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Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

Nebuchadnezzar's Madness and Restoration (Daniel 4)

March 1-3

Chapter 4 of Daniel is a most remarkable section of the Bible in that much of it consists of Nebuchadnezzar's own words. Some historians have questioned the authorship, claiming that there is nothing else in Babylonian records to confirm such an incident. They also dispute the king having used such words, as they would have been unacceptable to the Babylonian people who worshiped him as a god. Some who dispute the authorship claim that Daniel probably wrote it. Yet while Daniel could have drafted the declaration just as speechwriters do for today's leaders, the Bible specifically states that it was the word of Nebuchadnezzar.

The declaration comes at the end of an eight-year episode—the dream with its interpretation (verses 4-27), a year of delay or probation (verses 28-29) and the seven-“time” (i.e., seven-year) affliction (verses 25, 30-37; compare Daniel 7:25, where a “time” equals a year, as we will later examine). “The story is set in a time of relative peace after Nebuchadnezzar's major conquests and massive building projects. It best fits after the fall of Jerusalem, during the lengthy siege of Tyre when Babylon launched no other major military operation. Not unexpectedly no record of a lengthy madness has been found in the royal archives, but it could have occurred any time between 582 and 573 B.C.” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, note on verse 4). This would put Nebuchadnezzar's second dream about 23-24 years from the time of Daniel's captivity in 605 B.C.

The prophet has been serving in a high capacity in the empire for more than two decades. At the beginning of that period the king had the miraculous experience of his first dream and its interpretation. More recently, he witnessed the amazing episode of Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace. And yet Nebuchadnezzar, while recognizing the Hebrew God as a powerful deity, does not recognize Him as the true and only God. He says Daniel is called Belteshazzar “according to the name of my god” (verse 8)—his god being Bel-Marduk. And where the NKJV has “Spirit of the Holy God,” it is better rendered “spirit of the holy gods.” Nebuchadnezzar saw that “in contrast to the other soothsayers in his court, Daniel was truly inspired by God (or the gods): ‘The spirit of the holy gods is in him.’ (That this *elahin*, {‘gods’} is meant as a true plural—rather than a plural of majesty—is shown by the plural form of the adjective *qaddisin* accompanying it.)” (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 8). It should be noted that such language in the declaration does not necessarily mean that the king still thought in these terms after the whole affair was concluded. It may be that he was simply describing the way he understood things at the time of his dream—and that Bel *had been* his god. (Yet it could also be that He merely came to see and acknowledge the God of Israel as the “Most High” while still believing in and even worshiping lesser gods.)

The dream starts with a huge tree that grows to reach the ends of the earth. The magicians and others either can't or won't interpret the dream. Perhaps they can—the symbolism not being unique—but they are fearful of being the bearers of bad news to the king. So the king calls on the prophet of God. Yet “interpreting the dream was no easy assignment for Daniel. He well knew what the dream meant but could hardly bring himself to reveal it to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's loyalty to him—whom he had served so long and well and who had always shown Daniel kindness, even when Judah was being deported from her land of promise—was genuine. His sympathy for Nebuchadnezzar caused Daniel to shrink from announcing the king's coming degradation. It was a while before he could bring himself to speak (the Aramaic literally says, ‘He was stupified for one hour’—but the word for ‘hour’ {*saah*} does not necessarily mean anything more definite than ‘a time’). At the king's insistence, however, Daniel finally began to speak” (*Expositor's*, note on verse 19a).

Daniel explains that the tree is Nebuchadnezzar, who will be figuratively cut down to live like a wild animal for seven “times” or years unless he repents. While Nebuchadnezzar has provided food, shelter and comfort for his empire, like many dictators his sins include oppression of his people (verse 27). The Bible doesn't make clear why there was a delay, but it is another year before he loses his sanity (see verse 29). Perhaps this was to allow the king time to repent prior to the punishment. Whether the king made any needed reforms in his attitude or behavior is not revealed. But, in any case, his overall problem clearly remained—his supreme arrogance with regard to his own power and prestige. As Nebuchadnezzar walked on the roof of his palace, he boasted, “Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

(verse 30, NIV). Here was evidence from his own mouth that he had not been humbled by his dream's revelation and warning. Possibly his pride had even grown.

The king had "made Babylon the greatest city of the world, the 'queen of Asia.' [The Greek historian] Herodotus, who saw it one and a half centuries later, declared that there was no other city which could be compared with it. Babylon was built on a plain, on either side of the Euphrates, and had two surrounding walls. The outer wall, which went around the whole city, made a square" (Charles Seignobos, *The World of Babylon*, 1975, p. 69).

Historian Walter Kaiser Jr. writes: "It was a huge square, 480 stadia (55 1/4 miles) in circumference [making it nearly 2/3 the area of New York City], surrounded by a series of walls that made it virtually impregnable. Robert Koldewey, who excavated Babylon for eighteen years, verified how security-conscious Nebuchadnezzar was. The city walls were surrounded, according to Koldewey, with a brick wall 22 1/3 feet thick, with a space outside that wall some 38 1/3 feet wide, then another brick wall 25 feet thick. In the event that this outer wall was breached, the invader would be trapped between two walls. Inside the inner wall was another wall 12 feet thick. Every 160 feet the walls were topped by watchtowers, 360 towers in all, reaching the height probably of some 90 feet, not 300 feet mentioned by Herodotus, and wide enough to accommodate two chariots riding side by side...."

"He also constructed the city gates of cedar wood covered with strips of bronze. Numerous gates...were installed in the walls. The most famous of these, the Ishtar Gate [now on display in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin], was fifteen feet wide and its arched passage way was thirty-five feet above the level of the street. This gate led directly into the Processional Way, which was used primarily for the great annual New Year's Festival. The pavement was 73 1/2 feet wide and was lined with a series of 120 lions in enameled relief at 64-foot intervals.

"Along this Processional Way was the famous ziggurat or staged tower known as E-temen-anki, 'The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth,' which rose 300 feet high and could be seen for miles around the city. It is estimated that some 58,000,000 bricks were used in the construction of this ziggurat. Atop this seven-staged or terraced tower was a temple of Marduk, the god of Babylon...."

"On a mound called Kasr, Nebuchadnezzar built one of his most impressive palaces. Its walls were made of yellow brick and the floors were of white and mottled sandstone. Near this palace were the famed hanging gardens, considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World...."

"Babylon was a marvel of city planning. It was laid out in rectangles with wide roads named after the gods of Babylon. A bridge connected the eastern or new city with the western city across the river that flowed through the city. It had stone piers on both shores some 600 feet across the river, with a wooden footpath thirty feet wide that reached from shore to shore. The dwellings of the city often reached three or four stories high with the familiar eastern central courtyard" (*A History of Israel*, 1988, pp. 415-416).

Yes, Nebuchadnezzar had accomplished great things—but it is God who decides who will rule nations. All the amassed wealth and power of human beings eventually count for nothing (verse 35). The mighty king of Babylon is at last brought to this humbling realization.

It is interesting to note that throughout the seven-year exile, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is protected and is ready and waiting for his restored leadership when God heals him. Surely many officials in this large kingdom had greedy ambition, so it seems evident that it was God's intervention that secured the kingdom for him.

Some historians have compared Nebuchadnezzar's insanity to the story of the later Babylonian emperor Nabonidus, some even claiming the story in Daniel is misattributed, but there are significant differences. "Some scholars have proposed the thesis that the story of Nebuchadnezzar's madness in the book of Daniel is a distorted reflection of Nabonidus's exile in Arabia. It is now clear from the new Haran inscriptions that Nabonidus was in exile for ten years and not for seven as had been thought previously (Daniel 4:32 speaks of 'seven times'). Among other objections to this theory is the fact that this interpretation was based on Sidney Smith's rendering of a line in the Persian Verse Account, which is no longer tenable. Nabonidus's behavior may seem erratic but he was not mad. Unfortunately we have few details about the last thirty years of Nebuchadnezzar's life. He died soon after October 562 and was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach" (Edwin Yamauchi, *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, 1983, p. 334).

One other point that should be made in regard to this section is the possibility of duality in the prophetic dream. A king and his kingdom are often interchangeable in Bible prophecy. Indeed, that is clear from the previous dream of Nebuchadnezzar. The tree of the present dream may represent not only Nebuchadnezzar but the Babylonian Empire as well. Babylon fell in 539 B.C., but we know from

the book of Revelation that it is to experience an end-time revival as a powerful European empire dominated by a great false Christian system referred to in Revelation 17 as “Babylon the Great.” Indeed, as the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 13 explained, the ancient Chaldeans and Babylonians eventually relocated to southern Europe. In essence, the “roots” of the tree remained to sprout anew in the future. Considering this, it has been proposed that the “seven times” could be viewed as seven 360-day prophetic years. The prophetic “day-for-a-year” principle (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6) yields 2,520 years (i.e., 360 x 7)—perhaps stretching from the fall of ancient Babylon to the beginnings of its revival in modern times. While we can’t be certain, this does seem possible—particularly as there may be a parallel to this figure of 2,520 in the mysterious inscription of Daniel 5, as we will later examine.

Egypt Will Fall to Babylonian Conquest (Ezekiel 29:17–30:19)

March 4-6

In the spring of 571 B.C., two years after Ezekiel’s vision of the temple, the prophet receives one more dated prophecy. Jeremiah has already been taken to Egypt by the remnant of Judah, against his warnings from God. He prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would take Egypt (Jeremiah 43:10-13; 44:30). Ezekiel, too, has already received a series of prophecies about the coming fall of Egypt to the Babylonians (see the other prophecies of Ezekiel 29–32). God now gives Ezekiel two more prophetic messages concerning Egypt, which the prophet includes with the section of his book dealing with that nation.

Ezekiel is told that God will give Egypt into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand, as “payment” for the work the ruler of Babylon unwittingly performed on God’s behalf, especially against Tyre (Ezekiel 29:18-20). “As a fulfillment of God’s judgment on Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army laid siege to Tyre for thirteen years (cf. Jos[ephus] *Antiquities of the Jews* X, 228 {xi.1}). The scant historical data indicates that Egypt and Tyre became allies under Pharaoh Hophra (Apries). The extended siege of Tyre was perhaps due to the aid Tyre received from the Egyptians. In such an act Hophra was going contrary to God’s purposes. Not only was the siege prolonged by Egyptian support, but some also surmise that Egypt’s maritime aid enabled Tyre to send away her wealth for security during the siege” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on Ezekiel 29:17-21).

As you may recall from our reading of Ezekiel 26 and the prophecies against Tyre, in spite of 13 years of siege, Nebuchadnezzar failed to capture the island fortress and its store of wealth. God says here that He will give him Egypt to make up for it.

The meaning of Ezekiel 29:21, in which God says He “will cause the horn of the house of Israel to spring forth,” is uncertain. Given in the same context as the opening of Ezekiel’s mouth, it is usually interpreted to mean that the Jewish exiles would be strengthened or encouraged at the time of Egypt’s fall to Babylon along with further encouraging messages from the prophet that are unrecorded. Yet given the duality in these prophetic sections concerning Egypt, verse 21 could perhaps refer to a strengthened end-time Israel finally receiving Ezekiel’s prophecies. Yet there is another possibility. While the horn can symbolize national strength or power, it can also represent the power *center* of a nation—its ruler. Consider that it was during the period of Egypt’s ancient destruction that Jeremiah oversaw the transfer of the throne of David from Judah to the house of Israel in the British Isles (see *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future* at www.ucg.org/brp/materials/index.htm). This seems a likely fulfillment of this verse.

