

Daniel Sermons-Wayne Barber

THE BOOK OF DANIEL STUDY BY DR WAYNE BARBER Daniel 1-6

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Three Requirements for Studying Daniel

Well, turn to the book of Daniel. I want to talk about three requirements for studying the book of Daniel. If we're going to study together, there's going to have to be three things we're going to have to measure up to if we're going to get anything from it.

It's a hard thing to admit when you're wrong. I hate to do that worse than anything. Of course, it's only once or twice a year! But I really hate to do that. For years I have been saying that it's not necessary to study prophecy. And I've said that basically I'm more of a practical person, let's live today! It's all going to take care of itself one day anyway. But I have to admit to you tonight that I've been wrong. As a matter of fact I began to study and realized that one-fourth of all Scripture is prophecy. Do you realize that? One-fourth of the Bible is prophecy. Can you imagine taking your Bible tonight and cutting it into four pieces and taking one and throwing it away and studying the other three-fourths? Look at how much you've missed when you don't study prophecy. And when I say that "you," I'm referring to myself. Not only that, but one-fifth of all Scripture was predictive when it was written, and most of that has already

been fulfilled. And not only that, some of the things that we love to talk about and study about in Scripture is all wrapped up in prophecy.

For instance, the Lord Jesus is the main theme, whether directly or indirectly, in all of prophecy. You want to know about the Lord Jesus, you want to know why it's wrong not to believe He's God's Son? You go back and realize the prophecy of His coming, it is incredible what's in prophecy about the Lord Jesus. Not only the Lord Jesus, Israel. And everybody's wondering about Israel. There are some people, as I was in South Africa preaching in a particular denomination there, we ran across some folks who believe that Israel was completely done away with when the Lord Jesus came and the New Covenant began. And they say now that the wheat and the tares grow side by side, therefore they don't see any future for the nation of Israel. Somehow they can't seem to get into their minds in the New Testament it doesn't say "Israel" and the Greek are one in Jesus Christ. It says the Jew and the Greek, speaking of individuals out of the tribe of Israel who will come as a remnant to know the Lord Jesus Christ. It has nothing to say about Israel. Israel is still God's people, folks! And He's not through with them.

There are some people who say, "Oh, no! We're God's people now!" Yes, we are. But God has a plan for Israel. God chose them and we know that there's a history to Israel, and you don't understand that until you understand prophecy. It's all wrapped up in prophecy. God is not finished with Israel yet.

Well, not only is Israel mentioned in prophecy, but we also find the Gentile nations. Now, that's important to you and me, because that's where we come from. We need to be interested in the Gentile nations; what's going to happen to the Gentile nations. And I guess the one question that's facing everybody in the twentieth century is, "How is this age going to end?" How in the world is all this going to come to a head and every bit of that is wrapped up in prophecy, and everything I just spoke about is found in the book of Daniel.

Folks, this is the most exciting book I guess I've ever gotten hold of. I've said that about every book we've studied, but I really mean that as far as Daniel is concerned. I remember last year coming out of Romania and flew over to Switzerland and caught that plane coming to the United States of America. And as I flew out I picked up a Newsweek magazine. And in the Newsweek magazine it had a history of World War II. You know, I've never really sat down and read a lot about World War II. I've always been interested in it. A great big special section, about an inch thick, great big old copy, I think it was US News and World Report or one of those things. And as I started reading it I thought, "Man, I've got all kinds of time—ten hours. I'm just going to read this thing through." While I was reading that thing I got down to where Hitler invaded Paris. And it was so interesting how it talked about how he really surprised them about that invasion. And about that time the pilot up front of the plane said, "Ladies and gentlemen, if you're sitting on the right side of the plane," which I was, "if you'll look out your window, just to the right there, it's the city of Paris." I couldn't believe it! I was just reading about Paris, how Hitler moved in on that city. And then we moved on and I'd read a little bit further and the pilot would come on and it was almost like I was getting a travel log to that magazine I was reading. And I got to thinking, "Man, oh man."

And I got the same feeling when I was studying the book of Daniel. Folks, you watch the newspapers, you're watching things happening. Our young people don't seem to understand that there's more history taking place faster right now than ever in the history of man, going on right before our very eyes. It's almost like we're on a plane and we're taking the Word of God that's already been God-inspired and God-breathed and the pilot of this plane comes over the microphone and says, "Ladies and gentlemen, while you're studying the book of Daniel, if you'll just look out your window to the right, notice what's happening over here. Oh, and by the way, if you're sitting on the left of the plane will you look right over here." Folks, it's happening right before our very eyes.

And it's all found in the book of Daniel. If you want to know about the end of the age, if you want to know about what God has prophesied of what will take place in history, it's all there in God's Word. Well, if we're going to study Daniel, there are three requirements that we're going to have to meet, and if we don't meet them, we might as well hang it up. We'll never understand what's being said in this precious book. Now, I don't know if I'll get to all three of them this time, but guarantee I'm going to get one of them. And the first one is this: the inerrancy of the prophets.

The Inerrancy of the Prophets

The inerrancy of the prophets. These are convictions: you're going to have to be convicted of the inerrancy of the prophets or you're absolutely dead in the water when it comes to studying God's Word. What do I mean by that? I mean that the prophet cannot err in what he prophesied. You must realize that about the Old Testament prophets. Now, the Old Testament prophet was a lot different from those people going around proclaiming themselves to be prophets today. Quite different. Some of these quacks, they get on the thing and predict certain things to happen, and they hit and they miss and they hit and they miss. Man, you can't do that and qualify to be an Old Testament prophet.

I remember several years ago, somebody got in the paper and put a prophecy down that a large stadium during a football game was going to fall down and they believed it was going to be in the state of Kentucky. I'll never forget it. And that particular weekend I was going to Western Kentucky to see them play some team. And when I walked in the stadium I kept thinking about what I'd heard

on the TV and what I'd read in the newspapers that a large stadium in the state of Kentucky was going to fall during the football game. And I thought, "Now, that's just hogwash. Those people don't know what they're talking about."

But I happened to be sitting right underneath the great big balcony that would have fallen. And I remember sitting there during the game and every time I'd feel the stadium move—and they do move, by the way—I'd look up. And I began to plan, "Now, if that thing falls, where am I going to go?" But, you know, after the game was over I had expended a lot of emotion and that stadium was still standing. That was a false prophet, folks! That prophet was nothing like what we're talking about in the Old Testament.

You must realize that when a prophet would prophesy, they had to be exactly right every time or they were not considered to be a prophet. Now, once you get that down in your thinking, you'll be able to follow through. Because, you see, most of what a prophet says has not taken place, so you look and see what has been said and what has taken place and you've got to hang on. If it says it's going to take place, then you've got to believe it's going to take place. That's the inerrancy of the prophet.

There are two things about a prophet. Let's look at them under this heading, "The Inerrancy of the Prophet." First of all, the calling of a prophet. Now just who are these guys? I want you to see first of all that they were raised up by God. Turn to Deuteronomy 18. This will be a good time to learn the books of the Bible because we're going to jump around. Deuteronomy 18: They were called by God, they were raised up by God, and the people were supposed to be listening to those prophets. God intended to speak to the people through the prophets. Of course, you know that Israel decided they didn't want a prophet any more. They wanted a king; and they messed up. God told Samuel, "Don't worry, Samuel, they're not rebelling against you, they're rebelling against Me."

Verse 18 of chapter 18. Of course, this is referring to the Prophet of all prophets, the Lord Jesus, but it says in verse 18: "I will raise up a prophet from among your countrymen like you and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak them to all that I command him." Verse 19 says, "And it shall come about that whoever shall not listen to My Words, which he shall speak in My Name, I Myself will require it of him." So you see, a prophet was raised up and especially the Prophet of all prophets, the Lord Jesus, which we find right here in Deuteronomy 18. They were raised up and God said, "I will put My Words in their mouth and they will speak to you and you had better listen unto them."

So they were not self-appointed, they were God-raised up. As a matter of fact, they were chosen from all different kinds of society. There were the priestly prophets like Samuel and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. There was the aristocracy like Isaiah. And then there were the common prophets like Amos. It doesn't really matter what rank of society you came from. God almost, it seemed like, at random would pick a man here or pick a man there or pick a man over here and he would become His prophet and He would raise him up. They were called forth of God to speak the Words of God and the people were to listen to the prophets. God chose them to speak to the people. They were called, they were raised up.

But then, secondly, I want you to see the characteristics of a prophet. What were these guys like? Who were these people and what were their lifestyles like? First of all, they lived in a close relationship with God. Matter of fact, one of the names for prophet in the Old Testament, they're called "men of God" or a "man of God." Now go to 1 Samuel 9:6. And this is, of course, referring to Samuel as they go up to him, Saul and his men. But it says in verse 6, "And he said to him, 'Behold now, there is a man of God in this city and the man is held in honor.'" Don't let me read that too fast. "And he said to him, 'Behold, there is a [what?] man of God in this city.'" And he's referring to the prophet Samuel.

Now turn with me to 2 Kings 4. And by the way, get ready to go back and forth from 2 Kings to 1 Kings. We're going to do that for a minute or two. Second Kings 4, speaking of Elisha, called a holy man or a man of God. Look what it says in verse 8: "Now there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman," a Shunemite woman, "and she persuaded him to eat food. And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. And she said to her husband, 'Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually.'"

Now, because they were men of God, and because they were known as the holy men of God, because they had a close relationship with God, they were feared. You know why? Because whenever sin was present in the camp, that holy man of God usually brought forth the judgment of God. You don't want to see a prophet, brother, when there's sin in the camp, because God would speak His judgment to those people through that prophet. As a matter of fact, let me give you an illustration. Go to 1 Kings 17:18. This is after the lady's son dies, and Elijah is dealing with it. This is Elijah now, not Elisha, and this lady's son has died, and look what she says in verse 18: "So she said to Elijah, 'What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance, and to put my son to death!'" She had misinterpreted why he was there and thought that because he was there her son had died. And so they feared the prophets. Why? Because the prophet normally is a man of God, is a holy man of God, walking in close relationship with Him, having been raised up by God would pronounce the judgment of God.

Well, secondly the prophet only had one purpose and that was to be a servant of God. Another title found in the Old Testament, rendered to all the prophets, is a "servant of God." Not only a man of God, but a servant of God. Matter of fact, this is a title for all prophets in 2 Kings 9. Here we go, back to 2 Kings. They were servants of God. All the prophets were servants of God. Second

Kings 9:7: "And you shall strike the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants [the what?] the prophets." All the prophets were God's servants. They were men of God, they were servants of God.

Now, go back to 1 Kings 18, and we see this as a mark of Elijah. Servants of God: men of God, servants of God. First Kings 18:36, "Then it came about at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word.'" As a matter of fact they were such servants of God that they believed very strongly that they were sent forth by God.

Now go over to Isaiah 6. This isn't one of those messages that makes you want to go to the mission field, but I think it's what we have to do if we're going to understand the book of prophecy. We're going to have to realize what a prophet is. God raises them up; they're holy men; they're servants of God. Of course this is in the year of King Uzziah's death when Isaiah saw the Lord. Isaiah 6:8, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go of Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' And He said, 'go, and tell this people: "Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.'""

And look with me in Jeremiah 26 as it speaks of Jeremiah as one who is sent from God. I want to make sure you have a distinction in your mind for the prophets of the Old Testament and what some people talk about as prophecy under the New Covenant. There's quite a difference. Jeremiah 26:15, "Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing." So then they were men of God, they were raised up of God, they were servants of God, and they were sent forth by God.

But the third thing and I think this is the most exciting thing about a prophet: a prophet was an interpreter of historical events in light of God's sovereignty. Can I say that again? I think that might be profound. A prophet was an interpreter of historical events in the light of God's sovereignty. There are so many people today who don't understand the sovereignty of God. Man, they get all nervous and bent out of shape when things start happening in countries and in nations. Friend, God is in control. And only through the prophets of the Old Testament does He reveal history in light of His sovereignty. As a matter of fact, Israel could not be understood, what's going on in 1948. If you'd have gone back to 1945 people would have laughed in your face that Israel could ever be a nation again. Friend, way back in the Old Testament it was prophesied that it would be and they became a nation in 1948 and we began to look at the Word of God, and in light of God's sovereignty, we began to see history and we began to understand how to interpret it.

As a matter of fact, prophecy arises out of history, it interprets it, and it keeps pace with it. A lot of people say that you can't go to the Word of God and find anything historical. Well, that's the most off the wall thing I've ever heard. If you want to find out what history is all about, friend, you better go to the Word of God because Israel is the center of all prophecy. As a matter of fact, Israel is the center point of the whole world today, and everything happens somehow in light of what is going on in Israel. And it's all right here in the Old Testament. A prophet was an interpreter of events in light of God's sovereignty. As a matter of fact, God would reveal His secrets to the prophets.

Now turn to the book of Amos. Amos 3, he revealed His secrets to them in verses 7-8: "Surely the Lord God does nothing [now watch this] unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants [the who?] the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" So we see that the Lord would reveal history through His prophets and we begin to see it in light of His sovereignty.

So first of all then, they are men of God, they're called men of God. Secondly, they're servants of God. Thirdly, they're interpreters of history in light of the sovereignty of God. But the fourth thing I want you to see tonight is that all prophets spoke by the inspiration of God. God inspired them to speak. Now, let's go to the New Testament, 2 Peter 1:20-21. It says in verse 20, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation." My wife and I just got back from doing a retreat in Virginia. And I know it was interesting how the men of that church had been going through some struggles and their struggles were not over what God had said, their struggles were over doing what God had said. And I shared with them that it should never be a struggle. God's will absolutely must be done at any cost. If we're ever going to have disagreements, folks, let it be over what God has said so we can come to agree. We need to understand that if you differ with me, one of us is wrong. And when you finally get right with God and we agree, we can go on! No! But let's argue over that, let's discuss that. But let's never find ourselves arguing over, once we've discerned what God has said, whether or not we're going to do what God has said. Scripture is no private interpretation.

Verses 21 says, "For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." And that's to me is just incredible. These are men raised up of God, men who spoke many times things they didn't even understand themselves. But they simply became a mouthpiece for God and God would begin to reveal His judgments and reveal His plan, both past, present, and future through these prophets of the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, look with me in Hebrews 1:1 and we'll find that the prophets didn't have all of it together. You can't find any prophet—I guess Daniel is the most complete—but you don't find any prophet who has every piece of the puzzle. Each one of them has a differing piece of the puzzle. Hebrews 1:1, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers [how?] in many portions and in many ways." You see, one prophet had this piece of the puzzle,

another prophet had that piece of the puzzle, and they themselves many times didn't even understand all that they were saying. They were totally moved by the Holy Spirit of God. It was a totally God-initiated move. It was a man raised up of God and a message that only God could have given through that man. And the people were to listen to it.

Well, look with me in 1 Peter 1:10-12: "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look." Isn't it incredible the privileged generation we live in? Those prophets couldn't understand it all. They didn't know when He was coming. They didn't know anything except what God was putting on their hearts about the sufferings of Christ. But now we know Him personally and He lives in our life. And we can look back and look at all the prophets, and we can see the picture come together. That's exactly what's going to happen as we look at the book of Daniel. What a privileged time to study a book of prophecy.

So, the inerrancy of the prophet: he cannot be wrong. If a prophet was ever wrong, he disqualified himself of being a prophet. Called of God, he was raised up of God; he lived in a close relationship with God as a man of God. He was a servant of God; he interpreted history in light of God's sovereignty. And all prophets spoke by inspiration. And, folks, we come to the book of Daniel, don't just flippantly look into it. Because unless you have this nailed down, you will not get the message that God wants us to have in the book of Daniel. Man! If you're going to read through it for awhile, I trust that you will. When you get to chapter 7 just stop. We'll get there together soon enough. That's when it's going to get tough. The first few chapters are going to bless your heart. It'll all come to mean something to you. I wanted to go on and finish this tonight but I'm just not going to do it. I've got too much I want to say on it, so I'm going to just let you off the hook. I'll get you next time.

Start reading through the book of Daniel. You know, folks, do you love this Book? Do you love this Book? When you get to the book of Daniel, brother, you're going to start realizing that God's already got it under control. I think the one thing that grabs me so much is, man, I gripe and fuss and complain half the time. You get in the book of Daniel and you realize God has been in control the whole time. Last night, when my wife and I got off the plane and found out that the city was flooded, I said, "Well, can't I rent a car?" And they said no, that parts of I-75 and north Georgia are also closed. We can't even take a bus? We're going to have to stay in a hotel and I thought to myself, "God, why would you do that? I'm ready to preach. Now I could understand if I'd been messing around last week and didn't have my message ready. But how come You're not going to let me go?"

I called Brother Spiros, and—I loved his spirit—he said, "I'm the emergency preacher, I'm ready." I don't know why I had any doubt that he'd be ready or not. But you know, I've been sick the last several days, and today I realized that I really needed some rest and as I came in this afternoon I thought, "You know, God had something to say through Brother Spiros that the church needed this morning. God's in control."

Man, they did the same thing back in the Old Testament. "God, why are You doing this?" And God would say, "Would you just relax, you couldn't handle it if I told you." I think about old Habakkuk, bless his heart. "Lord, when are You going to do something?" And God said, "Habakkuk, would you sit down and shut up. You can't handle it." "Lord, when are You going to do something?" "I am doing something Habakkuk." "What are You doing Lord?" And He said, write this down, "I'm raising the enemy to power." And old Habakkuk had to back up a little bit and clear his throat four or five times, and then he comes back and tries to impress the Lord with all the good things he can say about Him. And then he finally gets in his two cents worth and he says, "God how you put up with all those mean people?" In other words, how are you doing that? God says, "Habakkuk, you wouldn't understand if I told you. Now, you just do what I tell you and you'll be alright. I'm in charge of this situation." And finally He reveals to Habakkuk what He's doing. Toward the last part of the book, you find a different character, don't you? He says, "Oh boy, when the vine bares no fruit and the fields are barren, I will wait patiently upon the Lord." Cause it finally dawned on him who was in control. Folks, if you don't believe that, then you'll have trouble with Daniel. I want to go on but I can't. Let's pray.

Father, we just thank You so much for just the excitement that comes from thinking about the fact that You've already got it planned as to how history will end. And, Father, we thank You for the book of Daniel. We thank You Father for the prophet Daniel. We thank You Lord that in chapter 1 verse 8 he made up his mind that he would not defile himself. And we thank You, Father, for how You honored him because he answered the highest calling of obeying You. Lord, I just pray tonight that as we begin to get into this book, we'll recognize Your sovereign Hand on everything that is going on, whether You're allowing it or initiating it, Father we know You're in control and we praise You for that. We thank You Lord that we're just to be in the flow of whatever You're doing. We love You and we thank You for these prophets of old, Father, that through them we now can reap a benefit as we look at Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray.

Our God is an Awesome God-Part 1

Turn with me this morning to the book of Daniel. I want you to start getting used to it. Put your marker there, we're going to be there for a while. And I want us to look at chapter 2, at one verse. Don't worry; I'm not getting into the text yet. We may not do that for awhile. I want you to be studying through it with me. Would you do that? Would you start reading through the book of Daniel? I know when you get into chapter 7 and you begin to go through this, it's going to be a little tough. That's alright. Relax; we'll get there sooner or later. Don't read a commentary, don't read somebody else's words, just start reading the book of Daniel. What I'm going to be doing today and possibly one more Sunday, is to try and give us a setting. I realize these messages are not the kind that makes you want to go to the mission field. I understand. This is just spade work. We've got to dig up some dirt here and we've to get ourselves ready so that we can see where Daniel fits in to the Scriptures that God has given to us.

But in Daniel 2:20-21, actually, verses 20 and 21 become the part of a real praise that Daniel is giving back to the Lord for God having answered his prayer. He says there, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and He establishes kings." "He removes kings and He establishes kings." Now, this morning I want to talk about the fact that our God is an awesome God. If I could sing, I would just sing, "Our God is an awesome God!" Only thing is, I can't remember the words; I know that's part of it! Boy! Don't you love that song: "Our God Is An Awesome God!" Now, before I get into that, let me go back to what we did last time we were together. We said there were three requirements that one had to pass or nail down before Daniel could ever mean anything to him.

Actually there are three convictions. The first one was the inerrancy of the prophets. Now the Old Testament prophet, friend, was a unique individual. We've never seen anything like it. When God spoke to the people, He spoke through His prophet. He was a mouthpiece, he didn't add anything to it, didn't take anything away from it, just simply declared what God had told him to share. Now, if you don't believe in the inerrancy of the prophets, you're going to have trouble with the book of Daniel. Now, they came from all classes of people at random. God would pick them from the priestly class, from the poor class, from the aristocracy. We see prophets coming from all different areas of society. And God would use them as His men, His mouthpieces. They were holy men of God as we saw, they were servants of God, and they interpreted history in the light of God's sovereignty.

You see, nothing happens in history, friends, that God is not behind. God is the author of all history. When there would be a famine in the land, a prophet would arise on the scene and tell why the famine was there. When there would be an enemy to raise up, a prophet would show up on the scene. As a matter of fact, they got to fearing the prophets, because everywhere the prophet would be, he'd usually have a judgment from the Lord because the people were very definitely rebellious and stiff-necked when it came to obeying God. So he was a man used of God to relay the judgments and the prophecies of what God was doing with His people. They spoke by inspiration of God.

Now, if they were ever wrong, they were disqualified from being a prophet. A prophet could never be wrong. You hear people in the 20th century trying to proclaim themselves prophets. Aw, that's ridiculous! These guys were never wrong. Some people might get it three out of four times; that doesn't qualify. You've got to be right every single time. You say, "Now, why is that important today?" I'll tell you why! Because it's one thing to say, "Well, yes, he must have been right. This has already taken place." That's one thing. But friend, if you believe in the inerrancy of the prophet, we're going to see in the book of Daniel he's going to say some things about what has never yet happened on the face of this earth. And if you don't believe in the inerrancy of the prophet, you're going to start doubting what the Word of God has to say through the prophet Daniel. So you must nail that down: the inerrancy of the prophets.

I was going to preach on the other two today, but I just changed my mind. I really believe we have hammered these things so hard into the floor, if you don't realize them by now, you're either in the wrong place or you just need to get saved.

The second one is the infallibility of the Word. I don't need to preach on that again. Second Timothy 3:16 ought to suffice for all of us. "All Scripture," and the word "all" in the Greek is a unique little word that means "all". And the word "scripture" means that which is written down, not oral tradition, that which is written down. "All Scripture is inspired by God." Now if somehow you've wandered into this church and you wonder where we stand on the Word of God, let me tell you real quickly: it is the inerrant, it is the inspired, and it is the infallible Word of God. Now if you don't believe that, you're probably going to be a little disjointed in this church. This is where we're going, this is where we stand, and we make no apologies about it. As a matter of fact, the inerrancy of the Word of God has never been the issue to me: it's the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When a person is bowed down to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is amazing how inerrant this Book suddenly becomes.

When I was in seminary I had the privilege of understanding what a liberal seminary was all about because I went to one for awhile. Boy, it will really thrill you, the JDE and P theory. Boy, it will really bless your heart. The first 11 chapters of Genesis were taught to me as myth. The only reason the 12th chapter of Genesis was literal was because they couldn't figure out how Abraham could be a nation. So they had to make him a man and that sort of made it literal. Jesus didn't really know that Moses wrote the first five books

of the Bible because He was just a little boy and that's what He was taught at home, so when He said it, He was just saying it out of ignorance. That's what everybody else told Him to say. Wouldn't that bless you? Just makes you excited.

Anyway, when I was in seminary all the guys would sit around and they'd discuss with a cup of coffee. "Well, I wonder if this is God's Word or is it not." I'm telling you, it just made me so mad. I went over to another seminary doing a J semester, J term, and it was Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky. I thank the Lord for that place. I don't know what it's like now; I know what it was like back then. I walked on the ground and it was almost like sensing the presence of God. So different. Liberalism, friend, never breathes life, it breathes death. But friend, when you honor God and honor His Word, you're going to find the life you're looking for. I saw kids sit out under the trees with the Word of God. And they didn't even have a class in it; they were just studying it so they could meet with the Lord.

I went into my classroom with Dr. Robert Coleman, I'd never seen him before; I'd only seen his name on a book. I'd read his book and I was impressed. He wrote The Master Plan of Evangelism and several others, so I wanted to take him as a professor for that course. Here I am sitting there in the class and I heard somebody walking down the hall singing, "And can it be..." I can't remember the words to that one either, but it's a good song. That's the one that says "my chains fell off and I rose to follow him." And I heard him singing. I said, "Who is that?" And it was Dr. Coleman. He walked into the classroom, and I want to tell you something, the class broke into a four-part harmony, I could have shouted! He walked up to the front of the room and I got cold chills all over me. I'd found the place! And he got to the front of the room and he said, "Now, gentlemen, let's stand together, raise your hands to a Holy God!" Got up, he prayed us right into the throne room. This guy could get it done with the Lord!

We sat down and he said, "I want to make a statement to this class." He said, "If anybody in this class ever dares for one second to question the inerrancy, the infallibility, and the inspiration of this Book, there's going to be a holy hush in this class." He said, "Some of you from other seminaries, because see, we're going to realize if you've had the audacity to step across the line of the sovereignty of God." I want to tell you, he'd start teaching in that classroom and I would weep to the point that sometimes my notes on the blood of Jesus, I couldn't even see them on the page. And I thought to myself, "This is what seminary is supposed to be." Life that comes from a Book that God has inspired.

I'm going to tell you something. If you're going to study Daniel with us, you'd better nail something down. First of all, the inerrancy of the prophets; secondly is the infallibility of the Word of God. Don't you even question it if you're going to be a part of this group, friend. We're all going a different direction from you if you don't believe this is God's Book. And thirdly, is the illumination of the Spirit of God. None of us are smart enough to put it together. God the Holy Spirit is going to have to reveal truth. And 1 Corinthians 2:10-14 very clearly states we did not receive the spirit of this world, but we receive the Spirit of God who reveals the deep things of God.

There's no way in the world that somebody intellectually can study Daniel apart from that revelation of God's Holy Spirit. And so when we come to this book we're not coming because we're so intellectual and we're so smart that we can get it. No, we're bowing down before God for the Book that He has God-inspired and we're asking the Holy Spirit to give us understanding as we go through the book of Daniel. So there are the three requirements and that's the message I was going to preach. Now this message: our God is an awesome God.

Our God is an awesome God

He's the God of history. Now, as we saw in Daniel 2:21, He raises up kings, He establishes kingdoms. He's the One who changes the epochs and the times. Do you realize that the center point of this world, the actual center of all geographical places on the face of this earth is what? A little country called Israel. With Jerusalem, does that remind anybody of anything? You have that as the center point of our world and do you realize that's the center point of all history? Boy, secular historians cannot figure it out, how one nation was raised up one day and was taken down the next day. And how another nation could come in and be raised up and put down, and another nation. But if you'll study the Word of God, this Book tells us that God is the God of history. Man, if anything comes out of this message at all this morning, it ought to be the absolute sovereignty of God. He is in control. He's the One who changes history. He's the One that's causing what's going on over in the Communist countries right now. God's in control. We can go through free elections in America and we can elect a president, but my friend, it is God who is the head of the nation. And it is God who puts men into places. It's God who gives power, it's God who tears down power, it's God who establishes nations in this world.

And if you don't see that, you're going to miss the whole point of Daniel. And when He would speak to His prophets, friend, they would tell you exactly what was going to take place, and I mean it happened right on the day. You could set your watch by it, because God has been in control of history. And the center point of all history is that little nation called Israel. So many of us don't understand that. It's amazing, and I want us to see this morning how Israel came about and to give you a short, brief history of Israel, bring you up until they split into ten tribes, the ten northern tribes split away, how they were taken into captivity, and that's going to be our message this morning. You can think to yourself, "Oh, boy, here we go!" Now, listen, I think it's exciting. I think perhaps it will help some of you. To some of you it will be a review, to others of you, you're going to say, "My goodness, I didn't know that!" That's

the ones I'm preaching to right now! Have you ever asked the question or been asked, "Where did Israel come from? What's a Jew all about? Who are these people?"

Friend, do you realize that Israel is the only nation that is in covenant with the living God? You can't find any other nation like that. There are Christians today who say, "Oh, no, brother. When Jesus came on the scene, He did away with Israel. Now it's just the wheat and the tares side by side until Jesus comes again." My friend, that's hogwash. If you understand the Word of God, Israel is in covenant with God, God's not finished with Israel, they have a land that He's given to them, and, brother, watch that land, watch that country, it's the center point of all history even today.

Now, let's go back to Genesis 12. Stay with me now, don't draw pictures, stay with me! We're going to get through this thing. This is the spade work, we've got to do it if we're going to understand where Daniel fits in, who he's dealing with, and what's going on. Now you know the background of Genesis chapters 1-11, or you should. Genesis 1: God created this world. It didn't just happen, it wasn't two little cells floating around in space and bang into each other and now we have interstate highways and airplanes that fly. God spoke and it was created. I mean, that's as clear as all you need to know. When God speaks, He creates, and when He creates, it's good in His sight. And He created this earth.

Now, He created man, and we see Adam and Eve in the garden. And He told them, "Now, listen, don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Well, they sin in chapter 3 of Genesis and you begin to see the downfall of man. Romans tells us that sin entered the world and death by sin. This is the beginning of the depravity of man. No one of the liberal schools try to deny the first eleven chapters of Genesis, because if you do you take away man's depravity and you make Adam a representative man and everybody has the same chance. Well, that's not the Word of God. When Adam sinned, sin entered this world and from that point on every man born of woman was born into sin. That's the beginning of sin in this world.

And you see the separation as man is ripped away from God. You see Cain killing his brother Abel and you begin to see a downfall. And in chapter 7 of Genesis you see God flushing the whole thing in the flood and just absolutely in disgust of what's going on in this earth. But He saved one man and his family, and that man was Noah. And in Noah's life, the first time covenant is ever mentioned in the Word of God, it's with that man Noah, as He covenanted with Noah, because He found a man who would honor Him and He spared that man. Well, of course, after the flood was over you see them trying to build a tower to make a name for themselves and how God was angered again, and He scattered them and changed their languages, and that's the 11th chapter of Genesis.

And then you come in to the twelfth chapter of Genesis. We see a redemptive God here. Oh, folks, if you can understand this. It's not man looking for his God, it's God looking for His creation. Man has never sought after God, there's "none righteous, no not one." It is God, the all-powerful, loving God who in His redemptive part begins to speak out for man. And we begin to see Him unveil His plan of redemption as He chooses a man by the name of Abram. He pulls him out. He's a Chaldean now, there wasn't anything on this earth known as Israel, He chooses him out from the land of Ur, he's a Chaldean, and He chooses to make covenant with that man. Isn't it incredible? Picked a man out! Friend, in chapter 12 watch this: He says, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land'" to the land, to the land, underline that, "which I will show you; and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will also curse. And in you, Abram, all the families, nations of the earth shall be blessed."

Well, Abram does what God tells him to do, and in the 15th chapter of Genesis, we see God cutting covenant with Abraham. Now you must understand that covenant is an agreement. Covenant cannot be broken. This covenant is an everlasting covenant as Genesis 15 tells us. You see, Abram believed God. Look at verse 6: "And he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." And so he becomes the father of faith. What did he do? He believed God, and because of his belief in God, then God reckoned that unto him as righteousness. That was his day of salvation. And, folks, something that Galatians has to help us with that we don't see here is that on that day, somehow, the gospel was preached to Abram. Can you believe this? And Jesus said in the book of John, Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he rejoiced and he was glad. Abram understood what God was doing; Abram understood the covenant that God was making with him. And my friend, when they would cut covenants, the two would walk in together, but in this covenant in Genesis 15, He put Abram to sleep and God Himself walked between the pieces of animal that had been separated. In other words, there was no way that man could ever break this covenant. It's an everlasting covenant that God has made with Abram.

Now what did He promise Abram? He promised him three things and the Jews can only see two, and many Christians can only see one. He promised him three things: He promised him a nation—and my friend that nation is here today in the 20th century and it's called the nation of Israel. He promised him a land—and that land is over there today. They have more right to their land than you and I do to the property that we have that we pay mortgages on every week. God gave it to them and it's not going to change. But He promised them one more thing: He promised them a seed. And that's where the Jew messes up. That's where the Jewish

mindset cannot see it. Galatians 3 brings this out. The Seed is the Lord Jesus Christ! Through Abram—that's why Isaac had to be born to Abram and to Sarah—because through them there was going to come a Seed and the Seed would be the Lord Jesus Christ. The Messiah! And it was going to be through Him that all nations, including Israel, would be blessed on this earth.

But, oh, how the Jewish mindset has missed that. Oh, they see the nation, they see the land, but they've never recognized the Seed. The problem is on both sides. We have the Jewish people not recognizing the Seed; we have the Christians not recognizing Israel nor the land. But, my friend, they're all three a part of a covenant that is everlasting. He promised all three of them. Then He changed Abram's name to Abraham in Genesis 17, and Sarai became Sarah, and they took upon themselves God's Name and they were in a bound covenant with God Himself.

Now, we begin to watch how Israel progresses. Where does Israel come from? So far, only a promise: nation, land, and a Seed. You see, this is why so many people think, like I said earlier, that when Jesus came that Israel was done away with. That only the wheat and the tares grow side by side. That's not right, folks! Israel is still in covenant with God. Yes, He's closed the door on them right now. That's why Jews can come to the Lord Jesus Christ as individuals, but as a nation you'll not see Israel repent. But there will come a day that they will. There's going to come a day; God's not finished with them yet. These people who don't understand Israel are people who do away with the tribulation period; they're people who do away with the rapture of the church. They don't seem to understand where that little parenthesize there between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel—and, boy, did I blow that because we haven't got there yet! We're right in there: we're the church, right in the middle of that thing. And nobody really knows now when the Lord Jesus is going to come because we don't have a time on that. But when He comes, there's going to be a time of tribulation on this earth. The tribulation is so that God can now redeem His people and He'll call them back to Israel, and it's the last part of the tribulation that you'll have the Day of Atonement for Israel. They'll fall down, recognize the marks in His hands and they'll surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ and He'll bring them all back in. He's not finished with Israel!

Now, when did Israel happen? Well, He passed the covenant from Abraham to Isaac. Do you remember when He told them that they were going to have a son, and Abraham and Sarah laughed? So they named him Isaac, which means laughter. God got the last laugh. Then they passed the covenant on to Jacob. Jacob was one of the two sons of Isaac: Jacob and Esau. Esau never would have turned his heart toward God, the New Testament tells us that, but Jacob cheated his brother out of his birthright. Therefore, Jacob was a deceiver and a conniver and a slanderer. God had to change him; change his name. So He wrestled with him one night in a dream, and God touched him on a thigh and crippled him, and he walked with a limp from that point on. And God changed his name and his name became what: Israel. Prince of God!

And he had 12 sons, and the twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel; a nation that is in covenant everlastingly with the living God. Now, what happens to them? Well, look in Genesis 15:13. "God said to Abram, 'Know for certain that you're descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.'" The interesting thing to me about history is how Israel is in the land, out of the land, in the land, out of the land, in the land, out of the land, protecting the land, enemies coming in on the land. Well, we're going to see them leave this land that Abraham had gone to, and they're going to leave that land and be oppressed in captivity.

What happened? You remember Joseph—and if I gave you all these scriptures, folks, we'd be here for three weeks, so just hang in there. It is in the Scriptures, I promise—Joseph had a coat of many colors, remember that? And, oh, how his Daddy kind of liked him. And Joseph had a dream. He probably made a big mistake sharing it with his brothers, about the fact that he's going to rule over them. They didn't like that a whole lot; his brothers wouldn't. And so they decide to get rid of Joseph. And so they sell him into slavery to the Egyptians. And so he's taken off into captivity. Now, they think that's the end of Joseph, but God, the very God, who changes epochs and seasons and raises up kings and establishes kingdoms, brought a famine into the land of Canaan. And so they had to have grain, so they went over to Egypt. And when they got to Egypt, guess who they ran into? The guy who was the number two man in the country, the guy who was head of all the selling of grain was their brother Joseph. Oh, dear!

And so they ran into him face to face. He loved them, he said, "You meant this for my harm, but God meant it for my good." And he brought them over there and so they settled in the land of Egypt. Now for 430 years, now you see the nation coming about that had been promised to Abram. Now you see the people multiply. As a matter of fact, they multiply so fast, and after 30 years a pharaoh came on the throne and he said, "You know, these people are going to cause problems. We better put them into captivity." And so they did. And for 400 years, just exactly as God said it to Abram, they were in captivity. But they grew and grew and grew and grew and grew and grew. And when Moses came on the scene they probably numbered around a million and a half. What a nation God had raised up under a captive flag over in Egypt.

Well, Moses was a deliverer of the people. And Moses, you know the story of Moses and how he takes them out, got them to the Red Sea. Somebody said when they crossed the Red Sea it really wasn't the Red Sea, it was the Reed Sea, only six inches deep. Doesn't that make a miracle even better? The whole Egyptian army died and drowned in six inches of water! Whatever happened, they crossed the Red Sea. God got them over into the wilderness, and, buddy, I want to tell you something. They could have gotten

into Canaan in a matter of days, but because of their disobedience, because of their rebellion, they walked and walked and walked. And finally they came to Mt. Sinai and that's where God brought in another covenant.

Now don't misunderstand this other covenant. Some people say it replaces the Abrahamic Covenant. No! It's a temporary covenant. It's not going to last long. There's another coming, the Seed who will bring an even better covenant, an extension of that Abrahamic Covenant. What is the covenant He put on them? The covenant of law. Now, what is that all about? It was a fence. That's about all you can say about it. He put a fence around them. He hemmed them in. Galatians 3 says it was a tutor, a babysitter to watch over them until the Seed could come. I mean these people, friends; I'd have hated to have been Moses and pastored the First Baptist Church of the Wilderness. These guys were absolutely the worst you can find. So He gave them the law and all of a sudden they were bound now to the law. Now what does the law do? It condemns them apart from what God will give them in grace when the Lord Jesus finally comes.

Well, they had to parts to the law: if you obeyed the law you were blessed; if you disobeyed the law you were cursed. And part of the curse of disobeying the law was, and He says, "I will take you out of your land." That's the thing they hated: this was God-given land. "This is my property! God gave it to me!" He said, "You keep on disobeying Me, I'll take you out of your land, friend!" Well, what happened? They kept on disobeying, they finally got tired of listening to a prophet, and they didn't want a prophet anymore. They wanted a king, and so they elected a king name Saul. Boy, they really did a good job, didn't they?

Saul was a fleshly-minded king. You remember what happened to him? God had to put him down and, of course, after Saul was David, a man after God's own heart. But look at the atrocities that happened in his immorality and immoral way of living. And finally it was Solomon, David's son. And it was under Solomon that finally there was sort of a civil strife and the nation of Israel split. This is what I'm bringing you up to this morning. They split. Ten tribes went to the north; two tribes went to the south. The ten tribes to the north kept the name Israel.

That's why, when you're studying scripture, make sure if He's talking about all of Israel or the ten northern tribes of Israel. It was prophesied by Hosea and Amos that Assyria would come in and capture them. Remember Jonah? God told him to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. He said, "Not me, brother! They're going to take our people captive. I'm not going over there and do a revival for them if they're going to take our people captive!" And just like God said, set your watch by it, Assyria moved in and captured Israel. They had one bad king after another. There's never one good king came from the northern ten tribes whatsoever. At least we have Josiah in the southern kingdom that had a little credibility during the days of Jeremiah.

So they moved in and they took over Israel. What happened? They had an interesting way of capturing an area. What they would do is move in and what they would do is take the young, the good looking, the handsome, the smart, the healthy. They took them all out. And what they left was the others and they would bring in foreign nations. And they had an idea, which was incredibly smart, they got these foreign nations to co-inhabit with the Israelites, who were told never to do that, by the way. And by intermarrying, what happened was they would lose their identity as a nation and disappear into other cultures. That's exactly what happened to Israel, friend.

Do you know what the capital of Israel was during that time? Samaria! You know why there was hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans in the days of Jesus? Because these people of Samaria dishonored their covenant with God and intermarried with other nations and became a half-breed nation. And that's why it was so dangerous for a Jew even to look at a Samaritan, much less to talk to one. They were hated because they had dishonored God's covenant.

