

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 12 April 2021 Today's topic: Daniel

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god. Daniel 1:1-2 (NIV).

Daniel. Even if you aren't too well-versed in the Bible, you've probably heard about Daniel in the lion's den. That's in this book. So is the story of the three men in the furnace. And the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. And the statue that foretold the world's empires. And the finger that wrote on the wall. In the book of Daniel there is history and prophecy, famous stories and obscure meanings. There are stories about the exile of Israel in Babylon, and prophecies about the end of the world: all this in a book that is likely 2500 years old. It was written over 500 years before the birth of Jesus, yet Daniel talks about someone like a "son of man, coming in the clouds of heaven" in a time that hasn't even happened yet today.

Knowing all that, let's agree that history is fascinating. God starts out the book of Daniel with a short history reference. This isn't just to give you an introduction: it's to ground His fantastic prophecies in the real, factual timeline of human history. It lends credence to the supernatural. In these first two verses, the author (Daniel, we presume) says that the Hebrew exile to Babylon happened at a certain time with verifiable events.

This exile continues the stories that finished 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, which conclude with the fall of Jerusalem, ending the kingdoms that started way back with Saul. Israel had been captured and deported to Assyria in the 700s BC, yet Judah persevered in the land. Then, between 605 and 580 BC, Babylon invaded Judah and deported all the people to be slaves in Babylon. Daniel was one of those who were deported. The Jews would later return to Judea and live there for several hundred years under occupied rule before being scattered again in the permanent diaspora that began in AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple.

Here in this book, we'll get some insight into how events during the Babylonian exile shaped the Jewish (and later Christian) faith, and what faith and courage in the face of adversity really looks like. That's a lesson we could all use today. Get ready: Daniel will be a great ride.

For further reading: 2 Kings 24:1-4, 2 Chronicles 36:6, Jeremiah 46:2, Zechariah 5:5-11, Daniel 1:3

Lord Jesus, thank You for Daniel and the things he recorded in this book. Open my mind to learn them.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 13 April 2021 Today's topic: No Coincidences

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility — young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. Daniel 1:3-4 (NIV).

The common language of Babylon was Aramaic; the common language spoken in Judea in the time of Christ was Aramaic. Coincidence? It's one way in which those in Christ's time would have related to this story. I don't believe there are any coincidences.

It's no coincidence that events would line up in Babylon the way they did. God had been patient with His chosen people for 1500 years. He had provided for them as they rose from the family of Abraham. He had guided Abraham's descendants into, then out of, Egypt. He provided the land of Canaan, 'flowing with milk and honey,' and guided the people there. Through the judges, God formed Israel into a nation, then gave them kings to rule and to build His temple home.

All through this, God warned His people that there would be consequences if they turned from Him. The invasions of Israel by Assyria and Babylon didn't happen all of a sudden. There were centuries of internal strife and moral rot that made Israel, then Judah, vulnerable to invasion. Yet God patiently taught, patiently provided, patiently sent prophets to herald both foreboding disaster and coming salvation.

Daniel and his people didn't end up in Babylon by chance. No, it was the outcome of millions of choices that culminated in God delivering His judgment on His people through the weapons of occupation. It wasn't a coincidence.

Thus, when the king sent for men of good standing from the Judaites, it was God who had moved all the chess pieces into place so that His prophet, Daniel, could serve His purposes by serving an enemy king. He would do this through faithfully voicing God's words to desperate ears; He would do this by causing miracles to occur in a palace of pagan overlords.

And it started with the Babylonians teaching their captives the common language of this foreign land. The students would learn Sumerian and Mesopotamian histories, and would learn how to speak in new ways to serve a hostile ruler. In doing so, they began working for the Jews' eventual return home. In a larger way, God was organizing the framework through which He would witness more of His messianic plan of salvation.

There are no coincidences.

For further reading: Genesis 39:6, 2 Kings 20:18, Ezra 4:7, Isaiah 39:7, Daniel 1:6

Father and God, You arrange all of human history to serve Your holy purposes. Thank You for doing this in my life.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 14 April 2021 Today's topic: A Nutritious Lesson

The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. Daniel 1:5 (NIV).

So what if Daniel and his fellow servants got special food and drink? So what indeed, or haven't you heard of the health benefits of good nutrition? If, that is, that is what "food and wine from the king's table" actually was. We'll see in a few days that this caused a conflict that led Daniel to stand on his principles.

For now, let's get back to that "so what" question. It was not just for nutrition's sake that the food was provided: it was instruction. Nebuchadnezzar's purpose was to train up his new captives into the way a young servant of Babylon should behave. The ancient city of Babylon lies approximately 100 nautical miles from Jerusalem. Daniel and his fellow captives would have walked there; they didn't ride a horse or in a wagon. Walking at a good pace, a healthy young man could make the trek, on roads and when properly shod and fed, in just a few days. But that probably didn't happen because a few things can be logically assumed:

- There were hundreds of thousands of defeated, exhausted, terrified people walking to Babylon at the same time.
- There weren't improved roads, so the group traveled en masse over small roads and open desert.
- They may have been in chains, driven by taskmasters and soldiers.
- It probably took many days, perhaps several weeks, without readily plentiful food or water.

By the time Daniel arrived in Babylon, healthy or not, he would have been physically and emotionally exhausted. Drained of energy and will, he would have been a ripe target for 're-education' into the ways of his new captors. To better serve his new master-king, Daniel and his fellow 'students' were fed plates of food like the officials of Babylon would have eaten. Reference.com says that "Ancient Babylonian cuisine was rich and varied, including meat from cows, sheep, goats, pig, deer and fowl, as well as eggs, fish, shellfish and even turtles...among the vegetables eaten by the ancient Babylonians were beets, peas, arugula, lettuce, turnips, legumes, and mushrooms." A varied diet indeed.

But things like pigs and shellfish were anathema to the Jews, forbidden as unclean by the laws of Moses. To refuse to eat them would have been an insult to the king, their new captor, and that would have been problematic; a death sentence even...which was exactly how things turned out. It would have been a nutritious diet, but it would have caused a moral conflict for Daniel (and a lesson for us). That was exactly what God was counting on.

For further reading: Esther 2:5-9, Daniel 1:6

Lord God, thank You for the story of Daniel.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 15 April 2021 Today's topic: Name Changing

Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. Daniel 1:6-7 (NIV).

Let's set the table to remember where we are. Judah, the nation, has been captured and their home, Jerusalem, destroyed. They walked across the desert to become slaves in a hostile place. Their 'best and brightest' were chosen to be special servants to the king based on their looks and personality (sort of like American Idol). Those chosen were served food that conflicted with the Jewish teachings they learned as boys. And, they were taught for three years how to serve their new slavemaster king; sort of like getting a bachelor's degree in Babylonian royal etiquette.

Now the Babylonians change their names. It's not enough that the men be re-educated and propagandized. No, the Babylonians wanted them to know deep inside that they were no longer free people of God, free Jews, free men who could worship who they chose and do as they pleased. Their Babylonian captors took their identities. Daniel and his friends needed LifeLock, not that it would have done them any good.

It wasn't as if it should have been a surprise. Decades before, Isaiah had prophesied that Judah would be taken captive to Babylon, and now it had happened. When someone takes you captive, they try to dehumanize you, throw you off balance, establish dominance over you in order to control you with the least effort. The most effective way to do that with the most minimal chance of failure is to take away your identity and your ability to stop them.

But the Babylonians didn't know God. They didn't realize that something like a name, or food, or even the most powerful nation on earth is insignificant compared to even a thought from the Most High. The Babylonian king put his trust in his own abilities to dehumanize and change his new slaves. He trusted in what he saw and who he was. He didn't know God, and He didn't even bother to ask.

So, when the rubber would soon meet the road, King Nebuchadnezzar wasn't ready for what Daniel would bring to his kingdom. 2600 years later, the message for us, in our crazy mixed-up world, should be the same: trust God, even in the most difficult times, even when our opponents try to oppress, control, or dehumanize us. Stay the course; refuse the tasty food. Our God is so much more than they know, and so much better than anything they have to offer.

For further reading: Isaiah 39:7, Ezekiel 14:14, Daniel 1:8

Lord God, You are fantastic. You are over all things, all time, all that is, because all that is has been given and created by You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 20 April 2021 Today's topic: Un-Daniel-Like

Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." Daniel 1:9-10 (NIV).

Thank God for the official of Babylon, and not just because he showed favor and compassion to Daniel. Instead, thank God for him because he's real, because he is me and you. "I am afraid" sums up so much of our lives because each of us has endured times of fear in our lives.

Today's verses are reminiscent of Genesis 39 and the story of Joseph, who was also a slave in a foreign land (Egypt). Joseph also found himself in prison under the supervision of a warden who God moved to show compassion. Like Daniel, Joseph had landed in prison for adhering to his beliefs (in his case, about adultery and lying) and, like Daniel, bigger things were yet to come for Joseph. Most of all, like Joseph, Daniel was bold.

Good for Daniel; good for Joseph. But most of the rest of us (yours truly included) too often succumb to our fears. The compassionate Babylonian warden was afraid for his neck if Joseph and his friends refused to eat the rich food from the king. He was afraid that the king would find out and punish him for it.

I'm ashamed to admit that's me. I'm the jailer. I'm sometimes scared to admit that I don't know something at work. Or that someone will punish me for things I did long ago. Sometimes, I'm afraid that I'll be rejected for not measuring up to other people, or for so boldly failing to measure up to the high standards God sets. Sometimes, I'm afraid I've built my life-house on unsound foundations.

How un-Daniel-like.

How laughable Jesus must find all this. Maybe a little sad, too. It seems so simplistic, so childlike even, to say that trusting more in Jesus makes all those fears fade away...but it's true! The older I get, the more I find myself reminding myself that the cure for the common sin – or fear, or worry, or whatever – is Jesus. I don't need to hold onto my old fears. He wants me to let them go, then follow, then let Him change me; He even pleads with us to let Him take them away. How about we do that today?.

Maybe the jailer listened to Daniel, who understood Jesus as God without even knowing Jesus by name. As we'll soon find out, things turned out just fine.

For further reading: Genesis 39:21, 1Kings 8:50, Proverbs 16:7, Daniel 1:11

Lord Jesus, forgive my fears and my lack of trust. Stay with me and make me bold for You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 21 April 2021 Today's topic: Eat Your Veggies

Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. Daniel 1:11-15 (NIV).

Gist of the story: the prison guard agrees to Daniel's terms. Daniel asks the guard to let he and his three friends become vegans for 10 days (which seemed preposterous in the moment), then the guard can judge for himself whether or not the food has nourished the four Judaites.

That's the gist. The moral of the story, however, is that with God all things are possible.

You can be a vegetarian if you want to. It's a dedicated lifestyle. It's Biblical; in fact, until the time of the Flood, people were vegetarians. I know quite a few vegetarians and, to be honest, they're in better health than yours truly. They eat cleaner; they eat healthier; they generally eat better quality food. Just ask them: they'll tell you all of this. Repeatedly. Know what else about them? I am betting that, if they were compared against we meat-eaters, after a 10 day period, they would look just as healthy.

My friend, Raymond, is fond of saying, "every day a pig must die so that I may eat." I'm with him on that, because I love pork and I love all kinds of meat. But, if God told me that I had to become vegetarian to save my life, I'd enthusiastically do it and I'd be just as healthy.

That was Daniel's proposition. He was given a choice to (maybe) live by faith or die. Live by eating the forbidden foods, but forsake your adherence to God's commands. Or chance death by rejecting the Babylonian-commanded foods while staying true to the Lord. It wasn't just an argument over the menu: it was literally a king-defying question of life or death. Even more, if Daniel had eaten the Babylonian diet, who's to say the king wouldn't have found him lacking and rejected him anyway?

Daniel surely contemplated all this and put his trust in the Lord. He was a bold man of faith who understood that God would provide a way through whatever was about to happen, even if it meant becoming a vegetarian and defying the king's will. There's a lesson in that for us as well, and the lesson isn't about vegetables.

But today, even though tofu is great, because God eventually commanded all food to be good, for my breakfast I'll have sausage and eggs.

For further reading: Genesis 2:16, Exodus 23:25, Acts 10:9-29, Revelation 2:10, Daniel 1:16

Lord let me follow only Your commands.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 22 April 2021 Today's topic: Set the Table

At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. Daniel 1:15-17 (NIV).

Today we learn that God was setting the table for something that was about to happen. Last time, Daniel boldly put his trust in the Lord, knowing that good would come of it. It was a cheeky move, refusing to follow the royal diet, but Daniel couldn't do it in good conscience. Now, we begin to see he was blessed for it. God gave Daniel and his companions good health, but also knowledge and understanding of learned things. To Daniel, God gave the unique ability to understand dreams.

Tell me: how is God setting your table today? He has given you special talents, knowledge, abilities, experiences, and passions that nobody else on the planet has. How are you using those to further His kingdom and your welfare?

And do you understand that we are to do that – use our talents to further Jesus' kingdom and our welfare – in the order listed?

That matters. It's tithing. It's work skills. It's hobbies. It's interests. It's past-times. We are here to learn to love the Lord more by using what He gives us to display Him in our lives. When we do our best, it's like we're sharing a little Jesus. And when we share a little Jesus, He gives us more to share. I know: in a hostile world, it makes no sense, but when exactly did God promise that everything He did would make sense to us?

After all, why would being able to understand dreams matter? Why would it matter to Babylonians that Daniel's 'posse' was learned and wise? When you're worried for your life, what good is that anyway?

In the way of the Lord, it's ALL good. It's the worry that doesn't matter. God was moving the pieces on the chessboard of Daniel's life so that he would be ready to serve Him through the Babylonian king. Being well fed on vegetables was the act of faith that God would use to prepare His servants to do wonderful things of which we still speak today. If God did that for Daniel, He can (and does) do the same for me and you. So, again, how is God setting your table today?

For further reading: Exodus 23:25, Job 12:13, Colossians 1:9, James 1:5, Daniel 1:18

Lord Jesus, reveal to me, I pray, how You want to use me today. Help me to see the opportunities You put before me to serve Your Kingdom better.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 26 April 2021 Today's topic: Nebuchadnezzar

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. Daniel 1:18-21 (NIV).

For Daniel and his friends, this was the moment of truth. Their faith and training had brought them to the king, who found them brilliant, wise, and superb.

Before going further, let's talk about Nebuchadnezzar. He was no ordinary king. He was the greatest of the Babylonian era. He was one of the most renowned rulers in all of antiquity. Even without the account of Daniel, thanks to archaeology, we would know and respect Nebuchadnezzar anyway. According to Wikipedia, he lived from 634 to 562 BC, and reigned for over 40 of those years. Though not a tall or imposing man, King Nebuchadnezzar ruled one of the largest armies in history. He's responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem (including the Second Temple). Nebuchadnezzar led the armies that finally defeated Babylon's arch-enemy Assyria, which (at the time) was allied with Egypt (whom he also defeated). He built the city of Babylon into the most powerful city on the planet (outside ancient China). Nebuchadnezzar also likely built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful man, a vain man, and he understood that the known world of his day knew and feared his name. Think of him as the Stalin of Babylon. To be summoned by Nebuchadnezzar would be to walk into the presence of a man who thought of himself as a god, and who knew of, but didn't fear, the living God of the Israelites.

Knowing all that makes it all the more amazing, and divinely miraculous, that Daniel and his three friends would become successful, even powerful, in the kingdom of this ancient titan. What would Nebuchadnezzar have thought of these four Jews, and the God they served? Until he questioned them, he probably wouldn't have given them much thought. He had delegated the preparation of them as arch-servants to another, and he trusted that man to do his job well...or else.

All that was about to change. The moment of truth had arrived. After all, even accomplished, powerful kings sometimes have bad dreams.

For further reading: Genesis 41:46, Daniel 2:1

Lord, thank You that we still know of and can learn from the vanity of Nebuchadnezzar. Thank You that You were at work there in Babylon, about to bring Yourself glory and honor through both Daniel and pagan enemies.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 27 April 2021 Today's topic: Sort Of

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means. Daniel 2:1-3 (NIV).

If you're in an ancient pagan city, the best thing you can do when you have a bad dream is call in people who don't know what they're doing to help you learn what it means. I mean it; I'm not being sarcastic. If something troubles you, the best thing you can do is summon people who don't have a clue about such things (but have set themselves up as THE experts in these matters). You don't know any better or have given up trying.

It's sort of like watching the Oscars. Or maybe the nightly news. But Nebuchadnezzar didn't have either of those things (which was a blessing for him). All he had were the people who called themselves experts at divining God's will by watching stars, mixing potions, and making up stories to explain things they didn't have explanations for (sort of like the news and the Academy). It was the best they knew how to do. In fact, it was all any ancient kingdom knew how to do.

Except Israel and Judah. They had once been a single kingdom – Israel – but divisions and greed split the kingdom after Solomon. They had always known (and sometimes trusted) God. But they chose more earthly paths...you know: the ones where magicians, enchanters, and the like tried to make sense out of human senselessness. Consequently, Israel disappeared altogether, then Judah found itself enslaved in Babylon.

And now the king had a troubling dream, so he did the only thing he knew how to do: he called in 'the experts.' As we'll soon see, it did him no good.

Sort of like it does us no good when we do the same thing. We know better but we choose the stupidity of our sins instead. We hypocrites of 2021 believe in God but turn from Him anyway. Nebuchadnezzar rejected a relationship with God, too. He knew of Judah's God, but he thought of himself as a god instead. He chose other ways, other things, other people like himself and his foolish advisors to tell him the best way to go. He learned it wouldn't get him far. Sort of like us. Sort of like the news. Sort of like the Oscars.

For further reading: Genesis 20:3, Exodus 7:11, Esther 6:1, Job 33:15-18, Isaiah 19:3, Jeremiah 27:9, Daniel 2:4

Lord God, forgive me when I forsake You, when I have turned aside and tried to do things without You. I chose stupidly. Forgive me.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 28 April 2021 Today's topic: Every Matter

Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me." Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it." Daniel 2:4-7 (NIV).

The comedians who served King Nebuchadnezzar weren't very smart. Was it that they thought they could bluff their way through interpreting the king's dreams, or were they afraid to tell him, "sorry, your majesty, but that's above our pay grade?" Either way, they weren't very bright.

Think about it: Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that bothered him so much that he called in some of his most trusted advisors, looking for their help. It was the best he could do. He was skeptical that they'd be able to help him, so skeptical that he vowed to either reward or kill them depending on what they say. Perhaps they failed him before; perhaps the toadstools or chicken bones that they 'consulted' to divine the future had actually been just mushrooms and bones after all.

Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar already knew they were wasting his time, so he laid down the law before they even spoke. As we'll see in the days to come, they were playing him, playing word games to try to get the king himself to tell them what to say.

What about now? We live in an age full of breaking news, statistics bent and twisted to prove what is untrue, and skepticism of even the best proven facts. What good is it without God? College professors don't know any more than Joe on the street. Anyone with an internet connection can post a video blog that interprets the day's events in any way they please. Nobody really knows.

We don't sound much different from the court fools of Babylon.

Our problem is the same as theirs: we don't go to God first. God tells us to come to Him in every matter, for everything. He doesn't say, "only bring me the big things." God says "everything" and He means it. Whether it's your in-most burdens or starting your weed whacker, God tells us to bring all our thoughts, prayers, and actions to Him first. Nebuchadnezzar didn't know this. His magicians didn't care. And they hadn't spoken to Daniel yet. What's our excuse?

For further reading: Genesis 41:32, Ezra 4:7, Ezra 6:1, Nehemiah 2:3, Daniel 2:8

Lord God, today I pray to bring every matter to You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 29 April 2021 Today's topic: In Desperation

Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me." Daniel 2:8-9 (NIV).

Confession of an obvious truth here: in reading these Old Testament verses, I'm hoping you pick up on how they still apply to us today and, more importantly, how, directly or indirectly, they point us to Jesus in every way possible. Case in point: Nebuchadnezzar's desperation.

He didn't trust his court jester magicians; they had let him down before. He knew they would try to play him, to stall, to get him to tell them what he wanted to hear, and to generally run out the clock on his crisis du jour. So, under threat of death, Nebuchadnezzar cornered his advisors, and bid them to tell him what he was dreaming.

He had nowhere else to go. Give this to Nebuchadnezzar: his mama didn't raise a fool. He's wise enough to know that what he's been dreaming matters. It's important; it has meaning beyond what he understands. Nebuchadnezzar knows that he needs an answer to this dream that has bothered him so much that he can't sleep and is deeply troubled. So, he asks the people who, according to his customs, are supposed to know what it means.

That must have troubled him more. He had talked with them before, and we can only imagine that their counsel, their interpretations of all things mystical, left him cold. More commonly put, Nebuchadnezzar knew they were full of it.

Have you ever worked with someone who was looking for information, or an answer, or help with something, and they had been let down before? Has that person been you? In my experience, most of those folks turn inward, 'doing it by themselves,' which never works well for long. Solitude and being a loner isn't what God designed us for, but it's understandable. We've all been there. We trusted someone and we got burned. Is it any wonder we'd be reluctant to trust again? Hello, desperate Nebuchadnezzar.

The good news for him is, well, the Good News. In a few days, we'll learn that he meets Daniel, who was familiar with the Good News of the God who saves His people. Our desperation is the clay God uses to mold us into something more than we could be on our own. Without God, nothing is possible, especially in our desperation. With Him, we cannot fail.

For further reading: Esther 4:11, Isaiah 41:22-24, Daniel 2:10

Lord, in my desperation, help me to always see how much I need You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 3 May 2021 Today's topic: The Experts

The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans." Daniel 2:10-11 (NIV).

The "wise men" of Babylon were cornered, so they folded. They didn't have a constructive answer, yet they responded anyway. Read what they said again and you'll see that they both confessed they couldn't answer AND blamed the king for even asking them to. "We don't know but how dare you ask it of us anyway!" Flash forward a few centuries and you'll find the Pharisees did the same thing of Jesus.

Flash forward to now. Anyone heard a full timeline of how Covid came to be, one that can be agreed on by all sides? Like the rest of us, "experts" have opinions, but don't know. The US national debt is in the tens of trillions of dollars, maybe even more: anyone ever heard of a way to pay it off or plausibly grow past it? Once again, like the rest of us, the "experts" have opinions, but don't really know. How about you? You're the expert of your life; what happens when you feel lost?

Once again, the "experts" know what to do...until they don't. Just like the rest of us.

Except that the experts in Babylon hadn't spoken with Daniel yet; that's coming in a few verses. You and I, more than twenty-six centuries after Daniel, have the complete Bible to give us guidance. The dirty secret of today's verses is that the "experts" of Nebuchadnezzar's court had the same Pentateuch and ancient history that we have. They had access to all the ancient knowledge of the Judaites, as well as that of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, and a dozen other societies of antiquity. And yet they still chose to ignore God and blame anyone but themselves. If they were alive today, perhaps they'd be employed by a TV news network. Or maybe the CDC.

Fact is, when ANY matter perplexes us, the first, best place we can go is to God. Bring our troubles to Him; seek the face of Jesus and open our hearts to His word. Pray, confess, talk, cry, grieve, whisper; whatever it takes. Take it to God, then turn the corner from it. Repent and move forward. You don't need to be an expert to understand that. You simply need to believe in God and what He says.

Even the experts, magicians, or CDC could do that.

For further reading: Genesis 41:38, Daniel 2:12

Lord God, forgive me when I fail to open my heart to You. Teach me Your better ways today.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 4 May 2021 Today's topic: Isn't It Ironic?

This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death. Daniel 2:12-13 (NIV).

It's ironic, isn't it? Nebuchadnezzar had had enough of the expert buffoons who were supposed to know what they were doing in matters of the soul. He was done with them; he became so furious that he ordered that they be killed. Not only them, but also the Judaites whom he had captured; that included Daniel.

Isn't it ironic (in a little Alanis riff there) that Nebuchadnezzar's death warrant was the vehicle through which God would soon work miracles? Starting tomorrow, we'll begin to see how the king's command to kill his trusted (but hapless) servants would bring out the faith in a captive Jew so that the power of the Most High could be displayed.

So let me ask: have you ever been fired? I have; three times, in fact. They tell you "this isn't working out" or "we're making a change." Once, though, I had a manager (a VP, in fact) tell me "nobody wants to work with you," which was possibly the most unkind thing he could have said to me in the moment. Then, as now, it feels like death. More appropriately, it feels like a death sentence, especially when you don't deserve it. I really hadn't deserved it, but it happened all the same.

Daniel and even "the experts" of divinity there in Babylon probably didn't feel they deserved death, either. The magicians had been frauds who had fooled the king more than once; perhaps they were deserving of death after all. Yet Daniel and his fellow captives had done nothing wrong other than be in the wrong place in the wrong time. Alanis might have said it: it's like rain on your wedding day.

Or, (again) as we'll find out soon, they were actually in the right place at the right time. They were there because God had arranged events so that they were free to choose Him. In doing so, they would display His glory to powerful unbelievers. Nebuchadnezzar had spoken on a whim, but he didn't know God would use his short temper to perform miracles.

I didn't deserve to get fired, but it has all worked out ok. Indeed, many of the blessings I know now might not have turned out as they did were it not for those unkind cuts. God was at work here, too. So it was with Daniel as well.

Isn't it ironic, don't you think? Yeah, I really do think.

For further reading: Daniel 2:14

Lord, all praise to You for how You arrange this world. Thank You for what once seemed like a death sentence.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 5 May 2021 Today's topic: An Amazing Turn of Events

When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. Daniel 2:14-16 (NIV).

These three verses transition us from the part of the story where Nebuchadnezzar becomes angry to the part where God, through Daniel, takes action. Notice a few things about them.

Daniel was bold, and he spoke in faith using the gift God had given to him. Imagine your jailer coming to you and telling you that he was there to kill you. We don't know how that conversation went; we only know of how it ended. Daniel spoke up to his would-be killer, and the would-be killer responded in reason. What's more, when Arioch was done explaining, he let Daniel go in to see King Nebuchadnezzar. That's astounding. In any era, in any time, it's an amazing turn of events. The more you think about it, the Almighty surely was at work in the moment.

We can think that because we see that Arioch was open to a Daniel's words. Arioch was the commander of the palace guard. Centuries later, Rome's Praetorian Guard would become famous (and sometimes infamous) guarding Rome's emperors. They were the Secret Service of their day, charged with guarding the king. Every strong leader has those around him (or her) who are trained to protect at all costs. They are disciplined, strong, insightful, and powerful. For the king's own senior guard to talk with this Jewish slave, then for him to let the slave personally visit the king after, is another amazing turn of events. It was because Arioch was open to hearing that Daniel could do what the Babylonians couldn't because Daniel believed God would allow it.

Most amazing of all, Nebuchadnezzar was probably skeptical, but he heard out Daniel anyway. Imagine the scene: your trusted guard is admitting a condemned man into your throne room. The man you trusted to carry out your decree is letting this slave into your presence...and Nebuchadnezzar allows it! He must have been a canny man, one who recognized something extraordinary when he saw it. It was surely extraordinary for this cheeky slave to come in and address the king after he had been condemned, and then to say he could interpret this worrisome dream: something the court magicians had failed to do.

All those are noteworthy. What's more noteworthy than just these words is what God did with them next. They're more than just an amazing turn of events: they're miraculous.

For further reading: Daniel 2:17

Lord, I give you praise for amazing miracles that inspire us to do great things in Your name. Thank You for these lessons from antiquity.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 6 May 2021 Today's topic: Only God

Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Daniel 2:17-18 (NIV).

Prayer works. It isn't just some wishing well; it isn't a giant claw machine where you put in a quarter and finagle the machine to give you a prize. When you open your heart to God and give Him what you believe, what you think, what's on your heart and mind, He responds.

Have you read about harvesting the Judean date palms? According to a story in Haaretz.com, in 2005, scientists got a 2000 year old seed, found at Masada, to sprout. Since then, five more seeds have sprouted, and one germinated the original one. Just this year, that plant produced dates: the first harvested from that species of plant since the days of Jesus.

Daniel is a story of supernatural miracles, only the first few of which we've seen. Yet here, today, in our world, is a miracle of the preservation of life. If there's ever a reason to give glory to God, it is the preservation of life. Or the resurrection of it from something that people thought surely must be dead. How amazing is it that God would let seeds, long dry and considered dead, sprout in good soil into trees that would grow and bear fresh fruit – and new seeds – centuries, even millenia, later! Only God could do that. Science alone would have long ago written them off.

A God who could sprout dead seeds into life can do any miracle he likes. He can speak a universe into existence. He can save innocent Jews from execution so that they might live to serve Him in new ways. He can burn up the wet sacrifices of pagan magicians. He can resurrect His only begotten Son so that, through Him, all mankind might live in eternal peace.

That's the God Daniel prayed to in Babylon. Daniel had full faith and confidence that God would hear his prayer and help as He saw fit. It wasn't just an amazing turn of events or chance: it was faith in the living God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. It was a miracle: one we, too, can see every day when we pray. In that faith, Daniel submitted to God to save not only himself, but his friends and even the hapless sorcerers of Babylon who actually had deserved that death sentence.

God does the same for us today. If you don't think He can, go try a Judean date.

For further reading: Ezra 1:2, Nehemiah 1:4, Isaiah 37:4, Jeremiah 33:3, Jonah 1:9, Revelation 11:13, Daniel 2:19

Lord, thank You for life from lifelessness. For prayer, for saving.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 10 May 2021 Today's topic: Prayer Matters

During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king." Daniel 2:19-23 (NIV).

God answered Daniel's prayer the night he prayed it. Daniel was given the ability to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's mysterious dream. What did Daniel do? He immediately praised God as soon as he woke up.

When was the last time you or I did that?

1 Corinthians 2 reminds us that God reveals all things to us through His Spirit: the same Holy Spirit who God sent at Pentecost; the same Holy Spirit who imparts grace and wisdom from God to us. That's a great comfort, knowing the God of the New Testament is the same God of the Old Testament. He's the same God through all of history.

All praise to Him for that. There. We've given up praise, and on a Monday morning even. Yet we're actually just acknowledging the same thing Daniel knew 2600 years ago. God gives us all wisdom and knowledge. That big "aha" moment when you discern the meaning of something? God's Spirit. Your new idea for making the best cookies in North Texas? God's Spirit. The moment when you look at your kids and realize how blessed you truly are? God's Spirit. That time you were so mad at each other yet, instead of continuing the fight, you opted for resolution and peace? God's Spirit.

Keep thinking of those things throughout the day and you'll see there are zillions of times when love touched your heart. When you realize that, now remember that those were times when God Himself was at work in you, in big moments and lesser ones. The God of the patriarchs and prophets is the God who resurrected His Son, Jesus, is the same God who worked the miracles of Acts is the same God of both Christmas morning and calming our deepest hurts. He's the same God who Daniel praised.

Prayer works; prayer matters, both in petition and praise. It's time we used some of it to give Him thanks and praise. He so much more than deserves it.

For further reading: Genesis 20:8, Exodus 3:15, Job 33:15, Psalm 75:6-7, Psalm 113:2, Ezekiel 28:3, 1 Corinthians 2:10, Daniel 2:24

Lord God, all my praise to You and You alone today!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 11 May 2021 Today's topic: The Answer

Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him." Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means." The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?" Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these: Daniel 2:24-27 (NIV).

God gives Daniel the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, so Daniel seeks out his captor to tell him to not harm other people. Notice that order of things. God gave wisdom, so God's servant seeks out his enemy to have mercy on him. It's a very New Testament, "Jesusy" thing to do smack dab in the middle of the Old Testament prophetic time. It's because God is the answer.

Daniel's first words (after praising God) are to tell Arioch to not kill the wise men of Babylon. He doesn't say, "stop! I have a solution" or anything about himself. He tells the king's high guard to not kill his own countrymen. And Arioch believed him. The guard must have felt desperate to not do this terrible thing the king had ordered him to do. So, he takes the slave into meet his king...and the king doesn't fume or scream, "Arioch, why aren't you out doing what I told you to do?" No, Nebuchadnezzar talks with the slave and asks if he has an answer (that his advisors didn't have).

That's when Daniel gives credit where credit is due. "Not me, sire, but God. Here's what it all means." Because God has the answers. Because God IS the answer.

Here's what it all means: those are words we could use today. Sometimes when I pray, I feel stupid, insignificant. The devil sneaks in and tries to tell me that my feelings are true, but he's a liar. He's always been a liar. The truth is that God does hold all the answers we search for. He can interpret a king's dream. He will lead us down His paths for His righteousness' sake. What seems impossible or foolish to man is child's play to our God. He is the answer.

For further reading: Genesis 41:8, Deuteronomy 21:10, Psalm 23, Daniel 2:28

Lord, in You alone are all the answers to this life. In You are all blessings.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 12 May 2021 Today's topic: The Almighty At Work in the Land

"As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind. Daniel 2:28-30 (NIV).

Can we see the future in dreams? There are people who dreamed of something and it happened. I know of quite a few women who somehow knew the sexes of their children long before they were born. We all have had déjà vu moments. And more than once I've seemed to know ahead of time what would happen in some very random situations that actually came true (even without dreaming of them)

Credit God, not me, or déjà vu, or even the expectant mothers. Whatever revelations we have, we get them from God.

Our so-called modern world downplays these types of things. After all, random chance and its opposite, orchestrated results, seem to account for many actions in our lives. But more and more, I see those aren't what makes things happen. I've come to see there are no coincidences, no real random chances, no acts of fate. In so many ways more than what we can count, God is at work in our lives. Near the end of the Civil War, when asked what he thought it all meant, Abraham Lincoln is rumored to have said "the Almighty was at work in the land."