Ezekiel then receives another prophecy from God in the first part of chapter 30—the last recorded message in the book. Ezekiel 30:2-3 mentions the “day of the LORD” in wording very similar to Joel 2:1-2. In this case, he describes the day as it will be from Egypt’s perspective, but the wording—fire and desolation—is quite similar (compare Ezekiel 30:7-8; Joel 2:3). However, the imagery need not exclusively apply to the end time. As *Expositor’s* notes: “*yom laYHWH* (‘a day of the LORD’) is not a construct state and therefore is not properly translated ‘the day of the LORD’ [but], literally, ‘a day {belonging} to the LORD.’ The word *yom* (‘day’) is indefinite twice in this verse. Those who see the ‘day of the Lord’ here as an earnest of the eschatological [i.e., end-time] Day of the Lord (cf. Joel), keeping it as a technical expression, generally link together the near and distant future into a singular meaning with multiple fulfillments” (footnote on Ezekiel 30:3). This seems reasonable—that the ancient time of divine intervention was intended by the passage as well as, in type, the end-time intervention yet to come.

Verse 5 mentions other doomed lands in alliance with Egypt. Where the New King James Version has “all the mingled people,” the New International Version has “all Arabia.” *Expositor’s* explains: “The translation ‘Arabia’ is based on a revocalization of *ha`erebh* (‘Arabia’) to *`arabh* (‘Arabia’) with the Syrian. However, some prefer to read *ereb* (‘mixed company’) since the term is

modified by *kal* ('all').... The exact meaning is still unclear" (footnote on verse 5). The identity of "Chub" or Kub is also unclear. Some have proposed the Cobii (or Cubians), a people of the Egyptian province of Mareotis in the western Nile Delta mentioned by the ancient Greek geographer Ptolemy (see *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, note on verse 5; *Adam Clarke's Commentary*, note on verse 5).

Nebuchadnezzar evidently laid waste the entire country of Egypt. "Migdol to Syene" (verse 6)—that is, Suez to Aswan—denotes, as it did in 29:10, the whole land from north to south. We read about Noph, Pathros and Tehaphnehes (Tahpanhes) in connection with Jeremiah's journey to Egypt in Jeremiah 43-44. Noph (Memphis), Zoan (Tanis), Sin (Pelusium), Aven (On or Heliopolis), Pi Beseth (Bubastis) and Tehaphnehes (Daphne) were in the northern Nile Delta region of Egypt. No (Thebes), Pathros (southern Egypt) and Syene (Aswan) were all in the south.

However, this could also refer to destruction meted out over time—by Nebuchadnezzar yes, but also by later invaders. Notice the prophecy of verse 13: "There shall no longer be princes from the land of Egypt." This has been understood to mean that the rulers of Egypt would no longer be native Egyptian. Under Babylonian rule, the pharaoh was subject to the Babylonian emperor. Yet, although a vassal, the pharaoh did rule as king and was Egyptian. This changed after the invasion by the Persian emperor Cambyses II, son of Cyrus the Great. "When the last Egyptian king was defeated by Cambyses II in 525 BC, the country entered a period of Persian domination under the 27th Dynasty. Egypt reasserted its independence under the 28th and 29th dynasties, but the 30th Dynasty was the last one of native rulers" (<http://www.emayzine.com/lectures/egyptciv.html>). At the time of Alexander the Great, Egypt came under Greek rule, which was perpetuated through the dynasty of Alexander's general Ptolemy. This reign was broken when, following in the tradition of the earlier northern empires, the Romans later invaded and took over Egypt as well.

Perhaps a similar measure of destruction will come in the last days when the ruler of end-time Babylon, the future Roman emperor and "king of the North," invades and assumes control of Egypt, as described in Daniel 11:40-43.

"By the Waters of Babylon" (Psalm 137)

March 7-9

Psalm 137, which is not attributed to a particular author, appears to have been composed during the Babylonian exile. Even if it was written afterward, it nonetheless sums up the feelings of many of the Jews in captivity. It is a deeply mournful song, full of longing for their homeland, where they had some semblance of contact with God through His holy city and temple. Now they are far away, adrift, without mooring. They could no longer sing the joyful songs of past days. They "hung up their harps" on the trees—that is, they put away their musical instruments.

The Babylonians, however, asked for some music. While they may have actually wanted to hear some rousing hymns from the famed Jerusalem temple, it is also possible that this was simply a taunt—as in, "Let's hear some victory songs now...ha, ha." Whatever the case, in reflecting on the psalms of past days, recalling the former glory of their nation, all the Jews could do was sit by the great rivers of Babylon and weep. "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" they groaned (verse 4). How could they sing praises to God for His help and deliverance against enemies when their nation and temple lay in ruins and they themselves were captives? Would not this just be something more for their captors to mock at? And were they, unclean sinners banished from God's land, even worthy to sing His songs?

In any case, the psalmist, speaking for the nation, resolves to keep Jerusalem in the forefront of his mind—to never forget and to never cease hoping for restoration. Were the harps retrieved from where they were hung to sing at least this particular song? There is, of course, no way to know. But the sentiment was surely widespread.

In thinking of what had befallen their homeland, the utter horror and misery of what had occurred, there was no way to avoid recalling those who had carried out the destruction—the Babylonians. Moreover, they were urged on by the longtime foe of God's people, Edom. A special plea is made to God in verse 7 to keep in mind Edom's cruel enmity. And a pronouncement is then made against the Babylonians—that God will bring back on their heads what they have done to the Jews. It may well be that when the Babylonians asked for a song of Zion from the exiles, this very one was composed in response. It would have served as a rather shocking rebuke against any mocking and ridicule.

Today many grimace at the ending of this psalm, wondering how it squares with God's loving character. This is due to a misunderstanding of the wording here and of God's plan in general. First of all, the "one" who is "happy" at destroying the Babylonians in verses 8-9 is not specifically declared

to be God. It may simply mean the national power that would later overthrow Babylon—the Persian Empire. The verses would then seem to constitute a prophetic declaration rather than an appeal. In fact, it seems likely that there is even a dual prophetic application here—to ancient Babylon as well as its *end-time* counterpart, the phrase “*daughter of Babylon*” perhaps hinting at this. Edom and Babylon will both play similar roles in the overthrow of Israel and Judah in the last days—and they will both suffer subsequent destruction themselves as repayment.

Of course, it is entirely possible that God *is* meant as the one repaying Babylon with destruction. If so, His being “happy” at doing so would not mean He sadistically relishes punishing human beings. The terminology in that case would have to be understood as His receiving “satisfaction” in a legal sense—that is, God’s righteous *justice* being satisfied through just recompense. Babylon’s “little ones” or “children,” who are to be dashed against the rock, would in this case most likely mean Babylon’s citizenry in general (the city or empire being portrayed as a woman, as already noted).

Moreover, being dashed against a rock is likely a figurative, rather than literal, expression denoting destruction. As the book *Hard Sayings of the Bible* notes on these verses, “One thing Babylon was devoid of was rocks or rocky cliffs against which anything could be dashed. In fact there were not any stones available for building, contrary to the rocky terrain of most of Palestine. All building had to depend on the production of sun-dried mud bricks and the use of bituminous pitch for mortar. Therefore when the psalmist speaks of ‘dashing...against the rocks,’ he is speaking figuratively and metaphorically” (Walter Kaiser Jr., Peter Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred Brauch, 1996, pp. 281-282).

Interestingly, “the verb [translated “dashes”] in its Greek form is found only in Psalm 137:9 (in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text) and in the lament of our Lord over Jerusalem in Luke 19:44” (p. 281). In this verse Christ speaks to Jerusalem as if she is a mother, saying, “They [enemies] will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls.” Again, children appear to denote the citizenry in general.

Of course, infants would die too—in both Babylon and Jerusalem. Yet all, children as well as adults, will be raised in the second resurrection to be taught God’s ways and given the opportunity for lasting repentance, as explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Ezekiel 37. Indeed, repentance and conformity with His will, resulting in great blessing, is what God desires—what makes Him truly happy. He assures us in other scriptures that He takes no pleasure in punishing people for sin, but that they would turn and live. This passage is no exception.

Jeconiah’s Release From Prison (2 Kings 25:27-30; Jeremiah 52:31-34) March 10-12

Jeconiah, known also as Jehoiachin, was just 18 when he reigned over Judah for a mere three months. Nebuchadnezzar had carried the young man away to Babylon where he remained imprisoned for 37 long years—until he was 55! Now Nebuchadnezzar was dead and a new emperor sat on the Babylonian throne. Evil Merodach (or Ewil Merodak) “is a transliteration of the Assyro-Babylonian Amel (‘man of’)—Marduk [the chief god of Babylon]. He was Nebuchadnezzar’s son, who reigned from 562 B.C. to 560 B.C.” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, footnote on Jeremiah 52:31). Readers should ignore the similarity between the way his name is written and the English word “evil,” as there is no relation whatsoever.

“Jewish tradition claims Evil-Merodach was imprisoned by his father for some action in the government during a period of Nebuchadnezzar’s indisposition. While in prison, Evil-Merodach became a friend of Jehoiachin. On his accession to the throne, Evil-Merodach released Jehoiachin and gave him a prominent place at the royal table.... [While it may be true, it should be recognized that] the tradition has marks of an ad hoc explanation” (same footnote).

As noted previously in the Bible Reading Program, Jeconiah’s continued provisions are confirmed by archaeology. “Tablets from the reign of Nabonidus (555-539 B.C.) record the daily rations of Jehoiachin who is called ‘Yaukin, king of the land of Yehud {Judah}’” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 2 Kings 25:27). Jeconiah’s descendants were barred from the Davidic throne (see Jeremiah 22:30). Nevertheless, they would play important roles in the future—his descendant Zerubbabel serving as governor of Judea at the time of the Jewish return from exile and his later descendant Joseph being the adoptive father of Jesus Christ—and Joseph’s sons being the apostles James and Jude, half-brothers of Jesus.

With the kind treatment shown to Jeconiah, the books of Kings and Jeremiah conclude with a ray of hope—as Jeconiah’s situation was typical of his nation. He was imprisoned for a long time, losing many unrecoverable years due to sin, yet eventually he was freed and treated like royalty. So it would be with the entire Jewish nation—and of all Israel in the future.

Four Beasts From the Sea (Daniel 7)**March 13-16**

The first six chapters of Daniel's book concern events and episodes in his and his companions' lives. The last six relate a series of visions the prophet experienced—all of which came late in his life. For the sake of chronological flow, we are skipping over the events of chapters 5 and 6 and reading chapter 7, which contains the first of these visions.

The date is “the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon” (verse 1). Evil Merodach, who assumed the Babylonian throne upon his father Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 B.C. and then released the Jewish king Jeconiah from prison, reigned only a very short time. “In 560 he was assassinated by Neriglissar, his sister's husband.... His tenure was [also] brief however (560-556). [Then] his young son Laba_i-Marduk, who succeeded him...reigned only one month [before] he was beaten to death” (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 476).

“This revolt placed its leader Nabonidus...on the throne. He does not seem to have been related to the royal house by blood but [as we will later see] apparently married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar...[possibly using this fact] to legitimize his seizure of the throne. He may have been a member of the wealthy merchant class, therefore being cordially supported by the commercial leaders” (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on Daniel 5:1-4).

In any case, as the neighboring Median Empire grew in strength, Nabonidus was beset with political confrontation at home over religious disputes with the Babylonian religious hierarchy. He may also have suffered from health problems and seems to have become more interested in scholarly pursuits than in administration. Whatever the reason, “the situation became so uncomfortable for Nabonidus that in his sixth year (550) he went into a ten-year self-imposed exile at Tema, the great oasis of the Syro-Arabian desert east of the Red Sea. Nabonidus did not abdicate by any means, however, but left the everyday affairs of government in the hands of his son Bel_ar-usur (= Belshazzar)” (Merrill, p. 477).

The Nelson Study Bible notes: “The date of Belshazzar's first year cannot be stated precisely. However, since Nabonidus appears to have spent at least ten years in Arabia and since Belshazzar reigned for Nabonidus in Babylon during that time, a date of 550 B.C. for Belshazzar's first year cannot be far off. This date coincides with the inauguration of the Medo-Persian Empire under Cyrus [when the Persians took over from the Medes], an occasion that may have prompted Daniel's vision” (note on verse 1)—that is, this signal event may have been the reason God gave Daniel the vision at this particular time.

