

The Book Of Daniel (Part Four)

Daniel Chapter 5 and 6

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So far, we have gone through the first four chapters of the book of Daniel and we have seen that God's sovereignty is immutably supreme, and that the Most High God's will *will* be done. The sovereign God rules over kings and provides protection for His faithful servants. Nothing can happen to us unless God allows it. Even if He allows something to happen to us, He gives us the strength to bear under it. We have a win-win situation.

Also, we have observed that it is vitally important that God's faithful servants humbly take concerns and problems to Him in prayer, especially in a crisis, casting all our worries on the Most High God. We have witnessed that faith is not shown by preferences of belief, but by conviction based on truth. Faith without conviction is a dead faith, and conviction is manifested by right actions.

In chapters 5 and 6 of Daniel, we find a continuation of these vital themes: the sovereignty of God; the faithful prayer, and convictions of beliefs. Let us begin with some historical background regarding the transition period between chapters 4 and 5. I would like you to notice the political instability of these times. It seems like whenever man is ruling there is instability, but it is amazing at how much instability there was at this particular time.

Nebuchadnezzar died after 43 years of ruling Babylonia. He was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach. In Chaldean, it is Amel-Marduk which means "the man of Merodach." It means nothing to us, but I think Merodach was one of the Babylonian gods, if I remember correctly. So Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach, under whom conditions in the kingdom began to worsen. However, one of the new king's acts was laudable. He freed Jehoiachin, the king of Judah, who had been brought by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon and imprisoned for nearly 37 years previously.

To show honor to the vassal king, Evil-Merodach allowed Jehoiachin the privileges of sharing the royal food in the palace. We find that mentioned in II Kings 25:27-30. This probably did not last very long, because after a short reign of about 2 years, Evil-Merodach was assassinated and another son (actually, a son in-law), of Nebuchadnezzar took his place. His name was Neriglissar, and he ruled for 6 years. Then his son, a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, took his place. His name was Labashi-Marduk, and he ruled for only two months. So you can see the instability they were having in Babylon at that time.

Then another son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar took his place. His name was Nabonidus and he ruled for 17 years, and then his son, another grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, co-ruled with him. He co-ruled with Nabonidus for about 14 years. Belshazzar had actually been the fifth in line to the throne when Nebuchadnezzar died, but he became the seventh and last ruler of ancient Babylon.

During these ongoing sudden changes, the kingdom's power suddenly waned. Babylon was a world power at that time and it steadily waned. By the time the idolatrous Belshazzar had become co-ruler with his father, the great "head of gold" empire was in chaos and serious trouble.

Media and Persia, two nations to the north and east, had sent their armies towards high-walled Babylon (remember in my first sermon I had mentioned that their walls were extremely high and wide), whose fall could mean the fall of all of Babylonia. Even under such ominous circumstances, Babylon seemed impregnable and impossible to take or even to siege.

We will pick up the story of Belshazzar in Daniel 5.

Daniel 5:1-3 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father [actually "father" here means "ancestor." It was in reality his grandfather.] Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them.

Picture this, if you will. Belshazzar disdainfully held a riotous feast for a thousand of his officials, a wild party, so to speak. As the evening progressed and the wine flowed more freely, Belshazzar staggered to his feet and motioned for the music and chattering to cease, and then he said something like this: "Why are we drinking for our gods from such ordinary cups? Why not use the gold and silver vessels brought long ago from the so called holy temple in Jerusalem? I say that it's time for those vessels be put to a better use than in serving the God of Judah."

There were raucous cheers, I am sure, and the servants hurried to bring out the costly

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containers, distributed them to the crowd, and poured wine in them. Then the king continued, holding a gleaming golden goblet, brimming with wine, "Here's to our soldiers out on our walls. May they never run out of boiling water to pour down on the steaming heads of our bothersome besiegers."

There were ripples of laughter, no doubt, especially from the king's wives and concubines who were present. Now everyone stood up, extended various containers of wine, roared approval, and guzzled the beverages. Then the music continued, and the people settled back to the loud drinking toast after toast to their many and varied gods. They were having a grand old time.

Daniel 5:4-5 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

Visualize this, if you will. Suddenly a disembodied hand appeared and began to write on the wall. The king and his nobles believe in dark omens, and this was the most unusual and terrifying omen that they had ever seen.