How is the Almighty at work in the 'land' of your life right now?

Today is a fresh, new day. It has never occurred before; it has never been lived before. What will you do with it? Everything you believe, everything you've done or know, everything up until now is at your disposal to think, say, do, and use in living out today. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed; it may not even happen. And while what you know, do, or are today may (or may not be) everything you've ever wished for, it is who you are today. Your life is your set of tools for today.

As you work today, God will also be at work in the land of your life. God has revealed everything we know to get to today. We'll use that uniquely. There's only one of every one of us, and we are His very good creation, made for love and to help Him in His work here.

What will you do with it today? What dreams are revealed to you? What land will God and you build?

For further reading: Genesis 40:8, Genesis 41:25, Isaiah 45:3, Jeremiah 10:7, Amos 4:13, Matthew 24:1, Revelation 1:1, , Daniel 2:31

Oh Lord, thank You for today. Thank You for revealing to me for today.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 13 May 2021 Today's topic: So, There You Have It

“Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. “This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. Daniel 2:31-36 (NIV).

My Concordia reference Bible explains that the layers of Nebuchadnezzar's statue represent the empires that came to rule the known world after Babylon. This is also teaching I'd learned years ago, in a WELS church in Colorado.

The head of gold represented Babylon, with the next layer being the empire after Babylon, specifically the Medo-Persian empire. Then came Greece, then Rome. Some people also believe that the final empire, represented by the toes of the statue, represents a modern empire today.

The Bible reference also says, “the diminishing value of the metals from gold to silver to bronze to iron represents the decreasing power and grandeur of the rulers of the successive empires...The metals also symbolize a growing degree of toughness and endurance, with each successive empire lasting longer than the preceding one.”

So, there you have it.

It's miraculous that Daniel was able to interpret all of this. It was a miracle from God. In the verses to come, Daniel will further explain the meaning of the statue, and the dream, and he'll do so bluntly and earnestly. In doing that, he will preach the good news of Jesus to a pagan ruler nearly seven centuries before Christ.

And Daniel was just a slave. He didn't have a Concordia to help him. Or the internet, or archaeology, or trained pastors and church leaders and deep analysis of spiritual matters. All Daniel had was God, and God was more than enough to do what needed to be done.

So, there you have it again. Tell me: what's stopping us? We have God and both of His testaments. What's in our way? Where can we ask for God's help today? So, there you have it indeed.

For further reading: Genesis 40:12, Job 12:19, Psalm 1:4, Isaiah 23:3-5, Micah 4:1, Habbakuk 1:7, Zechariah 4:6, Daniel 2:37

Lord Jesus, thank You for the revelation to Daniel of the coming history of his time, and the kingdom only You would establish.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 17 May 2021 Today's topic: What Lasts

Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. "After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. Daniel 2:37-43 (NIV).

How would Nebuchadnezzar have felt to know that his empire would not last? How would you or I feel in that situation?

Fact is, our empires won't last, either. Nowhere in Scripture is a "United States" mentioned. Businesses and corporations aren't meant to last over generations; in fact, most don't. And what about us? Most families don't raise a fortune; most families don't inherit fortunes either. In the end, the only earth we really, truly 'own' is our grave. Even Nebuchadnezzar is dead, and we don't know where he's buried today.

One thing to note about the verses: Daniel isn't referring to Nebuchadnezzar as Jesus. Jesus is often called "King of Kings." In verse 37, Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar "king of kings." He isn't referring to Nebuchadnezzar as savior. Instead, Daniel addresses him as the most powerful ruler in the known world; the temporal king who rules over lesser kings; the 'head Fred,' if you will, not the Savior of the world.

What do those thoughts have in common? What do the ideas of "nothing here lasts forever" and "some rulers are powerful" and "Jesus is King of Kings" have in common? They remind us that God is God and we aren't. That nothing here lasts, so we desperately need Jesus forever. As we'll see tomorrow, the good news of the Good News got preached because a bold man humbled himself before God so that he could boldly proclaim the truthful interpretation of a tough dream to a worried but understanding enemy.

For further reading: Daniel 2:44

Lord Jesus, only You last forever.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 18 May 2021 Today's topic: The Gospel

"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. "The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." Daniel 2:44-45 (NIV).

"Preach Gospel all the time. Use words when necessary." That is, supposedly, a quote from St. Francis of Assisi (my favorite of the Catholic saints). It's a quote that I told to a Sunday School class this past weekend. It's a quote whose concept would have been familiar to Timothy, and Paul. And, it would have been easily understood by Daniel, who did it to Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream and, in doing so, preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to him. Daniel wasn't the first person to preach the Gospel; that was God, Himself, to Adam and Eve. It happened just after the fall into sin. But Daniel's witness here is probably the boldest statement in the Old Testament made from one person to another. To find another, also go read Isaiah 9...if you're familiar with Handel, you'll find yourself singing the verses.

The Kingdom of God will last forever. It will permanently defeat all human empires, and it will be eternal because Christ is eternal. The one rule of law in that kingdom will be the one rule that Christ implored us to institute here: 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind'; and 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' It's the only rule God needs because, in it, is the full spectrum of faith in Him.

You and I live in a time where knowledge of this is commonplace. Even if we don't know (or know much about) Jesus, most of the world lives in a time and place where access to that knowledge is common and available. And still most of the world rejects it. Now, think of Nebuchadnezzar. He was the powerful sovereign of the most powerful nation in the world and he neither knew nor cared to know God. That is, until God gave him something over which he had no power, namely, his dream.

We can know the Gospel. Do we? Are we preaching the Gospel?

For further reading: Genesis 27:29, Psalm 2:9, Isaiah 9:7, Matthew 21:43-44, Luke 10:27, Revelation 22:6, Daniel 2:46.

Lord Jesus, only You are Lord, King of Kings forever.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 19 May 2021 Today's topic: Sharing Jesus

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." Daniel 2:46-47 (NIV).

Are you comfortable sharing your faith?

Notice how quickly Nebuchadnezzar recognized that God IS God. That He is the only real God because of what He (and only He) could do. Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan, a king who worshipped idols made of stone and mud. Yet, when he recognized the work of the true God, whom he didn't know, he immediately bowed down, king to King. He did this in front of both his trusted servants and a worthless slave.

In other words, don't get too big for your britches. Someone is always bigger than you.

In our time, we get to easily recognize and proclaim the Gospel: that God, in Jesus, saves His people from their sins. That His greatest commandment to us is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and then to love our neighbors in this way. That the only way to heaven is through Jesus.

Daniel lived before the incarnate Jesus and didn't know God in this way. We know God as Triune, three in one in a mystery only He can fully explain. Daniel didn't know that. He knew the Lord, his God, was One, but he didn't know God in the way we do.

And yet...

...And yet WE, not Daniel, are like Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel humbled himself before God, and God blessed him for it. Have we truly humbled ourselves before God? Or is He just an afterthought, a prayer wish factory, and a customary affectation for us? Or do we see Him as the living God, the Most High, the creator of heaven and Earth? We get the privilege of being able to talk about the good news of Jesus Christ, who selflessly saved sinners who couldn't save themselves. But Daniel is the one who humbled himself, then boldly proclaimed his God to the enemy who'd already sentenced him to death. And we don't talk about our faith?

Perhaps we forget that Nebuchadnezzar recognized the obvious supremacy of God. He, a pagan unbeliever, saw it through getting what he wanted, which was something his own people couldn't seem to do. We have both his story and the whole Bible, giving us far more faith and proof than they had in Babylon. And we're the ones who're uncomfortable sharing faith?

For further reading: Deuteronomy 10:17, Acts 10:25, 1 Corinthians 14:25, 1 Timothy 6:15, Daniel 2:48.

Lord, I ask for faith like Daniel's. Let Holy Spirit talk through me, live in my heart.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 20 May 2021 Today's topic: Groundwork

Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court. Daniel 2:48-49 (NIV).

This is another miraculous turn of events. The king elevates the slave who did what his own magicians couldn't. But, even more: with Nebuchadnezzar's own hand, he put in place the groundwork for God's next miracle in Babylon. He appointed Daniel as his chief advisor, and installed Daniel's friends, as administrators over the "state" of Babylon. More in the days to come.

Until then, consider the idea that, very often, we do the same thing. You know it's true: just as workers prepare land to hold a building, our choices often are the groundwork for our sins. Things that we do, things that we think, things that we say often become self-fulfilling prophecies that bloom in full as sin. Murder, lies, adultery, theft: they all start in the heart. If you think about it, all our sins start there, and all of them start as some combination of a particular sin and idolatry; this is ground we've covered before. All too often, when we sin, it's because of choices we've made.

Mind you, that doesn't say that random things don't occur. Sometimes, things happen that aren't our doing, aren't our fault. A tornado doesn't hit the town because the people there are liars. A car doesn't T-bone yours in an intersection because you're there all alone. And, yes, there really are some people in the world who like fire just to watch it burn others.

Things happen, yet all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Now, the good news of this is, indeed, the Good News. Our sins don't have to condemn us to an eternity away from God. Jesus reconciled all of it. All we have to do is believe. Most often, when we believe, we're inspired (by Him) to change our thoughts and ways, to master sin and temptation, and to make different choices. Just as our choices often breed our sins, so it is that our behavior after following Jesus can also bear good fruit that's pleasing to Him and helpful to His Kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar is about to find that out, when he gets another lesson in what it means to follow the Lord, and how the Lord rescues His people.

For further reading: 2 Kings 25:28, Esther 8:2, Romans 3:23, Daniel 3:1

My saving Lord God, all glory and praise to You for Your work in this world. For how You turn my sin into success; for forgiving me and then using me in Your good purposes.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 24 May 2021 Today's topic: Our Gold Statues

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Daniel 3:1-7 (NIV).

Sometime after Nebuchadnezzar recognized that God is God, he decided that's no longer the case. He'd shallowly gotten what he wanted, so he moved on and forgot what he'd said. Now, Nebuchadnezzar built a massive gold statue of himself, then commanded everyone to worship it.

This is gonna leave a mark, so prepare yourself. Me and you? We're Nebuchadnezzar. If you don't think so, try asking yourself, "what about me," and be honest about where those words could take you. Our human pride, in some ways so essential to our survival, can also make things, or ourselves, into idols we think – or demand – are worthy of worship. We make it easy to forget to credit the Lord for all of our blessings when we're striving to proclaim we have made a job well done, one we want others to praise.

Granted, there's a difference between recognizing good work and deifying yourself. But, there isn't much separating those two things. As Jimmy Buffet said (in a different context), "there's a thin line between Saturday night and Sunday morning." And, it's a healthy (even Godly) thing to be complimented and built up for things we say or do well.

What's needed is what Nebuchadnezzar forgot: humility, grace, and thankfulness. A massive gold statue speaks to their opposite.

Best thing to say about such things is, "be careful." Enjoy applause but don't seek it, and never forget to give God credit because He deserves it more.

For further reading: Isaiah 46:6, Jeremiah 16:20, Matthew 13:42, Revelation 10:11, Revelation 13:12, Daniel 3:8

Lord God, all I know is from You. You are God and I'm not. Thank You!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 25 May 2021 Today's topic: Where Have You

At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." Daniel 3:8-12 (NIV).

Politics and revenge often go hand in hand. Daniel had made the Babylonian sorcerers look weak, so the court insiders found a way to seek revenge. Look at governments all around the world today and you'll probably agree that little has changed in most of 3000 years.

Now ask yourself a question: where have you sought revenge, and where, also, have you stood up for your faith? Those two thoughts are obviously in conflict; one is sin and one is worship. Yet we are often people of double minds. People who say we want to do the Godly thing, and then in the next breath we damn our neighbors or worse.

Where have you operated like an insider to get ahead? The Babylonian magicians were trying to have the Jews eliminated so that they (the magicians) might get back in the king's good graces. In your life, have you ever schemed against someone, or tried to arrange events so that things look good for you no matter what it does to someone else?

I'll be frank: I have. Revenge isn't my game, but grudges were for a great many years. That's just as bad (and just as destructive). And I've cowered at times in sharing Jesus with others, thinking I wasn't good enough to do it or someone would think I looked foolish. And I've schemed and played games to tell one thing to one person but withhold the same information from others. A lie is a lie, however, and I got caught up in mine.

Thank God that God is God and I'm not. Thankfully He is merciful, and that He protects sinful selves like me. And you. Your sins are your own; they're between you and God. Yet thank God He has mercy on us and doesn't treat us the way He could treat schemers, liars, and politicians. Or evil sorcerers. As we'll soon see, God protects those who believe in Him, sometimes in the most frightening situations of all.

For further reading: Nehemiah 2:3, Esther 3:3, Isaiah 19:3, Daniel 3:13

Lord God, all glory to You for Your mercy, love, and protection.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 26 May 2021 Today's topic: Rage in Babylon

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" Daniel 3:13-16 (NIV).

Have you ever been furious with rage? I've seen people so furious with rage and unquenched anger that they become like someone else altogether. When the rage takes over, we often can't stop ourselves from saying or doing unthinkable things the calm us wouldn't consider. People often say they "see red" when that happens. In those moments, Satan laughs in delight.

Yet the cure for the common rage is the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. When we rest in the peace of Jesus, it's Satan who becomes furious with rage, yet his rage can't harm us where it matters most. Where it matters most, the peace of Jesus Christ is still in control, still dominates, still is more powerful than the strongest thermonuclear fury.

Nebuchadnezzar thought of himself as a god. He was furious beyond reason that these three impertinent Jews didn't see things the way he did. He had given an order and they damn well better obey it! Yet, when brought before the king, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood up for God instead of bowing to Nebuchadnezzar's god of the self. They went along with having their names changed to these new Babylonian ones, and they went along with serving Nebuchadnezzar faithfully in all matters governmental. But when it came to compromising their faith in the God of Israel, they refused to budge.

Recall that all this came about as a matter of political revenge that the slighted court magicians had designed. Nebuchadnezzar told the three they would be thrown into a blazing furnace, one so hot it would incinerate them in agony. He thought it would convince them to bend to his will, yet they stood in faith instead. Thomas (a) Becket, Thomas More, Nathan Hale, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King: people who also stood on faith and principle and were martyred for it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew they were setting themselves up for a similar fate. But instead of caving to fear, they trusted the peace of God to get them through. And He would. All the rage of Babylon couldn't stop it.

For further reading: 2 Chronicles 32:15, Isaiah 46:1, Philippians 4:7, Daniel 3:17

Lord, I trust You and Your peace.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 31 May 2021 Today's topic: Lessons From Babylon

Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Daniel 3:19-23 (NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar thought of himself as a god, so he let his anger overtake him. A brutal sovereign, he was also cunning and discerning. Not when he got angry, however. He who would smite an entire city gave into his rage and decided to smite his close officials: all because they refused to obey the king's order to worship that golden statue.

A few things to remember in this whole episode. One, this is the first recorded instance in the Bible of man-worship. There had been other idols, statues, false gods, and such throughout history; idolatry was nothing new. Yet this is the first recorded occasion when a person made an image of himself and demanded others worship it. In this, Nebuchadnezzar mimics Satan while foreshadowing the antichrist, who will one day do the same thing. Another way of looking at it is to see how it's the devil himself, working through gullible, furious Nebuchadnezzar, who engineers all this.

Second, remember the court magicians. One resource (<http://www.biblebookofdaniel.com>) said that the court politicians who ratted on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were Chaldeans: a people whose prominence pre-dated that of Babylon itself. They were jealous of the Jews, and jealous that these three upstarts would dare to take their own place in the king's administration. It was these inside operators who engineered this terrifying form of execution for their enemies. Not surprisingly, they did it not understanding how our God would turn and use it for His glory.

What's a lesson for us? Idolatry still happens today. Don't believe me? What about housing rushes, celebrity culture, and the official stance of every communist nation on earth? Are these not idolatrous? Money? 401K? Houses, cars, "the right school," our kids? Idols. You get the picture, my fellow Babylonian. Scheming? Still happens, no matter the cost to the rest of us. And rage? Oh brother: let me tell you some stories about that. Miracle accounts like that of the three men in the furnace are just as instructive to us today as they were to them back then.

For further reading: Leviticus 26:18-28, Daniel 3:24

Lord Jesus, thank You for the timeless stories of the Bible and the lessons they teach us now.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 1 June 2021 Today's topic: Angels

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." Daniel 3:24-25 (NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar had been so angry that he commanded the fiery furnace to be made as hot as possible so he could murder Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were thrown into this pit of hell for their defiance in not worshipping Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol of himself. All of a sudden, he sees the three men in the furnace pit but also a fourth man – an angel – and all four men are just fine.

Do you believe in angels?

I've written here about the time my toddler son got hurt when he sprayed bleach in his eyes. I was briefly downstairs when all of a sudden I heard music blaring upstairs. I rushed back up to find Dillon, across the room, playing with the bleach bottle and crying. I initially thought he had turned up the music, but I instantly saw it would have been impossible for him to do that and get to where he was in the 30 seconds or so that I was out of the room. In my mind, someone else was there to sound the alarm. It must have been an angel.

Or there was the homeless man I encountered in San Francisco. I regularly gave away food to the homeless, and one time I tried with several people but they wouldn't accept it. Finally, I saw a disheveled, smelly, hulk of a man. I walked over to him and offered the food, thinking he was just another drug addict or mentally ill person. Instead, he purposefully looked into my eyes, and calmly, lucidly thanked me. I said "you're welcome" and walked away. When I turned around to look for him a few minutes later, he was gone yet we were nowhere near a corner. Angelic.

Or there's the strange woman who appeared out of nowhere just a few days ago to offer assistance in the rain, in the middle of the night, during a very desperate moment.

How many times in any given day are we protected from harm in this chaotic world? How many ways can we think of beings sent by the Lord coming to encourage us, or help us without words, or offer up assistance out of the blue? An angel was sent to protect the three men in the furnace, and it happened to the glory of God. Remember the old Alabama song? It's true: I believe there are angels among us.

For further reading: Daniel 3:26

Lord Jesus, thank You for sending Your angels to guide and protect us.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 2 June 2021 Today's topic: Believing or Seeing?

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. Daniel 3:26-27 (NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar is back to believing his eyes. You'll remember that he had previously proclaimed the divinity of God when Daniel interpreted his dream. Now, he sees the three Jews he condemned to be burned to death walking around unharmed in the furnace: guarded by one who was like one of the 'sons of the gods.' When he sees this, he announces that God is "the Most High God." His double-crossing advisors see it, too, seeing as well that their scheme has backfired.

The Babylonians should have watched "The Santa Clause." Huh? Yep, specifically, they should have listened to Judy the Elf in that movie, the wise North Pole sprite who proclaimed, "seeing isn't believing. Believing is seeing." That's a quote I mentioned in this blog a long time ago, but it's worth mentioning again because it's still so true.

Like Nebuchadnezzar, we don't believe in God unless we have proof. We bargain with Him not fully subscribing to His existence; we plead to convince Him to let us have it our way without really submitting. We only marginally believe in the Lord until He does something so obvious that even we can't disregard it. Then, we believe. All through it, we forget what Judy said: seeing isn't believing. Believing is seeing.

Believing in the Most High God before actually seeing Him or His miracles is difficult. We're people who press for proof, yet with God there is no empirical proof that the world will accept. Yet all around us are signs and obvious proofs of God's magnificence. The sunrise or sunset; the miracle of making it through a day alive; breath in your lungs and blood in your veins; the kindness of strangers; a trillion blades of grass, and a newborn sleeping in a crib, the historicity of Jesus: all and more proofs of the power of life that is our God the Most High. Most importantly, His revelation to us in His word, how He softly but strongly speaks through this miraculous book He gave.

Nebuchadnezzar needed an angel and a miracle (his second, in fact) to testify that God is God. You and I: what do we need? Chances are He has already provided it. Will you believe with your eyes or with your heart? See or believe?

For further reading: Psalm 91:3-11, Isaiah 43:2, Hebrews 11:32-34, Daniel 3:28

Lord God, I believe in You no matter what.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 3 June 2021 Today's topic: Perhaps

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Daniel 3:28-30 (NIV).

Perhaps there's hope for the Babylonian king. He recognizes power when he sees it. Once again he gives God His due when he sees miracles, but at least he does that. His Chaldean sorcerers never did. And Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that God is supreme. Like DeMille's Rameses, Nebuchadnezzar reluctantly proclaims, "his God IS God." When you're out-gunned, it's best to quickly recognize the fact and adjust your actions accordingly.

Nebuchadnezzar was heavily out-gunned. He was, in fact, before he ever started this whole foolish episode. Notice, though, that Nebuchadnezzar doesn't rescind his earlier edict for his subjects to worship the statue. Apparently, he still thought of himself as divine, only now he recognizes that there's someone more divine than himself, and he wants to make sure he covers his bases. So, the king decrees that nobody may 'diss' God, and that those who do will suffer excruciating death and generational disaster.

For Nebuchadnezzar, that's practically a leap of faith. Baby steps, you know.

In the end, the king restores the three Jews to their high positions in his administration. Daniel isn't mentioned, though. Being close to the three men and the king, he would almost certainly have watched all of this unfold. And it doesn't say (yet) what happened to the Chaldeans; their day is still to come, and it will come several years down the road.

What does all this mean for us? Perhaps it's an exhortation to give God credit. To honor other men when they do great deeds but only by first honoring the God who made such possible. Perhaps it's a caution against political intrigue: something we'd do well to heed today. And, most of all, perhaps it is still a lesson that God protects those who believe in Him. Perhaps one day He'll send angels to protect you and yours; perhaps He already has. After all, God is far superior to anything or anyone we know.

Coming up: Nebuchadnezzar loses it.

For further reading: Job 13:15, Psalm 34:7, Psalm 97:10, Acts 12:11, Daniel 4:1

Holy Lord, all praise to You for Your holy protection, for the blessings You give to us, for the lessons of the three men in the furnace and the cagey king of Babylon.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 7 June 2021 Today's topic: Uncommon God

King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation. Daniel 4:1-3 (NIV).

Has the pagan king of Babylon undergone a conversion? As we noted last time, perhaps, if only a little. Don't forget that Daniel was, at this time, serving as his chief counselor. It's likely that the wording of this confession reflected Daniel's close relationship with the king, as well as Nebuchadnezzar witnessing miracles and more. Now, he's about to witness another, one that will strike him personally.

Before that happens, Nebuchadnezzar the pagan from Babylon does a better job of confessing who God is than most Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians, or Catholics I know. He does it overwhelmingly. How many of us have prayed prosperity over strangers and adversaries? How many of us talk about "my pleasure" to tell these same people about God and the constant miracles He brings? How many of us share our personal testimony of how God performs those miracles in our lives?

Now, don't beat yourself up too much being honest in your answer. Truth is, Nebuchadnezzar had a first-rate witness-advisor at his side. He was also the most powerful political figure in the world, with immense wealth and power at his disposal. He was a man of the world, well-versed in the superstitions and witch-doctor religions of his day, as well as how they would affect his position as king. All those things are things we may not (probably don't) have at hand. We're apples and oranges with the old man.

Except that we aren't. We have multiple opportunities to confess how Jesus blesses us every day, how we witness His power first-hand. Let me brag on my Lord for keeping my family safe, for helping my family in our great needs. Let me talk about how He is more powerful than addictions, or demons, or troubles and stressors. Let me proclaim how He protects my wife as she drives all over north Texas helping others, or how He cures me from dread disease. Let me sing about how He has blessed my kids and grandkids with health, happiness, and opportunities. I'd just be getting warmed up. And I'm no king. I'm just a guy with a good internet signal. But I fail to do it.

You and I don't need to be kings to share our common stories about our uncommon God. Neither did Nebuchadnezzar. He was about to find out more.

For further reading: Psalm 74:9, Psalm 105:27, Daniel 4:4

Lord, there aren't enough words in the dictionary to describe how wonderful You are. Thank You!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 8 June 2021 Today's topic: Tough Faith

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) Daniel 4:4-9 (NIV).

The pagan king is dreaming again. Like before, Nebuchadnezzar's Chaldean soothsayers can't tell him what it means. So, he calls in Daniel, who has a record for decoding these things because Daniel relies on the Most High God. It's sad: Nebuchadnezzar's affluence has made him arrogant, yet he's also doing the best he knows how to in a tough situation.

Another really tough situation regards one of the people I follow on Instagram. A loyal, fierce mom of three, resilient, tough, beautiful: Bella is a lingerie model; her public photos alone are casually R-rated. And she's dying of breast cancer. A survivor of a double mastectomy and 21 surgeries in 3 years, Bella has stage 4 metastatic tumors throughout her body now. I admire her determination in doing what she can to provide for her family as much and as quickly as possible. I hope she knows Jesus because He's there hurting with her while also celebrating her.

In fact, like Nebuchadnezzar, Bella is exactly the kind of person Jesus came to redeem and die for. But Dave! She's a sex worker! Oh, really now, Mr. or Miss Perfect: perhaps you're forgetting Jesus' advice about removing that plank from your eye? My dirty sins, like yours, earned me damnation. Thank God His Son rose to forgive all of 'em: mine, yours, and hers. And Nebuchadnezzar's. Got skin? Got sin. He rose once for all.

Like Nebuchadnezzar, Ms. Bella's in a tough spot. Nebuchadnezzar had his arrogance to blame for what was coming. This lady doesn't because nobody deserves cancer or pain, but she has it and now she's in the last, toughest battle of her life. Yet even now, God always sends His kind of rescue. For the king of Babylon, it was Daniel. Who knows how Christ may help this edgy online influencer; maybe through you? If you're so inclined, prayerfully consider donating to her kids' fund at <https://gofund.me/0e166acd>. If you can't do that, then please, at least, fight for her in prayer. Tough times build tough faith.

For further reading: Genesis 41:38, Job 3:26, Psalm 30:6-7, Mathew 7:5, Daniel 4:10

Lord, have mercy on us. Heal our diseases and give Your peace to our hearts.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 9 June 2021 Today's topic: Did he? Did We?

I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. Daniel 4:9-12 (NIV).

This sounds like a good dream, right? Nebuchadnezzar talks to Belteshazzar (Daniel) about this vision he has of a prosperous time in his kingdom. Naturally, he attributes the prosperity to himself. He says he was at home, "contented and prosperous" (see yesterday's verses), and he envisions a massive tree where everyone around him is happy, protected, and thankful (for him). It's only natural that Nebuchadnezzar would think of all this as a function of his reign.

After all, that's what leaders do. Presidents take credit for good things that happen on their watch (even when they don't cause them). Vice presidents in companies take credit for their departments and functional divisions; directors take credit for everything. Just yesterday, my wife and I were looking at a new house not far from our current home, and all I could think about was what I would do there, how great I could make it, what a great place this would be for us and for me.

Me. Me. Me. It's sorta nauseating because "it's not about me," or at least "it" isn't supposed to be.

It isn't supposed to be about me any more that the prosperity of Babylon was about Nebuchadnezzar. John Gunther Jr said (in "Death Be Not Proud") "God is what is good in me." Dying words or no, he only got part of it right. All that is good is from God. All that we know is from God. When things go well, generally, it isn't because of me or you, even if our talents & work go into it. No, we need to give credit where it's due. Lay it all at the feet of Jesus.

That's what Nebuchadnezzar should have done. Did he? Did he, who had seen repeated miracles interpreted by his friend and advisor, Belteshazzar/Daniel? Did he, who confessed that God is God, that He is the Most High instead of just another of Babylon's useless idols? Did we? I bet you know the answer.

For further reading: Psalm 4:4, Ezekiel 17:23, Ezekiel 31:3-4, Matthew 13:32, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Daniel 4:13

Lord, all that I have is a gift from You. Thank You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 10 June 2021 Today's topic: In the Visions

"In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. "Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.' Daniel 4:13-17 (NIV).

The pleasant dream has turned unpleasant. We've all had dreams that turn into nightmares. My nightmares, or at least the ones I remember, have usually been dreadful, not good turning bad. They've always been foreboding and building on that throughout. Maybe Nebuchadnezzar was like me, or I'm like him, because maybe a pleasant dream turning bad was how he knew this dream was different.

That shouldn't come as a surprise because God had already laid out a high-level blueprint of things to come. Jeremiah foretells both Nebuchadnezzar and his throne, and his prophecy was made public not long before Nebuchadnezzar actually did overthrow Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a part of the chain of events that fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy. He would rule, then his son and grandson would rule afterwards, then Babylon itself would fall. These are all things that, at the time of today's verses, were only partly understood.

Along the way, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that he fears means something terrible is going to happen to him. There's good reason for it when the angels in the dream say, "let his mind be changed." It's why he calls for Daniel. There seems to be hope in that the time of the king's insanity appears to be limited; it will only last "till seven times pass by for him." But where and when that would happen Nebuchadnezzar could only speculate. He was scared.

Are you ever troubled by dreams? Do you ever sense a divine message through them? Maybe God is trying to tell you something. Dive into His word and learn more so that you might better see His purpose in the visions.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 33:2, Job 24:20, Psalm 83:18, Jeremiah 27:5-7, Ezekiel 31:12, Matthew 3:10, Romans 13:1, Daniel 4:18

My Lord, help me to understand Your messages.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 14 June 2021 Today's topic: A Little Uneasy

"This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you." Daniel 4:18 (NIV).

How interesting it is that Nebuchadnezzar keeps going back to his captive, Belteshazzar/Daniel, because his best advisors and highest religious authorities just don't measure up. How did Daniel feel?

In your life, have you ever batted cleanup? Have you ever been brought in to clean up someone else's mess, or do something that someone else just couldn't get done? Have you ever been given a large task that even the best of your peers couldn't manage, and now you're the one under scrutiny? Or, in school, were you ever the new kid, the unpopular kid, the awkward teenager who got good grades but got called on to give an answer when some of the other kids couldn't?

I feel for Daniel. Once again, he's in the spotlight because the Babylonian sorcerers failed. They were people with occult practices or bones, sticks, and potions that they thought could portend the future (but were, in reality, just witch doctor tricks). Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that Daniel has been given a gift that nobody else has. But, to be honest, Nebuchadnezzar also doesn't fully believe in God. He has already recognized that God is supreme, but he hasn't yet been willing to fully bend the knee to the Almighty. So, he reverts back to Daniel because, once before, Daniel was able to tell him what a troubling dream meant.

Daniel must have felt troubled by this. He relied on God, so his faith in God wasn't shaken, nor was his belief that God would provide an answer in His way. Yet Daniel had operated in the Babylonian court for awhile now, and the stakes of this political intrigue were getting higher and higher. Daniel had already proven his faith by refusing to defile himself by eating unclean foods. Then, he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the multi-layered statue. After this, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego went through the fiery furnace, and would have been burned to a crisp were it not for God intervening. Daniel's faith didn't waver, but he probably felt nervous.

God had proven himself over and over to the pagan Babylonians, yet they kept coming back to Daniel – and God – for help. Once again it is happening, and this time the dream is one that dangerously, personally threatens Nebuchadnezzar. Just like our being on the dime at work, or being the awkward kid in school, or being unwittingly thrust into the spotlight in any situation, Daniel probably felt a little uneasy.

For further reading: Genesis 40:12, Genesis 41:8, Daniel 4:19

Lord Jesus, strengthen me when I feel uneasy, when I'm out of my element, when I'm on the spot.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 15 June 2021 Today's topic: Terrifying

Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! Daniel 4:19 (NIV).

Yes, Daniel felt uneasy about the task before him. Various translations of Daniel 4:19 use the verbs "perplexed, dismayed, astonished, overcome, appalled, stunned, stricken dumb (or mute), stupefied, amazed, confused, worried, alarmed, troubled," and "upset," where the NIV simply says "perplexed." You'd have to go to the original Hebrew verbiage to find what was recorded. Daniel's thoughts terrified him. He didn't lose faith in God, and God quickly showed him the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. But what God showed him terrified Daniel.

That's ok. Let's be real: sometimes God does terrify us. Sometimes following Jesus demands a terrible, heavy burden (even as His burden actually, truly is light and easy). Having faith in the Lord means doing something that most of the world finds offensive. Demonstrating that faith can mean going out on a limb, getting out of your comfort zone. Thus, delivering a message from the Most High God to the most powerful man in the world might cost you your life. Daniel knew the score and he was terrified. It'd be like someone delivering bad news to Stalin. Or Saddam Hussein. Or Mark Zuckerberg. Or, according to many accounts, Ellen.

We're watching "11/22/63" on Hulu right now. It's an adaptation of the book of the same title by Stephen King, and it is about a man trying to prevent the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The story involves time travel, and one of the themes in the story is, when you go back in the past, the past fights being altered. It's not just fictionally creepy: (in typical Stephen King fashion) the idea of it could be terrifying if it happened in real life.

Why? Because, yes, sometimes God does terrify us. Sometimes He does it through unnatural events in our lives. Sometimes it's by forcing us to confront things we don't want to see. And, yes, sometimes He does it by simply removing His hand of grace and letting the consequences of our choices play out. Usually those choices involve sin, and usually even small sins produce a butterfly effect. I can't imagine how terrifying it would be to see what could happen without God's protection in my life. I don't even want to think about how horrible the unchecked outcome of even a white lie could be.

It'd be like 11/22/63 fighting back, trying to prevent the undoing of something already done. Or facing an angry, scared Babylonian king.

For further reading: Daniel 4:20

Lord Jesus, all praise and thanks to You for Your grace and protection in our world.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 16 June 2021 Today's topic: Nothing Without Jesus

Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds— Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth. Daniel 4:19-23 (NIV).