Daniel had been taken captive 55 years before, so he was now in his early 70s. When the prophet received the interpretation of his current vision from one of God's angels, he must have recalled the explanation he gave to Nebuchadnezzar of his vision in Daniel 2 more than half a century earlier. Remember from that passage that the king had dreamt of a giant human image with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze and legs of iron. A great stone fell from heaven, struck the image on its feet and toes, causing the entire image to disintegrate, and then grew to fill the whole earth.

The four parts of the image represented a succession of four great imperial kingdoms: 1) the Neo-Babylonian Chaldean Empire of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors; 2) the Medo-Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great and his successors; 3) the Hellenistic Greco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great and his successors; and 4) the Roman Empire. The stone from heaven is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who takes over and sets up a world-ruling fifth kingdom, the Kingdom of God. The 10 toes of the legs of the image, extensions of the Roman Empire, are described as rulers who exist at the time of Christ's coming in power and glory—showing that the Roman Empire continues on in some form until the end time (as the Roman imperial system has been revived numerous times, the final revival to appear on the scene shortly before Christ's return).

Just the same, the four beasts of Daniel's vision represent four kings (7:17) or the kingdoms they represent (see verse 23). And like that of Daniel 2, this vision culminates with the time when “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom, even forever and ever” (7:18). Clearly the same succession of kingdoms is meant, and a more detailed look makes this even more obvious.

The beasts of Daniel 7 arise from the churning sea. Isaiah 57:20 states, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” Basically that would signify humanity in general. An even more direct parallel can be found in Revelation 13, where a “beast” comprising elements of those in Daniel 7 is described in vision as arising from the sea. And in another prophecy of the beast in Revelation 17, the waters of the sea represent “peoples, multitudes,

nations, and tongues” (verse 15). So it would appear that each of these beasts arises from a conglomerate of various nations and peoples. Again, a succession of great gentile empires is intended.

Regarding the first beast Daniel sees, corresponding to the head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* states: “The first of these beasts is a winged lion, whose eagle-like pinions are soon plucked, so that instead of flying it stands on the ground. A human heart...is given to it. In the light of Nebuchadnezzar’s career, it is clear that the plucking of the lion’s wings symbolizes reduction of his pride and power at the time of his insanity (ch. 4). The lion symbol was characteristic of Babylon, especially in Nebuchadnezzar’s time, when the Ishtar Gate entrance was adorned on either side with a long procession of yellow lions on blue-glazed brick, fashioned in high relief.... The final detail—‘the heart of a man was given to it’—may refer to the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity after his seven-year dementia. In any event, the correspondence between the winged lion and the Babylonian Empire is acknowledged by biblical critics of every persuasion” (note on 7:4).

The second beast, corresponding to the chest and arms of silver in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, is a hulking bear. Note that it is raised up on one side—so that one side is higher than the other. “The bear is...described in a way that very clearly suggests that it is to involve the alliance of two powers, one of which will dominate the other.... The symbolic action was altogether appropriate for the federated Medo-Persian Empire, in which the Persian element dominated the Median” (note on verse 5). Recall from the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 44–45 that the Persian ruler Cyrus overthrew his Median grandfather Astyages, who supposedly had tried to have him killed as an infant. Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, Daniel 8, the imagery of one side of a beast being higher than the other is specifically used of Medo-Persia. “Daniel saw [the bear] devouring three ribs from some other animal it had killed. Indeed, it was divinely encouraged to feast on the ribs. This corresponds perfectly to the three major conquests the Medes and Persians made under the leadership of King Cyrus and his son Cambyses: [namely] the Lydian kingdom in Asia Minor (which fell to Cyrus in 546), the [Babylonian] Chaldean Empire (which he annexed in 539), and the kingdom of Egypt (which Cambyses acquired in 525)” (note on verse 5).

The third beast, corresponding to the bronze belly and thighs of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, is a four-winged, four-headed leopard—powerful and swift. “This beast portrays the division of Alexander’s swiftly won empire into four separate parts within a few years after his death in 323 B.C. The initial arrangement involved the area of Greece and Macedon (under Antipater and then Cassander), Thrace and Asia Minor (under Lysimachus), all of Asia except Asia Minor and Palestine (under Seleucus), and Egypt-Palestine (under Ptolemy). Even after the breakdown of Lysimachus’s kingdom, a separate realm was maintained by Eumenes of Pergamum and others, so that the quadripartite character of the Greek Empire was maintained, despite the most determined efforts of the more aggressive Seleucids and Ptolemids to annex each other into a single realm. Very clearly, then, the four heads and four wings represent the Macedonian conquest and its subsequent divisions” (note on verse 6). We’ll see further substantiation of this in Daniel 8, where the kingdom of Greece is specifically identified as dividing into four parts (see 8:21-22).

The fourth beast is a fierce creature unlike any known animal. Paralleling the iron legs of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision, this beast has iron teeth. Daniel 2 had stated: “And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others” (verse 40). Compare that with Daniel 7: “The fourth beast...was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue [of the previous empires] with its feet.... The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth [i.e., all the land, the known world], trample it and break it in pieces” (verses 19, 23). Obviously, the same power is being described. Over time, Rome took over each of the four political divisions of Alexander’s kingdom (though not the full territory of the former empire).

The fifth and final kingdom is that of the Messiah, referred to in this chapter as “One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven” (verse 13). “Son of man” means a human being. God used this as a title for Ezekiel, the prophet-watchman being representative of his people. Jesus used the title as applying to Himself. Jesus is the ultimate representative man, who died in sacrifice for everyone and to whose life everyone’s must be conformed through His living again within them. Yet, strictly speaking, He is here said to be “like” the son of man. While in the flesh 2,000 years ago, Jesus was human. But when He returns in glory, He will not come as a mere man, but as the Almighty God who had lived a life in the flesh as a human being. Interestingly, this chapter gives us one of the

few Old Testament revelations of God the Father. “Ancient of Days” could refer to either the Father or Jesus Christ, but the fact that Jesus is clearly described here as the “One like the Son of Man” who *comes to* the Ancient of Days, the Ancient of Days must refer to the Father in this context.

The 10 Horns and the Little Horn (Daniel 7)

March 13-16 Cont'd

The Roman Empire fell in ancient times. Yet the empire was to continue until the end-time glorious coming of Christ, whose everlasting Kingdom would take over from *it*. How could this be? As already noted, the Roman Empire has experienced a number of revivals. This is where the “ten horns” of the fourth beast come in—symbolic of 10 kings or kingdoms. Notice the expression “three of the first horns” in verse 8. If some horns are “first,” then others come later. This would seem to imply that the 10 horns of this vision are consecutive—unlike the 10 simultaneous kings represented by the 10 toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The phrase in verse 8 could even be rendered “the first three horns.” This seems to indicate that there would be 10 revivals of the Roman Empire, the first three of which are uprooted or subdued by an additional “little horn” and the last of which would itself comprise 10 distinct powers.

Consider what has actually transpired in history. Late in the fourth century, the east-west division of the Roman Empire became permanent, with one emperor reigning from Rome over the Western Roman Empire and another emperor reigning from Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey) over the Eastern Roman Empire. The Western Roman Empire fell during the next century but the Eastern Roman (or Byzantine) Empire continued until 1453. It is the Western Empire, centered at Rome, that has experienced a number of revivals. As the Western Empire collapsed in the fifth century, three groups of barbarian invaders sought to succeed the Roman emperors. Indeed, these groups—the Vandals, Heruli and Ostrogoths successively—each sought and received official recognition from the Eastern Roman emperor as a legitimate continuation of Roman rule in the West. Yet there was a problem with these invaders from the perspective of the Western religious leader, the bishop of Rome or pope. These barbarians were not orthodox Catholic Trinitarians, having adopted a form of Christianity known as Arianism. At the pope’s urging, the Vandals were eventually overthrown by the Eastern Roman emperor. The Heruli were also overthrown at papal urging—the Eastern emperor sending the Ostrogoths as his agents to carry this out. Then the Ostrogoths themselves were later overthrown by Eastern Roman forces—yet again at papal behest.

Following this, the Eastern Roman emperor, Justinian, reclaimed a lot of the western imperial territory and placed it under the management of the Roman Catholic provincial bishops. This is often referred to as the “Imperial Restoration.” Yet it was not to last, the Eastern Empire eventually abandoning what it had recovered. A later revival of the Western Empire came under the Frankish king Charlemagne, who was crowned by the pope in the ninth century. Following the disintegration of his empire, another Holy Roman Empire was established the next century at the request of the pope by the German king Otto the Great. It continued for nearly 300 years until, rent by rival factions, 19 years went by without an emperor. This was followed by the election of the Hapsburg family to the imperial throne—a revival that reached its apex under Emperor Charles V in the 16th century. Eventually, this empire also diminished, the title “Holy Roman Emperor” becoming an increasingly empty distinction. In 1806, Francis II of Austria rejected the title in the face of the growing power of Napoleon Bonaparte, who had himself received the imperial crown from the pope two years earlier.

After the fall of Napoleon, another revival of Rome was still to follow. Benito Mussolini sought to restore the Roman Empire. In 1929, he signed the Lateran Treaty with the papacy, establishing papal sovereignty over Vatican City, Roman Catholicism as the Italian state religion and papal recognition of Mussolini’s government. In partnership with Mussolini was Adolf Hitler, who sought restoration of the imperial Roman tradition in Germany. The Vatican signed a concordat with Hitler in 1933, protecting the rights of the Church in Nazi Germany and giving Hitler’s regime an outward semblance of legitimacy.

That gives us nine revivals in all. The first three—1) the Vandals; 2) the Heruli and 3) the Ostrogoths—were, as appears to have been prophesied, uprooted at the behest of a “little horn,” a smaller power emerging from Rome, which would, according to the same premise, certainly seem to be the Roman Church and its leader. Appearing to strengthen the identification is the fact that the last six revivals were all, by contrast, sanctioned by the papacy: 4) Justinian’s Imperial Restoration; 5) Charlemagne’s Carolingian Empire; 6) Otto the Great’s Roman Empire of the German Nation; 7) the Holy Roman Empire under the Hapsburg Dynasty; 8) Napoleon’s French Empire; and 9) the

Hitler-Mussolini Axis. This listing shows that just one imperial revival yet remains to come on the scene—the final one, which will exist at the time of Christ’s return.

The little horn is guilty of great blasphemy and wickedness. Observe what *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states in its note on verse 25, with phrases in the verse set in italics: “*He shall speak great words against the most High* [could be rendered] ‘He shall speak as if he were God’.... To none can this apply so well or so fully as to the popes of Rome. They have assumed infallibility, which belongs only to God. They profess to forgive sins, which belongs only to God. They profess to open and shut heaven, which belongs only to God. They profess to be higher than the kings of all the earth, which belongs only to God. And they go beyond God in pretending to loose whole nations from their oath of allegiance to their kings, when such kings do not please them! *And shall wear out the saints*. By wars, crusades, massacres, inquisitions, and persecutions of all kinds. What in this way have they not done against all those who have protested against their innovations, and refused to submit to their idolatrous worship? Witness the exterminating crusades published against the Waldenses and Albigenses.... *And think to change times and laws*. Appointing fasts and feasts; canonizing persons whom he chooses to call saints; granting pardons and indulgences for sins; instituting new modes of worship utterly unknown to the Christian Church; new articles of faith; new rules of practice; and reversing, with pleasure, the laws both of God and man.”