Daniel 5:6 Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

That is quite a vivid picture of a man who is actually very terrified, and I am sure his lords were as well. So, Belshazzar called for the enchanters and diviners to read the writing and explain what it meant, but they were baffled. At last, Daniel, who by the time of this story had become a much older man, was summoned at the queen's suggestion and he read the writing. It was a judgment.

Daniel 5:18-22 O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor [this is Daniel speaking here]. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he [Nebuchadnezzar] wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven

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from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. "But you his son [his grandson], Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.

Before I deal with the meaning of this judgment, I want to discuss Belshazzar himself. This is because the name Belshazzar, or lack of the name Belshazzar, in historical records came into question. We have already seen where in the kingly line he fell, but there is much more to the story than that.

The chief extra-biblical supply of information about ancient Babylon is the Greek historian Brosius, who is quoted by Flavius Josephus as the source of his information. The problem is that Brosius does not mention Belshazzar as one of the Babylonian kings. In fact he does not mention the name Belshazzar at all, nor for many years was the name found anywhere by archeologists or historical works, or anywhere.

Nebuchadnezzar was known and so were the names of three kings who succeeded him in rather rapid succession, but the last of these, Nabonidus, which I mentioned earlier, and Belshazzar are not mentioned. But as usual, time has a way of answering such questions. In this case, in 1854 a British counsel named J. G. Taylor, was exploring some ruins in southern Iraq for the British Museum and came across several small cylinders inscribed with 60 or so lines of cuneiform writing.

It turned out that the inscriptions had been written at the command of Nabonidus, who ruled Babylon from 555 to 539 B.C. They commemorated the repair of a temple tower at Er and they contained the prayer for the long life and good health of Nabonidus and for his eldest son Belshazzar. So it was not until 1854 that they were actually able to prove that Belshazzar existed through archeological or historical records. That does not seem all that important to us because we believe our Bibles, but to the world and secular or mainstream Christianity, it meant a lot.

So for the first time the name Belshazzar was discovered in ancient extra biblical record, and it was proved that he was an important person who lived in Babylon at the time of its fall. Still, Belshazzar was only identified as the eldest son of Nabonidus and not as a king of Babylon. In fact, since Taylor's discovery in 1854, several other Babylonian remains have been found that also mention Belshazzar, but he is always called the king's son or the crown prince, not king.

How then do we explain the identification of Belshazzar as king in Daniel 5:1? I have already given you a hint of that. Here is a quote from the May/June 1985 issue of *Biblical Archeology Review*:

In legal deeds from the 6th century BC, the parties swear oaths by the gods and the king according to a well-known and long-standing practice. In some of these deeds from the reign of Nabonidus, we find that the parties swear by Nabonidus and by Belshazzar the king's son. This formula, swearing by the king and his son, is unattested in any other reign in any documents yet uncovered. This suggests that Belshazzar may have had a special status. We know that during part of his father's reign, Belshazzar was the effective authority in Babylon. The Babylonian text reveals that Nabonidus was an eccentric ruler. While he did not ignore the gods of Babylon, he did not treat them in the approved way and gave very considerable attention to the moon god at two other cities, Ur and Harran. For several years of his reign, Nabonidus did not even live in Babylon, instead he stayed at the distant oasis of Tema in northern Arabia. During that time Belshazzar ruled in Babylon. According to one account, Nabonidus entrusted the kingship to Belshazzar.

Apparently as Herodotus, the Greek historian suggests, Nabonidus, with his armies, left Babylon to fight against Darius. He was defeated by Darius and fled to Borsippa where he was bottled up by some of Darius' troops. Then Darius advanced against Babylon, where Belshazzar was apparently reigning in his father's absence.

The events of Daniel 5 took place on a night of the city's fall. Besides, there is this point: In Daniel 5:16, Belshazzar offers to make Daniel the third highest ruler in the kingdom. If he can read and interpret the writing on the wall, why third highest? When Pharaoh offered a similar reward to Joseph, it was to make him second only to Pharaoh. We find that in Genesis 41:40-44. Why should Belshazzar have offered to make Daniel third in command in an exactly parallel situation? Continuing on with the quote:

The puzzle is explained if we conclude, as apparently we should, that Belshazzar himself was actually only the second ruler in the kingdom, even though he was at time the only acting king of Babylon. Since Belshazzar's father Nabonidus was still living, Belshazzar would have been able only to offer the third place to Daniel.