Now if you've got a pencil handy, write this down: the date that the ten northern tribes was taken captive was 722 BC. Now, you say, "Big deal!" It's going to be a real big deal when we get into Daniel. You've got to understand these dates. Now, it's not hard. For all you guys that won't study the Scripture unless it has pictures on the page, now listen: you stay with me. We're going to make it simple. Everybody in this congregation is going to understand these dates; you're going to even get to like these dates! 722 BC, Assyria takes over Israel.

Now, you say, "What happened to Judah?" I'll tell you tonight. I'm going to cut this message in half and do the other part tonight. The most incredible thing to me though, is how every bit of this was prophesied. So if you believe a prophet, you better believe a prophet. You're going to see Babylon, the Medo-Persian Empire, and Greece. You say, "What's that got to do with anything?" Wait until you get to chapter 2 of Daniel. It's going to light your fire when you find out what those nations mean and what it all has to do with the end of time, the latter days. God is the God of history. Don't ever, ever forget it.

Well, you say, "Brother Wayne, you're right. I don't want to go to the mission field, so what else can I get out of this message this morning?" Years ago we used to go catfishing. I've probably told you this story before, but I'll tell it again because it's the best illustration I know.

We would go catfishing. We'd get a big old truck tire and we'd cover it up in kerosene or something and we'd light it. And it would burn, and, of course, you always wanted to fish upwind. Rough smell if you get in that smoke. And we'd sit there all night long and

we'd put our old bait out there. You had to get rotten bait, stink bait. What you do is you get you a little forked stick, stick it down in there, throw that thing out there, big old heavy weight, and it'd go down to the bottom, because they're on the bottom, down there where all the junk is. So you throw it out there and you just let that rod sit there.

Don't worry about it. And if they hit the bait, don't worry about it, they haven't got enough sense to check it out. They're going to eat it and go. Whatever is there, whoop and it's gone! That's kind of the way it is: they have that kind of appetite. And when they hit it, you don't have to worry about them chewing on it to see what it tastes like. Nah, they're gone. Just push that little button on your reel and just let them go. Just let them go, finish whatever you're doing. And then, when you get ready, go ahead and crank it. Oh, those fish are so dumb! So arrogant and so proud. They think they're getting away with something. They think they have really done something, but they don't know that there's a pair of unseen hands in a world they have never seen, completely controlling their destiny. And buddy, when they find out is when God sets the hook!

Friend, that's the way it is. If you're here and you say, "God doesn't know about my life. You don't know what I'm going though," friend, God knows everything about your life. God not only knows about it, He's controlling it step by step by step. "I don't believe that." Well, friend, you need to come back and study the Word over again. And it is God, if you'll turn to Him, that causes all things to work together, for what? For good, to whom? To those who love Him and are called according to His plan. Young people, hear me. God's got your life. He's got it. And you can't do anything He doesn't know about. If you disobey you will reap a consequence of sin, but if you'll turn back to Him, God will weave it back and cause it even to be good in your life. God is an awesome, awesome God. And He is in control.

Our God is an Awesome God

He's the God of history. Now, as we saw in Daniel 2:21, He raises up kings, He establishes kingdoms. He's the One who changes the epochs and the times. Do you realize that the center point of this world, the actual center of all geographical places on the face of this earth is what? A little country called Israel. With Jerusalem, does that remind anybody of anything? You have that as the center point of our world and do you realize that's the center point of all history? Boy, secular historians cannot figure it out, how one nation was raised up one day and was taken down the next day. And how another nation could come in and be raised up and put down, and another nation. But if you'll study the Word of God, this Book tells us that God is the God of history. Man, if anything comes out of this message at all this morning, it ought to be the absolute sovereignty of God. He is in control. He's the One who changes history. He's the One that's causing what's going on over in the Communist countries right now. God's in control. We can go through free elections in America and we can elect a president, but my friend, it is God who is the head of the nation. And it is God who puts men into places. It's God who gives power, it's God who tears down power, it's God who establishes nations in this world.

And if you don't see that, you're going to miss the whole point of Daniel. And when He would speak to His prophets, friend, they would tell you exactly what was going to take place, and I mean it happened right on the day. You could set your watch by it, because God has been in control of history. And the center point of all history is that little nation called Israel. So many of us don't understand that. It's amazing, and I want us to see this morning how Israel came about and to give you a short, brief history of Israel, bring you up until they split into ten tribes, the ten northern tribes split away, how they were taken into captivity, and that's going to be our message this morning. You can think to yourself, "Oh, boy, here we go!" Now, listen, I think it's exciting. I think perhaps it will help some of you. To some of you it will be a review, to others of you, you're going to say, "My goodness, I didn't know that!" That's the ones I'm preaching to right now! Have you ever asked the question or been asked, "Where did Israel come from? What's a Jew all about? Who are these people?"

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Now, He created man, and we see Adam and Eve in the garden. And He told them, "Now, listen, don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Well, they sin in chapter 3 of Genesis and you begin to see the downfall of man. Romans tells us that sin entered the world and death by sin. This is the beginning of the depravity of man. No one of the liberal schools try to deny the first eleven chapters of Genesis, because if you do you take away man's depravity and you make Adam a representative man and everybody has the same chance. Well, that's not the Word of God. When Adam sinned, sin entered this world and from that point on every man born of woman was born into sin. That's the beginning of sin in this world.

And you see the separation as man is ripped away from God. You see Cain killing his brother Abel and you begin to see a downfall. And in chapter 7 of Genesis you see God flushing the whole thing in the flood and just absolutely in disgust of what's going on in this earth. But He saved one man and his family, and that man was Noah. And in Noah's life, the first time covenant is ever mentioned in the Word of God, it's with that man Noah, as He covenanted with Noah, because He found a man who would honor Him and He spared that man. Well, of course, after the flood was over you see them trying to build a tower to make a name for themselves and how God was angered again, and He scattered them and changed their languages, and that's the 11th chapter of Genesis.

And then you come in to the twelfth chapter of Genesis. We see a redemptive God here. Oh, folks, if you can understand this. It's not man looking for his God, it's God looking for His creation. Man has never sought after God, there's "none righteous, no not one." It is God, the all-powerful, loving God who in His redemptive part begins to speak out for man. And we begin to see Him unveil His plan of redemption as He chooses a man by the name of Abram. He pulls him out. He's a Chaldean now, there wasn't anything on this earth known as Israel, He chooses him out from the land of Ur, he's a Chaldean, and He chooses to make covenant with that man. Isn't it incredible? Picked a man out! Friend, in chapter 12 watch this: He says, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land'" to the land, to the land, underline that, "which I will show you; and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will also curse. And in you, Abram, all the families, nations of the earth shall be blessed."

Well, Abram does what God tells him to do, and in the 15th chapter of Genesis, we see God cutting covenant with Abraham. Now you must understand that covenant is an agreement. Covenant cannot be broken. This covenant is an everlasting covenant as Genesis 15 tells us. You see, Abram believed God. Look at verse 6: "And he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." And so he becomes the father of faith. What did he do? He believed God, and because of his belief in God, then God reckoned that unto him as righteousness. That was his day of salvation. And, folks, something that Galatians has to help us with that we don't see here is that on that day, somehow, the gospel was preached to Abram. Can you believe this? And Jesus said in the book of John, Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he rejoiced and he was glad. Abram understood what God was doing; Abram understood the covenant that God was making with him. And my friend, when they would cut covenants, the two would walk in together, but in this covenant in Genesis 15, He put Abram to sleep and God Himself walked between the pieces of animal that had been separated. In other words, there was no way that man could ever break this covenant. It's an everlasting covenant that God has made with Abram.

Now what did He promise Abram? He promised him three things and the Jews can only see two, and many Christians can only see one. He promised him three things: He promised him a nation—and my friend that nation is here today in the 20th century and it's called the nation of Israel. He promised him a land—and that land is over there today. They have more right to their land than you and I do to the property that we have that we pay mortgages on every week. God gave it to them and it's not going to change. But He promised them one more thing: He promised them a seed. And that's where the Jew messes up. That's where the Jewish mindset cannot see it. Galatians 3 brings this out. The Seed is the Lord Jesus Christ! Through Abram—that's why Isaac had to be born to Abram and to Sarah—because through them there was going to come a Seed and the Seed would be the Lord Jesus Christ. The Messiah! And it was going to be through Him that all nations, including Israel, would be blessed on this earth.

But, oh, how the Jewish mindset has missed that. Oh, they see the nation, they see the land, but they've never recognized the Seed. The problem is on both sides. We have the Jewish people not recognizing the Seed; we have the Christians not recognizing Israel nor the land. But, my friend, they're all three a part of a covenant that is everlasting. He promised all three of them. Then He changed Abram's name to Abraham in Genesis 17, and Sarai became Sarah, and they took upon themselves God's Name and they were in a bound covenant with God Himself.

Now, we begin to watch how Israel progresses. Where does Israel come from? So far, only a promise: nation, land, and a Seed. You see, this is why so many people think, like I said earlier, that when Jesus came that Israel was done away with. That only the wheat and the tares grow side by side. That's not right, folks! Israel is still in covenant with God. Yes, He's closed the door on them right now. That's why Jews can come to the Lord Jesus Christ as individuals, but as a nation you'll not see Israel repent. But there will come a day that they will. There's going to come a day; God's not finished with them yet. These people who don't understand Israel are people who do away with the tribulation period; they're people who do away with the rapture of the church. They don't seem to

understand where that little parenthesize there between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel—and, boy, did I blow that because we haven't got there yet! We're right in there: we're the church, right in the middle of that thing. And nobody really knows now when the Lord Jesus is going to come because we don't have a time on that. But when He comes, there's going to be a time of tribulation on this earth. The tribulation is so that God can now redeem His people and He'll call them back to Israel, and it's the last part of the tribulation that you'll have the Day of Atonement for Israel. They'll fall down, recognize the marks in His hands and they'll surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ and He'll bring them all back in. He's not finished with Israel!

Now, when did Israel happen? Well, He passed the covenant from Abraham to Isaac. Do you remember when He told them that they were going to have a son, and Abraham and Sarah laughed? So they named him Isaac, which means laughter. God got the last laugh. Then they passed the covenant on to Jacob. Jacob was one of the two sons of Isaac: Jacob and Esau. Esau never would have turned his heart toward God, the New Testament tells us that, but Jacob cheated his brother out of his birthright. Therefore, Jacob was a deceiver and a conniver and a slanderer. God had to change him; change his name. So He wrestled with him one night in a dream, and God touched him on a thigh and crippled him, and he walked with a limp from that point on. And God changed his name and his name became what: Israel. Prince of God!

And he had 12 sons, and the twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel; a nation that is in covenant everlastingly with the living God. Now, what happens to them? Well, look in Genesis 15:13. "God said to Abram, 'Know for certain that you're descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.'" The interesting thing to me about history is how Israel is in the land, out of the land, in the land, out of the land, in the land, out of the land, protecting the land, enemies coming in on the land. Well, we're going to see them leave this land that Abraham had gone to, and they're going to leave that land and be oppressed in captivity.

What happened? You remember Joseph—and if I gave you all these scriptures, folks, we'd be here for three weeks, so just hang in there. It is in the Scriptures, I promise—Joseph had a coat of many colors, remember that? And, oh, how his Daddy kind of liked him. And Joseph had a dream. He probably made a big mistake sharing it with his brothers, about the fact that he's going to rule over them. They didn't like that a whole lot; his brothers wouldn't. And so they decide to get rid of Joseph. And so they sell him into slavery to the Egyptians. And so he's taken off into captivity. Now, they think that's the end of Joseph, but God, the very God, who changes epochs and seasons and raises up kings and establishes kingdoms, brought a famine into the land of Canaan. And so they had to have grain, so they went over to Egypt. And when they got to Egypt, guess who they ran into? The guy who was the number two man in the country, the guy who was head of all the selling of grain was their brother Joseph. Oh, dear!

And so they ran into him face to face. He loved them, he said, "You meant this for my harm, but God meant it for my good." And he brought them over there and so they settled in the land of Egypt. Now for 430 years, now you see the nation coming about that had been promised to Abram. Now you see the people multiply. As a matter of fact, they multiply so fast, and after 30 years a pharaoh came on the throne and he said, "You know, these people are going to cause problems. We better put them into captivity." And so they did. And for 400 years, just exactly as God said it to Abram, they were in captivity. But they grew and grew and grew and grew and grew and grew. And when Moses came on the scene they probably numbered around a million and a half. What a nation God had raised up under a captive flag over in Egypt.

Well, Moses was a deliverer of the people. And Moses, you know the story of Moses and how he takes them out, got them to the Red Sea. Somebody said when they crossed the Red Sea it really wasn't the Red Sea, it was the Reed Sea, only six inches deep. Doesn't that make a miracle even better? The whole Egyptian army died and drowned in six inches of water! Whatever happened, they crossed the Red Sea. God got them over into the wilderness, and, buddy, I want to tell you something. They could have gotten into Canaan in a matter of days, but because of their disobedience, because of their rebellion, they walked and walked and walked. And finally they came to Mt. Sinai and that's where God brought in another covenant.

Now don't misunderstand this other covenant. Some people say it replaces the Abrahamic Covenant. No! It's a temporary covenant. It's not going to last long. There's another coming, the Seed who will bring an even better covenant, an extension of that Abrahamic Covenant. What is the covenant He put on them? The covenant of law. Now, what is that all about? It was a fence. That's about all you can say about it. He put a fence around them. He hemmed them in. Galatians 3 says it was a tutor, a babysitter to watch over them until the Seed could come. I mean these people, friends; I'd have hated to have been Moses and pastored the First Baptist Church of the Wilderness. These guys were absolutely the worst you can find. So He gave them the law and all of a sudden they were bound now to the law. Now what does the law do? It condemns them apart from what God will give them in grace when the Lord Jesus finally comes.

Well, they had to parts to the law: if you obeyed the law you were blessed; if you disobeyed the law you were cursed. And part of the curse of disobeying the law was, and He says, "I will take you out of your land." That's the thing they hated: this was God-given land. "This is my property! God gave it to me!" He said, "You keep on disobeying Me, I'll take you out of your land, friend!" Well, what happened? They kept on disobeying, they finally got tired of listening to a prophet, and they didn't want a prophet anymore. They

wanted a king, and so they elected a king name Saul. Boy, they really did a good job, didn't they?

Saul was a fleshly-minded king. You remember what happened to him? God had to put him down and, of course, after Saul was David, a man after God's own heart. But look at the atrocities that happened in his immorality and immoral way of living. And finally it was Solomon, David's son. And it was under Solomon that finally there was sort of a civil strife and the nation of Israel split. This is what I'm bringing you up to this morning. They split. Ten tribes went to the north; two tribes went to the south. The ten tribes to the north kept the name Israel.

That's why, when you're studying scripture, make sure if He's talking about all of Israel or the ten northern tribes of Israel. It was prophesied by Hosea and Amos that Assyria would come in and capture them. Remember Jonah? God told him to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. He said, "Not me, brother! They're going to take our people captive. I'm not going over there and do a revival for them if they're going to take our people captive!" And just like God said, set your watch by it, Assyria moved in and captured Israel. They had one bad king after another. There's never one good king came from the northern ten tribes whatsoever. At least we have Josiah in the southern kingdom that had a little credibility during the days of Jeremiah.

So they moved in and they took over Israel. What happened? They had an interesting way of capturing an area. What they would do is move in and what they would do is take the young, the good looking, the handsome, the smart, the healthy. They took them all out. And what they left was the others and they would bring in foreign nations. And they had an idea, which was incredibly smart, they got these foreign nations to co-inhabit with the Israelites, who were told never to do that, by the way. And by intermarrying, what happened was they would lose their identity as a nation and disappear into other cultures. That's exactly what happened to Israel, friend.

Do you know what the capital of Israel was during that time? Samaria! You know why there was hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans in the days of Jesus? Because these people of Samaria dishonored their covenant with God and intermarried with other nations and became a half-breed nation. And that's why it was so dangerous for a Jew even to look at a Samaritan, much less to talk to one. They were hated because they had dishonored God's covenant.

Now if you've got a pencil handy, write this down: the date that the ten northern tribes was taken captive was 722 BC. Now, you say, "Big deal!" It's going to be a real big deal when we get into Daniel. You've got to understand these dates. Now, it's not hard. For all you guys that won't study the Scripture unless it has pictures on the page, now listen: you stay with me. We're going to make it simple. Everybody in this congregation is going to understand these dates; you're going to even get to like these dates! 722 BC, Assyria takes over Israel.

Now, you say, "What happened to Judah?" I'll tell you tonight. I'm going to cut this message in half and do the other part tonight. The most incredible thing to me though, is how every bit of this was prophesied. So if you believe a prophet, you better believe a prophet. You're going to see Babylon, the Medo-Persian Empire, and Greece. You say, "What's that got to do with anything?" Wait until you get to chapter 2 of Daniel. It's going to light your fire when you find out what those nations mean and what it all has to do with the end of time, the latter days. God is the God of history. Don't ever, ever forget it.

Well, you say, "Brother Wayne, you're right. I don't want to go to the mission field, so what else can I get out of this message this morning?" Years ago we used to go catfishing. I've probably told you this story before, but I'll tell it again because it's the best illustration I know.

We would go catfishing. We'd get a big old truck tire and we'd cover it up in kerosene or something and we'd light it. And it would burn, and, of course, you always wanted to fish upwind. Rough smell if you get in that smoke. And we'd sit there all night long and we'd put our old bait out there. You had to get rotten bait, stink bait. What you do is you get you a little forked stick, stick it down in there, throw that thing out there, big old heavy weight, and it'd go down to the bottom, because they're on the bottom, down there where all the junk is. So you throw it out there and you just let that rod sit there.

Don't worry about it. And if they hit the bait, don't worry about it, they haven't got enough sense to check it out. They're going to eat it and go. Whatever is there, whoop and it's gone! That's kind of the way it is: they have that kind of appetite. And when they hit it, you don't have to worry about them chewing on it to see what it tastes like. Nah, they're gone. Just push that little button on your reel and just let them go. Just let them go, finish whatever you're doing. And then, when you get ready, go ahead and crank it. Oh, those fish are so dumb! So arrogant and so proud. They think they're getting away with something. They think they have really done something, but they don't know that there's a pair of unseen hands in a world they have never seen, completely controlling their destiny. And buddy, when they find out is when God sets the hook!

Friend, that's the way it is. If you're here and you say, "God doesn't know about my life. You don't know what I'm going through," friend, God knows everything about your life. God not only knows about it, He's controlling it step by step by step. "I don't believe that." Well, friend, you need to come back and study the Word over again. And it is God, if you'll turn to Him, that causes all things to work together, for what? For good, to whom? To those who love Him and are called according to His plan. Young people, hear me.

God's got your life. He's got it. And you can't do anything He doesn't know about. If you disobey you will reap a consequence of sin, but if you'll turn back to Him, God will weave it back and cause it even to be good in your life. God is an awesome, awesome God. And He is in control.

Our God is an Awesome God - 2

Turn with me again to Daniel 2. You ought to be getting familiar with it now, ought to be opening up to the right place. Daniel 2, one verse. We've been looking at "Our God is an awesome God." As a matter of fact, somebody gave me the words to that song. "Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above with wisdom, power, and love, our God is an awesome God!"

Well, you got to sing with the message tonight: our God is an awesome God! Verse 21: notice what he says here. It says, "And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings." That was prophesied in the Word of God. You know, there have been the skeptics around since time began. Just not willing to believe what God's Word has to say. And I guarantee you that there were skeptics in the days that Israel, the ten tribes of the north, lived and existed. They didn't believe that anything would ever happen to them; One pagan king to the next pagan king. But way long before then it had been prophesied that they would be taken into captivity by the pagan nation of Assyria. And that happened folks; it happened in 722 BC. I told you this morning that those dates are important, and you're going to begin to see why tonight as we begin to see how God works through history. He's the God of all history.

Now, when Assyria took over, I guess they thought that nobody could conquer them. "As a matter of fact, now that we have taken over Israel, let's go get Judah, the southern two tribes down there with Jerusalem as its capital." I want you to look at something in Isaiah 36:1. There was a king of Assyria, a popular old king, named Sennacherib. And he just thought that nobody could whip them and he had all the power that was needed to come down against Judah. "Now it came about in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them." Now, I'm not going to take time to read all of that particular chapter, but it was a pretty bleak day in the life of Judah. They really thought they were going to get whipped by the Assyrians, and particularly Sennacherib.

But look over in Isaiah 37, and we'll look at verses 1-7 and then jump over a little bit. "And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord. Then he sent Eliakim who was over the household with Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. And they said to him, 'Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, rebuke, and rejection; for the children have come to birth, and there is no strength to deliver. Perhaps the Lord your God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard. Therefore, offer a prayer for the remnant that is left.' So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said to them, 'Thus you shall say to your master, Thus says the Lord, Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him [he's speaking for the Lord now] so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land. And I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.'"

Now look over with me in verse 37 and 38. Basically what Isaiah says is, "You can relax, Sennacherib is not going to bother you. As a matter of fact, God's going to put a rumor, a spirit in him, he's going to go back home and die by his own sword. Isaiah 37:37, "So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. And it came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place."

Now, I want you to know the significance of what has taken place here. Here's old Sennacherib; boy he's cocky, he's arrogant, he thinks he has come to power. Friend, God's raised Assyria to power. And it's going to be God who's going to take it away from them. And when he comes down against Judah, it's as if God stops him in his tracks. "You go home, son, because it's not up to you to handle this next thing." You see, these were pagan nations. You almost think sometimes that God is siding with the pagan nations. Oh, no, brother! Not only does He raise them up to power, but He puts them down and judges them for ever bothering with His people. This is God that we're dealing with. He is a just, righteous God.

Now, we want to look at what did happen to Judah; that is, those southern two tribes. Way back yonder in about the early 700s BC is when this is all prophesied. Isaiah said, "Don't worry, Sennacherib will not bother you. It's not going to be Assyria." Now, what happened to Judah? Well, there are four nations that we want to talk about tonight and if you don't believe what I'm saying, friend, you can pick up any history book, secular history book, and it will document everything we're going to talk about that is right here in the Word of God tonight.

There are four huge, ancient powers that we want to mention tonight and we'll mention them one at a time and when you get into the study of Daniel, remember what we're talking about tonight. It will help you greatly as we get into that study. The first one is Babylon. Babylon is going to be the nation God will raise up; it will overthrow Assyria and it will be the one to come down and take Judah out of the land. Remember the curse, "If you disobey Me, I'll take you out of your land." The land is promised to Israel, Israel is a covenant people with God, but God said, "If you disobey Me, I'll take you out of My land."

Now, while we're in Isaiah, look in chapter 39. Almost 100 years before it ever takes place, the old prophet Isaiah tells them what's going to happen. Isaiah 39:1-7:

"At that time Merodach-baladan son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. And Hezekiah was pleased, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and his whole armory and all that was found in his treasuries. [Now this was a real dumb move by Hezekiah. These are people from Babylon coming over to see what he had.] There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah did not show them. Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, 'What did these men say, and from where have they come to you?' And Hezekiah said, 'They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon.' And he said, 'What have they seen in your house?' So Hezekiah answered, 'They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasuries that I have not shown them.' Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the Lord of hosts [Now remember how long before it ever takes place this is prophesied], Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you shall beget, shall be taken away; and they shall become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.' [Hezekiah just could not get the significance of that, and verse 8 says] Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good.' For he thought, 'For there will be peace and truth in my days.'"

Now, what I wanted you to see was that, yes, Jeremiah prophesied the fact that Babylon would come and take over Judah, but this is Isaiah, folks, and it's way back around 712 or so BC when this takes place. Now look in Jeremiah 20:4-6. I want to show you that there have been false prophets around for a long time. There are people today who laugh at the fact that Jesus is coming again for His church. There are people today who laugh at the fact that there is going to be a judgment of fire to destroy this earth, and a new heaven and a new earth. They laugh at it. And particularly the younger generation, because they've never seen a world war, they've never seen conflict in countries, they've grown up in a time of peace and they personally sometimes think nothing can ever happen to us. But the Word of God says, buddy, it's going to take place. And just like there were false prophets trying to make everybody feel good back in the days of Jeremiah, there are false prophets in our day trying to cause judgment not to even be a part of our thinking.

Well, this false priest, as a matter of fact go back to verse 1; we'll just read it all: "When Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things [Now Jeremiah is prophesying to them what's going to happen], and Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put him in the stocks at the upper Benjamin gates which was by the house of the Lord. Then it came about on the next day, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, that Jeremiah said to him, 'Pashhur is not the name the Lord has called you, but rather Magor-missabib.'" It's interesting, that word means "terror on every side." And verse 4 says, "For thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am going to make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and while your eyes look on, they will fall by the sword of their enemies. So I shall give over all Judah [now watch this] to the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will carry them away as exiles to Babylon and will slay them with the sword.'"

Verse 5 says, "I shall also give over all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its costly things [That's exactly what Isaiah says!]; Even all the treasures of the kings of Judah I shall give over to the hand of their enemies, and they will plunder them, take them away, and bring them to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into captivity; and you will enter Babylon, and there you will die, and there you will be buried, you and all of your friends to whom you have falsely prophesied."

Buddy, Jeremiah stuck it to him and let him know real quickly what was really going to happen to that nation of Judah. Now, go on over to chapter 25. This is before the fact; again the prophecy of Jeremiah coming just maybe a few years before it actually took place. Jeremiah 25:9-11. Now, not only does he tell them they're going to be taken captive by Babylon; he could have known that from Isaiah. But he's going to tell them that they're going to be taken captive by the king and he gives them his name: Nebuchadnezzar.

He says in verse 9, "Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, declares the Lord, and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them a horror, and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." Can you believe this? How specific a prophet is. And remember, they can never be wrong. And he says he's

going to be taken captive by Babylon, the king's name will be Nebuchadnezzar, and you will be in captivity for 70 years.

It says the same thing in Jeremiah 29:10. Now, I want you to see. Did it happen? Did it happen? Look at Daniel 1:1. This all takes place around 605 BC. When was it that Assyria takes up captive Israel? What was the year? 722 BC. Now remember, you're counting backwards, not forwards: this is BC not AD. And so you have 722 BC, that's when Israel was taken captive, the ten northern tribes; this is 605 BC, quite a bit of time has passed by.

It says in Daniel 1:1, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah [now watch this], Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." Now it is very important for you to understand something here. When Nebuchadnezzar moved in on Jerusalem and on Judah there were three sieges. Now that's going to come up as we study the book of Daniel. The first siege, which is this one mentioned in Daniel 1:1 was in 605 BC; and what they did was, they took all the youths, all the good looking ones. That was a practice: all the smart ones, all the sharp ones, the healthy ones. They took them out of the land. That was in the first siege.

In the second siege, which came around 597 BC, they took Ezekiel—remember Ezekiel the prophet—they took Ezekiel and the 10,000; they took them back to Babylon. And the next siege came around 586 BC. They destroyed Jerusalem and took everyone and everything out of the city. So sometimes when you're studying a book, it may help you to remember not everything took place on the first siege. Remember that. On the first siege they took the youths out, and remember who some of these youths were: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And you'll get to know them real well as we get into the study of the book of Daniel.

And so Babylon became the power that God raised up. Assyria thought they were going to be the world power; God said, "Not on your life." And He stopped them, smashed them, and raised up Babylon. And Babylon was the world power in domination there up until 538 BC. So we see this Babylon, this great nation. But like Assyria, they would pay. Look back in Jeremiah 50. Jeremiah prophesies that Babylon is going to be put down. I hope you're catching what we're talking about here. God is doing this. God's raising them up; God's putting them down. God's raising them up; God's putting them down. Who's in control? Buddy, you better believe He's in control. And everything He ever told through His prophets, it happened exactly like He told them.

Jeremiah 50:1-3: "The word which the Lord spoke concerning Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, through Jeremiah the prophet: Declare and proclaim among the nations. Proclaim it and lift up a standard. Do not conceal it but say, 'Babylon has been captured, Bel [that's one of their gods] has been put to shame, Marduk [Marduk was called the "god of gold." You see, Babylon used more gold than any other nation at that time. They built their temples out of gold and they had a god of gold. They were called golden Babylon.] has been shattered; her images have been put to shame, her idols have been shattered.' For a nation has come up against her out of the north; it will make her land an object of horror, and there will be no inhabitant in it. Both man and beast have wandered off, they have gone away!"

And then in chapter 51, verses 11 and 28—I could read a lot more, but these are just the ones I picked out—verse 11: "Sharpen the arrows, fill the quivers! The Lord has aroused the spirit of the kings of the Medes" [oh, friend, that's going to be the next nation we're going to look at: The Medes and the Persians] because His purpose is against Babylon, to destroy it; for it is the vengeance of the Lord, vengeance for His temple." Now, look at verse 28: "Consecrate the nations against her, the kings of the Medes, their governors and all their provinces, and every land of their dominion." I didn't misread that. A prefect was one that oversaw a province, so that was all the provinces there, it says, in every land of their dominion.

And so it's prophesied by Jeremiah, "Babylon, you're going to fall. Friend, you've been a tool, God has used you, kept His people out of their land, but now your time is over. You've been raised up, boom! Now, you've been put down and we've got another nation coming on the scene."

Now I want you to go way back to Isaiah again. Isaiah 44. Friend, if you want to see a prophecy, folks, this is a couple of hundred years before it takes place. God said they would be there 70 years and they would come back and see the temple and the city rebuilt. That's what was prophesied. Isaiah 44:28, notice this, way a long time ago. Isaiah prophesied, "It is I who says of Cyrus [notice the name Cyrus], 'He is my shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

Look in chapter 45:1-7: "Thus says the Lord to Cyrus His anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him, and to loose the loins of kings; to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze, and cut through their iron bars. And I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden wealth of secret places, in order that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor though you have not know Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun [now watch this] that there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other."

Way back yonder, Isaiah said there was going to be a man by the name of Cyrus, who's going to set those people free to go back to their homeland, rebuild Jerusalem, and rebuild the temple. Well, look in 2 Chronicles 36. Chronicles and Kings kind of give us an historical flavor of what took place with Israel. And we see this in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23. If we don't do anything else, we're going to nail the fact down that God is in control, folks! "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia," now why does it say king of Persia? Because it was Cyrus who united the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. That's a united kingdom: two kingdoms into one. And it says, "The first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah—the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

Isn't that incredible? And it was prophesied hundreds of years before it took place. And what did Daniel tell us again? He's the One who raises up kings, He's the One who establishes kingdoms and it is God who changes the seasons and the epochs and the time. Okay, so we have then Babylon and now we have a new nation, a new world power that's come on the scene. The Medo-Persian Empire. You can relax; I'm not going to go into as much detail with them as I did with Babylon. So hang on, I'll just give you a few notes, hang on to it, it's going to help you now when you get into your study of Daniel.

By 538 BC, Babylon sort of phased out and history tells us that this kingdom, Medo-Persian Empire, came in about 538 BC, and goes to about 331 BC. That would be the time period, and way back in 722 Israel was taken captive. Then in 605 there we see the first siege as Babylon moves in on Judah, and now they go out in 538 and Medo-Persians come in until 331. Something about them; if you'll read your history books—and the scriptures do not tell this, but the history books do—they tell us that they were a financially sound people. Matter of fact, they tell us that they even built roads in order for people to get to the houses to tax the people. They made sure they had roads. Not so they could get around, but so they could get to their houses to tax them. Sounds like they came right out of America, doesn't it? And they were very financially sound people. They were basically Iranian people; they were a two-horned nation: remember now, two kingdoms into one. You think that's not important right now, you better hang on buddy when we get over into Daniel. That'll be very important. And Cyrus the Persian and Darius the Mede have several mentions in the book of Daniel. We know for a fact from the Word of God that this took place. We also have it documented by history. But you don't document anything by history, friend, you document it by the Word of God. That's what we always remember.

Well then, thirdly, there's another nation. In about 331 BC another nation moved in and took over, another world power. Babylon, you're raised up. Boom! You're put down; Medo-Persia, you're raised up. Boom! You're put down; for God establishes kingdoms. And then, there's another one that comes on the scene. Son, it's going to fire you up. You know what it is? It's the nation of Greece. And Greece had a leader. Who was the leader there? Alexander the Great! Buddy, was he ever a world threat. And he moved in power; but when he died suddenly—this is the only thing I'm going to say about Greece, but we're going to get into it later—but when he died suddenly, history records that there were four kings that took his place. But out of those four kings, only two became world powers. That is very, very important when you're studying the book of Daniel. Remember what I said: out of that nation of Greece, there came four kings, but out of the four kings there were two nations that became world powers. Something about Greece that you might be interested in and might help you a little later on, they were the first ones ever to make weapons out of bronze. What's bronze got to do with anything? I don't know, read the book of Daniel.

And then the fourth nation I want to tell you about—I'm having more fun because I know what's ahead of you! —and the fourth nation I want to talk to you about tonight, and I'm just going to mention it, is the nation of Rome. About 146 BC, Rome came in, conquered Greece. And they were the biggie, friend. They were the ones who made weapons out of iron that could pierce those bronze instruments that the Greeks had, and they ruled from 146 BC to about 500 AD.

You say, "I appreciate you going through all this, but this has been kind of boring. I can't even get excited about going home, much less to the mission field. What's all this about?" Well, you just wait. If you'll read through with me, I tell you what, you get in there and you start seeing things like gold, bronze, silver, what's this iron? And you start thinking, "What could that be?" You remember this message, will you please? Because it has something to say about the book of Daniel. He's going to talk about that.

These are important kingdoms, world powers, and the secular historians haven't got the slightest hint of the fact that it was God that raised them up! And it was God that slam-dunked them. Friend, He put one up, put one down, raised one up, put one down, raised one up, put one down. You know what? Let me just share this with you. If our God can do that, do you think He might be able to handle a few things that you're going through in your life?

One of the things I want to keep saying over and over again: all during this time there were the skeptics. All during this time there were the skeptics. My Bible tells me that Jesus is coming for His church. Is that what your Bible tells you? That's what God said, friend, I didn't say that. That's what God said. And we've got people living today, flirting with sin, loving the ways of the world, laughing in God's face. "You're not going to bother me." Well, I'm going to tell you something: He's coming and He'll be like that thief

coming in the night and, buddy, when He comes, you're going to wake up real quick and understand that there's going to come a day that even the unbeliever—you can turn on your television set and watch all the people spit on the name of God; you can watch all the pornography and all that junk—there's going to come a day that every knee shall bow and confess that Jesus is Lord! The sad part about that is, to some of them it's going to be way too late, when they finally recognize that this Book has got it all worked out.

Man, that fires me up. I can face tomorrow because I know He's already in control of it. I love it! I love it!

Daniel 1:1-5 Will You Please Make Up Your Mind - 1

Turn to the book of Daniel. Daniel 1:1. I want to bring you up to verse 1 this morning and get started in chapter 1. We won't go too far, probably about verse 5 or 6. I want to preach this morning on "Will you please make up your mind." Look down in verse 8 and I'll give you a little clue. It says, "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself...." You know, you've heard about my mugwump, the little black bird that I have. A mugwump is a bird that sits on a fence with his mug on one side and his wump on the other and he never can decide which side he wants to be on.

A man gave me a good example of that this morning. A friend of his was fishing one day he was using a great big old spark plug for weights. And he would sit on one side of the river and on the other side was lady who was fishing. And this fellow on the other side of the river would take his rod, with that great big heavy weight on it, and throw it all the way across the river and fish on her side. And she just kept getting irritated and more irritated and finally she yelled across the river, "Sir, will you make up your mind which side of the river you want to be on! If you're going to fish over here, come on over here, but don't sit over there and throw in front of me."

It's kind of like that in the Christian walk. Whose side are we on? Have we made up our minds? Many of us come to church on Sunday, we sing, we pray, and we pray, and then Monday through Saturday we live as if we don't even know the living God that's to be in control of our life. And I want you to see in the book of Daniel, friend, that kind of lifestyle will get you nowhere. But we're going to find four young men, Daniel and his three friends, that make up their minds they're going to honor God and not defile themselves.

Well, this will be part one of a series we'll do in chapter 1. Now, let me bring you up to verse 1 of Daniel 1. Look what it says, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." And we told you that was 605 BC. It's funny the comments I got from last Sunday's message. Some came to me and said, "I love this history stuff. Stay in there. Man, it's exciting." Some of you came to me and said, "That's the boringest stuff I've ever heard in my life. Will you hurry up and get into the text?" So those of you who don't like the history, take a nap. I'll wake you up in just a second. For those of you who do, we're going to go back and I'm going to bring you right up to Daniel 1. Now get a pencil and a piece of paper. This is going to be important down the road. Alright, first of all, write down this date: 931 BC. Now, remember, when you say BC you count backwards, because you're before that dividing point where you start counting forward. In 931 BC something happened, and you need to know about it. That's when the kingdom split. That's when Israel split under the reign of Solomon. Ten tribes went to the north; two tribes went to the south—Israel to the north, Judah to the south. Now we talked about that last Sunday. Right after that, in 930 BC, there was a prophecy made, and I love this, because it just shows you how God honors what He says. In 930 BC there was a prophecy made that didn't take place for over 300 years, and I want you to see that.

Look at 1 Kings 12. If we don't do anything else in the study of Daniel, we may learn the books of the Old Testament. First Kings 12:25. Jeroboam is the king of Israel; Rehoboam is the king in Judah, the southern tribe. Now there's a little bit of a dilemma here and the Scripture will bring it out. I want you to see the pagan idolatry that got into Israel's life. As a matter of fact, the ten northern tribes do not have any record of any godly king whatsoever. Every one of them did evil in the sight of the Lord. This is Jeroboam, verse 25, "Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived there. And he went out from there and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.'"

Now he had a little bit of a dilemma. Where are the people going to worship? Where are they going to make their sacrifices? If they go back to Jerusalem, where the temple is, they're going to leave me and their allegiance will go to Rehoboam. They'll walk away from me. Verse 28: "So the king consulted, and made two golden calves." Can you believe this guy? "And he said to them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods [your gods, plural], O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.'" It shows you how wicked this king was. "And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi." And, of course, the sons of Levi were to be the priests. "And Jeroboam instituted a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; thus he did in Bethel,

sacrificing to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.”

This is gross idolatry, folks! And it's terrible what he was doing in the sight of God. Verse 33: “Then he went up to the altar which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised in his own heart; and he instituted a feast for the sons of Israel, and went up to the altar to burn incense.” Now watch what takes place. “Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, ‘O altar, altar, thus says the Lord, Behold a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.’ Then he gave a sign that same day, saying, ‘This is the sign which the Lord has spoken, Behold, the altar shall be split apart and the ashes which are on it shall be poured out.’ Now it came about when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Bethel, that Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, ‘Seize him.’ But his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. The altar also was split apart and the ashes were poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. And the king answered and said to the man of God, ‘Please entreat the Lord your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.’ So the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king's hand was restored to him, and it became as it was before.”

Now you say, “What's that got to do with anything?” Well, just hang on. It has a whole lot to do with it. What was the man's name that was going to come one day and tear those altars down and render them as dust? His name was going to be Josiah. God sent his prophet to tell Jeroboam what was going to take place. Well, what happened? Nothing! Silence! Over 200 years go by. I'm sure the skeptics loved to sit back in their seat and laugh. “Did you hear what the prophet said? Why, God's not going to do anything!” And people would die out, generations turned over. Well, 930 BC was when that prophecy was given.

Now go on down your time line and put this date down: 722 BC. Now, I gave it to you last week; I'm giving it to you again today. That's when Israel finally fell into the hands of Assyria, as prophesied, as we looked at last week, by many Old Testament prophets. They're taken into captivity; they no longer exist. Now, Judah, the southern two tribes, is still hanging in there. They're still existing. Now, write down another date: 640 BC. Something happened that was prophesied way back in 930 BC. Look in 2 Kings 22. I'm telling you, I get so excited about this stuff. It just amazes me! I know this prophecy is right, and I know it's real. But it's just wonderful to see it fulfilled in Scripture. Friend, listen: God is in control whether you like it or not. Our God is on the throne, brother, and He's pulling the strings. He knows exactly what's happening around us.