Verse 25 concludes with this statement: “Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.” This expression occurs again in the book of Revelation 12 as the time during which a portion of God’s Church is protected just prior to Christ’s return. Some argue that the expression does not refer to a specific period of time, but such particular language would be a rather odd way to express something indefinite. Much more likely is that a “time” denotes a year. “Times,” in the plural, would need to mean the *smallest* plural—two—for this to be at all comprehensible. This yields a total of three and a half years—a figure consistent with the 1,260-day work of the end-time two witnesses in Revelation 11:3 and the 42 months of Revelation 11:2 and 13:5. What the statement in Daniel is telling us is that all the awful blasphemy and evil of the false Christian system during the Middle Ages was only a forerunner of what is going to happen in the last three and a half years before Christ’s return.

The dominion of the little horn is consumed and destroyed when the Kingdom of God is set up (verses 26-27). Indeed, the beast and presumably this horn emerging from it are both destroyed in burning flame at that time (verse 11), just as Revelation 19:20 explains that the final Beast and False Prophet will be cast into the lake of fire.

Finally, “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom” (Daniel 7:18, 22, 27). This wording emphasizes the great honor God will shower on His saints. Though the Kingdom of God will always belong to God and Jesus Christ, this sums up the generous love of God in sharing the blessings of the Kingdom with the saints.

Yet dark days would precede that time. Daniel was deeply troubled about what was coming. His “face paled (...literally...‘my facial hue was changing on me’) because of his inward concern about the severe trials and afflictions awaiting his people” (*Expositor’s*, note on verse 28). Nevertheless, he continued to mull it over.

The Ram and the He-Goat (Daniel 8)

March 17-20

After writing in Aramaic since 2:4, Daniel now returns to writing in Hebrew. While he will write two more historical accounts in Aramaic, chapters 5 and 6, those will be included in the early part of his book. Everything that follows 8:1 in arrangement order is in Hebrew, presumably because the intended audience was Jewish.

It is now about 548 B.C. Two years have passed since Daniel’s previous vision of the four beasts (see 7:1; 8:1). While Daniel is in a deep sleep with his face to the ground (verse 18), he is transported in vision to the River Ulai, an artificial canal near the Elamite capital of Shushan or Susa (verse 2). This city, which was about 230 miles east of Babylon, would become one of the imperial capitals of the Medo-Persian Empire. Thus it was a fitting place to see the ram representing that empire.

The ram’s two horns represented the Median and Persian elements of the kingdom. Indeed, as with the symbol of the tilted bear in chapter 7, we see that one horn of the ram was higher than the other, in both cases representing the dominance of Persia over Media (see 8:20). “Ancient records declare that the king of Persia, when at the head of his army, bore in the place of a crown the head of a ram. The same figure is frequently found on Persian seals” (qtd. in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 3).

The male goat coming from the west to cast down and trample the Persian ram, so swiftly that it is as if he flies above the ground, is the kingdom of Greece—its large horn being its first king (verse 21), that is, the first Greek king to succeed the Persian Empire after overcoming it. This could only refer to Alexander the Great of Macedonia, who carved out his vast Hellenistic Empire in short order. Launching his attack against Persia in 334 B.C., he had essentially subdued it by 332.

According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, this prophecy in Daniel factored into Alexander's positive treatment of the Jews—along with other miraculous intervention.

The account states that when Alexander laid siege to Tyre, he sent a letter to the Jewish high priest Jaddua asking that he switch allegiance from the Persian emperor Darius to him and provide him with military support. "But the high priest answered the messengers, that he had given his oath to Darius not to bear arms against him; and he said that he would not transgress this while Darius was in the land of the living. Upon hearing this answer, Alexander was very angry; and though he determined not to leave Tyre, which was just ready to be taken, yet, as soon as he had taken it, he threatened that he would make an expedition against the Jewish high priest, and through him teach all men to whom they must keep their oaths" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 8, sec. 3).

Alexander later moved down to take the city of Gaza. "When the seven months of the siege of Tyre were over, and the two months of the siege of Gaza.... Alexander...made haste to go up to Jerusalem; and Jaddua the high priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror, as not knowing how he should meet the Macedonians, since the king was displeased at his foregoing disobedience. He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifices to God, whom he sought to protect that nation, and to deliver them from the perils that were coming upon them; whereupon God warned him in a dream...that he should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest should appear in white garments, but that he and the priests should meet the king in the [garments] proper to their order, without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent. Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced; and declared to all the warning he had received from God. According to which dream he acted entirely, and so waited for the coming of the king" (sec. 4).

What is reported as happening upon Alexander's arrival is stunning. "And when the Phoenicians and the Chaldeans that followed him, thought they should have liberty to plunder the city, and torment the high priest to death, which the king's displeasure fairly promised them, the very reverse of it happened; for Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head, having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest.... whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, [his general] Parmenio alone went up to him, and asked him how it came to pass that, when all others adored *him*, he should adore the high priest of the Jews? To whom he replied, 'I did not adore *him*, but that *God* who hath honoured him with his high priesthood; for I saw this very person in a dream, in this very [garment], when I was at Dios in Macedonia, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea thither, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence it is, that having seen no other in that [garment], and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision, and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind.

"And when he had said this to Parmenio, and had given the high priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him, and he came into the city; and when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests. And when the book of Daniel was showed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended; and as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present, but the next day he called them to him, and bade them ask what favours they pleased of him; whereupon the high priest desired that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers, and might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired; and when they entreated him that he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do hereafter what they desired" (sec. 5).

These events transpired about 216 years after Daniel received his vision!

Four Notable Horns and Another Little Horn (Daniel 8)**March 17-20 Cont'd**

Continuing in Daniel 8, Alexander was prophesied to be broken when he became strong (verse 8)—and in fact the Hellenistic emperor died at the height of his career, before he was 33 years old.

Four notable horns would replace the broken great horn. This corresponds to the four-winged, four-headed leopard representing the Greek Empire in chapter 7. As was noted in the Bible Reading Program comments, Alexander's kingdom became divided among his generals into four parts, which then continued as distinct kingdoms.

In its note on verse 9, *The Nelson Study Bible* states: "The *little horn* here is not the same as the little horn of ch[apter] 7. The former horn comes out of the fourth beast, Rome, whereas this one comes out of Greece. The little horn here refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, the eighth king of the Syrian dynasty [descended from Alexander's general Seleucus] who reigned from 175 to 164 B.C. Thus, this prophecy skips from 301 B.C., the time of the division of Alexander's empire, to 175 B.C., when Antiochus became king." The identification with Antiochus Epiphanes, an evil ruler who persecuted the Jews and sought to corrupt them into idolatry, certainly makes sense. Indeed, a detailed prophecy of the succession of Greek Syrian rulers, especially Antiochus Epiphanes, is given in Daniel 11.

However, there is evidently much more to this prophecy. At least some measure of duality is intended since Gabriel (an angel mentioned for this first time in this chapter) explains that "the vision refers to the time of the end" (verse 17; see also verses 19, 23, 26). First of all, it should be recognized that since the Roman Empire took over from the Greek Syrian kingdom, Rome and powers emerging from it could, in a sense, be said to derive from Alexander's empire—just as Greece and Persia emerged, to some degree, from Babylon. Indeed, the final resurrection of the Roman Empire in Revelation 17–18 is also clearly a resurrection of the Babylonian Empire. The beast of Revelation 13 is a conglomeration of the four beasts of Daniel's image, as the Roman Empire had swallowed up the earlier kingdoms. Therefore, the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8 could be synonymous on some level—or at least parallel (although, while the horn of Daniel 8 could signify Antiochus as well as the Roman civil or religious leader through the ages and at the end time, the little horn of Daniel 7, springing from Rome, could not represent Antiochus except as a precursor to the actual fulfillment).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary offers the "plausible explanation...that the little horn arising from the third kingdom serves as a prototype of the little horn of the fourth kingdom. The crisis destined to confront God's people in the time of the earlier little horn, Antiochus Epiphanes, will bear a strong similarity to the crisis that will befall them in the eschatological or final phase of the fourth kingdom in the last days.... In each case a determined effort will be made by a ruthless dictator to suppress completely the biblical faith and the worship of the one true God" (note on verses 9-10).

"Continuing on with the predicted career of Antiochus (v. 10), we encounter the remarkable statement that he will grow up to 'the host of heaven' and will throw 'some of the starry host down to the earth,' where he will 'trample on them.' The 'host'...is a term most often used of the armies of angels in the service of God (esp[ecially] in the frequent title... Yahweh of hosts'), or else of the stars in heaven (cf. Jer 33:22). But it is also used of the people of God, who are to become as the stars in number (Gen 12:3; 15:5) and in Exodus 12:41 are spoken of as 'the hosts of Yahweh'...who went out of the land of Egypt.... Now since the Greek tyrant can hardly affect either the angels of heaven or the literal stars in the sky, it is quite evident that the phrase 'the host of the heavens' must refer to those Jewish believers that will join the Maccabees in defending their faith and liberty. It is then implied here that Antiochus will cut down and destroy many of the Jews during the time of tribulation he will bring on them, when he will have 'trampled on them'" (same note). Of course, God's people at the end time—both physical and spiritual Israel, the Church—is probably also intended. And there is likely an additional meaning.

In verse 11, this little horn exalts itself as high as the "Prince of the host"—the "Prince of princes" (verse 25)—God. Besides the megalomania of Antiochus, this verse also appears parallel to the prophecy of the "man of sin" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, the end-time religious leader "who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." And in all this, the exaltation as well as the assault on heaven's hosts, we are probably also seeing, in type, a description of the spiritual power behind these human figures—Satan the Devil, who assaulted heaven in an attempt to replace the Almighty and even corrupted and brought to ruin others of God's angels (see Revelation 12:4).

Like Satan, the little horn casts truth—God’s word and law (John 17:17; Psalm 119:142; 160)—to the ground. He causes the daily evening and morning sacrifices to cease and brings about the “transgression of desolation” to God’s sanctuary (verses 11-13). To what does this refer? On the spiritual level, Satan strives to end the prayers of God’s people and bring them to ultimate ruin—and he succeeds in this with some. Yet, on the physical level, the “transgression of desolation” is obviously parallel with the “abomination of desolation” set up by Antiochus Epiphanes as foretold in Daniel 11:31—an idolatrous desecration of the temple in conjunction with the ending of the literal sacrifices. We will see more about this in our reading of Daniel 11. Despite the past fulfillment of this prophecy, Jesus Christ made it clear that Daniel’s prophecy of the abomination of desolation was also to be fulfilled in an end-time context as the signal event preceding the Great Tribulation (see Matthew 24:15ff.).

Verse 14 of Daniel 8 states that the sanctuary would be cleansed after 2,300 “evening-mornings,” as the word “days” is literally rendered (NKJV margin, compare verse 26). *Expositor’s* notes: “This apparently precise period of time has been understood by interpreters in two different ways, either as 2,300 twenty-four-hour days (understanding *ereb boqer*, ‘evening morning,’ as indicating an entire day from sunset to sunset, like the similar expression in Gen[esis] 1), or else as 1,150 days composed of 1,150 evenings and 1,150 mornings [for a total of 2,300]. In other words, the interval would either be 6 years and 111 days, or else half of that time: 3 years and 55 days. Both views have persuasive advocates, but the preponderance of evidence seems to favor the latter interpretation. The context speaks of the suspension of the *tamid* (‘sacrifice’), a reference to the *olat tamid* (‘continual burnt offering’) that was offered regularly each morning and evening (or, as the Hebrews would reckon it, each evening, when the new day began, and each morning). Surely there could have been no other reason for the compound expression *ereb boqer* than the reference to the two sacrifices that marked each day in temple worship” (noted on verses 13-14).

There were three years from the temple desecration by Antiochus in 168 B.C. until its cleansing and rededication by the Maccabees in 165 (see 1 Maccabees 1:54; 4:52-53)—an event now celebrated by the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. Yet since the prophecy is primarily for the end-time, it also seems that there must be a last-days application, either of 1,150 days or perhaps 2,300. Indeed, some have postulated a 2,300-year fulfillment, stretching from ancient times to the future, based on the prophetic day-for-a-year principle, although it is not clear how this could fit (and this appears unlikely with the particular expression evening-morning, which if denoting a day would seem specific to a 24-hour day).