It is a long description, but it explains a lot and gives us background into Daniel 5.

There are all these biblical facts that we do not know and fail to understand, so it will always be possible to point to certain items and say that there are errors, but these things tend to become explained as time goes on. As time passes and the data from archeology, historical investigations, numismatics and other disciplines accumulate, these alleged errors or discrepancies tend to explode in the faces of those who promote them.

It has been proven time and time again that to take the position of standing upon the historical accuracy and inerrancy of the Bible is always the wisest choice. The Bible is seen to be more reliable, not less reliable, as time passes. Every time they find archeology that says anything about something said in the Bible, it backs the Bible. The archaeologists, scientists, and scholars always try to prove the Bible wrong and always wind up looking like fools (and, of course, they never admit their mistakes).

Let's pick up the story in Daniel 5:22.

Daniel 5:22-29 “But you his son [grandson], Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” [Now the reason it says Peres there instead of Upharsin is because Peres is the plural form of Upharsin.] Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Now you see why the previous description was important, because it is actually

mentioned in Scripture.

Earlier Belshazzar had promised Daniel all these things if he could interpret the dream, which he did, but Daniel told the king that there was no need to give him anything. So you see the humility of Daniel coming out even at that time.

It so happened that night, 533 BC. Darius the Mede attacked Babylon and overthrew, it killing Belshazzar. It was an example of one of God's great judgments in human history and is a warning to everyone.

Daniel 5:30-31 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

There are a number of important lessons in this story, in addition to the lessons of the Bible's reliability. Let me give them to you and then we will apply them in a slightly wider way. First, sin is not static. That is, the one who sins never remains on a plateau or on an even keel. The path of sin always leads downhill.

In the case of Belshazzar, because he would not learn from the example and experience of his predecessor, his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar sank not merely to Nebuchadnezzar's insane beastliness, which was a punishment for his arrogance, but lower still. Daniel 4:30 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar sinned by boasting.

Daniel 4:30 The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

He took to himself the glory due God and was punished by God by the loss of his reason. Now Belshazzar went further. He blasphemed God by desecrating the vessels of God taken from the Temple at Jerusalem, and by praising idols in place of the Most High God. He was basically thumbing his nose at the God of Israel, the God of Daniel.

He was punished not merely by the loss of his reason, though his actions were a true insanity, but also by the loss of his kingdom and his life. This is the biblical pattern of enmity against God, and it was also the pattern of Gomer, who left Hosea to live with other men. And it was the pattern of Jonah, whose rejection of God's call led to near disaster. The pattern is enunciated clearly in Romans 1.

Romans 1:21-25 Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

This is exactly the description of Belshazzar and his time, and exactly the description of our time today. It does not look like we have long before God's judgment in a great way in human history is again seen. This is exactly what Daniel told Belshazzar in verse 22.

Daniel 5:22 “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.

Second, sin makes us feel impervious to danger. The infamous Karl Marx said that “religion is the opiate of the people.” He meant that religion puts us to sleep so that our oppressors have less trouble maintaining their supremacy, but Karl Marx got it exactly backwards. He was wrong. It is not true religion that drugs us, but rather it is sin. True religion wakes us up by turning us from sin to the righteousness of God, which is in Jesus Christ. Belshazzar's final fling is an example of this stupidity.

Darius was outside the walls. That very night he would dam up the river and enter the city through the space provided when the water dropped and exposed the portals through which the river entered Babylon. At the moment of the greatest of all dangers, Belshazzar was drugging himself at his party. Is that not what this nation is doing today?

Yet it is not only Belshazzar who has done this. Today's culture is doing it as well by refusing to think, especially about eternal realities, and by filling our days with entertainment, particularly sin-oriented entertainment. We lose sight of danger and plunge into the abyss of sin and neglect as a nation and as a people.

Third, God is not static. I have said that sin is not static, but I need to say also that God is not static. There are times in history when sin abounds and God does not seem to intervene, at least not spectacularly. But we must not think that God is unaffected by sin, or that He will ignore it forever simply because His judgments are postponed.

In times like these, the wrath of God accumulates like waters rising behind a dam. The time eventually comes when a great accumulation of wrath is poured out against sinners. This happened to nations at the moments of their greatest arrogance, and it happens to individuals when the judgments of God are least expected because their foolish hearts are darkened. This reminds us of how Jesus spoke in His Olivet discourse just before His crucifixion.