This wasn't idle flattery. This was Daniel revealing to Nebuchadnezzar what God had told him (Daniel) about the dream. It may have sounded flattering (because it was), but in reality it probably shook Nebuchadnezzar even more.

Have you considered how truly awesome some ancient civilizations actually were? There are magnificent cities and nations that exist today and are fantastic beyond any previous society's wildest expectations. Our technology is astounding, and human liberty is the most wonderful of all our qualities. ALL of it is due to God and God alone; any honest admiration of anything in humanity must always, first recognize that we're nothing without the active blessing of God. Without Him, we're manure.

Our culture has the advantage of becoming what we have because we live in a time where God has revealed Himself through Christ in ways He never did to previous civilizations. Now, consider Egypt, Akkadia and Sumeria, Phoenicia, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Carthage, Rome, the Inca, Toltec, and Aztec empires, ancient China, ancient India, and Cahokia in America. Especially consider Babylon, which first surpassed all in grandeur, architecture, military power, economic prowess, and cultural influence. It's no coincidence that one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was in Babylon, or that this wonder – the Hanging Gardens – was built by Nebuchadnezzar.

He built Babylon the Great in the desert, along the banks of the Euphrates River, over the thousand-year-old ruins of the earlier Babylon of Hammurabi. In only a few years, Nebuchadnezzar transformed this (now) Iraqi by-water into the largest city in the world, replete with science, beauty, commerce, and the arts. He did it without electricity, or steel, or modern building techniques. If I could go back in time to visit just one place of antiquity, I might very well choose the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar.

But neither Nebuchadnezzar nor any of those empires knew Jesus; they were majestic but damned.

When Daniel flattered Nebuchadnezzar with these honest words, they told the mighty king that he was nothing. And it terrified him.

For further reading: 2 Samuel 12:7, Jeremiah 27:7, Ezekiel 31:3-6, Daniel 4:24

Lord Jesus, thank You for the blessings of cities of old, of learning our history and the lessons You teach from it.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 17 June 2021 Today's topic: Inevitable God

"This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king. Daniel 4:24 (NIV).

Don't shoot the messenger. Imagine Daniel's trepidation, even outright fear, at telling the most powerful monarch on the planet that his days as mighty king were numbered. It wasn't that Nebuchadnezzar would be struck down and killed; we'll soon see that wasn't the case. Instead, something much worse was in store for the arrogant king. It must have been a pretty uncomfortable moment in the throne room there in Babylon.

But there's no stopping what God has willed. If God wills that something is going to happen, it's going to happen. Imagine Daniel's trepidation at saying these words to Nebuchadnezzar (and Daniel hasn't even said what's going to happen to the king). Imagine Nebuchadnezzar's anxiety at hearing how God confirmed his (Nebuchadnezzar's) own arrogance. God would be neither mocked nor contained.

There must have been great respect between Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar that this exchange would have even taken place. Daniel, despite having proven himself trustworthy and competent, and despite being promoted to a high place in Babylonian culture, was a captured slave. He was the unwilling participant in court intrigues because he had been forcibly taken from his home by his militarily superior captors. Then there's Nebuchadnezzar, the vain and powerful monarch who has known both brutal success and incompetence among his native trusted advisors. He assumed the throne after his father died, and he expanded Babylon into a world power. When he looked around, he saw a tremendous city made glorious by his own actions...and he knew it. He must have felt great respect to bother to listen to the advice of a Jewish slave.

Again, there's no stopping what God has willed. God willed that man would be saved despite our unholy sins. God willed that a worldwide nation would arise from the children of elderly patriarchs. Delivery from slavery, tumbling the walls of Jericho, a shepherd boy becoming king, his son becoming the wisest and wealthiest ruler in history, His chosen people being disciplined through being overcome by pagan enemies, and now the mystical interpretation of dreams along with the protection of holy angels: what God wills cannot be stopped.

You know this to be true in your own life. Even if we don't always feel the presence of God, we seem to intrinsically understand that something, someone bigger than us is orchestrating things. It isn't paranoia: it's a natural knowledge of God. It's an acknowledgement of fact. Believing in Him and His inevitability then becomes the first step in faith. Don't shoot the messenger: I'm simply telling you the truth.

For further reading: Job 40:12, Psalm 107:40, Jeremiah 40:2, Daniel 4:25

Lord God, I believe in You. You are more powerful than anyone or anything else. What You will happens.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 21 June 2021 Today's topic: Hammer to Fall

You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.” Daniel 4:25-27 (NIV).

The hammer is about to fall. We've already discussed it: what God wills cannot be stopped. In these verses, Daniel is telling Nebuchadnezzar how God will punish the king for arrogance, then that the kingdom “will be restored” when Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that God is God alone. For the terrified king, the hammer is going to fall.

Is God arrogant? Is God cocky for wanting all the glory and the praise for Himself? Only if you think you know more than He does. It ain't cocky if you can do it, and God is the ultimate can-doer. Indeed, it is the Babylonian who's arrogant in this account: arrogant for thinking it was He alone who made all the blessings and grandeur of Babylon. Nothing was made there without God allowing it, without God blessing Babylon so that it, too, a hive of paganism, might serve God's high purposes.

Is God vengeful? Absolutely not. On the contrary, He's merciful. He could have wiped out Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon, and anyone He wanted to. He always can. Instead, He was as patient with Nebuchadnezzar as He is with any of us. Sinful, bold, arrogant Nebuchadnezzar was, like you and me, one of God's “very good” creations. He loved the man and wanted him to repent and turn to Himself.

Wait a minute. If God isn't arrogant or vengeful, then why the God-pile on Nebuchadnezzar? Indeed, why hammer anyone? After all, Nebuchadnezzar did ‘great’ things in his life. Why not celebrate that? Foolish thought, you know, to assume that the clay is greater than the potter. Where do me or you come off thinking we know more than the one who spoke all things into existence (including the clay Nebuchadnezzar and his people used to build their fancy kingdom).

Strip away our pride and all of us have to admit that God blesses us whether we deserve it or not. That's what Nebuchadnezzar had to learn.

For further reading: 1 Kings 21:29, Job 24:8, Psalm 41:3, Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 55:6-7, Jeremiah 27:5, Ezekiel 18:22, Daniel 4:28

Lord God, You bless all people simply by Your loving us. All we have is from You. Thank You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 22 June 2021 Today's topic: Think of That the Next Time

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. Daniel 4:28-33 (NIV).

It was no ordinary judgment that God decreed for Nebuchadnezzar. Indeed, though God loves us each uniquely, I suspect He was really trying to reach out to Nebuchadnezzar in ways He didn't to others. After all, have you ever had God talk with you from heaven? Yeah, me neither.

Then again, I'll count that as a blessing because, in this case, He decreed some very severe punishment for Nebuchadnezzar and his pride. That's because, while God must have had a special love for Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had a special, haughty love for himself. He looked around and saw the truly magnificent splendor of Babylon and refused to give the Lord His due. When he saw the tall buildings, instead of praising God for the talents of others, he commended himself. When he observed the beautiful gardens and artwork, he praised himself instead of praising God for the eyes that see beauty. When he realized glory, he kept it for himself instead of giving it to the one who gave him the life in which he could even understand glory.

Is it any wonder, then, that God would want to take down Nebuchadnezzar's pride?

What's even more astounding about this teachable moment is that God didn't smite Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, God taught him a lesson. God had mercy on Nebuchadnezzar in hopes that he (and those around him) would repent and seek God's face. Imagine how the world of the time could have changed if that had happened.

Imagine how our world today could change if only we'd do the same. Think of that the next time the hammer falls in your life.

For further reading: Numbers 23:19, 2 Samuel 22:28, Job 9:12, Job 24:8, Isaiah 13:19, Habakkuk 1:11, Daniel 4:34

Lord, all praise and glory to You: the source of all blessing.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 23 June 2021 Today's topic: A Miracle

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" Daniel 4:34-35 (NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar has personally experienced another of God's miracles and he wants you to know it. Have you ever felt like that?

A few years ago, a doctor told me that I had a brain tumor. A sudden loss of hearing took me to several doctors before I finally landed at one who wanted to test further than simply looking into my ears. The tumor was resting on the auditory nerve behind my left ear. It wasn't malignant but could grow and eventually become malignant. Best case, if left alone, the tumor would eventually find my optic nerve and take my sight as well. Thus, deciding to have it removed was one of the easiest decisions I've ever made.

Before going in for surgery, I felt as if "this couldn't really be happening to me." Though the doctors assured me the operation was no big deal, I talked with my wife and kids as if it were the last time I might have done so. Because it could have been.

When I awoke from the surgery, I felt no pain. No dizziness, no nausea, no disorientation. In fact, I felt just fine. What I really felt was thankful. I remember that one of the first things I did was to pray and thank God for waking me up, and for giving me another day. I didn't realize that I had been out for most of 10 hours, that the surgeons took out the tumor, but that I would need to go under the knife again, just one week later, to correct something the surgeons didn't get quite right. Three years on, all is well and there's no re-occurrence.

Yet, since then, I've remembered to thank God, to praise Him, for every day He gives me because He's God and every day is a miracle. Surviving a brain tumor is a miracle and a gift. Learning to manage your health is a gift from God. Like Nebuchadnezzar, it took something deadly serious to get my attention so that I might truly use my words and better give glory to God. Whether God designed a brain cancer to get my attention, to teach me a lesson, I do not know. I only know I'm grateful for the miracle.

For further reading: Daniel 4:36

All praise, honor, and glory to You, Father, Lord of the universe.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 24 November 2021 Today's topic: Nebuchadnezzar and Patton

At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. Daniel 4:36-37 (NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar finally bent the knee and his kingdom was restored. This is the last we see of King Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel. After this episode, Nebuchadnezzar's storyline ends. In a few short years, an unworthy descendant take his throne.

Until then, Nebuchadnezzar unknowingly gives us the greatest lesson of that we could learn from him: be humble and give glory to God alone. Centuries later, Jesus said it best: "for those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." When you echo the words of God Immanuel, you are on the right track. Nebuchadnezzar was, and he didn't even know it.

What did he learn from the experience? Perhaps the better question is what can we learn from it? One thing is to always humble ourselves before God, and to give Him the glory from the field of our lives. It's God who gives us those lives. It's God who gives us the talents with which we build on His gift. It's God who moves throughout time to affect the circumstances of our lives, and to bless us with opportunities, events, and words. If we choose arrogance instead, we're forgetting who makes everything possible. That never ends well.

Another is to remember that glory is fleeting. Here, I think of the last scene in Patton, himself an elusive, Nebuchadnezzar-like character. As the movie closes, George C. Scott s speaks one of Patton's famous quotes. "For over a thousand years, Roman conquerors returning from the wars enjoyed the honor of triumph, a tumultuous parade. In the procession came trumpeteers, musicians and strange animals from conquered territories, together with carts laden with treasure and captured armaments. The conquerors rode in a triumphal chariot, the dazed prisoners walking in chains before him. Sometimes his children robed in white stood with him in the chariot or rode the trace horses. A slave stood behind the conqueror holding a golden crown and whispering in his ear a warning: that all glory is fleeting."

Daniel could have said that to Nebuchadnezzar. If you think about it, in a way, he did. Let's remember today that only God is eternal, that what glory we know here is attributable to Him. That all glory, except the Lord's, is fleeting.

For further reading: Exodus 15:2, Psalm 34:3, Proverbs 22:4, Matthew 23:12, Daniel 5:1

Lord, all praise and glory to You alone!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 6 July 2021 Today's topic: We Belshazzar

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. Daniel 5:1-4 (NIV).

They traded the Creator for the created. Worse, they mocked Him in doing so. Welcome to our world.

Archaeologists believe King Belshazzar may have been Nebuchadnezzar II's grandson. Nebuchadnezzar had ruled for 43 years; we don't really know how he died. We also don't know specifically how many kings sat on the throne between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Finally, we don't even know precisely whether Belshazzar was a full-fledged king, or merely a regent overseeing Babylon while the true king was away. Indeed, Wikipedia repeatedly says that the Biblical account of Belshazzar is fiction (while also contending, without proof, that all of the book of Daniel is also just historical fiction).

I accept the Bible as fact; it matters little to me whether Wikipedia does. I say that because it mocks God to say that some of the things He said in His word are true and others aren't. That isn't a path I want to travel. So, no matter how Belshazzar came to be king, he's the king of Babylon as of the start of chapter 5 of the book of Daniel. And, like Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar is vain. He mocks God by dishonoring the articles that had been ransacked from the Temple in Jerusalem. The taken items were mere party toys for Belshazzar. In using them, he praises the gold and silver, not the God they were crafted to serve.

What he doesn't know is that, by doing so, his minutes are now numbered. Big changes are quickly approaching that will change the entire world. Belshazzar's reaction? Party on, dude.

Have you ever traded believing in God for something else? Belshazzar didn't know that he was about to die, so he kept on living a life that mocked the true God. Thousands of years later, we remember him for it. For teaching us to live every moment in praise and thanksgiving to God, not mocking Him. If we don't, the writing might just be on the wall, spelling out our doom.

For further reading: Judges 16:24, 1 Kings 3:15, 2 Chronicles 36:10, Isaiah 21:5, Jeremiah 50:35, Daniel 5:5

Lord, forgive me, a sinner. Forgive the times I have mocked You. Put aside Your righteous wrath.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 7 July 2021 Today's topic: Terrifying

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking. Daniel 5:5-6 (NIV).

One minute Belshazzar is partying with his pals – “Yah, folks, my grandpa knocked over this temple built by the Jews we enslaved, and I got these cool party favors. Drink up, besties.” – and the next minute he's trembling like the Cowardly Lion. “Aw, ain't it the truth.”

Now, I have to admit, this would freak me out, too. If you picture it, it's seemingly out of one of those 1950s Hammer horror films. Right in the middle of a royal banquet, Thing (from the Addams Family) shows up and starts writing on the wall in front of you. That isn't some party game: it was really happening. And it must have been terrifying to see. At least it was for Belshazzar.

Fast forward: as we'll see in the coming days, the hand wrote out words would reveal Belshazzar's doom. An invading army from Persia is nearly at the gates of Babylon, and Belshazzar is about to die. Perhaps his “friends,” the noblemen and women of Babylon, aren't very cordial after all; we don't know. Perhaps they know something else is happening around them but are afraid to speak. Do you think Belshazzar got scared because he knew that was about to happen, but hadn't chosen to reveal it to his guests? Or, like his ideological descendant, Nero, do you think he decided to throw a big party and fiddle while Babylon burned, and his besties went along with it?

It would have been a terrifying night to be alive. The supernatural hand, writing unfamiliar words, would have only made things worse.

Now, think about yourself. Have you ever had a moment that terrified you, not just because of the shock of it, but because it revealed something to you, something about yourself that you didn't want to face? That can be upsetting at least; at worse, it can shake you to your core. Have you considered that maybe God is allowing that to happen just to get your attention? What would have happened if Belshazzar had fallen prostrate and repented when he saw the hand on the wall? We'll never know.

But if there's something that is bothering you deep inside, something that terrifies you, have you asked yourself why? Only good can result by confronting an issue and taking it to the Lord. In the very least, at least the terrors may subside.

For further reading: Job 4:15, Psalm 22:14, Ezekiel 7:17, Daniel 5:7

Lord, help me to confront my fears, to confess them and turn them over to You. To seek Your face when fear returns.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 8 July 2021 Today's topic: Never Alone

The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled. Daniel 5:7-9 (NIV).

Belshazzar knew the writing meant something; he understood it was dreadful and important to him. He did what his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had done, and consulted 'the experts' of Babylon. Like the experts of today (or any age), they failed; "experts" usually do. And that made the king even more scared than he was before. "Not only do they not understand this, but they can't help me!"

I don't know about you, but I've felt that way, before. I've felt like I'd trade just about anything if only someone would genuinely understand me. It feels lonely and, yes, terrifying, to know, to feel, something that others don't and be unable to find someone who simply will help you understand what it all means. If you let it, that feeling can spiral in on you and lead you down dark paths.

Of course, part of the flip-side message is that we aren't really ever, truly alone. That matters more. Even in captivity, the Jews in exile were never alone. Belshazzar will soon consult Daniel, who (to him) mysteriously divines even the strangest messages. But that could only happen because Daniel the slave understood he wasn't really alone. God had allowed the Babylonians to conquer Israel, yet God was also actively living with them in their exile. God had provided miraculous understanding to divine Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, and He would soon perform that miracle, through Daniel, again.

We are never really alone. With Jesus' Spirit guiding our days, we're always in His company. We have His understanding to guide us in hard times, tough decisions, moments of doubt. His presence is worth far more than all the baubles & bling of Babylon.

But Belshazzar didn't 'get this.' If you read through the episode again, he didn't really want to. He hadn't humbled himself before and he really isn't humbling himself now. He simply wants someone to explain this strange occurrence so he can go on partying like it's 1999 (BC). Is it any wonder that he now found himself drowning in terror? Is it any surprise we would too?

For further reading: Genesis 41:8, Exodus 18:8, Psalm 48:5, Isaiah 19:3, Jeremiah 50:5, Daniel 5:10

Lord Jesus, You are always with me. Slay my pride today. Show me my sins and help me to turn from them.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 12 July 2021 Today's topic: What Do You Believe?

The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "May the king live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale! There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means." Daniel 5:10-12 (NIV).

In church yesterday, the pastor reminded us to always be cautious about taking only a single verse in the Bible and quoting it out of context. I try to be careful in doing these blog posts, but I'll admit I sometimes get it wrong. Yet, here, it's especially important to both read the few verses (to isolate the queen's words and analyze them for meaning) but also to remember how they came to be. This section of Daniel takes place when Daniel and all Israel are slaves in Babylon. God allowed King Belshazzar's ancestor, Nebuchadnezzar, to destroy Jerusalem (including God's Temple) and haul the Israelites back into slavery, this time in Babylon (recall that Israel had been slaves in Egypt eight hundred to a thousand years before).

The queen who is worried in today's passage cares very little for the Israelite slaves. She is, however, very concerned about her position as queen of Babylon (for the moment, the most powerful nation on the planet). The queen is wise to what's happening. She sees her king is upset; she hears the murmuring of the party guests, and she sees that all of this, combined, is a threat to their status quo. The queen doesn't understand how or why Daniel can do what he does, but she understands he can help; she's a pagan like the other Babylonians. She has also forgotten Nebuchadnezzar's proclamations from years before: that there is nobody like the living God, that the living God of Israel IS GOD. Maybe she never knew it in the first place.

What can we learn from this? In the times of our crises, do we really believe this Jesus we say we follow is God and is who He says He is? Within Chapter 5, we're going to see that Babylon's world changed in an instant and it was due to the sin of the man at the top. Ours can change just as fast. So, I'll ask you again: what do you believe?

For further reading: Genesis 41:38, Numbers 12:8, Nehemiah 2:3, Daniel 5:13

Lord Jesus, I believe in You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 13 July 2021 Today's topic: Believable

So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." Daniel 5:13-16 (NIV).

When we last read about Daniel, he had been made a high official in Nebuchadnezzar's administration, this after repeated interpretations of dreams and standing up for faith in God. The new king, however, doesn't seem to know who Daniel is, nor does Belshazzar seem to be aware of the things God had done for Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps this incident occurred early in Belshazzar's reign. Or, perhaps Belshazzar really isn't that smart; after all, he consulted the spiritual "experts" of Babylon (who, like experts today, really weren't expert in much).

To me, all this is believable. Yes, pop culture, the internet, and nay-sayers all contend this story is fiction, but I reject that. It's believable (and, I believe, actual history) because our own world is quick to forget things we or our immediate ancestors knew too well. Police generally keep law and order. Freedom must be won in every generation or it fades. God is the ultimate and only source of our liberties. Controlled economies don't generally work for long. Hard work usually pays off. Racism of any kind is wrong. Drug use destroys. We all bleed red and the burial flag covers all who serve no matter what they look like. No, I'm not here to contend politics: the previous statements are my opinions based in (prior) commonly understood truths.

But truths they are. We aren't so different from the people of ancient Babylon. Scheming queens still whisper into the ears of naïve kings (or presidents) because they sense something is amiss. And yet, rising above all our pettiness is the Lord. The same Lord who breathed Adam into life from dust, who saved Israel from Egypt (and, soon, from Babylon and Persia), who died and rose after the cross is the same Lord we pray to every day. HE is unchanging. Because He is the constant, Daniel's words are reliable and true.

For further reading: Genesis 41:15, Esther 2:5-6, Daniel 5:17

Lord, I believe all You reveal in Your holy Word is true and right. Thank You for not changing, for always being our constant.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 14 July 2021 Today's topic: Prophetically Shocking

"Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes. Daniel 5:17-21 (NIV).

Daniel tells it like it is. To cite God's bona fides, Daniel tells Belshazzar about what God did with Nebuchadnezzar. It isn't to build himself up: it's to say, "this is the truth because this is what God said and did." As previously mentioned, it isn't known exactly whether Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's son or his grandson, or even if he was a full-fledged king. Thus, it's possible that Belshazzar might not have known all the things Nebuchadnezzar the Great had said and done in his long and storied reign.

Let's also tell it like it is: that doesn't seem likely. Belshazzar is proud and scared, vain and worried. Like a wounded animal, he's cornered and is taking his best shot to keep himself in charge. He has sent for Daniel the Jew, who is telling him the story of how Nebuchadnezzar also lifted himself up in pride...and then how the Lord God brought him back to earth. Why would Daniel do this? You know the answer.

Belshazzar needed the cold, hard truth. Hardest of all, he needed to hear it from a captured slave who had served several kings of Babylon, and whose word was reliable. Daniel starts to interpret the mystery of the writing on the wall by telling the current king about the futile pride of the previous one.

I don't know about you, but I don't like it when someone calls me out, even when it's done respectfully, as Daniel is doing with Belshazzar. This isn't the first (or last) story in the Bible where a lowly servant excoriates a ruler, yet this one is jarring for its temerity. How dare a slave 'diss' the king! Indeed, how dare he not, for when Daniel next tells it like it is, it will be even more prophetically shocking.

For further reading: Job 40:12, Isaiah 14:13-15, Jeremiah 28:14, Jeremiah 43:10, Ezekiel 31:10-11, Daniel 5:22

Lord, thank You for the frank honesty of Daniel and Your Word.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 15 July 2021 Today's topic: For Thou Only Art Holy

"But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. Daniel 5:22-24 (NIV).

Chutzpah: is that what Daniel had? How imprudent; how confrontational; how accurate he was. How good it would have been for Belshazzar to genuinely repent on hearing these verses. Belshazzar had set himself against God by being unrepentantly proud, by mocking God through defiling the objects stolen from the destroyed temple. Worse, Belshazzar, as king of Babylon, had overseen the nation in defying God, leading Babylon to mock God through its idols, its pagan ways. Where once Babylon had been led by a man who (finally) gave God the respect and honor He deserved, now it was led by a weaker descendant who had no interest in the God of all creation.

Pretty serious stuff, don't you think. Just wait for the rest of the chapter: what happened changed history, even history that actively changes all the way forward into today. All because of chutzpah.

More importantly, all because of what God would do through Daniel, the fall of Babylon, and the rise of another empire from Persia. A hostile army is nearly at the gates of Babylon that very night; by morning, everything will have changed. Yet, at the end of today's verses, neither Belshazzar, Daniel, nor the festive guests appear to know that. What might have happened if, like Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar truly repented? If Belshazzar had broken down, weeping, taken off his robes and put on sackcloth, announced his sin to his guests, and directed the kingdom to repent with him?

We'll never know. As we will see next time, in just four words written by a ghostly hand, God pronounced judgment on Belshazzar and his kingdom. Without genuine repentance, the prophecy would immediately come true. That repentance is the thing that made God's actions against Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar different. The former had thrice confessed that God was supreme; the latter never did.

You and me: let's not make the mistake Belshazzar did. God is God no matter what we think or do. It isn't chutzpah when we praise Him and proclaim it: it's who we are and how we are blessed by Him simply to tell the truth.

For further reading: Exodus 10:3, Isaiah 14:13, Jeremiah 50:29, Habakkuk 2:19, Revelation 9:20, Daniel 5:25

Lord, for Thou only art holy. Thou only art the Lord.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 19 July 2021 Today's topic: The King Was Afraid

"This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekel, parsin. "Here is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." Daniel 5:25-28 (NIV).

Was Daniel afraid to speak these words to vain Belshazzar? He was telling the most powerful ruler on the planet that he just didn't measure up and the all-powerful God of Heaven had decided to make a change in leadership. If Belshazzar was terrified before, he must surely have been more terrified now.

What must have terrified him most is knowing it was true. Jeremiah 50 says that the king of Babylon has heard reports of a vast army coming to his city, and yet Belshazzar was paralyzed in fear. He's like the steward of Gondor in *The Return of the King*, except this is a story from history; something that actually happened. Even though much of the rest of the book of Daniel reveals prophecies that Daniel learned during Belshazzar's short reign, in a few verses, we will meet the leader who overthrows Babylon and lays the groundwork for one of the most famous stories in the Bible: one even unbelievers know.

For now, think back to that night in Babylon. You're in the room with Belshazzar and Daniel and the queen and all the guests, the nobles of the kingdom who are feasting while their very lives are in danger. The impudent Jew tells the wavering emperor that he's about to be overthrown. I bet you could have heard a pin (or maybe a Temple goblet) drop. Then, of course, the murmuring would begin.

That happens now, too. If you don't believe me, go sit in on a corporate board meeting, where group-think and complacency long ago overtook boldness in setting corporate policy. Or in our governments, where mediocrity and mendacity are the new norms. Sit in churches, where cliquishness and tradition can be the well-intentioned fuels that drive many poor decisions among the Lord's chosen.

Maybe we are all a little too afraid to speak up, to stake our claim firmly on the LORD's side and let Him guide what we say and do. But Jesus wasn't; neither was Daniel. After the next chapter, Daniel spends the rest of the book explaining visions he has of the end times. Some of those visions include war, and pestilence, and disasters unknown in any time of history. Belshazzar was afraid of these things, and he knew he was about to die. We who cling to the LORD Jesus shouldn't be afraid, yet we should be on our guard.

For further reading: Isaiah 13:17, Jeremiah 27:7, Jeremiah 50:41-43, Daniel 5:29

Lord Jesus, I cling to You and You alone! Ease my sinful fears.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 20 July 2021 Today's topic: Last Chance

Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. Daniel 5:29 (NIV).

This is Belshazzar's last chance. He has this final opportunity to plead with God, to pray for His mercy, to turn away this terrible swift judgment that is about to descend on his kingdom. Instead, he wastes it by keeping a foolish vow.

Have you ever had moments like that? Moments when you knew you shouldn't say something, but you say it anyway. Or moments when you know you shouldn't be doing something, but you do it anyway. You think about it later, knee deep in the consequences of your actions, and you wish you had done things differently. You're genuinely sorry for what you said and did, and you want to try to make things right. Only you can't. The deed is done; the door is closed.

That's where Belshazzar is in this verse. The door is shutting on him. He knows that, as king and master of the banquet, he has to keep the vow he made to his guests: to reward Daniel (even though Daniel gave him terrifying news). Yet he must also know that the door to repentance is almost shut, that it won't take long for God to do what He's about to do to Babylon.

So, like the Pharaoh of Egypt who rewarded Joseph for interpreting the dream about famine, or like Nebuchadnezzar who elevated Daniel above all his other advisors, Belshazzar keeps his word and adorns that same Daniel with symbols of Babylon's wealth and gratitude. At least Daniel would be dressed well when the Medes showed up a few hours hence.

So, I'll ask again: have you ever had moments like that? Or are you in one now? When you have the chance to do a right thing and you're standing at a fork in the road? Standing there, what does God tell you to do? Just before they both died, Jesus saved the criminal hanging next to Him when that man showed real repentance. It wasn't too late for the criminal on the cross. It's never too late for us, either...until it is. And we don't know what tomorrow will hold, or when our time will come. Have you ever had a moment like Belshazzar? And if you're in one now, deep inside of you, what do you sense God is telling you? God doesn't lead us to sin. If it's hard to tell, then seek His counsel and understanding through His Word. He's speaking somehow; are you listening? Eventually, we each come up to our last chance.

For further reading: Genesis 41:42, 1 Samuel 3:8-9, Daniel 5:30

Speak, Lord. Speak to me in my times of trouble and the moments of each day. Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 21 July 2021 Today's topic: Divine Justice, Natural Consequences

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two. Daniel 5:30-31 (NIV).

Let's face it: death will come for all of us. Without the salvation of God Himself, we are both doomed and damned. God, through His Son, Jesus, wants to anoint us with oil, to comfort and care for us. He calls to us every day of our lives to turn to Him for all our hope. He offers us the benefits of eternity both now and at the end of our lives if only we will believe in Him, trust in Him alone to save us from the crushing guilt of our humiliating sins.

And when we don't do it, there is eternal separation from His hope, His comfort, His love. That's not me saying it: read your Bible. It's God's own promise. I'll admit: Like my friend, Vern, I'm wistfully hopeful that, when I get to heaven, He will show how He made a mysterious way that I didn't understand to bring into His family even those we thought condemned. Such a magnificent mercy would be completely in character for our LORD.

Yet this divine justice He repeatedly promises is also in character, because His holiness demands perfect justice. It isn't slamming the Babylonians, or Belshazzar, or us for things we do here. It's Him turning us over to the natural consequences of our sinful things because we've rejected His salvation. God called to Belshazzar through years of the Babylonian captivity of His chosen people, to know Him and revere Him; to confess that God alone is God and the only glory of mankind.

Instead, Belshazzar, king of Babylon, rejected God. In doing so, he gave God the finger and told Him off. Within hours, Belshazzar was dead. Babylon, which had ruled the known world for over a hundred years, was in ruins. All the noble men and women who had feasted with the king were dead, or themselves enslaved, or in flight. A new era was beginning; one in which God would use Daniel to teach even more lessons to both the new powers-that-be and to every person thereafter.

Where do you stand? You and I bring nothing into the equation of our salvation. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, has already done everything to save us both now and forever. All we do is accept it...or reject it, and face the same desolation that Belshazzar received. Where do you stand in your profession of what you do, or don't, believe? God didn't save you for fear: in Him, we were made to thrive. Death comes for all of us. What say you?

For further reading: Isaiah 13:3, Isaiah 21:9, Jeremiah 50:35, Jeremiah 51:31, Daniel 6:1

O Lord, I believe in You. Thank You for the story of the fall of Babylon.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 22 July 2021 Today's topic: New Masters

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Daniel 6:1-2 (NIV).

The second half of the book of Daniel begins here. Up until now, the book has been pure history. For the next six chapters, history will be interspersed with prophecy.

That starts with the account of Daniel being promoted in Babylon again, this time by the new government, a government of Median-Persians. Who were these 'new' masters?

Persia was an empire within modern Iran. Not long before today's verses, the Persians had conquered the Median empire (also within modern Iran). This unified empire then overtook most of its neighbors, including Babylonia (contained within modern Iraq). According to <https://www.gotquestions.org/Darius-in-the-Bible.html>, the Darius mentioned in Daniel 6 may be a royal viceroy, appointed by Persian emperor Cyrus the Great, to rule over the newly-conquered Babylonian empire. It is also possible that "Darius the Mede" was a Median name for Cyrus himself.

Back to Daniel. After overrunning Babylon and killing Belshazzar, the Median-Persians were looking for people to run their newfound conquest. By the time all this happened, along with all the other Jews from Jerusalem, Daniel had been captive in Babylon for over a generation. Because of that, Daniel might very well have been an old man, maybe even in his 70s or 80s. This would have given him credibility in front of the new overlords as they would no doubt have heard how the sagely Daniel interpreted dreams for the former monarchs. It's also reasonable to assume the Persians felt both safe with and a little wary of the storied Jew who had served Babylon's previous rulers with distinction.

Daniel soon proved himself capable, just as he had under Nebuchadnezzar many years before. Daniel was both a faithful and honest man or the conquering Medes wouldn't have considered him for a position of responsibility in the new order. As we will see in coming verses, he was known for such fidelity that palace intrigue once again schemed in order to remove him.

What does this have to do with us? You know it's a lesson on being faithful, honest, and true so that people in authority might vest trust and power in us. More importantly, it's a lesson in how God blesses us when we remain true to Him at all times. Daniel would soon (and once again) prove himself true in this new world order. In doing so, he would record one of the most memorable accounts in all human history.

For further reading: Ezra 4:22, Esther 1:1, Daniel 6:3

Or Lord, strengthen me with faith to always remain honest and true to You, so that You might have glory through my life.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 26 July 2021 Today's topic: Just Like Us

Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." Daniel 6:3-5 (NIV).

Yes, we have been here before. In the Bible, the accounts of Joseph, Mordecai, David, Paul, and others tell the stories of how good men and women faithfully served the Lord by serving other, secular authorities and were hated by their secular peers for it. Admit it: you've seen that too. When you rise to the top, you become the most visible target. When you do a good job, there's always someone else who wants to take credit for what you've done. Got skin, got sin; this kind of jealousy is wired into our sin-disposed natures.

When you are in the public eye, especially in our interconnected age of the internet, someone will always try to take you down. Especially if you are a person of faith in the Christian community. You're going to be attacked for what you believe, how you act, what you say. It has happened to me, even when I didn't do things to deserve it (though all too often I have). It will happen to you as well if you are a follower of Jesus. Jesus mentions and guarantees it.