In verse 25, Gabriel told Daniel that the little horn would be broken “without human hand” (see margin). According to the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees, Antiochus died of painful diseases. And in the end time, the Beast and False Prophet will be destroyed by the divine Jesus Christ.

Daniel was utterly shocked by the vision, finding it far more traumatizing than his previous one as he considered the terrible plight his people would experience in the future. Whereas Gabriel had awakened him from sleep to explain the vision’s imagery (verse 18), the prophet now fainted and was sick for days (verse 27). He was able afterward to resume his state duties but remained stunned for some time.

The Handwriting on the Wall—and the Fall of Babylon (Daniel 5)

March 21-24

Nine years have passed since Daniel’s vision of chapter 8. The prophet is now in his early 80s and major events are transforming the region. Eleven years earlier, King Cyrus II of Persia, vassal to his maternal grandfather King Astyages of Media, deposed Astyages and took over the rule of the now-combined Kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Cyrus had initially formed an alliance with the King Nabonidus of the Chaldean Neo-Babylonian Empire—which is part of what had provoked conflict with Astyages.

Yet “while Nabonidus spent ten years in Tema [in Arabia], Cyrus was busily occupied in amassing an empire [an empire now known as the Medo-Persian Empire or simply the Persian Empire]. Soon all that was left to incorporate into his vast realm was Babylon, and so he set his sights upon that prize.... Babylonia, because of the absence of Nabonidus, began to deteriorate internally and externally under the incompetent Belshazzar” (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 478, 480).

Belshazzar, as we’ve already seen, was the son of Nabonidus, ruling as coregent for him in Babylon. Recall from the Bible Reading Program comments on chapter 7 that Nabonidus was not of royal blood, not being descended from Nebuchadnezzar. Yet notice that Nebuchadnezzar is referred to in chapter 5 as Belshazzar’s father (verses 2, 11, 13, 18) and Belshazzar as Nebuchadnezzar’s son

(verse 22). The terminology of “father” and “son” is a common way of denoting “ancestor” and “descendant” in biblical language—especially as Nebuchadnezzar was an important ruler in establishing the dynasty of Babylonian kings. Yet Nabonidus was not of this dynasty. So how could his son Belshazzar be? It seems likely, as mentioned in the prior comments, that Nabonidus had married the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. “In the account given by [the ancient Greek historian] Herodotus of the capture of Babylon by the Persians under Cyrus [written about 80 years after the event], Labynitus II, son of Labynitus I and Nitocris [daughter of Nebuchadnezzar], is named as the last King of Babylon. Labynitus is commonly held to be a corruption of Nabonidus” (“Baltasar,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02226c.htm>). Thus Nabonidus seems to have married Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter Nitocris, and their son was Nabonidus II, otherwise known as Belshazzar or Balthazar. The “queen” who comes to tell Belshazzar of Daniel (verses 10-12) was either Belshazzar’s mother Nitocris or—if Nitocris was away with Nabonidus—Belshazzar’s grandmother, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar (the latter being the conclusion of the Jewish historian Josephus).

Returning to events, “Many Babylonian provinces such as Elam fell away to Persia, and in 539 [B.C.] Cyrus sent an army under his general Gubaru to invest Babylon itself” (Merrill, p. 480). Indeed, the time had at last come for Babylon to fall. Recall that God had foretold through the prophet Isaiah that Cyrus would act as His servant to overthrow the proud city (see Isaiah 44–45).

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary provides further details of what was happening: “The Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle, according to a corrected reading...states: ‘In the month of Tashritu [Tishri], when Cyrus attacked the [Babylonian] army of Akkad in Opis on the Tigris, the inhabitants of Akkad revolted, but he (Nabonidus) massacred the confused inhabitants [for switching allegiance]. The 15th day [October 10], Sippar was seized without battle. Nabonidus fled’” (note on verses 1-4). Nabonidus had returned just in time to witness the downfall of his glorious empire.

“Apparently Nabonidus had commanded the troops in the field, while Belshazzar headed the defense of Babylon itself. Meeting with reverses, Nabonidus retreated south toward his salient at Tema (or Teima), leaving the Persians free access to the capital. Concerning this same campaign, Herodotus reported (1.190-91): ‘A battle was fought at a short distance from the city [of Babylon] in which the Babylonians were defeated by the Persian king, whereupon they withdrew within their defences. Here they shut themselves up and made light of his siege, having laid in a store of provisions for many years in preparation against this attack’” (*Expositor’s*, same note). Yet by October 12, just two days after the fall of Sippar, Babylon would fall to Persian hands.

Humanly speaking, this didn’t seem possible. Babylon was the great city of its day—like imperial Rome at its height centuries later. It was the most important trade center and the greatest cultural and tourism center, with its renowned hanging gardens and other remarkable works. The enormous city, with its towering and impregnable thick walls, endless fortifications, great troop strength and vast population besides, seemed unconquerable. Indeed, Babylon had a few years’ store of food within its walls along with an endless supply of water from the mighty Euphrates River, which flowed right through the city. Thus, the people within would, it was supposed, remain well-provisioned and hardy for a long time while an outside army would face great difficulty. Sieges that took years were not uncommon in the ancient world but they were certainly unattractive prospects. As the Medo-Persian army advanced, there was no real concern within the city. Given Babylon’s unparalleled defenses and staggering prosperity, the idea that the city could fall seemed absurd. But the handwriting was soon on the wall (Daniel 5 being the very origin of this popular expression). The impossible was going to happen. Babylon, the greatest national power the world had ever seen, was about to fall. Let this be a lesson to all great nations—including the leading nation on earth today, the United States of America. For when God says it’s over, it’s over.

No doubt informed of the approaching forces, and despite the retreat of his father, King Belshazzar did not fret. He did not convene a war council. He didn’t do anything to prepare for what might be coming. Instead, brimming with confidence in his inviolable security, he proclaimed a feast and descended with thousands of his lords and his harem into a night of drunken debauchery. Bringing the sacred vessels of the Jerusalem temple into this affair was a blasphemous act of sacrilege. Indeed, we later learn that Belshazzar actually knew of the seven-year madness that had befallen his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar to punish him for his unbridled arrogance and bring him to understand the overriding authority of God (verse 22). And yet Belshazzar now defiled the sacred treasures of that God, even using them to toast the pagan gods of Babylon.

God, of course, would not be mocked. As the night wore on, the Persians were implementing a daring invasion plan. Recall from Isaiah 44:27–45:1 that God had hinted at the remarkable way in

which Cyrus' men would enter the city—through draining the Euphrates by diverting it and having the inner gates along the river channel unlocked. The feast served only to distract from what was actually going on. “Herodotus...mentions that Cyrus, after laying siege to the town, entered it by the bed of the Euphrates, having drained off its waters, and that the capture took place whilst the Babylonians were feasting (Herod., I, 188-191). Xenophon [a Greek historian writing in the 4th century B.C.] also mentions the siege, the draining of the Euphrates, and the feast. He does not state the name of the king, but fastens on him the epithet ‘impious’” (“Baltasar,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*).

The palace revelry was at last interrupted by the shocking sight of the disembodied hand, suspended in midair, writing something into the plaster of a wall in plain sight of the king. Verse 5 mentions only fingers, but the word translated “fingers” in verse 24 should be “palm” (see NKJV margin). So an entire hand was seen—and it caused quite a stir. With Belshazzar being drunk and terrified, it's no wonder he was wobbly and his knees were knocking together (verse 6). The king summoned the priests and various occult practitioners to try to discern the message, offering to the one who could give a proper explanation the position of “third ruler in the kingdom.” This phrase gave interpreters trouble for centuries until it was realized that Belshazzar himself was the *second* ruler, reigning in Babylon as coregent for his father Nabonidus.

At last the elderly Daniel is brought in. Apparently Belshazzar did not know him—or perhaps he only knew *of* him but not to any great degree. While Daniel went about the “king's business” in the third year of Belshazzar (8:1, 27), this must merely have meant that he did work for the state, perhaps as a low-level civil servant—in any case working in a much lower position than the one he held under Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel first gives Belshazzar a short but sobering and piercing sermon, ending powerfully in verse 23 with “the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.” Daniel then translates and interprets the four words on the wall. In its note on Daniel 5:27-28, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* offers the following explanation:

“The first two were identical: *mene*, meaning ‘numbered,’ ‘counted out,’ ‘measured’ (passive participle of *mena*, ‘to number’). This signified that the years of Belshazzar's reign had been counted out to their very last one, and it was about to terminate (v. 26). Observe that even if the court diviners had been able to make out the three consonants *m- n- '* correctly, they still would not have known what vowel points to give them. For example, it could have been read as *mena* or [alternatively] *mina*—a heavy weight equivalent to sixty Babylonian shekels [or 50, as we will see]. The second word (v. 27) was ‘Tekel’ (*teqel*, cognate with the Hebrew ‘shekel’ [*seqel*] and coming from *teqal*, ‘to weigh’). Following after a *m- n- '* (which might mean ‘mina’...), ‘Tekel’ would look like ‘shekel’ (a weight of silver or gold slightly over eleven grams). But Daniel explained it as the passive participle *teqil* (‘weighed’) and applied it to Belshazzar himself. God found him deficient in the scales and therefore rejected him.

“The third word is *peres*, which is derived from a root *peras*, meaning ‘to divide.’ Daniel read it as a passive participle (*peris*, ‘divided’) and interpreted it to mean that Belshazzar's kingdom, the Babylonian Empire, had been divided or separated from him and given over to the Medes and Persians besieging the city. This word too might have been taken as meaning a monetary weight, like the two words preceding it; for the Akkadian *parsu* meant ‘half mina,’ and this may have been borrowed into Aramaic with that meaning. But more likely [it is supposed], as...[other commentators] have argued, it means ‘half shekel,’ since the root simply indicates division into two parts; and the usage in each individual language would determine what weight was being halved. In the descending scale of ‘mina,’ ‘shekel,’ the next weight to be expected would be something lighter than a shekel, namely ‘a half shekel.’ If, then, all that the diviners could make out of the strange inscription on the wall was ‘Mina, mina, shekel, and half-shekels [or half mina]’ (reading *uparsin*), then they might well have concluded that this series of money weights (this was, of course, still prior to the introduction of coined money into the Middle East) made no sense and conveyed no intelligible message. Daniel, however, being inspired of God, was able to make very clear sense of these letters by giving them the passive participle vowel pattern in each case....The same radicals [root consonants] that spell out *peres* (‘half shekel’) furnish the root for the word ‘has been divided,’ *perisat*. But furthermore *p- r- s* also points to the word for ‘Persian,’ *Paras*”—as the Persians would receive the kingdom.”

This appears a fairly reasonable explanation except that it leaves out the possibility that the particular money weights were also explicitly intended by the words God wrote—i.e., that the words had a double meaning. Recall that Daniel said Babylon had been weighed, like monetary weights in the balance, and was found lacking. Surely it is no mere coincidence that the words, taken together,

appeared to read as particular money weights. Considering these weights, it is interesting to note that they can add up to a surprising total. A mina is given above as 60 shekels. Yet the same commentary, in its footnote on Daniel 5:25, clarifies the definition as “a unit of *fifty or sixty* shekels—the latter was the standard in Babylon” (emphasis added). Fifty was the standard Hebrew—and thus biblical—reckoning. Note also that the favoring of the interpretation of the last unit of weight as a half-shekel is based on the assumption that these coins must have simply been related in descending order, not considering that they might have some special meaning. Why then, we might ask, is mina repeated?

