

PLAIN TALK
ON

Ruth and Daniel

By Manford George Gutzke

Ruth

Table of Contents

1. Ruth Becomes Naomi's Daughter-In-Law
2. Ruth Gleaned In The Field Of Boaz
3. Ruth Is Sent To Boaz
4. Ruth Is Sent To Naomi
5. Ruth Becomes The Wife Of Boaz

Daniel

Table of Contents

1. The Meaning of Prophecy
2. Daniel In His Time
3. Daniel As A Student
4. Daniel As An Interpreter Of Dreams
5. The Fiery Furnace
6. The Humbling Of Nebuchadnezzar
7. The Fall Of Belshazzar
8. Daniel In The Lions' Den
9. Daniel's Vision About National Affairs
10. Daniel's Vision About Future Events
11. Daniel's Prayer For Deliverance Of The Jews
12. Daniel Helped To Understand God's Will
13. Some Visions Are Never Understood
14. The Methods Of The Prophets
15. The Message Of The Prophets

RUTH

Chapter 1

Ruth Becomes Naomi's Daughter-In-Law

Do you realize that it is not what a person is inwardly, but what that person is outwardly in relation to others that is important?

The book of Ruth has just four chapters. In the Canon of Scripture it is found in the Old Testament just after the book of Judges and just before I Samuel. As we approach this study we should remember the word of Paul in I Corinthians 10:11 when he wrote: "Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." We turn here with confidence since "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). We can be confident there is something for us to learn in the reading of this book.

The story of Ruth is meaningful to us for several reasons. Ruth was not an Israelite. She was not a descendant from Jacob, from Israel, yet she became one of them with all the rights and privileges of being a member of the group. This is not just a routine observation. Personally, I was not one of God's children, and yet I became one of them, as a child of God.

In the second place what happened to Ruth was not something that she had earned. What I received in Christ Jesus was not something that I had earned. This opens up an entirely new idea. I can receive something that I did not earn. I can have something given to me that I would never be good enough to get by myself.

In the third place it was Ruth's personal loyalty to her mother-in-law that led her into the situation where she was greatly blessed. She did not know about it. As we read this story we will see that in Ruth's relationship to Naomi, Ruth did not have in mind that she was going to become the wife of Boaz. That was not in the picture. All she had in mind was Naomi; and she was personally loyal to her. She followed her loyalty, and it led her into the situation where she was so greatly blessed.

When I apply that to my own experience, I can remember I turned to God because I wanted to escape destruction. That is the nice way to put it. The actual fact is I did not want to go to hell. So I accepted Christ and received blessings I had not known about. I did not know that the plan was that God would come to dwell in my soul. I did not realize that. All I had in mind was that if I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ I would not be destroyed. In the last place although Ruth was not naturally one of the children of Israel, she became the grandmother of David, the greatest king that Israel ever had. Thus she became one of the ancestors of Jesus of Nazareth. When I apply that to myself, I remember that although I was not naturally one of God's own, I became one of His heirs, a joint heir with Jesus Christ. I do not know how to say that in any way that is worthy. I, only a human being, became not only a child of God, but an heir of God, a joint heir with Jesus Christ.

The story of Ruth itself is quite simple. A man of Judah, Elimelech by name, migrated to Moab because of famine. He had two sons who married Moabite girls by the name of Orpah and Ruth. The man died and his two sons died, thus leaving three widows, his widow and the wives of each of the sons, the two Moabite girls.

Naomi, the man's wife, felt that it would be best for her to return to her native land of Judah. She had been living in the land of Moab because of famine in Judah. Now she thought it would be best for her to go back home, and for her two daughters-in-law to return to their home land of Moab. This was practical judgment, a realistic outlook. Despite the strong affection among these three, Naomi bade them depart and sent them away.

Orpah went, but Ruth asked permission to stay with Naomi and go with her. She did this in words that have become classic: a classic expression of personal loyalty, very beautiful.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from the following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me (Ruth 1:16-17).

This wonderful expression of personal loyalty demonstrates the fact that the personal loyalty you may feel in your heart at any time can be stronger than social customs. The social custom would have been that Ruth should go back home to her land of Moab, but in these words Ruth indicated that she was ready to forsake everything and anything that pertained to herself personally, just so that she might be with Naomi, her mother-in-law.

Ruth had no notion what was in store for her. This reminds me about my own personal experience in coming to the Lord. When I became a believer I only had in mind that I would not be sent to hell. It is possible that a more basic, and perhaps a more dynamic, thought that persisted was I would not be left alone.

I was troubled at the time as a young man with loneliness. It dawned on me that I could have a fellowship with my Lord and Savior. He gave Himself for me. While I was not too conscious of what eternity would involve, I was aware of the fact that I was due to be destroyed because of the evil that I had done, and the evil that I had in me. Here was One who offered to save me and bring me into eternal life. This would not be a continuation forever of such a person as I was, but of a new person, a new creation, recreated in Christ Jesus. I would be allowed to live forever that way. I had such things in my mind in a very general way. But primarily it was the loneliness that I had and the fear of the future, that caused me to turn to the Lord. But when I did come to Him and did belong to Him, I received from Him so much more.

I received not only the forgiveness of sins that were past, but one of the most wonderful things I learned was my salvation included the forgiveness of sins of the present, even as I am right at the moment. It is true I am by no means perfect, "there is no man that sinneth not." But I can be conscious of that and not be too terribly upset because Christ Jesus has carried away my sins. When the fact is recognized that I am a sinner, and I would agree with that, immediately I learn that He is the Savior who came to die for the sinners. He gave His Word, His promise, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Many things have followed since. Not only is He my Savior from hell, but He reconciled me to God. I have learned to be conscious of the fact that God wants to have personal fellowship with me in the name of His Son. But beyond that something more is true: He sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in my heart. Even though I was not worthy, even though I was not fit, even though I was not ready, He bestowed upon me all the blessing involved in the presence of God and in the work of God in my soul. All these things were done for me when I turned to Him.

Now let us consider Ruth. She actually became the wife of Boaz, who was a very prominent and important man in Judah. Also it turned out that her grandson was David, the greatest king that Israel ever had. And in the course of history it turned out that one of her descendants was Jesus of Nazareth. This is a most amazing thing and a most remarkable thing. But Ruth had no idea of this when she made the biggest decision of her life. She made that decision because of personal loyalty to Naomi. She responded to an inward personal attitude toward Naomi which led her into this new situation. So it may be with us. You may not be personally worthy and you may not personally have all in mind that is going to happen. But when you accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you will come into things you never dreamed of. They will be wonderful things by the grace of God.

Chapter 2

Ruth Gleaned In The Field Of Boaz

Do you realize that when a believer does the work that he finds in his hands to do, he is actually following in the way of the Lord?

The story of Ruth is a sweet story of how a young woman, whose life seemed to be shattered by the death of her husband, suddenly became the grandmother of Israel's greatest king, David. Thus she was also an ancestor of Jesus of Nazareth. Ruth was a Moabitess. This means that she did not belong to the people of Israel, and so was not counted as one of the chosen people. Her personal loyalty to her mother-in-law caused her to forsake her own people, the people of Moab in her own land, in order that she might cleave to her mother-in-law. At the time Ruth made her choice she had no prospect for the future. She only chose to be with Naomi for the rest of her life.

The story proceeds in a very simple routine fashion. Speaking of Ruth and Naomi we read:

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest (Ruth 1:19-22).

Apparently the appearance of Naomi and Ruth was not only very humble, but apparently very forlorn. Their plight aroused the sympathy of all the city and Naomi interpreted the circumstances as evidence that God had done this to them. It had all been in the providence of God.

And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech (Ruth 2:2-3).

We should notice that Ruth volunteered to work in the harvest field as a gleaner. When they were cutting their grain, in harvesting the ripe grain some of the heads of the grain would fall to the ground. The people who were harvesting the grain in the field would not be stopping to pick it all up. But when they were finished, and would carry away the grain in the sheaves that they had, then others would come following them. These would be poor people who would come and glean. They would pick up the heads that were broken off and had fallen to the ground.

So Ruth came to glean. There is no evidence that Ruth had any specific purpose beyond ordinary work. She would follow the reaper, and would glean by hand the grain that had fallen to the ground. We should note this phrase "her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz." You and I would not use that term ordinarily. We would probably say it just happened. That is the same idea in "her hap." It seems that actually her coming on to this particular field was not her own design, though Boaz had been identified as a "mighty man of wealth."

And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? (Ruth 2:4-5)

Evidently Boaz had noticed that Ruth was a stranger and that she was in there with them.

And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: and she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearst thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens (Ruth 2:6-8).

In other words Boaz opened the way for her to stay right in there with his servants, so that she would not feel too strange.

Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? (Ruth 2:9-10)

All of this was very normal. When Boaz came to greet his laborers he saw Ruth, and at once inquired "Whose damsel is this?" The workers reported how she had requested the privilege of gleaning among them in the customary routine way. Boaz then spoke to Ruth personally and urged her to continue gleaning in his field among his other servants. He assured her of personal protection. He instructed her to share in the provisions which were available for his own servants. He wanted her to just make herself right at home. Ruth humbly realized that this was a gracious treatment because she was, after all, a stranger among them.

And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust (Ruth 2:11-12).

In this way Boaz helped her, telling her that her action in choosing to stay with Naomi, which meant that she would be separated from her own kin folk, was widely recognized. He had heard of it, and felt it was a noble act. Ruth had also separated herself from the culture of her native land. Boaz recognized this and he prayed that the Lord should recompense her work and give her a full reward from the "Lord God of Israel, under whose wings" she had come to trust. Ruth recognized the gracious action of Boaz as conferring a real benefit to her and made mention of the fact immediately that she was a foreigner, and that this was something special. Boaz then went further and arranged that she should eat among his own workers, thus being treated just as one of them.