It was happening (again) to Daniel. As you'll recall, years before, it had happened to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Back then, it was the court insiders who conspired against Daniel's friends. Now, it is Daniel's peers, his fellow administrators. I think of them as similar to vice-presidents in a corporation. Or colonels and generals in today's military. They're definitely like many of our politicians: high-ranking individuals who are entrusted with great power yet whose first concern is, usually, self-preservation and not serving others.

We'll say it again: got skin, got sin. It's in their nature. It's in your nature and mine.

What the satraps/colonels/vice-presidents of "New Babylon" don't realize is that, in conspiring against Daniel, they're really conspiring against God. Their jealous sins don't grasp this and won't until it's too late. Just like us. Instead of just trying to take out Daniel, they're also attacking God through their sneaky duplicity.

For further reading: Genesis 41:41, Esther 10:3, Jeremiah 20:10, Acts 24:13-16, Daniel 6:6

Lord, teach me to never conspire, to never plot against others or You. Teach me today, instead, to only follow You, to think and act only in godly ways.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 27 July 2021 Today's topic: The Conspirators

So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." So King Darius put the decree in writing. Daniel 6:6-9(NIV).

Conspirators are, generally, cowards. Like their mentor, Satan, they rarely attack you head-on because they lack the courage to do so. It's a military maxim that you should always attack your enemy at his weakest point, yet it's a maxim of cowardly conspirators that you only attack what you know you can absolutely get away with...until you can't.

Daniel's satrap peers don't come at him and accuse him of malfeasance as an administrator. In the previous verse, they admitted they couldn't. So they attacked him using his faith. They conjured up a scheme to appeal to Darius' vanity in order to trap Daniel, who they anticipated wouldn't play along. Their conspiracy attacked Daniel in a (supposedly) weak area, and didn't directly challenge God...until it finally did.

Funny, isn't it. The conspirators of today are doing the exact same thing. They can't attack you or me directly for believing (though many openly mock faith) so they attack how faith is expressed, how we may practice it in the public sphere. Without 'going political,' there is no actual Constitutional ban in America on public display of faith, even on government property or using means of government; the First Amendment doesn't prohibit it (while it does explicitly prohibit the government from inhibiting worship in any way). There is no explicit 'separation of church and state' in our Constitution. Find it if you dare. Yet those who hate and mock God intensify their attacks on faith, usually obliquely and incrementally, piecemeal using sleight of hand or word manipulation. They rarely attack head-on. Those are the tricks of Satan, and cowards, and Persian satraps.

They're cheeky, too, these conspiring bureaucrats. In their petty scheme, they indirectly attack King Darius, belittling his authority and pretending to tell him what he can and cannot do. In doing so, they prescribe the sentence of execution: something that would become famous for all time, giving glory to God in the process. And something that would eventually be their complete undoing.

For further reading: Nehemiah 2:3, Esther 1:19, Psalm 59:3, Daniel 6:10

Lord, humble me when I am petty, or conspiratorial, or scheming. Show me my errors that I may change and glorify You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 28 July 2021 Today's topic: Daniel Prayed Anyway

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Daniel 6:10 (NIV).

Look at how Daniel acts on adversity. He doesn't react to it: he acts as he always has. He continues to pray to God; he does it multiple times per day. He understands that a decree has been issued prohibiting this, yet, as a matter of faithful conscience, he continues to pray anyway. And he does so in private, not publicly defying the king's short-sighted edict but, instead, adhering to his faith in a personal, non-intrusive manner. He isn't hurting anyone.

Now, in this age when our right to freely worship and believe as we choose is under attack, would we have the courage to do the same? That isn't an easy thing to answer, especially in a time where government seems hell-bent on extending its control over more and more of our actions. Daniel exercised his rights – given to him as a follower of the one true God and king – by getting on his knees and facing west, towards Jerusalem. It's an act that, a thousand years later, Muslims would appropriate for their own practice. 1400 years after that, would you or I have the guts to, say, worship in our workplace? Or hold a prayer service in the school hallway? Maybe take off your mask and go to church when the government shuts things down?

Jesus did, and He asks us to do the same: to focus our prayers to God. Jesus asks us to do what Daniel did: go into a quiet room, alone, and pray out our hearts to God, who will see and listen to us. Then, after, to be unafraid in standing up for what we believe. You don't have to be Peter in the temple courts; you don't have to be Billy Graham in front of thousands. You simply have to say, "I believe," because you know deep inside that Jesus ran to rescue you when you and I were still mired in sin. We hit our knees because we're knee-deep in it. This isn't about some religion; this isn't about defiance, or even facing a conspiracy. It's about following Jesus.

Daniel wasn't a superhero, and he wasn't perfect. He probably understood the score. He could see the conspiracy stacked against him and probably understood it could result in his death. He probably felt scared. Yet, when faced with adversity strengthening against him, Daniel prayed anyway.

For further reading: 1 Kings 8:29, Psalm 95:6, Matthew 6:6, Acts 5:29, Daniel 6:10

Lord God, steady me today. You and You alone are my salvation. Thank You and all my praise to You for this. Abide with me, Lord.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 29 July 2021 Today's topic: Tattletales

Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." Daniel 6:11-12 (NIV).

Tattletales. Daniel's peer administrators went to his house and saw him there, praying. They heard him praying to God, asking the Lord for help. Then they went back to Darius and ratted Daniel out.

It's hard to like a tattletale. I wonder what Darius thought of his administrators when they came into his palace in full busybody mode, ready to tattle on Daniel. What's more, the jealous satraps are belittling the king again. "Yeah, boy, remember that thing you said about praying only to you?" I can picture Darius' eyes rolling and his thoughts. "These guys must really think I'm stupid. What's their angle?" Surely, Darius must have thought less and less of the men he had put in charge of his new kingdom.

Except Daniel. In the king's eyes, Daniel had done no wrong. The slave was devoted to his strange God, and yet he served willingly and enthusiastically in a foreign court. In doing so, he showed great integrity and admirable character. It wouldn't have been hard to see that Daniel's satrap peers were jealous of him, manufacturing an incident with which to push him out of the way. In fact, if they could misuse the royal laws in this way, what else were they capable of?

Yet, also in the king's eyes, his law was sacrosanct. The king understood that his decrees had to have the full weight of Babylon (and Persia) behind them: Even if it meant betraying a loyal subject, Darius had to keep his word. He knew that the word of a leader carries great weight, so he must now stand by this foolish decree that he let these tattletale bureaucrats swindle him into.

What about us? Have you ever been in a situation where someone tried to push you out of the way? Or make you do something you didn't want to do? Have you ever felt like a pawn in someone else's game? In such moments, remember always that the Lord Jesus is Lord of all, and how He never forgets His children who love him when they stand strong in what they believe. Even tattletales.

For further reading: 1 Kings 8:48-50, Esther 1:19, Psalm 55:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, Daniel 6:13

Oh Lord, be my strength when I am weak. Shield me from my enemies, and thwart those who plot against me.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 2 August 2021 Today's topic: Evil Quickly Tries

Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day." When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, "Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed." Daniel 6:13-15 (NIV).

Don't you hate it when someone tries to use your words against you? The satraps of "New Babylon" are trying to do just that to Darius the Mede. It was the legal custom of that empire that no royal edict could be changed. The only way an order from the king could be voided was for the king to issue a new order in its place. In a way, this is still the practice in most countries where monarchy is the form of government.

The satraps had engineered this scheme to trap both Daniel and Darius under their control. Daniel was the predictable one: the schemers predicted he would stay true to the Lord and violate the royal edict. Darius, on the other hand, was more elusive. He was, after all, the conquering king, whose forces had overthrown Babylon in a day. Back then, Darius probably had few choices when it came to appointing overseers for the new conquest. He most likely didn't have enough Median or Persian officials in whom he could place trust. And, neither he nor his army were familiar with where things were in Babylon, how to effectively manage the city without, first, killing every one of its inhabitants; that wouldn't have done them much good.

So, Darius had appointed local administrators to oversee the management of the city, and now they were trying to ensnare him in their scheme by misusing both the trust he placed in them and his own royal, legal customs.

Sounds a lot like Darius had to trust the American Congress. Or, perhaps, one of our political parties. Maybe a school board, or HOA. That's because little has changed in the many centuries since the time of these events. People are still sinful. People still scheme. With high rank and much power come great temptations to misuse the power and position. Unless someone is grounded through faith in the Almighty, evil quickly tries to take hold. It happened to the satraps; it happens still today. Here's to hoping our faith stops temptation when it comes for each of us.

For further reading: Esther 3:8, Esther 8:8, Ezekiel 14:14, Mark 6:26, Daniel 6:16

Lord, teach me today to overcome temptation, to resist the Devil so he will flee.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 3 August 2021 Today's topic: God Rescues

So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" Daniel 6:16 (NIV).

Even if you aren't well-read on your Bible, chances are you've heard the story of Daniel in the lions' den. Building up to now, we saw how Daniel's peers were jealous of him and orchestrated a scheme to get him killed. Then, they smooth-talked the king into issuing a foolish edict. Then, they set Daniel up and got him sentenced to death without even a trial. That brings us to this verse, yet also remember a few key things to keep the story in context.

Daniel was most likely an old man when this happened, possibly a septuagenarian or octogenarian. Most paintings you see of Daniel and the lions show a young (and mostly naked) Daniel lounging on the rocks. This probably wasn't the case. By the time this happened, Daniel would have been an old man, shuffling, trembling, but dressed in the finery of Persian Babylon. He would have showed courage and deep faith, yet he was also just an ordinary man of advanced age. I think that makes the story even more remarkable. Isn't it amazing how God constantly uses seniors to demonstrate his most amazing glory? Think Daniel, and Jacob, Abraham, Moses, and even John later in life.

Also remember that Darius didn't want to do this thing, yet he had unwisely ensnared himself in his own royal customs. The wily satraps had designed their scheme to trap both Daniel AND Darius, for there was more at stake for them than simply getting rid of a contrary Jew. If these experts and bureaucrats could control the words of the king, they could have anything they wanted. In verse 16, we read about an upright but reluctant Darius, one who knew of Daniel's reputation and his scrupulous honesty. Perhaps they even were friends. Darius sent the innocent Daniel to an almost certain death, but only reluctantly so, imploring the 'condemned' to stand fast in his faith in this mysterious God. How ironic it is that the king who issued the decree commanding worship of only himself now implores his prisoner to enthusiastically break the royal law and put his faith only in the Lord.

What lions' den have you been thrown into? Chances are, if you've lived any amount of time, you've faced down a dreadful thing or a terrible challenge. Did you believe the schemers who mocked you in your distress, or did you go humbly to our Lord and rest only in His protection and comfort? You've probably heard this story before. Come back tomorrow to learn about how God rescues us.

For further reading: Job 5:19, Psalm 37:39-40, Psalm 97:10, Daniel 6:17

Lord God, You and You alone are my only protection.

Practical Proverbial, From Daniel, 4 August 2021 Today's topic: Daniel's Good Friday

A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. Daniel 6:17-18 (NIV).

Have you ever considered this story to be a foreshadowing of Good Friday? The similarities to the burial (and resurrection) of Jesus are quite amazing. Consider that:

- Daniel was innocent and apprehended while praying (like Jesus at Gethsemane).
- Daniel was sentenced to death in a sham proceeding (like Jesus was).
- Daniel was sentenced to die in a horrible, public way (like Jesus was).
- Darius, like Pilate, knew Daniel was innocent yet had to pass judgment on him anyway.
- Daniel was thrown into a rocky den, similar to Christ's tomb that was cut from a rock.
- A stone was brought in to place over the opening (like Jesus' tomb).
- The stone was sealed (like Jesus' tomb).
- The events greatly troubled Darius (like the crucifixion troubled Pilate).
- (As we'll see) Daniel will be delivered alive from his tomb (like, well, you know).

Maybe that's why so many non-believers scorn the story of Daniel in the lions' den. After all, it's impossible, right? Ferocious lions would shred Daniel from the second he was thrown into the enclosure! But, you know, it was also impossible for a dead man named Jesus to say He was God, then raise Himself to life (which he both predicted, then later did).

Nothing is impossible for God, whether it's raising His only son back to life or saving an old Jewish captive from being eaten by lions.

It wasn't until I read these verses (in preparing this blog) that I recognized how they are a kind of foreshadowing of Jesus' death and resurrection. This isn't original; many others have considered this before. Call me slow to understand. Yet I also find it to be another reassuring example of how God continually worked miracles for His people all throughout history. Of course, those miracles reached their pinnacle on Easter morning, yet it's amazing to read again and again of how He performed them all along. And how He performs them still today, or haven't you considered just the simple miracle of your waking up today to read these words? Praise God for His mercy.

If you know the outcome of the story, you know what's next. Hopefully you'll see, too, yet another event that points not just to Daniel's rescue, but to how God still rescues each of us.

For further reading: 2 Samuel 12:17, Esther 6:1, Matthew 27:66, Daniel 6:19

Lord Jesus, thank You for this reminder from the Old Testament of Your resurrection

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 5 August 2021 Today's topic: A Morning Full of Miracles

At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty." The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. Daniel 6:19-23 (NIV).

This story describes a miracle. Daniel was thrown into a den of ravenous lions and, when the king ran to check on him the next day, Daniel was unharmed.

Miracle. Not just a miracle, but an expression of faith, a deliverance from evil. If the previous verses were a foreshadowing of Good Friday, then this is a foreshadowing of Easter. Christ rescued humankind from the eternal consequences of our sins. In this part of his story, God rescued Daniel from the consequences of someone else's sins (namely the scheming of the satraps and the moral weakness of King Darius).

Again, a miracle. Or maybe a host of miracles. It was a kind of miracle that Darius was troubled in lovingkindness for an innocent man he had condemned. It was a miracle that God sent His angel to shut the mouths of the lions. It was a miracle that Daniel witnessed his innocence to the king. And, it was a miracle that, after all this, Darius had Daniel removed from the den to find not a scratch on him.

It was a morning full of miracles, all due to the mercy of God. Just like Easter Sunday. Just like every Sunday. Just like today, in fact. How many angels protect us when we drive home in traffic, skirting a thousand cars a day to get safely from one point to another? How many miracles occur when a muscle called "the heart" continually pumping gallons of blood through our veins every minute of every day for decades? How many miracles happen every day around us, even when we forget to notice them? And what about the miracles of mercy and love that we find from Jesus, or from each other, when we least deserve them?

You could drive yourself crazy (in mania or joy alike) trying to begin to count them. I'm not even sure we could. But Jesus can.

For further reading: Genesis 32:1, Nehemiah 2:3, Psalm 91:11-13, Acts 12:11, 2 Timothy 4:17, Hebrews 11:33, Daniel 6:24

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your world of mercy and Your miracles.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 9 August 2021 Today's topic: Protection from the Lions

At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Daniel 6:24 (NIV).

Our choices – and our sins – affect so many more people than us. It was the jealous satraps – Daniel's administrating peers – who schemed to have him killed (and to manipulate the king). Yet, when retribution came, it was both they and their families who paid the terrible price. Centuries later, we who read this verse also become affected by it, drawing conclusions and hopefully learning helpful lessons.

When we choose sin, it dearly affects everyone around us. Deservedly so, often we pay the temporal price for our sins; even as Jesus paid the full spiritual price for our rebellions, sins carry consequences that we feel here on the good old Third Rock. Yet so do the people closest to us. When adultery splits a family, the spouse and children, in-laws, grandparents, and even more extended family are all affected. When a killer murders someone, everyone close to the victim is affected. The world is more than we know.

Traffic accidents because of careless drivers; lies in Congress and lies in the White House; schools teaching destructive beliefs or practices; families split by discord and stubborn-headedness: got sin, got trouble. Got sin? Got trouble. Got trouble? So do the folks in our circles.

When the satraps of Babylon were exposed for what they'd tried to do to innocent Daniel, King Darius had them and all their families thrown into the same den of lions where Daniel had been. But without the faith in God that had kept Daniel safe, the Babylonians quickly died. It must have been excruciatingly painful for them; it must have been wicked and gory to watch. Yet they paid the death-price that came with scheming against the king and, in truth, against the king's law: a law allowed by God for His better purposes. It wasn't primarily Darius (or even Daniel) who had been wronged: it was God. When God removed His protection in their unbelieving lives, the guilty soon perished.

So it was then; so it still is now. Without God's protection, we are quick prey for the devil, who is like a prowling, roaring lion, looking for an easy victim. That lion often hunts those around us affected by the things we do. But our God protects us every day in a thousand ways from lions we never see. Let today be the day when we choose Christ instead of our other choices so that others besides ourselves may thrive.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 19:18-19, 2 Kings 14:6, Esther 7:9-10, Psalm 54:5, Isaiah 38:13, 1 Peter 5:8, Daniel 6:25

Lord Jesus, in You is my safety; only You are my savior and protector.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 10 August 2021 Today's topic: Until Then, Now

Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: "May you prosper greatly! "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions." Daniel 6:25-27 (NIV).

Imagine the healing that could begin if President Biden issued a decree that said what Darius' did. No, this isn't a political post; I seriously pose the challenge for you to think about it. Imagine how our country and our world would begin to prosper again if those at the apex of our governing structure gave praise, glory, and reverence to the Lord God Almighty alone.

Maybe some day that'll happen. Until then, how about you and me do it in our own lives? In fact, if we really want to change the world, then that's really a better change than Biden or any of his cronies could make. Darius issued his decree for all of his people to follow, and they would do so under the power of his law. We, however, have only the decree of Jesus Christ to follow in order to govern our lives and live them in ways to glorify God.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself." That verse begins Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan: perhaps the most renowned story of neighborly love anywhere. To keep the spirit of Darius' decree (and to show our leaders what they ought to be saying), how about you and I do our best to live that out individually? Right here, right now, wherever we are: let's follow Jesus'. Give thanks to God right now for another day to live and serve Him by living His work through our lives. Doing our best. Loving those around us, even strangers. Forgiving generously. Listening more and more. Truly sharing and caring.

Instead of letting just our sins affect those around us, how about we let our faith affect us, giving Jesus the glory He deserves through what we say and do? Imagine if a king or a president could say something like that. Better yet, imagine if we could live it out today, Biden or not.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 6:5, Joshua 2:11, Esther 8:17, Psalm 5:7, Psalm 99:1-3, Luke 10:27, Revelation 1:18, Daniel 6:28

Lord Jesus, I love You with all my soul, heart, strength, and mind. Teach me today ways to share Your holy love with others.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 11 August 2021 Today's topic: God's Handiwork

So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Daniel 6:28 (NIV).

Here ends the part of the book of Daniel documenting the history of the Babylonian exile and God's mercy throughout it. It's the history of God's handiwork.

Part of that history is grounding us in facts that can also be verified independent of the Bible. The Darius mentioned in chapter 6 was likely "Darius the Mede:" a general or relation of Cyrus II of Persia. There was later a "Darius the Great," who was likely Cyrus II's son in law. The common reference to both of these Darius' was Cyrus the II, also known as "Cyrus the Great." This man created the Persian empire, which, during his lifetime, conquered every other empire in the Mediterranean, extending its influence into Europe and Asia. Until the rise of Greece, the empire of Cyrus the Persian was the greatest empire known to the ancient world.

And Daniel, blessed by God, prospered through this. Could it be that Darius and Cyrus prospered because of Daniel? You be the judge. According to Wikipedia, Cyrus was the greatest innovator of antiquity in the areas of government, administration, human rights, and the governing of conquered lands. The restoration of the Temple and Jerusalem happened during the Persian empire: something that couldn't have happened without divine blessing. Cyrus II was even referred to as an anointed one: the only non-Jewish person who was ever given that title.

It's pretty inconceivable that the enlightened emperor of Persia would have found himself uniquely blessed except for the ministry and influence of the former slave from Judea. Where Darius' and Cyrus' territory was blessed with prosperity through Daniel's administration, so were the people of that region as well as others in the Persian empire. God's handiwork? You betcha.

God uses who He chooses to use to be the vessels through which He will bless the world. Don't walk away from this today without thinking He still does the same thing in our so-called modern age. Indeed, some of the most improbable people of our lifetimes have worked and lived in ways that blessed many others far beyond their inner circles. This handiwork of the Lord seems clearly in evidence even now.

The rest of Daniel is fantastical. After today's verse, the rest of the book will be prophecy, everything from predictions about the end of the world to commentary on how we should live our lives in reverence. As we read it, just remember that all of this was written at a time when the idea of religious freedom and even modernistic government first took root in the world. Those, too, were the handiwork of God through the eyes and words of Daniel.

For further reading: 2 Chronicles 36:22, Daniel 7:1

Lord God, thank You for the words of this book. Teach my heart from them.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 12 August 2021 Today's topic: The Four Winds of Heaven

Posted by [aspiringwriterdt](#) August 12, 2021 Posted in [Current Proverbials](#)

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream. Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. Daniel 7:1-3 (NIV).

As we begin our look at Daniel's prophecies, we first go back in time. Daniel 6 ends with God prospering Persia through Daniel under the reign of Darius and Cyrus the Great. Yet Daniel 7 immediately takes us back a few years, back to a time when Belshazzar was still on the throne of Babylon. Recall that Belshazzar was the king who saw the mysterious writing on the wall, on the last night of his life. Today's verses likely date to as early as 533 BC (see <https://bible-studys.org/Bible%20Books/Daniel/Daniel%20Chapter%207.html>). Why chapter 7 is not physically placed earlier in the book we do not know, nor does its placement change the content.

Also, in full disclosure, we'll be relying heavily on the analysis and advice of others as we go through these next five chapters. I claim no originality on discerning what these prophecies mean: only on this blog's interpretation of them. These posts have long referenced associated verses as outlined in my Concordia study Bible. As we go through the prophecies, these references will become even more helpful and necessary.

Daniel's vision of the four winds of heaven likely refers to a great sea of humanity. In other places in the Bible (notably in Ezekiel and Revelation), the four winds are held back by angels. The context of those verses refers to large masses of people, perhaps whole nations or empires. Most likely, that is what Daniel saw in his vision here.

As for the four beasts, many people believe they do indeed refer to four empires, specifically two already in existence at the time (Babylon and Persia) and two yet to come (Greece and Rome). See <https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/understanding-the-book-of-daniel/daniel-7/> for more in-depth explanation. This fits best with the rest of the prophecy, yet some people think it may also refer to empires even after that, specifically ones in existence at the end of time.

All of this matters because there are prophecies coming in this chapter that exist nowhere else in the Old Testament. They point directly to the Triune God, specifically to the savior, Jesus, in ways no other prophet did. It's helpful to remember (and also lends credence to the prophecy) that all this was recorded by Daniel long before the fall of Babylon. It was after Nebuchadnezzar but many years before Media-Persia invaded.

For further reading: Psalm 4:4, Jeremiah 36:4, Ezekiel 37:9, Ezekiel 40:2, Revelation 7:1, Revelation 13:1, Daniel 7:4

Thank You Lord for the mysteries of prophecy.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 16 August 2021 Today's topic: Sources Say So

"The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it. Daniel 7:4 (NIV).

Multiple sources (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/daniel/7-4.htm>, <https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/understanding-the-book-of-daniel/daniel-7/>, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/daniel-7/> and many more) tell us that this verse is a reference to the Babylonian empire, specifically that during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel had been a witness to the fall of Judah, the inner workings of Nebuchadnezzar's court, and Nebuchadnezzar's madness and restoration, and the fall of Belshazzar, during whose reign this chapter was written.

Recall Nebuchadnezzar's madness. Earlier in Daniel (chapter 4), Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream, which Daniel then interpreted. In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar went mad but was restored to power after humbling himself before God. History doesn't record how Nebuchadnezzar died, but he reigned as emperor of Babylon – the most powerful nation on earth – for 43 years. His successors likely ruled less than twenty years more before the Mede-Persians invaded and killed King Belshazzar (chapter 5). What archaeological evidence we know of about these events doesn't contradict Daniel's accounts.

What can this mean for us today? In the larger sense, chapter 7 is a prophecy about how God is sovereign over earth's empires, past and future. Yet, specifically to us today, it means also that God is still sovereign in the details of our lives. The world is spinning out of control in many ways. Christian faith is under attack. Terror has taken hold again of Afghanistan, rendering the twenty-year war there useless. The world's economy hangs by threads, waiting for a seemingly inevitable crash. Governments are manically spending themselves into irrevocable oblivion in which liberty may be extinguished for the next thousand years. Disease, panic, and fear are on the rise in places that have never known them as well as places that have known nothing but them. And the very fabric of our order in society seems frayed, as if it is about to unravel or, worse, be violently torn apart.

God is still God in all. Jesus is still the way, the truth, and the life. His eye still watches both sparrows and each of us. And the Savior He sent to die for us is still very much on the throne of now and eternity. He's the same God who spoke prophecy through Daniel about pagan Nebuchadnezzar, whose visions and kingdom served God's higher purpose. God cared enough back then to counsel words of what was to come. He cares enough now to still abide with us as He promised. Count on it no matter how many sources say so.

For further reading: 2 Kings 24:1, Psalm 7:2, Jeremiah 4:7, Ezekiel 17:3, John 14:6, Revelation 13:2, Daniel 7:5

Ruling Lord, bless Your name for the prophecies and promises You gave.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 17 August 2021 Today's topic: What Matters

“And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and eat your fill of flesh!’ Daniel 7:5 (NIV).

This vision of the second of the four beasts is about the Median-Persian empire that overthrew Babylon. Median Persia would conquer more territory than Babylon, specifically to the directions of west, north, and south that Persia conquered. Some people also believe the three ribs may signify three kings who came after Darius, but this can't be confirmed (see <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/daniel-7-5.html>).

Yet many people also believe the four beasts in Daniel's dream also signify nations going to war at the end of time. In the first beast, ancient Babylon is seen as modern Iraq, which is where the ruins of Babylon are found. The second beast refers to modern Iran, which is located where Media and Persia once ruled. The three ribs would signify Persia, Ethiopia (in ancient days, already a powerful nation), and Libya (then as now, a strategic asset). Finally, the bear, raised on its side as if to look down might signify Gog, or modern Russia (<https://bible-studys.org/Bible%20Books/Daniel/Daniel%20Chapter%207.html>).

Many Christians believe this is a prophecy about nations that will ally against Israel in the final battle of Armageddon, which will usher in the end of the world. Whether or not this was Daniel's full intention, the original meaning (pointing to the age of Persia) lines up cannily with what is told to happen in the end days.

What to believe?

It's a great mystery, you know, yet the key to understanding it really isn't that difficult. Jesus said, ““But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Nobody knows but Him, not even Jesus. It isn't up to us to decide exactly whether this prophecy applied only to ancient empires or to future alliances in the time of the antichrist. In reality (and in my humble opinion), it also doesn't matter. The key to understanding any Scripture – and any human interpretation or action from it – is to match it against what Jesus says through His Word.

If believing the prophecy of the second beast as a prophecy of the end times doesn't conflict with Scripture – and it doesn't – then it is a Godly thing to believe. And, if believing the prophecy speaks solely of ancient Median Persia – and it does – doesn't violate Scripture, then that, too, is a Godly thing to believe. For our understanding, we have sufficient information, even when that doesn't point to definitive answers. The only answer that matters is Christ.

For further reading: Ezekiel 38:5, Matthew 24:36, Daniel 7:6

Lord God, thank You for the mystery of the second beast. Strengthen my faith in You through my understanding of it.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 18 August 2021 Today's topic: Two For One, As He Does

"After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. Daniel 7:6 (NIV).

Many people believe this third beast signifies the Greek Empire (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/daniel-7-6.html>). At the time the verse was written, the minor kingdoms of Greece were, back then, only beginning to coalesce into a nation-state. A hundred years in the future, Alexander the Great, of Macedonia (part of Greece), would defeat Persia. In fact, in his short time as the world's most powerful conqueror, Alexander conquered more territory, felled more kingdoms, and acquired more lands than any ruler had before or after him (including up to now). According to several commentaries, the leopard signifies the rapidity with which Alexander rose and overthrew the known world. The four wings stand for the kingdoms of Babylon and Persia, and beast with four heads denotes the four portions into which Alexander's empire was split on his untimely death. The heirs to Alexander's empire would be referenced again later in Daniel, specifically in chapter 11.

Yet any look at Daniel 6 is incomplete without also looking at Revelation 13:2, which says, "the beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority." It isn't coincidence that John's revelation includes the three beasts, all in one, mentioned in Daniel 7:4-6. The beast of Revelation is an earthly king, given power by the dragon – Satan – to rule over the world and, finally, subdue all mankind under Satan's rule.

This is another verse where both meanings are true. In Daniel's time, it spoke of the Greek empire to come. Yet, only a few hundred years later, the Greek empire had been superseded by the even-more-powerful Rome, which ruled during the time of John. When John wrote Revelation, he was an old man, likely exiled to Patmos, some 60 years or so after the death and resurrection of the Christ. By then, Daniel's prophecy had already been fulfilled. John's was yet to come. You and I get the gift of being able to understand both interpretations of the account.

Best of all, we get to absorb the lesson from it, namely that God is sovereign over all kingdoms. Many nations have risen and fallen in our world; as long as it exists, the world will see many more nations fall, perhaps including our own. Yet, through it all, God will still reign supreme, allowing as He does for human events to carry out His better will.

For further reading: Revelation 13:2, Daniel 7:7

Oh Lord, the stories of the beasts are mysterious, even terrifying. Thank You for ruling divine in our troubled world.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 19 August 2021 Today's Topic: The Beast

“After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. Daniel 7:7 (NIV).

Daniel 7:7 directly calls ahead (in time and bibliography) to Revelation 12:3, which says, “And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.” Where Daniel talks about the fourth beast being terrifying and powerful, devouring all else, Revelation describes the beast – Satan – warring against the woman who was with child (think Mary and Jesus). The obvious tie between the verses is the ten horns, which signifies great power.

Scholars believe the beast mentioned in Daniel refers to Rome, the greatest, most powerful, and most publicly wicked and vile of all the ancient empires. While modernity owes thanks to Rome for many things (such as senatorial government, systems of public access, sanitation, and bathing, widespread roads, and innovative military tactics), we must also admit that ancient Rome was, in many ways, the representative of Satan on earth. Rome ferociously conquered all the nations and empires of the Mediterranean and Europe. It administered conquered territory without mercy. Stories of sexual lasciviousness, orgies, perversions, and worse are found in accounts of every Roman city. And, it was at Rome's behest that the Son of Man – God Himself – was crucified. It was this Rome to which Daniel referred: the most powerful empire that would sweep away all its predecessors and surpass them in its ruthlessness.

Looking forward to Revelation, however, the beast John saw was more than just evil Rome. It is Satan incarnate, stripped of his God-given light and angelic beauty. What's left embodies raw evil. Many believe that Revelation 12:3 talks about both the fall of Satan from God's favor and Satan's battle against the Lord both when Jesus was born and when He will return. The picture ought to frighten anyone, even those of strong faith. Peter referred to Satan as a roaring lion. Peter's fellow disciple, John, talks about Satan as a mysterious and terrifying dragon. Both are the same being.

The dragon, the devil, Satan, Lucifer, whatever you call him: he is the enemy of Christ, and thus our enemy as well. He uses any means at his disposal to draw believers away from Jesus, yet when you strip away the clever wiles and gaudy raiment, Satan is pure, ugly evil.

Daniel's message was, “it will only get worse.” John's echoed that. Good thing we know Jesus, who has already defeated Satan's worst attacks and will fight for us in the final battle of history.

For further reading: Ezekiel 40:2, Revelation 12:3, Daniel 7:8

Lord, thank You for these visions.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 23 August 2021 Today's topic: The Little Horn

"While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully. Daniel 7:8 (NIV).

The other beasts represent empires from Nebuchadnezzar forward. What does this little horn represent?

The short answer is "nobody knows." I searched numerous sources, both online and written, and many possible answers were recorded. Antiochus, Nero, Domitian, even an unnamed future Antichrist: all are possible – and logical – answers to who is represented by the little horn growing out amidst the ten horns of the fourth beast. The most popular answer among millennialists is that the little horn represents the Antichrist, a tie to the beast John mentions in Revelation 13 (see <https://www.gotquestions.org/Daniel-four-beasts.html>). It's generally accepted that the boastful little horn grew to represent something sinful, blasphemous. Yet, even after over 2500 years, the only full answer is that we simply do not know.

What we do know about the little horn is that it represented human beings and spoke boastfully. In a way, we are our own little horns, our own boastful megaphones that can rise out of anything. Timid and small at first, our words can build things up, increase us in number beyond simple beginnings. Powerful movements usually don't begin at the top. Usually they start with ideas, then words, spoken small at first but then rising in volume and number. Whatever Daniel's prophecy refers to, this is how it begins. Something, or someone, small who rises and speaks boastfully, then blasphemously, against God. One word grows in intensity can become a roar, then a scream, then a battle cry.

What will you and I do with our words?

As mentioned, this prophecy is generally accepted as referring to something against God, someone speaking against, then growing against God; more of this will be revealed in the verses soon to come. Yet contrast it with the growth of Christianity, and the words of saints spoken since that time. Rome tried to exterminate Christianity from Good Friday onward. The tiny sect of "The Way" should have died out in first century Judea. It was just a very small group of people who preached a new idea. According to the world, it should have quickly died out.

But it didn't. Where evil sprang from the words of Daniel's beast (Rome), God's grace grew one believer at a time into the most powerful movement in history: a movement founded on simply following the only true God through His Son, Jesus Christ, who Rome couldn't kill. Who loud, boastful words can't crush. We know what Jesus did with His seemingly small words. What will we do with ours?