In any case, if *uparsin* denotes the Akkadian *parsu*, “half mina,” as the commentary admits it would seem to, then notice the tally: mina (50 shekels) + mina (50 shekels) + shekel (1) + uparsin (half mina or 25 shekels) = 126 shekels. An interesting number results if we reckon this in the smallest money weight measurement units—gerahs. A shekel was 20 gerahs (Exodus 30:13). So 126 shekels would be 126 x 20 or 2,520 gerahs. Remarkably, this would seem to parallel the proposed explanation of the “seven times” of Daniel 4 as possibly meaning a 2,520-year judgment on Babylon from its ancient fall to modern times. While not certain—as Daniel did not spell this out in his explanation—it could very well be that God intended this additional meaning. It may even be that Daniel himself did not completely understand the meaning, as he is later told that the full meaning of his book was not for him to know, but that it was sealed until the time of the end (see Daniel 12:4).

Somewhat surprisingly, King Belshazzar follows through with the investiture of authority he promised. He must have believed the inspired interpretation Daniel gave or he wouldn't have made him prime minister. Indeed, he might have had him executed for insolence instead. Perhaps Belshazzar thought that his honoring of Daniel would avert the divine judgment. But it was too late for that. The king had gone too far. And the time for Babylonian rule was at an end.

Herodotus recorded: “Hereupon the Persians who had been left for the purpose at Babylon by the riverside, entered the stream, which had now sunk so as to reach about midway up a man's thigh, and thus got into the town. Had the Babylonians been apprised of what Cyrus was about, or had they noticed their danger, they would never have allowed the Persians to enter the city, but would have destroyed them utterly; for they would have made fast all the street-gates which gave upon the river, and mounting upon the walls along both sides of the stream, would so have caught the enemy as it were in a trap. But, as it was, the Persians came upon them by surprise and took the city. Owing to the vast size of the place, the inhabitants of the central parts (as the residents at Babylon declare), long after the outer portions of the town were taken, knew nothing of what had chanced, but as they were engaged in a festival, continued dancing and revelling until they learnt the capture but too certainly” (1.191).

The city was taken, “without resistance, by Gubaru, governor of Gutium [to the north of Babylon] and commander of the Persian army [under Cyrus]” (Merrill, p. 478). Before the sunrise, Belshazzar was dead. “According to [Xenophon], the king made a brave stand, defending himself with his sword, but was overpowered and slain by Gobryas [Gubaru] and Gadatas, the two generals of Cyrus” (“Baltasar,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*). “This took place on October 12; two weeks later, on October 29, 539, Cyrus himself entered the city in peace. He forbade destruction, appointed Gubaru governor, and left the religious and civil administration of Babylon unchanged” (Merrill, p. 478).

Who Was Darius the Mede? (Daniel 5)

March 21-24 Cont'd

The last verse of chapter 5, verse 31, which the Hebrew Masoretic Text places at the beginning of chapter 6, states that the Babylonian kingdom was received by “Darius the Mede.” There is no mention in the chapter of Cyrus at all, though Daniel does later refer to him in 6:28 and 10:1. The identification of Darius the Mede is not entirely clear, though he is a significant figure in Daniel's book, particularly chapter 6, as we will soon see in our reading. There are other Persian rulers known as Darius—the actual Persian form of the name being *Darayavahush*—but they don't appear until later in history. A number of people through the years have tried to use this identification problem as a basis for declaring the Bible fraudulent, so it is important that we look at the matter.

Some suggest that Darius the Mede is another name for Cyrus. But there are problems with this identification. Cyrus is identified primarily as a Persian, even in the book of Daniel (see 6:28). However, Cyrus was indeed part Mede and united the thrones of Persia and Media in himself. Moreover, Isaiah had prophesied the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes, so that would have been a reason for Daniel to stress the Median side of the conqueror. Yet there are other difficulties, such as the wording of Daniel 6:28: “So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” This would seem to make them two different persons. Still, it must be acknowledged

that the word translated “and” could be rendered “even”—which would then make the names synonymous.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to seeing the two as the same person, though, is Daniel 9:1, where we are given the specific identification: “Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans.” Ahasuerus is also the name of a later Persian emperor to whom Esther was married. The Greek form of this name is Xerxes. Cyrus’ father was not Ahasuerus or Xerxes but Cambyses I. Indeed, in the Achaemenid dynastic line of Persia from which Cyrus sprung there is no Ahasuerus prior to him. Neither is there an Ahasuerus in the Median dynasty leading to Cyrus’ maternal grandfather Astyages—though it has been argued that the name of Astyages’ father, Cyaxeres, could possibly transliterate as such. While it is possible that Ahasuerus was an alternative name for Cyrus’ father or one of his forefathers, this is nowhere stated. Given this fact, it seems more likely that Ahasuerus was the name of a local Median ruler, or that he was an offshoot of the main royal line of Median kings, and that Darius was his son.

Notice that this Darius was made king over “the realm of the Chaldeans.” While this could refer to the entire Chaldean Empire, it could also refer specifically to the area of Babylonia and the rest of southern Mesopotamia. If the latter is meant, perhaps the most likely conclusion is that, as many contend, Darius the Mede should be equated with Cyrus’ general Gubaru (Gobryas in Greek), who was appointed governor over Babylonia.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary points out that “the name ‘Darius’ may have been a title of honor, somewhat as ‘Caesar’ or ‘Augustus’ became in the Roman Empire. It is apparently related to ‘dara’ (‘king’ in Avestan Persian); thus the Old Persian *Darayavahush* may have meant ‘The Royal One’” (note on 5:30-31). While this would allow identification with Cyrus, it would also allow identification with lesser rulers.

The International Standard Bible Dictionary has this to say in its entry on Darius the Mede: “Outside of the Book of Daniel there is no mention of Darius the Mede by name, though there are good reasons for identifying him with Gubaru... who is said in the Nabunaid-Cyrus Chronicle to have been appointed by Cyrus as his governor of Babylon after its capture from the Chaldeans. Some reasons for this identification are as follows:

“(a) Gubaru is possibly a translation of Darius. The same radical letters in Arabic mean ‘king,’ ‘compeller,’ ‘restrainer.’ In Hebrew, derivations of the root mean ‘lord,’ ‘mistress,’ ‘queen’; in Aramaic, ‘mighty,’ ‘almighty.’

“(b) Gutium was the designation of the country north of Babylon and was in all possibility in the time of Cyrus a part of the province of Media.

“(c) But even if Gutium were not a part of Media at that time, it was the custom of Persian kings to appoint Medes as well as Persians to satrapies and to the command of armies. Hence, Darius-Gubaru may have been a Mede, even if Gutium were not a part of Media proper.

“(d) Since Daniel never calls Darius the Mede king of Media, or king of Persia, it is immaterial what his title or position may have been before he was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans. Since the realm of the Chaldeans never included either Media or Persia, there is absolutely no evidence in the Book of Daniel that its author ever meant to imply that Darius the Mede ever ruled over either Media or Persia.

“(e) That Gubaru is called governor (pihatu), and Darius the Mede, king, is no objection to this identification; for in ancient as well as modern oriental empires the governors of provinces and cities were often called kings. Moreover, in the Aramaic language, no more appropriate word than ‘king’ can be found to designate the ruler of a sub-kingdom, or province of the empire.

“(f) That Darius is said to have had 120 satraps under him [in Daniel 6] does not conflict with this; for the Persian word ‘satrap’ is indefinite as to the extent of his rule, just like the English word ‘governor.’ Besides, Gubaru is said to have appointed pihatus under himself. If the kingdom of the Chaldeans which he received was as large as that of [the earlier Assyrian emperor] Sargon he may easily have appointed 120 of these sub-rulers; for Sargon names 117 subject cities and countries over which he appointed his prefects and governors.

“(g) The peoples, nations and tongues of chapter 6 are no objection to this identification; for Babylonia itself at this time was inhabited by Babylonians, Chaldeans, Arabians, Arameans and Jews, and the kingdom of the Chaldeans embraced also Assyrians, Elamites, Phoenicians and others within its limits.

“(h) This identification is supported further by the fact that there is no other person known to history that can well be meant”

(<http://bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Def.show/RTD/ISBE/Topic/Darius>).

While we cannot be certain, this seems a rather reasonable conclusion.

Regarding Gubar, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "The Nabonidus Chronicle and other cuneiform texts of that era indicate that he continued on as governor of Babylonia for at least fourteen years, even though Cyrus may have taken over the royal title at a solemn public coronation service two years later. Presumably urgent military necessity drew Cyrus away from his newly subdued territories to face an enemy menacing some other frontier. Until he could get back and assume the Babylonian crown with appropriate pomp and ceremony, it was expedient for him to leave control of Babylonia in the hands of a trusted lieutenant like Gubaru. A.T. Olmstead (*The History of the Persian Empire* {...1948}, p. 71) puts it thus: 'In his dealings with his Babylonian subjects, Cyrus was "king of Babylon, king of lands."...But it was Gobryas the satrap who represented the royal authority after the king's departure'" (note on Daniel 5:30-31).

Another possibility for the identity of Darius the Mede that some have argued for is that he was Cyrus' maternal grandfather, the Median king Astyages son of Cyaxeres—the idea being that Cyrus allowed him to live out his days as a figurehead in Babylon for the sake of holding the empire together. Others argue for a son of Astyages named Cyaxeres mentioned by Xenophon. This would seem to contradict Herodotus' report that Astyages had no male child, though he could have perhaps have had an intended male heir whom Cyrus saw fit to prop up. For more on these possibilities, see *The New John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, Dr. William Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible* and *Hasting's Bible Dictionary* (all quoted at <http://philologos.org/bpr/files/d003.htm>). See also *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* (note on Daniel 5:31).

Thus, even if Darius the Mede is not immediately identifiable from history, that is no reason to reject the scriptural account of him as errant and to therefore reckon the book of Daniel as fraudulent and uninspired—particularly as there are several possibilities as to his historical identity. As time has gone on, many biblical figures that scholars once reckoned as fictional characters have proven to be real people. We can be confident that Darius the Mede was likewise a real, historical figure, whether or not we can pinpoint his exact identity some 2,400 years later.

Daniel Prays for His People (Daniel 9)

March 25-28

It is the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede over Babylonia (539-538 B.C.). The rule of the Chaldean Empire was now over. Yet what did this mean for the captives of Judah in Babylon? Daniel at this point considers what Scripture has to say. It is not clear if he turned to Jeremiah's prophecy at this time or if he was simply recalling what he already knew from it. The prophecy explained that God "would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (verse 2). As explained in the Bible Reading Program's comments on Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years had two aspects to it. It denoted the 70 years of Babylonian imperial rule—from 609 to 539 B.C. Yet it also meant that Judah and Jerusalem would suffer 70 years of desolation following the invasion of Babylonian forces. This most obviously fits the time from the great destruction of 586 until the rebuilding of the temple in 516. (In fact, Zechariah 7:5 later made it clear that the 70 years began after the commencement of the fast of the fifth month, which was instituted following the temple's destruction in 586.)

Yet it should be remembered that there were three waves of Babylonian invasion and captivity in Judah—and Daniel did not have the hindsight of the temple's reconstruction in 516. Perhaps he was trying to determine the starting and ending points of the 70 years—or even considering the possibility of multiple fulfillments. Daniel himself had been carried away captive in 605 B.C., when Babylon first invaded Jerusalem and robbed its temple. That was 67 years ago. Counting 70 years from that point, the end would be just a few years away. No doubt Daniel also had in mind Isaiah's prophecy, given some 150 years prior, wherein God had said, "Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'" (Isaiah 44:28).

Perhaps Daniel felt that even if the ultimate fulfillment of the 70 years was more than two decades away, there could yet be an opportunity for early waves of return, as conditions seemed to merit that possibility.

Yet as Daniel gives further consideration to Scripture, particularly the terms of the covenant as written down by Moses, he understands that there will be no redemption or return at all without national repentance. And sad to say, as he surveys the spiritual condition of his people, he realizes all too well that they have not as yet, despite all that they have experienced, humbled themselves in repentant prayer and seeking God's truth (Daniel 9:13).