After conversation between Boaz and Ruth, Boaz gave special instruction that Ruth should be favored. He told his workers "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not." There is no indication while this was going on that Ruth had any idea of what actually followed. Everything was happening in a normal routine way. Ruth apparently was not following any personal design even though matters had drawn Boaz to notice her.

The whole story brings to our mind the amazing fact that the ordinary, everyday routine activity that Ruth was engaged in, was the very procedure she should have followed if she had wanted to come into the circumstances that developed later in her life. But she did not know it. The ways of God are past finding out. We should always keep that in mind. The very thing we are doing, the very task we have in hand, is the very way in which we could be walking in the will of God.

Chapter 3

Ruth Is Sent To Boaz

Can you understand that guidance in the way of the Lord may actually come to a believer through some other person in a very normal fashion?

It seems a common idea that guidance from God must come in some unusual, spectacular fashion. There is no doubt that it can come that way. Paul was struck blind on the road to Damascus when the living Lord Jesus appeared to him. Moses was shown a burning bush that was not consumed: it was an astonishing event. Baalam was confronted by his beast of burden that spoke to him with a man's voice, astonishing. Stephen in a vision saw the living Lord Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. Even Pharaoh was ministered to by a plague. These are unusual events. And such events impress us to feel that there must be something unusual in the communication of guidance from God.

The story of Ruth is so different in that all that happened in the course of her life followed along routine fashion. As we read there is no doubt that God was doing everything necessary to bring Ruth into her mission in life; but we note first there was nothing extraordinary, sensational or miraculous in the whole story. In the second place Ruth was not being affected personally in her own heart by any sense of call or mission. Also Ruth was unaware of the significance of her experience. When she was going along with her mother-in-law, when she afterwards went out to her work that she found, Ruth was unaware of the fact that one day she would be the grandmother of the greatest king that Israel ever had, King David. But it is obvious to the reader of this book that all things work together for good to them that love God and who are the called according to His purpose.

Ruth took her gleaning home to Naomi.

And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed. And her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned today? (Ruth 2:18-19)

This seems to imply that Ruth had gone into this particular field on her own initiative. Some might think that she had her future in mind all the time. But that is reading into the story something that does not seem to be there, because here Naomi asked:

Where hast thou gleaned today? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother-in-law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought today is Boaz (Ruth 2:19).

Apparently that was information for Naomi. This seems to establish the fact that it was not Naomi's idea to send Ruth into the field of Boaz. Apparently it would appear to have been a matter of providence. Apparently there was no intimation to Ruth that this choice on her part had any possibilities.

Being from Moab, Ruth possibly was quite unaware of the status of Boaz, and she certainly knew that she was not a member of the children of Israel. She probably had no expectation, no prospect and no hope. Any one of us could be on the verge of real blessing of which we are quite unaware, because no sensational communication has come to us. We might just feel "I am only going about my ordinary routine work." We might think nothing unusual will happen today: nothing really matters much, we are only doing the ordinary thing. But that ordinary thing we are doing, that routine work that we are doing may be following right in the groove that the Lord Himself has laid out before us.

And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead (Ruth 2:20).

Personal conduct in kindness does matter to God and to the future. So far as Boaz was concerned, apparently his act in being gracious to this foreigner in the group was not noted. Naomi drew attention to it. Then Naomi told Ruth that Boaz was "near of kin to us" and identified him that way.

When Ruth told Naomi that Boaz had asked her to continue gleaning in his field till the end of the harvest, Naomi encouraged Ruth to do that very thing, and not to go anywhere else. Thus Ruth stayed working in the fields of Boaz until the end of the harvest. All of this was a very normal ordinary procedure.

Before Ruth was finished with the assignment Naomi conceived a plan to bring Ruth and Boaz together. It is quite possible that Naomi was conscious of what might happen. She interpreted the situation and guided Ruth in what was going to happen. The plan was somewhat bold and would seem strange in our society, but as things worked out Naomi's plan was successful. Naomi conceived the strategy and directed Ruth exactly in what to do. There is no evidence that Ruth had any idea of how this would work out or what it would accomplish. Obviously without Ruth's willing obedience and her careful conduct, the plan might not have been successful at all. But Ruth moved in all this plan exactly as directed.

There is no indication that Ruth knew what Naomi had in mind, or what the will of God was for her. In understanding Ruth we should remember that her basic commitment after all was loyalty to Naomi, together with her humble willingness to follow guidance. This is very important. As we study this portion of God's Word we see a young woman, brought out of an experience of disaster. Her husband had died and she had been left a widow in a strange country and in a society where being a widow was a very difficult thing. She had been given the opportunity to go back home to her own people, where possibly it would seem there would have been more likelihood for her to make a good connection for the rest of her life. Being moved in her heart that she wanted to be loyal to Naomi, she had chosen instead to go along with Naomi into a strange country among strange people. During that time she did just exactly as she was guided to do.

In our lives there will be routine circumstances, which we should not discount. Actually what happens to us, just the very way in which we live and the very way in which things unfold to us, this could be the will of God for us. We could do our work any day as unto the Lord, confident that is our assignment. We may be right where we are in our own homes, and there will be things before us to do, ordinary things, simple things, the routine things. We should not ever discount those.

We may not meet any Boaz or marry a prince or anything like that. But we will be able to walk with a King. We ourselves can be members of the Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. We could have things happening to us far greater than anything we have ever seen, far more wonderful than anything we have ever been able to do. All this is involved in the Gospel, and it is for us. One might say "Nothing ever happens to me." But consider in the first place that you were born where God wanted you, and in the next place someone taught you the Gospel. Long before you were born, Christ Jesus died for you. All the time God had you in mind. You are somebody in God's sight. He sent His Son, and you can actually find yourself drawn to Him. Do not ever discount the usual things, the ordinary things, the everyday things of your life. They are all under control, and are being guided by Almighty God. Put your trust in Him and "whatsoever thy hands find to do, do it with all thy might."

Chapter 4

Ruth Is Sent To Naomi

Do we realize how very important humble willingness to serve is?

We must be very careful not to let our knowledge of the importance of the blessing which came to Ruth dazzle our understanding of her own part in the whole story. We need to keep in mind that Ruth did not know how great her blessing would be. In studying Ruth herself we can learn lessons for our own spiritual understanding. I can remember that when I was growing up as a boy, and then as a lad, and afterward as a young man, I became increasingly conscious of my problems. I did not particularly mean to be self-centered, and I did not mean to be conceited. But I had problems that were right with me. When I was thinking of myself, I was conscious of my loneliness, my confusion, my frustrations, my despair, and obviously my attention was focused upon me.

When I first heard the Gospel, it was something like that song we used to sing, "There is a happy land far, far away." That is the way I felt about the Gospel. When I thought about God He was high, holy, lifted up, far away, beyond the heavens. When I once got the message "Christ died for me," and when I understood I belonged to Him, everything was different.

At this point in the story of Ruth she had followed guidance so that she was involved. She went out to glean in a certain field. It turned out to be the field of Boaz, who turned out to be a kinsman of Naomi. This now presents a real lesson to us. We turn to God through the Lord Jesus Christ because of personal needs. And as it happened that was why Ruth was out in that field. She was out there gleaning that grain to get food for her and for Naomi. It was a very personal reason. And it was a simple reason compared to what ultimately happened to her. It was something she had to do, and that was what she did.

When we come to God through Christ it is because of our personal needs. I just needed Him. Out there where I lived in Manitoba, Canada, I had just gone through high school. I was looking forward to my career whatever it would be as a person, as a human being. Soon I found myself involved in something far more important than I ever had in mind. All I wanted was to have some relief, I wanted something for me, and it turned out that I got far more than I ever dreamed.

Our portion in this study in the book of Ruth is in chapter 3:8-18, in which Ruth and Boaz engage in personal conversation. The whole story involves an incident that seems strange to us. I recommend that as we read it, we just read it with an open mind, letting the situation develop just as it is recorded. Let us not try to figure it out because we will not find it possible to put ourselves back in those days. But even so we will remember that Naomi had told Ruth to go into the room where Boaz was sleeping, and to lie down at his feet and pull his blanket over her.

And it came to pass at midnight that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet (Ruth 3:8).

Boaz was startled to awaken at midnight and find a woman who lay at his feet.

And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman (Ruth 3:9).

The Hebrews had a social custom that would seem strange to us. It provided that if a man died before his wife had any children, the nearest kinsman should take that widow as his wife, that she might bear some children. This may have been what Ruth was alluding to.

We may not understand all the practical implications of what happened in this maneuver that Naomi had actually planned, but we can feel the integrity and the decency of all involved. One can read that story

through and one will not find anything about the conduct of Ruth nor anything about the conduct of Boaz, to which one needs to take personal exception. The situation is strange but their conduct was decent. We can learn much from the style of reporting that was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Nothing was written that would lend itself to base insinuations. One can feel the kindness in the words of Boaz as he assured Ruth of his honorable intentions.

And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:11).

Boaz showed his integrity by recognizing that another person had a prior claim to act as kinsman. It was true that Boaz was kin to Naomi, but there was another man that was a closer kin than he was. If anyone had the right to act as a husband to this widow, Ruth, it would be the other man. Boaz showed his integrity by recognizing that this other man had the prior claim, and said that they would have to see what that man would do. After this we find that Boaz showed his sense of propriety when he said to her, "Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor."

Boaz did not want to arouse any talk. He did not want to arouse any suspicion. Ruth got up before day and slipped out so that no one would know that she had been there. Then Boaz showed his generosity by giving Ruth six measures of barley to take home to Naomi.

In the latter part of the chapter in verses 16-18 Ruth reported all that had happened to Naomi. She repeated what Boaz had said. Then Naomi counseled Ruth to wait patiently.

Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day (Ruth 3:18).

Naomi was Ruth's guide, so to speak. All the way through this story this young woman, Ruth, was being guided and being led by others. Things were at a critical phase in this whole matter, and Ruth was told to wait.