Matthew 24:37-44 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

In a physical and secular way, Belshazzar was not watching, and in came the army that God had sent to destroy Babylon. This leads to the consideration of the judgment itself. Let us make a biblical comparison. You know the content of the book of Revelation and that in chapters 17-19 the judgment of God on evil is represented pictorially as the fall of mystery Babylon. Turn to Revelation 18, where the lament begins:

Revelation 18:19 “They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’

It is a scene of utter dismay and anguish, and that is exactly what happened in that city of Babylon as the Medes and Persians marched in to take over.

Revelation 18:21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.

But in the next chapter we find not mourning but rejoicing as a great multitude in heaven expresses their emotions at this judgment. In Revelation 19, John records Christ's words.

Revelation 19:1-3 After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!"

Here the Bible links judgment to the fall of ancient Babylon, using the earlier destruction as a portrait of all sinners' destinies, and this is good. But God tells us that evil will be judged and that the multitude in heaven will rejoice in this judgment, even as good people, no doubt, rejoiced in the fall of Belshazzar and his wicked regime. Nevertheless, God does not get a thrill out of the judgment of the wicked. He tells us these things so that we might turn from sin to salvation, as provided by God through Jesus Christ.

Now the judgment of God on Belshazzar's Babylon is defined by the Aramaic words, Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. Each of these words is a measure of weight similar to our ounce, pound, ton, milligram, gram, kilogram, and so on. The basic Babylonian unit of weight was the gold shekel—Tekel in verse 25. The Mene equaled 50 shekels. The Upharsin, half a Mene, equaled 25 shekels. So the four words therefore stood for: Mene: 50 shekels; Mene: 50 shekels; Tekel: 1 shekel; Upharsin: 25 shekels. Adding them all up the total equaled 126 shekels. In addition, each shekel can be divided into even smaller units, as a pound can be divided in to ounces, for example. The shekel was equal to 20 gerahs. Equivalentents are explained in Ezekiel 45. It says there:

Ezekiel 45:12 The shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, and fifteen shekels shall be your mina.

So the 126 shekels of Daniel 5:25 is equal to 2,520 gerahs. The words of the handwriting on the wall symbolized that God had weighed Belshazzar kingdom and found it wanting. The empire would be given to the Medes and Persians who entered and captured the city of Babylon that same night. God was about to punish Belshazzar's Babylonian realm for 2,520 years—the equivalent of the 2,520 gerahs. This is confirmed by another prophesy found in Daniel 4. God told king Nebuchadnezzar that a total of 7 times of punishment would befall Babylon. That is mentioned in Daniel 4:16, 25.

In prophesy, a time equals a year of 360 days. This can be seen by noting that three and a half times equals 42 months, or 1260 days, as we find in Revelation 12:6, 14 and Revelation 13:5. Seven times therefore equals 2,520 days, and Nebuchadnezzar himself spent 7 years without human reason, living like a beast. In certain prophecies however, such as Daniel 5, each day represents a year in prophetic fulfillment.

These back-to-back prophecies in Daniel 4 and 5 show the type: Nebuchadnezzar and the anti-type- Babylon, the fulfillment of many biblical prophecies. This is the prophetic principal of duality. So then from the experiences of both Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar it is evident that Babylon would be punished for a period of 2,520 years.

In addition to the literal word-for-word interpretation that Daniel offered Belshazzar, mentioned in Daniel 5:26-28, he also prophesied that the Babylonian kingdom would be punished for 2,520 years. Its fulfillment begins in verses 30-31, after which it was to rise again one final time before the return of Christ. What time does that add up to and where does that place the time frame? I do not know. I am not giving this sermon on prophesy, but rather on principles and what it says here.

Let's get back to the meaning of Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin in Daniel 5:25-28. Mene means numbered and that God is going to number the people's deeds to show that they have failed to achieve His standards. In the book of Revelation, we are told of a great book in which the deeds of men and women are recorded. This book will be opened on the day of judgment and what each wicked human being has done will be poured out on one side of God's scales and the sinners will be weighed and found wanting. That is what the word Tekel means—weighed. It signifies all the lies, hypocrisies, self-seeking, and all the harm done to others. All this will fill the scale. Sinners will be weighed and as they stand there, that great scale of God is going to go crashing down on the side of that just judgment.