For further reading: Psalm 12:3, Revelation 9:7, Revelation 13:5-6, Daniel 7:9

Lord, thank You for Your prophecies.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 24 August 2021 Today's Topic: Ancient of Days

As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. Daniel 7:9-10 (NIV).

All of the books of the prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) contain fantastical imagery that reveals both what is to come and descriptions of God's character and mercy. None of them is more fantastic, however, than these two verses, where Daniel, the interpreter of visions, takes a whole new turn.

In taking that turn, I'd ask you to read the verses that are referenced below. They talk about God on His throne, in splendor and, admittedly, intimidating, maybe even frightening. Frightening, that is, until you remember that God judges in grace and truth. The man sitting on the throne is both God the Father, and God the Son, Jesus. Daniel leans forward to later tie into Revelation. It's hardly a picture of 'Jesus, meek and mild,' but it's still the same man. Still the Son of Man. Still the friend and Savior of sinners who bled, died, and rose for us.

Still the Ancient of Days. That's a term in the Bible that only Daniel uses (<https://www.gotquestions.org/ancient-of-days.html>). It hearkens back to the knowledge that God is outside of time, that He created time and is older than it. The one who judges everyone in fire and holiness is also the one who created all things and deemed us, mankind, His very good, best creation of all. He did it out of love, out of the desire to be in community with us; out of His desire to share His beauty, peace, and love with us so that we could revere Him by sharing it with each other.

In the process of all that, we chose sin (and the boasts of the little horn) instead of Him; we still do, you and me. And that's a good reason to remember that Jesus meek and mild is also trinity Jesus on the throne of power, the one both Daniel and John saw in visions. The Ancient of Days sees each of us as we are, right now. One day we'll meet Him and He will open the books of our lives to rightfully judge us based on what we've done throughout our journey. Will He mark your debt 'paid in full'?

For further reading: Exodus 32:32, Deuteronomy 33:22, Chronicles 18:18, Psalm 50:3, Isaiah 30:27, Ezekiel 1:25-28, Matthew 19:28, Jude 14, Revelation 4:2, Revelation 5:11, Revelation 20:4, Daniel 7:11

My Lord, all my faith is in You. Have mercy on me, a sinner, today and in Your holy judgment.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 25 August 2021 Today's topic: God Will Prevail

"Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) Daniel 7:11-12 (NIV).

These verses tie directly to Revelation 19, where, at the last judgment, the beast is thrown into the lake of fire: a permanent hell from which there is no escape. Keep in mind, however, at the time Daniel prophesied this, he was living in Babylon, during the reign of Belshazzar. John's vision on Patmos was still 600 years in the future. The end of time was (and still is), as far as we know, far down the road.

This prophetic account was the story that was written while the Jews were still captive in Babylon. This was the story that became one of the books of the major prophets of the Old Testament. This was the story that Jesus and John and the disciples and all young men of their day would have learned in Torah school, long before John's eventual exile on the small Aegean island.

The fourth beast that Daniel saw was the only one of the beasts that was slain. That matters because the beast of Daniel 7:11 corresponds to the beast in Revelation 19:20. Both blasphemed against God; both represent the devil but aren't the devil. Many end times scholars correlate this beast and its loud little horn with the antichrist and his false prophet. The only difference is death. Where the fourth beast in Daniel is killed, the beast of Revelation and his false prophet aren't. At the end of time, after the antichrist has been slain, in-dwelt by Satan to be 'resurrected,' and has spoken through his prophet to lead millions astray, both will be thrown alive into a lake of fire (demonstrating eternal punishment).

The lesson this teaches is that God will righteously prevail over evil. While evil seems unstoppable all throughout history, in contrast, the goodness of God has also always prevailed. You and I wouldn't be reading this if it weren't so. Even the horrors of war, true depravity, and brutal holocaust are only allowed to exist so as to help drive us closer to the Lord. Ours is a God who always helps. In our daily lives, God prevails. He provides and we live until midnight, to rest and begin again tomorrow. At the end of time, Jesus will prevail over the beast, the lying prophet, and their godfather, Satan, and will vanquish all of them forever. He defeated Satan once; He will do it again. Daniel said so. John interpreted it. And we get to understand and share it.

For further reading: Revelation 13:5-6, Revelation 19:20, Daniel 7:13

Lord Jesus, victor over all evil, forgive, guide, and teach me today.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 26 August 2021 Today's topic: Daniel's Redeemer Lives

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14 (NIV).

Perhaps nobody in the cadre of Old Testament authors better depicted the true picture of Jesus without ever setting eyes on Him than Daniel. Even in Daniel's time, the Jews were awaiting the Messiah. Messiah would come and restore the glory of David's kingdom. Messiah would come and set all things right. Messiah would come and reign among men in ways He hadn't since Eden. Messiah would come and redeem Israel. Messiah would come and He would be God.

Daniel says Messiah would be "like a son of man." He would be God, standing in the presence of the Ancient of Days, yet He would also be a man; someone we could touch and hear and see. Messiah's authority would be given to Him directly by God, and all the world would know it and Him. People of all nations, all people, would know Him and recognize Him as God and worship Him.

Even in Daniel's time, Messiah is clearly Jesus.

Not only, but Daniel uses the word, "is." He talks about Messiah's dominion "IS an everlasting dominion." And His kingdom "IS one that will never be destroyed." Five hundred plus years before God Immanuel walked the earth as the God-man Jesus, Daniel describes Jesus the King as someone who already is King, who already is reigning, who already is eternal and forever. Where all the other prophets spoke of God's kingdom as a thing yet to come, Daniel speaks here of Jesus being the King of glory already.

And Daniel had never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, Nazareth was hundreds of miles away. When Daniel saw this vision, he was a captive in Babylon, esteemed by the emperor but still little more than a slave. Daniel needed a deliverer, a messiah, a savior, and God showed him who it is. Because of the vision, Daniel could tell his people that God hadn't forsaken them, that God would yet deliver them from this fresh beast who had made war against the Almighty and had been found wanting.

Twenty-five hundred years after Daniel, in a time when empires are shifting yet again, the same is still true for us. To paraphrase Job, we know our Redeemer lives and we will yet see Him standing on the earth.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 33:26, Job 19:25, Isaiah 13:6, Ezekiel 1:5, Zephaniah 1:14, Malachi 3:2, Hebrews 12:28, Revelation 1:13, Daniel 7:15

Lord, You alone are my Savior and redeemer!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 30 August 2021 Today's topic: Busier Than Ever

"I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things. Daniel 7:15-16 (NIV).

One of the sources I read on this verse (<https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/daniel/the-coming-caesar>) says that the person with whom Daniel speaks in these verses is an angel. For the first time, we learn about Daniel's reaction to these mysterious visions. He was "troubled in spirit" and "disturbed" by them.

Can you blame him? I mean, when this is written, Daniel has already lived a long, storied but dangerous life. Most likely, he's already an old man, certainly by the living standards of 550 BC (in which a life expectancy was measured around 30-40 years). He's living in the time after Nebuchadnezzar and things are uneasy at best.

Now, he has this fantastic vision and it troubles him, literally pains him. What does he do? In the vision, he approaches one of the people standing in the presence of the one who is like the Son of Man. That means it was an angel. It didn't upset Daniel to be face to face with the supernatural being. The angel wasn't terrifying, or imposing, or frightening. Daniel was unafraid to go up to him, sensing that anyone who stood radiant in the presence of the Ancient of Days and Son of Man was surely good. We'll learn later in Daniel who the angel is.

But the point for us is that we should be unafraid as well. God NEVER brings his people to sin. He never gives us a good option that includes sin. Right now, the world is troubled. A hurricane devastating the Gulf Coast. Fires in California. Surrender, slaughter, and now a resurgent terrorist war in Afghanistan. Covid all across the globe. Tensions in Ukraine, and Taiwan, and in several nations in Africa. Where, o Lord, are Your guardian angels now?

They're probably busier than ever. One of the songs that resonates with me is an Amy Grant song, "Angels." "Though I never see with human eyes the hands that lead me home," was one of the verses. Right on, right on. I'm betting the angels God sends to guard us every day are constantly busy, fighting off evil so that we can simply live our lives peacefully. We can't see them – until one day we do – but they're around us. Bank on it.

And if one makes himself known to us? When that happens, we should be unafraid. Daniel felt troubled and disturbed until comforted by the angel. We should feel the same.

For further reading: Job 4:15, Zechariah 1:9, Daniel 7:17

Lord, let Your angels please guard and guide me today. Thank You for them!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 31 August 2021 Today's topic: It'll Happen Then, and Now

'The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.' Daniel 7:17-18 (NIV).

More words of comfort from the angel. He confirms that the four beasts Daniel saw are indeed four kingdoms of the earth; kingdoms that, at that time, were yet to come and, in our time, are also yet to come. Then, the angel plainly says that the saints who truly follow God Almighty – Most High, Ancient of Days, and Son of Man – will be given His kingdom to possess it forever.

Or, as my friend, Mark, often says, “you’re a part of eternity right now.”

Really. You are. You believe in Jesus? You’re part of His eternity right now. You know, the kingdom He would give to His saints to possess forever. That’s it. There’s nothing more complicated to it than that. Sunday best clothes aren’t required; rock band praise music isn’t required. Catechisms, hail Mary’s, feasts of the saints, seder meals, and even the holy sacraments of communion and baptism aren’t required, even as many of those are good things. If you put your faith in Jesus, you’re in. That’s what the angel was alluding to.

That would all come to pass one Sunday morning in a garden rock tomb. The man who they had murdered days before would open His eyes, walk out of the tomb, and prove He was exactly who He said He is. The hundreds who had followed Him had received His holy kingdom and they didn’t even realize it. The billions since then who believed in Him, trusted in Him for their lives, shared Him, loved Him, worshipped and revered Him, knew Him as both Savior and friend then received it. You and I received it. Untold numbers of people who come after us in however long this world has left who profess their belief in Him will receive it.

It’ll happen then, and now, and it’ll happen again when this life is over. We will live in heaven with Christ forever in the most wonderful adventure any of us could ever imagine. Everything we know will be made new. Everything new will have the light of Him within it.

2500 years ago, Daniel didn’t yet know this. He knew the visions had troubled him and he couldn’t explain them on his own. So Daniel sought translation from an angel within the visions and the angel manifested this understanding, this prophecy, to him. In that, even if Daniel didn’t grasp the full meaning at the time, he knew he’d been given something meaningful that would endure.

For further reading: Psalm 16:3, Psalm 49:14, Isaiah 60:12-14, Matthew 19:28-29, Revelation 2:26, Revelation 20:4, Daniel 7:19

Lord of all prophecy, all praise to You for the words of Your angel, Your prophet, Your people.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 1 September 2021 Today's topic: Well That's Just Great

"Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. Daniel 7:19-20 (NIV).

These verses fast forward to Revelation 13, which describes the ten horns as ten kings who will reign at the end of time and give their political, military, and economic power – and worship – to the antichrist. Numerous commentaries corroborate this belief, though some speculate it was more applicable to the rise of the Roman empire. And the little horn? According to most sources I found (but especially <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/daniel-7/>), the little horn is prophecy about the end times, specifically about the antichrist.

Well that's just great. Nothing happy about these verses. That's the thing about the Bible, though: it presents truth, and truth isn't always pretty or fun...but it's always good. The truth can be quite imposing, even ugly, at least to us. The source cited above makes a good point about this. Where Daniel chapter 2 talks about four kingdoms to come, it makes the point from the vantage point of interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue was a dream of things he (or his successors) could endure. Here in Daniel chapter 7 we see another prophecy about four kingdoms to come yet the perspective is God's, not man's. We see the beasts come and go but the fourth beast makes war on both God and man.

If you don't have your faith in Jesus, that isn't something to look forward to. With all the changes afoot in the world right now, can you blame people if (like so many millions before them) they think that surely we must be near the end of days? After all, the future seems foreboding at best, terribly grim and threatening at worst.

Yet when your faith is in Jesus, you get to deal with these truths as they are: unpleasant things that God will use to proclaim His glory, to convince others to believe in Him, and to usher in better times. I used to be one who looked at these end-times prophecies as frightening words that nobody in their right mind would want to face. But, after putting my faith in Jesus, I now see them as challenges He will overcome as He makes all things new. Four beasts and eleven horns to overtake the world? Whatever. They're nothing compared to my Savior. Daniel saw, then understood that.

For further reading: Revelation 13:5-6, Revelation 17:12, Daniel 7:21

Sovereign Lord, You and only You will overcome all evil.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 2 September 2021 Today's topic: Jesus and Luna Lovegood

As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. Daniel 7:21-22(NIV).

One of my favorite movie quotes is from one of the Harry Potter movies. In the fifth movie, Luna Lovegood says to Harry, who seems alone and isolated, "Well if I were You-Know-Who, I'd want you to feel cut off from everyone else; because if it's just you alone, you're not as much of a threat."

This is a theme we've talked about before: without God, we don't stand a chance. Sure, you can go through this life as an atheist, agnostic, or whatever, rejecting the Almighty. You'll get by; you might even know success. You might even be a "moral" person, though you're likely to eventually see that there is no separating morality and Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no real morality, not even "good people." When you die, you'll face Him, and you'll answer for just why you rejected Him despite a lifetime of His mercy and proof. I'm hoping there's something we've missed in the Bible because what the Bible says will happen to you after that is worse than any of us can imagine.

That's the good news.

When you reject God in this life, what's more likely to happen is that you'll experience misery and angst for most of your time. That's because Satan makes war against us as long as we live. Then you die, and you'll then get to give God that same answer for why you rejected Him. And then you'll get those dire consequences.

My friend, you know there's a better way.

Without God, we don't stand a chance. With God, Satan and his minions can't defeat us, even if it kills us. The little horn made war against believers, and it killed many. I wonder if many more didn't simply give up their faith to appease the beast (only to find that there is no appeasing evil). In Daniel's world and ours since, this has always been the way. Satan attacks us in hopes of peeling us away from God. It's really God he's after; we're just pawns in the way.

Yet the good news in this is truly the Good News. Jesus died and rose for us so that we don't have to be eternally defeated by the evil one. We can be part of His eternity now and forever by confessing our sins, then letting Him take the helm. Without Jesus, we are alone and not much of a threat to Satan. With Jesus, Satan doesn't stand a chance.

For further reading: Mark 8:35, Revelation 13:7, Daniel 7:23

Lord, I believe in You alone. Thank You for saving and fighting for us!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 7 September 2021 Today's topic: The Winning Side of History

"He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time. Daniel 7:23-25 (NIV).

Some of this section seems to apply to Rome. That gels with Daniel's vision in chapter 2 (Nebuchadnezzar's statue), and with the timeline we know occurred after Daniel's life. Rome was indeed different from all empires before it. It did indeed trample and crush all nations in conquered (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/daniel-7-23.html>). The ten horns line up with how the Roman empire was divided and parsed once it fell (centuries after Daniel recorded this). Some people believe the kingdom that would arise refers to the Roman Catholic church, which grew stronger as Rome waned. And there are those who also believe that the one who would speak against the Most High may refer to the office of the pontiff himself; see <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/daniel/7-23.htm>.

Yet the verses also tie neatly to the end of times as mentioned in Revelation. The fourth beast may be the beast John the Revelator wrote of, complete with the ten horns and boastful one opposed to the Most High God. The Antichrist would oppress all people opposed to him (that is, followers of the Lord); he would blaspheme God in all matters; he would crush his opponents both politically and physically; and he would change times, rules, laws, societal norms, and everything humanity knows and holds dear.

And it will be all for nothing because the imp of Satan, that Antichrist, is already defeated. Christ defeated Him on the cross, and on resurrection Sunday, and every day since. And He will defeat Satan yet again, at the final judgment, when all evil is purged from creation and cast into a lake of fire from which there will be no escape.

Maybe both interpretations are true.

No matter what it means, remember what Jesus in Mark 1: "the time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." Now is the time to not be alone. Today is the day to hitch your star to His and come over to the Lord. This is the moment you've been living for. No matter what happens after, believe and be assured that you're on the winning side of history.

For further reading: Isaiah 37:23, Mark 1:15, Luke 21:8, Acts 1:6-7, Revelation 11:2, Revelation 16:6, Revelation 17:12, Daniel 7:26

Lord, I believe in You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 8 September 2021 Today's topic: Fun

“But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.” Daniel 7:26-27 (NIV).

There's a website I read called Daneric's Elliott Waves (<https://danericselliottwaves.org/>). The lead writer there is a right-of-center commentator on social happenings, economic trends, and eschatology. According to him, we are about to enter the 7-year tribulation; literally, as in 'by the end of this month.' Some things he writes conflict with much of what other Christian eschatologists say about a rapture, the remnant of Israel, and what will happen to bring about the final years of this planet. Much of what he writes in his blog segues off the timeline described in later chapters of Daniel (that we haven't covered yet).

To be honest, it doesn't matter when it happens. Really. I mean it. I'm not being flippant; we mustn't be casual with God's words. Yet I don't really care when the great tribulation begins, or how it plays out, or whether there's a rapture or not. Many folks I respect strongly believe there will be one; many other folks I respect think there won't be. For me, it matters little. I'm looking for Jesus to come back because, when He does, I get to go be with Him forever. Whether He comes back all at once or in several prophesied steps is ok with me. It's His return that matters most.

The fun will have started long before that.

In fact, today's a good day for the fun to start. What 'fun?' Sharing a little Jesus with someone. A family member; a friend; a stranger; anyone. Be yourself, be kind, be 'there' for that person, and be the kind of person Jesus would be if He were here in person. What you'll actually be doing IS letting Him be in person through you.

Because you believe in Him.

What Daniel records from his vision here clearly describes the events that will happen near the true end of the world. Whether or not that begins an earthly thousand-year reign or the start of the eternal reign of Christ misses a bigger point. That point is that Jesus will be the King we know Him to be, who will eliminate evil and set all things right, who will show Himself again as Messiah, and who will shine for us as the light in the new heaven and new earth. THAT will be fun forever.

For further reading: Genesis 14:18, 2 Samuel 7:13, Psalm 145:13, Isaiah 14:2, Luke 1:33, 1 Corinthians 6:2, Revelation 11:15, Revelation 19:20, Daniel 7:28

Come Lord, today! I can't wait to be part of Your kingdom, to serve You by serving others now and then.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 7 September 2021 Today's topic: What God Asks

"This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself." Daniel 7:28 (NIV).

Here ends Daniel's recounting of this particular vision. Future chapters of the book will contain other visions and other prophecies. Today's verse is the conclusion to this one.

And the vision deeply troubled Daniel, so much that he bottled it up and didn't say anything about it to anyone for years. Recall that he received the vision from God after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, but early in the reign of Belshazzar. When Daniel finally wrote it down, Belshazzar was long-gone; the Mede-Persians now ruled Babylon. The incident with the lion's den was in the past, and Daniel was likely an old man. And he was still troubled by the vision.

Our God demands a lot from us. Sometimes it's disturbing. In fact, that happens to a lot of people who God uses to deliver His messages in the Bible. Read Isaiah and Jeremiah; they were often worn out with their messages. David was in both physical and emotional anguish, wrestling with his humanity to follow the God who loved him anyway. It took Noah 100 years to build the ark: an entire century of ridicule, scorn, and maybe worse from most of his friends and family. Upright Hosea was moved to unwillingly marry a prostitute. Moses followed God for 80 years and, in the end, never entered God's promised land. Eleven of the twelve disciples were murdered.

Daniel was greatly troubled by this disturbing vision of empires to come and evil sweeping over the world in a time that could only have looked alien and terrifying to him. Even in seeing God triumph over evil, it was more than Daniel could stand, and Daniel was a long-standing loyal prophet of deep abiding faith.

Jesus asks even more.

Have you felt troubled in following Jesus? He gave you unique talents, unique dreams, unique visions and abilities and opportunities. Have you ever felt overwhelmed or troubled by it all? Perhaps you haven't foreseen the antichrist, but, if you're like the rest of us, you've probably felt the depth of it when God has really touched you. Think of it: God spoke through Daniel to prepare people for things to come. One of those was Jesus, who saves us while asking us to take up our crosses daily and follow Him.

God spoke holy foretelling through Daniel and the other prophets. Yet they lived difficult lives, and what God asked of them was never easy. For many, it was deeply moving but starkly disturbing, yet God asked it anyway. Has Jesus' ask of you ever troubled you?

For further reading: Job 4:15, Psalm 13:2, Isaiah 21:3, Daniel 8:1

Lord, sometimes what You say to me does trouble me, scare me. Abide with me and comfort me.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 13 September 2021 Today's topic: And Yet

In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me. In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal. I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great. Daniel 8:1-4 (NIV).

Chapter 8 begins with Daniel recounting another vision. This one had also come to him many years before, but after the chapter 7 vision. Spoiler alert: the angel, Gabriel, appears later in this chapter and explains what the ram with the odd-sized horns mean. We will learn throughout the chapter that this vision (the ram, and a goat that is also coming) is a partial retelling of Daniel's visions in chapters 7 (the beast with the horns) and even in chapter 2 (Nebuchadnezzar's statue). There. Now the work is done.

And yet...

...And yet, there's always more to it. This chapter of Daniel will be yet another chapter of prophecies that were soon to be fulfilled in the ancient world ('soon' being a term describing a few centuries hence) and in a time yet to come. Indeed, Jesus Himself would reference something Daniel said in predicting those end times that still haven't happened yet.

That means we should pay attention to it. After all, if some prophecies that Daniel recorded 2500 years ago can come true in multiple ways already, then it's reasonable to assume that those he describes about the time of the end of the world will also come true. Daniel's language is figurative, but there's a literal interpretation we should all heed.

Repent and believe now.

It really is that simple. We don't know when this world will end; some people think it's soon, some think it won't be for many more years. Yet the Bible itself – God's revelation of Himself to us – is complete and has been for a very long time. We have sufficient information to live our lives in ways that cleave to Him. That means paying attention to clues, signs, events, what's going on around us. When God chooses to end this world, nothing we think or do can stop it. That means the time to get serious about what we believe is now. Repent and believe. Hopefully, Daniel's prophecies help you do just that.

For further reading: Ezra 4:9, Esther 2:8, Isaiah 41:3, Mark 1:15, Revelation 13:11, Daniel 8:5

Lord, I believe in You and You alone. Thank You for Your mercies and prophecies.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 14 September 2021 Today's topic: Of Course

As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. It came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage. I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power. The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven. Daniel 8:5-9 (NIV).

Alexander the Great was, of course, the greatest military leader of antiquity. He conquered all of the known world (of his time), and then died. The goat prophesied in these four verses today symbolizes the Greece and Alexander would boldly unite, then lead, then leave on his untimely death (he is the horn that breaks off, to be replaced by four kinds, which was how Alexander's empire was divided).

That was then. Starting in verse 9, we have that account of the horn being broken off and replaced by four other horns. One of those, in ancient days, would be called "king of the North;" we will read about him in a later post. In the time after Alexander, this man would desecrate the Jewish temple (which, in Daniel's time, was yet to be rebuilt). We'll learn about that also in a few days.

For now, it's enough to know that this particular prophecy was actually fulfilled once, in the centuries immediately after Daniel's time.

You know what comes next, though. In another 'and yet' moment, God promises us that He will orchestrate events near the end of time so that what was old will seem new again. There will be another young, strong ruler who will rise to power and mock God. He will exercise more political, military, and religious power than any leader in history; more than Alexander, or Hitler, or anyone. He will do great and mighty things that will impress many, maybe most, of the world, and those things will lead so very many people astray. They'll forsake their faith in the Lord to follow him.

Of course, that man will be a liar and a fraud; of course, he'll be a politician. Of course, he'll be the antichrist, in whatever form he takes. And, most importantly, of course, his rise and fall were already prophesied, then guaranteed, by the prophets of old and the Savior Jesus they unwittingly served.

For further reading: 2 Chronicles 26:16-21, Ezekiel 20:6, Revelation 7:1, Daniel 8:10

Lord, troubled times are here with more to come. Steady my frightened heart to seek its strength only in You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 15 September 2021 Today's topic: It Will Come True

It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord; it took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground. Daniel 8:10-12 (NIV).

Evil keeps on growing. As with yesterday's verses, today's have dual meaning. Only a few centuries after Daniel's time, Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid Empire would persecute the Jews, then violently defile the rebuilt Jewish temple: blaspheming and defying the Lord as he did so. His persecution of the Jews was so widespread and evil that the Maccabean revolt resulted and the Greeks of Antiochus' forces were driven out of Judea. The conclusion of that revolt—the cleansing of the Temple—is remembered each year during Hannukah. See (<https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/understanding-the-book-of-daniel/daniel-8/>, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maccabean_Revolt).

Antiochus was the first Greek ruler to gain power by seizing the throne. As events unfolded over the coming decades, this began the decline of the Greek Empire (which had previously overtaken the Mede-Persians of Daniel's time, who had overthrown Babylon). That happened through power struggles, intrigues for power, and violent usurpation of the throne. Behind all that thirst for power was evil: same as it had always been going back to Eden, same as it is in our world today.

And the same as it will be in the days to come. The dual meaning of these verses is that they describe an "abomination of desolation" performed by Antiochus IV AND the defilement and rebellion against God that will be performed by the antichrist in the end times. The little horn of the goat grew and overtook all around it. Many Bible scholars assume this refers to the coming anti-Christ, the incarnation of Satan.

Evil simply keeps on growing. One day, it will grow too big for us to ignore. It would have been terrible to witness what happened during Antiochus' rampage. It will be much worse to see what happens when the imp of Satan rules this world. Some people believe he's already at work in our time; some think it will still be many years, even centuries, before the prophecy comes true.

But it will come true at some point; part of it already did. Will you be ready to make your stand for the Lord if it happens in your lifetime?

For further reading: Isaiah 48:1, Ezekiel 46:13-14, Revelation 8:10, Revelation 12:4, Daniel 8:13

Mighty Lord, You're more powerful than the puny devil and his race of fallen angels. I cling to You alone as the hope and salvation of this world.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 21 September 2021. Today's topic: Whatever It Means

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people?" He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated." Daniel 8:13-14 (NIV).

That's a long time: 2300 evenings and mornings. My Concordia Bible said that the 2300 likely refers to the morning and evening sacrifices offered over 1150 consecutive days. That time frame corresponds to the interval of time between the desecration of the Lord's temple (by Antiochus) and its reconsecration by Judas Maccabeus. Thus, this prophecy was fulfilled long ago – and specifically – in a time not too far removed from Daniel's.

Of course, the prophecy is also taken to have end-times applications. Some have interpreted it to mean an exact time that has to do with the great tribulation and the desecration of the rebuilt modern temple. Others insist that the prophecy refers to year-days; this belief gave rise to the Millerites of the 1800s, and the Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists who still worship today (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/daniel-8/>). Some see the verses as aligning with Jesus' declaration of destroying and rebuilding the Temple. And still others believe something else, whatever that means.

It was too much for even Daniel to fathom. He was perplexed by the vision and had to ask for help.

So do we. Whatever the verses mean, they mean something over long periods of time. Yesterday, a friend of mine turned 100. We saw her over the weekend at her birthday party, and it struck me that many amazing things have happened during her 36525 days on this earth. When she was a little girl (in the 1920s), if you had been able to foresee the evils that would result in the next 100 years, it would have been unbearable. Ever since Eden, evil has kept growing uncontrollably.

Yet evil still has boundaries: ones defined by the Ancient of Days Himself. Evil can ONLY operate within those boundaries; it is powerless to exceed them, and powerless to remove them without God's consent. In a time of His choosing, the Lord will vanquish evil, relegate it to eternal punishment, and make all things new for His people. Jesus completed the work of salvation; He will transform it when the Father commands it to happen. Until that time, it's our lot to better live out our faith in Him to help others along the way, whatever that means. In addition to seeing all the evil, in her 100 years, I'm sure my friend has seen this, too.

For further reading: Isaiah 28:18, Luke 21:24, Revelation 11:1, Daniel 8:15

Lord, I don't know what all these prophecies mean, except for them pointing the way to You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 22 September 2021 Today's topic: Significant Messenger

While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision." As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end." Daniel 8:15-17 (NIV).

We all need help understanding complex ideas. Daniel couldn't understand this deep and disturbing vision, so he asked for help. God answered Daniel's request through a messenger from the top: Gabriel. The same angel Gabriel who would speak to Zechariah, John's father, about the pending birth of John. The same angel Gabriel who would tell Mary about the pending birth of Jesus. Gabriel wasn't just some message boy, and this was no ordinary message. God wanted to attach significance to it, so he sent a significant messenger.

Gabriel addressed Daniel plainly as "son of man." Note that he didn't refer to Daniel as "THE Son of Man." That title is reserved for Christ. Yet here and in other places in the Bible, men are referred to as "son of man." It makes sense that the angelic messenger would address Daniel in this way because it's a title. Gabriel and Daniel hadn't been introduced until the man's voice – the voice of the pre-incarnate Son of God – performed the introduction.

Then Gabriel explained the visions. They describe times to come, specifically the time of the end of the world. Though the prophecy of the ram and goat and the horn would come true in later empires, and though the abomination that causes desolation would be fulfilled a few hundred years later by Antiochus Epiphanes, Gabriel's words said the vision described the end times. This is only the beginning of what Gabriel said; we'll soon learn how he specifically described what was (and is) yet to come.

No wonder it's hard to understand. Some lessons are like that. I'll admit it: some of the things in this chapter are disturbing. So I find comfort that Jesus – even before we knew Him as Jesus – steps into an old man's dreams to offer both intellectual satisfaction and personal comfort. He could have left Daniel vexed and suffering. But, Jesus being Jesus, instead, He reaches out to him and sends a comforter. He does the same for each of us. Thank God that He still sends messengers, teachers, and others to impart His peace to our hearts and minds still. If we choose, each of us can understand that.

For further reading: Ezekiel 1:28, Ezekiel 2:1, Ezekiel 44:4, Habakkuk 2:3, Luke 1:5-66, Revelation 1:17-19, Daniel 8:18

Lord Jesus, thank You for comforting Daniel, and me, and for helping us to understand what these mysterious verses mean.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 23 September 2021 Today's topic: True Rejuvenation

While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet. He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end. Daniel 8:18-19 (NIV).

All these visions exhausted Daniel; he was overcome and physically spent. Then, the angel (Gabriel) touched Daniel and infused him with energy.

Honestly, I wish an angel would do that for me every now and then. Maybe for all of us. In the last week, I've driven 2500 miles, to a birthday party in Arizona, then back home to Texas the next day. Middle age means I don't bounce back as quick as I used to, and I've spent much of this week pretty tuckered out. Usually, when I have an exerting weekend, by mid-week I've recovered; some extra sleep, a little extra exercise, watch it on the wine, and so on.

More important than that, however, is our spiritual exhaustion. I'm betting that's the real source of Daniel's exhaustion. By the time this vision is given to him (early in the reign of Belshazzar), Daniel has already lived an emotion-filled, physically stressful life. Captured and deported to Babylon; in danger from hostile captives; aide to the fickle Nebuchadnezzar; perhaps a spiritual leader to the enslaved Jewish people; diligent in maintaining his faith: all of these things would have worn at Daniel's spirit. Not worn it down, or even out, but worn it all the same.

Then came the vision of the ram and the goat and the visions of how they would rise and make war. The Son of Man Himself intervened, sending His special angel to serve as messenger and intermediary. It would have been spiritually fantastical, but also draining, exhausting. Have you ever had a time when you've given so much from the heart that you felt emptied and spent? I'm betting that's how Daniel felt.

Now imagine how overwhelming it would feel to be told, to realize, that you'd been given a special revelation from God Himself, translated to you by one of His most trusted servants. We'd be confounded, bewildered, emptied of all energy.

Maybe that's why Jesus overwhelmed Daniel: because He wanted his prophet to be spent of human energy so that He could fill him with what He needed Daniel to know and do. It was no ordinary message: it carried great meaning for man's future. We could use some of that meaning and energy today. Next time you feel drained, turn to God's word to start finding true rejuvenation.

For further reading: Psalm 102:13, Isaiah 10:25, Ezekiel 2:2, Habakkuk 2:3, Zechariah 4:1, Daniel 8:20

Fill me with Your energy and Spirit, Lord, that I may do Your bidding today.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 27 September 2021. Today's topic: Pay Attention

The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power. Daniel 8:20-22 (NIV).

More prophecy about kingdoms that would succeed Nebuchadnezzar. This was discussed earlier in Chapter 8. Then as now, the prophecy refers to Alexander the Great and the kings who would rule Greece, once it was split into four realms after Alexander's untimely death. These verses, and the next few after them, are repeats of those earlier parts of Daniel (verses 5-14)

(<https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/understanding-the-book-of-daniel/daniel-8/>). Why would Gabriel repeat something like this? If you're asking that (like I am), you (actually, we) have found God's (and Gabriel's) answer.

It's important, guys. Pay attention.

God wanted us to know that what he's saying mattered. He wanted us to pay attention. Daniel 8 is the first place in the Bible where Jesus is identified as "Son of Man." It's an important title and distinction that explains part of who God is. The people of Daniel's time didn't know God as Jesus, but Jesus knew them. Daniel 8 is also where God reveals how he will use the Median-Persians, Greeks, Roman, and later empires to shape and rule the known world. If you're a history buff, you can start in our own time and trace directly back to the time of Daniel to see who ruled the political world and when; how these things molded history. The people back then didn't have that luxury, and God wanted them to know to cling to Him throughout all these changes that would soon come.