How very important for any of us it is to wait patiently. It is so easy for us to take matters in our own hands when the matter is personal. I can be so tempted to feel that it is my business, my responsibility. The idea of trusting God would almost be stretched and strained. Why should I trust God? The matter is in my hands, I should do it. But let me now draw this lesson from this book of Ruth. It is never that way. There never is any circumstance or situation in my life that is entirely my own.

All things are known to the Lord and He works through all things to bring His will to pass. How very important that it is for any of us to listen to these words again: "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know." Oh how that would keep us from unnecessary effort because we felt we had to do something! There is nothing to do. There is nothing to push. "Sit still until thou know." In this whole story of Ruth as we have followed it along, we have found this was true all the way through. This young woman was being guided, being directed, being dealt with, by other people. So far as she was concerned, events moved on a very simple basis. She had personal loyalty to Naomi and had come with her to serve her, to help her in any way she could. These things had opened up before her. Now she is on the brink of being called into something that she had never planned, had never thought about. And right at this moment, right while things are in motion, she receives this word: "Sit still until thou know." We could pray to Almighty God that He would give us the grace to do just that.

Chapter 5

Ruth Becomes The Wife Of Boaz

Did you know that a believer may receive great blessing from God as a result of processes that he does not understand?

In living I may benefit from many processes that I do not understand. My living is a matter of interacting with my environment. I interact with the world, with the people, and with God whom I do not see but who sees me. In the whole invisible world I have a relationship. Even so in spiritual matters. God is invisible to me. Yet He made me and He keeps me, and He judges me, whether I believe it or not, or like it or not. He is God and He is the one who holds all things in His hands.

God judges me but He also saves me. He is the one that undertakes to bring me to Himself All of this is around me all the time. Paul wrote these words: "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33)! We should keep this in mind as we proceed with the book of Ruth.

The story of Ruth is a classic account of the operation of the providence of God. Ruth lived in a normal way, responding to one situation after another as they occurred as routine, did the routine thing, yet the result was unusual. Ruth did not know what a day would bring forth. She lived just the way we live. She was not any smarter and she was not any wiser than any of the rest of us. She did what her hand found to do.

As a young girl she married an Israelite. We do not know anything of that story, do not know how it happened, but she and another young Moabite girl married two brothers. The man she married was a man of Judah. Then this man died. When Naomi, her mother-in-law, decided to move back to Judah, Ruth's devotion to Naomi led Ruth to go with her. So she had been brought into the family by her husband, and now was brought into the land of these people, into the land of Judah, by her mother-in-law. This young woman lived a normal life and responded to her situation in a normal way.

Consider the providence that was involved. There was famine in Judah. So the family went to Moab to find food to eat. The death of Elimelech the father, and of his two sons, and then Naomi's decision to return to the land of Judah, and then Ruth's act in loyalty and devotion to her mother-in-law were all things that led to her being in the land of Judah where her fortune eventually lay. But she did not know it ahead of time.

All the events that followed, her gleaning in the fields for her food was normal. She was not the only one: there were other people doing the same thing. Boaz's interest in her, which might be called special, actually was normal. Naomi's guidance, advising her what to do and how to do it because she was a strange young woman in a strange land where Naomi was at home, was also normal. These things were not designed.

The decision of the kinsman to let Boaz redeem these folks was a procedure that they had in their society and in their culture. In all of this Ruth receives the benefit of being there in the land of Judah without seeking it. These things just came to her. In the first part of chapter 4 the important event is the detailing of a ceremonial procedure in which the result was that the kinsman who was closer to Naomi than anybody else, did not want to take the responsibility that his position offered to him. He told Boaz to go ahead and act in his place. Boaz was second choice because he was second in line. The first man had said, "I do not want to do it. I am not able to do it, you do it" and so Boaz did. He paid the necessary money and did what was involved in order to take over the responsibility of sheltering Naomi and Ruth.

Every action taken was responsible and proper. All the details are recorded. As we follow the story we can see again that the course of events was not designed, premeditated. Things just happened that way so far as Ruth was concerned. "So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife" (Ruth 4:13). That was a simple way to record it. That is the whole story, that is what Boaz did. "And when he went in unto her, the Lord

gave her conception, and she bare a son." That is a very simple sentence that covers the whole lifetime so far as they were concerned.

And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel (Ruth 4:14).

When this baby was born the neighbors came to Naomi and thanked the Lord for the course of events. Such a statement as this may seem only customary, as if it was just something people said, but they could have meant it. In any case we know it was true. And when they said to her "Blessed be the Lord who has overruled in this and brought His will to pass," they told the truth. It is interesting to note that they ascribed the course of events to God.

The neighbors predicted that blessing would come through this son of Ruth.

And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him (Ruth 4:15).

Isn't that an interesting thing? These women told Naomi that Ruth was better to her than seven sons. Evidently Ruth's devotion and loyalty was known and they all noticed it. But these women went on to point out that Naomi herself would be greatly blessed because of this child that Ruth had borne.

And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it (Ruth 4:16).

I do not know all that is involved in that, but it does seem that the mother-in-law took over taking care of the baby. She brought up this child. We do not hear any more about Ruth, this is something now that Naomi is doing.

One might ask, "What difference would that make?" For one thing that child would be grounded in all the tradition of the children of Israel. You can be very sure that the grandmother would be very certain to make sure that that baby would know all the stories that belong to the history of the Jewish people. Naomi would give it to him. Ruth seemed to be ignored, almost as if she were set aside. She is treated almost as if she was not important. Yet she became the grandmother of David, who was the greatest king that Israel ever had. We have taken our time in going through this book of Ruth, a very simple story, a beautiful story in many ways. It does not record any particular evil. There is no particular sin or anything grotesque or bad about it, anywhere along the line. It is a very normal, natural story. But it indicates how a young woman who did not belong in the Jewish family, in the Israelitish family, was brought in; and how she became one of the ancestors of king David. She was his grandmother, and also one of the ancestors of the great Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

DANIEL

Chapter 1

The Meaning Of Prophecy

Do you know what part the prophets had in the history of Israel?

The Bible reveals the truth about the relationship between man and God. God is the Creator, the Keeper, the Sovereign, the Judge, the Savior; man is the creature, dependent, limited, responsible, who has sinned in disobedience and faces destruction. Then there is that wonderful truth that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. God in His grace has provided a way to salvation, to be received by man who accepts God's way in faith. To be saved from death into life eternal, man must hear the promises of God and believe them. The promises of God must be revealed by Him. There is no way that human beings by any kind of research or discovery could find out what God has in mind. But God will reveal them.

The reality of God is revealed in nature. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). The providence of God is seen in events in history. God's hand is on human affairs. The Law of God is seen in the natural processes all round about us. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). And it has been expressed in the Ten Words on Mount Sinai that we call the Ten Commandments. The Gospel of God is revealed in the Word of God, written in Scripture and incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. The Word of God, as the Scriptures, reveals the promises of God.

All of this reviews how God approaches us. We know that no prophecy of the Scripture is of private interpretation. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21). From this we conclude that the Holy Spirit guided holy men to speak and to write so that they communicated to other men what God wanted them to know.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).

A revealing incident is reported by Moses when he reminded Israel how they had asked him to act as an interpreter of God's will for them.

Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it (Deuteronomy 5:27).

The people were afraid their sinfulness would mean that God would deal with them only in judgment. Moses was a godly man so they wanted him to go into the presence of God, learn what He had in mind, then come and tell them.

God created the natural world in which events occur according to His law in due course as processed. This is the basis of all science, and can be studied, recognized, known and manipulated. We can thank God that in His faithfulness things are as they are, so that we can manage and accomplish things thereby. But God is a living Being, with spontaneous freedom to act as He will. There are things God can do that are not in the book, so to speak. This is the same with human beings. No matter how much we study the physical nature of men there is always the possibility man will act in a way that is different. So it is with God. That is why the promises are so important because when God promises, He promises to do certain things which you could not find out any other way, because it is in His own sovereign will that He

promises.

This is the basis of Revelation which can be and is communicated through Scripture. Thus the Word of God can be grasped in these two ways. I have spoken of how the natural world moves according to process. Thus the knowledge of the process will always help. When you are thinking about doing things with God, it is always proper to have things in hand the way they occur. For instance, if you were trying to raise a crop there are certain ways to do. At a certain time of the year the seed is put into the ground, watered in a certain fashion, cultivated, and your beans will grow. That is the way it is in the natural world, and that is part of the will of God. But there is also the revelation of God in Scripture. In dealing with that you are influenced, not according to knowledge but according to faith. You have faith in the promises of God.

The way in which the will of God is derived from inanimate nature is shown forth in the parable of the sower and the seed. That parable is based upon something that is in nature, that can be seen. We all can understand and can follow even in human nature, as in the story of the prodigal son. These parables fit into life as it is and help us to understand the ways of God. In addition to that, in the Old Testament we have history and biography. Paul says these things happened to them for examples, and are written for our learning, upon whom the ends of the world have come.

In addition, God uses dreams and visions of certain persons to show His will, as with Paul when he had a dream in which he saw a man in Macedonia saying, "Come over and help us." As a result the apostolic company moved on over into Macedonia. Also, in the Bible as a whole, the Scripture tells us in the latter part of Psalm 119, "The entrance of thy words giveth light." "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7).

These are the various ways in which the knowledge of God's will may be made known. All of this demands interpretation. A child and a beginner cannot understand it; someone needs to interpret. There were in Israel certain gifted men and women who acted as interpreters. They were called "seers" because they could see the truth; sometimes they were called prophets. The Tower of Babel left mankind so disorganized in speech that words alone could not reveal the message. No one language would ever be able to completely convey the mind of God, because other people would not understand that language.

Events have a universal significance because of the consistency of natural processes. When we refer to certain events in nature or certain events in history, anybody can understand it does not make any difference what language or dialect is used in description. And so, to communicate to specific persons a unique promise different from natural processes God revealed through Moses the Law, and then through Jesus of Nazareth He. revealed His grace.

