Spirit-filled men can be receptive to spiritual things. *"The natural man received not the things of the Spirit of God ... because they are spiritually discerned."* (1 Cor. 2:9-10). We in this modern materialistic Age are ourselves so cumbered with material thoughts and preoccupations of all kinds that we cannot so easily, as could Daniel in his quiet retreat and the intensity of his communion with God, lend ourselves to be vehicles of the Holy Spirit.

It is not uncommon, though, in this our day, for watchers around the bed of a dying Christian to catch a few whispered words or glimpse a sudden look in the failing eyes, as though the departing one had suddenly seen some wonderfully glorious vista of which the watchers had no consciousness. It may well be that as the material things slip rapidly away in the last few moments of earthly life the Holy Spirit finds more abundant entrance into a mind that has always been a sanctuary of that Spirit, and sights such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah,

and even Saul perceived, appear plainly revealed to the inner consciousness.

Gabriel's message covers the whole of Chapter 11 and part of Chapter 12. It is readily recognised as an outline of world events which in Daniel's day were still future but which must be accomplished before the final deliverance of Israel. Very little of it could have been intelligible to Daniel; there is still much of it which, while not unintelligible to us to-day, is nevertheless so obscure that there are a great variety of interpretations. The first four verses of Chapter 11 are obvious enough to us; they describe briefly the passing of the Persian empire and the coming of the Greeks, the "belly and thighs of brass" of Nebuchadnezzar's dream image and the leopard of Daniel's earlier vision. That much was probably plain to him. The remainder goes off into a long catalogue of "wars and rumours of wars" in which the most definite factor is the climax, the coming of Christ at his Second Advent, pictured by the standing up of Michael the Archangel for the salvation of Israel. That, at least, must have been quite understandable to Daniel, but the long record of happenings which had to transpire first must have led him to realise as never before that many years were yet to pass before the great deliverance could come. It might well be that in this message Daniel realised the great truth that God will save Israel and all mankind, "whosoever will" not by patching up this very unsatisfactory present world, but by a resurrection from the dead to a new world, a world in which God himself makes all things new. That is the clear implication of Chapter 12.

One wonders how this detailed and extremely lengthy statement of things to come got recorded. Daniel listened to all that Gabriel had to say but the circumstances of the interview, the grandeur and solemnity of the occasion, entirely preclude any idea that he wrote it down at the time. We must here allow for the influence of the Holy Spirit, quickening Daniel's mind after the angel had left him, so that he remembered accurately every word and compiled a complete transcript of all that had been said.

So the failing hand of the old man traced the record of his last revelation. That it was to be for the benefit of future generations he no longer had any doubt. "*I am come*" Gabriel had told him "*to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many clays.*" (Ch. 10. vs. 14.). Therein lies a great principle of Divine revelation. Anxious as we may be to witness in our own time the fulfilment of "all things written" we must realise, as Daniel was led to realise, that God's time-scale is not as ours. We can study the prophetic Scriptures and witness the signs of the times with ardent zeal and heart-felt longing, but the best and most scrupulous of our conclusions cannot take into account all that is in the mind of God; only that which He has revealed, and He does not reveal all. Countless earnest Christians in past ages have been persuaded that Bible prophecy and contemporary events have joined together to point unerringly to their own time as the day of Divine intervention in human history for the final battle between good and evil; and none have actually witnessed the climax. But it will not be always thus. The time must surely come when the last generation of watchers has had revealed to it the last hidden secrets of God's design. Then the Clock of the Ages will strike twelve.

It behoves us all to be as sure of our faith and as fervent in our expectation as was Daniel, and others like him. To live as though the end will come to-morrow, and yet be prepared to live out the span of natural life to extreme old age, undisturbed in faith and hope whether the outward signs point to the one or the other eventuality; that is the faith of Daniel and the faith God wants in us. "*Though it tarry*" cried Habakkuk "*wait for it, for it will surely come; it will not tarry.*" So many in modern times have made shipwreck of their faith because of the failure of expectations. They could wait ten years, twenty years, thirty years, for the Kingdom,

but they could not wait a lifetime. But the Creator has waited through the entire span of human history and has never deviated one iota from that challenging statement of faith both in himself and in man whom He made, uttered more than three thousand years ago *“As truly as I live, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory”*. The thoughtful Christian, viewing as dispassionately as he can the insane world in which he must perforce live to-day, might be pardoned for thinking that the present order cannot possibly survive the next few years. If he is right, and the end of this Age is that much near, all Christians and all right thinking men everywhere have cause, knowingly or unknowingly, for rejoicing, for that climax means the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ in manifest power over the nations. It means the end of cruelty and hate and injustice and oppression. It means the fulfilment of the inspired words of Zephaniah *“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.”* (Zeph. 3:9.). It means the time when *“The Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him ... He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom.”* (Isa. 40:10-11). It means the realisation of words spoken to John on Patmos *“Behold, the dwelling-place of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor sighing, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.”* (Rev. 21:3-4). It means that every faithful Christian will live and reign with Christ for the thousand years, the while the *“ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads ... and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”* (Isa. 35:10.).