Where 20-22 deal exclusively with the ancient world, what comes afterwards delves again into predictions about a world even we haven't yet seen come to pass. Many strange things are happening in our world now, things that seem unexplainable and irrational; things that just don't add up. Read up on the rest of Daniel, then the other books of Biblical prophecy, even Revelation, and you might see that chord consistently woven through. Something just doesn't add up; something simply isn't right, or normal.

That's evil. Evil isn't right, or normal. It isn't logical; it doesn't compute. Evil is raw hatred and unchecked ambition to usurp God. Evil never makes sense. It didn't during Daniel's time; it doesn't during ours (despite the best efforts of so many to normalize it). We weren't made for evil; we were made by God to share in His blessings, His love, His world. In the face of increasing abnormality, God wants us to cling more to Him. He gave us these words because He wants us to pay attention.

For further reading: Ezekiel 27:1-, Daniel 8:23

Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 28 September 2021. Today's topic: In the Time of the Evil One

"In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. Daniel 8:23-25 (NIV).

Pay attention to this indeed. These verses aren't just about Alexander or yet another ancient kingdom yet to come. This could be about our time, or our children's, or our grandchildren's.

Near the end of time, man will become completely depraved again. In many ways, things will be as depraved as they were before the great flood. At that time, a man will come to power who will embody all that is evil. This man will become the most powerful political leader the world has ever known. At first, he will seem peaceful. He'll say the right words and impress billions of people with his knowledge, wisdom, and insight. We don't know what he will look like, but given how people flock to good looking leaders, chances are he'll be dashing and handsome. That smile will cause millions, even billions of others to smile along with him.

That smile will hide vicious teeth. Fangs ready to inflict damage, and tear, and kill.

And he will have deceived a large majority of humanity already. The world will have already seen extraordinarily wicked days, maybe not unlike our own. Other than "wicked," how else could someone describe a world that glamourizes violence, scorns faith in God, idolizes the legal ability to kill babies, and celebrates what so many other generations considered to be vile and repugnant? It isn't much of a stretch to think that this deceived generation could be like our own...or maybe even be our own.

Make no mistake: this 'man of the world' will be defeated by Jesus. THAT is the final destination of all evil, and it's unavoidable. When eternity resumes on earth, Jesus will be the Prince of Peace and Lord forever. Until that peaceful time, evil will rise. And grow. And conquer. And murder. And blaspheme the Ancient of Days. It will test us, sift us like wheat. Evil will personify itself in the one who will be called Antichrist, and he will wield unearthly Satanic power to kill and destroy on a scale humanity has never known. And still, many will put their misguided faith in him. It happened before in Antiochus Epiphanes. It will happen again in the time of the evil one.

For further reading: Daniel 8:26

Lord Jesus, my faith is in You alone. Only You. Always You. Forever You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 29 September 2021. Today's topic: Sit on It

"The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future." I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding. Daniel 8:26-27 (NIV).

At the end of the chapter, we find Gabriel and Daniel. Gabriel tells Daniel to put the vision on ice, to not talk about it for awhile because the time to do so hadn't arrived. That's what Daniel does. Even though Jesus Himself had appeared, and even though Jesus' holy messenger angel had explained what Daniel had asked to understand, Daniel, a wise old man in a foreign land, still felt vexed. Remember "Happy Days?" The 1970s TV show? "Sit on it:" that was one of the show's catchphrases. Gabriel tells Daniel to sit on it with the vision God had given to him.

If you go back to Isaiah, you find that isn't unusual. God told His prophets several different times to seal up His words until other times. Later, Jesus Himself told several people He healed to not talk about it (naturally, they were overwhelmed and sang like songbirds). Even later, in Revelation, God told John the same thing, only to reverse His command later on.

Why?

Hint: it isn't for God, or even because God isn't ready to have it happen yet. God Almighty lives outside of our time; time is only another tool for Him to use. But we don't. And, in His wisdom, God sometimes sees how the time isn't yet right for a people to grasp certain truths. Like a revelatory set of visions on Patmos. Like being healed unexpectedly. Like a prophecy given in Babylon.

The people of Daniel's day were shell-shocked. Their homes had been destroyed; they had been enslaved in a foreign land of enemies; their way of life was gone. They felt abandoned by God. Perhaps God saw that they couldn't handle what He was saying; perhaps there was another reason altogether that only the Lord knew. No matter the reason, Gabriel tells Daniel of God's command to sit on the vision and not say anything about it just yet.

So Daniel obeyed.

So should we. When our words are too much for others to bear; when our words and deeds come across as selfishness instead of love; when anything we say or do runs contrary to what God tells us through His word, perhaps the best thing we can do is listen to the Fonz and sit on it until a more appropriate day arrives.

For further reading: Isaiah 8:16, Isaiah 21:3, Revelation 10:4, Revelation 22:10, Daniel 9:1

Lord, You know the times of our lives. All praise to You for this, and for revealing things to us as we need to know them.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 30 September 2021. Today's topic: Jeremiah

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. Daniel 9:1-3 (NIV).

One of my daily Bible studies right now is Jeremiah, and I'm really enjoying it. What? You're enjoying the depressing words of the Weeping Prophet? Yep! That's the very one. I've read the book before, but before, I had read it grudgingly. With writing these words about Daniel, I've come to view Jeremiah (indeed all the prophets of the exile) in a new light. If you want to know more about Jeremiah, see <https://www.gotquestions.org/weeping-prophet.html>.

Jeremiah was a big deal. He was the prophet who had warned Israel of pending doom. God had told him (repeatedly) that He would allow Jerusalem to be destroyed and the nation taken into captivity. They didn't listen, so it happened. And, while the Jews were in captivity, Jeremiah wept, prayed, and lamented; he also wrote the books of Jeremiah, Lamentations, and both 1 and 2 Kings. Jeremiah himself didn't go to Babylon, for God had told him to prophesy to the people that they should surrender to Babylon without a fight (lest the city be burned, which it was, because they ignored God). Nebuchadnezzar spared him, and he remained in Israel for a time. We don't know when Jeremiah died, but it is believed he might have died in Egypt (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremiah>).

Most importantly, Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be in captivity for seventy years. That exact number is then repeated several times in various books by three different authors (specifically in 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, and here in Daniel). Keep that figure of seventy in mind; we'll soon see another reason why it's significant.

Perhaps it isn't surprising, if you understand that many of the prophecies in the Old Testament are cross-corroborated in other books in the Bible. Or, perhaps it is surprising, meaning that maybe God is opening your heart to the knowledge of how truly fantastic His Word truly is.

I encourage you to read more on Jeremiah (who, said the song, was a bullfrog). He's one of the few Biblical figures considered divinely inspired in Judaism, Christianity, and even in Islam. Then come back to Daniel to learn about Daniel's prayer and why 'the seventies' are a big deal, too.

For further reading: 2 Chronicles 20:3, 2 Chronicles 36:21, Ezra 4:6, Nehemiah 1:4, Jeremiah 25:11-12, Jeremiah 29:10-12, Jonah 3:6, Zechariah 1:12, Daniel 9:4

Lord, I follow only You seventy times seven times.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 4 October 2021. Today's topic: Pray Like Daniel

I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. Daniel 9:4-6 (NIV).

Verses 4 through 19 of Daniel 9 are a prayer. Read them again, then read them again after that. They're a very good prayer for each of us to model.

Daniel was praying for his people. They didn't know he was praying for them; they were simply going about their business as captives in Babylon. Yet, to Daniel, they were his family. They were God's chosen people, Israel, who had sinned multitudes of sins and had been punished greatly by God. Many hundreds of years before, God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He had provided for them in the deserts, fought battles for them in Canaan, established His covenants with them, protected them from invaders, and prospered them as He had no other kingdom in history. And still they disobeyed God frequently and wickedly.

So, Daniel was praying for them. He had already witnessed God use His servant, Nebuchadnezzar, mete out hard justice on Israel, and he had already witnessed God use His servants Xerxes and Darius mete out harder justice on Nebuchadnezzar's descendants. Through it all, Israel still had not fully repented of their sins despite being told, through Jeremiah, that the exile in Babylon would last only seventy years. By the time Daniel prayed this, several decades of those seventy years had already come and gone. And still Daniel kept on praying. Perhaps this wasn't the only time he'd done so, yet it's the only one recorded here.

Do you pray for your people? Politically, economically, militarily, spiritually, socially: our nation is in a bad way. While our best days may still be yet to come, they will only come if God so blesses them. He has until now, but even to the unspiritual observer, something seems different about today. Our world is in crisis. Everywhere, everyone: we're living in hard times that are becoming harder.

That means we should pray. Pray for our leaders; pray for our opponents. Pray for those in charge and those who follow behind. Pray for those out of work and those who never stopped working. Pray for enemies. Pray for the sick. If you haven't prayed before, start today. Just pray. Like Daniel.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 7:21, 2 Chronicles 36:16, Psalm 106.6, Jeremiah 8:14, Jeremiah 44:5, James 5:10, Revelation 10:7, Daniel 9:7

Have mercy on us, O Lord. Grant us Your holy favor once more and forgive our sins.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 5 October 2021. Today's topic: Only Jesus Can Give

“Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. Daniel 9:7-8 (NIV).

This prayer could be about me; in fact, it is. Thousands of years ago, Daniel prayed these very words about me, or anyone like me. Or you. Or our sainted grandmothers. Or Mother Theresa, Billy Graham, the Apostle John (or John Paul Jones, for all that it matters).

Me, you, and all those others: we're covered in shame because of our filthy sins. Even the best of our intentions, even the kindest and most selfless of our good works are still stained dirty with sin. We're human; we're born disposed to rebellion against God. We are each sinful from birth, and there's nothing we can do to prevent that, or lessen it, or make it right. The only cure for our sins is the cleansing blood of the Savior Jesus Christ. In Him and Him alone can be found righteousness, sanctification, and being made justified in front of God. On our own, we will die eternally separated from the Triune God of eternal peace. Through faith in Jesus, however, we will stand before God Almighty and be declared fully innocent of every one of those shameful, filthy sins. He took our punishment so we wouldn't have to.

Daniel didn't know about Jesus; Jesus wouldn't reveal Himself as God and man both for another six hundred years. Yet Daniel prayed this plain and simple acknowledgement of Israel's many sins knowing that he alone wasn't justified in front of the *Lord*. That only God would justify him. Daniel knew Israel's rebellion against God was the reason God brought disaster on His chosen people. And Daniel knew that, even in captivity, God was watching them, providing for them, protecting them until the seventy years were complete and they could return home. It wasn't God's fault Israel sinned: it was Israel's.

This prayer is similar to one Ezra prayed (and Nehemiah, and David, and Jeremiah). But it could have been prayed by Moses, or Joseph, or anyone all the way back to Adam. It could be about any of them, or about you or me today. Like it or not, we human beings are shame-filled and sinful, and we need the help only Jesus can give.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 4:27, Ezra 9:15, Nehemiah 9:17 & 33, Psalm 44:15, Isaiah 42:6, Jeremiah 3:25, Jeremiah 14:7 & 20, Ezekiel 16:63, Amos 9:9, Daniel 9:9

Forgiving Lord, I am guilty in front of You today. I have sinned against You in so many ways. Forgive me of my sins. Make me clean again.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 6 October 2021. Today's topic: One More Last Chance

The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. Daniel 9:9-12 (NIV).

We've all heard the canard: how could a good God let such bad things happen. Has any one of us ever really considered that it isn't God who lets those things happen, but us? God tells us He will bring punishment on us if we are unrepentant, that He will remove His protecting hand. Why are we surprised when it does?

But did you catch the catch? God offers to forgo that punishment if we repent. He gives us another chance; in fact, He gives us one more last chance yet again. And, yet again, we repent, then sin, then sin again and again. The nasty thing about all of our sins is that they dull us to their nature. Sin a particular sin enough and you become inured to what it's really doing. Keep lying and eventually you won't be able to tell the truth from the lies. Keep cheating enough and eventually it won't bother you to do it constantly. It's like our small sins are gateway drugs to bigger ones.

When our sensitivity to sins becomes dulled, is it any wonder that calamity would follow? What seems like God's wrath may only be Him simply removing His favor from our situation. Mind you, He still provides; we still get food, air, water, the like. He doesn't have to provide those; we don't have any right to them. Yet, He can remove His protection from even worse things happening to us because of our theft, our adultery, our sins. Sure, God's wrath is a real and terrible thing; I don't want to find out just how terrible it could be.

But, more than not, I wonder if the terrible things that happen to us aren't simply consequences we've incurred by our misbehavior when God lets up on His protection. Wouldn't it be nice if we could avoid all that?

We can.

How? Accept Jesus. Confession, turning away from our sinful patterns, letting God remake and remold us, walking the walk and talking the talk, not to please God but because it's what He asks of us. Put our faith only in Jesus and accept His forgiveness for yet one more last chance.

For further reading: Exodus 34:7, 2 Samuel 24:14, 2 Kings 7:13-15, 2 Kings 22:16, Nehemiah 9:17, Jeremiah 2:29, Jeremiah 42:12, Revelation 10:7, Daniel 9:13

Lord, I'm sorry for my sins. Please forgive me because of Your Son.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 7 October 2021. Today's topic: Even in the Bad Times

Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him. Daniel 9:13-15 (NIV).

Just last night, I passed a country church whose sign read, "tribulation ahead. Make your peace with Jesus." As I drove away, I couldn't help but think that they had it wrong. Tribulation isn't dead ahead: it's here now. Yes, the bad times we see in our world today won't be nearly as bad as they will be at the end of the world, but these days are no walk in the park. There are so many bad crises brewing, so much discord and rancor in our discourse, and so many people siding with outright evil that it wouldn't take much to spark one crisis into a full-blown forest fire.

And then I had to check that thought because, even in the bad times, God is so good to us. He provides a home for us to live in. He woke us up today and will keep watch over us when we sleep tonight. Food, clothing, shelter, love, friends, vocation: whatever me or you have is all thanks to God. A thousand spiritual battles are fought for our safety every day: battles we never see. All thanks to Him. Even in ancient Israel's worst days, He did all this for them, too.

When I was checking my thought, I also realized that the church sign had it wrong about Jesus as well. It's Jesus who made peace with me, a sinner. I don't do anything to make peace with Him because He already did everything necessary, everything possible, to make peace with someone who didn't deserve it. There's absolutely nothing you, me, or anyone could do to earn our salvation, to add to it, or take it away from us once Jesus guaranteed it. And, even when we reject Him – as sinful Israel did so many times – Jesus still relentlessly pursues us, constantly working in our lives to show us His mercies, His provisions, His boundless love and perfect justice. To convince us to repent.

Even in the bad times, if they seem bad at all, it isn't because of Jesus. God never abandons us even when He pulls back His holy hand of protection. Be ready now for the end, but don't forget to live thankfully during today.

For further reading: Genesis 18:25, Exodus 3:20, Nehemiah 9:33, Isaiah 9:13, Jeremiah 2:30, Jeremiah 18:8, Jeremiah 29:11, Daniel 9:15

Merciful Lord, Your promise of protection and forgiveness is beautiful. Thank You for saving me when so often I've shown I don't deserve it.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 11 October 2021. Today's topic: God is God and I'm Not

"Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us. Daniel 9:15-16 (NIV).

The toughest lesson we can learn in life is, "God is God and I'm not." It goes back to the very first sin, to Eve and Adam in the garden; it's the lesson they forgot. I've forgotten it before; have you?

This is a story I believe I told here before. Years ago, after my wife had left me, I was wallowing in misery, in self-pity. I deserved it; it wasn't her fault. I wasn't yet broken; I hadn't yet seen how awful things could be. Yet I was starting to grasp how terribly I had wronged her, how my sins had caused our split. I wanted to die. In fact, one night, I sat at the kitchen table and counted out pills just to see how many it would take to kill myself. Thank the Lord that someone talked me out of that.

A day or two later, a friend unexpectedly told me, "Dave, there's only been one perfect person who ever lived and you aren't him." I didn't know what this friend believed; his faith was a mystery to me even as we had known each other for years. But what he told me was a powerful reminder that I wasn't God, that my anguish and self-focus were pulling me away from God. It's a good thing to realize and 'own' our sins, but then the better thing is to take them to the cross and lay them down there. Jesus hung on that cross so we could do just that. Only He could take our sins and make eternal amends for them. Realizing that meant realizing I'm not God but He is.

My friend's words literally changed my life. They were a lifeline he didn't even know I desperately needed. We never truly understand the impact our small moments of genuine honesty and faith may have on other people. Every day, people go through untold calamities, most of which we know nothing about. How amazing is it that we then get to show the love of Jesus to them simply by saying and doing things for them the way He would while remembering that we aren't God.

For further reading: Exodus 3:20, Judges 5:11, Nehemiah 9:10, Psalm 31:1, Psalm 85:3, Isaiah 5:25, Jeremiah 32:21, Daniel 9:17

My Lord, You are God and I am not. Thank You for that.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 12 October 2021. Today's topic: Too Big for My Britches

"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Daniel 9:17 (NIV).

God is loving, merciful, honest, and it's because He's God, not because we deserve it. After learning that God is God and I'm not, this is, perhaps, the next most important thing any of us could learn about Him. God doesn't give and provide to us because we deserve it, because we're wonderful, or even because we need it. He does these things because He is God and these are fruits of His nature. It's who He is; it's what He does because He is the supreme being of the universe.

It's a humbling thought, you see. And that turns out to be another very real blessing.

I don't know about you but I struggle with humility. I'm very proud, and I have a few rare talents that God has given to me. Hard work has taught me to make the most of them, and while I give all credit to God that He gave me these things, I'll admit: sometimes it's REALLY tempting not to. Sometimes I really want to take the spotlight, bask in it, and enjoy playing center stage.

That's a good time to remember that, because of my pride, because of anger, because of a host of sins, most of our lives are desolate without faith in Jesus. Sure, you can be a non-believer and say and do 'good' things and be applauded for them, but when the applause stops, you're left feeling lonely and abandoned. It could even be that your world has fallen apart and your life has become that desolate sanctuary Daniel mentions. You know the one: the hollowed-out shell of the once hallowed building that was your life (or was God's Temple). If you don't turn to God at those times, there really is no comfort for you.

Except that there is. Many (maybe most) churches (except the one I attend) usually incorporate the blessing found in Numbers 6. Go look it up and read the words that God Himself spoke to Moses (to speak to Aaron). Even in the troubled times, the Lord blesses and keeps us. Even when we feel desolate and lonely, the Lord makes His face to shine on us and is gracious to us. Even when it feels as if all is lost, we get to remember that the Lord turns his face to us with His favor and gives us peace.

Remembering that makes it much easier to remember He's God and I'm not, and I shouldn't get too big for my britches.

For further reading: Numbers 6:24-26, Psalm 80:19, Daniel 9:18

Lord God, You bless and keep us, You shine Your holy face on us. You give us Your blessed peace. Keep me humble so I might better appreciate and share these priceless gifts.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 13 October 2021. Today's topic: 2020

Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. Daniel 9:18 (NIV).

I'm going against popular opinion here and saying that 2020 wasn't all that bad. Sure, the covid epidemic blew up and killed more people than the flu (which mysteriously disappeared; but that is for another blog). Nations and states shut down and the economy then tanked, causing unemployment, discouragement, and panic. There were riots in all the major cities. Government did what government does: nothing good. The election was a rollercoaster. And 2021 hasn't been a walk in the park like everyone hoped it would be.

It wasn't that bad? Yes. Consider that miracle treatments for a brand new disease were devised in record time by a team of focused professionals; time will tell if they are effective. Our system, flawed as it is, survived very real threats of illegality, some of which are still playing out. Most people have food on the table and a roof over their heads. Things are re-opened, or are re-opening. Jesus has truly blessed us: all because of what happened last year in 2020. Though it was awful in many ways, it wasn't that bad..

Why can I say that? Because of the kind of prayer prayed by Daniel. He asked God to bend His ear to the plight of His people, who were suffering. He prayed knowing that he (Daniel) wasn't righteous, wasn't God, but that God was. He prayed because he understood that, above all else, our God is merciful in ways we can only begin to imagine.

God had preserved His people through war, exile, and prophecies of harder times to come. He gave them food, shelter, air in their lungs, hope in their hearts...just like He does to us today. Jesus gave Israel His blessings and His favor even though He and they knew they didn't deserve them...just like He does to us today. Any objective analysis would have to conclude that the year Israel was captured into Babylonian exile was far worse (for them) than 2020 was for us. More people died; more people lost their homes; more was destroyed and turned upside down than had ever happened since the time of Moses.

And yet God was still merciful. Just like He is with us. None of this makes light of real suffering, real people who have really hurt. But let's please remember that, through it all, the God of the universe is righteous and merciful to every one of us because that's who He is, even in the 'hell-year' 2020.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 28:10, Psalm 5:1, Psalm 116:1, Isaiah 37:17, Jeremiah 7:10-12, Daniel 9:19

Merciful Lord, thank You for always providing for me, for protecting us in times of hardship and plenty

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 14 October 2021. Today's topic: Bold in Jesus

Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.” Daniel 9:19 (NIV).

This part of the prayer seems pretty cheeky. It's as if Daniel is trying to command God to listen, forgive, hear, and act on behalf of people who he (Daniel) had just said aren't righteous and don't deserve to have their God listen, hear, and act for them.

Or...

...Or it could be that Daniel is effusive in his imploring God to act because only God could take the kind of bold action that desperate Israel needed. That seems more likely, given the penitent context of the rest of the prayer. Daniel is prostrate before God, having confessed his (and his peoples') sin and unrighteousness. He knows he has nowhere else to go, and he's desperate for the salvation and redemption that only God can give. God had chosen this tribe of Israel to represent Him in the world, and Israel had failed Him. Yet Daniel knew God was, above all else, merciful and forgiving. So, Daniel emotionally, enthusiastically prays to that same God to take action because of who God is and what He promised to His people.

That's a good kind of prayer. It's a great thing to hit your knees and realize that you have nowhere else to go but to Jesus. When you do that, you are in the presence of the One at whose feet all must fall. You have on your side the holy Savior who rose from the garden tomb and redeemed the world. Nothing is impossible for Him; nothing is out of His control or His view. When you accept and repent your sins to Jesus, you're where you need to be, where you've needed to be all along.

And when that happens, your possibilities become endless. In Jesus alone, there is both peace and boldness, forgiveness and hope.

But don't go getting the big head because of it. You're there because you're a sinner and you've realized you desperately need Jesus. You finally see that this same Jesus has been relentlessly pursuing you, providing for you, nudging you to recognize that He is the solution to your woes. All He asks is that you trust Him, believe in Him. Doing that shows your sin to you, and something inside you changes. As they said in the excellent TV series, "The Chosen", "I was one way, but now I'm completely different. And the thing that happened in-between was Him."

If that's cheeky, we need more of it. Be bold in Jesus.

For further reading: 1 Samuel 12:22, Psalm 44:23, Daniel 9:20

Lord and Savior Jesus, embolden me to do Your bidding today, using the talents You give me to do Your work today.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 18 October 2021. Today's topic: In Prayer

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. Daniel 9:20-21 (NIV).

Another prophecy is about to be revealed. In it, we'll see our own time described (as well as every other up until now), and we'll get an understanding of what time means to Jesus. Gabriel is also back. All this happens when Daniel is praying.

One source that I found (<https://dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/daniel-9-20>) brought up a really good point: it is in prayer that we can find God. If you're a Christian, this must seem like a big "duh" moment. We pray; God hears; God answers prayers because of His grace, though sometimes we don't understand the answer (or see it when we want to). Christianity 101: if you want to have a relationship with God, pray. It's a way He gives us to build us up, to winnow out troubles, to commune with Him because He wants us to bring our inmost thoughts and feelings to Him, not under compulsion but willingly. Simple stuff, right?

Now put yourself in the place of someone who doesn't understand this. Maybe a Muslim or Hindu who doesn't know the ways of Jesus (or who Jesus really is). Put yourself in the shoes of someone on the streets, or someone caught up in the overwhelming comforts of suburbia; those two people really aren't too different. Put yourself in the place of someone eaten up with ambition, or worry, or pride, or selfishness. Or cherishing a hard heart.

Do those people know about Jesus? Do they care, let alone understand prayer? It's a blessing to recognize when your bottle is so empty that only Jesus can fill it. How must someone feel if they don't understand, maybe don't even realize, their greatest need?

That's most of the streets, most of the suburbs, most of the boardrooms, halls of government, and our world. That's a lot of churches. That's us: broken, lost, self-focused us. That was Babylon in the time when Daniel prayed. He prayed for his people, and he prayed for God's mercy. Daniel understood that he had a relationship with God that was nurtured and strengthened in prayer. God answered Daniel's prayer and sent His angel to deliver a message of hope.

Maybe it won't be Gabriel – or maybe it will – but look for how God answers your prayers. If you haven't gotten an answer, then level with me: when was the last time you really, deeply prayed? He is already waiting for you.

For further reading: Ezra 10:1, Psalm 145:18, Isaiah 58:9, Luke 1:19, Daniel 9:22

Lord God, I pray to You. Hear my prayer and have mercy.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 19 October 2021. Today's topic: As Soon

He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision. Daniel 9:22-23(NIV).

When does God hear our prayers? Easy: as soon as we begin to pray. Don't believe me? Reread these verses. Then read Isaiah 65. God hears our prayers as we say them, silent or silent or spoken. He knows what we are going to say before we even say it.

So why pray? If He knows what we're going to say before we say it, why put us through the (sometimes) humiliating experience of having to say it? You know why. It's for you.

No, this isn't to shame or guilt you into praying. God gave us a free world to live in as free people of choice. He doesn't want you to be compelled or forced to believe in Him, or talk with Him. He does want us to willingly bring our inmost thoughts and feelings to Him, though. God asks us to bring all our troubles, successes, thoughts, wishes, everything to Him in prayer, as an ongoing conversation. Not because we have to, but because we want to. Why?

Love. Love isn't forced, not with the real God. Even love here on the Third Rock isn't forced. Everyone wants to be in love. Even Osama Bin Laden, Che Guevera, and Adolf Hitler wanted to be in love. God is real love and He wants us to share in Him and it. Because of that, He doesn't force us to say what's on our hearts, doesn't force us to come to Him. Allah forces you. A thousand Hindu earth-gods coerce you. The self-focus of Buddhism compels you. But the triune God of the Christian faith doesn't force you to love Him. Or to pray to Him.

And He hears us anyway. As soon as we speak.

God sent Gabriel to give another divine revelation to Daniel. He did this because He listened to Daniel's prayers and saw that Daniel was in earnest. Daniel prayed selflessly, and honestly, for the state of his people, Israel. He prayed for their return to Jerusalem, and the restoration of God's temple there. And he prayed when he didn't have to. You and I get to do the same thing, any time we want, in fact. When we do, rest assured that God not only hears our prayers: He hears them as we were speaking.

For further reading: Isaiah 65:24, Amos 3:7, Matthew 24:15, Luke 1:28, Daniel 9:24

Lord God, hear my prayers today and the things most on my heart. Comfort my weary mind and body. When I don't know what to say, put Your holy words on my lips so I can speak with You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 20 October 2021. Today's topic: Complete

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Daniel 9:24 (NIV).

This is another ‘both/and’ verse, where it is both figurative and literal in what it says. You and I get to understand it in countless ways, but God conveys His message in just these few words in ways we should understand both literally and figuratively. One source (<https://dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/daniel-9-24>) called this verse “the backbone of bible prophecy. Gabriel reveals that there will be seventy “weeks” which, according to <https://versebyversecommentary.com/2002/04/24/daniel-924/>, corresponds to seventy years. It means that Israel would be in exile in Babylon seventy literal years. That’s literally, exactly what happened.

Yet consider that seven is also a biblically significant number. It signifies completeness, fullness. Thus, when Gabriel tells Daniel that, for Israel, “seventy sevens” are decreed, he’s not really talking about a figure of time but, instead, that Israel will be made complete. The overthrow of Jerusalem will be made right. God’s temple, His home, will be restored. It will not be something that men accomplish: it will be done by the Most High Himself. God Himself will make His people complete. Salvation.

Hint: it’s not literal. It’s figurative. It’s a Jesus thing: a prophecy of Jesus Christ coming to complete God’s holy plan of complete salvation. It would happen when God had made all things right for it to happen. A few generations hence from Daniel’s, Jesus would arrive to accomplish salvation. At a complete, yet (humanly) undetermined time in the future, when God’s mission of preaching to all nations and baptizing them in His name is complete as well, He will again make things complete, renewing creation by permanently defeating evil and expunging it.

Gabriel isn’t just revealing words about Jerusalem or the Temple, though. WE, the people of God’s Word, are who and what will be anointed. We will be Jesus’ most holy place, the church on which He is building His eternal kingdom. He completed the work for it: we are the rock on which He is constructing (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/daniel-9-24.html>). According to this source, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/seventy-sevens.html>, it also means a great deal more.

What it means to me is that God Himself finishes everything, does all the saving, makes us all brand new. No matter whether it took seventy years, or four hundred ninety (with seven still remaining), to me, the important thing is Jesus completing salvation. Nothing else remains to be done to open heaven’s gates. All of it was revealed in prayer: in Daniel’s momentous prayer.

For further reading: Isaiah 1:26, Isaiah 53:10, Isaiah 56:1, Hebrews 9:12, Daniel 9:25

Come Lord Jesus and quickly. We don’t know when You will return but need You more than ever. Complete our world today.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 21 October 2021. Today's topic: Seventy Sevens

“Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. Daniel 9:25 (NIV).

My Concordia Bible says that verses 25 through 27 “are broken down into unequal stages or segments of “seven,” “sixty-two,” and “one” weeks. This division of the symbolic total gave assurance that the redemption of mankind would take place in a historical setting but not before two distinguishable eras had run their course. The first seven weeks were God’s pledge to restore and build Jerusalem...The 62 weeks to follow affirmed that the rebuilt city would continue to function as Israel’s religious center when the Messianic age was to begin. The final week would bring the consummation of all things which are decreed and preceded it.” Any questions?

This prophecy concerns both the physical rebuilding of Jerusalem (that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed) and the restoration of Christ’s kingdom (at the second coming). No, I’m not going to try to break down the specifics of how the seventy weeks distinctly satisfy both prophecies. The language in the prophecy can be both literal and figurative, both a real timeline and a foretelling of an unknown time to come. In our world today, people still argue about just when the second coming and final restoration of Jerusalem will occur. Some easily understood sources that give good explanations are <https://dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/daniel-9-25>, <https://www.neverthirsty.org/bible-qa/qa-archives/question/why-is-daniels-prophecy-in-925-27-so-vital-to-understanding-the-future/>, https://gracebibleny.org/understanding_vision_daniel_92027, and <https://www.gotquestions.org/seventy-sevens.html>. I encourage anyone who’s curious to investigate this more.

But you know where we’re going, right?

The most important thing in Daniel’s prophecy is that he foretells the coming of Jesus, the Anointed One. In His coming, there would be seven ‘seven’s, signifying total completeness. In Jesus, Israel would have and find everything and everyone it ever looked for. Jesus would be both man and Messiah, ruler and servant to all. Jesus would come in times of trouble – which He did and He will – and He would be God’s chosen one from His chosen people to make all things right.

People much more deeply educated than yours truly have discussed this prophecy for over 2500 years. I’m content to know that God gave this promise to come here and live as one of us. He did just that, five hundred and change years after Daniel. He lives with us still in our hearts and when we live out His Word. And He will come back to live yet again at the end of the age. That’s enough for me. I’ll leave arguing the specifics to others.

For further reading: 1 Samuel 13:14, Ezra 3:3, Ezra 4:24, Matthew 1:17, John 4:25, Daniel 9:26

Lord God, thank You yet again for promising to come and deliver us from our sins, to make all things new.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 25 October 2021. Today's topic: Bad Moon Rising

After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. Daniel 9:26 (NIV).

This verse is another part of the prophecy that is both literal and figurative at the same time.

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/daniel-9-26.html> figuratively explains how Jerusalem, rebuilt after the time of Daniel, would be destroyed by pagans (Rome), who would overcome it like a flood (with a massive army). <https://ebible.com/questions/17587-what-does-it-mean-in-daniel-9-26-that-the-end-of-it-shall-be-with-a-flood> talks about how this will all occur at the end of time, how this verse is apocalyptic in its meaning. And the Anointed One? Jesus, of course; see <https://www.free-bible-study-lessons.com/people-of-the-prince.html>. Happy Monday, my friend. What does this mean for us today?

John Fogerty knows. "I see a bad moon rising...I see trouble on the way." It was figurative trouble for the people after Daniel. It's trouble for us and perhaps those after. In this verse, the Bible is figurative in how it describes long timeframes, savior Messiah, future peoples, and the destruction of God's temple. How God's people – His real temple – will be led astray by a new ruler, who will deceive and destroy. How the end of all things will arrive like a torrential flood cascading down. It will be unstoppable, massive, unavoidable. We don't know the exact times and dates; we only know that God, via Gabriel, through Daniel, prophesied it.

And it's literal in that it tells of the "Anointed One." That means Messiah; that means Jesus Christ. The verse mentions that wars will continue throughout time, how the character of war is always violent, destructive, bringing desolation and waste. How people are always sinful and easily deceived. It tells that Christ will be put to death. That the holy city of Jerusalem will be destroyed. These things are verifiable history; they actually happened. And will happen again.

Bad moon and trouble indeed.