The Scriptures record that God called Abraham to be blessed by the grace of God. God would do for Abraham all that Abraham needed. Abraham would obey in response to God's call. This was known as the covenant with Abraham. God would do for the Hebrews who were the children of Abraham all that He had promised to Abraham, if they would obey His will as set forth in the Ten Words. God would bless Israel according to the promises to Abraham and the covenant with David as long as they obeyed the law of Moses. In the event they disobeyed God they would be chastised with misery and suffering. Often the people suffered bad crops, calamities and distress without realizing the truth that this was because of their disobedient conduct.

We should keep in mind that the occurrence of a bad crop or a calamity, such as an earthquake or a drought, a hurricane or a tornado, does not necessarily imply that God is thereby at the present time teaching all men. Individuals can learn from such events, but in the days of the Old Testament these catastrophes had spiritual meaning for the Israelites. It was the mission of the prophets to interpret situations and to reveal the will of God by way of calling the people to obedience, warning them of the dire consequences of their disobedience; calling them to repentance and assuring them that God would graciously bless anyone who would believe and obey.

This, in a general way, is the function, the meaning of prophecy. When we study in the book of Daniel we might have in mind that Daniel would be counted as being a person who was enabled to do these things. It is interesting that in the Jewish Scriptures Daniel is not listed among the prophets; he is listed in the addenda at the end of the prophets. Only certain books were put there, like I and II Chronicles and Daniel, as if in an appendix. But we have counted Daniel as a prophet because the New Testament treats him that way. We do not think that the order of the books in the Jewish Scripture is inspired. For that matter, we do not think the order of the books in our own Bible is inspired. We understand that is the way godly men have handled the books of the Bible.

Chapter 2

Daniel In His Time

Can you understand that the community in which you live affects your own living?

We are all affected by the people with whom we live, whether we agree or disagree with them. One of the strange aspects of creation is that in this world there are both food and poison. Man is born to live, but is prone to disease and sickness, and is destined to die. The Scriptures reveal God and Satan, angels and demons, heaven and hell. This is truly remarkable when you think about it. Many will think that if God did it, it should all be good. But the fact is, this is not always true, though we cannot explain why. For instance, an elemental characteristic of mankind is that it is not good for man to be alone; yet the influence of other people can lead a person astray. A great thinker once said, "I am the product of all I have met." This may be an humble comment, but it is actually a serious confession.

It makes such difference as to who you live with, and who are your neighbors. If you are a product of all such, you may have problems. Christian education has hailed in the course of history the thesis of Horace Bushnell, which he set forth in his book called "Christian Culture." He maintained that a child can be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord so that it will never know anything but that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior. But few people recognize that this is the very principle that condemns the multitude of children. Just as believing parents can rear a believing child, even so unbelieving parents can rear unbelieving children.

But the danger is not always in the family alone: it is also in the community. Some people will say about faith that there it is more caught than taught. This may well be true in a certain sense, but it is equally true about disease: you can catch that. And it is true about error: you can catch that. So this immediately poses a problem: one of the ways in which we remain healthy is by avoiding infection. This is a very practical issue. It challenges intelligent measures of prevention on our part.

I have been discussing these matters because we want to appreciate the situation that confronted Daniel. In the opening chapter of the book of Daniel we see the procedures that Daniel followed, when he undertook to live godly in an ungodly world. The historic facts involving Daniel are a simple story. In the course of his campaign Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, besieged and conquered Jerusalem, which he ultimately destroyed.

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god (Daniel 1:2).

Nebuchadnezzar plundered Jerusalem. Then he promoted a scheme to draft gifted youth among the young Hebrews into his service. He instructed Ashpenaz, the minister of education, to find the most gifted young men and provide them with scholarships.

And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well-favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans (Daniel 1:3-4).

This official was sent out into the country to select certain young men who were to be trained, that they might gain the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. They then would become servants of the king.

And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king (Daniel 1:5).

I have always felt this can be seen as one of the original cases of an accelerated program. We ordinarily think of a young person taking four years in college, but in this case they took three years.

Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego (Daniel 1:7).

And now the attention of the reader is focused upon Daniel.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself (Daniel 1:8).

We have been noting that we are all influenced by our social environment, our neighbors. You can be sure your children will be affected by the other children in school. How can they guard against such influence? Notice what Daniel did: he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself. That cannot be emphasized too much. It is essential, if I am to keep myself straight and true in the midst of crooked people, that I should make up my mind. If I do not make up my mind as to the course I will follow, I can be swayed by those around me. Daniel was just a human being. He would have been influenced by people around him, but he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat.

It is not pointed out here that the king's food would contain items that were not "kosher" according to Jewish custom; but we can think that was true. In the days of Moses there were definite rules about the food the Israelites could eat. Daniel had in mind he did not want to be affected by the food these pagan people provided, nor did he want to be affected by the wine they drank. He asked for the privilege of conducting himself in such a way that he would not be influenced by those who were around him. This request was based upon an inward, personal, heartfelt commitment on his part to a certain course of action that would keep him straight, even though he was surrounded by the wrong kind of people.

Chapter 3

Daniel As A Student

Do you understand how a person can show respect to those in authority even though he does not agree with their judgment nor endorse their politics?

Godly men are instructed in Scripture to "Fear God, honor the king." A problem arises when the king does wrong. The record in Scripture shows that Jesus of Nazareth showed respect to the governor of Palestine, and to the high priest in Jerusalem. Peter and John conducted themselves with respect to the rulers who beat them and falsely accused them. Paul showed deference to the high priest, and courtesy to the Roman rulers; even though he was mistreated.

A case in point was Daniel. In the Jewish culture in which he had been brought up he had been trained to control his habits in obedience to regulations. He did not want to indulge himself by taking what was offered freely by those in authority.

Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs (Daniel 1:9).

How could this foreigner, a Jew, come into favor with the responsible man in control; what does that tell us about Daniel? On the basis of this good relationship Daniel was able to ask a favor. He asked to be allowed to forego the privileges. I am sure that man in authority must have been surprised to have a student ask him for the privilege of not taking part in the elaborate things that were provided free.

And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king (Daniel 1:10).

The prince of the eunuchs was afraid that if he gave Daniel the privilege to live on such meager fare, David would limit himself in activity, drop out of much that would go on, and so not be as well trained; thereby causing the prince of the eunuchs to lose his head.

Then said Daniel to Melazar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melazar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse (Daniel 1:11-16).

"Pulse" was a cereal used on a vegetarian diet. And thus the matter was settled.

It is interesting to note that Daniel did not act rebelliously or in a surly manner. He was not contentious. He went quietly to the man in authority and asked humbly for a favor that would be in line with his own personal convictions. When Daniel made it possible for this man to do it safely, by offering to be put to the test, he received the favor he asked for. The final result of this whole matter was very impressive.

As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued

even unto the first year of king Cyrus (Daniel 1:17-21).

The four Hebrews were found to be much superior to all of the scientists and philosophers in the whole country. Daniel was then placed in a government position and given great responsibility, being chief of all government agencies through four administrations: while Nebuchadnezzar was king; and then his son, Belshazzar; then Darius the Persian; and until the first year of king Cyrus. All this indicates how Daniel was enabled to keep his integrity before God, and, at the same time, gain goodwill among the very people he lived amongst with whom he differed.

Chapter 4

Daniel As An Interpreter Of Dreams

Can you understand that if a spiritual man wants to communicate his message to this world, he must relate his ideas to the events that are happening in this world?

In chapter 2 is the report of the first incident in which Daniel established himself as a competent adviser to the king. It is a simple story that records the fact that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream that troubled him.

And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him (Daniel 2:1).

There are a number of dreams and visions in this book of Daniel. Such an experience as a person might have in dreaming a dream would have meaning to him or her because of the practical situation in which that person is. If the dream one has bears no relation to anything that is occurring in one's life the chances are one will forget it soon. While in military service in Canada in the first World War I was faced with the problem of wanting to transfer from one unit to another. I used several different procedures that had all been unsuccessful. I was wondering what to do when I dreamed about the person I should approach to make application. The dream was very clear. The next morning the procedure I had dreamed fitted exactly into the situation. I made the application I had dreamed about, and presented it to the man I had dreamed about, and that very afternoon I was transferred. Everything fitted. Nothing like that has happened to me again, but it did that time.

Joseph dreamed that he should go down into Egypt with Mary and the baby who had been born to them, and that fitted because Herod wanted to kill the baby. When Peter was to receive insight as to what he should do about the Gentiles he was on the housetop waiting for a meal when he dreamed about eating food. I would not say that all dreams have such meaning, but I do want to point out that the dream in itself can have meaning in relation to the dreamer.

So the king called in his staff of consultants, his scientists and philosophers, and asked them what the dream meant. As a matter of fact the king had forgotten the dream, which is a very ordinary thing. He said in so many words: "Tell me what the dream is, and then I will believe you when you interpret it." The scholars protested; they said, "No man living can tell you what the dream was. Tell us what the dream was and we will tell you what it means." The king answered that unless they could tell him what he dreamed, he would not believe them when they told him what it meant. In fury the king, according to the custom in those days, decreed that all these wise men should be killed. When Daniel heard of the king's decree (and Daniel was one of the wise men and he also would have been slain) he offered to reveal the dream to the king. He went into the presence of the king and told him that he would tell him the dream and its meaning, if given time to do so.

Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him (Daniel 2:17-22).

This was his way of expressing his appreciation of the Almighty, and of the broad and complete knowledge of God.

I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter. therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation (Daniel 2:23-24).

It is interesting to note that Daniel had confidence in God, and Daniel believed that God could show him. Daniel involved the three other Hebrews who were with him in the whole program, and told them of his problem. They united themselves in prayer. One should not overlook that united prayer is involved in this. So Daniel learned what the vision had been, and he went to the king and told him what it was.

There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these (Daniel 2:28).