In 2 Kings 22, and look who it is who is coming on the throne. What's his name? Josiah. Well, I'll be! You mean that's the same guy? That's the same guy! Two hundred years before it was prophesied he was going to do something. He hasn't done it yet, but he comes on the throne in 640 BC. Josiah was eight years old when he became king. Now I know a lot of eight-year-olds who think they're king, but this is the only one who actually was king! “Josiah became king when he was eight years old and he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem and his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. And he did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.” And so we see a godly king coming on the throne of Judah.

Now, something happened 18 years after he's on the throne. See, you've got to learn this folks, or you're going to mess up in Daniel. Sometimes between verses there can be 18 or 20 years, sometimes between chapters there can be 40-50 years or so take place. If you don't see that, you're going to really mess up as to how all this is taking place in history.

Alright, 2 Kings 22:3: “Now it came about in the eighteenth year.” Now anybody, I know math is a tough subject for most of us, but if you take 18 and subtract it from 640, what do you come up with? 622: isn't that good? Boy, we're historians and didn't even know it. Write down 622 BC. That's when this takes place in verse 3. “King Josiah sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam the scribe, to the house of the Lord saying,” and he gives a message to them and he's going to take care of some things. But I'm not going to get into all that context. Look at verse 8: “Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe.” Now they found something on this mission the king had sent them on. They discovered something. He said, “I have found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord.” And without belaboring the point and reading all of the Scriptures that are there, let me just simply say revival broke out in the house of Judah. Man, they had found the Law and they repented and they had a godly king that would honor God in whatever that he did. He didn't lean to the left; he didn't lean to the right.

Now you say, “What's that got to do with Daniel?” It has a whole lot to do, friend. This is in 622 BC. Daniel is born in 620 BC. He's born at a time of great revival in the land. He's not born under an evil king now; he's born under Josiah at a time when the Law has been discovered. And so when we get to Daniel, we see him as a teenage boy having been under this godly time in the nation of Judah. Well, we see that Josiah does something that was promised in verse 15 of 2 Kings 23. Remember the prophecy that we read a few moments ago about an unnamed prophet that went to Jeroboam and said, “It's going to take place, mark it down.”

We read in 2 Kings 23:15: “Furthermore, the altar that was at Bethel and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made [remember Jeroboam?], even that altar and the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its

stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah," which was a goddess of that day. And so he did exactly what was prophesied; he went to Bethel and he tore down that altar. This is the godly reign of Josiah, a time they found the Law and revival has broken out in the country.

Well, 2 Chronicles helps us now. Go to 2 Chronicles 35 and I'm going to bring you right up to Daniel 1:1. Josiah does a dumb thing. Not a simple thing, just a dumb thing. You ever done a dumb thing? Sometimes the consequences of doing dumb things are pretty severe, and he died as a result of it. And we're going to see this in 2 Chronicles 35:20: "After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt came up to make war at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to engage him." Now he wasn't out there to war against the people of Judah. Josiah had nothing to do with it. These were natural enemies of his and he wanted that city on the Euphrates River and so he had made battle with those people in that area. That had nothing to do with Josiah. But since Josiah was in the region he felt like he needed to defend Carchemish. He needed to go and help these people. Verse 21, "But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, 'What have we to do with each other, O King of Judah? I am not coming against you today [you're not my problem!], but against the house with which I am at war, and God has ordered me to hurry. Stop for your own sake from interfering with God who is with me, that He may not destroy you.'"

Now did you notice the terminology in that verse? "God that is with me;" "God has ordered me." This is something that you're going to have to get hold of in Old Testament language. I love it! Because He used the pagan king, called the servants of God. Why? Because God is the author of history and will use anybody at any time He chooses to use them. But brother, that doesn't mean He's befriended them, because they're still pagan. Don't confuse the two. He knows good and well that he's under orders to go to Carchemish. And he tells Josiah, "Listen, God's telling me you back away. Don't you bother me! I'm not out here to bother you!"

But Josiah just a dummy, doesn't listen. Verse 22, "However, Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to make war with him; nor did he listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to make war on the plain of Megiddo." And friend, you can't disobey and get away with it. "And the archers shot King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, 'Take me away, for I am badly wounded.'" Next few verses talks about them lamenting over Josiah, and finally Josiah dies.

Now look in chapter 36:1 and we see the succession, what happened after he died. "Then the people of the land took Joahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in place of his father in Jerusalem. Joahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem." And evidently the king of Neco liked him and took him back to Egypt it says later on, but it says in verse 3: "Then the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem, and imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold."

Now look at verse 4. His brother now, "And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem." Now you say, "You've lost me! Man, what are you doing all this for? It has nothing to do with Daniel!" Oh yes, it does. Look at the next phrase: "And changed his name to [what?] Jehoiakim." In other words, Josiah's son, Joahaz, three months, and then his brother Eliakim, his other son, and his name was changed to Jehoiakim.

Now what's that got to do with the price of eggs in China? Alright, go back to Daniel 1:1. Maybe now we can get into the flow of things. Now the rest of you that don't like history, wake up! Wake up! Now we'll get to your part of it. Verse 1: "In the third year of the reign of [who?] Jehoiakim." Who's that? I just told you who it was; if you'd been paying attention you would have caught it. He was the other son of Josiah who was the godly king over Judah. "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." This is 605 BC and now we're in Daniel 1:1.

It says in verse 1, "in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim." Now, if you'll study the prophet Jeremiah, he says it's the fourth year. "There's a contradiction in Scripture! I knew it! You can't trust that book!" That's the way the liberal theologians always do. They see an apparent contradiction and they want to build a case on it. Let me explain this to you. Jeremiah was using one system of calendar dating and Daniel was using another. Ha, ha! There were two. You see, a king could be on the throne for even over a year sometimes and it still not be the official first year of his reign. Daniel referred to the official third year of his reign. Jeremiah looked at the chronological period of time and put the four years in. So probably he was one the throne for a period of time before he was actually made the official king over Babylon. There are no contradictions in Scripture friends. It just takes a little bit of understanding how they do things back in those days.

So, in the third year, official year, of the reign of Jehoiakim Nebuchadnezzar comes down and seizes the city. Now, this is the first of three sieges. If you don't understand that, some of Daniel will just be perplexing to you. The first siege they take out Daniel and all the young men, and we'll look at that this morning as part of our message. The second siege, which comes years later, they take out Ezekiel and the ten thousand. The third siege, which comes even later than that, they destroy the city and take everybody out of it. So this is just the first siege of Jerusalem, so remember that.

Okay, verse 2: "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god." Little "g". It's

interesting, because this doesn't mean a whole lot to us now in the text of Daniel, but will mean great things to you in chapter 5. They took the gold and silver vessels right out of the temple that were used and set apart for worshipping God, and they took them over into Babylon and put them into pagan temples of their "gods", little "g". Now you say, "What does that mean?" Well, it means a whole lot. Do you think God is going to let them get away with that? You think the Lord is going to do that? Listen, even though He's using pagan kings, friend, again, He's not befriended them! They're going to pay, buddy, for their dishonoring Him. He's just using them right now to accomplish His purposes with His people.

Well, Shinar, by the way in verse 2, is another name for Babylon, so again the thought is there. He takes these vessels over and puts them into pagan idolatress temples. Verse 3: "Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles." Now you remember, one of the ways, when they would conquer an area, that they would really conquer it, would be to take all the qualified youth out of it, leave the rest of the people, bring in foreign nations and let them co-inhabit with the people, and what happened was they would lose their identity as a race. And this is what constantly was done. Assyria did it, and not Babylon is about to do the same thing. So he's going to choose certain youths to be taken out. Now the plot begins to thicken. Ah, now we begin to see why Daniel is over in Babylon. Look at verse 4, "youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court;" Now you had to meet three qualifications to go.

I was thinking about in my teenage years. Daniel, at this time, would have been about 15 years old—can I say that a little more loudly for our young people? —15 years old when Daniel and his friends were taken out. Now, they had to meet certain qualifications. I would have never met them. First of all was a physical test. They had to pass a physical test. They could absolutely have no physical defects. That meant physical defects where it says "no defects." They had to be good, healthy specimens of young people, and were good-looking. Sharp, sharp young people. Can you imagine America being taken over by another country, say Russia, and they came in to every city of every state and they picked out the young people that were sharp, healthy, good-looking rascals.

Alright, secondly, they had a mental test that they had to pass. They had to be mentally fit. It says, "Showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom," (I'd have flunked that one, too) "endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge." They had to be not only good-looking and healthy, but they had to be sharp mentally; those that could pick up real quickly and could do things. And then thirdly, they had to pass a social test; they had to be socially fit, in a sense. It says, "And who had ability for serving in the king's court." Now what does that mean? Well, it refers here, the basic understanding that I can get out of the wording here, is that it refers to the fact that they had social traits, personality traits, that would lend themselves to serving in that kind of service. They didn't just pick anybody indiscriminately. They went by and they very carefully chose the ones who were physically fit, who were mentally fit, and who were socially fit to be part of the king's personal service.

And they took them out of the land. The best idea I can get from the text is this choice was made over in Jerusalem, before they went to Babylon, and they took them all over, a select group of young people of the house of Judah, into Babylon, to be a part of the king's service. Now this is where the plot really begins to thicken, because these are godly young people, or supposed to be, and they're being taken into a pagan land. Now somewhere there's going to have to be a rub, isn't that correct? Somewhere there's going to have to be something that they're going to be told to do that God tells them to do something else. And we begin to see that in verse 4. It goes on to say "he ordered him to teach them the literature and the language of the Chaldeans." So far, no problem. And, as a matter of fact, verse 5 says for three years they were to be educated. They were to be put in school over in Babylon, learn all the customs learn the language, and then they'll be ready to be put in the service.

Look at verse 5: "And the king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank." Now at first glance, what's wrong with that? What it means is that actually the food that he ate from, and the wine that he drank from, he was going to give to these youths. I can hear my son and some of his friends right now. "Man, this is great! I mean, T-bone steak every night. We can have anything we want. They've taken us into captivity. Captivity's not so bad! You get fed well. And he's given us the best food in the whole area. What's wrong with that?"

It's the first test, folks, of their real godliness in their life. Do you know why? Number 1, that food and that drink violated the Levitical dietary law that's been given to all of the house of Israel. They would have violated God's command on what they could or could not eat just by eating and drinking what that king drank. But even more important than that, the food had been sacrificed to idols and that food then was brought to the king, and as the king would consume the food he was, by consuming it, recognizing the false gods of that day, and in doing so would somehow superstitiously gain favor with those false gods. For those young people to have bowed down to that king when he made a decree that they should eat of that food, and to dishonor God, would have defiled their whole life. So what did they do? What is their choice? Now think about it with me. Just stay with me.

Think what they had going through their minds. Now, we know teenagers. I was one once, were you? As a matter of fact, my mind stopped normally functioning at 19, so I'm still somewhere in that age! You know how a teenager thinks. I know how young people

think. "Hey, man! Mom and Daddy can't see me, they didn't take the parents!" Boy, you talking about a bunch of young people had it made! They left their parents back at home and they took them over there. "Mom and Daddy don't know anything about it. As a matter of fact, I realize God is telling me to do this, but hey, I'm away at college. I'm going to school for three years. I'm in a pagan land. They want me to do what they want me to do, and Mom and Daddy can't say a word about it. I think I'll just play the game. I think I'll dishonor God during my school time, but when I go back home I'll sit with the youth group, I'll sing in the choir, I'll even go on the youth camps in the summer. Nobody will know the difference!"

You see, you've got to think about what they're facing here, folks. As a matter of fact, if you know anything about Nebuchadnezzar, and if you know anything about the Babylonian Empire, you know how ruthless this man could be. You're going to find that out over there when he takes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, simply by refusing to bow down to a false god, and throws them into a blazing, fiery furnace. Just zip them out boy, just that fast. A pagan, mean, ruthless king. And here's these young people thinking, "Man, am I going to honor God, or am I going to do what he tells me to do?" Now, be real careful for those of you who say you can break the law at any cost, always to honor God. Be real careful. The decree was they had to eat that food. No negotiation and no choice whatsoever. Everyone was told in captivity to eat of that food and drink of that drink. And that's going to play a real role in your understanding this as we go on. What are they going to do? What are they going to do?

Well, it's interesting that there are only four, out of all that were taken out, were mentioned in Scripture as having not defiled themselves and honored God. Look in verse 8 again and you'll begin to realize what's being said. "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself." You know, so many times, and by the idea of this thing it wasn't that he made up his mind when he got over there. He had already made up his mind that he would not defile the Lord. And, young people, you need to make up your mind now!

You're in the security of your family right now. You're in the security and protection of your mother and your father, and everything is laid at your feet. Clothes are bought, food is bought, everything is yours, but one day you're going to leave that home and you're going to go into a pagan land and you're going to be there where people are going to place the same decision before you. Make up your mind now that you will not defile yourself by dishonoring God and doing what this world tells you to do. Make it up now! Man, my prayer is that in this church we could have some Daniels raised up. Not wishy-washy wimpy kids that come to church on Sunday and then play a stupid game during the week. Daniels who will stand and be counted for what God says to do.

And notice I'm saying this to young people, but adults, you need to be listening to what I'm saying, too. What about your job, sir? If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there even be enough evidence to convict you as guilty? Do your people around you know that, buddy, you will not compromise. It doesn't matter if your boss tells you to go out and drink with a client so that you can get his business; you're not going to do it. And you're going to make some hard decisions that you will not defile yourself so that you can honor God in everything that you do. Even at the risk of losing your job, even at the risk of losing even more than that in your life. That's a Daniel, and these are 15-year-old kids who had made up their minds not to play the game like other kids. But they're going to make up their minds to be a Daniel, to be a Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. To be the people that God wanted them to be.

Well, they made up their mind, and they're not going to do what the king has to say. Well, what happened? I'll tell you next week. Just to whet your appetite. Oh, folks, it is so beautiful how God works in your life. And I want you to understand something as you study ahead of me this week. Please write it down somewhere. Listen to this: notice the godly character which was theirs when they told the king they couldn't do what he told them to do. We're seeing a lot of people today saying that you can do this and you can do that, but buddy, some of the harshest, rudest, meanest, cruelest things that I've ever received in the mail or ever talked with anybody about have come from people who claim to be Christians, who say that they're standing for God, and who say they have a right to do it. You don't get that in the book of Daniel. You do not get that at all.

These guys had such a character about them; they weren't rebels looking for a cause. They were truly godly young men who made up their minds they would not defile themselves when a pagan king when told to do so. I want to tell you something that made a difference when they made their appeal to the ones who were in authority. Because it wasn't just their appeal that struck those authorities, it was the lifestyle, the behavior, and the character of those young men that changed the hearts of those who were in authority.

Well, young people, I get mean sometimes, but I'm really not. I'm on your team. I just want you to know that it doesn't pay to dishonor God, for popularity or anything else. Sometimes I get up here and holler and rant and scream and pound the pulpit. My heart to you is I'm trying to encourage you. Because, young people, there was a time in my life that I played a game and I paid a price and my fear for you is that you'll go through the same thing. I realize we all have to make our own mistakes and learn from our mistakes. Don't ever think I'm getting on you when I holler like that. I'm just so convicted in my soul I get a little louder when I get to those points.

My fear is you won't understand that it only pays when you serve God, regardless of what it costs you at school or with your friends, or anybody else. And I say that out of my heart of love because I've got my two sitting right out there, and so it's kind of delicate

territory when we get in that area. But I love you! Make up your minds. Make up your minds. Are you going to defile yourself by honoring man? Or are you going to honor God and dishonor what man says? You know, Scripture says if you start pleasing man you stop pleasing God. At that point, you have stopped pleasing God. You know, income tax time is coming up. I wonder if our country would be in the debt that it is in if we had Christians that would be honest on their income tax? "Go back to the history, Wayne. That was better. Give me a date, I can write that down!"

Well, seriously, if we had all had to make that decision years ago, our country would be in a whole lot better shape. You're going to see in the book of Daniel, the problem is not with the pagans, folks. It's with the believer who won't make up their mind to get on the right side of the fence. That's the problem. So quit throwing stones at the government and everybody else and look at yourself in the mirror and see if you're the person that's defiled yourself and not stood up for what God wants in your life. Let's pray.

Father, we just thank You so much for men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. We thank You, Father, that they made a stand, that they chose not to defile themselves, but they chose to honor You. And oh, Father, You know the frustration in my heart of all the dumb things that I've done in my life. Thank You, Lord for Your grace and Your mercy, and certainly, Lord, You've brought me through those days. But oh, Father, how my heart beats for these young people.

Lord, in this evil, evil, pagan world that we live in today, with everything in every corner to pull them this way and to pull them that way, I pray, Father, especially these young boys, 15, 16, 17 years old, will make up their minds that they will not dishonor You. They'll not defile themselves, that they're going to honor You and stand when the time comes to stand. Father, I pray for them in classrooms where they hear people dishonor the Word of God, when they hear people, Father, put down the things that You have done. I pray for them, Father, that You'll give them a boldness like never before, to keep that stand firm and solid.

I pray for them, Father, when they're with their friends and, Lord, all of us deal with the choices that we have to make every day. God, I pray that they'll be leaders, not followers. And I thank You Father, for their friends, and I thank You Lord, that through that friendship they can build such a unity, that boy could reach so many young people. God, I pray that You'll break the heart of our young people that they can realize the lost kids that are around them every day and are going to absolutely bust hell right open if they die today. Father, I just pray that You'll give them that godly compassion in their hearts for those kids.

And I pray, Father, for the adults that are listening to the sound of my voice. All of us, Lord, I pray that we won't pass it off to the young people, but Father, we'll make our stand, that we will not defile You or ourselves, but, Father, we'll honor You and we'll obey You regardless of what it costs. Lord, we see in the history of kings that have gone against You, how they had to pay. Father, we realize that disobedience automatically brings judgment, but Father, I pray that we'll learn that obedience, in obedience we find the joy we've been looking for. For in pleasing You, Father, that's what really makes us be what You want us to be. We love You and we praise You.

Daniel 1:6-8 Will You Please Make Up Your Mind - 2

Turn with me to Daniel 1, as we continue a message we began last week entitled "Will You Please Make Up Your Mind? Part 2." Will you please make up your mind? Now, if we were teenagers from upper-class families in Jerusalem in 605 BC, we would be living in some very difficult times. Now verses 1-4 help us to get the setting as we looked at it briefly last week. Verse 1 says, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." This was the first of three sieges that he made upon the city.

Verse 2 says, "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar [another name for Babylon] to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god." Now they've taken the gold and silver vessels right out of the temple and have taken them over to their pagan idols, and what a defacement had happened to the people of God.

Verse 3 says, "Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel [notice the next phrase], including some of the royal family and of the nobles." They wanted the sharpest youths and one of the areas they looked in was the upper-class young people. These were all teenagers about 15-17 years of age.

Verse 4 says, "Youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking [physically they were healthy specimens], showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge [they had to be mentally alert], and who had ability for serving in the king's court [the kind of personality that would be serviceable to the king in his own court. And they were to be sent to school]; And he ordered him to teach them the literature and the language of the Chaldeans." That was to go on, verse 5 tells us, for three years. Then if they were approved they were put into the king's personal service.

Now imagine this morning, young people particularly, being jerked out of your home, being taken out of your homeland, parents nowhere around, by a pagan king into a pagan land, and there they are going to brainwash you. They're going to make you learn their literature and language and they want you to conform to being what they are and what they want you to be. This is the setting we have on Daniel 1. Not too far removed to what happens to a lot of our young people when they go off to school. They go off to a school that perhaps is not a godly institution in the sense of teaching the Word of God.

And that doesn't mean that education facilities are wrong, going to universities or secular schools. I'm not saying that. And so often I'm heard as saying that; that's not at all the point in mind. But what I am saying is that when you go off, young people, learn to eat the chicken and throw away the bone. There are a lot of things that are taught today from the humanistic side of this world, the ABC's of the way the world thinks. But if you know the Word of God, learn to choose between the two and make your stand. Don't become a clone to what they want you to be and the way they want you to think. Think on your own two feet as governed by the Word of God.

Well, we've already seen just four teenagers are mentioned in the book of Daniel as to not giving in to the system. They were not willing to defile themselves. They were certainly going to honor God at any cost. They were not wimps at all. They said, "No way, Jose!" You know, any old dead fish can float downstream; it takes a live one to swim upstream. And you've got four of them, only four mentioned, out of all these Jewish kids that were taken over to Babylon. Only four of them made their stand, but praise God there were four.

Well, in verse 8 we see it. We looked at it briefly last week. But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself. Now, when it says Daniel you know it also includes his three friends, because as chapter 1 shows, all four of them had come to this conclusion. Now, before they packed their suitcase and left their land, they made up their minds they would not defile themselves. And I think we need to understand that: it wasn't a decision they made when they got there, young people, they made it before they ever left home. "We will not defile ourselves."

So we want to look at what happens now, and we want to look at chapter 1. The narrative in the Old Testament is so much easier; it doesn't take as much time as it does when you're preaching through the New Testament. But, first of all, let's look at their problems. And I doubt very seriously we'll get any further than this. The first problem they face, the plot begins to thicken; they've made up their minds not to defile themselves.

They made up their minds not to defile themselves

Look at verse 5, "And the king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank." Now we mentioned some of this last week, and I want to make sure you understand it. First it seems to be no problem. What could be the problem with having the best food? By the king's choice food, by the wine which he drank, it meant from the very table they served him, they were going to serve these youths. Now, to a teenager being jerked out of his homeland, put into a foreign country, into a pagan land, but being given the best of all the food in the land, I mean, what's the problem?

What could be wrong in having the best food in the land? I mean, after all, what's the big deal? Well, very obviously there was something wrong, because it does say in verse 8 that Daniel chose not to defile himself. Something about what the king was serving was going to defile them. Now what could that be? We made some suggestions last week. Let's go back to them this morning and let's document them in scripture. History teaches us that the habit of a lot of these pagan kings was that what they would do is they would sacrifice their food to idols before they would eat it. In other words, if they had their food sacrificed to idols and then they would eat it, they would gain favor with their false gods and somehow their gods would be good to them. And so they would do this.

Well now, you know immediately that God's child cannot recognize those false deities. Look in Exodus 34 and it's very clear. Exodus 34:14-15. It's very clear they were never to eat food that was sacrificed to idols. Verse 14 says, "for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous [remember that; He's jealous, He's a jealous God] is a jealous God—lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they play the harlot with their gods, and sacrifice to their gods, and someone invite you to eat of his sacrifice." And so it's very clear from the Word of God they were never to eat food sacrificed to idols. That could have been the problem.

But if you'll look in Leviticus 11:44-47 we find that there were certain clean foods and certain unclean foods that they were to eat: "For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate ourselves therefore, and be holy." Boy, what a tremendous phrase, because we're going to look at that later in the New Testament. Consecrate yourself. Set yourself apart. The word "holy" there means to be set apart for God's use. These were His people, they were in covenant with Him and it was the Law that separated them from the way pagan people would live, and how they would eat and how they would live. Well, it says, "for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; thus you shall be holy for I am holy. This is the law regarding the animal, and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters, and everything that swarms on the earth, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and

between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten.”

So there were certain foods they could eat, there were certain foods that they could not eat. Certain animals were clean, certain animals were unclean. But you know, we’re not under that covenant anymore. But you have to understand where they were. There were certain foods they could eat, there were certain foods they couldn’t eat. And evidently, part of the king’s diet happened to fit into those Levitical laws and they were not supposed to eat it. Of course, Numbers 6:3 gives us the Nazirite law. You know, the word “Nazirite” comes from the word that means separation, and it referred to a lay person who would make a consecrated vow to God which would include several things. One of them was they could not touch wine. So somehow, all of this was involved. And Daniel made up his mind he would not defile himself. He would not eat of this food; he would not drink of this drink.

Now you’ve got to get into the feel of this thing. If you miss this, you’ve missed the whole thrill of Daniel 1. Here are these teenagers over in a pagan land, here’s a pagan king. Look at this in verse 5, “And the king appointed for them a daily ration of food.” That word “appointed” means he commanded. Folks, listen, Nebuchadnezzar is no nice guy. You’ll see later on when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to do what he tells them to do; he throws them into a fiery furnace. This is a pagan king with a pagan mindset. And here are these youths that have come over into the land. Momma and Daddy are not around; they can’t lean on them. And here they are faced with the biggest problem of their life. Are they going to obey God or are they going to obey man?

That’s a tough one. That’s a tough one for an adult that’s been around for awhile, much less for a 15, 16, 17-year-old teenager. Quite complicated; this was their problem. Well, what did they do? Well, I’m not going to tell you. That’s what we’re going to talk about next time. How they went about it, their procedure, and not only that, but how God prospered them because of their willingness to stand for Him. But you’ve got the setting; here’s the problem: they’re going to have to go against what God’s Word has to say in order to obey the king. Are they going to obey the king or are they going to obey God? This is a tough one.

Folks, we are told to be holy. I want you to look at that with me in 1 Peter. We’re going to go to the New Testament for awhile as we finish out the message. And in 1 Peter 1, I want you to see that holiness for the believer as well as for that person under covenant in the Old Covenant is no option. We don’t have an option when it comes to obeying God or obeying man, if in fact they conflict. Now remember that: Whenever they conflict we have to go to a higher law. Very rarely does that take place; however, there are times when it does. First Peter 1:14-16. Now notice this: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.” Now remember, he’s writing to the most persecuted believers in all of Asia Minor, in all of the New Testament. They’re being martyred for their faith. And he says, “Now you’re obedient. Stay obedient. Don’t be conformed to former lusts that were yours in your ignorance.”

Verse 15, “but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in [in how much of your behavior?] all your behavior.” The Greek word for “all” there means “all”! Hard to understand, isn’t it? “In all of your behavior.” Whatever you’re doing, whether it’s at work, whether it’s at school, whatever you do, you be holy unto the Lord. And then it says in verse 16 as he quotes from what we read awhile ago, “because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am Holy.’” You see, this is the imperative of the Word of God. When it comes to a choice between what man says beyond what God has to say, then we have no choice. There’s no debate. We must be holy. We are in the world, but not of the world. Do you realize that a boat in water is by design, but water in the boat is disaster? God has so programmed us and made it possible for us to be in this world but not of this world. His Holy Spirit lives within us. We have the Word of God. In John 17:17 Jesus prayed in His high priestly prayer, He said, “Father, sanctify them in the Truth.” And the word “sanctify” means “set them apart from this world.” And then He says, “Thy Word is Truth.”

As I give myself to this book, as I surrender myself to the Lord Jesus Christ, that is the only way to work out that holiness to which I’m commanded. Yes, I was made holy when Jesus entered into my life. That’s a positional truth. But now I must be experiential with it. I must choose moment by moment by moment to do what God tells me in my life. There’s no option whatsoever. Now, let me make sure we understand something here. When we start talking about separation a lot of people have different ideas about that. It is not that we separate ourselves, but that by obeying God, that obedience separates us. Do you understand what I’m saying? Many people think that what they do externally somehow separates them from the world.

For instance, people say that if you have long hair, you’re giving in to the world. Therefore if you have short hair, you’re spiritual. That’s about as dumb as anything I’ve ever heard. You may look at me this morning and my hair’s above my ears. So then there must not be sin in my heart. You know they have an unwritten rule around here that says that if you have hair over your ears, you have sin in your heart. You’ve heard us say that many times. I’ve changed that: if you have hair over your heart, you have sin in your ears. Well, people think that! If your hair is short, it must mean that you’re separated from this world.

Women don’t wear slacks to church or don’t wear slacks anywhere because that’s going to keep you from being separated from the world. Not necessarily. Now listen: when you do what God tells you to do, it may mean that He’ll tell you to cut your hair. It may mean that He’ll tell you not to wear slacks. But you let Him tell you that; don’t let man tell you that. You see, what men go through, thinking they’re separating themselves, many times is far beyond what the Word of God is teaching. It’s not external first, it’s internal. It’s the motive of your heart. You may think, “Well, you sure look spiritual to me this morning with that short hair.” Do you know why I don’t

wear long hair? Because it irritates me. My hair frizzes and I would look like I had an afro, really! If I let it get wet it just curls up. And when it gets too long, it just curls up. Now you don't walk around pointing to somebody because they've got long hair and say, "Boy, that person's living in the world. He's of the world." You forget that! You just check him out with his heart. Find out where he is, find out his lifestyle. And if somebody wears a pair of shorts on your block, don't go around thinking they're giving in to the world. Man, it just might be hot!

I went to a camp one time and they said you could wear shorts only if they were so many inches above the knee. And that's fine if you're 5'11" like the guy who made the rules. I buy shorts for everybody else, but find shorts for my legs which are just a little bit longer. I went out to play softball, and I was teaching for the camp and here comes a guy up with a ruler and he measures it off on my leg and makes me go back and put on a pair of long pants to play in 100 degree temperature so I could be spiritual on the ball field. Good grief, how stupid can we be? Holiness is not doing something on the outside so we can prove anything on the inside. It's doing something on the inside. Now, that may mean all these other things may take place, but it's a total thing of a relationship with the Lord in your life. If God through His Word convicts you to do that, I'm not here to offend you or to judge you. If God doesn't convict me, don't you point your finger at me. Man, each one of us is free in the Lord Jesus Christ and needs to discover where it is that He's going to set us apart. But sanctification is not what we do; it's what He does as a result of our obedience to Him and our obedience to His Word. Do we understand that?

Secondly, look in Ephesians 5. We have no option but to be holy. But holiness is simply doing what He tells us to do. Ephesians 5:25-27. It's very interesting. It's in the context of husbands and wives, but it gives us a picture here of the end purpose of what sanctification is all about. What holiness is all about: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Why did He do that? That He might sanctify her. There's your word: set her apart. It has the idea of cleaning something that has been in the mud and washing it and setting it on a shelf for a different purpose. Not on a shelf in the sense of passivity, but to put it over here for another purpose. "That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word," as verse 25 says, "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory," here's the overall goal, "having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless."

You realize the decisions we make every week? I try to tell my kids, listen; all you've got today are choices! You're free to make your own choice; you can't decide the consequence of that choice! And we must be redeeming the time with the collateral of choice, making the proper choices, doing the things God's telling us to do so that we can be holy and walk blameless before Him. This is the whole purpose of our salvation, among many others. This is the end result so that one day Jesus can present us holy and blameless before His Father. For a person to be in here this morning and to be living a double lifestyle, to be living one way during the week and another way on Sunday, you're going against the very purpose that God has for your whole salvation. Why do you think the Holy Spirit lives in you? Why do you think Jesus washed you and gave you the Word? So we can live in the world but not of the world.

What's happened I think in the 20th century is that we've become so used to the world that the world has slowly and silently crept in and got a part of our behavior. Now we laugh at what they laugh at, we watch what they watch, we think like they think, and we've forgotten the admonition that there's no option to be holy, and that's the end result and purpose of our salvation.

Well, one more Scripture came to my mind, in James 2:26. You know, to be holy you've got to obey. There's no way around it. Holiness simply means the result of obedience. You don't make yourself holy by carrying a thick Bible and wearing old clothes. That's not what he's talking about. Holiness comes as a result of obeying whatever God tells you in the Word. James 2:26 tells me something. It says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." You see, folks, how do you know you're even saved if you're not seeking to live a holy and blameless lifestyle in the sense of obeying the Lord Jesus in His Word in your life? If there's no evidence of obedience then something may point back to the fact that you have a dead face and not a dynamic face. You may have joined a church, but you never joined Jesus.

Something about the seed of life that He puts within us that motivates us to want to walk separate from this world. And that doesn't mean so much externally as much as it does internally, which affects itself externally. So I think that we need to come to the place that Daniel and his three friends came to. Before you get up tomorrow morning, you make up your mind: let me make up my mind. We will not defile ourselves! And I can tell you what, Jesus said, "Sufficient tomorrow is the evil thereof." There'll be enough opportunities tomorrow for you to choose against what God wants in your life. I guarantee you. Deal with the ones you've got today and make the right choices. And when you wake up in the morning, then let's be Daniel. Let's be like these four youths that were taken over into that land. It's such a shame that we have people today that won't walk holy before the Lord.

Well, in Daniel 1:6-7, they could change their names but they couldn't change their minds. I love that. They could change their names, but they couldn't change their minds. Look at verse 6, "Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah." You say, "Who in the world are those three?" Well, we always called them by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Watch: "Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them;" And I understand, and this cannot be proven, but it's suspected here that they're putting in their gods into each one of these names. Especially Daniel,

spelled Belteshazzar. Bel was one of the gods of the people of that day, pagan gods. "And to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar." Now, be careful; there's a Belshazzar coming later on. This is Belteshazzar. "And to Hananiah Shadrach, and to Mishael Meshach, and to Azariah Abednego."

So each one of these have changed their names. They can change their names, but they can't change their minds. Anybody like that this morning? They can call you anything they want to call you, brother, but they can't change your mind. As we heard sung a while ago, "I am determined to obey my King." I am determined to walk the way God wants me to walk. Well, our time always runs out on me, but there are two things I want to give you as an example this morning.

For several years I was in youth work and I've told you many times that those years were like my 40 years with the sheep. I guess I learned more then than any other time. Work with those young people. I had two kids that stand out in my life as Daniels. And I want to challenge our young people. I can't get off of it. The whole theme here is teenagers standing up for God. How can you get away from it? I'm not trying to just pick on the teenagers. But I had two kids that stand out in my mind. One of them was named Debbie. She's now married to a fellow who's a doctor.

Debbie came to me early in her teenage years and she said, "Brother Wayne, I'm about to start dating. Would you give me some guidelines? I want some biblical guidelines for dating." I said, "Debbie, who am I to tell you anything, but I want to give you some advice I think will help you though." I said, "Listen, whenever a boy calls you up and asks you out, why don't you get hold of your dad (he's a wonderful Christian), and why don't you have him over for dinner, and why don't you let your Dad sit around the table with him. Because, Debbie, you're not going to be able to tell what a boy's thinking as much as a man will be able to tell it. Just like a woman can tell more what a woman thinks. Why don't you invite him over for dinner one night and just find out where he's coming from?"

Well, one of the few kids I've ever known who did this. And so her father was telling me not long ago what a ministry this was to him as a father. Man, I tell you what. When your daughter comes to you and says, "Daddy, I want you to tell me who I ought to date! I want you to put your stamp!" I'll tell you what it'll do for you, Dad. It'll make you get right with God real quick, to make sure you're giving proper discernment. Her father said, "I began to have a relationship with my daughter Debbie that I never had before." And Debbie would make this statement to these guys when they'd come to date her, "Listen, if you don't like my standards, there are plenty of other people that you can date. But this dating relationship is not going to be based on anything physical. I will not defile myself. I'm going to honor God in my dating relationship."

And I remember when sharing that with her she said, "Well, Wayne, if I do that I'm not going to have many dates." And I said, "Well, what's the big deal?" She said, "Well, what are the people going to say to me? Some of my friends have already started dating and they've already gotten into this physical stuff and what are they going to say to me?" I said, "Debbie, listen. You can point your finger to them and say, 'Listen, I could be like you any time I choose. But because of your unwillingness to honor God, you can never be like me.'" Why in the world is it, young people, we let other people lead us. Why don't we stand up and be Daniels and lead them, set the standard ourselves? Buddy, she did it. And to this day she's got the purest relationship with her husband and her family and her Dad and Mom, they walk around beaming all the time because of the purity of a teenage daughter that was willing to not defile herself just so she could have a date, just so she could be popular.

Not only was there Debbie, there was Robert. Old Robert, I led him to the Lord when he was 12 years old. Boy, has he ever changed since he was 12. He was just about going into that brain-dead stage, like 12 or 13. God did a wonderful thing. He spared me those first few years. What is it James Dobson said—when they get to the teenage years you want to put them in a barrel and feed them through a knothole. When they turn 16 you want to plug up the knothole. That's where he was. God somehow in all His sovereignty worked it all the way around that I went to Mississippi, to the same church that Debbie was a member of. And Robert's Dad had moved there, his family was there, and here I run into Robert again. And I had the privilege of discipling him through his formative years there and his teenage years in high school. And Robert made the same commitment Debbie had made. And he said, "I will not defile myself."

He made up his mind, long before he ever went to college, long before he ever started his dating, he made up his mind. And today he's pastor of a church down in Mississippi, just having a ball, looking forward to going to Zimbabwe in the mission field as soon as the Lord opens a door for him to leave. And when I sit with Robert today and I can remember back, that boy meant more to me because he's a kid that listened. They didn't sit in church and pass notes; they didn't think it was funny. They sat there and they listened and they chose to follow God. Where in the world are Daniels? Where are the youth that will not defile themselves?

You know, adults, when we look back, doesn't it grieve our hearts? If I could go back and relive my life, I'd do it so fast. One thing I wouldn't change was accepting Jesus and the other was marrying my wife. But there'd be a whole lot of other things that I'd change. But I can't do that. Thank God this is not a condemning message to people who have already come through their years, because God gives grace to match the sin and He gives mercy for us to deal with the consequences. But at least we can say it to tender young people that are just now in those times of making decisions. Young people, make up your mind. If anybody ever tells you it's

stupid to be a Christian, just write it off and back away about 30 feet, because they've just shown you their ignorance. They'll answer to God for that statement.

Make up your mind. You think of the high schools that are in this area! Make up your minds. Be some Daniels. Man, stand up! How many kids do you sit next to in class that are going to hell? And here they are influencing you to do what they're doing. Why don't we make a stand so that we can start reaching out to those other kids? That's the thing. And by the way, it was Daniel who made the decision before it ever mentions the other three. Somebody's got to start it. Somebody's got to drop anchor: "I'm going to be different. I am not going to be suckered into what this world tells me I ought to think." When you sit in a classroom and you have a professor who is very obviously one who does not know the Word of God, sit there and respect him because he's in authority. Sit there and listen to him, but don't you buy everything he's saying. You measure it to the Word of God. That's what I'm saying. And don't think that's stupid. This Book will hold up. Listen, you can go to all the science libraries in the world and every one of them are out of date, because it's changing every day. This Book has never changed, folks.

That's my soapbox for this morning. I really love our young people. I guess even more so because I have two that's among that age. And when I say these things to the young people, I'm also saying it to the adults. Folks, we went out to eat Friday night because my wife's brother and fiancé had come by. We hadn't really planned on doing that but we ended up doing that. That's okay. And we were sitting in a restaurant here locally. Had to wait about 45 minutes to get in and it wasn't great, either.

And we were sitting there and a man introduced himself to us. And he found out that I was pastor of this church. Here's what he said, "I'm a member of a Methodist church," and he told me the name of it. He said, "I've been wanting to meet you." And I said, "Well, here we are. You can always find me in a restaurant." Do you know what he said? He said, "Wayne, you don't realize the impact your church has had on this community. We're of another denomination and that's all we can talk about, is what God's doing at that church." Well, you know, I appreciate those things, because sometimes you hear something positive and it's really nice. Seem like sometimes all you hear is the other. But I went home and God's really put that thought on my heart. Oh me, folks, do you realize the responsibility we have? God's already raised up a witness and they're going to watch us! They're going to watch you where you work. You're going to be sitting at work and somebody's going to say, "Where do you go to church?" You're going to tell them, and, buddy, you've become a fishbowl just like that.

And the choices you make and the choices I make are going to reflect what God's doing in this whole building right now. No man is an island. It takes one to start messing it all up. Are we a Daniel this morning? Make up your mind, get off this fence. Whose side are you going to stand on? And let God take care of the rest and it'll be fun to watch.

Daniel 1:8-19 Will You Please Make Up Your Mind - 3

Turn to Daniel 1 as we finish up this little series within a series called "Will You Please Make Up Your Mind?" This is part 3.

Praise the Lord for four teenagers, out of all those taken captive out of Jerusalem, that would not defile themselves. Taken into a pagan land, put into a pagan school, and actually trained in speaking in pagan ways, but they would not defile themselves. We saw their first problem arise in verse 5 and we also saw that they could change their names, but they couldn't change their minds. They had made up their minds before they ever went into captivity, before they ever packed their suitcase; they had made up their mind. They would not defile themselves by dishonoring God in their life.