Yet isn't it amazing that God gave us this warning AND still provided His Anointed One to save us anyway. He gave Daniel this prophecy to tell people to come back to Him, to seek refuge in Him from the destruction of the world. He sent Gabriel to announce, long before he ever spoke with Zechariah (John the Baptist's father) or Mary, that the Savior would be coming to save all humanity from the true destruction that sin brings: eternal separation from God. Despite knowing ahead all that would devastate humanity – as a consequence for humanity's many sins – God saved us anyway. That ain't no bad moon rising, even if that is a cool song.

For further reading: Psalm 46:8, Isaiah 28:2, Isaiah 53:8, Isaiah 59:19, Isaiah 61:1, Ezekiel 4:5-6, Nahum 1:8, Haggai 2:23, Zechariah 4:14, Matthew 16:21, Daniel 9:27

Savior Jesus, You came to save us anyway! Thank You!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 26 October 2021. Today's topic: Positive Spin?

He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." Daniel 9:27 (NIV).

<https://dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/daniel-9-27> says that verse 27 refers to the end times, when Antichrist will defile the rebuilt third temple. That will lead directly to his undoing. The "abomination that causes desolation" also refers to how Antiochus Epiphanes set up a tribute to Zeus directly inside the ancient second temple, permanently defiling it (despite the fact that the rebuilt temple of Zerubbabel never held either the Ark of the Covenant mercy seat or God's presence filling the Holy of Holies).

<https://evidenceforchristianity.org/can-you-explain-what-the-prophecy-in-daniel-927-is-about/> says that this verse refers to both a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD AND a prophecy about Jesus' ministry as Messiah some 40 years before that.

My Concordia says something altogether different. Just what does this complicated and difficult verse really mean? What does it mean to you?

Yesterday we talked about how the previous verse foretold bad times. Today's verse seems to continue that thought. But have you ever considered that, in order to get to the permanent blessings of eternity, we have to endure hardship? That was a constant in Daniel's time and ours as well. To save His very good creation, Jesus had to die a horrific death of torture and rejection before being glorified and resurrected. Before we can live in His presence forever, we will also die, maybe by horrible death as well. None of us knows ahead of time.

It's this strange paradox of humanity, to endure awful things while living in a world where God also continually blesses us. Instead of looking at apocalyptic verses as dreadful, perhaps such verses are actually beautiful blessings. God gave Daniel a set of things to look for so that those who believed Him would know when the signs were coming true. When they happened, they could look for the redemption that only Jesus can bring (and Daniel didn't even know who Jesus was, yet he still believed). So it is for us. Even in the middle of terrible days, we get to see how God actually uses those times to bless us, to comfort us by telling us ahead of time what would happen so that we wouldn't be surprised or frightened. By being with us.

Spin? Maybe a little, but isn't it a wonderful thing, no matter what anyone else says, to know that the God of the universe thought enough of you to tell you that He would be with you even when things seem to be falling apart.

For further reading: Isaiah 10:22, Daniel 10:1

Lord Jesus, You always abide with me. Live with me and through me today even in these difficult times.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 27 October 2021. Today's topic: A New Set of Visions

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. Daniel 10:1 (NIV).

Our God is a man of patience. Reading these books one might think the revelations happened one immediately after another. But that's only on paper. In reality, from chapter 7 on, there were stretches of several years in-between them. This next prophecy was given to Daniel several years after those recorded in chapter nine. How would it feel to be given these visions, these gifts from God Himself, and then have to wait months, then years, for the next? How would it be to stew about what He'd told you?

Especially since this prophecy leads into one about war. Chapter 10 is an introduction for 11 and 12, which will reveal a great many things while concluding Daniel's book. Daniel provides the time when it was given to him, and, like the others, it was written afterward, recorded on paper (skin or papyrus most likely) later. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/daniel-10/> breaks it down quite nicely. This site brought up a good point for context: the third year of Cyrus corresponded to the time when Israelites began returning to Jerusalem. That means it took place towards both the end of Daniel's life AND near the end of the Babylonian exile. What had begun as a punishment for spiritually slacking and wayward Israel was turning into a time of hope and renewal. Daniel's people would return home and rebuild the temple, the city walls, and their old homes. Though Jerusalem would see conflict and more subjugation, the nation had endured a renewal in exile, finding its identity again as God's chosen people.

Maybe that's why God revealed this new set of visions when He did. He was reminding His people to not get too big for their britches. "Don't fall into the traps you fell into before. I'm saving you; you aren't saving yourselves. Indeed, after being slaves again all these years, you need God more than ever. I'm changing the world around you in ways you can't fully see yet. For now, you'll be going home to fresh work and a renewed commitment to me. Oh, by the way, I'm gonna let you in on a few things that will happen long into the future. They're gonna be tough to hear."

At the end of time, mankind will endure greater hardship than at any time in history. Greater than before the Ark; greater than when Israel was overrun (each time). Greater than before any of the cataclysmic wars of the last three hundred years. This verse begins Daniel's last prophecy about them.

For further reading: Daniel 10:2

Lord, strengthen my heart to hear Your holy prophecies and to heed Your good words.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 28 October 2021. Today's topic: In Mourning

At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. Daniel 10:2-3 (NIV).

Daniel was given a new vision by God, and the first thing he does is go into mourning. Why?

Quite honestly, we don't know. It could be that he was saddened by the previous visions (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/daniel-10-2.html>) though this new one was given to him months or years later. It could be that he was sad for being the one who would have to bear this new bad news to Israel. It could be that he was in mourning because so few of the Jews had chosen to return home, to Jerusalem with Ezra, to rebuild the Temple (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/daniel-10/>). It could be for another reason of which we don't know.

All we know is that Daniel mourned for three weeks (likely actual weeks instead of the "sevens" mentioned in chapter 9). By the time Daniel is given this vision, he's an old man, probably in his mid-80s. He has lived most of that life as an exile, and perhaps he's feeling his years. That's understandable. In fact, given what else is about to be revealed in the chapter, I think that Daniel being a weary many of old age makes him more relatable and believable.

I think of my Mom. She died seven years ago this week, and she was 85. She would have been around Daniel's age. She was tired, a little weary. Mom still had a lot of life to live and wasn't afraid or unexcited to live it. But she was also an old woman. When she realized she was dying, she accepted it, not feigning bravery or acting uncharacteristically. She simply faced it with dignity.

And I think of my uncle, her brother, who also died just two years ago (incidentally, also at age 85). He died of cancer after being widowed several years before. The last time I talked with Buzz, he said that he was tired, and that he missed Nancy (his wife, my aunt), and that he'd been blessed with such a good life but that he would simply turn over the rest of his time to God and go when called. That's exactly what he did.

Thinking about Mom and Uncle Buzz and their predicaments at about the same age Daniel would have been makes me think that it wouldn't be unusual for an old man to mourn. It's not a bad thing. Even Jesus grieved and mourned when his friend, Lazarus, died. And Jesus wept over Jerusalem (the same city Ezra and Nehemiah helped in Daniel's later years), grieving and mourning for what His chosen people would do.

For further reading: Ezra 9:4, Daniel 10:4

Lord, thank You for grieving, for mourning when our hearts are heavy.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 1 November 2021. Today's topic: That Same Jesus?

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. Daniel 10:4-6 (NIV).

Who did Daniel see that day along the river? Was it Jesus, or an angel? In the end, does it really matter? As long as God's vision was given to Daniel, does it really matter who he saw?

The description of the man in these verses is similar (in some ways strikingly) to the description of Jesus, given by John in Revelation. Face like white light, eyes flaming, feet like bronze, and the voice of every man. Jesus also appears to John suddenly, unexpectedly, whereas the man here appears to Daniel after being announced. In both Revelation and Daniel, John and Daniel are in a state of mourning, Daniel for unknown reasons and John while exiled as a prisoner innocent of a true crime. In both cases, both men were old, assumably near the end of their lives. And they were both given visions that would change history though they couldn't know that yet.

Does it matter whether this visitor to Daniel was an angel or Jesus? I suppose not. But it's exciting to know that the pre-incarnate Christ would have visited Earth before His prophesied time. This wasn't the first time this happened. Such Old Testament appearances by Jesus are called "Christophanies;" see <https://www.gotquestions.org/theophany-Christophany.html>. As this site points out, two of the most well-known likely Christophanies were the visitors who met Abraham, and when Jacob wrestled with God.

But is that same Jesus the person who met with Daniel? <http://christology101.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Christology-101-Lesson-4-Christophanies.pdf> provides a good litmus test. By asking the five questions that site proposes, the person Daniel met is probably not Jesus but, instead, one of His angels.

Does that change the meaning of the message the angel would deliver? Of course not. Still, reading more about the verses helps to understand them better, and to get a better picture of who Jesus is and how He works His word and His mission through people like Daniel, you, and me.

For further reading: Genesis 2:14, Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 32:22-30, Exodus 28:20, Job 41:19, Jeremiah 10:9, Ezekiel 1:7, Ezekiel 9:2, Matthew 17:2, Revelation 1:12-15, Revelation 15:6, Revelation 19:12, Daniel 10:7

Lord, thank You for the words Daniel left for us to study. Thank You for appearing to Your people, and for sending your angels to do Your good work as well.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 2 November 2021. Today's topic: Thunderstruck

I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. Daniel 10:7-9 (NIV).

This isn't the first time that God revealed things to one person in the presence of others but the others didn't see it. As you'll see from the associated verses (below), God personally interacted with Jacob, Elisha, Habakkuk; later, Peter, James, and John, and Paul. Events from Jacob wrestling with the Lord to the transfiguration of Christ are things not revealed, at the time, to everyone.

Is that so strange? After all, there are things in your life that you keep close, or don't tell others, or don't talk about immediately. Most people only reveal things about themselves, or their actions, or their thoughts and dreams, carefully. Social media has complicated that principle, at least for me (but I think for many, many others as well). Still, even on Fakebook, we only share what we want people to know when we want them to know it.

So it was with Daniel here (and with the other Biblical examples cited). God wanted to speak especially to – and through – Daniel, so He tailored the audience. Those who weren't addressed became terrified, then took off. Even Daniel seemed afraid, his face turning pale and his feeling turned helpless. Think of Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration. They saw Jesus, Elijah, and Moses, glorified and alive, talking about matters far above the disciples' pay grade. Peter's reaction? Fear. Not really trepidation or terror, but uneasy all the same.

I won't speak for you, but I would probably feel like Peter. And I'd feel like Daniel, if God spoke to me as He did to Daniel. Dave of many words would be speechless, unable to convey anything except fear of God. It wouldn't matter if it was a Christophany, or one of Jesus' angels, or something altogether different. I'd be unable to say anything or do anything except praise God. In the words of AC/DC, "you've been thunderstruck."

Maybe that's the point. Maybe God was rendering Daniel speechless so that he would simply watch and listen, then write down what he saw later. God sometimes works that way, and that isn't a bad thing. These days, maybe we could use some more of that.

For further reading: Genesis 32:24, 2 Kings 6:17-20, Job 4:14, Habakkuk 3:16, Matthew 17:6, Acts 9:7, Daniel 10:10

Lord Jesus, You sometimes render us awestruck. When You do, inspire us to worship, watch, and listen, to simply be in Your presence.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 3 November 2021. Today's topic: He Esteems Us

A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Daniel 10:11 (NIV).

<https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/Daniel10> brings up a really good point: "this is God's word of comfort for all who flee for shelter in Christ."

When he got this vision, Daniel had been praying and fasting for three weeks. It was nearing the end of the Babylonian captivity and some Jews were already back in Jerusalem. Now that he is prostrate and hungry, God sends angels to both comfort Daniel and to encourage him because the news God will lay on him will be tough to hear. A few verses ago, God Himself appeared.

Imagine hearing from God's personal servant "you who are highly esteemed." Imagine hearing from this being that God esteems you. God thinks enough of you to send His own angel to visit you, to give you information nobody else knows. This intimidates Daniel, who stands trembling. But he stands. He stands in the presence of God's messenger to hear what the messenger angel has to say.

And the angel says that God esteems Daniel. God values Daniel. The God who created the world in six days, who delivered Israel from Egypt, who spoke to Elijah in the whisper, who kept Noah safe on the flooding seas, this God personally thinks of Daniel.

News flash, fellow believer. He thinks of you and me this same way. When Jesus hung on that cross, He knew you then. He did it for you because He believes in you. He knew my sins even then. He understood the things we would do, good and bad, and He still chose to know us even through the agony of dying. He who created all things, who is love and justice incarnate, died and then rose with you and me on His mind. He's the same Savior who sent the angel to Daniel.

He esteems us. Jesus esteems us, values us, wants, loves, desires, and saves us. He loves us enough to hit us hard with truths that are hard to hear, but He knows we can bear them because He promises to abide with us while we do.

No wonder Daniel trembled. The weeks of praying, fasting, falling on his knees in front of God had left him in the posture to both accept a hard message knowing that God esteemed Him and would not ever abandon him.

He esteems us still. When we finally realize that, He becomes our shelter and our stronghold.

For further reading: Genesis 6:9, Ezekiel 2:1, Daniel 10:12

Lord God, who am I that You should value me? I am overwhelmed by Your love.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 8 November 2021. Today's topic: God Hears Us

Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. Daniel 10:12 (NIV).

God hears us even when we don't speak with Him.

Yesterday, I sat by on a plane between two guys who put both of their pieces of luggage in the overhead bin on a full flight; this is one of my pet peeves. One of them was later quite rude to the woman who sat between us. I said a prayer for him anyway. I know God heard me then.

Or when I prayed before a test. When I talked with God in a traffic jam. Those times I was terrified because I knew I was getting laid off or fired. The countless times when I really didn't know what to say to God, felt awkward talking with Him, was ashamed, or thought about it but didn't end up praying at all. God heard all of them. It's the thought that counts.

Not mine: His. He's God and I'm not. You aren't. Whenever we let ourselves think of Him, He hears us. Granted, God knows ahead of time even what we're going to think and say, and He hears us still. Yet when we truly set our minds to Him, it is we, not He, who are finally moving into the right direction. He's already there. His thoughts and His Word are so much bigger than us. We matter to Him, but He matters so much more than we do. Thus, when we finally "get on His level," it's us who have moved back to Him, not He who has (once again) moved closer to us. It's because we're the ones who originally moved away yet, all along, He heard our hearts and waited for us anyway.

A few years back, my pastor preached about the fall of man. In Eden, after Adam and Eve had first sinned, God asked "where are you?" It wasn't God walking through the garden and being unable to find His creation. Instead, God was calling to man, asking him to self-reflect and repent because God had already seen and heard what had happened. When Adam and Eve finally answered, God taught, and administered love and justice.

If He heard them, He hears us today. It's because He esteems us. It's because He's God. It's because of Jesus. It can happen for you right now.

For further reading: Genesis 3:9, Leviticus 16:31, Isaiah 65:44, Matthew 14:27, Daniel 10:12

Lord, all praise to You now. Hear me as I pray this to You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 9 November 2021. Today's topic: Michael or John Travolta

But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.” Daniel 10:13-14 (NIV).

My Concordia says this is an account of how a demon tried to misuse the nation of Persia, but was thwarted by an intervention from the archangel Michael. Michael is mentioned 3 times in the Bible – here in Daniel, in Jude, and in Revelation – and always in the context of protection, fighting, or war. This section of Daniel mentions Michael as one who will arise at the end of time to defeat Satan (see Revelation for that). One source that I read discussed how Michael is stronger than Satan.

When I think of Michael the angel, I think of the John Travolta movie where Danny Zuko played him. Fun movie about a real being who's really high up in the order of things.

Thank God he's on our side. I've written here before about how I haven't ever seen an angel (that I know of) but I know they're real, that they've intersected my life several times. Maybe when our lives are over we will be shown all the times that has happened; I bet it's more than we could even count.

Again, thank God they're on our side. Let's be real: Satan and his fellow fallen angels are indeed powerful. It isn't cool in our world to talk about angels and demons, about how they are active in our time. But they are. I've long thought many things we think of as mental illness, or even incurable disease, may very well be demonic in nature. Demons fight against us because we matter to God and they despise God. They rail against Him, fighting against the inevitable admission that He's God and they aren't. Like us, angels are just created beings, not the creator. Powerful as he is, Satan can't create, isn't God, is so much less than God.

And is much less than Michael, leader of the Lord's Host. In fact, if the best of the evil realm are thrown at us every day (and I believe they are) then we really don't have much to worry about. Sure, they'll lie and twist words and work to deceive us. When they attack, it hurts. But their power is puny compared to that of the angels Jesus commands and sends to protect us and intervene in our lives. Thank God that this is so.

Maybe even John Travolta would recognize that.

For further reading: Isaiah 24:21, Ezekiel 12:27, Habakkuk 2:3, Jude 9, Revelation 12:7-9, Daniel 10:15

Lord, praise and thanks to You for sending Michael and your angels to guard and protect us.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 10 November 2021. Today's topic: Clam Up

While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. Daniel 10:15 (NIV).

In this verse, Daniel was overcome with emotion, being in the presence of his Lord and then His angels. He didn't know what to say or do other than to simply look down and be quiet. All of us would do well to do the same

Me, would I do that? Would you? Or any of us? Or would we break out our smartphones and try to capture it on video? Would we open Instagram and try to share a picture of it along with our "it's all about me" commentary? Would we text all of our friends, "I'm here with God's angel and I don't know what to do!" What would our Tweet say?

Admit it: you'd be tempted. So would I. And, with social media, it's all too convenient. It's so easy to shift the focus to ourselves and away from God. Perhaps that's why He uses moments in our lives to speak to us through conscience so that we stop speaking, start worshipping, remain speechless and begin to listen.

Daniel could have gone vain. He could have been one to say, "how did I feel about this." Or "what's in it for me?" There were plenty of others in the Bible whose personal feelings or self-focused vanity mattered more than what God put on their hearts. The Pharaoh of Moses' time; Balaam, Judas Iscariot; Ananias and Sapphira; the list goes on. In 2021, we'd encourage Daniel to share what he thought because that mattered more than anything else. It's all about you. Your feelings matter more. You have a voice!

Sure. But, in remembering those things, remember that God's voice is bigger, and more important. In all moments of our lives, God is calling us to develop the discipline that seeks Him first before getting to the bottom of our feelings. That happens through reverence, prayer, and a few quiet minutes before Him, confessing our wrongheadedness and listening for what He has to say. There are times to talk and times to listen. And there are times to remain speechless and reverent instead of talkative and selfish. How many times does the devil use our words against us, or against others? How many times do we let our tongues draw us into sin?

You know the answer. Yet every time we go to God, He listens. Shouldn't we do the same?

The next time God puts it on your heart to clam up, listen to Him.

For further reading: Numbers 22, Ezekiel 24:27, Luke 1:20, Acts 5, Daniel 10:16

Lord Jesus, You listen to my prayers. Remind me today to humble myself, to be quiet in Your presence, to listen to Your voice and do as You bid.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 11 November 2021. Today's topic: Overwhelmed

Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I feel very weak. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe." Daniel 10:16-17 (NIV).

Have you ever been so overwhelmed that you couldn't even function? That's what happened to Daniel here. He was so overcome with this vision that he was first speechless, then completely weakened. By the time this happened, Daniel was an old man, probably in his eighties, and nearing the end of a long, busy, eventful, and stress-filled life. When the angels appeared to him, and when God Himself appeared in the earlier vision, Daniel was overwhelmed. When this vision occurred, he was spent.

The being conversing with Daniel in this vision isn't Jesus, but it is one of His angels (<https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/2626/who-is-the-man-in-daniels-vision-in-daniel-10>). This angel, the one who spoke of Michael then told Daniel that he was esteemed by God, must have been a magnificent sight to see. He looked like a man but was still radiant. He was powerful, amazing to behold, and holy.

Being with the angel drastically affected Daniel. As mentioned, he was overwhelmed. This source, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/daniel-10/>, says that the Hebrew words used to record this vision describe sorrows, and debilitating pain so severe it wracked Daniel deep inside. It was almost as painful as childbirth.

So, again, have you ever been so overwhelmed that you felt like that, that you couldn't even function? I must admit: that hasn't happened to me. I was once severely injured in an auto accident, and I have known the agonies of death, separation, and great loss. Too often I let worry overtake me. Sometimes, it has hurt so much to live that I couldn't imagine pain any worse. Yet I don't think that's what Daniel felt. He felt the pain of being so emptied, so drained, so wearied by the weight of these visions that he couldn't even breathe. In the presence of holiness, Daniel knew he was empty, ready to be filled.

Yet, in the middle of this, God reached out to him by sending Daniel the angel to both reveal His message and to comfort him. Note that the angel touched his lips, imparting divine power and strength so that Daniel might endure. And also note that the angel stood with Daniel, observing and sharing in his distress. Even if we haven't been overwhelmed in this way, surely God has also abided with us even in our most taxing moments.

For further reading: Isaiah 6:7, Isaiah 21:3, Jeremiah 1:9, Daniel 10:18

Oh Lord, when I am overwhelmed, in pain, in anguish, please stay with me and give me Your holy comfort. Send Your angels to protect and ease me.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 15 November 2021. Today's topic: So We Might Know Peace

Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. "Do not be afraid, you who are highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength." Daniel 10:18-19 (NIV).

Perhaps this is the most pervasive theme in all of scripture in how God deals with man: peace, be strong. Even in the difficult passages where God metes out harsh judgment, He also gives freely of Himself so that His people might know His peace, His strength, His rest.

Yesterday, I taught a Sunday school class to our church's middle school kids. We discussed two main themes: are there things worth fighting for, and does God endorse violence. I've known most of these kids for most of their lives; they're a good group.

And when faced with those two questions, they all enthusiastically said "yes" that there are things worth fighting for, but struggled to identify what some of those things were. Most of them knew some of the more prominent stories from the Bible where our God brings hard judgment on the human race through violence. The great flood, deliverance from Egypt (we watched part of "The Ten Commandments"), how God commanded Israel to slay the unbelieving pagans of Canaan: throughout history, God has used violence to punish unbelief and cleanse it from His creation. We looked at a scene from "The Return of the King," when the armies of men (of God and peace, actually) battled "for Frodo" against the armies of Sauron (of evil and Satan). The kids hadn't seen this before, and they enjoyed it.

After that, I read them an excerpt of my grandfather's diary, when his ship sailed into Nagasaki in September 1945. We discussed how we, the 'good guys' who believed in God, dropped two atomic bombs in a week and killed a quarter million pagan Japanese, using harsh brutality to restore peace. And we discussed Jesus' crucifixion, how God allowed unspeakable violence on Himself so that we might be able to come to Him, one on one, again.

It's because God saw mankind was worth fighting for. Not for the fighting, but for His peace. So that we, undeserving sinners who chose sin instead of God, might experience His peace both now and in eternity. Think about that today and, like Daniel, you'll be overwhelmed. It's like Max Lucado said: He chose the nails. He chose the justice of purging horrors and evil from the world by choosing the excruciating torture of the cross. So we might know peace.

For further reading: Joshua 1:9, Judges 6:23, Isaiah 6:1-8, Isaiah 35:4, Daniel 10:20

Lord God, I don't understand violence, or why people choose it. Forgive us our violent sins, and remind us that You fight for us to save us from ourselves.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 16 November 2021. Today's topic: Angels Battle

So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince). Daniel 10:20-21 (NIV).

Have you ever considered that one, or some, or even many angels might have done battle for you, in the name of the Lord, many years before you were born?

The angel sent to Daniel was sent to deliver a prophecy. He would do that while also on a mission from God to do battle in Persia and Greece. Persia had already overthrown Babylon, and eventually Greece would occupy and overthrow Persia (and Babylon). In time, Greece would be overthrown by Rome, and Rome a thousand years later by hordes from central Europe. America supplanted Europe in the last century, and in ours, America is being surpassed by China and India.

Long before that happened, angels did God's bidding in Persia, and Greece, and we can even assume in the other empires. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/daniel-10/> says that, "heavenly warfare is to be directed against first Persia and then Greece, because each of these in turn will have power over God's people." Before the empires in those states became empires, God sent His messengers and soldiers to fight so that humanity would be enabled to rise as it did according to God's purposes.

It was so then; it is so now. Or have you forgotten that we, in America, pride ourselves (sometimes too much) on being "one nation, under God." "In God we trust" is, for now, on all our money. Nearly all our founding fathers believed they were doing the Lord's will, that they were being guided and protected by His Providence. That the United States was uniquely blessed by God, despite our many faults, failures, and sins. Maybe one evidence for this is how we've been protected by the angels. Today, though, we are in decline.

I believe there are no coincidences, that there is only the will of God. When things work out 'just so,' perhaps it's because God has sent invisible warriors to fight battles that clear our paths. Things work out the way they do because God wills it to be so, and sends fighters to make it so. This side of eternity, we may never know for sure. For now, it's enough to remember that God esteemed Daniel by sending divinely commissioned messengers to bring a message to him while enroute to battle. A message that Daniel would later share with us, for all time.

For further reading: Jude 9, Daniel 11:1

Lord Jesus, thank You for sending Your protecting warrior angels to fight battles for You and for us against forces of evil who only want to destroy and kill.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 17 November 2021. Today's topic: More Believe in Angels

And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him. Daniel 11:1 (NIV).

The start of chapter 11 of Daniel sees the angel, speaking to Daniel, telling him that he (the angel) had come to protect the person of Darius the Mede. The last verse of chapter 10 had alluded to the (narrating) angel assisting the archangel Michael as well, but verse 1 of chapter 11 indicates that the (narrating) angel had been tasked with defending Darius; as (probably) the most powerful angel in God's realm, Michael would not have needed angelic protection. You'll recall that Darius was the sub-ruler, under Cyrus, who governed Babylon after Babylon had been overtaken by Media-Persia. Please also recall our last discussion, where we posited how angels battle for us, sometimes many years before we're born.

Once again I'll ask: have you ever considered that invisible angels have done battle on your behalf, battles you never see, or feel, or maybe even know have happened? And how does it feel to know you have someone protecting you?

In our superficial world, it's easier to believe in angels than it is to believe in the triune God who created them. Just ten years ago, according to CBS News, 8 in 10 Americans believed in angels (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/poll-nearly-8-in-10-americans-believe-in-angels/>). That says something, but it's easy to believe in the beings you see on TV, or in decorations, or in the movies. I mean, every Christmas, "It's A Wonderful Life" comes on your TV to tell the story of how Clarence the Guardian Angel comes to help his man in need. And even people who don't seem to want to have much to do with Jesus are quick to ask Him for guiding and guarding angels to protect them and their loved ones.

It's comforting to believe in an invisible someone who makes it their business to protect you, fight for you, ward off unseen and unspeakable evil on your behalf, and guard you and those you love. It's comforting even as those beings in whom you believe are supernatural, mysterious, and much more powerful than any of us.

Still, there are other facts. People don't become angels when we die; Frank Capra had that wrong. No, angels aren't the equals of humans; only people were made in God's image, even as angels are endowed by God with supernatural powers that humans don't seem to have. And, no angels aren't redeemed by Christ. That honor is reserved only for people, even as God has special relationships with these holy beings who He created. When angels fall – and many have – they become demonic, damned.

And yet people believe more in angels than they do in the Jesus who created them. Go figure.

For further reading: Genesis 1:26-27, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Daniel 11:2

Lord, thank You for Your angels and all they do on Your behalf

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 18 November 2021. Today's topic: Historical Angels

"Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will arise in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. Daniel 11:2 (NIV).

The angel is prophesying about what will happen in Persia in the next few years. A concise site I found, (http://www.herealittletherealittle.net/index.cfm?page_name=Daniel11). explains this verse well. The prophecy was handed to Daniel during the reign of Cyrus the Great. After Cyrus, the next three Persian kings were Cambyses II, Gaumata the Magian, and Darius the Great (Darius II). Darius the Great had a son named Xerxes who, from childhood, was raised to punish the nascent empire of Greece. Have you ever seen "300", the graphic novel movie that tells the story of the Battle of Thermopylae? The Xerxes of that movie is the Xerxes prophesied by the angel (though, in real life, he wasn't a bald, half-naked giant).

Xerxes would rule the Median-Persian empire seventy years after Daniel received this prophecy. He ruled from 486-465 BC, while the prophecy was given at approximately 535 BC. This isn't the first time that Daniel had been given foretelling of empires to rule the known world. He had previously passed along God's divine visions to Nebuchadnezzar about the empires that would rule after his own. This same knowledge was passed to Belshazzar (specifically about his impending doom), and from Gabriel to Daniel several chapters ago.

The source I listed mentions how Daniel is one of the few books in the Bible that can be specifically dated to known events, namely how the times described in chapter 11 line up with historically verified events and people. Thus, this book is a crossover from the supernatural into the empirical. The veracity and historical reliability of what is described in this chapter lend believability to the entire Bible. What seems fantastic is, in reality, factual, verifiable.

And that's part of the beauty of it. We exercise faith in the Bible by believing it, but then we find history usually backs it up. Not only, but the words Daniel records are those uttered by an angel (possibly the angel Gabriel, though this is disputable). That's amazing. This isn't the first time angels spoke to people; it happened with Lot in Sodom, and to Abraham, and to Elisha, Zechariah the father of John the Baptist, the virgin Mary, Jesus' disciples, and more. Indeed, there are more instances recorded in the Bible of things angels told ordinary people than there are most words recorded from most of the ancient kings and emperors of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined.

For further reading: Daniel 11:3

Lord Jesus, thank You for recording Your angels' words to men over the years. Thank You for the lessons You teach us through them, and for protecting us all throughout history.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 29 November 2021. Today's topic: Prophecy and Soothsayers

Then a mighty king will arise, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. After he has arisen, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others. Daniel 11:3-4 (NIV).

These verses talk about Alexander the Great who, in his short time on the world stage, ruled more of the known world than anyone ever. During that time, he pretty much did as he pleased. When he died mysteriously in Nebuchadnezzar's palace in Babylon in 323 BC, the empire he had forged was divided between four rulers because Alexander left no descendants.

This isn't the first time Daniel prophesied about Alexander. Visions described in chapters 2, 7, and 8 also allude to Alexander and the kingdom he would build. That's one of the things that makes this prophecy believable: it directly alludes to events in history that are well documented. People put their faith in things that do that; see Nostradamus, Edgar Cayce, and Jean Dixon. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if we did that with God? Fortune tellers have never been something I've been interested in; ditto the zodiac, horoscopes, or things like them. They seem too much like divination or sorcery. Be very wise if you follow them.

Likewise, be wise about what you read online. A website I follow is zerohedge.com; it's a financial, political, and social commentary site. One of its contributors is also a millennialist Christian who makes a compelling case that we are in the tribulation that will lead to the end of the world in seven years. His contention is that the tribulation period began on September 21st of this year. According to his analysis, major global warfare will begin by next spring (most likely in the next six months), with the return of Christ to establish His kingdom in 2028. See <https://danericSELLIOTTWAVES.org/> for yourself.

More importantly, see the Bible and the many books and verses. Don't take my word, or the word of some website or soothsayer, or even the word of a single pastor. Check it out for yourself in God's word and draw your own conclusion. It isn't for us to know the time, but we are to be prepared. Historical veracity was what lent worldly credibility to the prophecies in Daniel (and other books). Those prophecies were revealed by God through angels He specifically sent to do just that. Alexander was revealed in prophecy hundreds of years before he lived. There is much else we must learn from these prophecies in order to prepare.

For further reading: Daniel 11:5

Lord, bless Your prophecies. Help each of us to heed them and to be ready now, based on Your holy Word, for what You have in store for us.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 30 November 2021. Today's topic: The True King

"The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power. After some years, they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her power, and he and his power will not last. In those days she will be betrayed, together with her royal escort and her father and the one who supported her. Daniel 11:5-6 (NIV).

These verses discuss what would happen after Alexander the Great. According to my Concordia, "the king of the South" was Ptolemy I Soter (of Egypt). His commander was Seleucus I Nicator. The daughter of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (also of Egypt), Bernice, would ally with Antiochus II Theos of Syria, whom she would eventually marry to form that alliance. The alliance stood until Antiochus' former wife, Laodice, formed a conspiracy to have Bernice and Antiochus killed.

That sounds like soap opera, or some Hollywood mafia plot, but it actually happened. The Ptolemies were installed in power, as Greek satraps, in Egypt, after Alexander's death. Ptolemy Soter, that first of the Ptolemies, was a general and possible relation of Alexander's. He eventually declared himself pharaoh and began what would be the last pharaonic dynasty of ancient Egypt: a line that descended back over 3300 years. In all, there were twenty Ptolemy pharaohs (kings) who ruled Egypt for Greece. The rule of the Ptolemies lasted from 305 to 30 BC. After the pharaohs were ejected from power – nearly 500 years after Daniel – Rome would install its own rulers.

And it was predicted in detail two centuries before it actually happened, by an angel, to an old prophet living in captivity. Archaeology and historical documentation bear it out, confirming a prophecy that, in our timeline, is now over 2500 years old.

That shouldn't be surprising. God can do as He pleases. We don't need proof of Him: the proof is before your eyes, in in your beating heart, and in the love you feel for others. Yet, for our benefit so that we might believe more, He gave us fore-knowledge of things that would happen. He told us about things to come so that we humans might prepare for them. So that we might prosper to His glory. So that we might know and appreciate Him more. So that those who don't yet know Him might come to see the truth of who He is: not some pharaoh overseer in a foreign land, but the one true King.

For further reading: Daniel 11:7

Lord, You give us prophecies that were proven by our own human history. How mighty and merciful You are!