Daniel then told Nebuchadnezzar what the dream was, adding:

But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart (Daniel 2:30).

Daniel did not want anyone to look upon him as being an exceptionally wise man; he wanted all to know that this came from God.

The king had dreamed of an image. It was the image of a man. The head was of gold, the shoulders were silver, the chest and the body of brass, the legs of iron and the toes were iron and clay. Actually, this was a preview of what was going to happen in the history of that part of the world at that time. God raises up and He sets down as He overrules; Daniel pointed this out.

People who are knowledgeable about that history have been inclined to point out that the gold could refer to Babylon; the silver could be Persia that took over the Babylonian empire; the brass would represent Greece that came in and destroyed Persia; and the iron could very well be the Roman empire that followed the Greeks. The two legs could be the two kings, the double control in the Roman empire, between Rome on the one point and Constantinople on the other. Finally, the iron and clay (the ten toes) seem to imply the ten kingdoms into which the Roman empire was broken eventually.

Continuing in this interpretation in the time of those ten kingdoms, God would one day set up His kingdom. That was indicated in the vision by an unhewn stone that fell from heaven on that image on the feet that was made of iron and clay. The unhewn stone shattered the whole image. That stone grew until it filled the whole earth. By this many can see this predicting that at the time of the latter days of the Roman empire there would come the Kingdom of God. It would be revealed on the face of the earth in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The latter verses of that chapter indicate that the king accepted the interpretation, honored Daniel, made him ruler over Babylon, and chief of the governors over the wise men. Daniel then promoted his three companions to places of responsibility in the government.

That is the story we find in chapter 2. Thus we learn how Daniel became prominent, because God enabled him to render a service that no one else could possibly render.

Chapter 5

The Fiery Furnace

Since believers are not to be contentious or quarrelsome, does this mean they should cooperate with everything the majority proposes?

We come now to a simple story which is astonishing. It is known as the fiery furnace. The problems of government are standard and perhaps classic everywhere. In a large empire composed of many varied people of different cultures the problem of establishing morale and unity as one nation exists. The common procedure in solving this problem is to focus attention upon the leader; in the case of a kingdom: the king. The plan of Nebuchadnezzar is recorded in chapter 3. The king had been advised to take certain steps about concentrating attention upon himself.

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold . . . he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up (Daniel 3:1-3).

It is to be noted that the description of those people does not include any common people. These were the leaders. This would be the way the king would seek to gain unity in the nation. He did not attempt to build that unity from the grass roots, but he built that unity from the government, the governing group; in the structure of the leadership. So he made an image of gold, and according to the culture of that time, he announced that it was to be worshipped. We read that all officials were ordered to bow down to this image. In keeping with the way they did things, they faced an alternative: warning was given that if anyone would not bow down to that image he would be cast into the fiery furnace. In this way the king would attempt to weed out from the kingdom any forces or any influences that were contrary to himself as the ruler.

Some Chaldeans reported that the Hebrews failed to comply. The fact was that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were the governors of three of the provinces, would not bow down to any image, because they worshipped God. The issue was very clear to them. The first commandment said, "Thou shalt have no other god." This is how they felt. This points to the very cruxes of consciousness on the part of all men. When we read this we may very well ask ourselves, who is our god? In other words, to what do we commit ourselves above all else? That is who our god would be. What is the most important thing in all our experience? To what do we give first place when it comes to our time, our energy, our thoughts, our money? To these three Hebrews the most important thing was God: The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These Hebrews were committed to worship God exclusively.

Nebuchadnezzar was infuriated when he heard about this. He called them to come before him. Then he issued an ultimatum: either they would bow down to the image or go into the fiery furnace. That was a critical moment. The king asked if their God was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace and they answered, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter." They were not anxious. They added:

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that

were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace (Daniel 3:17-23).

Even a straightforward, honest answer does not always mean we will be relieved of the issue. We may still have to face it. So they were cast into the furnace. The opposition to the worship of God in that country was real and vicious; the king had made no idle threat. To resist that opposition would result in real affliction.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counselors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. (This is a very striking, unusual element here. And Nebuchadnezzar felt it.) Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them (Daniel 3:24-27).

All attempts at explaining in any natural way are foolish. We should let the story stand as it does. If we tell this to children, we should tell it exactly as it is written. We should not forget to say there were four seen in the furnace, because that is very important.

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I made a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort (Daniel 3:28-29).

In this amazing story the outcome was that this pagan king honored God. And he promoted those three. "Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon." This incident has a glorious ending; but that is not the main point in that story. The implicit obedience of these three men is the essential note. As a whole we can remember this is one way in which we can gain in the face of opposition. God can and will overcome.

Chapter 6

The Humbling Of Nebuchadnezzar

Can you understand that a strong, willful person may experience calamity in order to grasp some significant truth?

The book of Daniel is known as the book of dreams and visions. Dreams have always been fascinating. Men have been impressed to believe that dreams might have significance, perhaps some occult significance. It is commonly observed that the content of a dream can be related to the situation in which the person is living. We remember Peter's vision on the housetop, and Paul's vision at Troas. So the meaning of dreams can be sought in some aspect of the situation.

Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream something that frightened him because it seemed to imply that he would be cut down. In the first nine verses of chapter 4 we read how the king called in his wise men to interpret the dream. Finally he called on Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation (Daniel 4:1-3).

I find it remarkable that this was a pagan. We should have in mind that just because pagans do not know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they are not acquainted with the Scriptures, it does not mean they have no concept of God. After all,

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge (Psalm 19:1-2).

We are aware that all human beings have in their hearts and minds, both from nature outside and from their own personal experience, as well as from intuition from within, some conception of God.

Nebuchadnezzar had this remarkable conception:

I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof. But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream (Daniel 4:4-8).

So Nebuchadnezzar described the dream. Daniel had interpreted a dream earlier, so he was brought in now.

Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: the leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven; he cited aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times

pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee (Daniel 4:10-18).

The record then shows how Daniel interpreted the dream.

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong . . . it is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth (Daniel 4:19-20).

Daniel goes on to say that just as that great tree was to be cut down so the king would be set aside.

This is the interpretation, O king . . . that they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will (Daniel 4:24-25).

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that in his dream what had been indicated was that he would lose his mind. He was to be given a beast's heart, losing his mentality, and reduced to his physical or animal nature. According to the custom of the people in those days, when anyone was mentally deranged he was ostracized from society. So Nebuchadnezzar was sent from the palace, and he lived among the wild beasts for a length of time. But before Daniel had finished his interpretation he said,

Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility. All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:27-28).

At a time when the king had felt secure, events occurred just as Daniel had predicted:

At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of thy kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will (Daniel 4:29-32).

So the king was sent out. According to the plan, it came to pass that at the end of the days,

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation . . . At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase (Daniel 4:34-37).

That is the whole story. We cannot help but see in all of it that Nebuchadnezzar came to grasp a certain

truth about God. This great king passed through this very serious and shattering experience, in which he lost his mind, and was treated as though he was deranged; then suddenly he came back into all his glory, and through that experience he came to an understanding of the truth about God. God is sovereign, high and lifted up and He controls all events. Even the greatest person on earth is dependent upon the will and the providence of God. This is the truth that was shown forth in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Chapter 7

The Fall Of Belshazzar

Would you believe that foolish impudence could bring the immediate and direct judgment of the living God?

We read these passages of Scripture about dreams and visions, and oftentimes our hearts and minds are baffled. But is it not true that there are days when events occur which we do not understand? We feel ourselves helpless in a flow of circumstances we cannot control; nevertheless, we can see every now and again something of truth that will come to our hearts.

In chapter 5 we shall note a famous, tragic story about Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, involving a vision he had. When he ascended to the throne Belshazzar indulged himself in revelry. As a young man he suddenly came into a situation where there was much at his hand with which he could indulge himself; and he did. In the course of this revelry he had his people bring the holy vessels of the temple of Jerusalem which had been captured as war booty, and which had been brought from Jerusalem before Jerusalem was destroyed, into his presence, to be used for drinking wine in the course of their revelry. This was an affront to God. Belshazzar did not believe in God: but God is, whether the king believed in Him or not. Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way, and now Belshazzar was to find it out.

Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another (Daniel 5:1-6)

This is the age old description of a man terrified, stricken with terror. The king cried aloud to bring in all his wise men to tell him what this meant. And he promised:

Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished. Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O King, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: there is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him. . . . (Daniel 5:7-11)

The queen then drew attention to the fact that there was a man by the name of Daniel who could do this kind of interpretation. You will remember that Daniel was a despised Jew, a captive in war, but he had helped Nebuchadnezzar. So the king sent for Daniel and promised rich rewards if he could interpret the writing.

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation (Daniel 5:17).

Daniel realized that men who received their insight from God, having been made wise by the grace of

God, should refuse to take personal advantage of it. He told the king the story of the king's father Nebuchadnezzar's rise and fall in that period of mental depression, and of his restoration to his normal condition; all of this having happened to him because of pride. Daniel then told him that, knowing what had happened to his father, Belshazzar had failed to humble himself. On the contrary he actually took license with the holy vessels of the temple, defiling them in his revelry. Now God had by the I writing on the wall announced his downfall.

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:24-28).

We must remember that Daniel was in a difficult situation, a captive in a foreign land, talking to men who ignored and insulted God. Daniel did not try to smooth matters over. He told the king the truth. The truth was that Belshazzar had been warned his time would be cut off.

Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom (Daniel 5:29).

Belshazzar kept his word. He honored Daniel and promoted him. However, the king's fate was sealed.

In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old (Daniel 5:30-31).

All this illustrates a truth that is stated in just so many words in the book of Hebrews.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

It seems strange that God would deal this way with pagans. Apparently God not only deals with people who trust in Him, but also He deals with all men. This is something people in the world are slow to appreciate. Everyone is before God, and He is able to make everything work in His will.