Well, we want to go on. We've seen their problem was that the king told them they had to eat of his food and of his drink. And obviously that violated the Levitical Law of what they could eat. Possibly the food was sacrificed to idols which again would violate Scripture, and some of them perhaps had taken a Nazirite vow, which meant they couldn't touch wine. So all of the things that the king offered to them were things that God said, "No! You cannot eat, you cannot drink." That was their problem and we see the solution was that they had made up their minds they would not give in. But I want you to see, secondly, the procedure.

The procedure

What did they do? How did they proceed? Here is a pagan authority telling them that they're going to have to do one thing, and yet they're going to do something else. How would you handle this? What procedure would you have? Well, we pick up in the last part of verse 8. Let's just read the whole verse.

Verse 8 says, "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank." Now remember, so also did his three friends. We'll continue to call them Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but remember that's their Babylonian names, that's not their real names. And in those names is even built the names of the false gods of Babylonia. But we at least can identify with them by those three names. They'd all made up their minds. Now watch what he does.

“So he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.”

Now you've got to be thinking with me. You've got to read between the lines here. We don't have every single detail given to us in Scripture. But we understand now that these are captives in a foreign land, in a pagan land, and you know and I know that a slave, a captive, has no right to appeal to anybody, which has to tell us something about the mannerism and the integrity of Daniel and his three friends. There was something of godliness in their life that gave them an audience with a pagan authority. He goes to Ashpenaz; he makes a request to him. And it's incredible how God honored that direction in his life.

You see, so many people do not realize that to break man's law, it's very, very serious. And the first thing to remember is the only time it's ever broken is when it violates God's Law, which means as we go about that, we have to have a tremendous respect for authority. We've got to have it. We've got to have such a godly influence to pagan authority that they can see godliness in us; that we are even of a higher Authority. And I really believe in all of my heart that Daniel and his three friends had that kind of integrity, they had that kind of lifestyle. They were not rebels looking for a cause, they were not out just to break man's law, they were people who respected man's law, they respected authority, but above all of that, they honored and respected God.

Now look what happens in verse 9. As a result of his approach, of making an appeal to this pagan authority, verse 9 says, “Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials.” I get so excited in this thing. You know, you talk about the sovereignty of God and now we're in a book that absolutely illustrates the sovereignty of God. Do we believe that God is in charge of authority? Matter of fact, look in Proverbs 21:1. And it just documents what He's doing. God has the authority in His hand and we must understand that and we must trust God above and beyond the authority. It says, “The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

In other words, God has absolute, total control over the authorities. The key is not whether the authority is pagan or not, the key is how are we responding to that authority? Do we believe that God is ultimately in control, and if we do believe that, we're going to begin to see some great things happen as we live godly lives around pagan authority.

As a matter of fact, I want you to turn to Romans 13. I just want to give you a few thoughts; I'm not preaching on Romans 13, so I just want to give you a few thoughts that came out of a recent study. Romans 13:1-7: Seven principles about dealing with a pagan authority. And I can hear somebody, “Brother Wayne, this is in Romans, and they don't understand how difficult times can really be. They don't understand how pagan authorities can be friendless and,....” Do you know who was in power when Romans 13 was written? Would you like to know? His name was Nero. There has never been a more ungodly, pagan ruler in the history of man on the face of this earth. He was such a deranged emperor, that friend, listen, he would take the Christians and put them in oil and put them on poles and burn them while he had his orgies there with all of his people. It was a tremendously pagan, sad time in the life of these Christians that were in Rome. And look what Paul writes to them in the midst of all of this.

Verses 1 “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.” Boy, does that ring a bell with Daniel 2:21, where it says that God changes the epochs and raises up kings and establishes kingdoms. Every authority on this earth—the first thing that we need to learn as Christians in a world that's not going to have all the time godly people in control, nowhere in Scriptures does it say that we're going to have that. But it teaches us how we can properly respond and it teaches us that God ultimately is in charge of all authority. First thing we need to learn to do is to recognize authority and learn that we are commanded by God to be in subjection to that authority. This attitude that because we're free in Jesus, we don't have to obey man, is crazy! It's not in the Word of God. We need to recognize authority and recognize we are to be submissive to authority.

Let's move on to verse 2. Boy, there are so many powerful things in this, maybe one time we'll just take it apart and preach out of it. Verse 2, “Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God.” Not only are we to recognize the authority, but we are to recognize God's sovereignty in authority. Do you realize that? When you start breaking the law, just at random, when you think you can go against man's law, listen friend, you're going against God's Law, because it's God who put that person into that position of authority. Not only are we to recognize authority and obey it, but we are also to recognize God's sovereign hand in the midst of that authority. And also, in the last part of verse 2 there look what it says: “and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” You see, we're not to fight God for what He has placed for His purpose. And that ought to be the third thing we ought to write down.

First of all, recognize authority; we are to obey authority. Secondly, recognize the sovereignty of God in the midst of that authority. Thirdly, don't fight God for what He has placed for His purpose. I remember back when they had the CB radios. Do you remember that? Everybody had to have a CB radio, and then it got so filthy nobody wanted one. I was going from Memphis, TN, down to Jackson, MS, and I was riding along and everybody was on it saying, “Hey good buddy, 10-4 good buddy, and all this kind of stuff. I can't remember what you said! I'm trying to remember it but my mind just went blank. But I remember they were talking about the fact that there was a “smokey” in the area, and of course a “smokey” was a state trooper. And of course most of the people would use CB's back in those days to break the law, very honestly. I didn't use mine for that reason, I just enjoyed talking to some of these

old truck drivers. Boy, you could flat get into some weird conversations with these guys. And they were asking if there were any "smokies" around and the guy comes back on and says, "Man, don't worry. There aren't any smokies around here. Put the pedal to the metal." And boy, just go on, no smokies around here. And everybody was just passing the word on back, from car to car to car.

Well, come to find out, the guy who was telling everybody to put the pedal down was a "smokey" sitting in the middle of the road down there. He was catching them right and left as they were coming down. And he was on their channel just talking to them just like he knew what was going on, and he had every one of them just being caught. Well, the word began to pass around, "Look out, look out. There's a smokey out there using a CB." And I remember riding down the road and this one guy came on and said, "Tell me again now, where do you think that smokey is?" And I mean he was nervous, he was upset. You could tell, evidently he was late for something and he was just flying. And finally, after this long discussion back and forth between the cars, one old guy comes on and says, "Hey guys, ya'll are spending a lot of time unnecessarily. Why don't you just drive the speed limit and don't worry about the smokey?"

You know, it didn't dawn on anybody, "Hey, oh yeah, the law's not bad if we just obey it." Well, I'll be! You know, the only people that worry about authority are the people breaking the law, and we're going to see that as it comes up. So, recognize authority, we're to be in subjection to it. Recognize God's sovereignty in authority; don't fight God for what He has placed for His purpose.

But then verse 3 says not to fear. "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior [if you're living right, what are you worried about?], but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same." So don't fear authority, do what is right. Look at verses 4-5. Don't kiss your conscience goodbye. Look what it says, "for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing." In other words, if you're going to break its laws, you're going to pay the consequences already set up, "for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake."

You see, there are a lot of people that every time they see a state trooper they go into a frenzy. Why? Because they're always breaking the law. Their conscience is already affected because they're lawbreakers to begin with. And he says for your own sake and your conscience, honor what authority is in your life. Obey that authority. Then in verse 6 he tells us something nobody likes to hear, "For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing." In other words, one the things of responding to authority is to pay your taxes. Quit thinking that because you're a believer you're above and beyond doing what everybody else has to do.

And then finally, in verse 7, be respectful to authority: "Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." I think that we as Christians need to start learning afresh what authority is in our life. And brother, it is God who is in charge of that authority. And we're to have an attitude; we're to have a manner of being willing to be in subjection to that authority. Yes, there may come times when the law requires all of us to do something that God says you better not do, or you'll defile yourself. When that time comes, make sure that we have the kind of testimony around authorities to where they don't look at us as a rebel looking for a cause, but they recognize the fact that we've come into a real dilemma and we need to honor God; we can no longer obey them. And to me this is what I see in Daniel's life. He was the kind of man who could even approach an official above him and make a request that he not do what he's been told to do because he does not want to dishonor his God. What an incredible testimony.

Well, let's move on to verse 10 and find out what happened. Verse 10, "and the commander of the officials," now remember, God's already changed Ashpenaz' heart toward Daniel. Man, he has compassion on him. This is how God works in authority. Man, old Ashpenaz likes Daniel for some reason. He's got compassion on him. He really understands where he's coming from. But look at his dilemma, verse 10: "and the commanders of the officials said to Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king.'" This is honest! What official is ever going to be this honest with anybody? I think there's something about the integrity of Daniel, he can just bare his heart with him. He understands his dilemma, he's very compassionate about it. But he says, "I'm afraid of the lord my king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."

In other words, "I'm in a bigger dilemma that you're in. I understand your problem, I really see where you're coming from, but I'm just doing my job!" Now, isn't it interesting how we tend to think that people just doing their jobs are always the wrong ones because they're in authority? There's an attitude that really scares me that's coming out of the 20th century towards those just doing their jobs. I remember going over into Romania back when it was under the Communist control and you go through the airport there and they were really tough on you, very tough on you. But the one thing that God impressed on my heart was, "Hey man! These people are not your problem. You don't war against flesh and blood. Love these people." And I began to pray, "God, give me a love for these people. Give me a compassion in my heart toward them. They're just doing their job!"

Boy, every time we'd go through after that, God just gave me such a burden for those guys. And they're sitting in those little booths with those stupid looking uniforms on and they knew they were stupid looking and they didn't want to be there anymore than I would

want to be in that thing. But they had to do what they were told to do. One's check another, one's checking him, and somebody else is checking him, they've got to go through the motions. As I'd go through I found out something: you know, when you smile at people it's incredible? They just have to smile back. They can't stand it! They can't stand it! You can go through, there's something about the manner of a believer, when he deals with authority, if you truly love those people, it's going to come out. And they're going to understand where you're coming from. And how many times God would honor that.

Now folks, listen. This is what Daniel did, and here is Ashpenaz, the official appointed over him, and he likes the guy. He really does like him. But he's stuck; he's in a dilemma himself. Well, what does Daniel do? Look at verses 11-13: "But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days.'" He didn't tell him; he asked him! "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be observed in your presence, and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food, and deal with your servants according to what you see."

You know, I love that! He so respected that this old boy was just doing his job, he didn't present something to him that was absolutely out of the question. He said, "Just for ten days. Man, I realize the position that you're in. I so trust God, God's not only going to honor me, He'll honor you for doing it. But let's just do it for ten days." That really struck me. He didn't say, "Okay, for the first year, why don't you do this?" No, just ten days, ten days. "Give me some vegetables, give me some water, and let's just see how God can honor this request."

And I love how the Lord honored all of that. It says in verse 14, "So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days." Folks, I guess the point I'm trying to make in this and what I see so strongly in Daniel and these three friends, is the tremendous respect that they had for authority, and the overwhelming understanding that they knew that God was sovereign over all authority. And that God wasn't going to bless them with a belligerent attitude toward authority if they came to ask him anything. But since they had the two in balance, then God was able to honor that request and change the authority's heart and then even bring about a proposition that would be very reasonable for both.

Over in Romania there's a precious pastor. The day that Ceausescu was out there in the big city square there and people began to say, "Down with Ceausescu, down with Ceausescu," at that very same time he was over in Braillia and he'd left his home and 30 some secret agents there surrounded him with little Uzi machine guns and made him get out of his car and said, "You're under arrest!"

Well, they'd already done something to make his tires go flat. And Joseph, being the kind of man he was said, "Well, sir, I don't want to leave my car out here in the middle of the road. Let me fix my tires, let me do something to get this car off the road." He was sort of buying time saying, "Lord, give me wisdom, give me wisdom." They lived under this all the time. And while he was in the back rummaging around in his trunk, a call came over one of the radios of the secret police, and come to find out they were letting them know what was going on in Bucharest, that Ceausescu was under pressure and had fled and all the 30 some secret police just turned away from Joseph and got in their cars and ran off. He'd be a dead man today. There was one man but in Braillia that now has come out that was assigned just to kill him. Joseph is going to be right here and preach in the pulpit, God willing, sometime in the last part of April or the first part of May.

Joseph to me is one of the most godly pastors I've ever known in my entire life. He was a man who had a deep, deep respect that God was in control. Frustrated, yes! Like all of them were. Not liking the conditions they had to live under, but a respectful decent man that lived with integrity under a pagan government. One of his deacons was caught and arrested because he had four tracts in his briefcase. Four tracts! Can you believe this? They put him in jail and Joseph heard about it and Joseph said, "There's no way I'm going to let this man go to jail because he's got four small children and his family can't exist without him."

So Joseph goes to the authority and makes a request. He says, "I'm the one who gave this man the four tracts and I would ask you, I would beg of you, that you would take him out of prison and put me in his place because this man's family cannot survive without him." And so the law officials, just like Ashpenaz, allowed that request. They put him in jail. A big trial came up and the word got all over that part of Romania. Christians were praying everywhere. And a judge came down to the final decision and when they brought Joseph in, and when you see his face, folks, I'm telling you, you're going to see Jesus like you've never seen it before. When I saw him, it just drew me to him. He's like a magnet. He loves Jesus!

Well, when he got before the judge to make that final decision, the judge said, "Joseph, I could take your license away, I could put you in prison, I could fine you, and that would be the doom of your family ministry and everything else. But I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to take your license away; I'm not going to put you in prison. I'm going to fine you because I'm under the laws of this country to do something." But already the Christians had raised the money for his fine. Do you know what he said? He said, "The reason I'm not doing these other things is because you're the first person who calls himself a Christian that has acted as decently and as respectfully in this courtroom. There's something unusual, there is something different about you."

Daniel and his three friends. I'm telling you what, folks. There are some types of attitudes that are getting out today that are just frightening me. You don't know what we've been through. Back when I was in Lexington, there was a group down there that called themselves nuns. If they're nun, I'm the pope. They said they were Franciscan nuns. That's a monk order. Wore hot pants and halter tops around the city. They were getting all the blacks together to try and rally them and have boycotts on the stores. Lexington was on the CBS news three times for racial violence. I mean, I both thought, "God, what are You doing to us?" Twenty-seven hundred people, 87% black, and we were the only people who had ever had a ministry to the blacks down there. But these people would call me up all the time. "You call yourself a preacher?" "Yes, sir, I do. I'm called by God." "Well, come on over here to this meeting because we're going to discuss civil rights. We're going to discuss the rights of each individual." I said, "My friend, I'm not coming to your meeting." "Why aren't you coming to our meeting?" "Because I believe in seeing the gospel change people's hearts and then those people will properly respond to situations like that. You're dealing with the external. I'm dealing with something far greater; I'm dealing with the internal heart of an individual."

Boy, I was called every name in the book by people who represented "the cause of Christ." Oh, brother, you know, every time I say that I'm always afraid somebody is going to say, "He's talking about me." Now listen, folks, I have nobody on my mind. If God gets that specific with you, then you go deal with it and get on your face before Him. I'm not trying to do that. I'm just trying the best I can to honor what the text is saying. Here's a man who trusted his God and with integrity went to an official and made a request and God changed the official's heart and as a result of this it worked out not only for the official but it worked out for the four men that made the request.

Do we believe that today? Do we really believe that? Do we believe that if we were Daniels that God might do something to change the heart of our government? Well, we see the procedure. Now let's see the prosperity that resulted.

The prosperity

Boy, this is a tremendous chapter. As a matter of fact, it's just getting us started folks. Daniel is gangbusters. It is one of the greatest books I've ever studied. Look at verse 14, "So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days." Now look at verse 15, how God honored it. I love this! "And at the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths." On water and vegetables? That's incredible. Now you go back and check that out. We say in America to drink water and vegetables and you'll get slimmer. Well, they got fatter! "They were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. So the overseer continued to withhold."

You see, oh, this is so neat. He continued to honor their request and withhold the choice of food and the wine that they were to drink and kept giving them vegetables. "And as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams." And this is when you begin to see the foundation for the rest of the book. Why is it in chapter 2 that we have that great panorama of history? Why is it in chapters 7-12 that we understand what's going on in the latter days? Because a man made up his mind not to dishonor himself or to dishonor his God. And because of that God honored him.

I just think of the potential that's in this room right now, and for young people. I had so many precious responses from the youth and I want to thank you for that. I didn't know if you knew my heart as I shared some of those things with you. Thank you for your sharing back with me. Man, the potential sitting right over here. If they make up their minds not to, what God could do! Not only to change our lives, but to change our whole country's lives, because of people who are will to be Daniels.

Then verse 18 says, "Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar." Now Nebuchadnezzar is going to check them out. "And the king talked with them [three years have now gone by and the king talked with them] and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the king's personal service. And as for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm."

You know, I'm going to stick something in here that is sort of an application, but something that has been on my heart for a long time. Parents, you have a kid at home who doesn't do well in school, struggles with his grades, and says he can't comprehend anything going to class. I promise you, you start praying for child, and you get him in the Word and God gets him into the Word and you're going to see a difference in his grade level when God begins to quicken to his mind how to comprehend and understand. I believe there is something to that. I'm not going to force it: if it doesn't fit, throw it out. I've always believed that a kid who honored God and honored the Word of God would be one of the finest students you'd find anywhere, because God's in control of that mind, folks. He has the capacity to understand.

Well, as a result God honored them. I was thinking about the movie, "Chariots of Fire." I like those kind of movies because the man honored the Lord and plus it was athletic. I like anything sporty or anything like that. I also like shoot-'em-ups. My wife says I've got a perverted mind—I love spiritual truth and somebody getting their brains blown out! Understand, it's always when the good guy wins.

That's what I like. I don't like it just for the sake of violence. Not that kind of stuff. But anyway, I should never have said that. My wife's going "Oh, no."

She told me the other day, "If you'd just watch me, I'd get you out of a lot of trouble!" I'm trying to learn, I really am. But in "Chariots of Fire," I love that thing. This guy is running and he gets to the Olympics and he won't run on Sunday because it's his conviction that he's not supposed to do that. That's precious. That's between him and the Lord. And they wouldn't run him in those races and it hit the headlines and all the flak that he took, and finally they decided to let him run in a special race against all the top runners. I remember when he was getting down in the blocks and getting ready to get started, a fellow walked over to him and handed him a little slip of paper. Remember that? And he opened up that slip of paper and it said, "When you honor God, remember, God will honor you." And did he ever blow those guys off the track that day in that race.

Folks, listen, Daniel; isn't it wonderful? Make up your mind which side of the fence you're going to get on. Stop being a mugwump with your mug on one side and your wump on the other. Make up your mind before you leave the house tomorrow morning, "I will not defile myself. I will honor God, regardless of what He does and wants me to do today." Make up your mind before you ever leave the house. Live that way tomorrow. Don't worry about Tuesday because you've just got tomorrow and you may not have that. But if you wake up in the morning, just take one day at a time. That's why the Christian life is called a walk—one step at a time. And it would be incredible, you know, I think the principle of Daniel that is so strong is this: the problem we have in the world today is not because of pagan government. The problem is because we have weak-willed people who call themselves Christians. If the church would start living and standing up as they ought to live, you'd see a lot of changes in this world folks, of what God would be able to do as a result of it.

Daniel 2:1-11 Godliness in the Face of Pressure

Turn with me to Daniel 2. I thank the Lord for the music today that just so points us to praising God Who is in control, absolutely in control. And we see that in Daniel so beautifully. Of course, this is the chapter that we see the great panorama of history just laid out, we see what happens in the latter days. And if you're excited about getting into that, I hate to pop the bubble, but we're not going to get there this time. There's a little bit of ground work we need to do in chapter 2, but next time we'll be getting into the dream that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar and oh, how thrilling it is. We hope to have a little insert in the bulletin next week with the statue that was revealed in the dream to Nebuchadnezzar that has the kingdoms on it. Oh, folks, this is going to get so thrilling. How the stone is cut out of a mountain not made with hands, and how that stone crushes that statue at its feet, and oh, me, how God sets up His kingdom on this earth. It's going to get real good!

But don't think that today is not going to be good, too, because it's the first part of chapter 2. Don't run ahead of us. Do you realize that we would not have that great panorama of history that we have, the prophecy of what will take place in latter days, if there hadn't have been a Daniel, a man who said, "I will not defile myself. I will honor God regardless of what it costs me." That's chapter 1:8, and because Daniel honored God, God honored Daniel. And we have it recorded for us in this precious book in this time.

Well, I want to preach this morning on godliness in the face of pressure; godliness in the face of pressure. There are so many practical truths in the book of Daniel. Do you realize that pressure is probably one of the greatest ways of testing godliness? You know, you squeeze the lemon and what's on the inside comes out. You put a Christian under pressure, you find out a lot about where that person is in his walk with God. Godliness, when I mention the term godliness, I mean your walk, where you are in your walk with God. You know, it's interesting that Job, you don't really know a lot about Job until he's under pressure. I mean, for instance, this is the argument Satan gave back to God. God said, "Hey, have you considered My servant Job?" He said, "Aw, come on man, You've got a hedge around him. You're not going to let anything touch him. How do You know he'll trust You or not?" God said, "Hey, I'll take you up on that. But you can only do what I'll allow you to do." And that's good to remember, he's on a leash; Satan is directly on a leash. And so He allows him to do certain things in Job's life. And it's when Job has lost everything and he's under tremendous pressure that he makes that statement that so rings in our ears. He says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

You see, pressure forced out of Job where Job really was in his belief with God. But sometimes pressure doesn't always reveal the things we want to be seen, especially by others. For instance, it was pressure that caused Elijah to run from Jezebel. Now, there are some mean women out there! And Elijah had just seen God conquer the gods of Baal and the priests of Baal and this rascal, he's got Jezebel coming after him, and buddy, he flees, he runs from her. Under pressure, he runs! And the next time you find him, he's feeling sorry for himself, sulking, and God comes to him and he says, "Oh, God, I'm the only one who hasn't bowed my knee to Baal." And God says, "You rascal! You only missed it by 7,000. There are 7,000 others who haven't bowed their knee." It's amazing: pressure, what it brings out of Elijah.

It was under pressure that Abraham lied to the Pharaoh and said, "Sarah's not my wife, she's my sister." What had he done? It was under pressure that Simon Peter said to a little girl who said, "Listen, you were with them, weren't you?" And he said, "No, I don't even know Jesus Christ." And she said, "Yes, you do. I know who you are." And he cursed, to make it even that more emphatic that he didn't know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pressure does funny things. It lets you see where you are at the moment in your walk with God. And we're going to see Daniel under severe pressure in chapter 2. Now, he's been under pressure since we started the book, but I wonder what we're going to see about him. I wonder if he and his three friends are going to fold. I wonder if they're going to run out from under their stand of not defiling themselves. Well, I'll go ahead and free up something for you: if they ever fail the Lord in their consistency to obey Him, it's not recorded in the Word of God. Thank God for four men that stayed consistent and even under pressure show that they can still stand and honor God regardless of what it will cost.

Now in chapter 2 we see some pressure of a different kind. It's not persecution, and you're going to see that later on. It's not persecution at all. As a matter of fact, they're not bothering anybody. They're in the king's service, they're going to work every day, and they're just doing everything like their supposed to be doing it. They haven't done a thing, and a predicament comes about in their lives and we want to see how they respond; not react, but respond, to that pressure.

So let's jump right in. Verse 1, chapter 2, "Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar." Now, that's far enough. Some people, the liberals particularly—I mean, these guys really make great comics—they say, "You see there, there's a contradiction in the Word of God: 'Second year in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.' It says in chapter 1 that the boys had to be in school for three years before they could be put in the king's service. We know they've already been in school three years, now look: second year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. You see there, there are contradictions in the Word of God."

I tell you, some people are just so smart. They don't understand that if you'll go back and study the history of these people, they didn't sometimes record the official year of the reign of a king until sometimes he'd been in office for two years. They had a different way of doing things. Why in the world, when we see something like that, do we automatically think there's a contradiction? If you'll just study a little bit of history, a little bit of culture, it'll tell you that. Many, many times it was the second year of the reign, but it would be the first official year. So it was the second official year of Nebuchadnezzar being the king.

"Nebuchadnezzar had dreams." Boy, did he ever! "And his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him." Now this is quite a dream, or dreams. Now one of the things I want you to note some place in your Bible or on a piece of paper, write down the fact that God is beginning to move visibly in Nebuchadnezzar's life. God's been moving in his life for a long time, He raised him up; He's the One who established his kingdom. He's the One that pulled him down to take over His people in order to purify them because of their disbelief. But Nebuchadnezzar is a proud rascal and he wouldn't recognize that. And so God begins to start moving in his life and he starts having these dreams as God begins to give them to him.

It's interesting, all the predicament that took place in Daniel and his three friends' lives result because of God doing something in Nebuchadnezzar's life. Isn't it incredible? God is always doing something, folks. He never slumbers and He never sleeps. And what's going on in your life, because you can't understand it, may not be the result of anything you've done. It may be God doing something in somebody else's life, but God is doing something in Nebuchadnezzar's life. So he has these dreams and he cannot interpret them.

So, what does he do? Verse 2, "then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans, to tell the king his dreams." It's interesting that he didn't call Daniel. In 1:20 it says that Daniel was ten times wiser than all of his magicians. But for some reason or other he doesn't call Daniel. Daniel and his friends are not even informed of what's going on. They have to be informed later on. And he calls these men in and tells them he wants to understand his dreams. They must interpret it for him. Verse 3, "And the king said to them, 'I had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream.' Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: 'O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation.' The king answered and said to the Chaldeans [now, before you get to cocky about this thing], 'The command from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb, and your houses will be made a rubbish heap.'"

In other words, don't speak up too quick! You better hear what I'm saying! Verse 6, "But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation." You know, it's interesting what they do. It's immediate that they recognize the urgency of this command and they realize the seriousness of not being able to do it. So watch what happens. "They answered a second time and said, 'Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation.' The king answered and said, 'I know for certain that you are bargaining for time [these rascals; they've already got a strong suspicion that they were in water over their heads] inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm, that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for you. For you have

agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed; therefore tell me the dream, that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation.”

Now, you want to see some weaseling! I want you to watch what these wise men do. The king puts them on the spot. “I know you’re bargaining for time, but, buddy, I want to know the interpretation of this dream. That’s what you’re here for, that’s what you’re hired to do.” Listen to what it says in verse 10, “The Chaldeans answered the king and said, ‘there is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king.’” They set themselves up. It’s amazing how you watch this plot thicken. There is not a man on earth—is that right?—“inasmuch as no great king or ruler has ever asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean.”

You know what they’re doing? They’re accusing him of being insensitive. In other words, “What are you doing asking us this kind of stuff? Nobody else would do it to their magicians.” It kind of sounds like your children sometimes when you tell them to do something, doesn’t it? “Well, Dad! No other Dads make their kids do this!” Anyway, verse 11—I just rang a bell, didn’t I? —“Moreover [now watch this], the thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with mortal flesh.”

Do you know what they’re saying? They’re saying, “We can’t get in touch with our god. And they’re the only ones who could do this.” Well, bless their little sweet hearts. Why don’t they change gods? Their gods won’t communicate with them. I’m telling you, folks; look first of all in Deuteronomy 4:7. I get just a little bit excited in this book. Boy, you’ve got skeptics everywhere. Look at this: here’s the kind of God that we have. He’s the kind of God that not only can be communicated with, but He wants to be communicated with. He’s the kind that makes Himself available to His creation. It’s not like the gods of this world. You take the gods of this world and you put a man in a dire situation and you find where their gods are at that time. They can’t help them when they’re under pressure, they can’t help them when they’re in the valley. Only our God can help us when we’re in the valley. Deuteronomy 4:7 says, “For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him?”

Isn’t that precious? But I’m so grateful that when I cry out to my God, He hears me and not only hears me, but He answers me. But the problem with these guys is they were serving gods that they couldn’t communicate with. Well, bless their hearts! I was in a class when I was in college: World Religion. I took it because I liked the teacher and he was real easy. But it was a good class. And one day he was talking about the fact that we ought to have a missions burden and a missions heart to get around the world to tell people about our God being the One true God, the only God. And we had an intellectual in our classroom. Man, the guy made me want to slap him every time he opened his mouth. And he wore these little round horn-rimmed glasses and he’d come to class, his hair all combed back, he was always the smart aleck in the class. I didn’t like him. Maybe us dumb guys never did like smart guys.

And I remember one day the teacher made that statement and the intellectual raised his hand. “Professor,” I could tell from the start that this was going to be downhill. “What right do we have to go to other countries and tell them that our God should be their God? Why, they worship Allah, they worship Buddha, why not let their god be their own god?” Man, our professor took his glasses off. That was something, because he couldn’t see past the first row with his glasses off. He took his glasses off, walked out from behind that rostrum and for 20 minutes I’ve never heard a message any more precious on who God is and the fact that He came to die for us and what Christ has done for us. And he said, “You name me another religion that the central object of that religion has ever died on a garbage heap for the people he said that he loved. And then resurrected the third day and ascended back into heaven.”

When he finished that thing, friend, it was like two points! Man, he dunked that thing! He slammed it home. They couldn’t communicate with their god. Well, bless their little sweet hearts. That’s what their problem was: they had the wrong god.

Well, this just irritates Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 12, “Because of this the king became indignant and very furious, and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.” At first you think that’s good, they deserve it. But wait a minute! Daniel is one of the wise men! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with their Babylonian names, they’re some of the wise men. And all of a sudden they’re caught up in a predicament they had nothing to do with. They don’t know this whole thing is even going on. And all of a sudden a decree is out that they are going to be killed. Talk about pressure! You’ve got pressure this week? I doubt very seriously that it’s greater than what they faced.

Now, watch this. How did Daniel handle this pressure? Wasn’t persecution. It was simply a king was mad at his magicians and in anger declared that all of them be killed. How did Daniel handle that kind of pressure? That’s really the basic I want to talk to you about this morning. First of all, you might want to write this down: he didn’t panic.

He didn’t panic

Verses 13-16: “So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill them,” because they were part of the wise men. Verse 14 says, “Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch.” Now notice how he goes with this: with great integrity. You see this all through Daniel. He never went through an authority that he did not go with great respect and integrity and character. “So he replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king’s bodyguard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon; he answered and said to Arioch, the king’s commander, ‘For what

reason is the decree from the king so urgent?' Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter. So Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king."

What's he doing? Friend, listen. He's not panicking. He's trusting his God to get him out of this stuff. Immediately, he doesn't run, he doesn't frustrate anybody, he simply says, "I need to make a request. I need to see the king. If you'll give me some time, I'm going to pray and my God is going to give me the interpretation of this dream." Now friends, when pressure moves in on your life, remember who's in control. You see, the Hebrew prophets had a wonderful understanding of the sovereignty of God. I remember sitting in a seminary class and I heard a professor say, "Well, the Hebrew people were just ignorant. They thought that every time it rained, God made it rain. They thought every time there was a famine, God made it have a famine. And they were just ignorant. Why, you ought to go onto the Greek thinking. They were more analytical." And what they were really saying is you ought to come ask us because we're really smarter than all of them. About the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life.

Praise God for these Hebrew people who understood the sovereignty of God. You know, John MacArthur said something to me that has run a bell in my mind that I so agree with. He said, "One of the most refreshing doctrines of Scripture to me is the sovereignty of God." God is always in control. Whatever is going on, He never slumbers, He never sleeps, so when things happen that you don't expect, when things move in on you that you hadn't planned on, don't panic, don't run, God's in control. Trust Him for the answer. Exactly what he did. He didn't go to anybody else. He said, "If you give me some time, and that's all I need. You give me some time and I will have the interpretation for you. My God, my God will come through." No panic. No panic.

Look what he does in verse 17. Instead of panicking, he prays. "Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter, in order that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery." Now he's going to ask them to intercede because, as the verse goes on, "so that Daniel and his friends might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon." It makes it appear that he didn't pray, but he got his friends to pray. But you've got to go to chapter 6 to understand the habit of Daniel. In chapter 6 you find Daniel being told by the king, another stupid decree. Darius has come on the scene, the Medo-Persian Empire has moved in, and he tells them that they cannot pray to any god for thirty days. They must simply worship him as the king.

Well, Daniel's not going to stop doing what he's been doing all his life. He's up in his 80s by this time—he's about 17 years old here. And so what happens is they put him in the lion's den as a result of that. You see, Daniel prayed in the morning, Daniel prayed at noon, and Daniel prayed at night. Three times a day. Just like the psalmist says, "Yea, I will seek you in the evening and in the morning and at noon time." It was a habit of his life. So we have to understand that he was certainly praying when he got his friends to pray with him. So, folks, when pressure moves in, godliness reflects itself first of all by not panicking. But secondly, by praying. And not only by praying ourselves, but getting others of like mind to pray with us. Why? So that God might deliver them from that situation.

Praying

Now, if you're not real careful you can draw some wrong conclusions here. If you took chapter 2 and you built a theology off of it, you could be in trouble if you tell people that every time you believe God can get you out of a situation, God's going to do exactly what you tell Him to do. Now, that's not what's taught in Daniel. That's what happens here; the principle here is that he trusted God. You see, God may not have chosen to do that. If you'll go over to chapter 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego certainly didn't want to get in to the fiery furnace, and certainly they would have prayed, "Our God, deliver us!" But remember their statement? Our God is able, but even if He doesn't, we'll still not bow our knee. We don't know what His purposes are."

And so in their situation, God chose not to deliver them from the situation, but in the midst of the situation. So you've got to see balance in the Scripture. I'm not saying that every time you pray God's going to do exactly what you want Him to do. God's going to do what's right, period. And it may not be what you wanted Him to do, but it'll always be right. You don't have to defend the character of God. It defends itself. So remember that: don't get the wrong idea when we say he prayed and it happened the way he prayed. But this specific time, the key is, he turned to God. He didn't panic, he didn't go to man for man's answers. He went to men that were around him to pray with him that God might deliver them in this situation.

When you're going through a difficult time and pressure has moved in on you, just trust God. Just trust Him. And don't go to find man's wisdom, go to find God's wisdom. And don't panic: pray! And you can always tell how much you're trusting God by how much time you spend in prayer. You can always write that down. You're trusting God to the degree that you're praying to Him. Because prayer is not twisting His arm, prayer is letting Him know you're dependent upon Him and if He doesn't come through, you're sunk. That's the key: you're trusting God regardless of what He does.

I've said many times, we've been trying to sell our house. I don't know what in the world is going on. You know, sometimes I believe I wish that God would give me a hint. If I could wake up in the morning and He'd write something in the sky and I could see it for a fleeting moment. "Tomorrow at 3:00!" Gotcha! But He doesn't do it that way. I don't know what He's doing, but Daniel's telling me

something. Daniel's saying, "Hey, Wayne, stop trying to figure it out. Just trust Him. He's got something better than what you expected anyway."

Oh, friend, remember Lazarus? I love it! In John 11, Jesus had heard, Martha and Mary sent Him a note. They said, "Lord, the one whom You love is sick." And He gets the note and He sends a message back and says, "Don't worry; the sickness is not unto death." So when do they get the note? On the day that they bury Lazarus. And old Martha and Mary say, "Oh, thanks a lot! Sickness and not end in death and we just buried him. Who is this guy?" You see, the Lord didn't say he wouldn't die. He just said it wouldn't end in death. Everybody misses that. So Jesus decided since he was sick, He'd wait three more days. And when He got there, it had irritated Martha and Mary. Martha runs out to Him and says, "Lord, if you'd have been here he wouldn't have died." Mary, the more silent one and the more discreet one, finally came to Him and said the same thing. You see, they wanted a healing, and God wanted a resurrection. What they had in mind was so far away from what God wanted to do it was incredible. But they thought since He hadn't come through and done what they wanted Him to do, that God just wasn't on the scene. God had something greater.

After they said that, Jesus said, "Where is he? Where is he?" They pointed him toward the tomb and he said, "Alright, roll the stone away." And Martha, full of faith, said, "Oh, Lord, he stinks by now." I can see the Lord, "Cool it, Martha! Just shut up!" And after they had rolled the stone away, the Lord stood there in front of the tomb. He said, "Lazarus!" Aren't you glad He said "Lazarus"? Buddy, if He hadn't have said Lazarus every dead corpse in the whole area would have walked out of the grave. He's the resurrection and the life. Who do you think He is? But He said "Lazarus," and old Lazarus jumped out of that place and said, "Yes, sir, here I am!" Front and center. They took the grave clothes off him and turned him loose. You see, they wanted a healing and they got bitter toward God because He didn't have a healing. God wanted a resurrection.

So that's the balance in that praying stuff. Hang on to that. When you pray something and God doesn't do it the way you wanted Him to do it, you hang on. Don't you ever think you have to defend the character of God. What He does is right, folks. He is a righteous God and can never deny what He is by what He does.

Well, the third thing I want you to see is he didn't panic, he prayed, and here's the real essence of the message. I had someone tell me one time that I'm the craziest preacher because I spend more time on one point than I do the other two. Well, nobody ever taught me, so you just hang in there. I'm hurrying to get to this point. When God came through, and He did come through, look at verse 19, "Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel [God chose to do it the way Daniel asked] in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven;" That's what I want you to see. You can truly tell the character of an individual, not only when he'd under the pressure, but when God has relieved the pressure, how he properly responds in giving praise back to God.

Give praise back to God

Boy, a lot of people forget it and walk off and it's done with until the next time they go through a bad time, using God as if He's some cosmic bellhop. Listen, friend, a true, godly person, once he's been delivered in whatever way he's been delivered, gives all the praise back to God, and can say nothing but good things back to Him. The word "blessed" there means he said good things. It means to say good things back about God. What did he say about Him? Seven things he praised Him for that I found in this. Look at it.

"Daniel answered and said, 'Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever.'" Don't let anybody ever for one second stop saying anything but that which is good about God, because He's a good God. It says first of all "for wisdom and power belong to Him." Man, if we could only learn that. Wisdom and power belong to Him. Boy, so many people take the great commission: "All authority has been give unto me. Go ye therefore," and they start thinking they've got the authority. And they start going around acting as if they could be little gods just because they use a certain phrase or use the name of Jesus, that it's their authority. No, sir! It's still His authority. And it's only on loan to us, friend, according to the degree of surrender we have to Him. If there's any authority in me or in you, you better give Him the glory for it because in Him is all power and wisdom.

But then the second thing he praises Him for: "And it is He who changes the times and the epochs." Oh, I love that. If you're going through a season of trial in your life, hang on, friend. Only God can change that season of time in your life. He's the one who moves things this way and moves things that way. He's in control.

And then he says, "He removes kings and establishes kings." Anytime you see the word "king" you can also interlace the word "kingdom." So He establishes kings and kingdoms. God does that. I want to tell them that sometime. Wouldn't it be great if we turned on the ABC news one night or the CBS new, or the NBC news or the CNN news and the commentary would say, "I've come to an understanding of something." And all of America goes, "What?" "God's in control." I can see people, "That boy's freaked out. Turn the television off and watch cartoons." Nobody believes that.

The fourth thing, "He gives wisdom to wise men." That's interesting. Why do wise men need wisdom? "And knowledge to men of understanding." Do you know what I think he's talking about? I think he's talking about people that are smart enough to understand that they have to depend on Him to give it to them. People that are wise enough to come to Him for it is the ones that He gives it to;

People that are understanding enough to realize that they cannot figure life out. They're going to have to come to God and get His perspective. He gives wisdom to them.

And then the fifth thing: "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things." And then the sixth thing, "He knows what is in the darkness." And then the seventh thing: "And the light dwells with Him." He just praises God for what He has done. Has absolutely no thought of any self glory for coming up with the interpretation of this dream. And verse 23 says, "To Thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for Thou hast given me wisdom and power." I didn't get it on my own, I don't deserve it. "Even now Thou hast made known to me what we requested of Thee, for Thou hast made known to us the king's matter."

But it doesn't stop there. I want you to notice as he goes on in verse 24 and 25 what happened: "Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: 'Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon!'" By the way, did you realize the wise men of Babylon, the pagans, were saved because of the righteous influence of one man? I doubt they ever thanked him for it. "Take me into the king's presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king." Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel [I guess so!] into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows [Now notice how vain this guy is], 'I have found a man [you little dummy] among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!'"