That is what it means if the world does perish by its own hand in our own time. And if not, if the evil vitality of this old order of things prolongs its life for a season and time, the end will still be the same and just as sure, for it is written in the purposes of God and will surely come to pass. Like Daniel, we may have to wait longer than we expect and longer than we wish, but *“it will surely come; it will not tarry”*.



# DANIEL IN BABYLON

(A. O. Hudson. Bible Study Monthly. July/August 1973, page 81)

The story of a  
great man's  
faith

## 16. At the End of the Days

The old man's task was done. He sat, quietly scanning the little pile of tablets the writing upon which he had just completed. There would be no more to put on record. The revealing angel had said his last word, and departed. The story had been told, ranging far into futurity, into that dim time when God, rising up in judgment, would have abolished evil and brought in everlasting righteousness. And Daniel was old, too old to take in any more, too old to do any more writing. He began to realise that now. He had to accept the fact that his life's work was finished and he must lay down the responsibility and wait for the call. What was it the angel had said? "*Thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.*" He began to feel that was what he needed—rest. He had led a full and busy life; survived hazards and dangers; administered great tasks and discharged heavy responsibilities; manifested sterling allegiance to God in the face of opposition and persecution. Now he was ready to yield himself to the care of God whom he had served so faithfully. He prepared himself for the rest of death knowing of a surety that at the end of the days he would stand in the resurrection of the just and see with his own eyes the reality of the visions he had just now recorded. With that he was content.

Daniel's final revelation led him far beyond the political events and foreshadowings of his own time. It spoke, not only of kings following kings, and empires following empires, but also of the gradual emergence, on the stage of world history, of a determined and calculated enemy of all righteousness and goodness, an enemy that would at the last stand up to oppose the power of God come forth to win the world for himself, and be utterly destroyed before that power. It spoke of the kingdom which will never pass away, the world in which God's will shall be done as it is done in heaven; of the resurrection of the dead and the triumph of the righteous; of all those glorious themes which coloured the words of the prophets and inspired their hearers. It set the seal on his work of sixty years and constituted him instructor for the coming twenty-five centuries of prophetic study.

It is probably true that Daniel never understood much of the detailed prophetic meaning inherent in that angelic revelation of world history which constitutes chapters 11 and 12 of his book. Even to-day there is considerable uncertainty and difference of opinion as to the right interpretation of much of these passages. Admittedly the opening verses of chapter 11 deal with matters which would have been plain enough; he had already learned, eleven years earlier, in the third year of King Belshazzar (Chap. 8) that the Persian power would one day give way to that of Greece. Although that event was still two centuries away the influence of Greece was already being felt in Daniel's time and he would not find it difficult to interpret that part of Chapter 11. But after that the story went into details which must have been completely incomprehensible to the aged prophet. He could only have come to the conclusion which Jesus at a later date had to impress upon his own disciples, that there would be "wars and rumours of wars", that "nation would rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, but the end is not yet". After a lifetime of studious and devoted waiting upon God to know when the golden time of blessing was destined to break upon the world, he eventually had to accept the Divine decree, which those other disciples had in their day and turn also to accept. "*Of that day and hour knoweth no man, but my Father only.*" There is a lesson in that for all Christian students of prophecy. We must reconcile ourselves to the fact



that, no matter how closely imminent the words of the Book and the signs of the times make the Day of Deliverance appear to be, the day and hour is locked up in the counsels of the Most High. It may be an age hence; it may be to-morrow night. We have to be ready for either eventuality.

Although Daniel would not be able to anticipate the detailed outworking in history of the strange story he had written on the tablets, there were certain embedded principles which he would be able to follow. He was of course by no means the first Hebrew prophet to be used by the Holy Spirit of God to transmit knowledge of God's designs for the end time. Joel, Isaiah, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Ezekiel, all had spoken and written of those things in previous years and Daniel would assuredly have possessed and been familiar with their writings. He was by no means a stranger to the general tenor of Divine revelation concerning happenings of the End. This crowning revelation, coming to him at the end of his life, was in considerable degree supplementary to what he already knew from his studies in the books of the earlier prophets. He must have been familiar with the prospect of a day to come when the hosts of the north, the enemies of Israel, would come out of their place to invade and destroy the chosen people, and God would intervene with the powers of heaven to destroy those forces of unrighteousness and deliver them. The factor which was new to Daniel in his own revelation was the delineation on the one hand of a personal figure who would be the Divine Leader and champion in this battle—one like the Son of Man; Michael the archangel—and on the other hand the crystallisation of all those world forces allied against God, the Antichrist, into one figure.

It is to Daniel that we owe the first shadowy silhouette of that dark, dread figure which has so intrigued—one might almost say obsessed—Christian thought through the centuries. *"He, as God, sitteth in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God."* That was St. Paul's definition in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. Who or what is he; man demon, or world system? On what stage does he appear; Greek, Roman, or yet to be: Rome, Babylon, Jerusalem? Christians have bandied these questions to and fro for centuries; only in a planned prophetic study can they be properly discussed, and certainly Daniel had no consciousness of the developments of thought into which his dim picture of a godless and all-conquering king who met his doom at last on the sword of Michael would lead.