Then God speaks the word Peres, plural of Upharsin, which means divided. The Greek word for judgment means divided. So we have Peres meaning divided and we have judgment meaning divided, because God's judgment is a final dividing of the ways. One way leads to life and the other way leads to death.

Daniel 6 is a wonderful example and lesson of uncompromising dedication. Daniel believed God, and what he knew and how he acted upon it showed that his conviction was unbending. He put things in God's hands and was willing to submit to however God decided to use him, whether unto life or death. Daniel had been promoted to a position of great prominence, as we saw in the previous chapter, and those around him were

jealous, to say the least.

Daniel 6:1-5 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God."

Daniel's faithfulness earned him some powerful enemies, either through jealousy or because his incorruptibility restricted their opportunities to enhance their own income. Yet his character was such that they knew that the only way to bring a charge against him was in the area of the law of his God. Would it not be wonderful if that could be said of every Christian, especially of each of us? I am afraid that sometimes it cannot be said of us because there are many things of which we can rightly be accused.

There are many times we can be accused of wrong actions. If this is the case with us, we need to confess the sin and have it cleansed and forgiven by Jesus Christ. At other times, we can be accused of laziness. The jealous peers of Daniel tried to fault him for his negligence, but they could not prove it; they could not prove that he was negligent of anything. Sometimes people will accuse Christians of pride and this may be an unjust accusation in some instances, but sometimes Christians have been prideful. We all have.

Continuing on here in Daniel 6, the governors and satraps came together by agreement. In the original Aramaic and equivalent Hebrew, it depicts the nations noisily assembling against the Lord and His appointed. There is an example in Psalm 2 where it says:

Psalm 2:1-3 Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us."

So this description of what these governors and satraps were doing in coming after Daniel was not just something calm, but rather they were noisily assembled, probably arguing and screaming and yelling as they planned this. They went to King Darius with the proposal for a new law. For the next thirty days no one was to petition any god or man except the king himself. All offenders would be cast into the den of lions.

Darius likely viewed this law as a political rather than a religious edict, and saw it as a means of reuniting the realm by identifying himself as the sole mediator between the people and the gods, seen by them as the source of every blessing.

Notice that if Daniel's enemies were going to be able to attack him at all, it was going to have to be in the area of his relationship with God. Daniel must have been over 80 years old at this time and these scheming men have had many years to observe him, yet there was nothing they could honestly accuse him of. So they resorted to a stratagem.

They approached Darius with the flattering suggestion that a law be passed according to which no one would be allowed to pray to any god or man for the next thirty days except to Darius himself. They suggested further that if anyone disobeyed the law he would be thrown into the den of hungry lions. It was purposed that this law be decreed in the most binding way according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which could not be annulled even by the king himself.

Darius was trapped by this evil plot. He probably did not want to condemn Daniel, but he easily fell into this deception. What did it mean for Darius to issue a law forbidding anyone to pray to any god or man except himself for a period of thirty days? The answer is obvious. It meant that Darius was putting himself in the place of God. Unwittingly perhaps, but nevertheless doing so. He was basically saying, "I am the one to whom people should look to for all things. I am sovereign."

Darius had the same attitude that Belshazzar and his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had. He did the same thing that Belshazzar had done in the desecration of the Temple vessels and what Nebuchadnezzar had done before him. It was the ultimate blasphemy, placing themselves as supreme sovereign, the sin that God will not tolerate.

The breaking of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" is there for a reason because it is most important. But this is the sin of every secular culture, the sin of putting self in God's place. We have expressions of this in Babylon, but think also of the kingdom of Rome, whose coming Daniel prophesied.

Rome was extraordinarily arrogant and the ultimate arrogance was the cult of the Caesars. Citizens of the empire were required to burn a pinch of incense to the reigning Caesar and utter the words, "Kyrios Kaisar" meaning "Caesar is lord." It is this that the early Christians refused to do and for which they themselves were thrown to wild lions or crucified.

It was not necessarily that Christians were forbidden to worship God. In many cases they were, but not in all cases, and this is what we should be aware and careful of. They were free to worship any god they chose so long as they also acknowledged Caesar. Romans were hypocritically tolerant, but when Christians denied to Caesar the allegiance that they believed belonged to the true God only, they were executed in very horrendous ways. Is it any different today? People think that they are in a more enlightened age, and we are in some secular respects. In many places in the world a person is not killed for an exclusive worship of Jesus Christ. But there are different kinds of executions and the attacks on Christians are often no less vicious.