Now Daniel has the best opportunity he's had yet to take glory for what he's done. Watch this: "The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, 'Are you able [now watch it] to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?'" Are you able? "Daniel answered before the king and said [I love this], 'As for the mystery about which the king has inquired [he makes sure the king understands this], neither wise men, conjurers, magicians, nor diviners are able to declare it to the king.'" Got that king? Write that down there. None of your men could do it. Is that right?

Verse 28, "However, there is a God in heaven [don't you love it? He doesn't take any credit. I'm not able, but there is a God in heaven] who reveals mysteries and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place [When? What does it say, you tell me] in the latter days." You put a circle around that. That's what his dream is all about. Not just then, he's going to give him a preview of what's going to take place in the latter days. It hasn't yet taken place on this earth. He's going to tell Daniel what's going to take place. "This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed."

Well, I know you want me to go on, because this is when it starts getting real exciting. I want you to study it for yourselves this next week. I want you to see who the head of gold is. I want you to see if you can figure out who the silver is that is the shoulders and upper torso. I want you to see on the statue who the bronze is, the belly and the thigh. And what the iron, the legs of iron, and the feet of clay, baked clay and iron, and the toes. I want you to look at that and you study it this week. And see if you can figure out who those kingdoms are. And who do you think the stone is, that's cut out of a mountain not made with hands. And what do you think the kingdom is that's going to be established on this earth. I hear people today say, "Oh, there's not going to be a millennial kingdom. Can't be. The kingdom's already here." If that's the truth and you go back to Daniel, you tell me in chapter 2, why it is when that kingdom is here there are no other kingdoms on earth? They're all eradicated. That's interesting, isn't it?

Well, there are a whole lot of things we'll get into before this thing is over with. The key is, how do you respond under pressure? Godliness in the face of pressure.

You know, I love my children. I'm going to brag on my son. He played his last game at his high school. I know he wanted to have a good game that night. He'd started scoring and was just having a lot of fun. He had just found himself on the team or whatever; I don't know all the ends and outs of that. Last game they played this year in a tournament, he hadn't been in the game more than two minutes and got two fouls on him. Coach set him on the bench.

He sat there for almost the whole first half. Shot two times the whole game. Came back, the second half, started the second half and wasn't in the second half more than about 30 seconds and got the third foul. And the coach set him back down. He sat there for the whole part of the second half almost, and got in a little bit, but didn't score a point. Not one point. I told my wife after the game, "He's really going to be down. I need to be with him."

Walking out to the car with him, he said something to me that blessed me. I said, "Son, how are you doing?" He said, "Fine." "Fine?" He said, "Yea. You know, Dad, if God's sovereign, and if I did the best I could do, and that's what took place, I can't go back and erase that, can I?" "No, no." "Then why should I get down about it? I'm just going to trust the Lord. Evidently He's doing something that I don't understand in my life."

I wanted to run out in the parking lot and scream, "That's right, that's right!" You know, sometimes our kids do a whole lot better job at it than we do, don't they? What's going on in your life? Are you griping, complaining, and murmuring? Get off that kick. What's God up to? Why won't He do what you want Him to do? I tell you what, because you don't have Him on a string, friend. He's got you. There's a pair of unseen hands in your life controlling what's going on. Now, how you respond, that's the kick, that's the deal.

Daniel 2:28-47 He's Got the Whole World in His Hands

Turn with me to Daniel 2. Now if you have a little statue in your bulletin, you need one of these for the message. You are going to need this as we get a little further into this chapter. So keep it handy and hopefully you'll have a pencil or pen that you can jot some things down on it.

I want to preach this morning on the title "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." I love that song and I've loved it for years because it's easy to sing. It just repeats itself: "He's got the whole world in His hands." You can sing that in the shower and not have to hum part of it. I mean, just keep singing it over and over again. But it's not just a song, it's a truth. He has the whole world in His hands.

Have you ever been reading a book and you get so excited about the book you couldn't stand it and so you skip from the chapter that you were on to the end of the book and you read the last chapter? Now you know how it ends, now you know how it finishes, but if you don't go back and read the whole book, you're going to miss a lot of details on how you get from where you were to the end of that book. Well, it's kind of that way in chapter 2 of Daniel and in our Christian life, because God reveals through a dream to Nebuchadnezzar what's going to take place in the latter days. This is very, very important. This chapter will lay the groundwork for what we'll get in to in chapter 7 and following as we study through the book of Daniel.

Now go to verse 28 very quickly and let's notice something in verses 28-29 that's important. And if you have your pencil you might want to underline this or circle it. Now Daniel has come back to Nebuchadnezzar, God having given him the interpretation of the dream, and now he's standing before the king, and look what he says in verse 28. He says, "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place [now notice the next phrase] in the latter days." You might want to circle that phrase. "This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed." Verse 29, "As for you, O king, while on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place [notice the next phrase] in the [what?] the future." Now underline that. "And He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place."

Now Daniel's trying to get across to Nebuchadnezzar that it is God who has caused him to have these dreams, and God wants him to understand these dreams. Verse 30 says, "But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man." Daniel doesn't take any credit. Daniel is trying to say to King Nebuchadnezzar, "King, listen. God has a message for you. He's using me to interpret it, but I'm not any better than any other man. God has an interpretation here that's very important for you to understand."

Then he says, "but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind." You see, Nebuchadnezzar had a problem. He was a pagan and had many gods, but did not know the true God. He was thinking he was doing all these things. He thought he was powerful enough to have conquered all these lands, in particular Judah. And so God wanted him to understand who was in control, but in doing so gives us a picture of what's going to take place in the latter days.

Now, here's the dream. We haven't seen it up until now, verses 31-35, and Daniel recites it back to Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 31, "You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands [Oh, I love that part] and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."

Now what in the world does this mean? Well, he's going to interpret it for us. But first of all, take your little picture here of the statue and take a pencil and write beside the head, put a line out and say "gold." It was a head of gold. We'll explain to you what that head was as Daniel interprets it for us in a few moments. The head of gold. Then from the folded arms up, that's your upper torso: your arms and your upper chest. That is silver; draw a line out and put "silver." Head of gold, upper torso of silver. Then the belly and the thighs right down to the bottom of his skirt, draw a little line out and put "bronze." That's the third part of the statue. The legs and the feet now are the fourth part. They're both included together, but on a little line from the legs put "iron." You've got gold the head, upper torso silver, your belly and thighs bronze, and then you have iron. Then a line from the feet, put "iron and clay." That'll get us started this morning as Daniel interprets what this is all about. So you have gold, silver, bronze, iron, and then iron and clay. By the way, the word "clay" there refers to baked clay, and we'll see some things about that.

Alright, verse 36. Now we've caught up. Verse 36, "This was the dream; now we shall tell its interpretation before the king." So let's get started. First of all, let's look at the head of gold. What does that represent? What is he talking about? Alright, verses 37-38:

"You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength, and the glory; and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold."

Now, we're talking about kings and kingdoms. When you mention "kings," you can substitute the word "kingdom." When you put a "kingdom" down, you can actually substitute the word "king." So the first kingdom. Look at verse 40: "Then there will be a fourth kingdom," so we're talking about kingdoms here. So the first kingdom on the statue is the head of gold, which is Babylon. It existed at the time of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar being the king of Babylon. This was part of his dream. Now, if you want to put a date there, let's do this because it'll help us later on, particularly those that are interested in any kind of history that we're looking at.

Babylon existed in power like this from 612-538 or 539 BC. Now some people will vary a year: 612 BC to 538-539 BC to give you an idea of the time frame there. Now, why is it a head of gold? Well, we don't really know. I wish the Bible was a little clearer on why, but we have some ideas that come from history. Now, history does not back up the Word of God, the Word of God backs up history. But at times it lends some help to us as we go back and look, because here we're going to see that God is the God of all history.

One thing we know about Babylon was that in the days that it was in its power it was called "Golden Babylon." As a matter of fact, it used gold to build the temples to their false gods. Marduk, one of their gods, was called the "god of gold," and all the things of history, even the historians tell us that it was his gold that was always attributed to Babylon. And so we see the head being of gold. Perhaps that's why he called it a head of gold. I don't know, but we do know that was Babylon. That was the first kingdom.

Now it gets interesting, because Nebuchadnezzar is the king of Babylon. That's going on in his time. No problem so far. Watch the second kingdom, look what he says in verse 39: "And after you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you." Now what kingdom is that? Well, history tells us, and so does Daniel. The next kingdom that moves in and conquers Babylon is the Medo-Persian Empire. That's silver on the statue; the upper torso would be the second kingdom and he's speaking there of the Medo-Persian—the Medes and the Persians—the two kingdoms that came together that conquered Babylon. Matter of fact, look over in chapter 5, I'll preempt a little of it. Chapter 5 the last part. This is when Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, takes the golden and silver vessels that were used over in Judah in the temple, and took those vessels and had a drunken orgy one night and drank wine out of those vessels and a ghostly hand appeared upon the wall. We're going to get into some good stuff!

Now, look what happened: verse 30; "That same night Belshazzar [who was a Babylonian] the Chaldean king was slain. So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two." And so we see then Cyrus, Darius, they come in, two people that work together, the Medes and the Persians, the two kingdoms that conquered Babylon. And so what he's doing here before it ever happens, he's telling him what King Nebuchadnezzar has dreamed.

And why would it be a kingdom of silver? Again, we don't know. However, we do know from history that they had a tremendous financial organization. As a matter of fact they would build roads, not for the convenience of the people, but so they could get to the people to tax the people. They had an incredible taxation system and maybe that's why they were called the kingdom of silver. Why would it include the two arms? Well, the Medes, the Persians, you see, two kingdoms there. And why would it be the upper chest? We don't know all the answers to these questions, but this is the second part of the statue.

And let me give you some dates. It started about 538-539 BC, conquering Babylon, and it went to about 331-332 BC. It says in verse 39 that it was in inferior kingdom. Why would it be considered an inferior kingdom? Well, we're going to see in chapter 7 that here the Medes are more powerful than the Persians. They're mentioned first. But we're going to see, 100 years later over in the book of Esther, where it was reversed: the Persians were more powerful than the Medes. You have two kingdoms. Never, when you put two entities together trying to make one, is it as strong as when you have one in itself as a totality. All right, it's stronger that way. So maybe that's why it was inferior.

So, the head: gold, Babylon. The upper torso: silver, Medo-Persian Empire. Now we really get to the interesting part. Oh, the liberals hate this part. They can't stand it. They like to see Daniel translated within the book of Daniel: they don't understand it's the latter days. They don't understand it's in the future. They can almost buy the Medo-Persian Empire because it does take place in the book of Daniel, but they can't swallow this one: what's the third empire?

He says in verse 39, "And after you there will arise another kingdom [that's the Medo-Persian], then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth." Now if you're an historian, you can jump up to your feet right now and tell me what that kingdom was, because you know from history who it was that moved in and defeated the Medo-Persians. Who was it? It was Greece! And this is the part that the liberals don't like, because at this time it was so far removed from anything they could understand. How in the world could Greece ever move in and take over all the earth? But they didn't reckon on the fact that God was going to raise up a man by the name of Alexander the Great, one of the greatest generals that ever lived on the face of this earth. And how quickly he moved, like a leopard and that'll come back to you in chapter 7, how he moved swiftly and quickly to devour his prey. And how beautiful the picture we're beginning to see here.

You see, Greece was the kingdom of bronze. That was your belly and your thigh. Now it's interesting to me why that part of the body. Well, we don't know, again. But there are some things that give us a little bit of help. Why, first of all, was it bronze? Well, we don't know that either, but history tells us they were the first country or empire to make weapons out of bronze. Isn't that interesting? And they became noted for that. Not only that, we know that when Alexander the Great died an untimely death, four kings came in to take over his kingdom, it was so vast. Alexander the Great, when he was living, made a decree. He said, "You must worship me as the king of all the earth." Out of his very mouth came those words and that's exactly what is said right here: "which will rule over all the earth." Known to them that day.

But when those four kings took over the kingdom Alexander left after he had died, only two of them ever became powerful. Maybe that's why it moves into the thighs of the upper legs, because there's a kingdom here, there a kingdom over here. Syria, Egypt, they begin to become the strong powers that emerge out of those lands that Alexander the Great had conquered. Some dates on that: it started in 331 BC and lasted until 146 BC. And this is why I love Scripture at this particular point. I love it all the way through, but especially for skeptics that are just strictly historians. Man, I just want to say, "Put that in your craw and swallow it." They already know that this took place, and boy they don't like the fact that God told a boy by the name of Daniel, hundreds of years before it ever happened.

So we see three kingdoms. We see the head of gold which was Babylon, we see the upper torso of silver which was the Medo-Persian Empire, and you'll see that in Daniel. Then we see the belly and the thighs which are bronze, which was Greece. Now, watch, and be very careful. Observation is the key to understanding Scripture. Observation, interpretation, application. Now, let's observe what it says. Don't grab a commentary too quickly. Let's look at see what the Bible says for itself. It'll tell you something about this fourth kingdom.

Verse 40, "Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron." Now, again, an historian who would be here would just want to jump and shout because you know exactly what kingdom it was that defeated the Greeks. It was Rome. And we know that from history. You don't have to go back and figure anything out. It's already documented for us. This has already been lived out. Now when Daniel told him this, it hadn't. But we have the advantage of looking backward. He had to look forward to what was going to happen in the future.

We know the dates of Rome would be about 146 BC all the way up to about 500 AD. You talk about a kingdom, friends, and look what it was called: it's "as strong as iron." Why were there two legs there that were iron? I don't know, but there was an eastern and a western division of Rome. Rome was so large that it had to be divided into two divisions. It was such a vast kingdom and it's noted as iron to show you the strength of this kingdom. They made their weapons out of iron which would pierce the weapons of bronze which the Greeks would use.

Look at verse 40 again: "Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces." So, on your little line right beside the legs that says "iron," make sure you put "Rome" right there.

But I want to make something very clear to you. He also talks about the feet. Is that another kingdom? No sir! Only four kingdoms are spoken of in this dream. You have to be very careful here. Don't make the feet another kingdom. So if it's not another kingdom, then it must be another time in Rome's history. It must be another phase of this kingdom. The legs are strong, they're iron, they're solid, they're unified, they crush, and they break. But look what he says. He's not concerned with the legs; he's not concerned with the period of time from BC 146 to AD 500; not at all. He's concerned with the latter times of this fourth kingdom. This is when it starts getting exciting.

Look at verse 41, "And in that [he doesn't even mention the legs] you saw the feet and toes," now watch careful now; careful observation. Look in verse 42: "And as the toes of the feet." See, Daniel is not concerned with the legs of iron. He's not really concerned with the feet of baked clay. He moves it all the way down to the toes. Verse 33: legs, feet; verse 41: feet, toes; verse 42: the toes of the feet.

Now we know that after Rome fell, that over and over again people tried to put it back together: Napoleon, Charlemagne, people tried to reunify Rome so that they could have a power over there in Europe. But they could not do it. All efforts have failed. So as a result, Rome has become divided through the centuries into the seed of men. Just read verses 41-43. It explains itself.

"And in that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron." Now potter's clay is base clay, and iron and base clay do not jell, they'll not adhere. "It will be a divided kingdom. But it will have in it the toughness of iron." There will still be strength, but not like it used to be, "inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. And as the toes of the feet [now this is very important] were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men." And this has been the history of what happened after Rome fell. It began to intermarry and all the different nations began to inbreed with it and after awhile it became a

very weaker kingdom, a much weaker kingdom. But he's not talking about just one phase back after it begins to be divided. He's waiting to the latter time of it, to the toes. You start at the head of a statue and what's the furthest point of that statue that you can go? It's the toes. That's the extremity of that statue. And he points to those toes. It has to be in the latter days. It has to be in a time the world has not yet seen.

How many toes do you have on your feet? Now if you don't have ten, don't you say a word. Normally we don't have to count them for you to tell you: there are ten toes. Five on one side, five on the other side. It appears to me that there's going to come a time in Rome's history that has never happened on the face of this earth. This is latter day prophecy, folks, when Rome will be united but really divided. In other words, there will be divisions, ten of them to be specific, of Rome, yet it will be one in a sense of its power. It'll still have a toughness of iron, but it will be divided at least into ten different parts.

And look at verse 44. This to me brings it home. He says in verse 44, "And in the days of those kings." What kings? I still believe just from simple observation that he's talking about the kings of those toes, those ten kingdoms in the day that Rome is divided into ten different fragments. But those ten different countries, entities in themselves, cohere together to a point. They don't really mesh into one—they're ten different, distinct countries—and yet they form a coalition and they become one. In those days is what he's talking about in verse 44.

Man, I tell you what, you won't be able to sleep after awhile when you start realizing that this has never happened in all of history. Can anybody today ever stand up and say, "Yes, sir, I know a time when there were ten kings and yet there was one governing power. All of them together, but not secure as if it was one?" Never has there been a time on the face of this earth. This is your latter days. He saw future, but he also saw latter day prophecy of what was going to take place. We need to be watching what's going on, folks, because in the days of these kings—how many?—ten kings, ten nations that come together. You're going to see in chapter 7 of the beast that there are going to be ten horns, and you're going to be able to see the parallel of the two chapters.

I really have to apologize to you, but I'm reading part of chapter 7 into chapter 2, and I realize I'm doing that, but not all of you are studying through with me and some of you will never be back. I hope you will, but some of you won't. So therefore let me go on and share it with you now.

In the days that there's a kingdom over in Europe when ten countries come together to form some kind of power, for whatever reason, in those days of those kings, something is going to happen. Now look at verse 44. It says, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom," by the way, hold it. There's some people who spiritualize this and they say that's the spiritual kingdom of grace and it's speaking of the church. No way; because the kingdom of grace is a progressive happening. This is something that is instantaneous. It's going to happen: Boom! It's going to take place. You cannot spiritualize this passage. There are many people who do not believe in a millennial kingdom being set up on this earth: you're going to have to explain to me better than what's been attempted in verse 44 what he's saying here. It's going to be set up on this earth and God of heaven will set it up.

Now watch: "and that kingdom will not be left for another people." Buddy, when that day comes, all the other kingdoms will go away as fragments into the wind. It'll be crushed; the stone's going to crush it. "It will crush and put an end to all of these kingdoms, but it will itself endure [how long?] forever." So we haven't seen the manifestation of God's kingdom yet. Yes, it's within us; yes, we're His spiritual kingdom. Colossians 1:13, "We've been delivered from a domain of darkness, transferred [or translated] over into the kingdom," His dear kingdom of His son."

Friend, that's not what he's talking about here. It's the manifestation on earth of a kingdom that God is going to set up. And in those days there will be no other kingdom. Now people say, "No, you're wrong. That's a spiritual kingdom." Then you explain to be why there are other powers on this earth. You explain to me why righteousness has not yet prevailed on this earth. It has not. And in this day, it will. Watch, verse 45, "In as much as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands." Who is the rock? The real Rock? The Lord Jesus Christ. And He's cut out of a mountain made without hands and He was born of a virgin. There was no seed of man that caused Him to be born, friend. He was virgin born on this earth: a stone that is cut out of the mountain there. The word "mountain" usually refers to a nation. Of course, He came out of the line of Judah from David. And look on what it says, "without hands, and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king [Nebuchadnezzar] what will take place in the future; so the dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy."

You know the thing that grabs me about this? I get so excited about it! Somewhere, in all of this prophecy, is the church. You think Daniel knew about the church? No way, friend. This was a mystery only revealed to the saints in the New Testament, and we have scripture to back that up. Abraham only understood that Jesus was coming. He understood the day that Jesus would come. He "saw it and was glad," John tells us that. But as far as your Old Testament prophets, they had no earthly idea of what the church was all about. It's not even in this. This has to do with God's people, Israel, down the road.

Where are we in all of this thing? When God comes to set up His kingdom on the earth, what's taking place with the Christians? "Oh,

I believe in the rapture of the church.” Now, you may not and we don’t have time this morning to get into all the scriptures to back that up, 1 Thessalonians 4 and other places. But folks, if you don’t believe it, I still love you in Jesus, and I know you think I’m wrong. But when I go with the first bunch, you send me a postcard and tell me how it’s like back down here! God’s going to take the church out. Why? Because He’s not finished with His nation Israel yet and when He’s done with His nation Israel, which was the everlasting covenant He made with Abraham, when that’s over with, sealed and delivered and they have finally bowed down as the Old Testament prophets tell us, and they say, “It is You we have wounded,” and they come to that day of atonement, then He’s going to come. And when He comes, He’s going to crush any kingdom on this earth and He’s going to establish His kingdom right here on this earth, planet earth, some day in the future.

Now that’s what he reveals to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2. Wouldn’t you like to have been a skeptic back then? You think you’re having fun being a skeptic now, what about back then? They hadn’t even seen the Medo-Persians yet. They didn’t even know that Greece was around. They were the king over all the earth. Friend, listen. We’re looking way back now when we look at Daniel. All down through the years we see that this prophecy stands in front of us.

Well, how did King Nebuchadnezzar handle all that? “Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel [bless his heart], and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. The king answered Daniel and said, ‘Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery.’” Well, he received what was said to him. Now, again, I am not the authority. Do you understand that? Don’t go home and have a “Wayneology.” The Word of God is the final word. If I’m wrong, I’m wrong. We’re all students of the Word. You get in there for yourself and let’s see what the Word of God has to say. Let’s learn it together. I’ll immediately apologize if I get off. We’re trying to let the scripture defend its own self. We’re not trying to take Hal Lindsey or somebody else and read it into scripture. However, some of the things that some of those folks are saying make a whole lot of sense to me. There’s no way in the world we can prove this, but let me just give you a thought.

What could those ten nations be? We don’t know. We have no idea; well, we have an idea, but we don’t know. Anytime you come up with what you think is already signed, sealed and delivered, look out! There has never been a generation on the face of this earth that didn’t think that they lived in the days when that kingdom would be set up. Isn’t that beautiful? The Lord did it in such a way that even Paul looked forward to it; I mean, good grief, clean back to the New Testament. God has so organized history that no man can just sit down and put Him into a box. We’ve got some things going on our side in this century. At least that’s what they said in the last century.

Let me just throw something at you that you can chew on from Newsweek magazine. What does the secular world have to say? This is written November 20, 1989. They didn’t even know when this was written of what was happening over in Romania. They didn’t even know that because it happened over Christmas. “Europe, it’s already 1992,” now this is in Newsweek, “Berlin isn’t the only place where the map of Europe is being redrawn. West Europeans are also taking a big eraser to their ancient grudges and frontiers as they march toward economic union.” This makes sense to me. I wish I could document it, but I can’t. “Remember [now watch this], the technocrats of capitalism’s new age are following the precept that kingdoms and dictatorships make war but democracies makes money.” In other words, let me just throw something in here. Man, cannot put Rome back together, friends. God’s going to have to do it. But, do you know, one of the things He’s used many times to form many things on this earth is the greed in the heart of man, to accomplish His end. Isn’t that incredible? He takes what man’s doing for greed, turns in right around. He took Pilate, and Pilate didn’t know what he was doing: God did. He took it and used it to accomplish His very purpose of putting His Son upon the cross.

You watch this: “In 1992, the European Common Market will formally consolidate into a single trading unit. It will still be individual countries, but a single trading union. Monetary policies are thrashing toward unity. The fall of the Berlin Wall may open even more territory to the invisible hand of market economics. At this point in the ebb and flow of history, the new world [that us, America] is a junk bond and the old ancient world is a growth stock, and this is the old world. We always thought history centered around us. It did for awhile, but we went the way of Rome. So look and watch what’s happening in Europe.” Newsweek magazine, November 1989.

A lot of people wonder when those ten nations to form that common market come together, could that be, could that be? You know, I don’t know. I really don’t know. I’m not going to stand up here and say, “Yes! That’s right!” Nobody in here can say “Yes, that’s right. Yes, that’s what he’s talking about in Daniel.” Nobody can say that. But I want to tell you something else: nobody can say it’s not what he’s talking about. What if it’s right? Friend, if I understand it correctly, the rapture will take place before that kingdom is set up on this earth, which means we are ripe for the Lord Jesus to come again.

Bless his heart, the guy that wrote the book and fixed up the dates, I really feel for him because I think he got about as excited as I’m getting this morning. Except he went a step further and really acted dumb and put a date on it. You can’t put a date on it. It’s like the little boy whose daddy was leaving for awhile and he said, “Son, I’m going to be back in the fall.” Little boy was about three or four years old and said, “Daddy, what’s the fall?” Daddy tried to explain the seasons to him, and it was not getting through to the little boy. He said, “Okay, son, remember this: when the leaves start falling off the trees, Daddy will be home.”

The little boy kind of forgot about it. Several months went by and in the fall the leaves began to change and die and the colors—and by the way, that's a beautiful spiritual principle, the beautiful color of the leaf is only in death. Same way when we walk dead to self is when the beauty comes out in our life. But anyway, the leaves. One night after a hard rain, the wind blew and blew them all off the trees. That little boy hadn't thought about that in a long time. He came running out the front door the next day, he looked and saw all the trees bare and he said, "Mama, Mama, Mama, Daddy's coming home?" She said, "Son, how do you know Daddy's coming home?" "He told me when the leaves start falling off the trees."

Now, folks, I don't know how to say this, but the leaves are falling off the trees! "Oh, but Brother Wayne, He's going to come like a thief in the night." Yes! To the lost people! Not to the believers! We're to be ready at any instant when the Lord Jesus comes. We're not to be caught by surprise, to be looking at the signs all around us. He didn't give us a day, He didn't give us an hour, but He gave us enough signs and enough wisdom to know what to watch for. Folks, the leaves are falling off the trees.

You might be sitting here this morning; you've never received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You've joined a church, but you've not joined Jesus. You know it and everybody in your family knows it. I am going to tell you something, friend. You will bow one day, and you will confess Him as Lord in your life. But my friend, it may be way too late; as long as your heart is beating and your lungs are breathing, He's your Savior. And you have an opportunity right now. But, my friend, the day He comes again, He'll be your Judge, not your Savior. You will bow, but you may be in hell when you do it. There are a lot of things to take place that Daniel's telling us about. Where are you this morning? Are you ready for Him to take the church out of here so He can get to the business of chasing His people who have rejected God, rejected Christ, and even rejected the Holy Spirit? And yet He's not through with them because He made an everlasting covenant with Israel. They're not done with yet. The church is going to be taken out before He deals with them. You ready to go? Oh, friend, there's some days in my life I didn't want Him to come because I had too much invested in this world. "Lord, don't come yet! Got too many interests down here." Oh, boy, I've got so much on me this morning; I'm so full I can't seem to get it all out.

Let me just squeeze one more little thought. Think about old Paul standing in front of Agrippa. You think he wasn't ready to go? "To me to live is Christ and to die is gain." He said, "I'm in a dilemma. My heart wants to go on, kill me, get rid of me. Man, I want to go." Old Agrippa stood before him. He couldn't take anything away from him, because he didn't own anything. He couldn't humble him, because of all men he was the most humble. He couldn't embarrass him, because he'd already lost all of his pride at the cross. Agrippa looked at him in total perplexity. And said, "Paul, you almost make me want to become a Christian."

Now there's a man who's ready to go. He's not scared to death the stock market is going to drop tomorrow, because all of his investments are in heaven. Well, if you'll think about the anxieties of this world, exactly what they are—anxieties of this world.

Daniel 2:48-3:18 Characteristics of Convictions – Part 1

Well, let's turn to Daniel 3, moving right along in the book of Daniel. The narrative just flows like a river and I so appreciate the music, especially "Our God is an Awesome God." Well, we saw that He's got the whole world in His hands. Kind of like putting pieces of a puzzle together. Have you ever worked a jigsaw puzzle, like at Christmastime or something and you have all these pieces around, you put this piece there and this piece there, but you want to look at the box over and over again so you can know what it's supposed to look like when it's finished. Kind of that way. God already knows what it looks like, we're just finding the pieces and trying to fit them wherever we can fit them. He's already got the picture in control.

Bob Peterson gave me this poem this morning. He wrote this, and I'd just like to read what he said. I thought this goes right in line with how the Lord is putting everything together and how we just need to find out what He's up to. That's the whole key to the Christian life, folks. Find out what God's up to and cooperate with Him. Don't try to come up with your own plan and ask God to bless it. He's got it all under control. Watch this:

Have you ever done a puzzle piece by piece and bit by bit?
Tried to get a section finished when a piece just wouldn't fit.
Oh, the shape is almost perfect with the lines or shape or hue
Though you tried you couldn't force it. Makes us think of me and you.

We see others in their place, it may be home or church or work,
We see what God is doing, oh, their lots they never shirk.
Would be nice if we could be there, do their job or sing their song.
But it wasn't in God's planning. It would make the puzzle wrong.

Yes, the puzzle makes a picture, oh, but not before it's done.
There's a place for every Christian, there's a battle to be won.
God's designed a place, my brother; it's for you and you alone.
So don't try to be another, don't you fret and gripe and groan.

Isn't that beautiful? By one of our own, inspired by the Word of God. You see, since God's in control, just find your little piece of the puzzle, wherever you fit, and just cooperate with whatever God's doing, friend. He's already got it in control; He's already got the design cut.

Well, in chapter 3 we move right along and we're going to find characteristics of conviction. We're going to talk about characteristics of conviction, and I won't finish this message because we've got a wealth of material here in chapter 3.

Characteristics of conviction

Look in Daniel 2:48-49. We need to understand here the situation that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are in. Remember now, that's their Babylonian names. I'll refer to them that way since that's the most common names that we understand. Verse 48, "Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. And Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel was at the king's court."

Well, Daniel hasn't forgotten his friends. Because he's interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has lifted him to a high office. So he says, "Hey, I've got three buddies and I'd like for you to remember them." And so they put them in these high places of responsibility. Now, the plot begins to thicken. Great jobs over in a pagan country, but everything was going their way. I mean, you could not ask for it any better. But remember in Daniel 1:8, it says "Daniel made up his mind," and when you see that Daniel made up his mind, you've got to write down that so did his three friends. They made up their minds they would not defile themselves.

You see, these were four convicted men. Do you understand conviction? There is a difference in being convinced and being convicted. The Holy Spirit is the only One who can convict our hearts. You can be convinced about something and still never do anything about it. But when a man's convicted, he is automatically committed and there'll be action that'll come out of his life. These men were convicted men: they did not want to defile themselves; they did not want to dishonor their God. Conviction is a powerful word.

This past week I had the opportunity to go with my son out to Lake Tahoe in California. Now, somebody had to go, and I just made up my mind I'd go ahead and go with him. You know how it is. I struggled with it for days but finally decided to go! I had some frequent flyer points I'd saved up and so we had tickets already to get out there and we ski at a place called Northstar. It's right outside of Tahoe City in California. Gorgeous place. My son was on spring break and we decided to go together. Well, we get out there and he kind of goes his way sometimes and I go my way, but we get back together later in the day. And there was one place, one run, when you catch the forest lift and you go up to the top of the mountain. Boy, when you get to the top of the mountain off of that forest lift, first of all, you get the little village and you get your ski stuff and you get your tickets and all, and then you get on this little gondola and you get inside it and it takes you on up. Oh, you're going way up the mountain. Then you get off of that and put your skis on and get on another lift and it takes you to the very top of the mountain. When you get up there you look down and see Lake Tahoe down in the valley.

Well, you get off the lift there, you turn right. You ski down but you only ski to another lift called Rendezvous. And you get on the Rendezvous lift. Now, this time, friend, you're really going to the top. And when you get up to the top of that lift, right as you get off that lift there's a run right there to your right. Scary! Scary! Folks, it's a black run, it's called the Powder Bowl. It's one of those runs that you can't see the mountain. All you see is like the edge of this pulpit: it just drops off. Every year that I've been out there, and this is the fourth year we've been able to go, and we stay with friends there in Tahoe City, every year that I've been out there I have just wanted to ski that run. I've been convinced that I could do it! But being convinced has never motivated me to action! For the first time this year, last Thursday, I went up and I said, "You know, all I can do is fall. And if you fall, all you can do is go down, so what's the problem?" I knew that if I skied up to the edge of it and looked down, no way! It just does something—chills get up my spine, even right now thinking about it. It's like you have to be either crazy or convicted or something to go over it. So I got back about 20 feet and I decided. I'm not only convinced, I was convicted. "I can do this, I've skied all week long, I've skied on some black runs, I'm going to do it!"

Boy, I just took off and not looking over the edge, and the next thing I knew I was in the air. It was the funniest feeling! But I want you to know I had moved from being convinced to being convicted. Now, I'm committed folks, and that's what the word is talking about. Once I got over, I had to ski. There was no choice. You have to do everything you know to do. It's the survival of the fittest if you're

going to make it down. And I made it! Boy, I got down to the bottom, didn't fall. I was just shouting and hollering. I thought, "Hey! I can do this again!" Stupid! I went back up and sure enough, I did it again and I was getting very arrogant, very cocky, boy. There is nothing to this.

Friday morning—I did not know something about those runs that I do know now. And it will benefit me greatly other times if I ever have a chance to go back—the runs in the morning freeze. And so in the morning, if you go early, it's nothing but ice. There's no snow to ski in. I mean there's nothing but ice. So here I am, first time up Friday morning. I'm thinking, "Man, this is the last day to ski. I'm going to make this right!" Did I ever! I went flying over the edge of that thing and I got to the edge of that hill and I tried to cut into it. Ice! Next thing I knew it was just shooo! I fell down, but I really was standing up, it's so straight down. That's the funniest feeling. It's like being on an elevator and somebody drops the bottom out of it. Whew! I got about three-fourths of the way down and finally it stood me up. I didn't have to do a thing. It looked like I knew what I was doing, and I just kept right on skiing down the mountain.

Well, that's a crazy way to get to tell you that story, but I'm trying to convince you of what conviction is! Being convinced is one thing, being convicted is another. You see, a lot of us say we're convinced about something but we never do anything about it. But brother, if God the Holy Spirit convicts you about something, that moves you to commitment, that moves you to action.

And we're going to see this. You know, it's interesting; there's a recurring theme in Daniel, and that theme is how God uses the conviction of four godly men to change the whole history, the course of everything with the king. You see, folks, the problem is not with our government; the problem is not with those kinds of things; the problem is with us. And if we would get convicted and get in God's Word and let His Holy Spirit speak to our heart and we start making the decision that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego made, brothers, we'd see some changes in this world. Don't ever blame anybody else. Always look within: are you convinced or are you convicted? Are you committed to action, have you made up your mind you will not defile yourself?

Well, let's look at the setting; Daniel 3:1. They've got high offices now; they're doing well, living over in this pagan land. Daniel 3:1, "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold." Now, I can't help but think that somehow he was enamored by that dream that he had in Daniel 2. It doesn't say that, it's reading between the lines. I almost get the feeling that, "Hey, I like being the head of gold," as he was told he was in Daniel 2. So he makes an image out of gold.

Now the word for "image" means a "human form." So he makes a big statue of a human being. I personally believe he made a statue of himself. It was a tendency of pagan kings in that day to do that very thing: to make a statue of themselves and require the people to worship them. So he makes this statue. Now, let's go on in the verse, "the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits." Now a cubit is a foot and a half. So by 60 cubits, that means 90 feet tall. How tall is 90 feet? Well, three telephone poles, stack them up on each other. That'll give you an idea. It was 90 feet tall and it was six cubits wide. Now for six cubits wide, that means it was nine feet wide.

Anybody that knows anything about design or architectural knows that that's a little bit exaggerated. You don't ever put something ten times its width. Sometimes maybe four or five, but you don't make something ten times its width. And it says, "he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon." Now the word "Dura" means a long plain. Now we know it was flat there in Babylon on the Euphrates River, we know that. But perhaps there was an area of hills or something, and there was a plain in the midst of it and right in the middle of that plain he put that 90 foot statue of himself. What a vain guy. He gets up in the morning and looks in the mirror and sings "how great thou art." He was really impressed with who he was.

Now look at Daniel 3:2, "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble" all the biggies of the country. Look what he says. First of all "the satraps," now a satrap is the head of a province. "The prefects," the prefects were governors or superintendents. Then he says, "The governors, the counselors," the counselors were ones that were arbitrators of the day. "The treasurers," they were masters of the treasury. "The judges," they were actually those who made decisions, guardians of the law. "The magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up."

Now it's interesting. He sends out an invitation to all the Who's Who in Babylon. All the biggies come. I mean, and friend, there's no RSVP! If you don't show up, you're dead. You have to come. He's the king, he wants everybody there. Big dedication, big celebration. He's going to unveil the statue to all these leaders in his country. I can't help but think of the day that a member of our church got me to go and pray with a bank that was opening up. And all the biggies were there, the mayor and all the people were there. It kind of gave me the idea as I was looking at this. And when it was over, I was walking out in the parking lot. And I said, "Do you realize what you have done? You have asked me to come and pray for this bank and I have not been able in all of my life to even balance my check book?"

So it was a big celebration that way. He had the statue built; he had all the biggies coming in. Now watch, verse 3, "Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then the herald [Now this guy as a herald simply gives a command. He says, he loudly

proclaims, and that word “loudly” means in such a clear way that everybody could understand] loudly proclaimed: ‘To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.’”

Now we have the royal orchestra there. All the leaders of the country are there and he makes this decree and says everyone must, at the sound of the music, bow down and worship this idol. You know, I had a side thought and it doesn’t cost you a thing extra and I’ll go right on after I say it. Isn’t it interesting the power that music has, anyway? At the sound of the music you bow down and worship the man-made idol. Take that home and chew on it for awhile and see what the Holy Spirit says to your life.

I remember one time I was doing a youth retreat and I mentioned something about music and as soon as I finished, I knew. You know you can shoot at a pack of dogs and the one that hollers is the one got hit! Boy, I mean two of them come out of that audience towards me. I mean, they had smoke coming out of their ears. And they came down and said, “You mean to tell me that some of my music is wrong?” I said, “I’m not telling you anything. I’m just telling you what the Word of God is trying to say.” And I wasn’t even preaching on music that night. I just happened to make a statement about that. Well, they stood there toe to toe, nose to nose, and tried to defend their music. And it taught me something. Anything you ever think you have to defend, friend, usually, 99.9% of the time, is wrong if it’s not found in the Word of God. Hang on to that. Because in the service of the Lord, we don’t have any rights to begin with. How in the world I ever got on that I don’t know.

Okay, he has the royal orchestra and he tells them to bow down. Look at verse 6, “But [Here’s where the plot thickens] whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.” Now you see the plot thickening. Here we’ve got four convicted men, men that say that regardless of the price, we are going to honor God. We are not going to dishonor ourselves. And yet they are told that they’re going to be thrown into a fiery furnace if they don’t bow down and worship this man-made idol on the plain of Dura.

Now we’re going to see the characteristics of conviction begin to work themselves out. Some of you perhaps say tonight, “I’m convicted, Wayne, I’m convicted to live holy before the Lord.” How long will it take you tomorrow when somebody threatens your job before you’ll start relaxing those so-called convictions? When all of a sudden you find out that you can cheat a little here or do something over here in order to keep that job. They had great jobs! They were in danger of losing those jobs. But they were in danger of losing a whole lot more, guys. They were in danger of losing their lives. Now what are they going to do? Are they convicted or are they just convinced? You can talk somebody out of being convinced. Friend, when you’re convicted, it motivates you to action.

The inevitable result of conviction

What do they do? Okay, first of all, I wanted to see the first characteristic and that is the inevitable result of conviction. When you’re convicted, when God speaks to you about a conviction in your life, maybe about your music, maybe about something else, but whatever it is, is somehow going to defile you if you do it. When you’re convicted about it and you make a move toward obeying what God’s told you, the inevitable result will always be, and you can write it down, persecution. You can write that wherever you want to write it. Put it in blood on your forehead. You’re going to be persecuted.

Young people, when you make up your mind that you’re going to serve God, you’re going to be persecuted. Write it down. That’s all of us. As believers, when it doesn’t coincide with what the world is doing, we are definitely going to be persecuted.

Well, look at verse 7, “Therefore at that time [now watch this wording here], when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.” Now, friend, when everybody else—notice it said “all”—when everybody else is bowing down to what man has made and you are daring to stand up for what God has said, you better duck, because it’s on its way. Persecution is moving in.