Perhaps, though, these last two chapters of Daniel's prophecy do sow the seeds of a prophetic distinction which only comes to full flower in the New Testament, the slow but inexorable heading up of all the various and mutually antagonistic forces of evil in the world into one iron spear-head of resistance which as a single unit meets the powers of righteousness and by them is utterly broken. Daniel saw the development of earthly empires and the rising arrogance of man and the lining up of those powers into two camps—the king of the north and the king of the south. Whether we do or do not understand the extremely detailed narrative of the continuing conflict between these two powers does not alter the fact that quite evidently a long period of time is indicated. But when we come to the end of chapter 11 and the time when Michael stands up to wage final war, there is only one enemy. How it comes about, and when, may or may not be certainly apparent, but here in Daniel, as in the New Testament, God rises up in judgment at the time of his kingdom to find one united enemy, and one only, standing against him. Perhaps the vision of Revelation 19 where the Rider on the white horse comes forth from heaven to do battle, is more lucid. In that scene the powers of earth are clearly seen united as they have never yet been united in history "to make war against him that sat on the horse and against his army".

It might be, then, that Daniel at the end of his life did see, in shadowy outline, a far future day when all the world and every power in the world save that of the relative few who have retained their allegiance to God, has coalesced into one single, well-disciplined, determined fighting force, drawn up in solid phalanx to resist the coming of the Kingdom of God. That must mean that individual jealousies and national rivalries have been laid aside in the face of what all can see is a greater threat. No longer will it be a question of which type of man-made government is to rule in the earth, but whether man-made government is to survive at all. The standing up of Michael, the opening of the heavens and the emergence therefrom of the Rider on the white horse, is the answer.

From that time onward affairs in the world will take a different course. *“At that time thy people shall be delivered.” “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”* The Rider on the white horse; Michael who stands up; these are none other than our Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent, come to overthrow the power of evil and establish the Kingdom of God upon earth under which all men and nations will be instructed and led in the ways of God, and the message of repentance, justification and reconciliation preached as never before.

So the old man closed his eyes in complete confidence that it would surely come. He knew and had proved throughout a long life the faithfulness of God. He knew that, like Peter in a time yet to come, he had not followed “cunningly devised fables,” but had been an eye-witness of God’s majesty. What was it that the saintly Polycarp said when exhorted by the pagan magistrate to save his life by forswearing Christ? *“Eighty and six years have I served him, and He has never failed me. How can I deny him now!”* Daniel must have felt like that. Perhaps his mind went back to the early days of boyhood, when he first learned of God and his plans for eventual world deliverance, at the feet of his mentor, Jeremiah the prophet. Maybe he recalled dimly, because it was a long time ago, the journey to Babylon as a youth of eighteen or so, and his companions Azariah, Hananiah and Mishael, who together with him had refused the rich foods of the palace and because of their abstemiousness had eventually found the king’s favour and attained high office in the State. That would have brought before his failing eyes the picture of the arrogant king whom he had been able to serve so faithfully, and the king’s family which he had known so well, the gentle Queen Amytis, and Nitocris the king’s daughter who had remained so staunch a friend through all the vicissitudes of a life time and into old age. They were all dead now and only he was left. He remembered the king’s dream of the image, and how God had given him the interpretation and the understanding that four great empires were to rule on earth and then the kingdom of God come. The leaping flames of the fiery furnace flickered before his eyes, and again he heard the awed voice of the king “I see four men, loose, and the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” The thin hands moved restlessly; again he was in spirit endeavouring with Queen Amytis to restrain the mad king as he sought to emulate the beasts of the earth, and once more he knew the thrill of hearing the voice of Nebuchadnezzar, restored to sanity, professing allegiance to the God of heaven. The days of dreams and visions passed across his mind, the visits of the revealing angel, the years of study and reflection when he lived as a private citizen, waiting in patience for the revelation of God from heaven. The shadows in the room gathered and he entered again into the darkness of Babylon’s last night, when the Persians besieged the city; the blaze of light at the palace banquet, the writing on the wall, the end of the empire, his brief time of service under the Median King Darius, his deliverance from the lion’s den. Rapidly the pictures passed before his mental vision and at the end of

them all, a golden glory in the background, he saw the fair beauty of the world that is yet to be, the world for which he had waited all his life, the world in which he himself was to stand, in his lot, at the end of the days.

He could see them more plainly now, those his friends and companions of days so long ago. They had all gone in front of him; he had not seen them for a long time. They were there, waiting for him. In the land yet to be, in the end of the days, he would take up his task with renewed strength and ability, and once more serve God to whom he had been faithful, and who had been so faithful to him; serve him in that glory transcendent that will never pass away.

The room was getting very dark now, and it was quiet, quieter than Daniel had ever known it. The golden visions flickered on, beckoning him ... He was going to rest now, as the angel had promised ... but he would stand in his lot ... at the end of the days.