Incidents like this are not often recorded in Scripture, but you and I should learn from this. Round about us, among the people we know and with whom we have dealings, God's hand is in their affairs. Almighty God is sovereign over all. He deals with each one. Pride is something God abhors: "God resisteth the proud" (James 4:6). It makes no difference who the man or the woman is: whether ignorant or educated; whether crude or refined; anybody who pays no attention to God and acts in pride and impudence will be dealt with according to God's will in justice and righteousness.

We humbly bow our hearts before God and ask Him to grant us inwardly the grace to commit ourselves to Him in humble contrition and repentance, and to call upon Him to show His mercy and grace that we might be saved by the power of God through the Lord Jesus Christ from the fate that our own conduct could bring on.

Chapter 8

Daniel In The Lion's Den

Do you think a believer should change his customary procedure in the public worship of God because of the threat of persecution?

Daniel had the experience of being the leading government official under a number of administrations or kings. After the death of Belshazzar things worked out for him to serve under king Darius the Median.

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

That is the account of the events which showed Daniel rising to prominence under king Darius. The Medes and the Persians were actually two neighboring allies who combined to conquer Babylon. When Darius conquered Babylon he organized the government, as we have read, with 120 princes who served under three presidents of which it is said Daniel was first.

Daniel was a despised Jew, but here he is placed in authority over all the others. It is no wonder that envy and jealousy moved the other officials to seek an occasion in which Daniel could be discounted before Darius.

Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever (Daniel 6:4-6).

That is the way they approached the matter.

All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counselors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not (Daniel 6:7-8).

That was the custom in their empire: any decision that had been established, any law that had been passed, would never be changed; the law of the Medes and the Persians would never be altered.

So they tricked the emperor into passing a law that forbade any kind of worship in the kingdom apart from the worship of himself. Should anyone ask anything of a god or man, without first coming to Darius, he should be thrown into the den of lions. This, of course, was aimed directly at Daniel.

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime (Daniel 6:10).

That was Daniel's response. He did not let the new law make one bit of difference to him.

Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the

den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, or the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him (Daniel 6:11-14).

Darius realized that he had been caught in his own plan. For a whole day he tried one way or another to find out if there was not some loophole in the law, that had been passed, whereby he could excuse Daniel.

Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee (Daniel 6:15-16).

One wonders what the king really had in mind. Did this king Darius really believe that God would do this, or did he simply offer this to Daniel to ease his own conscience?

And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his steep went from him (Daniel 6:17-18).

Evidently Daniel had conducted himself in such a way that the king really appreciated him. Now the king realized in the maneuver that had been carried out that he had been tricked, and that Daniel was the victim of underhanded planning.

Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den (Daniel 6:19-24).

This is a familiar story; I suppose it is one of the first we remember from the history of the Old Testament.

Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end (Daniel 6:25-26).

It is striking that Darius had so much more to say in his proclamation than has come out in the course of the story of the incident. He continued,

He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian (Daniel 6:27-28).

Daniel was an alien in a foreign country, beset by people whose views were different from his. He was

made the victim of scheming enemies who managed to have him placed in a position that was threatening and very difficult. But Daniel trusted in God, and God saw him through. You and I might just take to our hearts something like this: believers are strangers and pilgrims in an ungodly world. The world is our opponent but there need be no alarm. We can leave everything in the hands of God; He can deliver us even as He did Daniel.

Chapter 9

Daniel's Vision About National Affairs

Do you think a dream can ever be meaningful to anybody?

The dream of Daniel was not necessarily the kind that would happen to just anybody. Here was a man who was acquainted with the affairs of an empire. He knew the problems that beset the nation and his mind and heart were filled with those matters. There was a consciousness in him of national matters – of history, of prospects of the future, and so on. Persons change and situations will change without an explanation. Men should be alerted not to put too much value to anything in a dream because it can be unstable; it shifts so much. However, when a person is facing a difficult problem and no solution is in sight, then by the grace and providence of God a dream may present a pictured solution that fits the problem. Daniel chapter 7 tells rather fully about the application of Daniel's dream to the political matters of the kingdom of the Persians. Since we would be somewhat unaware of what those problems were, we should be rather hesitant about feeling that we can fully understand why Daniel had the grasp that he did of the situation. Some Bible students think they see in this report of Daniel's dream the revelation about events which will be seen at the end of the world and the coming of the Lord.

It will serve our purpose to go through this chapter as we can see things there as we read. The Holy Spirit will bring to mind such things as we are to grasp. This comment suggests that I am somewhat skeptical and perhaps rather wary of accepting interpretations of Scripture that are offered by some human being who offers what seems to suit his mind. I rather have the feeling I should wait until it comes to my mind, trusting in the Holy Spirit meanwhile. I do not say that these other people are necessarily wrong. Whatever they see in this Scripture will, I trust, be a blessing to them. I pay my respects to the possibility that others may see more in here than I do; I do not say they are wrong, nor will I admit they are right.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters. Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things (Daniel 7:1-8).

It would be interesting to see what an artist would do in attempting to picture those grotesque figures. In verse 9 is the first mention of the thrones.

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and then thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. It saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and

languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me (Daniel 7:9-15).

Daniel was concerned because there was something about this that had touched him, that he felt was important.

I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast, which was diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, braken in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet; and of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom. Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Hitherto is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart (Daniel 7:16-28).

After Daniel had been told what all of this meant, he did not explain it any further. Although it was something very impressive to him, something that pained him in his heart and his countenance changed, he kept it in his heart. You may read things in the Bible that you do not understand; do not be surprised. You do not know everything. You have not lived long enough to know everything. Since you are normal let me advise you one thing: if you do think you see something in a special way that especially touches you, and it is not readily explainable to other people, it might be wise to just keep in it your own heart. You can be blessed in many ways from reading the Bible that you cannot explain to others. Such blessings are for you alone and they are from God.

Chapter 10

Daniel's Vision About Future Events

Do you understand that a person can see things happening that he does not understand?

Our study in Daniel moves on into chapter 8, where we have the report of a vision. In the book of Daniel both visions and dreams are reported. Actually, visions and dreams are similar; their significance has been the object of much study and research. Many people have endeavored to learn the significance of dreams or of visions. The big question is: do they reveal anything?

We can think of the fact that when Peter had his vision on the housetop, he went up before the noon meal when he was hungry. He had a vision of something to eat. The vision seems to be related in a fashion to his own state. Then again, in this case Daniel was involved in national affairs, and was at the point of being one of the leaders in the administration of the affairs of the nation; his vision would therefore be concerned with national problems and fortunes. That seems to fit in. But those factors which are involved in the origin of such dreams and visions really do not help much to indicate their significance. Perhaps if one could find in any of them the suggestion of the solution of some dilemma the dreamer was in when insight was given to him, this could perhaps be checked against practical facts. This might be a help. In other words, nothing definite has been established about these matters. Everything has to be said on a tentative basis. It is a matter of suggestion or a matter of that which fits your case.

You will find that so far as any kind of meaning was concerned, this would always be related to the actual situation in which the individual stood. I am thinking now of the time Paul had his vision at Troas (Acts 16:9-10), which we have previously discussed. What Paul actually saw in the vision fitted the circumstances, and provided a solution to the dilemma Paul and his party were facing.

Here Daniel tells of his vision.

In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared unto me, even unto me Daniel, after that which appeared unto me at the first. And I saw a vision; and it came to pass, when I saw, that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai (Daniel 8:1-2).

At the beginning of chapter 7 you will find that Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. Here it was in the third year. These visions did not occur every day. These two visions were two or three years apart.

Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last (Daniel 8:3).

This reminds one of a rhinoceros who is a two-horned beast, one horn in front of the other, the longer horn being at the back.

I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great (Daniel 8:4).

This is the first thing Daniel saw: a powerful being pushing in all directions.

And as I was considering, behold, a he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power. And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns:

and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand (Daniel 8:5-7).

This must have been a terrific sight for Daniel. It was happening in a fantastic fashion. But all the way through there was power in this he-goat.

Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down (Daniel 8:11).

There are things here I do not recognize. I can only see that so far as this he-goat was concerned, he had great power.

And a host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practice, and prospered (Daniel 8:12).

This showed an uninterrupted display of power and of violence.

Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed. And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man (Daniel 8:13-15).

We should note this. Even Daniel did not understand what it was all about; he just wanted to know.

And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision. Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright. And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be. The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power. And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practice, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand. And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days (Daniel 8:16-26).

That is what Gabriel told Daniel to do. The revelation was all true but Daniel was to close it up. Here I apply something from that to myself. There can be many things that I can feel and that I can read about that are true, but they are not always all to be talked about. Sometimes there are truths that should be shut up in our hearts.

And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it (Daniel 8:27).

I have the impression that some Bible scholars use this vision upon which to base their systems of interpretation. But I note that whatever insight Daniel gained with the help of Gabriel, was shut up. This causes me to be unimpressed with those who generations later undertake to explain what Daniel kept quiet

about. The insight given to Daniel was shattering, but he shut up the vision. Should not we learn something from that? We can read certain things in the Bible that speak to us of the great and terrible things that are happening in this world; we may have inward impressions that will shape and guide our hearts and minds in the right way. But many of such things we will keep quiet about. We cannot tell. May God help us to be humble enough to be quiet when we do not know what to say.

Chapter 11

Daniel's Prayer For Deliverance Of The Jews

Can you understand that praying in the will of God means asking God to do something that He has promised to do?

For years I felt inclined to avoid the study of Daniel because I was not able to identify persons and events recorded in the dreams and visions in this book. But now I am actually relieved, to find that each chapter has had some obvious truth by which I could prosper. Even if I do not know all of the details that may be implied in what Daniel saw, I am blessed by what Daniel recorded. I note with interest some of the dreams were interpreted for Daniel; and their interpretation was written for us. Some of the visions were interpreted for Daniel, but he was instructed to tell nobody. And some were not interpreted, even to Daniel. That should give a person pause.