Keep your finger right there and turn to 2 Timothy 3:12. And this is a promise, it happens every time. It’s the mark of people that are convicted; people that are convicted to the point of commitment and activity. It says in 2Ti 3:12, “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be [what?] persecuted.” Look over in Matthew 5. Surely Jesus wouldn’t have said that. He was so nice about everything. Surely He wouldn’t let us know we’re going to be persecuted. “I thought when you got saved you were going to be healthy and wealthy.” Matthew 5:10-12, and it’s written in red so you know it’s inspired: “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Now friend, listen. The plot has already thickened. We know that all the people bowed down to that image. We also know that there

are four men in the kingdom, only three of them mentioned in this chapter, that are not going to bow down, and we know they're going to be persecuted. I've shared many times this story about Dave Weaver. I know you're tired of hearing about it, but every time I think of persecution I think of that illustration so fresh in my mind. He said when he was in the Navy Seals, when he said the biggest enemy was not the enemy in the bushes shooting at him; it was his roommates in his barracks.

Each one of them, they had four to a barracks, he said they called him Preacher Man. He called them Pervert #1, Pervert #2, Pervert #3. He said Pervert #2 was in the bed above him. He said at night he would pray for him, get on his knees, and while he was praying for him Pervert #2 would spit on his head. Talk about persecution. And so he kept praying, "Oh God! Kill him!" He said you have to tremble with your voice to make sure that God knows you're serious. So he'd pray for him that way.

But wherever you go, you're going to be persecuted. I'm going to be persecuted. Here come the perverts beginning in verse 8. Watch this. They decided they're not going to dishonor God. Watch what happens. Verse 8, "For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews." Now notice how it differentiates between Chaldeans and Jews. There's something to that, folks. I guarantee you there were jealousies running out these people's ears. "Here are these captive Jews coming over here and here they are in the highest positions of the land. We'll get them, we'll watch for where we can find a loophole in something that they're doing or not doing."

Verse 9, "They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: 'O king, live forever!'" Boy that would be a mistake. "You yourself, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image." As if he has to be reminded, they tell him about what he had made in his decree.

Verse 12, "There are certain Jews," man, you can hear the spite in what they're saying. Oh, they just love to get people that are godly, trying to put them in a position to where they can be harmed. "There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely [Namely? Namely? If you'd like to have their names. Are you awake? They made sure he knew who they were] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."

Now friend, listen: it's going to come and when you're at school and you're trying to live as a believer, you watch. They'll try to find something in your belief and something in your walk to use that against you to bring persecution down on you. It'll be the same way in your job, wherever you are. The world cannot stand godliness. It's light against darkness and there's going to be a conflict. Look what Nebuchadnezzar does in verse 13, "Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; then these men were brought before the king."

And I think you get the idea here it was in a very rough way. He sent some of these men out to get them and dragged them into the court. Verse 14, "Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them," now watch what he does. In Daniel 3:14 he gives them a chance to deny it. Now you're going to find out if you're really convicted, when you're brought on the spot if you're going to lie your way out of it. A lot of people do this. They'll lie in a minute to protect their job or to protect their life. They're not convicted, they're only convinced. But true conviction will never do that. It gives them a chance to deny it, and in verse 15 he gives them a chance to comply with what he's done. Watch. He gives them a chance to deny.

Daniel 3:14: "Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, 'Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?'" You know, it's interesting to me in Ephesians 6:10-18 ([Wayne's note](#)) it talks about the armor that we put on for spiritual warfare. Have you ever noticed the first piece? It's the belt of what? Truth! (Eph 6:14-Wayne's note) How many times have you heard sermons preached on the fact that's the Word of God? Anybody ever heard that preached? I have too. I think I might have preached it. I'm wrong. There's no definite article used there. He's not talking about the Word alone. Certainly the Word is a piece of our armor; certainly it's where faith comes from. But I think what he's talking about is honesty. Just like it says in Colossians: "lie not to one another." You see, the first way of bringing down the barrier to allow Satan to have his way in your life is when you're not willing to be honest when it comes to making your stand for Jesus Christ.

Have you ever been on an elevator someplace, well certainly you didn't risk losing your job or your life. But you certainly risked losing some popularity with the people on that elevator and somebody sees you or knows you're a Christian and starts talking to you about something at church and you don't want your boss or whoever you're working with to know that is where you go, and all of a sudden you start trying to weasel your way out of it, and before it's over with you almost catch yourself being totally deceptive because you don't want to make a stand for the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the same thing. Is it really true? Come on, guys.

Can you imagine all the whispering, "Hey, let's lie our way out of this. Let's just act like we haven't done it and let's just go through with the game. We can be secret service Christians." Well, a lot of people are, aren't they?

He gives them a chance to deny it. Then secondly, he gives them a chance to comply. He gives them a chance to comply. "Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all kinds of music, to fall

down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you will not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire;” Now watch the next phrase. I love it! “And what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?” Oh, I love that. If he hadn’t have said that up to that point, it would have been a little boring. And he puts them on the spot and puts God on the spot. “What god is there that can deliver you out of my hands.” Oh, son!

The immovable resolve of conviction

Now the first inevitable result characteristic of conviction is persecution. And you’re going to be put on the spot; I’m going to be put on the spot to make a stand for what God has convicted us of in the Word of God. But the second thing I want you to see, and that’s as far as we’ll go, is the immovable resolve of conviction.

We see an inevitable result, don’t you like the way I’ve alliterated this? Secondly an immovable resolve. I want you to see what they do. You see, when you’re convicted, when you’ve made up your mind, you do not budge under the face of persecution; you will not budge. But if you’re only convinced and that’s it, friend, you put a little pressure on somebody and they’ll run in a minute. When you’re convicted, you will not budge.

They’re not going to budge. They make three statements in verses 16-18 that are beautiful characteristics of a truly convicted person. Now, watch this. First of all is the statement of admission, of guilt. “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered and said to the king [I love this], ‘Oh Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this.’” “You’ve got us, hands down! You are exactly right; we’re not going to worship.” Now they didn’t have the kind of integrity I’m trying to throw out, they had much more than what I’m saying. “We’re not going to bow down to your stupid statue. We’re not going to do it. You’ve got us, we’re guilty. Honest, there’s nothing we can say. We have nothing to say to you whatsoever. You know exactly what we’re going to do.”

You see, that’s the characteristic of what conviction will do. It’ll make you honest, buddy, in the face of persecution. When you know you’re going to pay a price for being honest, you’ll be honest. The second, in Daniel 3:17, you see a statement of faith. It says in verse 17, “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.” Now, don’t get the idea from that statement that they’re not believing that God can do it. There not saying “if our God can,” what they’re saying is, and a better way to say it is, “if God in His plan—which we don’t know right now—sees fit to it to deliver us, He can and will deliver us. We have no doubt about His capacity.” They absolutely put their statement of faith in that passage.

But then look at verse 18; they have a statement of submission: “But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” Statement of submission. “Buddy, if He doesn’t come through, we’re not doubting His character this much. As a matter of fact, we will not bow our knee to that statue you have set up out on that plain.”

You know, folks, the more I think about it in my own personal life, how much in my life is conviction? Do you think about that? How much is conviction and how much is just understanding or you’ve been convinced about something. You know it’s true but you’ve never been convicted of it in your life.

You know, I had a note passed to me the other day. Thirty years ago, they said Jack Paar, on his television show, Jack Paar was kicked off of a radio for simply saying “water closet.” Now, you know what a water closet is? It’s a bathroom over in Europe: WC. If you’re ever over there, by the way, remember that. It may help you! It’s a bathroom, and he made the statement “water closet” on a national radio and was kicked off the radio just for saying that word. Now, we talk about conviction; look how far we’ve come, folks. Look at what we’re laughing at; look at what amuses us, look at how the world has gotten into our life. And you ask yourself the question—and I’m not pointing a finger at you, I’m pointing it back to me—where’s the conviction? Where are people who won’t watch it? I don’t think we’ll ever have the power to keep it from happening. God alone has that power. But brother, you don’t have to watch it and I don’t either. You don’t have to listen to it; I don’t either. If you’re convicted, make up your mind. And I guarantee you what you can expect. You can expect persecution. But brother, you can also expect the grace to be bold and to be honest in the midst and in the face of that persecution.

I had a lady call me one morning years ago; I was in youth work. And she said, about 6:00 in the morning, “Wayne!” That was the way she started the conversation. Well, it really thrilled me. You can really tell the people that have been walking with the Lord and been on their knees before Him early in the morning. And I said, “Ma’am!” You always say “ma’am” when a woman screams at you like that! She said, “What are you teaching these kids on Wednesday nights?” And I had the Wednesday night service at that time like we do here. We divided our youth out and I had charge of them on Wednesday night. And I said, at first I had to think what city am I in and where am I and all this kind of stuff. And finally I said, “You know, I don’t even remember. What are you talking about?” It was on a Thursday morning and we had service that Wednesday night. She said, “My son came home last night and he said he took all of his rock music,” and this was before it ever got as bad as it is now, “took all of his rock music,” and she said, “We have spent hundreds of dollars for this stuff, he came home, took it and put it in a box, took it out in the back of the yard and put it in the

incinerator and burned it!"

I said, "Well, praise the Lord!" Wrong! She said, "What do you mean, praise the Lord?" And then, I was struggling for words. What do you say? I don't know what to say. She made a statement. "Just how far are you going to take this Christianity?" Ha! Thank You, Lord! I said, "No ma'am, that's not your problem how far I'm taking mine. I think it's pretty clear. Your problem is not how far your son is taking his. Your problem, ma'am, is how far you're willing to take yours?" The biggest problem I ever had in youth work was parents who were not willing to live up to the convictions of their children.

If we're convicted, friend, we're immovable. And we're being persecuted right and left for standing up for what God has convicted in our hearts to stand for. Well, that's just part of it. We haven't even gotten them in the furnace.

Daniel 3:19-30 Characteristics of Convictions – Part 2

Turn with me to Daniel 3, still talking about the characteristics of conviction. We've seen that there's a difference in preference and conviction. When a man is convicted, he acts on what he says he believes. If there's no action, there's no conviction. Conviction is something the Holy Spirit has to do within an individual's heart. You and I can be convinced; that's one thing. Convicted, that's quite different. A person can be convinced that Jesus Christ is God's Son and be lost and die in an eternal hell. But a person must be convicted by the Holy Spirit of God and once convicted, he will act out of that conviction.

And we're seeing some convicted men in the book of Daniel. And I love it that we're talking about men: four Jewish men. They were young boys when they were taken over into captivity in the area of Babylon, and now we see them honoring their commitment of chapter 1:8. "They decided they would not defile themselves. They would not dishonor their God."

Well, the scene is in chapter 3. Nebuchadnezzar the pagan king of Babylon had decided to build a statue. And the word "image," there in verse 1 it says, "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold," the word "image" means a human form. And most likely, it was a tendency of pagan kings to make a statue as a replica of themselves. Perhaps he was a little enamored by his dream in chapter 2, and he saw that he was the head of gold, that king of Babylon, and Babylon being that nation represented in that statue. Whatever, he builds this statue 90 feet high, ten feet wide. Quite exaggerated. Most architects know that you don't build a statue or anything, ten times as high as it is wide. But you see the distortion in this person's mind.

And he wants everybody to bow down to this statue. So he has a party, a celebration, has a royal orchestra there, sends out invitations, and there are no RSVP's. As a matter of fact, if you don't show up, you lose your head. All the biggies come to this great celebration. And he says when you hear the sound of the music, bow down to this statue. Now verse 7 is an interesting verse. Daniel 3:7 says, "Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up."

Now the plot begins to thicken. We've got four young men that are not about to bow to that statue. And so certain of their cohorts go to Nebuchadnezzar and they tell him about the fact that these four will not bow; they will not bow. Now, we saw the first inevitable consequence of conviction. The first characteristic; the inevitable result: When all the world is bowing down to man-made idols and you're standing because you refuse to bow, look out; the inevitable result will always be persecution. You can write it down and keep it somewhere in the back of your mind. You cannot possibly honor God in this fallen earth, in this world of darkness without being persecuted.

Second Timothy 3, as we read the last time together, says those who seek to live godly lives shall be persecuted. Maybe in your family, maybe it's your wife, your husband, and they're not interested in the things of God. They're doing it their way; they're not going to do it God's way. You make up your mind you're going to do it God's way. Conflict, immediately. Light and darkness do not fellowship well together. They can't do it.

Matter of fact, it's interesting that the Greek word for persecution is a word that means "to follow after." That's all it means: a hounding on your trail all the time. And it sometimes can mean death, it sometimes can mean pain or whatever; but it doesn't talk about the method as much as it is something happening in your life all the time.

I don't know if you've ever gone coon hunting or not. Some of you are too cultured for that. But anyway, if you go coon hunting and you go out at night and you take those old coon dogs and you love to listen to those dogs. And those dogs will talk to you, I mean, you can understand them. You can know which dog it is. You talk to a good coon hunter, buddy, and he knows the name of those dogs, knows how they sound. And they'll start off with one kind of bark. And then they'll get on a trail and it'll pick up a little higher pitch. And then they'll tree, and, boy, they go nuts. You can hear them for a mile. And if you haven't ever experienced that, you've

just missed part of your real life.

But every time I think of the word “persecution,” I think of that old hound dog on that coon’s trail. Now, that coon is not bothering anybody. I mean, you know, just lying up in a tree just fooling around, not bothering a soul, and all of a sudden this dog gets on its trail. It runs from this tree to that tree to this tree and that dog is right behind him sniffing and hollering and barking and he can’t get away from it. And as long as it’s dark and as long as those dogs are in the woods, they’re going to be on his trail.

And, folks, why don’t we just get used to it? You make your stand for Jesus Christ, it’s going to be on your trail; persecution is going to follow you everywhere you go or I go. It’s the inevitable result of conviction. It will always be there. When you start acting out what you say you believe, persecution is the inevitable result.

But we also saw the immovable response or resolve. There’s an immovable resolve to a person who is convicted. What is that? “I shall not be moved.” Reminds me of my son in the morning when I’m trying to get him up to go to school. I shall not be moved! That’s the immovable resolve that you see in conviction. And, you see, what happens is a person that is convicted, even when he’s persecuted, will not budge. That does not frighten him; that does not bother him. His convictions will cause him to stand up and to stand still and to stand tall. He will not bow to what the world wants him to bow to.

Well, we come then to the third thing and it begins in verse 19. Now we’ve already seen that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—somebody asked, where’s Daniel. Remember now, they’ve been appointed over Babylon. He’s in the king’s palace. Daniel’s not here right now when this is taking place. Don’t think that Daniel would not have been involved. The beautiful thing here is that these three are standing on their own faith, not Daniel’s faith. That’s what I see out of it. I’m so grateful Daniel’s not even in this chapter. Makes you think if Daniel wouldn’t have stood, they wouldn’t have stood. Hey, buddy, they’re by themselves and they’re making their stand for the Lord God in their life.

Well, verse 19, they have let Nebuchadnezzar know, “We will not bow!” So verse 19 says, “Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered.” Isn’t that amazing? Watch people’s faces, folks, you can tell where they are. I mean, you ought to see what I see up here. I know, I know, I ought to see what you see down there! You’ve got to look at me. But it’s amazing how you can watch people’s faces. The countenance.

Remember when God came to Adam. He said, “Adam, why has your countenance fallen?” Isn’t it amazing? What’s on the inside always reflects on the face. The face is just a mirror to let everybody know where you are. His facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I’m sure one of the things that made him mad was that they were under control and in control, but he was totally out of control. You see, the world that doesn’t know our God is never in control because they’re not under control. They won’t bow to Him. They’re bowing to the wrong god and they never can control.

“He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.” This was an interesting guy. Built a statue ten times as tall as it is wide, now he puts them in a fire and heats up the furnace seven times hotter than it’s ever been heated. “And he commanded certain valiant warriors,” the word means strong. He picked out the strongest warriors that he had who were in his army “to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire.”

The incredible realization of conviction

Now, the third principle enters at this point. Not only have we seen the inevitable result, persecution; not only have we seen the immovable resolve, I shall not be moved no matter what you do to me. But the third thing that I want you to see is the incredible realization of conviction.

There is something incredible, and you don’t know this unless you’re convicted and you’re acting out of these convictions. When the persecution comes, you learn something that you could never know otherwise. It’s an incredible realization. What happens? They’ve got the fire seven times as hot, and the king has got them tied up. Now why would he tie them up and throw them in the fire? What are they going to do in the fire? But he ties them up. There in verse 21 it says, “Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps, and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire.”

So we see a pretty bleak picture. I can assure if you put this on television, “Hey, if you honor God, you get thrown into a fiery furnace.” Isn’t that exciting? I can see somebody turning that channel. Get that thing off. And then some doodah comes on and says you can be healthy, wealthy and wise. “Oh good, I’ll send my money to them.” They don’t ever tell you the truth, folks. The fire is a pretty bleak picture. They’re honored God, now what? A furnace.

Alright, now watch. Verse 22, “For this reason, because the king’s command was urgent,” and that word “urgent” means that he was so emphatic that this be done now and right now, “and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.” Now, let me explain something. A lot of people don’t understand the type of furnace that they used. I didn’t either. Somebody had to help me understand it. I couldn’t understand how Nebuchadnezzar could

look over into it if the men who put them into it were burned up by the heat of the fire. How could he get close enough to even see?

Somebody told me that it was like a blast furnace. Do you know what a blast furnace is? I didn't either, so they told me. It was the kind of furnace that the air would come in down here. You could see inside the furnace, but the air would come in this way, blow the flames and all up out of the top. And usually when you put the fuel into it, you put it into the top. If you're going to put something into it, you'd throw it down into the furnace. But when the king possibly was looking, and this is just conjecture, but if the king was possibly looking, he was looking from down here, not up there where it was so hot. And the men who came to put them into that furnace were the ones who were burned up. The king, however, could look and see and know what was going on inside the fire.

Now, what's going on? What's going to happen? First of all, let's show you what's happening outside the furnace. I love this! Verse 22, "the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego." In other words, on the outside of the furnace, the guys who were persecuting them, the guys who were putting them into the furnace, are being burned up. They're crispy critters. That's what's going on the outside of the furnace.

You know, I don't know how many times I think of this. Paul says in the book of Philippians, he says, "Don't be worried about your adversaries." Man, when they come at you, don't even be terrified, which is a sign of destruction to them. Because, you see, they can't hurt us. You say, "Well, buddy, they can kill the body." Well, what's that! Well, Jesus was really worried about death when He was at Lazarus' tomb, wasn't He? He shed a tear, that's what the Greek word is, He shed a single tear. You mean He was no more moved than that? He was no more moved, why? Because He came to conquer death and it was nothing to Him. What He worried about was spiritual death, never physical death. Why do we worry about physical death? Is that the worst thing that can happen to us? Do you know what it does? It throws us right in the presence of Jesus. That's really bad, isn't it? I'm not worried about that!

So what's happening here is that the people who are putting them in, they're the ones being fried. Now let's look what's going on in the inside of the fire. Verse 23 says, "But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up." So far they're still alive. And verse 24 gives us an astounding reality. "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded," I guess so when you find out what he saw, "and stood up in haste; he responded and said to his high officials, 'Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?' They answered and said to the king, 'Certainly, O king.'" I mean, have you aged that much? We just did it. Three men, we tied them up, you saw it, we threw them into the fire.

Look at verse 25, "He answered and said [Oh! I love this part], 'Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!'" Oh, me! Built into that statement is an incredible reality. In verse 24, three men bound, falling; in verse 25, four men loose, walking, and the fourth is like, the king said—a pagan king—"like the son of the gods." And you know exactly who that was. That was, I believe, our Lord Jesus, as clear as a bell in one of His appearances in the Old Testament where He walked with those three in the midst of the fire.

Now some of you here, you're afraid perhaps to stand up for anything. Maybe you're a young person and you're afraid to stand up for Jesus at your school. You're afraid you won't be cool, you won't be accepted. You don't like the persecution. But what we're seeing in this is that persecution does not hurt you. It's the greatest thing in the world that can happen to you. That's why Jesus said in the Beatitudes, "Blessed." That word means "fully satisfied." "Those of you who are persecuted for My name's sake." What does He mean? Something happens when we're being persecuted for what we're doing in the name of the Lord Jesus and according His will that is incredible. First of all, the fire does not hurt us. It only purifies us. It burns only the things that bind us. That's what persecution will do every time. It does not harm us; it just simply burns off the things that bind us. What was binding? They were tied up.

Look at verse 27, it's incredible: "And the satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them." I can travel and come back home and my wife will say to me, "You smell like a tobacco factory" or something. I don't smoke, but just by being around where people are smoking it just seems like it gets all in your clothes and all over, the scent. It says here the scent was not even on them. They'd been in a fire that had been turned up seven times as hot and it didn't singe a hair on their head, it didn't touch the clothing that they were wearing, and it didn't even leave a scent on their bodies. Incredible!

What are you trying to tell us? Friend, when we go through persecution, if it's true persecution—now understand what I'm saying. Many, many people bring their own persecution on themselves. I'm not talking about self-inflicted persecution. A lot of people doing that—I'm talking about people that simply make a stand and honor God and have to pay a consequence as a result of it, those people, when they go through the purifying fires, will not be harmed. As a matter of fact, it will just burn off the thing that binds them.

Look with me in 1 Peter 1:7. You know, we're talking here about the most persecuted believers in the New Testament. This is Asia Minor, the continent of Asia Minor. Nero was the emperor of Rome and he was just literally causing havoc with the Christians. He's the worst emperor that ever lived on the face of this earth. He would take Christians and put them in oil and burn them, using them

as torches while he had his orgies with his people. He would take animal skins and put them over the Christians and put them in arenas and let the lions literally devour them and charge people to come see it. That's how deranged he was. He blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians. It was an incredible situation.

But look what Peter says to these persecuted, martyred believers in verses 6-7. He says, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Now what is he saying? Basically what he's telling them is, "Listen, your faith is like gold; and just like gold has to be refined, so must your faith be purified." But here's the key. I heard a man say one day when you go through a trial, God makes you into gold. That's wrong. That is not right. We are gold before we ever go into the fire, but the fire proves it to us and everybody else that we're genuine, by burning off that which has been hiding the genuineness of that gold. You see, that silversmith or that goldsmith, heat up the pot of metal and it gets so hot that the impurities start coming to the top. And he takes a little ladle and he dips off all of that dross and impurities and then he looks at the metal, and when he can see his face reflecting back in that pot, he cools the fire.

And that's all that persecution does to you and me. All it does is purify us and prove to everybody around us, and ourselves included, that we're genuine and that our faith is strong and it will endure and it's what it ought to be. If it doesn't do that, then your persecution is not the right kind. But when it's a real persecuted experience, it does nothing but purify your faith and prove to everybody you're genuine and you truly love God and it's God who's doing this in your life. Isn't that an incredible thing? Doesn't hurt you, it just purifies. The only thing it burns off are the things that bind you.

You know one of the things that they told me in Romania back when they were under the communist domain? A pastor told me one night, "Wayne, the things which I fear the most is not what you think. It's not the communists. The thing which I fear the most is freedom in our country." And it caught me off guard, and I said, "What do you mean you fear freedom? He said, "Wayne, what we have seen under persecution, the purity of belief that has come as a result of persecution, it frightens me if freedom ever comes." And you know what's happening right now in Romania? Pornography is moving in right now like you wouldn't believe. The AIDS epidemic now is going to spread; they say it's already up 80%. The Mormons have moved in, the cults have moved in, and these poor people don't know the difference. And now they're all susceptible to all these different areas and Jesus no longer, I'm afraid, in some of their lives, will be enough. And that's the peril of what we call freedom.

Friend, persecution is what purifies a believer's life. You know, if you know anything about stalking quails, you put quail on your land and don't hunt it, or there are not predators there to give it any kind of conflict, those quail will die out. I understand this from people that do those kinds of things. But the more they're hunted, or the more they're persecuted for whatever, or chased after, the more they reproduce and the more plentiful they become on the property. It's almost that way with bullies. The less persecution, the less purity you have in people's faith. I really wonder if we don't need in American a real good dose of persecution. And I tell you what, folks, if it ever comes, and I really believe that it's going to get worse before the Lord comes back, and when it comes remember this: we'll find out who's real, who has been coming to church every Sunday. You'll find out quickly where the chaff is, because it's going to be separated and you'll find out who the real wheat is. We'll find out what the sincerity and the genuineness of people is all about when persecution comes.

You find it out in the youth group when people go away to school. It's wonderful at camp, it's wonderful at a retreat, but when you go to school you find out who's real and who's a fake. You find it in the adult world when you have a men's retreat and then everybody goes to work on Monday, you find out who is real and who is not. Because when the persecution comes, it purifies the believer and all it does is burn off the things that bind you. Others will run away because they don't want that persecution.

But something else that persecution does, and that's an incredible realization. You only know it when you're being persecuted. It says "I saw three men bound falling;... I see four men loose walking." It intensifies our walk with Jesus Christ. Do you realize that? You never know Jesus like you know Him when all hell is breaking loose because you're standing up for what He says and you're standing up for your convictions. That's when you know Him like never, never before.

I can remember in the pastorate in another church, I was going through a maturing process in my own life. And so many times when I talk about these times, it makes them sound a whole lot worse than they really were. A lot of that was just the fact that I didn't know how to handle it. But I can remember some very difficult times, a lot of persecution. By the way, do you know where most of your persecution comes from? It's not from the world. It's from within the walls of the church by the so-called spiritual people. Look out. That's where you'll catch the most of it.

And when I started, when some of these things started happening, I remember I had a little shack out back, everybody called them a little shack out back. It was a little old dump and we'd made it into a study. And rather than visiting people I just decided to pray for them and study and they didn't like that. A lot of people still don't. But I was in my study one day and a lot of it was flying. Buddy,

when it would fly, it would fly! And I didn't know what to do and I got into the Psalms. I love the Psalms. David is always in trouble in the Psalms, that's why I like it. I love how he cries out to the Lord, "O Lord, they've dug a pit for me. Get me out of this pit!" And I love how God always speaks back to him, "Will you relax? The pit they dug for you, they will fall into themselves. And don't worry, David. Man, you're My property. I'll take care of you." Over and over again, and now I can go back through my Bible and I've got dates written down of certain times the Scriptures meant something to me. And I can go back and look at those dates and look at that Scripture and almost bring back to my mind the persecuted experience that we were going through at that time. And it was in those moments with my face on the floor many times weeping before the Lord, that I met Him in a way that I'd never know Him before.

It's an incredible reality, folks, and you don't know it, you've missed it if you're not convicted, if you're not standing for what God tells you in your life. And don't point your finger at somebody else because they don't have your conviction. That's not what I'm talking about. Some people take a message like this and use it to beat the whole Christian world over the head. I'm talking about you, in your conviction. Quit looking for other Christians to rally behind you. You understand something: you can stand alone and God is big enough to stand behind you. You're going to meet Him like you've never known Him before in the fires of persecution. That's what I'm talking about. And if you hadn't stood up, friend, it's all a game anyway.

Why do we even bother on Sundays and Wednesdays? Good grief, we could be doing a whole lot better things. It's a pretty day, why not play golf if we're not serious with what we're dealing with? But, buddy, when you make a stand, it's going to cost you. You're going to find out something about God that you never knew before. He walks with you in the midst of your fire. And you'll know Him like you never knew Him before.

You know what the contrast of that is? The man who says, "God, don't call me, I'll call You. I'm busy right now; I've got to be cool. Man, I've got time. When I get old and sick I'll call you. Don't worry! Don't worry!" You know what the contrast is: Proverbs 5:22. "A man is bound by the chord of his own sin." Do you realize that? You know what frees me? Conviction and my response to that conviction. What binds me is saying, "God, Your Word can't meet my needs. It's archaic, it's not for today." You just bound yourself, friend, and you've cheated yourself out of the glorious experience you could have ever had of knowing Him like you've never known Him before in the fires of persecution.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for My Name sake." Completely, totally, wholly, satisfied are those who will stand for something, My Word, and be persecuted for it. The inevitable result: persecution. The immovable resolve: I shall not be moved. The incredible realization: You know Him like you've never known Him before. And the only thing that gets burned are the things that were binding you anyway. You didn't need them.

The invincible reward of conviction

The final thing: The invincible reward. Don't you like my alliteration? I can't do that very often, so you better write these dates down. I'm not smart enough! Look in verse 26, "Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, 'Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, come out, you servants of the Most High God.'" Well, look here! Let me show you something. Remember back in verse 15 he says in the last part of the verse, "And what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" And God said, "Oh, a contest. I love contests." And Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said, "Lord, We wish you didn't love them so much, because we're always the ones in the middle of it."

And here he is. He said, "You servants of the Most High God." Why did he say that? Because he knew good and well his gods couldn't have done it. Verse 28, "Nebuchadnezzar responded and said [Now watch this], 'Blessed be the God'—and the word "blessed" means "say good things about Him" —'of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.'"

Now watch what he does. He does the most incredible thing in verse 29: "Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of [listen to what he's saying now!] Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego [now watch this] shall be torn limb from limb [you think he wouldn't have done it?] and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

Doesn't say he became a believer, does it? But, buddy, he was filled with respect, not so much for what he saw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego do, oh no, what he saw God do in their behalf. That's what excited him. Not what the believers had done; what God had done in response to their belief. Can you imagine if the President came on the CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS networks this Monday and said, "I want to make a declaration to all the United States of America. I don't care what Congress says." Oh, do it, do it! And he came out and said, "Listen, if there's any person who makes a detrimental statement about the God of the Christians of this nation, about the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, the God-man, about His Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, I will tear you limb from limb and we will render your houses a rubbish heap in this nation today."

You say, "Oh, that's kind of dumb isn't it?" Yes. You know why? Because I'm not real sure we have enough believers in our nation that have enough conviction to be what God wants them to be. That's why it's dumb; that's exactly why it's dumb. Back in the early 60's, we've come so far that in the early 60's they took prayer out of the public schools. "Oh, we don't want to teach these little kids to pray." You know what; the congress has already denoted that humanism is a religion. You can teach it in any public school any day you want to teach it, but you can't bring Christianity in. No! Higher form criticism came from over in Germany and got in our seminaries. It makes the Bible a piece of literature and now you see it falling apart everywhere. When I was at seminary, I was never taught to study the Word of God. I was taught how to tear it apart and find out what was the J theory, the E theory, the P theory, the whatever. That was all I was taught. It wasn't until I finally found some folks that preach that taught me how to study the Word of God and what an incredible difference my life has become.

Where are we, folks? I want to tell you something, and we've seen it in Daniel all the way through. Be careful how you hear me because I'm telling you, sometimes I'm almost afraid to make statements for the way people try to hear you. They hear you the way they want to hear you. What I'm trying to say is, if we have the kind of character that Daniel had, the kind of integrity that was so strong that he could even go to one of the king's officials and make a request, have an audience with the king, and the king change his mind because he respected so much of the character of Daniel. That's what I'm talking about. Make sure you get that strong. The kind of character that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had. They didn't with arrogance tell the king, "We don't have anything to say." They just did it out of conviction. Brother, it's never been the problem of the government in any country. Never. It's been the problem of Christians. That's the problem.

You want to know why evil abounds? Because Christians are not living in the Word of God, abiding in His Word, being obedient to His Word. And I couldn't point a finger at anybody this morning. Could you? I'd have to point one right back here. "Not my brother, not my sister, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer." How far have we moved off-center from what God really wants us to be?

Daniel 4:1-18 The Dead End Street Called Pride – Part 1

Turn with me to Daniel 4. Moving very quickly through the book of Daniel, I simply want to entitle this tonight the "Dead End Street Called Pride." You know, if you want to know the definition of "pride," take the word and the middle letter will define itself: P-R-I-D-E. There it is right there. As a matter of fact, you can do the same with the word "sin;" the middle letter is its own definition. The dead end street called pride.

You know, as we study through Daniel and we see that many years transpire between the chapters, you would think that Nebuchadnezzar, at some point in his life, would finally learn. But some people just seem never to learn. He's had two incredible experiences with the one true living God. This is a pagan king, remember. They've taken the people of God into captivity. In chapter 2, God interrupts his life, just shakes him up. Gives him a dream that in that dream and its interpretation, gives us the whole panorama of history, what even is going to take place in the latter days. In chapter 3 he sees Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego thrown into a fiery furnace, heated seven times as hot as it's ever been heated and yet we see them being delivered by our God.

Now he's encountered the true and living God at least twice in his life and in miraculous ways. And so you would think that all the things he'd seen about our God would humble him and he would bow down and worship our God. Not so! He's hardheaded. And in chapter 4, we're going to see that Nebuchadnezzar wouldn't get down off his high horse and so the Lord knocked him off.

As a matter of fact, the key verse is in chapter 4, verse 37. It's almost like the Lord is saying to Nebuchadnezzar, "Enough is enough, friend. If you don't know who I am by now, you better bow down to Me." Daniel 4:37; what a verse for us to go home with: "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just [in other words, they're righteous; they don't have to be defended] and He is able to humble those who walk in pride." Now that's the testimony of a man who has been greatly humbled by our God.

I wonder what it's going to take in some of our lives? What is God going to have to do to get us down off of our high horse? Pride is a subtle thing and whenever it begins to be a part of our lifestyle, look out! God will not tolerate it. He hates pride. He does not tolerate what man can do. He wants man to understand what only He can do.

Well, if you look in chapter 4, we see that Nebuchadnezzar is recounting this story and we can see that if we're having a testimonial meeting tonight, he would be the first one to his feet. He's got a message he's just got to share. Have you ever been in a situation like that? And people say, "Would you like to just share what God is doing in your life?" And some people just jump to their feet and they just can't seem to wait and they've got to share what is going on in their life. Well, Nebuchadnezzar has something to say.

This proud old pagan king has finally been brought down and he has definitely a testimony. It says in verse 1, "Nebuchadnezzar the

king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: 'May your peace abound! It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me.'" Now that's interesting isn't it? You're catching the tale-end of the story. He's starting off saying, "I have something to say. Something has happened to me. God has done great things in my life."

The word "signs" there refers to miracles and the word "wonders" refers basically to his response to those miracles: the miraculous things that God did in Nebuchadnezzar's life, his response of wonder that he gave back to the Lord. You know, that's what a miracle is for anyway. And I can throw this in without it costing us anything here. In John 20, very clearly it states that the signs that Jesus did, speaking of His miracles on this earth, were for one reason: they were to point to who He is and the fact that He's God, the fact that He's the Messiah, the fact that He's God's Son. And you know, so often people start worshipping the signs and forget what the sign is pointing to. Remember that.

There were some signs in Nebuchadnezzar's life. He didn't get hung up in the signs; he saw what God wanted him to see. The wonder of it all was that he realized that it was the Most High God. Look in verse 3, "How great are His signs, and how mighty are His wonders!" Now God's taught Nebuchadnezzar something, because notice the next phrase. He compares his own kingdom to God's kingdom. He says, "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation." Mine, not much to it; I live for a while and I die and somebody else takes it over, but His kingdom is everlasting and it goes from generation to generation.

Now in this story of God's humbling Nebuchadnezzar, there are basically five parts and I apologize that we don't have the time to do all five of them this time, but I'm going to do two of them at least and get our appetites whetted a little bit, and perhaps this week you can read ahead of us and begin to discover what God does in Nebuchadnezzar's life. How does He humble that king? We'll see a little bit of it.

The delusion of his pride

But the two things I want us to look at, first of all, is verses 1-8 as Nebuchadnezzar recounts the delusion of his pride.

You see, even though God had tried to intervene in his life, tried to tell him that he really didn't get to power on his own, that God had raised him up, Nebuchadnezzar just seemed like, we said earlier, never seemed to learn. And so we see how he was deluded with pride. That's one of the saddest things in a person's life when he starts thinking he's doing it all himself. Do you ever hear people talk, "Oh, I'm telling you, I'm a self-made man." Oh, brother! You're not! God is the One who is in control. God is the One who raises up and God is the One who brings down. God's the One who establishes the seasons of our life. It is God who is in control and foolish is the man who thinks that what he's doing, he's doing in his own power. It is God who allows, it is God who is behind it.

Well, verses 1-8 we see the delusion of pride. How subtle it really is. Look in verse 4. He says, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace." Boy, that sounds pretty good, doesn't it? I get the picture that he's got him a hammock out in the back yard, it's a breezy day, and he's laying out there just admiring his kingdom. Now, if you look in the encyclopedias about the kingdom of Babylon, it'll give you some unreal pictures. This was an elaborate, an extravagant kingdom and so old Neb, he's looking out over his kingdom, several years have passed in chapter 3, and he's just enjoying himself. Man, everything is good: peace with everybody, he's the best king around. "Look what I have done." Laying back there in that hammock, got him a lemonade, got his shoes kicked off, it's a nice, easy afternoon, he's just at ease and flourishing in his kingdom, thinking that he did it all himself. How sick can you get?

You know, I've noticed these commercials, and isn't it sad that the beer commercials end up sometimes being some of the wittiest because they have the money to put them in there. Then they put them in these sports events as if that's the way young athletes are supposed to think. I wish they'd put the sick situations of people being mangled and maimed and families being ripped apart by alcohol and then say, "Hey, isn't this wonderful?" But anyway, you know the commercial of the two guys, the guys are out fishing. You can tell it's a bunch of men that have gotten away.

These men were all together and they were fishing and I remember one particular scene, they'd been catching trout or whatever and they're sitting on the side of the river. It shows them casting flies, shows the fish coming up and grabbing the fly, you know, and all this, and you know, a wonderful day catching those fish. And then they're sitting around the campfire that evening, you know the commercial. And they're cooking the fish and one of them leans over as he takes a big old glass of suds and says, "You know, guys, it just doesn't get any better than this!"

Now, isn't that dumb? Think about it. Now for him, it probably doesn't. I guarantee you. The next step is he's going to be in some rehab unit after he's completely demolished his family or killed somebody else, trying to get dried out. But "it just doesn't get any better than this." Getting sick off the fish you ate, getting drunk off of something that will completely delude your mind. But that's the height of pride, folks. To some people, that's it. And it's an attitude that I feel that Nebuchadnezzar has right here. Man, he's just proud of himself. He's at ease; he's flourishing in his power.

He's got it all under control, man. He's number one, he's on top of the whole world at this particular point. Watch! Verse 5, I love this. "I saw a dream." Buddy, he's had enough of dreams in chapter 2 and he doesn't want any more. Many years have gone by and that's something that shook his life because God moved in and his own people could not interpret it and Daniel had to come on the scene. Well, look here, God's about to move again. "I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me." Oh, no! Another dream.

I wonder why it made him fearful. I think it's because he's had one before and he's got a sneaking suspicion God's up to something again in his life. Isn't it wonderful guys, when we can just be left alone? "God, don't bother me. I'm doing my thing. Don't bother me." But you know, God's not going to leave us alone. And when that pride begins to set in, God's going to make His move in every one of our lives for He is able to humble those who walk in pride.

And so, what does he do? Same song, third verse. He calls the wise men; and they hadn't helped him before, I don't know why he thinks they're going to help him now. Verse 6, "So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream." I don't know why they called them wise men. "Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans, and the diviners came in, and I related the dream to them; but they could not make its interpretation known to me."

Now, he tries the same thing that he did years earlier in his life: he calls those same guys in. You know, it's funny. We know that Daniel must have gotten that call. Go back to chapter 2:48, remember something, don't forget this: "Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over the [Who?] wise men of Babylon." So you know if called for the wise men, this time he didn't just call for the wise men, he must have gone to Daniel. And isn't it interesting at this particular point, Daniel did not respond. He just, I guess, relayed the message to the other wise men and they went in and they tried their best to interpret that dream.

Now you wonder why Daniel didn't go in. Well, we pick it up in verse 8, "But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god." According to the name of who? Go back there and read that again. According to the name of what? "My god." Who's telling this story right now? Nebuchadnezzar. Wait a minute, whoa! This guy is telling his testimony. Something has happened in this dude's life. "My god!" What do you mean? Awhile ago he was "a god" and now he's "my god." What a difference that has come: "in the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods, and I related the dream to him." And he tells him the dream. And again I want to ask the question, why did Daniel take so long to come in?

We don't know all the answers, but my personal feeling is that Daniel probably had watched this king go from one prideful act to another. Over these years he'd watched what was happening, and I think old Daniel just sat back and said, "Well, it won't be long now. Let's just wait it out for a little bit." And finally he has that dream and he calls Daniel. Daniel says, "Now it's time. Now before I go in, let's let him try his wise men for a while and see if they can do it. Let's get them out of the way. Because I believe God has a message for this king." And finally Daniel comes in.