So Daniel resolves to intercede for the nation, imploring God through prayer and fasting that He act without delay for the sake of His holy name to restore His sanctuary, His city and His people. Notice that Daniel, despite his own sterling record of following God, does not take the high-and-mighty approach of saying throughout, “Look at what *they* have done.” Rather he includes himself as one of the guilty. And indeed no human being is without sin (Romans 3:23). Yet Daniel, through regular repentance, was already considered righteous before God. He certainly didn’t stand guilty in the way the rest of the nation did. So Daniel was, in a sense, taking the sins of the people on himself—and in this way he serves as a type and forerunner of the ultimate intercessor and sin-bearer, Jesus Christ.

Remarkably, before Daniel even finishes his prayer, the angel Gabriel appears, having been sent by God as soon as Daniel started speaking. Gabriel is the angel who had appeared to Daniel nearly a decade earlier to explain the vision of the ram and he-goat in chapter 8. Since it is specified that he arrives at the time of the evening sacrifice, it appears that Daniel had chosen this particular time to pray. “Because the temple was in ruins, regular daily sacrifices were impossible. Nevertheless, Daniel observed the ritual of worship by praying at the hour of the evening sacrifice. Daniel’s prayer was his evening offering” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 9:20-21). While not a direct command from God as to when we should now pray, it is nonetheless a good example to us of regular, daily prayer. Indeed we will later read that Daniel’s custom was to pray three times a day (6:10), just as Israel’s King David did (Psalm 55:17). And in more critical circumstances, to draw even closer to God, Daniel sought Him through fasting and even more prayer—as we must also do.

The 70-Weeks Prophecy (Daniel 9)

March 25-28 Cont’d

Daniel received a rather surprising answer to his prayer. He had asked about the 70 specified years of desolation (verse 3), but God tells him of 70 “sevens,” as the word translated “weeks” is literally rendered (verse 24, NKJV margin)—70 seven-year periods, seven times as long as Daniel was thinking about.

Just how are we to understand this prophecy? Gleason Archer, author of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, gives a thorough explanation in his *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*:

“The prophecy of the Seventy Weeks in Daniel 9:24-27 is one of the most remarkable long-range predictions in the entire Bible. It is by all odds one of the most widely discussed by students and scholars of every persuasion within the spectrum of the Christian church. And yet when it is carefully examined in light of all the relevant data of history and the information available from other parts of Scripture, it is quite clearly an accurate prediction of the time of Christ’s coming advent and a preview of the thrilling final act of the drama of human history before that advent.

“Daniel 9:24 reads: ‘Seventy weeks have been determined for your people and your holy city {i.e., for the nation Israel and for Jerusalem}.’ The word for ‘week’...is derived from...the word for ‘seven’.... It is strongly suggestive of the idea ‘heptad’ (a series or combination of seven), rather than a ‘week’ in the sense of a series of seven days. There is no doubt that in this case we are presented with seventy sevens of years rather than of days. This leads to a total of 490 years.

“At the completion of these 490 years, according to v.24b, there will be six results: (1) ‘to finish or bring transgression {or ‘the sin of rebellion’} to an end’; (2) ‘to finish {or “seal up”} sins’; (3) ‘to make atonement for iniquity’; (4) ‘to bring in everlasting righteousness’; (5) ‘to seal up vision and prophecy’; and (6) ‘to anoint the holy of holies.’ By the end of the full 490 years, then, the present sin-cursed world order will come to an end (1 and 2), the price of redemption for sinners will have been paid (3); the kingdom of God will be established on earth, and all the earth will be permanently filled with righteousness, as the waters cover the sea (4); and the Most Holy One (Christ?), or the Most Holy Sanctuary (which seems more probable, since Christ was already anointed by the Holy Spirit at His first advent), will be solemnly anointed and inaugurated for worship in Jerusalem, the religious and political capital of the world during the Millennium (5 and 6)” (1982, p. 289).

Thus, God had a detailed, comprehensive plan leading all the way from Daniel’s day to the time of the setting up of the Messianic Kingdom!

“Daniel 9:25 reads: ‘And you are to know and understand, from the going forth of the command {or ‘decree’; lit[erally] ‘word’...} to restore and {re}build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince...will be...seven heptads and sixty-two heptads.’ This gives us two installments, 49 years and 434 years, for a total of 483 years. Significantly, the seventieth heptad is held in abeyance until v.27. Therefore we

are left with a total of 483 years between the issuance of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah.

“As we examine each of the three decrees issued in regard to Jerusalem by kings subsequent to the time Daniel had this vision (538 B.C., judging from Daniel 9:1), we find that the first was that of Cyrus in 2 Chronicles 36:23: ‘The LORD, the God of heaven,...has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah’ (NASB). This decree, issued in 538 or 537, pertains only to the rebuilding of the temple, not the city of Jerusalem. The third decree is to be inferred from the granting of Nehemiah’s request by Artaxerxes I in 446 B.C., as recorded in Nehemiah 2:5-8. His request was ‘Send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.’ Then we read, ‘So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time {for my return to his palace}’ (NASB). The king also granted him a requisition of timber for the gates and walls of the city.

“It should be noted that when Nehemiah first heard from his brother Hanani that the walls of Jerusalem had not already been rebuilt, he was bitterly disappointed and depressed—as if he had previously supposed that they had been rebuilt (Neh. 1:1-4). This strongly suggests that there had already been a previous decree authorizing the rebuilding of those city walls. Such an earlier decree is found in connection with Ezra’s group that returned to Jerusalem in 457, the seventh year of Artaxerxes I. Ezra 7:6 tells us: ‘This Ezra went up from Babylon,...and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him’ (NASB; notice the resemblance to Neh. 2:8, the last sentence). According to the following verse, Ezra was accompanied by a good-sized group of followers, including temple singers, gatekeepers, temple servants, and a company of laymen.... After arriving at Jerusalem, he busied himself first with the moral and spiritual rebuilding of his people (Ezra 7:10). But he had permission from the king to employ any unused balance of the offering funds for whatever purpose he saw fit (v.18); and he was given authority to appoint magistrates and judges and to enforce the established laws of Israel with confiscation, banishment, or death (v.26). Thus he would appear to have had the authority to set about rebuilding the city walls, for the protection of the temple mount and the religious rights of the Jewish community.

“In Ezra 9:9 Ezra makes reference to this authority in his public, penitential prayer: ‘For we are slaves; yet in our bondage, our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins, and to give us a *wall* in Judah and *Jerusalem*’ (NASB; italics [author’s]). While this ‘wall’ may have been partly a metaphor for ‘protection,’ it seems to have included the possibility of restoring the mural defenses of Jerusalem itself. Unfortunately, we are given no details as to the years that intervened before 446; but it may be that an abortive attempt was made under Ezra’s leadership to replace the outer wall of the city, only to meet with frustration—perhaps from a lack of self-sacrificing zeal on the part of the Jewish returnees themselves or because of violent opposition from Judah’s heathen neighbors. This would account for Nehemiah’s keen disappointment (as mentioned above) when he heard that ‘the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire’ (Neh. 1:3, NASB).

“If, then, the decree of 457 granted to Ezra himself is taken as...the commencement of the 69 heptads, or 483 years, we come out to the precise year of the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah (or Christ): 483 minus 457 comes out to A.D. 26. But since a year is gained in passing from 1 B.C. to A.D. 1 (there being no such year as *zero*), it actually comes out to A.D. 27. It is generally agreed that Christ was crucified in [or around] A.D. 30, after a ministry of a little more than three years [or, more accurately, in the spring of A.D. 31 after a three-and-a-half-year ministry]. This means His baptism and initial ministry must have taken place in [the autumn of] A.D. 27—a most remarkable exactitude in the fulfillment of such an ancient prophecy. Only God could have predicted the coming of His Son with such amazing precision; it defies all rationalistic explanation” (pp. 289-291).

Just before Jesus began His ministry, the Jewish people “were in expectation” of the Messiah (Luke 3:15). And well they should have been—as it had been so clearly foretold in Daniel.

Archer continues in his encyclopedia: “Daniel 9:25 goes on to say, ‘It [the city] will again be built with the street and moat, even when times are difficult.’ It is fair to deduce from this that the actual completion of the reconstruction of the city, both walls and interior appointments of the city, would take up to about seven heptads, or forty-nine years [that is, within the first seven seven-year periods]. Soon after 400 B.C., then, the walls, the defensive moat, and all the streets and buildings behind those walls had been completely restored

“Daniel 9:26 goes on to foretell the tragic death of the Messiah: ‘And subsequent to the sixty-two heptads {ensuing upon the early installment of forty-nine}, the Messiah will be cut off and shall

have no one {or “nothing”}.’ This suggests that the Messiah would be violently put to death, without any faithful followers to protect Him. He would die alone!” (p. 291). However this follows the New International Version translation. Instead of “and shall have no one,” the NKJV renders the phrase “but not for Himself”—which may refer to the fact that Jesus Christ died not because of Himself or anything that He had done, but as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

It should be noted that the Messiah would die “after the sixty-two weeks” (verse 26)—that is, not necessarily right at the end of them but some time after they were over. “At all events, the earlier statement ‘until Messiah the Prince’ in v.25 refers to His first appearance to Israel as the baptized and anointed Redeemer of Israel; it does not refer to the year of His death, since His ‘cutting off’ is not mentioned until v.26.

“Daniel 9:26b then foretells what will happen by way of retribution to the ‘holy city’ that has rejected Jesus and voted to have Him ‘cut off’: ‘And the people of the prince who shall come {i.e., Titus, the victorious commander of the Roman troops in A.D. 70} will destroy the holy city, and its end will come with a flood {of disaster}, and war is determined down to the {very} end, with devastation.’ These vivid terms point to the total destruction that overtook Jerusalem in that fateful year” (p. 291).

We have seen that the time from the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. to the beginning of Christ’s ministry in A.D. 27 was 69 heptads—483 years. Then we see mention of the Messiah’s death, which took place three and a half years beyond the end of the 69 heptads, and Jerusalem’s destruction, which took place nearly 40 years after that. What, then of the last heptad, the 70th “week” of years? Where do these last seven years fit? There are two main Christian interpretations of the latter part of this prophecy.

We find the 70th week in verse 27: “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.” Who is the “he” in this verse? That is the critical question. There are two individuals mentioned in the previous verse: 1) the Messiah and 2) the prince who is to come. The most natural antecedent for “he” in verse 27 might seem to be the last person mentioned—the prince who is to come. Yet it is possible that it refers back to the previously mentioned person, the Messiah.

Halley’s Bible Handbook, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* and some other study aids prefer the Messiah as the “he” who confirms a covenant for one week. The idea is that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, launched a seven-year proclamation of the New Covenant, which He confirmed with His disciples, but was “cut off” “in the middle of the week”—that is, three and a half years into His ministry. However, it should be observed that the passage does not explicitly state that the Messiah would be cut off in the middle of the week. His being cut off was mentioned at the beginning of verse 26. The mention of the middle of the week is a separate reference in verse 27. Nevertheless, His being cut off in verse 26 is equated in this view with what is actually stated in verse 27 as having happened in the middle of the week—His bringing an end to sacrifice and offering. This refers, it is understood in this perspective, to the fact that Jesus Christ offered Himself as “one sacrifice for sins forever” (Hebrews 10:12), thus ending any need for blood sacrifices to provide atonement. (The “middle of the week” is dually understood by some to mean the middle of an actual week, Wednesday, which is indeed the day of the week on which Jesus was crucified.)

The end of Daniel 9:27 mentions the abomination of desolation referred to in Daniel 8 and 11. Christ explained that this would have an end-time fulfillment preceding the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:15ff.). It would last “until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate”—or, rather, as it should be understood, on the “desolator” (NRSV). Thus in this understanding, the 70th week is divided, with the first half (the first three and a half years) being the length of Christ’s human ministry and the last half (the last three and a half years) waiting until the end time—to be fulfilled either through Christ teaching His Church while they await His return in a place of refuge for the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord or, alternatively, Christ teaching people for three and a half years after His return.