Today attacks are often related to us being against abortion and homosexuality. Here is an example: in early 1981, after Ronald Reagan's election as president of the United States, the distinguished pediatric surgeon, C. Everett Koop, was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, which put him in line to become Surgeon General of the United States. Koop was then Surgeon-in-Chief of Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, where the entire surgical center is named in his honor. He was a pioneer in pediatric surgery and an inventor of many pediatric surgical techniques.

He founded, and was at the time the editor of, the Journal of Pediatric Surgery. He had been awarded the French Legion d'Honneur. But Koop opposed abortion on the grounds that the fetus was made in the image of God, and to abort it is commit murder. Indeed he was nominated to be Surgeon General because of this conviction. But because his opposition to abortion was unpopular, the media and many political opponents embarked on a slanderous campaign in which his many medical accomplishments were ignored and he was repeatedly portrayed a little more than a close-minded fundamentalist.

We know what fundamentalist means and what it refers to. It is not something that we want to be called because of the derogatory connections with it, yet we do follow the basis of Scripture and the teachings of the apostles and Jesus Christ. So if we are called a fundamentalist for doing that, so be it. But this man, who was a professing Christian, was labeled as a fundamentalist to discredit him. *The Washington Post* described him as, "a fundamentalist Christian with a Lincolnesque beard." *The Boston Globe* dismissed him as a mere "clinician with tunnel vision." These and other attacks

delayed Koop's appointment as Surgeon General for nearly a year, although in the end he was appointed.

This is a clear case of this society wanting to continue to play god in the matter of life, the life of the unborn, and of its furious hostility against anyone, however distinguished, who stands against it in obedience to God. If we practice our religion on the reservation and do not attempt to bring it out into the real world, the world may tolerate us for a while. But if we determine to take a stand on any important issue on the basis of genuine religious principle, the fury of this secular society will break all bounds. We should ask ourselves, what are we willing to die for? It should certainly not be for what you prefer to believe, it must be a conviction.

Daniel was an experienced diplomat, so he knew immediately what the king's decree meant and where it came from. For thirty days, Daniel would need to abandon his customary practice of praying three times daily or else be thrown into the den of lions. Well, one may say that it is not too bad; it is not as if he had to bow down to an idol as his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were required to do. All he had to do was stop praying openly for one month; certainly he could be subtle instead. He could close his window so his prayers would not be seen, or better yet, pray in bed at night. He could let his supplications slide for a month—after all there are many so-called Christians today that probably allow a month or more to slide by without any significant prayers. There are some who may think like that, but not Daniel. Daniel was convicted.

Daniel 6:10-11 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

So, he did what he had always done in the way that he had always done it, without slighting it in the least. Daniel's windows were probably open in the usual manner. It does not mean that he made a special effort to open them for the purpose of ostentation, or to show that he disregarded the decree. It merely means that he did not bother to close them to avoid the consequences.

In the warm climate of Babylon the windows were commonly open. That was just the way they lived then and even to this day. Houses among the Jews in later times, if not in the time of the exile, were usually constructed with an upper chamber. This was a room

not in common use, but used as a guest chamber where they received company and held feasts, and at other times they retired for prayer and meditation. Those upper rooms are often the most pleasant and airy part of the house in that climate.

Always remember those words, “as was his custom.” This was a pattern with Daniel. The outside world may have been changing, but God had not changed, and Daniel was not going to allow his relationship with God to change either, regardless of the shifting circumstances. Daniel was living his beliefs as a way of life as was his custom and when the crisis arose, he was prepared. His conviction about what to do was strong and clear and he went on unhesitatingly as his custom was.

There are two things that I would like you to notice about Daniel at this point. First, Daniel was the smallest of all possible minorities at this time, a minority of one. But although he was one man among many hostile enemies, he was the one man who knew the true state of affairs in this struggle. He was one man standing alone.

Darius did not seem to know he was being manipulated. He did not even see through the conspiracies of the administrators and satraps, and he perceived nothing of the spiritual struggle. The conspirators did not understand the situation. They did not know Daniel’s God and they thought it would be an easy thing to get Daniel executed, one way or another. At this time, Daniel probably did not even have the support of his three friends, because they are not mentioned as they were in the incident involving Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Either they had been transferred to other parts of the empire or they had died. Daniel was now elderly.