And you know, wives, you may have a husband that you feel like that sometimes is a little proud and arrogant and won't get in the Word of God. Will you quit trying to get in God's way and help God out? Just hang on. You just trust the fact that God's going to humble your husband and He's capable of humbling anybody who walks in pride. You just wait. You don't have to do the work for Him. You know, sometimes we want to help God out and that's not what it's all about. Just wait. In His time, in His own way, God will take that man down. Whatever response the man has, that's between him and God. But I guarantee you God will humble those who walk in pride.

That's what I've loved about my wife all these years. She's been really quiet and carried a big stick. The big stick is the fact that she knows that God can handle me. And it's amazing. Sometimes I'm about to do the dumbest things and I think I'm so right and I just have to prove it to her by telling her how smart that I am. And she'll just get real quiet and just look at me. It's kind of like she's saying, "Well, go ahead. Help yourself. If you're dumb enough to do it, I'm dumb enough to let you do it. I'm just going to watch God bring you down. If you won't listen, then you just let the Lord do it."

It's fun to be broken, isn't it? I hear some of these people pray, "Oh God, break me!" Dumb, man, dumb! Do you understand what you're praying? Listen, we don't get away with it, folks. If you're a believer particularly, remember this is a pagan king; remember the difference and how to God, it doesn't matter really, as far as this story goes. But if we're Christians particularly, we know God is not going to let us get away with living for ourselves. With that big number one, you watch it. God is able to humble those who walk in pride.

Well, so the first part of the story then, verses 1-8, basically, is the delusion of Nebuchadnezzar's pride. He's trying to tell you he's deluded. "I thought everything was fine. I'm at my ease; I'm flourishing at my palace. I looked around and I couldn't see anything better. Look what I have done. And the people are at peace and everything is wonderful." There's a problems though. He's looking at

himself and he's not looking to give honor and glory to the Lord.

The difficulty of his dream

So the second part of the story that's probably all we'll get to today, is the difficulty now that he had with his dream. Why was this dream so hard to interpret? What was in the dream that so threw him that he had to go get his wise men to come in and answer it for him? Well, we start see that in verse 9. "O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians," this is Nebuchadnezzar talking now, and Belteshazzar is another name for Daniel, "since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen along with its interpretation."

Now, here's the dream that he had and it really shook him. Listen to what it says. Verse 10, "Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great." Now you already begin to see a little bit of pride in this dream, as he dreams about this tree. Remember the statue in chapter 2, 90 feet tall, nine feet wide. The height of the tree was great and you get the picture that this is the only tree around. The whole earth could look at it. He was dreaming about a beautiful tree that everybody could look at. Not only that, look at verse 11: "The tree grew large and became strong, and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it."

So he dreams of this marvelous, beautiful tree that the whole world could look at. And it's a tall tree, a great tree, and it has fruit and it has shade and even animals and man can all feast under it and they can get shade from it. Verse 13, "I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold," and here comes the difficulty. I think up to verse 12 there is no difficulty because Nebuchadnezzar probably could say, "My kingdom is that tree. I'm the tree. Boy, everybody benefits from me." Well, here comes the difficulty, "I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, and angelic watcher [basically, the word phrasing there really is an angel of some kind], a holy one, descended from heaven."

Now here's what he does. This is the difficulty of this whole thing: "He shouted out and spoke as follows." Now notice his instructions, very explicit "Chop down the tree." Now up till this point it's been fun. Great tree, wonderful tree—chop it down! What do you mean chop it down? "Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit [not only that]; let the beasts flee from under it, and the birds from its branches."

Now that will pop your balloon real quick! You're lying there dreaming about this gorgeous tree that nobody can miss looking at and how it feeds the animals and feeds the people, and all of a sudden there's an interrupter in that dream and an angel comes in and says to cut that sucker down and cut off its branches and strip it of its leaves. And all of a sudden he's confused. What is he saying? Look at verse 15, this is even more difficult: "Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground." Now, you know if its roots are in the ground then the tree is still what? It's still alive. He didn't say rip it up by the roots, he didn't say completely destroy the tree. He said to cut it down but leave the stump and leave the roots in the ground. Now watch this, "But with a band of iron and bronze around it."

Now a band there can be translated "fence." In other words, put something to protect that stump because there's going to be something to take care of it later on. Make sure you don't kill the tree. Cut it down, leave the stump and put a fence around it to protect it. What in the world is going on? Well, he goes on to say, "In the new grass of the field." And then watch what his dream does. Watch the change in the pronoun there. "And let him." Now this is probably when he began to be fearful in his dream as he's recounting it now to Daniel. "Let him? Oh, no, he's talking about me again." Here we go, "let him be drenched with the dew of heaven." Now we know what's going to take care of the stump, but what about him? "And let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man, and let a beast's mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him." Good night!

Now we've seen what's going to happen to the tree and that was disturbing enough, but now it's personal. Let him; let his mind be taken away, given an animal's mind and to eat and to live like an animal, and for how long? For seven periods of time! Look in 7:25. And boy, when we get to chapter 7, look out! Let me show you the word for "time" and what it means there. We think it means a year, so it would be seven years. Verse 25 of Daniel 7, "And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law," in other words, he'll be lawless, whoever this "him" is, "and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time." That's three and a half years. And so we think then, because of that verse and what he's saying here is that for seven years something is going to happen to the "him" in verse 16. And this is what's making Nebuchadnezzar very fearful because he's got a sneaking suspicion that he knows who the "him" is. He knows who he's talking about.

And so, buddy, he goes to the wise men, he gets Daniel in there. He wants to know what God is saying to him. Well, verse 17 says, "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers." Now here is the reasoning for why the angel said what he said, "and the decision is a command of the holy ones ["To" the holy ones, actually] in order that the living may know that the Most High." Now, the

"Most High." Does that ring a bell with anybody? The Most High? That's one of the most tremendous names used in the Old Testament to refer to God. In Genesis 14:18-22 the Most High refers to the fact He possesses heaven, He possesses earth. In 2 Samuel 22:14-15 it says that "He rules over the storm, the wind, the thunder, and the lightening." And in Psalms 47:2 it says that "the Most High is to be feared [now watch this] as the great king over all the earth." That's who the Most High is.

Nebuchadnezzar thinks he's the king over all the earth. No! The Most High is the king over all the earth, and in his dream they tell him why this decision was made: That "the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind [and look what he says] and bestows it on whom He wishes." Oh, if we could understand this. What it's saying is that He acts like a superintendent over the elections of men to the offices that man has come up with. And we think we're the ones who control that. No, sir! God controls that. And Nebuchadnezzar just would not agree to that.

I imagine right now if you sat down with the kings of the kingdoms of this world, sometimes I wonder if they would understand that you don't get there by yourself. God's up to something and you're only there because God put you there. When Jesus stood before Pilate before the crucifixion, Pilate was talking about, "don't you know the power that I have?" And, boy, Jesus turned that right back on him and said, "Buddy, you have no power except that My Father in heaven has given it unto you. You can do nothing that My Father does not let you do." Boy, this is such a beautiful picture of the sovereign control that God has in our life, in our country, in our nation, in our family, it is God who is in control and God hates people that take credit for themselves! He hates pride. And that's what this dream is all about.

He will never let you and me get to the point that we take the credit for what we're doing. Brother, He wants all glory to be given back unto Him. And it even tells of the favorite ones that God would choose. Obviously through history we see that He's chosen some interesting people. But He says, "and He sets over it the lowliest of men." And that word "lowliest" there means the humble, the ones that are meek, the ones that are low. Basically, the people that God chooses and loves to choose, rather, would be the people of lowly minds, people of humble minds. And evidently what He's saying here is that "Nebuchadnezzar, you don't qualify. You don't qualify. You're too big for your britches and it's time I took you down."

Now, I don't know how many of you can come back next Sunday. Let me give you a preview. What he's talking about here is that the tree is the kingdom of Babylon and the kingdom that Nebuchadnezzar is enjoying. He says, "cut it down." And what he's going to do is he's going to take the kingdom and he's going to protect it. It's going to be there for seven years; it's not going to be ripped away from Nebuchadnezzar, but God's got a job to do on the king. He takes care of the kingdom and He gives him some kind of a mental disorder where for seven years this great king who sat in his hammock saying, "I'm at ease, flourishing in my kingdom," He puts him and makes him live like an animal. They have traced a certain mental disorder all the way back to his days and they say that if that's what He gave him, and we don't know, if it is, you can relate to one another. In other words, I can look down here and I can know people and I can know everything around me, the problem is I don't react properly and I want to live out in the grass. I want to eat grass like cows would eat it. I want to live out in the open under the rain and wake up in the morning with the dew all over me.

And for seven years God takes Nebuchadnezzar down and it's after that experience that we're seeing chapter 4. And it's interesting now it's "my god" and now it's, "I want to tell you of the wonderful thing God has done in my life." Oh, dear Lord, give me a testimony. "Okay! I'll give you one." And BOOM, brings you down. Business falls apart, everything goes away. Bank accounts bankrupt, all of a sudden the problems in your family, your kids are going every which direction. "God, where are you?" Seven years like an animal! And God says, "Now, you ready? You give?" Do you remember that little game you used to play when you were growing up and when you'd get somebody down you'd say, "Alright! Cry uncle, uncle!" "No, I won't do it!" And finally you get to a point where it hurts so bad you say, "Alright, I give, I give, I give. Uncle, uncle, uncle!" And you let them loose. Kind of like that with Nebuchadnezzar.

Seven years it took for that man to be broken down. But, buddy, when he came out of it he sang a different tune. "Ah, you don't scare me preacher." I'm not trying to scare you. It scares me. I'm not trying to scare you. But I want to tell you something. If you're living for yourself and you're not honoring God to be God in your life, you write it down: your days are numbered. There's a dead end street called pride and you're going to deal with the Lord face to face somewhere. He's going to bring you down, friend. He's going to bring you down.

Well, that's basically as far as I want to go this time, because I don't want to get us into what we're going to deal with the next time. We don't have time. But let me just talk with you a little bit as we close the message about pride. The book of Proverbs says that pride goes before a fall. I know that's what it says. I was out in Colorado one year skiing and we had an evangelist with us and I was about to go over the lift there and go down the run and he says, "Wayne, remember one verse: 'Pride goeth before a fall.'" Boy, he was right, you know? You think you can do it and watch. I fell all the way down to the bottom. Pride goes before a fall.

And James said that God resists the proud. The word "resists" means that He literally takes His place in front of him and works against him. He resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Boy, I'm telling you, sometimes I want to go home and crawl into a closet somewhere and say, "Alright, alright!" The essence of pride is "I will, I can, and I did."

Years ago when I was in college the cheers were different. They've changed them now; I can't understand them anymore. Back when I was going to college it was "rah, rah" type of stuff. I remember when we'd go for a jump ball and I'd go out as center against a guy who was 7'4", and listen to the cheer. As I walk out on the floor, his chin is above my head. He's 7'4" and I'm the tallest guy we have. And everybody starts laughing. I laughed, the referees laughed. What am I doing out here? I looked like a little short fat guy. I walked out to the jump ball and I remember the cheerleaders as I walk out on the home court there, place is packed out there. I walk out to start center and here's the cheerleaders: "You can do it, you can do it, you can do it, you can! You can do it, you can do it, you can do it, you can." Dumb, man! I could not! Some stupid cheerleader thought I could do it. Made me think I could do and I jumped up and friends, my hand didn't get above his head.

And you know, that attitude that's built into us, we can do it. The worst people to deal with in this world are athletes because they think they can. They still think they can. Somehow somebody suckered them into this world mentality and they still think they can. Walk into a room and they have a big sign: "When the going gets tough the tough get going." Baloney! We can do it. And that's the essence of pride, folks. And until we come to grips with the fact: no we can't, but we have a God who can. Then we're going to start seeing some things a little differently.

Nebuchadnezzar was really sold on himself. Looked in the mirror every morning and sang "how great thou art". And God said, "I'm sick of you." Boom! Took him down. Friend, you're skeptical tonight. You don't believe me. Well, just remember that we're around here to help pick up the pieces. If you keep on living in your pride, God's going to bring you down because, buddy, it is God who is in control, not man.

There was an interesting television personality that was in our area recently and he came pompously to an area and spoke to a particular group. And I liked what one of the people responded back to him. He was a student in that particular place and they asked him what he thought about this particular individual who had spoken. He said, "Well, before he came I heard he was rewriting the Ten Commandments. Somebody told me he was smarter than God." And the individual, friend, has said it almost exactly that way. And all I can do is cringe. My God is able to humble a man who walks in pride.

Turn on Johnny Carson; turn on some of these people. Turn on ABC, turn them all on. Friend, any time you ever hear anything that makes it sound like a man's doing anything, cringe. Our God's watching and, buddy, there's going to come a day that this whole earth is going to be down on their knees and every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord. If He doesn't bring you down in this life, buddy, you will come down. I'd rather be brought down now than wait until it is too late. Our God is in control. God hates pride and He's able to humble those who walk in it. And I'm not here to point a finger, buddy, I may be next.

Daniel 4:19-37 The Dead End Street Called Pride – Part 2

Turn with me to Daniel 4 as we continue what we began the last time together in Daniel entitled the "Dead End Street Called Pride." Daniel 4 and we'll pick up in verse 19. "The Dead End Street Called Pride."

As I was reflecting over the first four chapters of Daniel, it appears to me that the phrase "God is able" appears in two very significant places. And they're in such contrast to one another I thought it would be good for us to look at those two places as we begin the message. If you'll look back in Daniel 3:17, the situation is this: three young men—of course there are four mentioned in Daniel, Daniel being one of them—but three young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, have humbled themselves. You see, the reflection of humility is obedience to the Word of God. They have humbled themselves, they have purposed in their heart not to dishonor themselves and not to dishonor God. As a result we see the statement God is able to deliver them from and through the fires of persecution that result. So that's a wonderful truth. If I humble myself this morning out of conviction, I obey the Lord and do what He tells me to do, there will be persecution, but God is able to deliver me and will do just that.

However, there's another side of the picture. In Daniel 4:37, we see a contrasting situation. Here we have a pagan king who was unwilling to bow down before God. As a result, God had to humble him. Since he wouldn't humble himself, God had to humble him. And in verse 37 it says, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just," now watch, this is his testimony, "and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Now we can bring a conclusion out of that and it seems very apparent. I've got a choice to make and so do you. I either humble myself before the Lord, or He will humble me. And I don't know about you, but I've made my choice. I'd much rather humble myself than I would for God to have to humble me. And you're going to see this hopefully in the story today about Nebuchadnezzar. He's telling his own testimony in the fourth chapter of Daniel.

Now in verse 19, Daniel comes in to interpret his dream. As we've already studied, he's had quite an interesting dream. The first part of it was really good. The second part of it was a little bit difficult. And in verse 19 we see that Daniel hesitates. Now, why would he

hesitate? Because he knows that what he's about to share with Nebuchadnezzar is not going to be good. In verse 19, "Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him."

By the way, speaking of pride, last week as I preached the first message in this chapter, in verse 8—go back and look at verse 8. I want to show you what I did and how the Lord will humble you—it says, "But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar," which we see also in verse 19, "according to the name of my god." And I was just preaching away and had a dead brain cell attack me, and I said, "You know, look there, old Nebuchadnezzar is calling God his god. He says, 'My god.' And I thought I just had the most wonderful point in the world. I hadn't even seen it when I studied. Well, no wonder, because what I had seen wasn't there. And I got out of the pulpit that evening and someone walked up to me and said, 'By the way, Wayne,' he was very cautious in correcting me, he said, 'You know, he's talking about a pagan god, not our God.' Oh, that was so humbling, isn't it? That just killed me. And that morning I had gotten home and I'd made the statement, 'And God said to Adam, 'Adam, why has your countenance fallen?'"

And I got in the car and my wife is so sweet. She said, "You know I love you, Wayne, but God didn't say that to Adam. He said it to Cain." Well, that proves two things: that proves that the Word of God is the authority, not me and I'm over 40. So let's go on! I just wanted you to know that I am aware of the mistake that I made and I'll probably make another one today before it's over with. God just keeps me humble like that all the time.

Well, anyway, "Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, 'Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.'" He sees that Daniel doesn't want to tell him the interpretation. "Belteshazzar answered and said, 'My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries!'" You know, the thing I see in Daniel so much is his respect for someone who is in authority. He wasn't putting him down, this wasn't arrogant. He said, "Oh king, it would be the wish of my heart that this would be to your enemies, not to you." He doesn't really want to tell him.

Well, in verses 20-22 he explains the tree that Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream. Verse 20 says, "The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth, and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged—it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth."

Now if the dream had stopped right there it would have done nothing more than to feed the pride of Nebuchadnezzar. He was already kind of "pridey," and, folks, listen, if you'll get an encyclopedia or something and look up the city of Babylon, you can see why he was so proud. It was an incredible place. It just blows your mind! The archeologists now have come up with what they think the city looked like and it is just beyond anything your mind could comprehend. And so in a way, in human terms, he had something to be proud of I guess. And so when he talks about his kingdom that just puffs him up.

But there was a difficulty to his dream. An angelic watcher had entered in and we pick this up in verse 23. Daniel is going to explain this: "And in that the king saw an angelic watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it.'" Now the tree is his kingdom and all that he's done. Chop it down and destroy it. "Yet leave the stump." In other words, don't completely annihilate it. Leave the stump and leave it alive with its roots in the ground, "but with a band of iron and bronze around it [in other words, with a fence around it to protect it] in the new grass of the field." Now this is the part that really bothered Nebuchadnezzar, when the personal pronoun there became evident in verse 23. It says not "let it," but "'let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him. This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: that you be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time [seven years] will pass over you [now watch this] until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes. And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules."

Now it's very clear why Nebuchadnezzar is going to have to go through what he's going to go through. He's such a proud king he will not bow down and recognize that it is God who rules, it is God who gave him his kingdom: he will not do that. And in verse 17 of this same chapter, verse 25 and in verse 26, very clearly it states he's a proud man, and since he won't humble himself, then God is left no alternative but to humble him. This is what brings us up to what we want to talk about today. And again, let me say it: I don't know about you, but I'm making my choices. I would rather humble myself than have God to humble me.

Can I ask you a question? How many of you at times in your life have gone through a real arrogant, proud time and God had to bring you down? And you know, one thing to remember is it can come back on us over and over and over again. Beware of pride! We're going to see three things about Nebuchadnezzar that maybe can teach us a lesson and help us in our walk with the Lord.

Nebuchadnezzar refused to acknowledge God in his achievements

First of all is this: Nebuchadnezzar refused to acknowledge God in his achievements. Now this is interesting. Again, verses 17, 25, and 26; he thought he had done something. I started to bring a book this morning that was four pages long though and I felt like that was just too much to read, about the city of Babylon. I mean, it just blows you away: the hanging gardens, I mean it was one of the most incredible places ever on the face of this earth. And you can imagine this guy sitting up there at ease; remember back in the earlier part of this chapter, and looking down over his kingdom thinking, "Man, I'm not bad! I have really succeeded in life. Man, I have really done something."

You know, the middle letter in the word "pride" tells you the whole story: I have really done something; I have really accomplished something in my life. You know, it's one thing for a pagan king to be proud. I think we can understand that. Although he doesn't have much of an excuse, because he'd already seen the sovereign power of God in his life. We can understand him a little better than we can God's people to begin with. For instance, the nation Israel. I thought about this as I was studying. Look in Deuteronomy 8. And there's the most incredible thing here of the warning that God gives to the Israelites going into the land of Canaan, and to me it's so appropriate to look at this because we tend to blame Nebuchadnezzar as a pagan king for being proud, but, folks, we deal with it every day in our life. And certainly God's people have been warned.

Deuteronomy 8:11. Now watch; He warned the people of Israel through Moses, to beware when they go over into Canaan. He says in verse 11, "Beware lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today." Now, there are two marks of a person who becomes proud. We're going to see this in a minute. Those two marks are these that are in verse 11. First of all is the fact that the Word of God has no place in his life. Now you may come to church on Sunday morning and Wednesday nights and that's fine. I'm glad you do and I'm certainly glad that you respect the Word and you want to hear it. But what we're looking at here is that we must remember that to a person that is filled with pride, he'll hear the Word, but he's not obeying the Word. In other words, that's what He's saying right here: you stop obeying the commandments that you know to obey. When obedience disappears in your life or my life, when I begin to say, "God, don't call me, I'll call you," look out, pride has entered into my life.

I can be walking with the Lord Jesus Christ and all of a sudden a measure of success comes into my life: look out! If I move away from the Word of God, whether it's in the preaching business or whatever I'm doing, if I move away from my personal obedience to the Word of God, immediately pride has set in. I'm calling the shots: "God, I don't need you right now. I'll call you when the kids get sick, I'll call you when the finances are down, but right now I can do it myself." That's the height of pride. And Moses warned those people. "Don't you go over into the land now, and you forget the commandments of God. Don't you go over there and forget the Lord your God. And he even tells them how pride comes about.

Notice first of all is the material prosperity. Notice this in verse 12, "Lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied," when you have plenty to eat. Isn't it amazing when you're of poor means or poor circumstances many times, that's when you really depend upon the Lord Jesus Christ. I can remember praying for food when I was first married and God would provide that food. We'd walk out to the car and there would be a sack of groceries in the car. And how every day you're always depending on the Lord. You're coming to the Word; you're walking in that wonderful fresh presence of God. But what happens? All of a sudden you get a little more prosperous. All of a sudden you have a refrigerator full of food and you have plenty to eat, and all of a sudden you stop being grateful and stop being thankful to God and you begin to pull off center.

Not only that, it says, "When you have built good houses and lived in them." I can remember back in the days, our first parsonage we lived in: 900 square feet. I could stand in the middle of it and reach the kids from any room. It was wonderful. We had a little fireplace there and a carpet on the floor and we thought we'd just died and gone to heaven. Then all of a sudden you move away from that and all of a sudden you've got a bigger house and a nicer neighborhood and all of a sudden, "Hey! Look what I'm doing! Look what I'm doing! My salary's increased, I'm accomplishing something." Look out, beware! Beware!

It goes on to say, "and when your herds and your flocks multiply." In other words, when your possessions get more and more abundant. Not only now do you have one car, but you have two cars and you have a boat and you have other things, look out! Look out! Look out! Because it's in those kinds of times that pride moves in evidently upon the people of God. When they were back here in the wilderness and they didn't have anything and they depended on God and it was a beautiful relationship of oneness in their walk. But when they get over into the abundant area, the land of abundance, they all of a sudden start thinking, "Look what I have done," and they forget their God.

Well, it goes on, and verses 14-16 are so sad. He says, "then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for

you in the end.” Oh, isn’t it the saddest thought to realize that what Moses warned Israel about, they did exactly what he told them not to do.

They got over into Canaan and just felt like, “Look what we’re doing; look what we’ve got.” And they forgot God and that’s when pride moves in. All of a sudden you think you’ve gotten to where you are in life. All of a sudden you think you have something to do with all the possessions that you have. Verse 17 says, “Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’” I wonder how many of us have patted ourselves on the back at the same time that we’re praying. Have you ever done that? “Oh Lord, thank You so much for blessing me like You have.” And what you’re really saying is, “Lord, I know You’re so glad for me to be on Your team. I’m so glad, Lord, to know that You’re blessed because I have such expertise in the financial area. But, Lord, thank You for those little things that You have done.” And that’s the attitude of the heart.

Folks, listen, if you’re rich—and all of us are, if you’ve never been behind the iron curtain you don’t know what rich is; every one of us is—listen, if you’ve not gotten down on your knees and said, “God, I deserve not one single thing that I have. Thank You God, from the bottom of my heart for what You have given to me.” Then friend, the pride that we’re talking about in Daniel 4 has already moved into your life.

We’re dust! Who do we think we are? And yet, when we get these things, we think we’ve done it ourselves. “Oh, I live out in this subdivision” or “I live in that subdivision.” Boy, what a message for people. Upper middle class, look at us! Look what we’ve done! That’s exactly what Nebuchadnezzar did.

Nebuchadnezzar would not bow. He did it, it’s him, it’s not God in his life. He actually thought that he had the ability to make that wealth apart from God’s sovereign intervention in his life. Incredible! Verse 18 says, “But you shall remember the Lord your God,” now watch this, “for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth.” Can’t we understand this? Verse 19 shows the consequence if they ever forget Him. “And it shall come about if you ever forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish.”

Now we know the context of that is Israel and under the covenant and as they go into Canaan, but the principle can be applied in our own life. The moment that I start thinking that I’ve done something... You know, one of the things that, it’s just come to my heart, and many people have said why don’t you praise more people in the pulpit? Why don’t you mention this person or that person and everybody who contributes to do all these things? That’s something I’ve got a conviction against in my heart, folks. We’re not here to praise men; we are here to praise God. And when you do what you do, if you do it as unto the Lord, it is God in you that needs to be praised for He’s the One who gets the glory.

I’ve had people ask me, “How in the world, Wayne, could you pastor a church of 130 some people and see it grow to the size that it is now?” I don’t know, folks; we’re just going to have to thank God for doing those things. We haven’t done this: this church is not run on its own. God’s behind this church. We must understand that. And He’s not going to be conformed into our image. He wants us to be conformed into His. I honestly believe that what we try to do so often is come together and pride ourselves on what we’ve done. No, no! If we’d get on our face and say, “Oh God, we deserve nothing. Thank You for what You have done,” it would turn the whole tide of events and people would start giving honor and praise to the One who deserves it.

Nebuchadnezzar was a proud man. “Look at me, look at what I drive, look at the neighborhood I live in, look at my kingdom. I’ve done it.” And God says, “Whoa, buddy, you just messed up. Since you won’t humble yourself, I’m forced to humble you.” And that’s the sad part of Nebuchadnezzar’s life.

Nebuchadnezzar refused to heed Daniel’s warning

Well, let’s go on: the second thing. Not only has he refused to acknowledge God and His achievements, but secondly, he refused to heed Daniel’s warning that Daniel gave to him in verse 27.

Daniel said, “Repent, repent! Repent! Change your whole lifestyle and God may have favor on your life.” But watch what he does. Look at Daniel 4:27: “Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you [now watch], break away now from your sins by doing righteousness, and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.” Now do you understand the biblical meaning of prosperity? It’s not what we think. Prosperity biblically, whether we have that definition or not, biblically it means to have enough for yourself and have enough left over for somebody else who is in need. That’s prosperity. And the only reason God would prolong his prosperity is if he started doing righteously and he even qualifies what doing righteously is. What is it? Having mercy upon the who? Upon the poor.

Now, what does that tell you about what Nebuchadnezzar is doing? He’s hoarding everything for himself. It’s his kingdom, it’s his money, it’s one thing not to acknowledge God in your achievements, it’s another thing to hoard up your own wealth and to think that it is yours to do with as you please. He says, “No, if you’ll do righteously, if you’ll repent and turn around and realize the only reason you’re prosperous is to help those who are in need, then maybe God will prolong your prosperity.” Over and over again he’s warned,

but he will not heed the warnings. So therefore God has to break in. Since he won't humble himself, God will break him.

You know, folks, those of us who may be here that have enough—and I say “those of us,” I can't balance my checkbook—but those who have enough to actually invest it and to have money invested, and do you realize folks that if God told you to do it, do it! Don't ever ask me about it because I know nothing about finances. But I'll tell you what: God could humble you so fast it would make your head swim. As a matter of fact, about a year or so ago the stock market bottomed out, didn't it? And I tell you what, within about 30 minutes a lot of people were humbled like you would not believe. And I've heard it over the years; Manley Beasley said it years ago. He said, “God's going to bring Americans to their knees over the financial situation.” He's going to drop the bottom out of us and that's when we're going to find out really who is in control. That's all God would have to do. You know, God doesn't sneeze, but He could sneeze and we'd all be on our knees before Him. All He'd have to do is just click His fingers and the financial market of America would just completely bottom out. And one of these days as I understand it, there's going to be a one-world currency. I understand that. I understand that when that comes, it won't be the dollar. And if it's not the dollar, what's that going to do to the dollar and what's going to happen to people in America who have thought, “I have made my wealth. I have stored up my barn?” Well, it doesn't take long for God to just bring it all down, just that fast.

I remember a man who was in a church that I pastored, a precious man. I don't believe he knew the Lord Jesus because of his lifestyle. Nothing backed up the fact that he did, but I liked him. Have you ever met somebody like that? They're lost, but you just can't help but like them. There was just something about them. They're just funny or whatever it is about them. I just liked him, and he liked me. And he loved to hear the Word. He just wouldn't respond to it; he was too proud.

Why he had a nice home with a swimming pool behind it, it sat up on top of a hill. He had all kinds of businesses all over the particular state that we lived in and everything he touched turned to gold. And all of a sudden he began to put himself up on that throne. “Look what I have done.” His wife loved the Lord, loved the Word and tried to get to him. His friends tried to get to him. He'd come to church, sit there and smile at you during the service, not one word entering his life. “Nah, preacher, what do you know? You're poor. You live in a parsonage. Look at me, buddy. I've got the money. I can do what I want to do.”

I wish I could take you to his house today, after God brought that man down. Friend he is a shell of a man. He has nothing tangible, material in this world today. Bankrupt and God brought him down, but for the first time now he's humble enough that he wants to submit, he wants to hear God's Word now. God has him down so he can start looking up. You may be here and you're proud. People ride by your house and it's the most manicured yard in the subdivision. Man, you've got the biggest cars sitting there. You're proud of that. God says, “Man, listen, if you don't humble yourself, I'm left no alternative. I will bring you down!” That's what He's teaching us in His Word.

I love to fly first class and do so quite often when they'll let me do it. I always request it. I just hate to have to relearn to walk after I fly in the tourist section. Talk about discrimination, folks. Nothing is built for people over 6'5", and I can't even sit in the seats. The people can't lean back and I can't move. My usual request is “Is it okay if I fly first class?” And it's been such an experience. It's amazing! I'm going to write a book someday of what I've experienced in the first class section. It's incredible. They find out I'm a preacher and I have literally seen this: they break into a rash and they don't know what to say. I'm just a dumb little preacher sitting up in first class. “What are you doing up here with us?” I love it! I love it! “The Lord put me up here!”

I flew back yesterday. It was a beautiful day to fly, little bumpy. Got into Atlanta and got on the plane to come to Chattanooga. I was so tired, but I watched this guy get on the plane right behind me; sat down beside me. I read his title from A to Z before he ever sat down. You could tell, son, he was somebody. He was somebody. He had a ring on his finger that could have bought my house with. I'm telling you, he's dressed. He came into that thing and I could tell—it's one thing to see people well-dressed. I don't care what people have and God doesn't care what people have. But you can tell the people that are flaunting it. You don't have to discuss the matter: it's very clear.

He was sitting there and you could tell he was in charge of a big business. I'm thinking, “This guy travels.” I figured him; I just sit there and read his whole title. The first thing he wanted was a glass of tomato juice and two bottles of vodka. Now he didn't want to drink the vodka, he was going to put them in his pocket because it's free in first class. So they always make money off of me flying in first class. I was born that way, so I don't need it.

Anyway we took off. I was so tired I just laid back and shut my eyes and didn't think about much until the flaps dropped coming in to Chattanooga. I was just really tired. But I noticed it was bumpy all the way; I did pick that up. And I noticed that the seat belt light was on and the pilot did come on and say, “We're looking to experience some turbulence even though it's clear. It's pretty windy.” And he said, “We'll have to leave this light on.” Well, we landed in Chattanooga and then my thoughts were confirmed. Now, you think I'm just being judgmental. No, I'm not. They were confirmed. We were pulling up to the little satellite area at the airport out here and I heard the guy call one of the stewardesses. Sweet little lady and he called her back and said, “I'm just very disappointed with Delta on this flight.” And I'm thinking, “How could you be disappointed? You're alive, we didn't go down.”

And she said, "I'm sorry, I don't understand what you mean." He said, "I got on this plane and the reason I fly first class is because you give free drinks and all I got was two vodkas." And I'm thinking, "Come on, now. That's not the reason you fly first class. You could buy the plane. You don't need them to give you that." Just had a gripe. And he said, "You didn't have one bit of cabin service this whole time and I want you to know, young lady, I'm going to let Delta know about this." Made me so mad. I wanted to stand up and say, "What?"

And that little lady, she couldn't do anything. She said, "Well, sir, didn't you understand that the light was on and we're not allowed to do anything when they leave the seat belt sign on. We have to sit in our seats." "Well, I'm going to let Delta know about it." You see where he's coming from? "I'm somebody! I'm going to call Delta, because they know who I am and I'm going to tell them what I think about life."

You see, a man like that submits to nobody, respects nobody, he's so proud. It's his money, it's his life, and he can just lord it over anybody he wants to. I want to tell you something, friend. God may never humble him on this earth, but there's going to come a day. My prayer is that God would humble him before that day comes. Because his knee is going to bow and his tongue is going to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He never had a dime on this earth that God, a sovereign God, did not give him the ability to make that and by his misuse of it, he will stand before a holy God one day and he'll answer to it. That's what we're learning.

Folks, I tell you what. This thing of pride is something we just slough off. You better be careful. I tell you, I tremble as I preach this message. "Oh, Lord, where is it in my life? I don't want to be humbled."

Well, what happens finally? Since he wouldn't repent, since he wouldn't listen to God, watch verses 31-33. Let's go back to verse 28 to show that he didn't repent. "All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. Twelve months later [one year later], he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon." And I wonder what he was doing. Was he humble? Not on your life. "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great [now watch this] which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'" Good night!

This guy is hard-headed. This is a year after he's been warned, he's had the dream and he still has not repented. And look at verse 31, "While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you.'" And now what God said would happen is taking place in his life, "and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field." As a matter of fact, they say that the disease he had is still around today and he could be conscious of his surrounding, but he had the appetites and the lifestyle of an animal and his main diet for seven years was grass.

Oh, Lord, I don't want to eat grass. That just always bothered me. I'm serious. "You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time [seven years] will pass over you [now watch] until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes. Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers [real long], and his nails were like birds' claws [Big old fingernails]. But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven." Bless his heart, now he's not looking down on anybody. Now he's looking up. Now the pride is gone; God has humbled the man for seven years.

Someone was telling me that his younger brother, when he was four years old, was praying at the table one day and he'd just heard the story of Nebuchadnezzar being an animal for seven years. And he said, "Oh, Lord [four years old], please don't make me be like an animal and eat grass for seven years. Oh, Lord, I want to be humble in Your sight." I laughed when I heard that, but I was thinking a four-year-old probably has more sense about this story than the rest of us. I don't want to eat dirt and grass for seven years.

And, you know, God will stop at nothing to get us to look up, folks. We're going to look down on everybody, well, look out. God's going to say, "You're going to look up." And he said, "my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?' At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom [just like the dream had told him] and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me."

And verse 37 caps it all off. "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways [look what it says] just." You'd think he would say unjust. "What kind of God would make me eat grass for seven years? No, He's just, because now he sees why he had to do that. "And He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Well, that just teaches itself, doesn't it? What do you add to that? How are you doing? Let me ask you a question. Have you come to

the point in your life where the Word of God is not important to you anymore? You just don't have time to get in it; don't have time to apply it to your life. Now, I don't mean for study; that's information. Forget that; knowledge puffs up. I'm talking about for living, applying it for living. Are you doing that every day? Men, in your business world, are you conforming your business practices to what the Word of God says? "Oh, Brother Wayne, you don't understand. Not in the business world; you can't do that." Is that right? I don't know, I can't find anything else to use. Do you realize that when we begin to cross the grain we have become so proud as to think we have a better way, that God doesn't know what He's doing? And all of a sudden we start forgetting God, just leaving Him out. Just don't have time for Him, just too busy. "Well, Brother Wayne, you're a pastor and all you do is work two days a week. You've got time to study." Well, you have to talk to God about that. I didn't put myself in the ministry, He did.

Problem is, He's told us all the same thing. We're all to be in this Book. The man that's not in the Book is a proud man, proud man. And look out; he's ready for a fall. Pride goeth before a fall. I pray that God will keep us where we ought to be. I'd rather say that we would humble ourselves, wouldn't you? I'd rather humble ourselves. But I've got a sneaking suspicion that if we don't, buddy, God's going to humble us. I stand here sometimes in this congregation and I look at it and get a funny feeling in my stomach, tears well up in my eyes because I remember the day that we didn't have enough people to fill up half the balcony. I remember that day. I don't know where we're going. The only fear I have is that if we ever start thinking we're better than anybody or that we've done it ourselves. We're dead in the water if we ever feel that way, folks. You got a Sunday School class that's growing? You better get on your face before God and say, "God, what is man that You are mindful of me. Thank You for whatever You do with my Sunday School class." You've got a group that's happening? Get on your face before the Lord. That's it. If we ever step aside and start thinking we've done anything, God's forced to have to humble us, and I'd rather humble myself.

I've eaten some grass in my life. You? Anybody else eaten grass in your life? Buddy, I have, too. I don't want to eat any more. Young people, you think this is funny? I hope not. I always say that, but it's never like I really think they do. I say that to get to what I'm going to say. I want you to take it seriously. Take it seriously. "Oh, Brother Wayne, I'm a senior in high school this year. I've got the world by the tail." No, you don't. As a matter of fact, it's amazing what happens to the pride of a senior and the humility of a freshman in college. Amazing what three months does.

"Brother Wayne, I'm pretty good in sports and I've got a career ahead of me." No, you don't, not unless you're thanking God every second of your life that He gives you breathe and gives you that ability. He'll take it from you so fast it'll make your head swim. God's in control. Let's praise Him for it.

Daniel 5:1-31 The Dead End Street Called Pride – Part 3

Turn to Daniel 5. Quite different than going through the New Testament, isn't it? We can move right along. A lot of narrative; and it's just beautiful how the Lord brings us through the book of Daniel. Daniel 5, this is part 3 of a message we began two times ago entitled "The Dead End Street Called Pride." You know, as we said before, some people just never learn. As far as I can tell, there are only four people in the whole book of Daniel, if you don't count Nebuchadnezzar, that have humbled themselves before the Lord. I guess you couldn't really count him because he was humbled. And that is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, giving their Babylonian names, and Daniel. Now these pagan kings are having some hard times, they just won't bow and they're getting some hard knocks as a result of it.

I don't know if you've heard the story or not, but I love to tell it about the two moose hunters, trying to emphasize the point of how some people never learn, and they took a trip up to Alaska to hunt moose. And the guy who flew them in, it was a perfect spot, a little cabin sitting on a lake and it was just wonderful. And he said, "Now guys, I'm going to leave you here for about three weeks. Now under the laws of this state, you can each kill a moose, but I want you to know something. If you kill two, if each of you kills one, you're going to have to eat one of them because we can only carry one out. This is a pontoon plane and the weight of those moose, I can't carry but one." Alright, alright! So he lands on this little lake, I mean, just a perfect place, no telephone, nobody can get to you, anything moves you can shoot it. I mean just a wonderful heaven for three weeks.

And he leaves them. Well, in three weeks time he comes back. And he's circling the lake to land and he looks down on the dock. Oh, no, what he sees is two moose lying there. And he's thinking, "Oh, man, I told them they could only bring out one." So he lands the plane on the lake, pulls up to the dock and he says, "Look, didn't you guys understand? I told you we can only take one moose out of here." One of the guys spoke up and said, "Oh, come on! I was here last year and the guy told me the same thing. He had the same spiel. You guys, you don't change a thing. You're like a broken record." He said, "Look, I talked him into it, come on, man, let us take these two out. Time to go, come on!"

Well, the other guy chimed in and sure enough they put two moose on those two pontoons. They took that plane up to the other end of the lake, cranked it up, and boy, it was a hard task just getting it off the water. Well, there were some woods at the end of the

water and it was sort of a mountainous area there and they had to pull it up over those trees and he was trying everything he had to pull that plane up over the trees, but it just wouldn't make it. Crashed into the trees.

Miraculously they're all alive, lying around on the ground. One of the hunters looked at the other and said, "Oh, no, wonder where we are?" The other hunter said, "You know, I think we're about two hundred yards from where we crashed last year!"

Well, some people just never learn.