When Daniel tells us what he was told, I can read and accept what he says; when Daniel did not record what was shown to him, I will not guess what it means. And when Daniel was not told, I will not presume to interpret. When anyone else does, I have to say humbly, I cannot accept what that person says. I have a feeling that what is for me to know has been set forth plainly in Scripture.

There is much for me to learn in every part of what is written, even in this book of Daniel. We are going to find in the first three verses of chapter 9 how Daniel was led to pray.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; in the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:1-2).

That means to me that Daniel was a Bible student. He read and studied the Scriptures. And he took note that the Scriptures revealed that Israel, Judah, would be captive in Babylon for seventy years.

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land (Daniel 9:3-6).

When Daniel read in Scripture that seventy years was the length of time that Judah was to be captive in Babylon; and he saw now, by the calendar, that the seventy years were up, he turned to God to pray. We can anticipate what we will find in this chapter, when we ask ourselves what he prayed for. He prayed that God would do what He said He would do. What did God say He would do? He said He would release Judah after seventy years and return them to their land. This did not inspire a casual acceptance from Daniel. He wanted his people to go back home but the will of God was to be done. Daniel had this spiritual insight: the will of God would be done in answer to prayer.

There may be some believers who have problems. Somebody in the home does not believe: there may be children who are skeptical. Shall we feel that because we have committed them to God as children, that He will take care of them? Actually, there is something for you and for me to do. If I want my child to have the blessing of God, how would that blessing come? In answer to faith? We are told that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Are you teaching the Word of God to your children? Are they attending Sunday School where the teachers tell the Scriptures? You can do these things and then you can also pray that the Word which they hear will grip their heart. This is what Daniel did. He expected

Israel, Judah, to be delivered because God had said so.

And so Daniel prayed. Does he think his praying will deliver the people? No! God will deliver them. But God will do something in answer to prayer that would not otherwise be done.

O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee (Daniel 9:7).

Daniel acknowledged the Lord was righteous but the Jews were sinful.

O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him (Daniel 9:8-11).

In praying we recognize the problem. Daniel recognized that the real reason Israel, Judah, was in captivity in Babylon was because of their sin. Now he is saying in effect that since they are to receive the blessing of God they should confess their sins, so that God could forgive and deliver them from all unrighteousness. When we pray about that family member let us notice a fact: that person has unbelief or that person has a mind filled with other things. This being the case, we need to do what we can to witness and to let our light shine. But above all, we should pray to Almighty God to do things, to approach this person and to act in response to His promise. We plead when we pray.

As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast rought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly (Daniel 9:13-15).

In verses 16, 17 and 18 it is recorded how Daniel continued to pour out his confession of sin.

O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding (Daniel 9:19-22).

There was a further explanation as to how this was done. As we read this chapter it is revealed to us to see that the basis of prevailing, persistent and powerful praying is an understanding of the will of God, of the promises of God. We do not pray to twist God's arm or to jostle His memory that He might remember something He has forgotten. No! We reach up to receive from God what He has promised to give, and we exercise our faith and ask Him to do the things that will glorify His name.

The plan of God as to procedure is determined by Him. Messiah, the Prince, will come and Messiah shall be cut off. Opposition to Messiah will be rampant for a time, bringing desolation. But we can be very sure that Messiah, the Prince, the Chosen One of God, will win the ultimate victory and we shall be saved.

We thank Almighty God for this revelation and we pray that we might be kept trusting in Him.

Chapter 12

Daniel Helped To Understand God's Will

Can you understand that when one person can see a vision while another standing by sees nothing unusual, this indicates that seeing a vision is a personal, inward experience?

Daniel reported what happened to him as he was seeing a vision. There is much in this that as we read we can learn. There is much for us to ponder, but it will become clear as we read it.

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision (Daniel 10:1).

It is interesting that the word "thing" does not tell us anything. It is not described or identified, but there was something there. A "thing" was revealed unto Daniel and the "thing" was true. Now we shall find out that it was true in the sense that what it indicated was the truth from God's point of view. Something here is indicated in relationship that is absolutely true, but the vision itself did not include things that were real. This is a philosophic use of the word "real," by which I refer to something that is actually out there. You will see in a moment why I put it this way, but I am alerting you to it now. What Daniel saw was not actually outside himself; he could see it but the people around him could not see it. That indicates that it was a matter of his own personal experience.

We read "the time appointed was long." Apparently the language here is somewhat obscure because the marginal reading says there was a great warfare. We just take it that the time appointed was long; if there was warfare involved that would just make it seem longer. "And he understood the thing" (the thing that had been revealed to him), and had understanding of the vision. That is a general statement that will cover everything that follows.

In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled (Daniel 10:2-3).

Here Daniel tells what form this mourning took. In other words, if he was mourning, what difference did it make? He did not eat special foods prepared to please the appetite. He did without a great many things that would have pleased him personally for three weeks. That is what he means by mourning. Some of us would call it "fasting."

And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude (Daniel 10:4-6).

We need to note here that Daniel was confronted by a messenger who was very imposing in his appearance; the kind of person who would attract attention because of the various aspects of his appearance.

And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves (Daniel 10:7).

If that had been a person living there like another human being, the others would have seen him; but they did not see him. We do not know the full understanding of this, but we can make this comment; they

did not see the vision though they felt its presence, and they were affected by the feeling they had.

Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me (Daniel 10:8).

We pause here for a moment to take note of that. Many may undertake to interpret the Scripture for you. They may undertake to tell what the Bible means as though they actually have seen it. Let us ask this: how were they affected when they saw what they are talking about? When Daniel saw what he was talking about there remained no strength in him.

For my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength (Daniel 10:8).

Any feeling he had about his appearance became corrupt; he was like nothing. He could have said, "All my righteousness is as filthy rags." His strength departed from him when he looked at that great person: that great man who came to bring him a message.

Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard thy voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground (Daniel 10:9).

It was as though he had fallen unconscious, face forward, lying on the ground.

And, behold, a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling (Daniel 10:10-11).

That is how this man Daniel was affected by what he saw. Now I think that when someone comes with some revelation from God, to tell us about some aspect of the truth of God that is to be found in Scripture, we have a right to expect that person will himself be deeply impressed. He should act like a man who feels appreciation of the things he is talking about.

Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia (Daniel 10:12-13).

This amazing and startling figure in speaking to Daniel told him to stand up, he wanted to talk to him. Daniel stood trembling, then he was given the message.

And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb (Daniel 10:15).

Apparently Daniel was speechless and looked to the ground. Michael was going to help this person bring Daniel the message from God.

And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me (Daniel 10:16-17).

Daniel was completely overwhelmed with the prospect of coming into personal contact with this messenger from God.

Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, and said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto

me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me. Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. But I will show thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince (Daniel 10:18-21).

What we have in this chapter is a remarkable revelation of the experience Daniel had as he was being prepared to receive from God a revelation of His will about the people of God. This helps us to appreciate how very important it is that God's face should be sought and His mind learned, if we are going to speak in His name and tell the world what God wants them to know.

As we go in our study we are deeply impressed with the idea that Daniel himself, when he was seeing these things, was completely overwhelmed. They were too great for him. We can just think in our hearts how they would be too great for us. But we, too, would come to God and ask Him to strengthen us and enable us to understand the great things which God has prepared for those who put their trust in Him.

Chapter 13

Some Visions Are Never Understood

Would you think that a preacher would be able to interpret any and all Scripture if he truly believed in God and had received the Holy Spirit?

Daniel's life is rich in significance to us in that his situation is such a close parallel to the situation in which any believer lives today in this world. Just as Daniel was a stranger and a foreigner in Babylon, so the believer is just that in the world today. We need to keep in mind that Daniel was highly educated, thoroughly grounded in all the learning of the Chaldeans, as well as a spiritually minded man who kept himself conscious of God at all times. You will remember in our study so far Daniel has several times been referred to in the message from the Lord as "dearly beloved."

Daniel lived in a significant period in Israel's life as a nation. The children of Israel were being chastened as a nation because of their disobedience and their sin, so they had been brought as captives to a foreign land. We should take note that the Jews in Babylon had no temple, no place of worship. There was no public worship, and Daniel was not a priest, he was a layman. He was what we would call chief coordinator of the civil services of the government. As we read through the last chapters in Daniel, we shall be reading what Daniel saw but we shall not understand what Daniel understood. We can understand this as we note:

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end (Daniel 12:9).

Do you wonder what I have in mind about that? After Daniel has been shown certain things and has reported them, which we read in chapters 11 and 12, came these words, "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." We can count on being blessed as we read, even if we do not understand. It is noteworthy that Daniel intended to serve Darius, the Mede, as he told of his vision.

Also I in the first year of Darius the Mede, even I stood to confirm and to strengthen him (Daniel 11:1).

Here was Daniel actually working to serve the king, who was a Persian. "And now will I show thee the truth" he said to this king. We have in mind as we read chapters 11 and 12 that Daniel stood to confirm and to strengthen the king. There follows passage after passage of predictions of the course of national affairs. No names are given and that is rather striking. The kings referred to will vary in strength; some will be stronger than others, but none will be permanent. As we read about one king doing so and so, and another king following him doing differently, we get the impression that we are looking at the waves of the sea. They just roll along. These leaders will differ in their lifestyle and in their fortunes. Some are successful and some unsuccessful; some last a long time and some a short while, but when Daniel keeps talking about them he says "but the end is not yet."

There are various events in the course of these chapters. There are repeated turnovers in control: one king would last for awhile and another king would last for awhile. Then there would be contention and conflict between the king of the north and the king of the south. But all the efforts of these men would be futile; none would be able to establish themselves permanently.

But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased (Daniel 12:4).

We note with interest the words we read:

And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and a half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished (Daniel 12:6-7).

What we can actually pin down is the fact that things would come to an end; all these affairs would be finished.