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 1 December 2021. Today's topic: Still True Now

“One from her family line will arise to take her place. He will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortress; he will fight against them and be victorious. He will also seize their gods, their metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt. For some years he will leave the king of the North alone. Then the king of the North will invade the realm of the king of the South but will retreat to his own country. His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great army, which will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress. Daniel 11:7-10 (NIV).

These are prophecies about the empires that would succeed Greece after the death of Alexander the Great. And they're also more. According to <https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/understanding-the-book-of-daniel/daniel-11/>, in ancient days, the king of the North would be Syria, and the King of the South would be Egypt. Both of these would eventually be conquered by Rome. That was in the world of antiquity, though.

The site also brings up an important point about the prophecy. It is dual in nature, applying to both the 'near' future of Daniel's time AND the far-off undetermined future that is still yet to come. While the prophecies would be fulfilled only a few hundred years after Daniel, they also foretell events to come at the end of time, when forces of evil gather against the armies of the Son of God.

All this happens to proclaim the majesty of Jesus Christ as the true king. The original kings of the south – the Ptolemies – fought against the kings of the north – the Selucids – over the course of several decades. After the assassinations of Bernice and Antiochus II, Ptolemy III fought against the Selucid king of Syria and recouped vengeance.

That was then. Some day, after an Antichrist has risen to power, the armies of the North and South will gather against Israel to exterminate it once and for all. The North – led by modern Russia – will join with an alliance from the south (likely an Arab or Muslim alliance, including Egypt. Islam hadn't yet been invented in Daniel's or Christ's time). They will fight against Israel. But they aren't too smart. Already their defeat is foretold. Jesus will return to fight for His people in the final battle of earthly political power.

All of this was advertised 2500 years ago to Daniel. It's astounding how many people ignore it, and how few heed it to prepare. That was true then; it's still true now.

For further reading: Isaiah 8:8, Isaiah 37:19, Jeremiah 46:8, Daniel 11:11

Prophesying Lord, all praise to You for telling us of Your holy plans. Of how You walk in history and tell us of weak man's plans for conquest and evil, then how You overcome them.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 2 December 2021. Today's topic: Middle East Wars

Then the king of the South will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North, who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated. When the army is carried off, the king of the South will be filled with pride and will slaughter many thousands, yet he will not remain triumphant. For the king of the North will muster another army, larger than the first; and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped. "In those times many will rise against the king of the South. Those who are violent among your own people will rebel in fulfillment of the vision, but without success. Daniel 11:11-14 (NIV).

More about the wars that the Ptolemies and Selucids would fight for control of what we know today as "the Middle East." If that seems unsurprising, it's because it IS unsurprising. People have been feuding for this storied piece of real estate since before the time of Jacob and Esau. Today's particular verses talk about the wars between Ptolemy IV (Philopater) and Antiochus III (Magnus), as well as the troubled reign of the next southern king, Ptolemy V. These wars would be fought in (what are) modern day Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and parts of Syria (see <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/daniel/11-11.htm> for a description of just Daniel 11:11, as well as <https://www.end-times-prophecy.org/daniel11-study.pdf> for a discussion of the entire chapter).

Again, people have been fighting in and for lands of the Middle East for centuries. The terrorism and war that occur there in our lifetimes are but the latest battles in wars of conquest and defense that have raged there for nearly 5000 years. And, again (again!), what's new about that? Sure, our technology is new, advanced, and lethal in ways that ancient armies would find astounding. But it serves the same purpose as the best weaponry of the Ptolemies or Syrians: to kill people and hold land. Strip a modern soldier of his micro-chipped firepower and he would do no better against the phalanxes of Egypt than the Selucids did.

Part of the reason for that was that the new, rising empire from the Tiber – Rome – came to the defense of the south. Rome brought new capabilities. We'll learn more about that in the next verses.

What's amazing about it is that this short but detailed (and confusing) chapter of Daniel carries us from his (Daniel's) time to the time just before the life of Christ. It accurately chronicles the major political powers from Babylon to Rome while also providing the blueprint that the final political powers will follow in the war for Armageddon at the end of time.

For further reading: Daniel 11:15

Lord God, You are magnificent in the revelations You shared with Daniel. Forgive us our timeless wars and quarrels, and teach us more to focus only on You through Your Son, Jesus.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 7 December 2021. Today's topic: Happen Again

Then the king of the North will come and build up siege ramps and will capture a fortified city. The forces of the South will be powerless to resist; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand. The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and will have the power to destroy it. He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make an alliance with the king of the South. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans will not succeed or help him. Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put an end to his insolence and will turn his insolence back on him. After this, he will turn back toward the fortresses of his own country but will stumble and fall, to be seen no more. Daniel 11:15-19 (NIV).

These verses are the short bridge between the time of the rise of Rome (in the 200s BC) to the time of Christ (approximately 4-2 BC). According to sites I cited last week, "the invader (who) will do as he pleases" is Rome. Even now, some 1400 years after the fall of the Roman empire, we still feel the effects of what Rome did, Rome was, Rome itself. Everything from our system of laws to the width of our roads traces back to Rome.

Everything that happened in the life of Jesus happened in the context of a Roman world. THAT is the point of the prophecy, the point of it bridging the time of the Ptolemies to the time of Jesus. Over 500 years before Christ, the angel was revealing how the world stage would be set for His arrival. In fact, not long after Daniel's life, God went silent. The time of the prophets and the time in which the Old Testament was written was closed. For over 400 years, God would be silent as Israel was brought home, occupied, then occupied again and again. All of this happened so that we could see how the prophecies about the Messiah came true in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Given that this is Advent, consider what all this means. All of ancient history was lived to reach the time of the Messiah, when God would deliver His entire people from the slavery of sin. All of history afterwards leads up to the time when God will again return, in Himself Jesus, to cleanse the world from sin itself. It happened before. It will happen again.

For further reading: Joshua 1:5, Psalm 20:4, Psalm 27:2, Psalm 37:36, Isaiah 66:19, Jeremiah 25:22, Ezekiel 26:21, Hosea 12:14, Daniel 11:20

Lord, all our history is the story of You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 8 December 2021. Today's topic: History Leads to Him

"His successor will send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor. In a few years, however, he will be destroyed, yet not in anger or in battle. Daniel 11:20 (NIV).

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/daniel-11-20.html> says that the successor mentioned here is Seleucus Philopator, who succeeded his father, Antiochus the Great, as the emperor of the Selucid Empire. He imposed heavy taxes on his people, many of whom were Jewish exiles. It was severe enough that one of those exiles murdered him (as predicted by the angel); this caused great persecution of the Jews for many years to come.

Or, as http://www.herealittletherealittle.net/index.cfm?page_name=Daniel11 states it, "Antiochus III's eldest son, Seleucus IV Philopater, took over after his father's death. Due to the heavy debt burden imposed by Rome, he was forced to seek an ambitious taxation policy on his shrunken empire. This included heavy taxation on the people of Israel. In fact, Seleucus IV even sent his treasurer, Heliodorus, to the Temple in Jerusalem to extract money. The Roman senate decided to trade hostages; therefore, they ordered Seleucus IV to send his son Demetrius, the heir to the throne, to Rome. In return, the Romans released Seleucus IV's younger brother, Antiochus IV. When released, Antiochus IV went to Athens. In 175 BCE, after Demetrius had been sent away to Rome, Seleucus IV was poisoned by his minister Heliodorus. Some historians think that Heliodorus desired the throne for himself, while others believe that Antiochus IV was behind the murder. Seleucus' young son, (another Antiochus – age 5) was put on the throne in his place. However, Heliodorus was the actual power behind the throne."

What does this mean for us? It's a reminder of a few things. One, the prophecy came true. All this is independently, historically verified. It isn't just Biblical prophecy: it's secular human history, something that can't be tarnished by even the most strident naysayers. God doesn't need that to be true, but some of we fallen people do.

Another thing is that human intrigue is nothing new. It goes back to Cain.

Last, the world of the Bible was brutal. Every age of humanity has known savagery, with autocratic government using the latest weapons and schemes to control and destroy. Yet the years of empire and conquest in the centuries immediately preceding Christ were particularly brutal, with one empire subjugating another through conquest and generational slaughter. This was coupled with new weapons and advancing tactics that made the government's targets particularly susceptible and easily controlled.

This makes it all the more amazing that the Almighty not only bequeathed prophecies to sinful and hard peoples, but that they could all come true in one and only person, Jesus Christ. Next time you read this history, remember that all of it points and leads to Him.

For further reading: Isaiah 60:17, Daniel 11:20

Lord, thank You for the history You give to us through Your holy word.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 9 December 2021. Today's topic: Brush Up Your Shakespeare

“He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue. Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed. After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power. When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses—but only for a time. Daniel 11:21-24 (NIV).

While the previous verses spoke of the brutality of the times in which Bible participants lived, they also predicted various things in the future. The verses immediately prior to these alluded to the inheritors of the Ptolemaic/Selucid thrones. What if they also prophesied something else? Indeed, verse 23 spoke of one who would send out a tax collector, but the man (the sender) would be destroyed and not in battle. What if this was speaking of the Caesars?

Brush up on your Shakespeare and you'll remember that Julius Caesar – the first of the Roman emperors – established the Roman Empire after confronting his own government, then overtaking it. He was then murdered by two of his friends. After Julius Caesar, his nephew, Octavian, hunted down the killers, then eventually turned on his comrade Mark Antony (who also then vied for the throne). Verse 24 may allude to the Battle of Actium, in which Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra (one of the last of the Ptolemaic monarchs), and solidified his hold on power. After consolidating his power, Octavian declared himself Caesar Augustus.

You know who that is. He was the same Caesar Augustus who ordered a census of his empire, during which humble Mary and Joseph went to Joseph's hometown. There, Mary gave birth to Jesus. Years later, Augustus was succeeded by Tiberius, who was indeed contemptible. It was during Tiberius' reign that Christ lived, preached, and was murdered, by Rome.

Out of all the prophecies in Daniel, this is the one that most closely prophesies Christ. When the angel says, “both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed,” perhaps he is directly referencing Jesus. <https://www.end-times-prophecy.org/daniel11-study.pdf> is a good source for this line of thinking. Daniel had no way of knowing that the angel was giving him the very conditions of a new world order as well as a direct reference to the Christ who would sacrifice Himself for all. But it's there for all to read and interpret as you will.

For further reading: Nehemiah 9:25, Isaiah 28:15, Luke 2:1, Daniel 11:25

Oh Lord, thank You for these words that describe Your holy Messiah coming to be in an unholy world.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 13 December 2021. Today's topic: No Time for Lies

“With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. Those who eat from the king’s provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle. The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time. The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country. Daniel 11:25-28 (NIV).

This is a prophecy about Rome, about what would happen with the nascent Roman empire and how it would overcome enemies. It is also a prophecy about the end of time, when Satan ascends to rule mankind and how political leaders will lie to each other while plotting against each other; that could be our time.

Let's focus in on that part: sitting at the same table and lying to each other. We just don't have time for that, my friend. We simply don't. Now, I've lied before. I've told lies and later paid the price for it; that's justice. And I'm thankful God is God and I'm not because He sustained me through the consequences of lies when most others abandoned me to my own devices. Now, far beyond those things, I'm glad to not be sitting at the table with family and friends and putting up a front, telling only half-truths, or telling outright lies with the stupid hope of looking better or being unscathed.

We simply don't have time for that kind of stupidity anymore. In reality, we never did. Lies beget more lies. Take them to their natural conclusion and they beget violence. In today's verses, that's what happened. Political intrigue entailed kings sitting together, supposedly in peace, while secretly plotting to kill each other. That still happens today. It has always happened, and until Jesus returns, it always will.

Leading up to the time of the end, it will be even worse. It will be worse than Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It will be worse than Rwanda, Cambodia, and President Xi's Uighur torture camps of our time. It will be worse than the worst you or I can imagine, and all of it will be based on lies. That's how Satan works. We don't have time for him or his lies.

For further reading: Psalm 12:2, Psalm 64:6, Jeremiah 9:5, Habakkuk 2:3, Daniel 11:29

Lord Jesus, point out my lies to me, hear my confessions, and forgive me. Help me to repair damage I cause.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 14 December 2021. Today's topic: Hold Fast

“At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant. “His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Daniel 11:29-32 (NIV).

This is a passage that was and will be fulfilled again. Years ago, after the time of Daniel, when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, he sacrificed to pagan gods on the altar of the true God. It was the abomination that causes desolation, and it permanently defiled the Temple before it was destroyed.

In the end times of this planet, another defiler will come who will cause another abomination that causes desolation to desecrate a rebuilt Jewish temple. Satan's Antichrist will mock God and deliver the ultimate insult to Him yet again. As the verses say, with flattery the Antichrist will corrupt people who will think nothing of it. After all, flattery is more effective than torture.

That isn't hard to believe in our time, you know. Think about it and it isn't really hard to believe in any time. Since the years after Noah, most of the world has rejected the God who gives life without conditions. Most of the world doesn't believe in the God of the Bible, let alone know, understand, or care to meet Him in His Son, Jesus. Most of the world willingly, willfully listens to any voice but God's, not realizing that any voice not God's is not of God.

Is it so hard to believe that an Antichrist could so easily deceive billions of people alive at that terrible time when billions of people throughout history willingly turned their ears away from God? Indeed, we lie, we cheat, we inflict pain on each other, we do the most terrible things imaginable in the name of 'freedom' or 'choice.' All the while, Satan is laughing with delight.

In the face of that, be different. Those who hold to faith in Jesus will prevail. Satan is already defeated even as he continually struggles to disprove it. When his time is finally due, he will try even harder and still will end up in final defeat. It isn't easy to resist him, but by holding fast to Christ, it also isn't as difficult as you would think.

For further reading: 1 Samuel 17:32, Job 15:13, Jeremiah 19:4, Hosea 3:4, Micah 5:7-9, Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14, Daniel 11:33

Christ, I hold fast to only You

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 15 December 2021. Today's topic: July 1914 and After

“Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time. Daniel 11:33-35 (NIV).

July 1914 must have felt like this. Or April 1861, September 1939, December 1941. I know that early September of 2001 did. Surely any time can feel like impending disaster when big events happen that cause our world to spin out of control.

It's ironic that these verses today are on our docket when they are. They foresee the original Hanukkah, the last day of which occurred just last week. My Concordia talks about how the verses foretell the time when Judah Maccabeus drove Selucid invaders out of Jerusalem; foreigners who had disrespected the Lord and defiled His temple. A miracle soon after is what is commemorated at Hanukkah.

Throughout the fighting that led to that first holiday, the men who struggled surely must have felt the fear and trepidation that comes from being part of something large whose outcome is in doubt and whose consequences seem to foretell doom. Surely those men must have felt alone, cut off from the God who had told them and their ancestors, “I am your God and you are My people. I will never leave you.”

These verses transition to the last part of the angelic prophecy in chapter 11. After this, the angel will spend the rest of the chapter talking about matters other than Selucid invasions or Maccabean revolts. Instead, he will deliver news about the antichrist: the one who will arrive at the end of time to plunder and destroy in defiance of the true and only God. Then as now, or in Daniel's day, there will be wise people who will defy him and put their full faith and confidence in Jesus, who will lead them to eternity and peace. Along the way of that faith-walk, they will be targeted, persecuted, tortured, even killed. All of it will be to strengthen their faith and strengthen their bond with Christ. Those who hold fast to Him until the end will, by God's hand, prevail.

But make no mistake: they will be times of dread, days of fear and mystery. 1914, 1861, 1939, 1941: they must have felt only a little bit of what it will be like at the end.

For further reading: Job 28:1, Psalm 78:38, Isaiah 48:10, Zechariah 13:9, Malachi 2:7, Matthew 7:15, Matthew 24:9, John 15:2, John 16:2, Romans 16:18, Hebrews 11:32-38, Daniel 11:36

Lord, I hold on to You today and always. Protect and fight for me in this world of dread fear.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 16 December 2021. Today's topic: What Awaits

"The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his ancestors or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his ancestors he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price. Daniel 11:36-39 (NIV).

These verses are about the Antichrist, the 'savior' who will represent Satan. Many in the world – indeed, most people in the world, including many Christians – will follow him, comply with his edicts, dedicate themselves to him, believe what he says about himself. Like the Antichrist they adore, they will be damned.

I'm not here to guilt you or scare you, just to tell it like it is. Imagine the worst things possible and that's what will be happening at that time. Then, worse.

So, know this: the cure for the common apocalypse is Jesus. Yes, it really is that simple. Put your full faith in Him and nobody else, not even yourself. You'll be persecuted for it, but you'll be safe where it matters most.

What can we do when the long knives appear? Pray. Seek inner peace and calm (through meditation, yoga, prayer, stress reduction). Music is a gateway to peace; fill your heart with music of peace. Fellowship with others of the same belief, and worship often. Be financially prepared to hold out until God calls. There will come a time when the rights we cherish, to worship and speak, will be erased by him who was foretold in Daniel. Your faith in Jesus will paint a target on your back. The evil one will win all battles of wits. Yet you and I can win the battle of wills by aligning our will to Christ's. Once again, doing so will ensure our safety where it matters most.

In eternity. Eternity matters most. The damned will experience eternity as well, but there will be no peace for them. Hell awaits, and God will be absent in their eternity without hope. That's what awaits Antichrist and those who follow him.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 10:17, Isaiah 10:25, Isaiah 14:13-14, Ezekiel 35:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:4, Jude 16, Revelation 13:5-6, Daniel 11:40

Lord, in the times to come, I will trust only in You. Guard and keep me, and strengthen me to stand for You against the foe.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 20 December 2021. Today's topic: Like Another Christmas

“At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Cushites in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him. Daniel 11:40-45 (NIV).

Chapter Eleven ends with an account of the battles that will occur at the end of time. It does so while being steeped in the Old Testament prophecies of those battles (and some that also happened centuries before), and how God will prevail over this temporal embodiment of evil.

That's good to remember as we start Christmas week. Yes, I mean it. During this time when we, as a world, remember the birth of the baby in Bethlehem, let's remember that his wannabe usurper awaited even then an opportunity to destroy humanity that it might injure Christ the Lord.

Don't believe me? Part of that magical Christmas story of love, peace on earth, and ultimate giving is the story of wholesale murder. With the visit of the Magi came a revelation from God, to them, to return home without visiting Herod. Herod, the Roman puppet who ruled Judea, was insanely jealous for his power. Knowing that the newborn Christ might grow to dethrone him, Herod slaughtered every boy of Jesus' age for miles around. Jesus had done nothing wrong. Those innocent babies had done anything wrong. No, Satan was at work through Herod and it brought out the worst in humanity.

Just like will happen again, in the days of the Antichrist. Antichrist will summon the best of the armies of men, all of who will turn on their better angels and rage war against the faithful to God. At the time of His choosing, Jesus will return to defeat Satan for all time and begin the timeless peace of eternity for Him. It'll be wonderful, spectacular and a celebration of Christ. Almost like another Christmas.

For further reading: 2 Chronicles 12:3, Isaiah 2:2, Isaiah 5:28, Isaiah 11:14, Isaiah 12:1, Jeremiah 48:47, Ezekiel 20:6, Ezekiel 38:4, Nahum 3:9, Malachi 3:12, Matthew 2:16-18, Daniel 12:1

Mighty Lord, thank You for this reminder of why you came at Christmas.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 21 December 2021. Today's topic: An Easter Christmas

“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. Daniel 12:1-3 (NIV).

Resurrection and judgment. At the end of time, after Satan has been defeated, the dead will be arisen and all of humanity will be judged by the Lord. Those who put their faith in Him will live eternally with Him in love, peace, and beauty. Those who did not will take the places in hell that they chose in this life. In that place there will be pain, anguish, hopelessness, and an absence of peace that has never existed in our world.

On that thought, Merry Christmas. Yes, Christmas is about resurrection and judgment. It is about how God will resurrect ALL people who have ever lived and will submit us to His perfect justice. It won't be about retribution, revenge, or punishment. Instead, it will all be about God delivering rewards that He has promised since Eden.

If you think about it, without Easter, without that resurrection, Christmas is a birthday party for just another guy. It's just a day to spend with others, enjoy holiday food, and sing some annual songs. But without the Christ, Christmas is largely meaningless. And, without that same Jesus who dies on Good Friday and rises to permanently defeat sin, Christmas would be a pathetic and useless holiday.

The infant savior born in the city of David was born for this. It was the whole mission of His life. It was His reason for incarnating among us, being Immanuel, to do what we could not. He was born to live and die and live again so that we might put all our faith in Him and live again with Him. Unless we are alive on His return, each of us will die. It is a certainty. And if we die without having believed in Him, our lives will have been lived in meaningless self-pity. There's a better way. An Easter and Christmas way. Remember that this week.

For further reading: Exodus 32:32, Psalm 56:8, Proverbs 4:18, Isaiah 6:7, Isaiah 26:19, Jeremiah 17:13, Matthew 24:21, Matthew 25:46, Mark 13:19, Luke 10:20, John 5:35, John 11:24, 1 Corinthians 15:42, Philippians 2:15, Jude 9, Revelation 16:18, Daniel 12:4

Lord, You were born on Christmas to be resurrected on Easter. It made all the difference in the world. Thank You for doing what we could not.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 22 December 2021. Today's topic: For Itching Ears

But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge." Daniel 12:4(NIV).

Know what this verse talks about? Human nature. God's angel had been sent to give Daniel unique knowledge to share with the world. But Daniel was to share it at an appropriate time: a time that wouldn't even occur in his own lifetime. Indeed, Daniel's prophecies wouldn't be shared until several centuries after his death (but before the time of Christ). His book has since been corroborated by the events of antiquity as well as sources such as (several of) the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Many will go here and there to increase knowledge. Hey, if it's on the internet, it must be true, right? We can't agree on many things these days. It seems as if, the more information we have at our disposal, the less we can agree on even simple matters. Throw social media into the mix and agreement becomes even more unattainable, especially when our media, our government, even our friendships have all been affected or, in some cases, been rendered untrustworthy. Is it any wonder, then, that people don't trust what they read or see? Accordingly, is it any wonder that people will seek out their own answers?

The trouble comes up when we don't seek our answers in good places. I just read a book about Charles Manson. It was shocking to read how this evil, diabolical man was able to so quickly, so effectively, draw in lonely, hurting, and confused people and sway them to do his bidding. Charlie made his followers believe he had the answers they sought, and their disaffected ears were more than willing to listen.

We aren't much different. What about a resurgence of faith in communism, ignoring how it's responsible for untold death? Or the long-term lethality of drugs? How divorce destroys while forgiveness heals, yet most marriages choose divorce? People of our world want answers but are we looking for them in the right places? Itching ears ache to hear a pleasing sound.

At this Christmas season, wouldn't it be a Christmas miracle to be able to give the hurting, the uninformed, the dejected, the rejected, something better to hear? What difference could it have made if someone had made a Jesus-connection with the Manson family to draw them away from the lunatic they followed? How could we help our own generations avoid coming pain by shying away from mistakes of the past?

Tell them about the Christ child. Tell them about the Christmas boy who grew into the man who ran to the cross and die for them. Tell it without words, even. Human nature craves it.

For further reading: Isaiah 8:16, Jeremiah 5:1, Revelation 22:10, Daniel 12:5

Lord Jesus, use my words and actions today to reach out with Your message.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 23 December 2021. Today's topic: Ask the Father

Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." Daniel 12:5-7 (NIV).

Let's say this now: nobody except God the Father knows when the end of time will occur. The pope doesn't know. Joel Osteen doesn't know. The heads of all the denominations in protestant Christendom don't know. Nobody here on Terra Firma knows; only God the Father, not even His Spirit or His Son. When will it happen? When God the Father wants it to.

Still, these verses illuminate the end of time. In Daniel's vision, Many people believe that Revelation 10 and 11 explain Daniel 12; see <https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/understanding-the-book-of-daniel/daniel-12/> and <https://daniel11truth.com/daniel-12.htm> for easy to follow interpretations.

In short, Daniel is back at the river, where he stood several chapters before. He sees two 'men,' who are likely angels; they are discussing the vision. The man clothed in linen – possibly Jesus – says that the time it will take to fulfill Daniel's visions, once they are set in motion, will be "a time, times, and half a time." This means three and a half years. When will that start? Ask God the Father.

Per daniel11truth.com, the "holy people" whose power will be broken are two divine witnesses who will appear at the end of time to speak against Antichrist and his actions. Many people believe these will be Moses and Elijah, brought back to witness for God. Or perhaps Enoch and Elijah (<https://www.gotquestions.org/two-witnesses.html>). In reality, we don't know; what's more, we don't need to know. They will witness God's judgment and mercy to an unbelieving world until they are murdered by Antichrist.

What can you or I do about this? Not much, except everything. Believing is everything. God creates miracles every day. We're in the middle of celebrating Christmas, one of the best miracles of all. Jesus came at Christmas so that we might put our faith in Him and live with Him forever. Knowing our lives are secure in Him, it doesn't really matter what happens at a time that nobody here can predict. Or with an antichrist who's already going to hell. What matters is Jesus. All eyes on Him. Ask the Father about the rest.

For further reading: Genesis 14:22, Ezekiel 9:2, Luke 21:24, Matthew 24:36, Revelation 10:5-7, Revelation 11:2, Daniel 12:8

Lord Jesus, I believe only in You.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 27 December 2021. Today's topic: I Don't Understand

I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be? Daniel 12:8 (NIV).

This one verse sums up all mankind since Eden. We don't know; we don't understand. All the colleges, all the elites and self-proclaimed experts, and the entire internet, and every book ever written fail to fully explain the meaning of God. Indeed, the more I live here on the Third Rock, the more I wonder if some of our quest for knowledge isn't just another kind of idolatry; another way to say, "I know better," to God.

Daniel was genuinely perplexed by all he had seen. At this time, he was an old man, nearing the end of a long and adventurous life. Now, he had been given this set of visions showing things that would happen in the future...and then he was told to keep them a secret until a later time: a time that would happen after he had died. Thus, when Daniel said he didn't understand, then asked what the outcome of these things would be, he wasn't being coy, or arrogant, or cagey about his words. He was perplexed. He truly didn't understand.

What Daniel DID do then was trust God. God had prospered him during the Babylonian exile. He had used Daniel to discern visions to kings, to administer justice to God's exiled people, and to record prophecies that would help all of mankind navigate in faith when the end of the world arrived. God had never given Daniel the hint of any reason to question or not trust him...so Daniel trusted. Because Daniel trusted, he could speak with the Lord's angel in honesty. Daniel didn't question God or try to puff himself up. Instead, he simply accepted what God said would happen even if he didn't immediately "get it."

He didn't launch a blue-ribbon commission. He didn't go to social media. He didn't write a blog, research a new book, author a treatise or dissertation. He didn't seek advice from academia or the "experts" who say they know better. Daniel simply trusted what God said but spoke up when he didn't understand it. In his honesty, Daniel foreshadowed the virgin Mary, who professed not understanding the (possibly same) angel's words of how a virgin would birth the Savior

Let's be fair: some things aren't easy to understand. Why must we die? How is it right that society obsesses about celebrities but ignores the homeless on the street? Why is there always a let-down after Christmas? Why is there a football team in Jacksonville? Why, why, why? It's ok to say we don't understand. It's never ok to use that as a pretext to reject the Lord or what He says.

For further reading: Luke 1:34, Daniel 12:9

Lord, there are many things I don't understand. But You do. I trust You for the answers You give.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 28 December 2021. Today's topic: Begins and Ends in Faith

He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. Daniel 12:9-10 (NIV).

Who is wise? The wisest man who ever lived was Solomon, and that's because he specifically asked God to bless him with wisdom (when he could have asked for anything else). Dr. Fauci doesn't seem wise. Neither do the talking heads on TV or in our political parties. Or on the internet. Pope Francis seems like a wise man, even with certain failings; we all have them. Billy Graham seemed like a wise man; ditto Norman Vincent Peale, C. S. Lewis, my grandpa Julius, and a hundred other people who'll come to mind if you give me a few minutes to think about it.

Who is wise and what makes wisdom?

No, it isn't academic degrees. My parents practically worshipped knowledge, and both my sister and I are college-educated with multiple degrees. But college doesn't make you wise. Indeed, most colleges today disparage anything Biblical, especially, it seems, colleges like Harvard, Yale, and the other Ivies that were originally chartered as Christian institutions.

Experience helps make someone wise, but that's not all of it.

What about me? Am I wise? I'm very interested in apologetics. Ten-plus years of these blog posts seems to be proof of that. I really enjoy studying the Bible and looking for how it plays out in our lives, how God speaks to us daily through these timeless verses, and what we can do to better live them out. It's a great thing, but my interest (or even just study) doesn't make me wise. Indeed, many people would insist (and maybe rightly so) that I'm not very wise at all. So, what makes people wise?

Isaiah 29 brings up a very good point: if someone doesn't know how to read, or even interpret scripture, then the scripture is sealed. If Scriptures can't be understood because they can't be read, then they can't be comprehended. More and more this is becoming the case. When study or use of Scripture is taken out of the public domain, as it has been in our civic and public school lives, understanding of it is removed as well. By their own choice, most people willingly fail to understand God's word in their lives because it is sealed off by their own willful ignorance.

What makes us wise? You know the answer. Wisdom begins and ends with faith in God alone. Only in faith – like Daniel had – can we understand what God reveals to us.

For further reading: Isaiah 29:11, Daniel 12:11

Lord, open my mind to understanding Your Word. Let me understand what You speak to me so that I might share it in Your world.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 29 December 2021. Today's topic: What We Do Know

"From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. Daniel 12:11-12 (NIV).

Before Daniel's account concludes, the angel drops a nugget of prophecy and people have been debating it ever since. In my opinion, the best way to interpret this (seemingly) specific prophecy is "it'll happen when God says it'll happen."

A few days back we discussed how only God the Father knows the day and hour when He will end this Earth. And, all through these discussions about end-times prophecy, we've discussed how the best approach to implementing these prophecies is to be ready any time. It's all well and good to try to understand specifics of dates and times, but those really aren't for us to know. It's moot when you can't know anyway.

A better way is to assume God could end the world today, right now. We should live our lives in faith right now, every day, every minute, knowing that this could be the last. That isn't a charge to get hog-wild. Instead, it's a challenge to live life fully in faith in Jesus, freeing ourselves from the burdens of guilt, anguish, self-pity, and the other sins. Then and only then, can we understand what liberty really means. Only when we stop living for self and start living for Him – and thus others – can we be ready to meet Him at any time.

These verses refer to "the abomination that causes desolation." We've discussed this already here in Daniel. To refresh, this prophecy was fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. The prophecy was also invoked by Christ (recorded in Matthew and Mark), who referred to it in the context of something that occurs in the end times, when Antichrist will desecrate the temple again. Whether that means another Jewish Temple (as many believe) or somehow desecrating the church as a body of believers, we just don't know.

What we do know is that we should be ready for it when it happens. Like I said, God could end the world at any time; only the Father knows when it'll happen. We should wisely pay attention to the world around us, recognizing things that may fulfill prophecy as ways to prepare ourselves to endure persecution and stay true to the faith. But, again, when it happens is known only to the Father. Whatever happens when "the abomination that causes desolation" occurs will be bad. It will, however, be meaningless compared to the power of abiding faith in Christ.

For further reading: Exodus 29:38, Isaiah 30:18, Ezekiel 4:5-6, Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14, Revelation 11:2, Daniel 12:13

Lord, I put all my faith in You alone. Prepare me to face the end holding on to this faith.

Practical Proverbial, from Daniel, 30 December 2021. Today's topic: After the End

As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." Daniel 12:13 (NIV).

In concluding his book, Daniel records that the angel told him he would die. Gee, what a happy ending! He would die, then receive his inheritance. So it is with all who 'fall asleep' in the Lord. We die, we join eternity, then enter the place Jesus has prepared for us.

Here in Texas, in an unusual move, I've already taken down most of our Christmas decorations. Lights are down and put away. Inside things are put away. Even the tree is bare, and it'll be put away after New Year's. It's sad to see the lights taken down, and to see how bare the house looks again.

Every time I put away the yearly decorations, I think of my Mom. Mom taught me to wrap all the ornaments individually, and to group them by their kind in bins and trunks. She did this for years and was able to keep ornaments safe to use over and over, sometimes for many decades. I have many of her ornaments now, and some of them go back to the 1950s; some of my cookie cutters are even older. As of today, nearly all of them are safely wrapped, boxed, and securely stored until next year when we'll see them anew, once again.

As I was putting away things, I thought about Mom, and about Daniel. My time in writing about Daniel's book is ending. Mom's life here ended seven years ago. But in a bigger sense, they're still very much alive, in heaven; perhaps they've met by now. Daniel lived 2500 years ago, and we're still waiting today for some of the things he prophesied to come true. My Mom started collecting Christmas decorations nearly 70 years ago, and my family is still enjoying many of them today. What we do today impacts so many others for untold years to come.

Which is why, after reading all these things, if you haven't talked with Jesus lately, how about you use this New Year's celebration to do so? All things here eventually end before beginning something new. To begin anew with Jesus means putting faith in Him, then spending eternity on an adventure of wonders that will never end. Eternity without Christ, however, will be too terrible to contemplate. That's one reason Daniel wrote his book.

I'm so thankful you read these. Now I'm hoping you take that next step and get to know Christ better on your own. One day, we'll meet him in person. And Daniel and my Mom as well...after the end.

For further reading: Psalm 16:5, Isaiah 57:2, Matthew 10:22, John 14:1-3, James 1:12, Revelation 14:13, Galatians 1:1

Lord, thank You for the blessings of Your word, for Christmas, for Mom, for everything.