Here was one man, standing alone in the midst of an utterly pagan culture. All were against him and any who knew of his convictions would have laughed at them. Yet in all this vast empire, Daniel was the one man who really had it together. He knew that there was a true God and he knew who that true God was.

He knew that God was powerful and that He could deliver him if He chose to do so. Above all, he knew that obeying and serving the one true God had to be the supreme goal of his life. It is something that each and every one of us have to keep in our minds every minute of every day as things close in around us in the way of persecution and other happenings that will take place in the future.

The second important thing about Daniel was that what he knew he practiced openly. Some people maintain their belief in God privately and witness for Him if asked, but they do not want to offend anyone. They do not want to be seen as religious, so they back off, retreat. They privatize their convictions. Daniel did not do that, and in this he showed

true greatness. Instead of hiding his convictions, he humbly knelt before his normally open window, which allowed a gentle breeze to pass through, and the window was in the sight of Babylon. He prayed as he had always done. He was not flaunting his spirituality; he was not out to make a spectacle of God's way of life for vanity's sake.

I am not saying that we should go out and witness on the street corner in an embarrassing way, such as is done, but any opportunity we have to give people God's truth, we should, if they are willing to hear it. Most people are not willing to hear it and we find out very soon. Here in the South, though, I am always amazed at how often we run into people who want to talk about it, although they have the mainstream view of it. But if they are willing to talk about it, we should.

Our internal motivation is the central concern in prayer. Jesus Christ does not specify the times when we should pray in private. He does not say how often it should be done, but why not? Why does He not give us the details in that way? Well here are three possible reasons:

1) God wants a voluntary relationship from us, and there is not a better test of true faithfulness than a genuine desire to go to Him in personal prayer. He leaves it to us to show our devotion to Him by coming to Him often and as often as we choose.

2) An attempt to specify all the times when we should pray would tend to make fellowship through prayer mechanical. Here is a vivid example of this: Mohammed undertook to regulate this, and the consequence is a cold and formal prostration at the appointed hours of prayer all over the land where his religion had spread.

3) The periods of prayer are so numerous and the reasons for prayer vary that there is no easy fixed rules for when this should be done, other than in public formal worship. If we desire to have convictions that will stand the test of what is coming, we must exercise our minds daily by submitting to God and coming to know Him in the arena of life. Then we can be deeply convicted about what He expects and what our choices should be to please and glorify Him. So even if we are at the store or out doing a job in the field, or wherever we may be, we should pray to God and ask Him to help us to figure out how to do this better or wiser, keeping Him in mind throughout the day.

Yet without given rules where Christ has given none, let me suggest some times that may be some of the proper times for private prayer, although there are many more than this, but here are some ideas.

We should pray in the morning. Nothing can be more appropriate than when we have

been protected and sustained through the night and when we are about to begin accomplishing the duties and avoiding the dangers of another day, than to offer thanks to our great Preserver and to commit ourselves to his fatherly care.

Another appropriate time would be in the evening, when the day has closed. What would be more natural than to offer thanksgiving for the mercies of the day and to implore forgiveness for what we have said or done wrong. And when we are about to lie down to sleep, not knowing whether it may be our last sleep, what would be more proper than to commend ourselves to the care of Him who never slumbers or sleeps.

Another idea is to pray in times of embarrassment or perplexity. Such times occur in everyone's life and it is then a privilege and a duty to go to God and seek His direction. Another suggestion is to pray when we are tormented with strong temptations. Jesus prayed under duress in the garden of Gethsemane; so should we pray when we are tempted or under pressure.

Hebrews 5:7 [Jesus] who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear . . .

Another suggestion is to pray when God's Spirit prompts or compels us to pray and when thanksgiving is in order. This is when we feel most like praying, when nothing can satisfy the heart and mind but prayer. Such times occur in the life of every Christian. Our prayer, at such times, is just as congenial as a conversation with a beloved friend.

We should thank God and ask Him to bless the food of which we are about to partake at meals, and thank Him for whatever we receive from anyone. Another suggestion is if we are watching a movie or TV show and we see something wrong in it, we should pray and ask God to forgive us for seeing that and help us to turn our eyes away. There is never an inappropriate time to pray unless it is to be ostentatious or to make a spectacle. These are just some of the times we should pray. There are other appropriate times as well.