This would not seem to allow for a linear progression of events in verses 26-27 of Daniel 9. For notice that, by this interpretation, the description of events in the two verses would be: 1) Messiah dies; 2) first-century Roman destruction; 3) Messiah’s ministry; 4) Messiah dies; 5) End-time abomination and destruction. Yet it is possible that this is a Hebrew poetic arrangement—thematically A, B, A, B—where the first halves of verses 26 and 27 go together, and the latter halves of verses 26 and 27 go together. Some have pointed out as a possible weakness in this interpretation the fact that when Jesus died, this did not truly bring an end to blood sacrifices—as they continued for nearly 40 more years. Even Jesus’ disciples continued to bring sacrifices to the

temple during these years. And there will be a reinstatement of temple sacrifices, as God explains through Ezekiel, during the millennial reign of Christ. Nevertheless, the once-for-all offering of Christ did end the need for the physical sacrificial system in obtaining justification with God.

The other major Christian interpretation of this section, maintained by Archer and many other commentators today, is that the “he” who confirms a covenant with many for one week in verse 27 is the one referred to immediately before in verse 26—the prince who destroys Jerusalem, the Roman leader. Yet this “he” is in this perspective a much later Roman ruler, just as we will later see in Daniel 11 that the distinctions of “king of the North” and “king of the South” denote successive rulers occupying the same offices as the prophecy progresses. Moreover, the ancient Roman destruction was a forerunner of the end-time destruction.

As mentioned in the Bible Reading Program comments on Daniel 8, and as will be more clearly seen in Daniel 11, the Greek Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes was a type of the final dictator of the end-time Roman Empire. Notice what we are told of him: “With the force of a flood they shall be swept away from before him and be broken, and also the prince of the covenant [the Jewish high priest]. And after the league is made with him he shall act deceitfully” (11:22-23). The Jewish nation had entered into a league or treaty agreement with Antiochus but he violated it. Such a league or agreement can alternatively be called a pact, compact or covenant. As part of his violation, Antiochus cut off the temple sacrifices and set up an abominable image over the temple altar—the abomination of desolation—as a type of what will transpire in the last days (see 8:11-13; 11:31; 12:11).

With all this as basis, the prince confirming a covenant with many for one week in Daniel 9:27 is seen in this alternative view as the end-time Roman leader confirming a treaty with the people of Judah (and perhaps all Israel) for what would be the final seven years of the prophecy but then revoking the agreement after three and a half years with the ending of sacrifices and the setting up of the final abomination of desolation. The condition of destruction and defilement would exist for the final three and a half years of the prophecy—until the determined consummation is poured out on this desolator.

By this interpretation, verses 26-27 do follow a linear progression: 1) Messiah dies; 2) first-century Roman destruction; 3) End-time Roman treaty with the Jews; 4) End-time breaking of treaty with ending of sacrifices; 5) End-time abomination and destruction. However, this perspective has been criticized as well. One difficulty is the fact that the Hebrew term for covenant is not used elsewhere in Daniel to denote a treaty or league.

Either way, the ending of the 70-weeks prophecy is the same—the defeat of the enemy and the triumph of God and His people. Yet, again, it was far beyond the time frame Daniel had in view. What impact this newfound understanding had on the prophet, he does not say. Yet for us, it should provide wonderful encouragement, as we see in hindsight how powerfully God has worked in history to fulfill what He has foretold—and know that the remainder yet to be fulfilled is just as certain to come.

Daniel in the Lions’ Den (Daniel 6)

March 29-31

Once again, we encounter Darius the Mede—here in a rather important context. As noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Daniel 5:31, various theories have been advanced as to his identity. Most commonly accepted today is that he was either identical with Cyrus or that he was Cyrus’ governor over Babylon, Gubaru.

That Darius passes a decree that no god or man other than him could be petitioned for 30 days and that he wields such other power besides perhaps makes it difficult to our sensitivities to see how this could have been a lesser ruler than Cyrus himself. Yet it is certainly possible that a sub-king such as Gubaru, as the representative of the sovereign, was invested with the full authority of Cyrus in the higher king’s absence. (And the exaltation of the ruler above the gods of the land was probably deemed more to symbolize the dominion of the Persian state than to exalt Darius personally.)

Interestingly, archaeology has revealed that there was great focus on Gubaru’s authority only a few years later. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* states: “As [commentator] Whitcomb (p. 35) points out, the statement in 6:28—‘and the reign of Cyrus the Persian’—may very well imply that both of them [Darius and Cyrus] ruled concurrently, with the one subordinate to the other (i.e., Darius subordinate to Cyrus). It would seem that after he had taken care of more pressing concerns elsewhere, Cyrus himself later returned to Babylon (perhaps a year or two afterward) and formally ascended the throne in an official coronation ceremony. It was in the third year of Cyrus’s reign (presumably as king of Babylon) that Daniel received the revelations in chapters 10-12. Yet it is also

evident from the cuneiform records...that Gubaru continued to serve as governor of Babylon even after Cyrus's decease. The tablets dating from 535 to 525 contained warnings that committing specified offenses would entail 'the guilt of a sin against Gubaru, the Governor of Babylon and of the District beyond the river {i.e., the regions west of the Euphrates}' (Whitcomb, p. 23)" (note on Daniel 5:30-31).

Reading chapter 6, we learn that "one of Darius's first responsibilities was to appoint administrators over the entire territory won from the Babylonians (v. 1). The 120 'satraps' chosen by him must have been of lesser rank than the 20 satraps Herodotus mentioned (3.89-94) in listing major districts composed of several smaller regions (e.g., the fifth satrapy included Phoenicia, Palestine, Syria, and Cyprus). Here in Daniel the *ahasdarpenny* ('satraps') must have been in charge of all the smaller subdivisions. But over these 120 there were three commissioners (*sarekin*, v. 2), of whom Daniel was chairman (v. 3). In view of Daniel's successful prediction in Belshazzar's banquet hall, it was only natural for Darius to select him for so responsible a position, though he was neither a Mede nor a Persian. His long experience and wide acquaintance with Babylonian government made Daniel an exceptionally qualified candidate. But after he had assumed office and turned in a record of exceptional performance, it became obvious that he had superhuman knowledge and skill; and he became a likely choice for prime minister.... [But] just as his three friends had become the target of envy many years before (ch. 3), so Daniel encountered hostility in the new Persian government. Undoubtedly the great majority of his enemies were race-conscious Medes or Persians, and they did not take kindly to the elevation of one of the Jewish captives" (note on verses 1-4). Of course, there is also a natural tendency within administrative structures for people to become jealous when better-qualified individuals among them are promoted above them.

Daniel's enemies could not dig up any dirt on him. Knowing his reputation for faithfulness to his God, they decided this was the only area they could get him into legal trouble—by making up a law contrary to his religious practice. "The government overseers (v. 6) came to the king 'as a group'.... As an official delegation, they presented their proposal, falsely implying that Daniel had concurred in their legislation. 'The royal administrators [of whom Daniel was chief], prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed' (v. 7)—i.e., in drawing up the decree. Darius should have noticed that Daniel was not there to speak for himself. Yet Darius had no reason to suspect that the other two royal administrators would misrepresent Daniel's position in this matter, and certainly the reported unanimity of all the lower echelons of government must have stilled any doubts Darius had about the decree. The suggested mode of compelling every subject in the former Babylonian domain to acknowledge the authority of Persia seemed a statesmanlike measure that would contribute to the unification of the Middle and Near East. The time limit of one month seemed reasonable. After it the people could resume their accustomed worship. So, without personally consulting Daniel himself, Darius went ahead and affixed his signature or seal to the decree (v. 9)" (note on verses 6-9).

The new law could not be rescinded (verse 8). "Once a royal decree had been issued, it could not be revoked—even by the king himself. It remained in force until its time of expiration. The practice of creating an unchangeable law may follow from the idea that changing a decree was an admission that it had been faulty" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 8).

Despite the severe penalty mandated for disobedience, Daniel would not be deterred from his regular prayers to God. It is interesting to consider that he could have resorted to praying to God in secret. And no doubt he often did anyway, just as all believers. Indeed, it seems that Daniel perhaps prayed in open sight three times a day toward Jerusalem to serve as a continual witness of God to the pagan empire and as an example to the Jews in captivity to be bold in their devotion to God and their faith in His promise of future return to the Holy Land. The morning and evening sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple had been a continual public witness of the true religion in Judah—and as noted in the Bible Reading Program's comments on Daniel 9, there seems to have been a relation to those offerings and Daniel's example of regular prayer. Perhaps Daniel, as the senior Jewish official in the empire, saw it as his duty to continue a form of that witness. Whatever the reason behind his practice, he no doubt felt that to cease from his practice in the face of a contrary religious decree would have been quite a witness of itself—a witness of compromise, godless fear and apparent denial of God. In no way would he, prophet of the Most High God who had humbled Nebuchadnezzar and had later given Babylon into the hands of Persia, cower at this plot against him and attack on his faith. He trusted God to defend His own holy name.

When the conspirators reported Daniel's disobedience, the king was very displeased with himself (verse 14). "For the first time the real reason for the decree dawned on him. He probably realized that he had been manipulated by Daniel's enemies, and he regretted his failure to consult Daniel

before putting the decree in writing. Undoubtedly Darius respected Daniel for his consistent piety to his God. Throughout the day he tried his best to save Daniel's life. He may have thought of ways of protecting him from the lions, perhaps by overfeeding them or by covering Daniel with armor. Such schemes would have been interpreted as subterfuges undermining the king's own law. A miracle was Daniel's only hope. Darius undoubtedly respected Daniel's God—the God who had enabled him to interpret the letters on Belshazzar's wall and who had made Daniel the most able administrator in the court. Could it be that this God might save him? In all probability Darius had also heard of the deliverance of Daniel's three comrades from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. By sunset, therefore, the king had resigned himself to comply with the conspirators' desire; and when they again reminded him of his irrevocable decree (v. 15), he was ready to go ahead with the penalty. Yet to show his personal concern for his cherished minister, Darius went with Daniel to the very mouth of the pit where the lions were kept" (*Expositor's*, notes on verses 13-17).

And so Daniel was cast into the den of lions and sealed within. People today often imagine a young, vigorous Daniel in the pit with the ferocious beasts. But the prophet was an old man, in his early 80s. All his life God had proved faithful. This night would be no exception.

The king spent the night fasting (verse 18). Whether he just couldn't eat, or refused to as a form of penance, or was actually trying to seek Daniel's God is not clear. But the next morning, he rushed to the lion's den and called out to Daniel, "servant of the living God" (verse 20). And Daniel answered back, "O king, live forever!" "Though this is a standard way of greeting a king (see 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6), it is ironic here because Daniel, who has just been made alive by the God whom even Darius confesses as 'the living God' (v. 20), blesses the king with the wish that he should live forever. That is literally possible for the king, of course, only if he comes to know Daniel's God who is the source of life, as the lion's den episode shows so clearly" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 21).

The king then issues a new order. "Without any judicial hearing or trial, King Darius, absolute monarch that he was, ordered Daniel's accusers to be haled before him and then cast with their families into the pit they had conspired to have Daniel thrown into. Presumably Darius considered them guilty of devising the decree that could have deprived the king of his most able counselor. Furthermore, they had lied to the king when they had averred that 'all agreed' (v. 7) to recommend this decree, when Daniel (the foremost of the administrators) had not even been consulted in the matter" (*Expositor's*, note on verse 24). Yet what of the families? "What Darius did seems arbitrary and unjust. But ancient pagan despots had no regard for the provision in the Mosaic law (Deut 24:16): 'Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin'.... Perhaps Darius acted as he did to minimize the danger of revenge against the executioner by the family of those who were put to death" (same note).

Darius then issues a new decree that Daniel's God, the living God, be honored. Perhaps this was after the original 30-day decree had expired. As for Daniel, his position as prime minister was now secure, and he apparently continued in it until his retirement a few years later.