Nebuchadnezzar, we thought, had learned a lesson. I believe he did, but now we're going to move on. In chapter 5, verse 1, we see another man; his name is Belshazzar. Now, let me explain something to you. Between 4:37 and 5:1 a lot of time has gone by; quite a bit of time. As a matter of fact, in this particular chapter Daniel is about 80 years old. Remember, in chapter 1 he was 15, so we're just seeing time fly by and you must understand that as you study the book of Daniel.

Now it says in verse 1, "Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem." Now, be real careful here; this was when a secular historian would stand up and say, "Ah ha! There's a mistake in the Word of God. Because history tells us that Belshazzar was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar. Now, how do you handle stuff like that?"

Well, first of all the word there, "father," can easily be translated into a number of ways. It can be translated "grandfather," "great-grandfather," it can be translated "father-in-law." It would not hurt the text whatsoever and the word definitely was used in those ways.

Let me give you a clue of what's gone on before Belshazzar came to the throne. Nebuchadnezzar's son was a man by the name of Evil-Merodach. Now, how would you like to have a name like that? Evil-Merodach. He was the one who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar. He only had a short term; he was murdered by his brother-in-law who did not live too long. His name was Nergal-sharezer. How would you like to have a name like that? It even gets better. He was succeeded by his son, Labashi-Marduc. That's some interesting names here. He didn't last very long, because he was murdered by a man, and this is the key one, by the name of Nabonidus. Now you say that doesn't mean anything to you. Well, it should, because up until just a few years ago secular history said this man, Nabonidus, was the one who was on the throne when Medo-Persia came in and took over Babylon. So what they were saying was that since he was on the throne at that time there could not have possibly have been a man by the name of Belshazzar; this was all dreamed up, somebody who just didn't know put this man's name in there.

But it's incredible what they have discovered. In recent years now that theory has been blown out of the water. They have now discovered that the son of Nabonidus is the man by the name of Belshazzar, either the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar or his great-grandson, we're not really sure, I'm not really sure, somehow kin. The word does not hurt the text whatsoever. He's the one who also ruled with him. There was a co-rule. Isn't that incredible? And look at verse 7 of chapter 5 and you can understand it. "When the king called aloud and brought in all the magicians he said, 'Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me will be clothed with purple, and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as the [second ruler of the kingdom? No, the what?] the third ruler of the kingdom.'" In other words, that was the highest position he could offer. Why would it be the third ruler? Because there were two rulers. And history has already now proven to us that this Nabonidus, the father of Belshazzar, had a retirement home. He didn't even exist in Babylon for one period of time of 12 years. So it was Belshazzar his son who actually carried out all the affairs in the area of Babylon.

You say, "I wasn't even going to question it; why don't you go on into the story?" Well, I know that, but some people just do, and I just love it when the Word of God blows them out of the water, and I give it all the credit for doing that.

Well, Belshazzar, whoever he was—if he was the son-in-law, the great-grandson, or whoever—he ought to have paid attention to what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Shouldn't he have paid attention? He ought to at least have heard from somebody what was going on. We believe later on that Nebuchadnezzar's wife was still living: the queen mother at that time. He ought to have heard the stories. He should have learned his lesson, but like we said, some people just never learn. You either humble yourself or God will humble you. That's just it: that's the word of God. We've got a choice to make.

A proud man has no fear of God

Well, three more things about pride that I'd like for us to look at in Belshazzar's life that perhaps will help us in our Christian walk. First of all is this: a proud man, like we're going to see in Belshazzar, has no fear of God. You can write that one down. A proud man has no fear of God. No respect for Him whatsoever, no fear of the holiness of God. A person who says, "I don't need the Bible in my life, I'm doing fine," that is a very ignorant person or stupid, one, because he has no fear of God in his life.

Now we've already read verses 1-2, but let's go back and pick it up in context. "Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring

the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem.” Now those vessels, as we saw way back in chapter 1, were the sacred vessels that were set apart for worshipping God in the temple; those golden and silver vessels. Nebuchadnezzar had brought them over and put them into his pagan temple there, the gods of his pagan temple. He said he did this “in order that the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone.”

Now what an incredible situation we have here, and we can just see how he’s defying anything to do with a holy God. Takes those vessels that were set apart

for worship over in the temple there in Jerusalem and he puts wine into them and they all have a drunken orgy. And even more than that, in their drunkenness they begin to praise the gods of gold, of silver, of bronze, of iron, of wood, and of stone. You know, I had a thought as I was studying that: it just grieves my heart that these folks would do that and yet at the same time I can see the pride that’s just as rotten today as it was back then. But the thought that came into my mind was that a proud person only worships that which he can understand and that which he can control.

Notice these were manmade gods; these were idols that man had come up with. The gold, the silver, the bronze and the wood: a proud man would never worship our God because he knows that he has to be controlled by our God. He only would allow himself to worship that which he is in control of. So a proud man has no fear of God whatsoever: pride has robbed him of his fear.

Will you look with me in Proverbs 29:1. Nebuchadnezzar and all of his crowd there took that which was sacred and made a mockery out of it; took that which was sacred and made a mockery out of it. Proverbs 29:1, “A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be [What?] broken beyond remedy.” It is good for us to remember, folks, that the vessels of that temple are no longer present because we now are the temple of God. God lives within us. I couldn’t help but think of Paul talking about in Romans of yielding your life to Him, yielding all that you are back to Him. And a person who would allow the place where the Holy Spirit dwells in our life, to make a mockery of all that God has done, is a person who is very proud: he’s a fool, folks, and he doesn’t realize that God is going to humble that individual. We have to remember that we are to keep sacred that which God has declared sacred; and a holy man, a godly man, will always give reverence back to that which God has given to him.

God will put fear into the proud man

So we find that he has no fear of God whatsoever. But the second thing that I want you to see is this: not only does a proud man not have any fear of God, but the second thing, and the real good part of this, is that God will put fear into the proud man. Proud man doesn’t have a fear of God, but you’re going to see that since he won’t humble himself, God is going to put fear into the proud man. That’s an incredible thing. Hebrews says it’s a fearsome thing to be in the hands of a living God. Do you ever feel like I feel, that in the 20th century we’ve lost a little bit of the sense of the fear of the holy God? It seems like we play around with the manmade idols of this world and we treat as unholy the things that God has called holy and we think that God’s not going to bother us. Why, He’ll give us another chance; it’s always a second chance or whatever. We seem like we just push Him and push Him and push Him. And what I’m learning from Daniel, and what’s helping me in my life, is bringing me back to dead center. To bring back the fear of a holy God: not the kind of fear that runs away from Him, but the kind of fear that understands that He’s a God of judgment and He’s a God that’s going to deal with unholy things in our lives.

So, not only does a proud man have no fear of God, but God will put fear into a proud man. This is the story as it unfolds beginning in verse 5. In the midst of this drunken feast, as they took the vessels out of the temple and they were drinking out of them, in the midst of all this look what happens. Verse 5, “Suddenly the fingers of a man’s hand emerged,” and that word “emerged” means just appeared on the wall. All of a sudden there were some fingers, and it doesn’t really even give us the idea that it was a hand. It was just some fingers there on the wall, “and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace.” Now that plaster would have been something like a dull white, a chalky white, or a lime color. What they have dug up would give us that idea. So, in other words, it would be enough of a light background that anything that was written on it everybody could see. But not just everybody, the king could see it. And all of a sudden, folks, we find him sober. But it’s too late, old buddy. He’s pushed God too far. Right in the midst of their party God crashes it and ghostly fingers appear on the wall and begin writing a message. Now, this terrifies the king. Well, now, wait a minute. A few moments ago it didn’t matter to him if he took the sacred vessels right out of the temple and had a drunken party with them and made mockery of a holy God. But all of a sudden God moves in and God crashes the party and now he’s dead sober and now there’s fear all over him. “Oh, no, what are we going to do?”

You see, this is exactly the way God works in people’s lives. You push Him and you push Him and you act as if He’s not who He is, friend, you can only push Him so far. And then God is going to make His move. You may not have a fear of the Holy God now, but you can write one thing down: there will come a day when God is going to put fear in you as to who He is.

Well, verse 6, “Then the king’s face grew pale, and his thoughts alarmed him; and his hip joints went slack.” What it’s talking about,

and it sounds kind of funny when you say it, but it's in the hip there that you stand up. If you didn't have a good strong hip you'd fall down. Anybody that's had a replacement in their hip knows that. And so the hip joint just goes slack and "his knees began knocking together." Buddy, this old boy is worried. Dead sober now! Oh, he was playing his games for a little while; God has his attention and now terror has struck his heart.

Look at verse 7, "The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, 'Any man who can read this inscription [that the fingers had written on the wall] and explain its interpretation to me will be clothed with purple, and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom.'" Man, he's frantic right now. "I've got to know: what is this message on the wall." He knows it's not going to be good, but he can't stand it until he finds out. Terror is in his heart.

Have you ever watched somebody that made a mockery out of God and God moved in their life and it brought them to where they were so weak they couldn't stand up? That's the kind of God that we have. We see Him on one side; we forget He's also a God of judgment. Verse 8, "Then all the king's wise men came in," and here's the failure again: human reasoning and understanding couldn't do it, "but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king."

Watch how progressive this whole thing is. He starts off and he's struck with some terror, but now he's absolutely frantic. He's about to lose his mind. Verse 9, "Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed."

Now at this particular point we're going to see Daniel come in on the scene. It says in verse 10, "The queen entered the banquet hall." Now, we don't know who the queen is for sure, but we know that he had his wives over in verse 2 already there, because it says that, so very likely this would not be his wife, the queen. More than likely it's the queen mother who was probably the aged widow of Nebuchadnezzar who was still hanging around. She saw the dilemma and I guess a little bell went off in her mind, "I have seen this before." And so she comes in to Belshazzar. It says, "The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, 'O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans, and diviners. This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas, and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned, and he will declare the interpretation.'"

Now we have Daniel, probably in his eighties. After Nebuchadnezzar had died most likely he lost his job as being head of the wise men. He was just now a captive from over in Judah. And so this queen mother remembered what went on over in Nebuchadnezzar's life, so she called for Daniel to come forth. I had a thought that came to my heart. Isn't it amazing that God's people are only necessary when the world's and people's pride has been knocked out from under them? Have you ever noticed that? They don't have any need for us right now, folks. They don't have any need for a preacher or a minister or a Christian or a missionary. Oh, how foolish! Boy, you let that old boy start being humbled by God Himself and you see who is the first one he cries out to.

Now he wants Daniel in front of him, buddy. He knows the guys around him can't interpret this thing so now he wants Daniel to come in. And it's really interesting here: he really tries to flatter Daniel. Now a few verses back, here he is dishonoring the God of Daniel, and now he's trying to flatter him. Look at verse 13, "Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, 'Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight, and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. But I personally have heard about you.'" I don't know why, but something in this, I believe he's just buttering this old boy up: "I got another one: Daniel, you're a good guy now. Haven't had any use for you since I've been in the kingdom but I'm kind of at a loss right now and you're in good check."

"I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom." And I love what Daniel does. Old Daniel reads between the lines. He says, "Buddy, you can't buy me, and what I'm going to say, I'm going to say. I'm going to let it go, I mean both barrels." Look what it says in verse 17, "Then Daniel answered and said before the king, 'Keep your gifts for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him.'"

You know, there are a lot of verses and we're trying to read this verse by verse, but sometimes we get lost in the reading. But I want you to see what's happening here. It's a tragic, terrible thing, because Belshazzar has mocked a holy God; taken the sacred vessels and had an orgy out of it in total defiance to a holy God. God now has put fear in this king's heart. He does not know what to do. His knees are literally shaking. He's so weak he can hardly stand up and they bring a man by the name of Daniel in and he tries to butter him up and flatter him. But Daniel says, "No way, buddy." It's almost like one more dose of what's coming. Daniel said, "No

way; keep your gifts to yourself. But I will read that inscription for you.” Old Daniel, in his eighties, had probably watched how it had gone down, down, down, since Belshazzar had become king, or really since Nebuchadnezzar had died.

Well, the first thing is this: a proud man has no fear of God. Second thing that we learned from this passage of Scripture that may help us in our walk is that God will put fear into the proud man. He’ll bring you to a point that you can’t handle or me to a point that I can’t handle, and He’ll put His fear within me. Buddy, that’s when I’m going to start reaching out, crying out, trying to find somebody to help me understand what’s going on in my life.

Are you proud tonight? I told somebody before the service, “I’m going to get into another book as soon as I possibly get into it. This is killing me.” You know, pride is such a subtle thing and how quickly God can move, how quickly He can put that fear and that uncertainty in a person’s heart. Why? Because He wants that person to bow down and honor Him.

God will judge the proud

Well, the third thing that I want you to see, and it’s just a principle that I picked out and it might help us and encourage us in our walk, and that’s this: you can write it down somewhere and just take it to the bank: God will judge the proud. If you’re here and you say, “Oh, you don’t scare me,” well, I’m not trying to scare you. But I want you to know that God is going to scare you. He’s going to put His fear into your life. He’s going to judge that pride in your life. He doesn’t like it; He hates it, one of the seven things that He hates.

But let’s look at that, verses 18-21; he begins to interpret the dream or the writing. Verse 18 says, “O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory, and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father.” He gives him the story, rehearses what God did with Nebuchadnezzar. “Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations, and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed, and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated, and whomever he wished he humbled. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne, and his glory was taken away from him. He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind, and that He sets over it whomever He wishes.”

And then he says this in verse 22, “Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though [now watch this] you knew all this.” That’s a very key phrase there.

Belshazzar knew what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, but he still would not humble his heart. He says, “but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand.

But the God in whose hand [watch this] are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified.”

Good night! You realize when you get up in the morning and you start thanking God for all your material blessings, get that out of your mind. Thank Him for the fact that you can take a breath in the morning because God gives you the next breath that you take. He’s the One who gives you your life-breath and how ungrateful people are. He says, “Man, you have not glorified the One that gives you the life-breath.”

I had a thought. You know, He gave Nebuchadnezzar several chances, didn’t He? He seems like He dealt with him in chapter 2, He dealt with him again in chapter 3 and dealt with him again in chapter 4. It looks like Belshazzar is getting a rough shake. Did that ever trouble any of us? I mean, after all, why didn’t He give him another chance? Why didn’t He say, “Oh, come on Belshazzar, this is your first time. Now I’m going to give you a dream like I gave Nebuchadnezzar and I’m going to give you another experience. I might even put you out in the pasture for seven years until you finally get right with me.” But He didn’t do that, did He? He moves right into a judgment that is final in Balthazar’s life.

Now I want to make sure that you understand something about the character of God. Remember what Nebuchadnezzar said? Of course, we don’t have to hear it from a pagan king: God’s ways are just, folks. Whatever God does is just. The question should never be, “Why did He give Nebuchadnezzar three chances and Belshazzar only one chance?

That should never be the question. The question should be, “Why did He ever give me the time of day?” That’s the key. We don’t sit in judgment of what God does. But I’ll tell you something that comes out in the Scripture in the next few passages. It is God who holds the scale, folks.

It’s God who holds the scale. What He did in Nebuchadnezzar’s life was because He knows the hearts of all men. He knew something about Nebuchadnezzar that He also knew differently in Belshazzar. And we don’t question what God does. What He does

is right; it may seem like it's not equitable to us, but God's character never needs to be defended. The key is, why does God fool with us? Why does God give the time of day?

We are dirt; we are dust, that's all we are. And yet sometimes we act as if we don't even care that a holy God was the One who gave us our life-breath. I'm telling you, folks, I wonder sometimes why He fools with me. Do you ever wonder about that?

I read about Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar, but I can see things in their lives that have been right there in mine the same way. I love that passage that says, "His mercies are fresh every day." Aren't you glad? Aren't you glad you can come before Him and know He's a merciful, loving God to His children? That's a beautiful thing that we have about Him.

Well, verse 24 says, "Then the hand was sent from Him," Daniel is telling him, "and this inscription was written out." Here is what was written on the wall. "Now this is the inscription that was written out: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN." Now he explains those words. The word "mene" there means "thou has been numbered." The word "tekel" means "to be weighed," and the word "upharsin" is an interesting word; don't let me lose you here. It means to be divided, or division. It's in the plural form.

Now watch, verse 26 begins the explanation. "This is the interpretation of the message: MENE—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it." God, who numbers days and numbers the hairs on your head, has numbered your kingdom and it's over, big boy. It is too late. It's gone. He's numbered it: God has numbered it. Man didn't number it, God numbered it. Secondly, "TEKEL—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient." And then the word "PARES—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

Let me ask you a question: do you ever wonder why he didn't explain the word "upharsin"? Why didn't he bring it up again? Well, he did. Upharsin is the plural word for division, "pares" is the singular word. Same word comes from the very same thing. So it doesn't mean that he didn't explain all the words; that's just a plural and a singular. And what he says is, "Your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and the Persians."

Now, historians tell us that there was a river, that Euphrates River, that somehow flowed up underneath that city. Now, I don't understand all this, but this is what I'm gathering. And evidently it was an underground river. And what they did, they suspect, is that the Medes and Persians, while all this was going on inside, over on the other side of the walls there, they diverted the river and they caused that channel to dry up, and so all their men came in and went underground and were coming down that channel now that the water had been drained out of. And that's the way they moved in on him. And as quickly as God said it, they were there and took over his kingdom. Verse 29, "Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom." But that wasn't going to last long; a few hours maybe. Verse 30, "That same night, Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two."

Now remember back in chapter 2, the statue? The head was Babylon. Then you have the shoulders and the upper torso, which was what? The Medes and the Persians that was prophesied to Nebuchadnezzar. And now you see the second part of the statue coming true. It was prophesied, God said it would happen, now it's taken place. That's a whole chapter and a lot of verses.

But what are we learning about pride? Well, we're learning the fact that a proud man does not fear God. A proud person does not fear God. What do we find out

about a proud person? How do you know when you're a proud person? When you don't have time for the Word of God and you're leaving God out of everything you're doing, very obviously you're displaying the fact that you don't have time for a Holy God. You don't even fear a Holy God. But the second thing we've learned is that God will put fear in those who are called proud men. Don't you worry about it. God has a way of getting our attention, folks. And the third thing we learned is that we can take it to the bank: God will judge our pride.

I'm thankful to be in the Lord Jesus. I'm thankful there's no condemnation to those who are in Him. But I can take that principle and understand the fact that I'm going to pay a consequence when I leave God out of my life. When I say, "God, don't call me, I'll call you," I'm asking for trouble. I'm asking for trouble. And I have no idea what He'll have to do to get to me to get my attention. Hebrews 12 says he chastens and disciplines and even does what? scourges, those whom He loves. Do you know what the word "scourge" means in my personal vocabulary? It beats the hide clean off! He'll bring me right down to the end of my life if necessary to get me back to respecting Him, honoring Him, and humbling myself before Him. A proud man does not fear God; God will put fear in a proud man; and God will judge the proud.

Turn with me if you will tonight to Daniel 6. I want us to look at how to live with pagans and still maintain your witness. I almost want to jump over to Daniel 7, this being Easter Sunday, and all the prophecies that we're going to begin to unravel in that great chapter. As a matter of fact, chapter 7 all the way through the end of Daniel has to do with the prophetic revelation of what is going to happen in the latter days. Be reading that this next week and get excited about it. But we don't want to overlook what takes place in the sixth chapter of Daniel. Daniel 6: How to live among pagans and still maintain your witness.

You know, it's interesting to me as I studied chapter 6 that Daniel only spent one night with the lions and the rest of his time with pagan kings and pagan rulers. I bet if he was here now he would say it was safer with the lions. But, you know, Daniel had what it took: he had a determined mindset, he had a determined love for the Lord and he promised in his heart and determined in his heart that he would not disobey Him.

Look back in chapter 1. Let's remember what he determined in his heart. Daniel 1:8, "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself" before his God. He would honor God, he would not defile himself. Now he was 15 years old when he made this determination in his heart. But in chapter 6 we find that he's up in his eighties and guess what? Nothing has changed. As a matter of fact, he still has that same determination in his heart. As an older man now, he's not wavered to the left; he's not wavered to the right; he's stayed right in the middle of the line there in his determination to honor God. He's finishing the way he started.

You know, we've learned just from the life of Paul as we've studied through 2 Timothy about a life without regrets. And Paul was the same way; he finished like he started. God is much more concerned with how we finish than how we start. Can I say that again? God is much more concerned with how we finish than how we start. Saddest thing in the world is for somebody to tell you, "You know, it used to be that I loved God. It used to be that I walked with God. It used to be that I had a burden for lost souls. It used to be that I had a real hunger for His Word." That's the saddest testimony that a Christian could ever utter.

But you see, God's concern is how you are finishing. Is it as strong now or stronger than it was when you started? That's exactly what we see in the life of Daniel. Daniel's commitment had weathered many kings and we've already studied them in the first five chapters. Now it's about to take on another kingdom, the kingdom of the Medo-Persians as we saw ending or coming in the last part of Daniel 5.

Well, look in 6:1-2. We begin to get the setting. Darius the Mede that 5:31 tells us about, who had now received the kingdom. Remember Darius was the Mede, Cyrus the Persian. They ruled side by side. Cyrus was the one who sent all the Jews back to their homeland. Remember that? It was part of the prophecy of Jeremiah. Well, in verse 1, "It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they should be in charge of the whole kingdom, and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss."

Evidently what Darius is doing is organizing this new territory that he's just taken over. He has 120 governors and he has these three commissioners that are over all of that new territory, and it shouldn't be surprising to us that Daniel is one of those three. Now, in this pagan setting, Daniel being in a high office of government, let's just see the qualities in his life that enable him to be among the pagans and at the same time maintain his witness.

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Daniel had integrity

First of all, he had integrity. I want you to see this: he had integrity. He had such integrity that a pagan government could trust him in a position of great responsibility. Now that's quite a compliment to a believer: he had such integrity that a pagan government could trust him in a position of great responsibility. Verse 3: "Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom."

He had such integrity that the Bible says he was distinguishing himself over his peers. The word "distinguishing" is a participle in the present tense, and it means that he's consistently doing that. He was constantly outdoing his peers. He had such character; he had such integrity. God had His hand all over Daniel. Now don't ever forget that! Don't start patting Daniel on the back. Remember, Daniel had honored God and now God was honoring him. And in everything he endeavored to do, God gave him that integrity, and through that integrity he absolutely overshadowed all of his peers.

It goes on to say “because he possessed an extraordinary spirit.” The word “extraordinary” means above and beyond. Man, there was just something about Daniel that absolutely put all of his peers to shame. Above and beyond. And the word “spirit” there had to do with the way in which he went about what he did. In other words, the work that he did, the labor that he did, how God just gave him what he needed for any task that came up.

You go back to chapter 5:11, he uses that word and it has to do with his abilities as he has approached several things: “There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight,” look at all these things God gave him, “and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans, and diviners.” And then in verse 12, “This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas, and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned.” And in verse 14, “Now I have heard about you,” Belshazzar said to him, “I’ve heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight, and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you.”

Daniel was just filled with the abilities that God was giving to him. And in that he had an extraordinary spirit. Darius was so impressed with him that 6:3 says in the last part, “the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.” Now what a witness that is to be among pagans: for them to know that you honor a God different from the one they honor and yet at the same time to have such integrity, to have such character that they would literally trust you with the highest position of responsibility.

I wonder how many of us here tonight work in situations where a lot of pagan people are around you? By pagan I mean non-believers: they do not honor the Lord Jesus Christ. And I wonder how they see your life? What is your witness like? You know, it’s one thing to tell people about Jesus; it’s one thing to make a stand and verbalize what you think about Jesus. It’s another thing to be so affected by God Himself that you have such character and integrity that even when the people around you don’t agree with you, they respect you to the point they would trust you with any office of responsibility. I would suggest to you that as you go to work tomorrow you remember that. And do the people around you feel like you’re always trying to get something out of them because you deserve it, you’re a Christian? Look out! The kind of integrity that Daniel had was such that a pagan government would put him in a position of high responsibility.

Daniel had character

Well, secondly, not only did he have integrity, secondly, he had character: he had a tremendous character. He had such character that even those who were looking to find fault in him could not find it. Boy, what a compliment! He had such character, the obvious thing when the king put him into a high position, it affected jealousy of the people around him. And immediately they’re going to try and find fault in him and because his character is impeccable, they couldn’t find one single thing to hold up against him. He lived a blameless life in front of them.

Not only integrity with an extraordinary spirit, but he had character. There was absolutely no flaw anywhere that they could find in his behavior. The king had placed him in that high position and now they’re going to be gunning for old Daniel. Let’s look at the scripture there in verse 4, “Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs.” Now they’re trying to find fault, they’re trying to find something. Surely he’s a politician: while he’s smiling at the babies he’s taking away their suckers. Surely he’s a politician; surely there is something wrong in this man’s methods. Surely there’s something in his life that they could find fault with and then they could report him to the king. Perhaps since he’s in his eighties he was inattentive to his duties. Perhaps maybe there was an abuse of power since he had such a high, powerful position. Maybe he had made an attempt to somehow profit monetarily by all that he was doing in the kingdom. Surely there was something wrong.

But look what the Word says, “but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him.” Boy that’s an incredible verse, isn’t it? Trying to find fault with him, they couldn’t find any! The guy absolutely had the kind of character that was impeccable. He had the integrity to where they would trust him in a high level of responsibility; he had the character that when those around him became jealous of his high position they tried to find fault with him and they couldn’t find it.

I think one of the saddest things that’s going on in our country today is the testimony that Christians are giving to a lost world. Everywhere! Everywhere! Even churches. I understand the other day that 34% of pastors in all different denominations nationwide, per year are voting out their pastors and people on their staff. Cruelness and meanness like you’ve never seen before. What kind of testimony is that to a lost world? We find people in jobs, people that are supposed to be Christians cheating on their income taxes, all kinds of things going on. What kind of testimony is that to a pagan world?

Daniel had faithfulness

He had integrity; they’d trust him with the highest position in the land. He had character; they tried to find fault with him but they

couldn't find it. Well, the third thing he had was not only integrity and character, but the third thing was he had faithfulness. He had faithfulness that was so consistent that they could totally predict his behavior. I love this about old Daniel: he's up in his eighties and since he was 15 until the time he was 80 he hadn't changed a bit. He had a certain discipline about his life that was such a consistency that they could predict almost his every move. They could almost set their watch by what he did.

Well, notice in verse 5, "Then these men said, 'We shall not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God.'" Isn't that amazing? His consistency was going to play right into the hands of the people who were trying to set him up: what a compliment. He was so consistently faithful to God that the people could use that against him. If they ever find anything against us folks, let it be in our consistency of devotion to a Holy God. That's what he had in his life.

They knew something about him: they knew he prayed in the morning, he prayed at noon, and he prayed at night. They also knew that he prayed in a window as it faced toward Jerusalem. Every day it was the same thing, and from what I get from the text, it must have been over and over and over and over, a consistent pattern in his life. So finally they used that to set him up to somehow get him out of the way. Verse 6, "Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: 'King Darius, live forever! All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together,'" now notice that they said "all." They lied to start off with because Daniel wasn't in on that, "that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." And in verse 9, "Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction."

Now he's in trouble! They said for 30 days no man could bow down to any god except bow down before the king, and you know, you know, that Daniel's not going to change. You've already seen the consistency in his life. Now what's he going to do? Well, he's up in his eighties by now, he's not going to change one single thing. Look at verse 10, I love it! "Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously."

Now let me be sure that we wipe out a suspicion that some people might have. Some people might have "they told him not to do this and what he's doing is being arrogant, he's being defiant to the whole government system. He's opening up his windows and he's praying in the window so that everybody can see him when he prays." Now, before you make that suspicion about Daniel, let's remember his integrity and let's remember his character. Maybe so, back when he was 15 years old, you might could have pegged him with that. Maybe as a young lad he would be arrogant enough to defy everybody by opening up his windows and praying that way towards Jerusalem. But no, let's look a little deeper than that. You see, as a devout Hebrew man, he was simply obeying what God had already told him to do. He didn't fling the windows open just to be doing it. He'd been doing that for a long time.

Why, first of all, did he pray morning, noon, and night? Well, look in Psalms 55:17. Let's find out why he prayed morning, noon, and night. It's simply the heartbeat of a devout Jew to pray that way: morning, noon, and at night. It says in verse 17, "Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice." Not complain in the sense that we look at complain, but he would bring his request before the Lord and God will hear his voice. That was nothing different. He didn't just decide, "Okay, they've made a law: I'm going to break it. I'm going to get up in my window and I'm going to pray three times a day and I don't care what they say about it. I'm going to do my thing." No, he was just a devout person seeking God and that was his everyday habit. It was as consistent as setting your watch. And just because the king said not to do it, he knew that in his heart he must do what a devout Hebrew would have done.

Well, let's go a second step: why would he open the window? Why didn't he get off in secret? Why didn't he get down? Doesn't God hear in secret? Why did he have to be in the window facing Jerusalem where everybody could see him? Go to 1 Kings 8. And let me tell you what's happening here. They're dedicating the temple and verse 10 kind of gives us a clue, but I want to jump way over to verse 35 from there. Verse 10, "And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord." In other words, God had moved in. God had accepted what they had built and this was a marvelous day as Solomon was dedicating that temple. But look over in verse 35. It says, "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, because they have sinned against Thee, and they pray toward this place [as Solomon cries out to God] and confess Thy name and turn from their sin when Thou dost afflict them, then hear Thou in heaven," and what does it say? When they pray, how? When they pray "toward this place.

It was part of what Solomon prayed to God that the people of Israel, whenever they had sinned and it wouldn't rain, that when they prayed they would turn their face toward the place where God dwelled, and that was in the holy place of the temple. That wasn't any big deal: they prayed that way. Look in verse 38, "whatever prayer or supplication that is made by any man or by all Thy people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house." Look over in verses 44-49, "When

Thy people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way Thou shalt send them, and they pray to the Lord toward the city which Thou hast chosen and the house which I have built for Thy name, then hear in heaven," notice that toward the city, toward the house, "then hear in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. When they sin against Thee (for there is no man who does not sin) and Thou art angry with them and doesn't deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to Thee in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly,' if they return to Thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive," now watch, "and pray to Thee toward their land which Thou hast given to their fathers, the city which Thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for Thy name, then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause."

What I want you to see is that he's not arrogant, simply defying what the king had said. This had been the practice of his life for all these years, from the time when he was 15 and now up into his eighties. He's not going to change a thing. He sought the Lord at night, he sought the Lord in the morning, and he sought the Lord at noon. And he did it the way Solomon told them to do it: he did it with his face toward Jerusalem, and he would always get in that window, not to be seen of men, but so that he could pray toward where the presence of God was, there in the holy place of the temple.

Matter of fact, Jonah 2:4. Here's old Jonah in the fish. He wouldn't get right in the storm, but now he's going to get right in the fish. And he has a little prayer meeting there in the fish and notice what he does in verse 4. He said, "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.'" Well, you say, "Did he do it?" I don't know; I've never been in the belly of a whale. I don't know which way he turned. At least he knew in his heart that he was praying toward the holy place that God had given them.

You know, Daniel was an old man, and let me make sure that we understand this. This is a point in his life he's got nothing to lose. He's not worried about pride. He's not a rebel looking for a cause. He's not on a soapbox. He's just simply going right on doing what he's always been doing. And those men who trapped him with this knew exactly what he would do. He wasn't going to waver to the left or to the right.

In all of this, however, Darius had great respect for Daniel. Now, they may not agree with us, folks, and they may turn against us at times, but they'll have great respect for us when there's consistency in our lives. Look at verse 16. After Darius has to go put him in the lions' den, "Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, 'Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.'" Well bless his heart; he knew exactly what would happen to Daniel. Why? Man, he'd watched this guy. This guy was consistent, he was constant, he had integrity and extraordinary spirit, he knew that God was all over him, and Darius, a pagan king said, "Don't worry, Daniel, your God, everything I've seen about Him, He will deliver you." Incredible! That's the kind of life he lived in a pagan world folks. That's the kind of quality about him.

Verse 18 says, "Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him." Boy, he's so torn up about Daniel; he just sure hoped that God would come through. And in verse 20 it says, "And when he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God [now notice the next phrase] whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?'" All I want you to see is that incredible character that he had.

He had such a consistent faithfulness to God that even his enemies could predict that and use that to set him up. But in spite of all of that God still used that to give a witness to Darius. Darius respected, Darius honored, what was in Daniel's life.

Well, he had integrity, so much so that they could trust him with a high office of responsibility, even though they may not agree with him, and his God was not their God, they had to say he had such integrity. Secondly, he had character: the kind of character that even when his enemies tried to find fault with him he was found blameless. They absolutely could find nothing. Thirdly, he had faithfulness: faithfulness to the point that he was so consistent you could set your watch by it, and that had already struck the heart of Darius.

Daniel had such devotion that he feared God more than the lions

Well, finally, it's a long portion of Scripture, it's the final thing: he had such a devotion to God that he feared God more than he feared the lions. I want to show you something. He feared God more than he feared the lions. Look at verse 11: "Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God." He hadn't changed a thing. "Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king's injunction, 'Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into the lions' den?'" The king answered and said, "The statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." Then they answered and spoke before the king," and this is when the king really wished he hadn't done it, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no

attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day.' Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed," not like Nebuchadnezzar who was angry, "he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel."

That's incredible! The king had made the decree and now the king's wanting to get Daniel off the hook; "and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him." I guess he was trying to revoke that law somehow, that Daniel wouldn't have to be put into the lions' den. "Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, 'Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed.'" Boy, doesn't that make you mad? They just had to come back to remind the king, "King, you can't get this guy off the hook. You made a rule and a law that cannot be revoked."

Verse 16, "Then the king gave orders," and of course we read that verse and he tells Daniel, "Your God will deliver you." Verse 17, "And a stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing might be changed in regard to Daniel. Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting," he didn't get any sleep whatsoever, "and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him."

Then verse 19, "Then the king arose with the dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den." Boy, he couldn't wait to find out. Now what's happened? All night long has gone by. "And when he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out," and then verse 21, "Then Daniel spoke to the king," I imagine that just thrilled his heart. "O, king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me," now watch this, "inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime."

The thing that was so strong on Daniel's heart was that he was found innocent before his God. If he was innocent before his God, there would be no crime that he would be guilty of toward his fellow man. And to me that was the thing that really caused Daniel's deliverance there in the lions' den. The fact that he sought before God, "God, is there anything in my heart that somehow that I have sinned against You or my brother?" And God found him innocent. Because he was found innocent, and innocent towards his brother, he was delivered from the lions.

You know, I wonder how many of us fear God more than we fear what people say to us and think about us. You know, I've had this on my mind all day, and you know me, I'm going to go on and say it and then pay for it later. I've had it on my mind all day. You know, this is Easter Sunday. I don't know if you've been out to the mall during these days, I haven't. But I understand from others that have been that it's quite a madhouse at the mall. Everybody trying to find something that can outdo somebody else on Easter Sunday. "I've got to find this kind of clothes, got to have this kind of shirt, got to wear these kinds of pants, got to have this kind of dress," whatever. And isn't it interesting most of us fear more what man thinks about us than we fear about what God thinks about us? As a matter of fact it dictates the way we dress, it dictates the way we live, and it dictates the way we talk: everything! We want man to be in favor of us.

Friend, I want to tell you something: when you start getting afraid of God, in the right sense, the respectfulness of God, that becomes a paramount issue in your life. It's no longer that you're afraid of men nor are you afraid of lions. You just want to make sure that you are found innocent before God, who is ultimately in control of whatever you're doing.

I remember when I was going through high school—and I know the young people struggle with this—I used to cry because we didn't have very much, and I used to cry because I didn't have the right kind of clothes to wear. And there were many, many days when I didn't go to school because I didn't want to look stupid to all the other kids that were around. Isn't it amazing! If I could have just understood the heart of Daniel back in those days. Oh, if I could go back and live my high school years over again, knowing what Daniel knew at his age and understanding what he thought, just simply worried about one thing: "God, am I being found innocent before You? I don't care what man thinks. God, I care what You think."

Well, it was the obedience of Daniel that freed him from the lions. It will always be the protective thing. Obedience was his protection. Trusting God was his protection. The fact that he was found innocent before God became a protective measure in his life. Verse 22 says, "'My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime.' Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him," and look at the last phrase, "because he had trusted in his God." There was not one mark on him. God shut the mouths of the lions because he was more concerned with what God thought than what man thought, or the lions. God protected him and He shut their mouths.

Well, verse 24 shows you what happened to those guys who were trying to set him up. And this has been a comforting thing to me as a pastor. I'm glad since I've been here that hasn't gone on. But I tell you, I've been in some churches folks, where some people would dig a pit for you in a hurry. They'd set you up to look at you just to get rid of you. "Oh no, Brother Wayne, people don't act that way anymore." I wish I could call a person you know very well by name who was just fired out of his church and if I told you who it was tonight it would just send a chill up through your back. He'd be the last person you ever thought that would ever happen to. And

he was the last person that ever thought it would happen to him: maliciously kicked out of his church.

I want to show you something here. It's a verse that protects us all. Verse 24, "The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children, and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones." I was in Philippians one time and it said don't be afraid of your adversaries. It said when you're that way it's a sign of destruction to them but of salvation toward you. I've never seen it to fail, folks, you ever devise a plan against anybody, doesn't matter who they are, if it's a believer, and you're going to be eaten by the lions that you're going to put around them. You can write that down. It'll put you in the same pit. Listen, God is in control of His people. And the fact that He honored Daniel is because Daniel had honored Him.

Daniel just wanted to make sure that he had that innocent walk before His God, and as a result of that, God protected him. That's always been a comforting thing. I think the first thing that ought to happen in any of our lives when adversity strikes us is this: first thing we ought to ask ourselves is, "God, is there any sin in my life that I'm causing this thing to come upon me?" And once you've dealt with that and God shows you that your heart is cleansed, friend, from that point on stand up, praise Him, because He is in control and whatever He's going to do, He's going to do nothing more than to bring a witness through you to the people that are around you.

First thing that ought to happen every time: God, is there any sin in my life that's causing anything to go on around me? And when God covers us and clears us, then just leave it alone. God will take care of the rest. Look at verses 25-28: "Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language who were living in all the land: 'May your peace abound! I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel;'" Another king! Boy, I'm telling you! "For He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be for ever. He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has also delivered Daniel from the power of this lions.' So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

What are the four things that he had? How do you live among pagans and maintain your witness? With integrity, with character, with faithfulness, and with devotion. And when these characteristics are found in us, don't worry about the lions, folks. Don't look at the lions, look at the Lord, and as long as He's pleased with your life and there's not sin there causing that affliction around you, there's rest. He's up to something: He's going to change the heart of some pagan that's around you. You watch. And as God delivers you it becomes the basis of a witness to others.

Well, you say, "Brother Wayne, you're running through these chapters faster than you've ever done before." I know, because I can't wait to get to chapter 7. I just can't wait! I'm glad we got Daniel out of the lions' den. You just want until next week. I want you to start reading it now. Read it over and over and over again. When you get confused, go on and admit you're confused. And remember what we told you when we started studying Daniel: you're not going to figure this stuff out. God the Holy Spirit is going to have to start doing some revealing at some point in time in our hearts. Don't read into it what it doesn't say! Don't jump ahead of it! Just read chapter 7, folks.

We're going to see something else come up in chapter 7 that we haven't seen yet. In chapter 2 we got the panorama of the statue and the kingdom and how they were going to be crushed by the stone coming out of the mountain not made with hands. But you're going to see something else come up in chapter 7: a little horn that's going to grow up and get bigger than ten other horns. That becomes very significant in latter day prophecy. Who is that little horn?

Well, have fun with chapter 7 this week! And when you come next Sunday I promise you I'll even confuse you greater! This is going to be fun as we begin to look and see how it's all beginning to piece together. Well, as you go out amongst the pagans this week—that's a terrible thing to say! Let me ask you a question just to see if I'm off track. How many of you work with at least three people that you know or suspect do not even know the Lord Jesus or go to school with during the week? Okay! While you're among the pagans, that's what I said, while you're among the pagans remember your witness, keep your integrity, keep your devotion, your character. And you watch: when they try to hang you because they don't like you because of what you believe, don't worry about it! God's in control. The lions they put on you are going to eat them. Just keep on trusting God.