And I heard, but I understood not . . . (Daniel 12:8)

If Daniel did not understand it when he was right there, how should I think that I would understand it? There are some who do think they can understand, and they feel led to interpret it. But I am impressed by the fact that the material as presented in this portion was of such a nature that Daniel did not understand it. So far as I am concerned I feel I should leave it the way it is.

Then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days (Daniel 12:8-13).

In all of this we have been shown again that there are things recorded in Scripture that are not understood. I realize that Old Testament prophets oftentimes searched diligently what these things meant (I Peter 1:10-12), these things that pointed toward the coming of Christ, and were given to understand that it was not for them to know the times nor the season. I am inclined to think that some of these prophecies we have in Scripture are written for the time to come. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns and His saints are gathered together, they will find out that the Word of God revealed many true things not understood when written. Many will understand far more than we understand now. But in the meantime it is much the same as in reading the book of Revelation. The promise is that there will be blessing for all who read the book, and I have always been helped personally just to realize that it did not say for anybody who understands the book; but for those who "read" it.

Thus we come to the end of the text of the book of Daniel. He I was a great man in the service of God, who served God in a foreign land among pagan people.

Chapter 14

The Methods Of The Prophets

Do you think all preachers should act the same when they are preaching, if they preach the same message?

Inasmuch as Daniel was one of the prophets it might be helpful at this time to consider how the prophets did their work. A large portion of the Old Testament consists of the writings of the prophets. There were prophets in the Old Testament who did not write any Scripture, but we also have those who did. In our culture a prophet is usually thought of as someone who predicts what is going to happen. In Bible usage, however, the word "prophet" and the word "preacher" are much the same. Though we can learn much by reading the messages of the prophets, it is helpful to remember that those messages which we are reading were actually preached to that generation in which the prophet lived. So in studying the prophets we can learn some principles that we could expect would be helpful to preachers today.

I want to think with you concerning some of these well known prophets in the Bible and ask ourselves how they went about their work. Moses was a prophet. He communicated God's message to the Hebrews. Moses used various methods. The prophet would be a man who would come to the people to tell them that God wanted them to do this or that. How would he impress those people listening, that they were to believe his message was from God? One of the devices or methods that Moses used his miracles, as, for instance, when he threw his rod on the ground and it became a serpent. Then he took that serpent by the tail and it became a rod again. Who was he that he could do those things?

Moses employed also another method: in communion with God is how he learned. We read that on a certain occasion he went to the top of Mount Sinai and spent forty days uninterrupted in communion with God; worshipping God. He came back with the revelation on tablets of stone that he wanted to share with the people. We have another report as to how Moses went about his work. Moses reported what God said to him.

But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it (Deuteronomy 5:31).

We have never been told just how that message was given to Moses. Did he hear an audible voice, or during the time he was in meditation were these ideas formed in his mind? Did the message come to him in the Hebrew language? We have no clue. But we do know that he was given this message, and he was to teach the people.

Another device Moses used was what I would call structured demonstrations, as for example, the tabernacle. Moses was shown while he was on the mount the pattern of the tabernacle and the items of furniture that would be in it. When that tabernacle was built it meant something in the way in which it was situated, and the form in which it was designed. The various items of furniture each meant something as they were placed in the tabernacle. In this way Moses used a sort of object lesson to show the people how this would go.

We think of another prophet, Samuel, who had personal communion with God. Even when he was a child he was called: he heard a voice in the night calling his name. He learned what God wanted him to share with the people. He led the people through his service as a priest in the worship of God. In that way he was able to impress upon them the fact that the words he spoke were the words God wanted them to hear. Another method Samuel used was prayer: he led the people in public prayer. One of Samuel's great principles of procedure was obedience to God. So Samuel conveyed to the people the truth that God wanted him to share.

When we think about prophets the names of two men, Elijah and Elisha, are often linked. They lived in

the northern kingdom and the king under whom they lived was the wicked king Ahab. Both Elijah and Elisha were in conflict with Ahab. In the time when the king in the country was an ungodly man, God sent prophets who came with authority from God, and declared truth to the people. One of the devices they used was that of miracles. In all the Old Testament history there are more miracles performed at this time in the history than any other period. When the people saw the miracles performed they learned something from the miracle itself, but above all they learned that the prophet was a man who had a relationship with God that was vital. Another method used was prayer. We remember how Elijah prayed on Mt. Carmel that it should rain after it had not rained for three years and six months. That demonstration of prayer was referred to in the New Testament (James 5:17-18).

Another method the prophets used was the instruction they would give to the people, and their guidance. Sometimes the prophets were called "seers." Their usual method was that of preaching. They showed how the covenant with Abraham and the covenant with David were still in force and how they applied to their present situation. They preached as in the law and held Israel responsible in their conduct for obeying God as He set it out in the Ten Words given on Mt. Sinai. Then they preached the message which they had received directly from God. How they got it is not recorded.

The prophets sometimes drew attention to what they were saying by dramatic behavior. Isaiah, commonly called the prince among the prophets, used the method, on one occasion, of walking naked for three years. That would certainly draw attention. He was indicating to the people that would be the way they would be stripped by the power of God.

Although Ezekiel was man of great power as an orator, he was actually told by God to stamp his feet and clap his hands, so if we should see a preacher using methods like that, we should not think he is sinful; the man might have been led to do it. It is interesting that sometimes the prophets would convey their message by significant action on their part. For instance, we read about Jeremiah buying a piece of property at a time when it seemed as though the enemy would come in and destroy the nation, when the people would all be taken away. Jeremiah registered the deed for the property by way of demonstrating to the people that he believed they were surely coming back. They would recognize that he certainly thought so because he bought that property and registered the deed so that he might have it when they returned.

In these various ways these men whom we commonly call the prophets, received messages from God; which they then shared with the people by using various methods, as we have reviewed here. Daniel was one of these men.

Chapter 15

The Message Of The Prophets

Do you have any idea what messages the prophets preached?

In the plan of God some persons are gifted to have insight into the will of God, and are commissioned to help others know this by preaching. Daniel is considered one of the prophets. I should like to share with you some thoughts concerning the message of the prophets. The problem to which the prophets addressed themselves existed because God is invisible and infinite, and man is limited and perverse. The prophets were sent by God to finite perverse men with a message to help. The Scriptures show that God is compassionate and gracious; He wants to help man, His creature. There are some things that God can and will do in His providence apart from anything that anybody says or does. And there are some important things that God can and will do by His grace which are in response to faith on the part of the believers.

Man is born without faith, and without any desire to get that faith. But God is gracious. You will remember how Paul said, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." Sinful man needs to be told; he needs to be taught the truth about God and about man. God arranges that men should have this truth: parents perform this function first. In our Sunday Schools and our churches teachers and ministers continue the work of teaching people what has been revealed about the will of God.

In the Old Testament times this was done notably by the prophets; men who analyzed situations, evaluated what they found, and then formulated their own ideas. In II Peter we read, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." This is a basic truth about all prophecy. We ask ourselves if these men had a particular message that they shared. Was there only one idea that was set forth about the truth they had in mind and do we find it just one time, or do we find it again and again?

Throughout the Old Testament Moses would probably be counted as the first prophet and from then on there were men and women who taught others the Word of God as it had been revealed to them. Was there any structure and was there any way of organizing what these people taught? The first thing that comes to mind is that in every revelation the basic idea that was set forth was the truth about God, the Creator of man and of all things; the Keeper of all living things; the Sovereign. His providence controls much of the situation in which men live. He controls His providence according to His will. God is Judge; He sees what happens and His eyelids try the children of men. He examines what is happening and evaluates it. He is just and in the judgment He will be fair. The soul that sinneth it shall die. And so, because of His judgment, death is passed upon all human beings. But God is the Saviour. In judgment He remembers mercy, and this God is the One who has arranged to save to the uttermost those who come unto Him by the Lord Jesus Christ.

All mankind everywhere who live in this universe are under the eye of Almighty God. God pays attention to everything that happens, blessing those who do His will, and cursing those who disobey Him. God's blessing comes to mankind supremely through His Messiah. That blessing comes to anyone, whosoever will repent and turn to God. Another truth about God is that the law of God is valid. Those Ten Words that were revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai are really the truth about what God expects of man. And as a principle of interpretation, where there is evaluation of conduct, the Ten Words represent the truth.

But God will deal in a new covenant with all who will accept Christ. Before they accept Christ they are dealing with God on the basis of the Old Covenant, which is based upon the law of God: "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Under the Old Covenant man experienced the consequences of his own actions, brought to him by Almighty God, who paid him off, as it were: "The wages of sin is death." At the same time we think about the New Covenant which God has established between those who

believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The New Covenant operates on the principle of grace. God will do for us. The whole idea is that because Christ died for sinners and because He carried their sins away, and because Almighty God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the sins of man no longer are on him. Christ Jesus carried them away. God's dealing with these people is on the basis of His grace. This is a way of saying that because Christ Jesus died for me and rose again, I can live in the newness of life. By the Holy Spirit of God I can be moved to obey God in the course of my living. This is included in the whole truth about Jesus Christ.

We remind ourselves we are trying to grasp what the message of the prophets was, and what did they tell the people? In general they told the people that God will arrange to save and to deliver anybody whosoever will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. God will then deal with this believer on the basis of His grace and mercy, and will bless the believer. When we speak about a believer we are speaking about a repentant person. The truth is that sin is real and the whole arrangement with God begins with a person confessing his sin and forsaking it; being willing in his heart and mind to turn his back on it and no longer depend on himself. He is the one whom God will arrange to save.

By the time of John the Baptist, who may be looked upon as the last of the Old Testament prophets, the message from God that may be put in a word was this: repent and believe. Repent before God and believe the Gospel, which included the idea of obeying the will of God. This, in general, is the message of the prophets. Whether you think of Moses or Elijah and Elisha or whether you think of Jeremiah, Isaiah or Ezekiel, Daniel or Hosea, any of the prophets that we could name, we think of them altogether, including John the Baptist, and this is the general message that they preached. God is, and God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.