Let's get back to the story of Daniel. Darius did not want to see Daniel killed, so he tried to find the means to escape the force of his unchangeable edict, but to no avail. The law had to be enforced.

Daniel 6:16-17 So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your

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God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.” Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

There is a point from an earlier moment in the story that is of interest at this time. When the conspirators burst in upon Daniel when he was praying, we are told in verse 11 that they found him asking God for help. This means that Daniel was not oblivious to his danger, even though his outward calm might have suggested that he was not taking the threat of execution seriously. In actuality, Daniel was acutely aware of his danger. He knew that he stood to lose his life and he was asking God to help him, and of course that is exactly what God did. God stopped the lions' mouths so that they could not attack Daniel. While he was with them, he was kept from harm, not only from the lions, but from his enemies too. He was in the safest place on earth at that time. He had God's protection and I am sure God probably helped Daniel to sleep peacefully that night as well. This reminds us of David's psalm concerning the safety of the faithful in Psalm 4.

Psalm 4:1-8 Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; have mercy on me, and hear my prayer. How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness and seek falsehood? Selah. But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly; the Lord will hear when I call to Him. Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord. There are many who say, “Who will show us any good?” Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

That is exactly what Daniel was doing and he may have even said similar words as in verse 8. This psalm demonstrates that each godly person must, especially times of distress, cry out to God as the psalmist does in verse 6, and each is to find the answer to his suffering in prayer and in remembering all that God has done for him and be thankful for it.

It was King Darius who could not sleep. He thrashed about, and very early in the morning he rushed to the lions' den to see what had become of his most influential administrator.

Daniel 6:20 And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

Even the king himself knew that Daniel served his God continually. What kind of an answer do you think Darius was expecting? A satisfied roar from the lions perhaps? Well, whatever he expected, it was not the silence of the lions! God had shut their mouths. They could not eat and they could not roar. So when Daniel spoke, he could be heard very clearly.

Daniel 6:21-24 Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! [Still showing respect to the very one who put him in this position.] My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.” Now the king was exceedingly 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 injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God. And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den.

What a contrast to what Daniel had slept with that night. How excitingly and powerfully God looks out for His people. The experience of the conspirators in the den was the exact opposite of Daniel’s—they were seized and killed by the lions before they even hit the bottom of the den. As the divine restraint furnished for the protection of Daniel was withdrawn, the lions acted out their normal nature and by that time they were pretty hungry and they got their fill.

So Darius, like Nebuchadnezzar, confesses the awesome power and protection of Daniel's God. The king issued a decree with which the story ends.

Daniel 6:26-28 I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel

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from the power of the lions. [The decree witnessed to the truth with certainty. God is God, and He rescued Daniel.] So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

In reality God does not always rescue His servants in this way. Hebrews 11:33 speaks of those who, by faith, stopped the mouths of lions, a clear reference to Daniel. But immediately after that, Hebrews also speaks of this:

Hebrews 11:35-37 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

Conviction does not come because we are suddenly struck with inspiration, but it is a product of a sanctification process and involves a growing relationship with God. The whole of the Scriptures is clear regarding the faithful. They grew in faith as they came to know God. Sometimes it required a great amount of time as God worked with them, bringing them to maturity, producing the fruit of the Spirit in them and preparing them for His use.

God calls some to witness and to win victory by living and others are called to witness and win victory by dying. But in life or death, God rules, and we are all called to serve Him. The question is, will we do it? The world needs those who know God and who will live for His righteousness even when the entire culture ferociously turns against them.

Let's lose with Psalm 57, a psalm David used when he fled from Saul into the cave. It is a prayer for safety from enemies.

Psalm 57:1-5 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by. I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me. He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth His mercy and His truth. My soul is among lions; [lions depicting all the persecutions and all of the dangers the Christian faces] I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their

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tongue a sharp sword. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be above all the earth.

The circumstances are dire and yet the faithful person will cry out to God in confidence that He hears and that He fulfills His purpose for His children. We can know that calamities will pass away and will cease, but at present we know that we are in increasing danger. We see the writing on the wall that Christians are increasingly being targeted and persecuted, so we desire divine protection because under that protection we are eternally safe. May God protect us all!