

Trial of the Saints

Ten Trials from the Book of Daniel



*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....*

Daniel G. Caram

“Trial of the Saints”

Ten trials from the book of Daniel

© 2011 Daniel G. Caram

Zion Christian Publishers

Reprinted in April 2015 Version 1.1

All Rights Reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

All Scripture quotations in this book
are taken from the King James Version
unless otherwise stated.

For more information, please contact:

Zion Christian Publishers

A Zion Fellowship ® Ministry

P.O. Box 70

Waverly, New York 14892

Phone: 607-565-2801

Toll free: 1-877-768-7466

Fax: 607-565-3329

www.zcpublishers.com

ISBN 1-59665-087-7

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the following :

Mary Humphreys for her proficiency in the editing of this book.

Carla Borges, Hannah Schrock for their work in formatting this book.

FOREWORD

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....

Several years ago, as I was musing through the book of Daniel, I felt the Spirit of the Lord begin to quicken certain truths that I had never really focused upon before. At the time, I was teaching a New Testament course in Latin America – totally unrelated to the book of Daniel.

Daniel is an end-time book, filled with prophetic chronological events and yet, it was not the eschatological truths that seemed to capture my attention, but rather the array of trials. The book of Daniel gives us a multicolored assortment of trials that seem to inculcate the whole book. As I was ruminating over some of these trials in my mind I began to see some new truths emerge. For example, there is a progression to these trials: In chapter one, Daniel and his friends are tested over their diet. In the last chapter (Chapter 12), there is a trial beyond anything that the world has ever known.

If Daniel and his friends had not passed the first test, which concerned the Levitical diet, they would never have progressed to trial number two. In a sense, all of these trials are preparing the contestant for the ultimate challenge. Perhaps the word *contestant* seems a trite expression and yet the apostle Paul tells us that we are competing for an

incorruptible crown. The Christian life is filled with tests that will challenge our faith. The overcomer receives the crown; and as we shall also see in Daniel, there was a promotion or a merit of distinction or a reward at the conclusion of the test. We do not receive a crown for accepting Christ as our Saviour; we receive a crown for finishing our course, which may include many hurdles (2 Tim 4:7-8).

The man Daniel has always been rather special to me because my mother named me after this great man. In fact, my mother would sing to me a little chorus from the old hymn “*Dare to be a Daniel.*” That was well over sixty years ago.

Israel, a Sign

Another thing that my mother instilled within my heart was that we (my brothers included) were born for this generation; to see the fulfillment of things written. One of the major signs of the end of the age (the Church Age), would be the restoration of Israel to statehood. This took place in 1948. Christ indicated in His Olivet discourse that this generation (*the generation that was born at that time*) would not pass away until all came to pass:

“Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” (Mat 24:32-34).

*The fig tree is Israel's symbol.

Daniel lived at the time that Judah lost its sovereignty (586 BC); and it was never regained until 1948. Israel was always under the boot of some alien power. However, Israel had to regain its national identity in order to fulfill the end-time plan. The final test of the nations is centered upon Israel. The *sheep nations* will support Israel's sovereignty; the *goat nations* will denounce her (Matt 25:32-33).

Trial of the Saints

The interesting thing about a trial is that everyone involved is on trial as well. The contestant is being tried; all of those who are fomenting the trial are also being tried; and all those who witness the trial are on trial as well. (See 2 Thess 1:4-9.) Job's friends were on trial as well as Job.

The Scriptures prove that trials are for the purpose of purifying the saint – the wise shall understand this! I have singled out ten trials in the book of Daniel that I believe will help us to appreciate the benefit of a trial. They will also help us (by God's grace) to endure the test that is coming to try the whole earth. If we are not faithful in the smaller trials then we surely will not stand in the great trial. As the prophet Jeremiah once said: "*If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?*" (Jer 12:5)

God does not give Job-size trials to the new convert. God carefully monitors a trial. As the prophet Malachi said, He sits as a refiner of silver, carefully monitoring the heat and the purifying of the metal. As soon as the refiner sees his reflection in the silver, the silver is removed from the heat. The apostle Paul also states that God will never give us a trial or a test beyond our capability:

*“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”
(1 Cor 10:13).*

The Purpose of a Trial

There are a number of purposes for trials: Perhaps the trial is to reveal something in our lives that God wants to cleanse us from. Perhaps the trial is to adjust something in our character, or to show us the stuff that we are really made of. Perhaps it is to qualify us for a greater place. Or, perhaps we need a good trial just to teach us a lesson – something that we will not want to repeat.

Trials come in many forms (and for many of the above reasons):

- * Temptation
- * Crisis
- * Pain/suffering
- * Loss

- * Shortage
- * Enemies/persecutors
- * Circumstances that deny or contradict
- * Betrayal
- * Perhaps in the form of crucial decisions
- * Perhaps as a challenge to our loyalties

Ten trials from the Book of Daniel

In consideration of these various trials, it is our earnest desire to bring them from out of the abstract into present tense relevance. We may not literally be thrown into a lion's den, and yet we may dwell with people who would like to tear us to pieces. As David said in Psalm 57:4: *“My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.”*

We may not literally be thrown into a fiery furnace, yet Peter warns us not to be surprised at the fiery trial that shall try us (1 Pet 4:12, Ex 4:20). There are indeed situations in life that may even make death seem attractive. All of the testings in life are preparing us for the martyr's crown – there are many martyrs in history that did not literally die. Daniel and his friends prove the point!

Let us receive courage and renewed faith as we examine the trials that perfect the saint and will give him a place of brilliance among the stars that shine throughout eternity.



DARE TO BE A DANIEL

Philip P. Bliss 1873

Standing by a purpose true,
 Heeding God's command,
 Honor them, the faithful few!
 All hail to Daniel's band!

Refrain

*Dare to be a Daniel,
 Dare to stand alone!
 Dare to have a purpose firm!
 Dare to make it known.*

Many mighty men are lost
 Daring not to stand,
 Who for God had been a host
 By joining Daniel's band.

Refrain

Many giants, great and tall,
 Stalking through the land,
 Headlong to the earth would fall,
 If met by Daniel's band.

Refrain

Hold the Gospel banner high!
 On to vict'ry grand!
 Satan and his hosts defy,
 And shout for Daniel's band.

Refrain

Ten Trials in the Book of Daniel

PART 1

Trial of the individual:

1. Tested in the Commandment	21
2. Tested in Faith	35
3. Tested in Worship	47
4. Tested with Success	63
5. Tested on the Balances	81
6. Tested in the Devotional Life	93

PART 2

Corporate Trial of God's People - The War against the Saints

7. Wearing out the Saints	111
8. The False Prosperity	123
9. The Cross-less Gospel	137
10. The Trial of the Ages	149

*Satan's original argument: man will do
anything to save his own skin
(Job 2:4).*

INTRODUCTION

The backdrop of the book of Daniel takes us back to the year 606 BC. The Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, had just carried off a large number of captives from Jerusalem and had exiled them to the city of Babylon. There were three major exiles; however, the first deportation was different because it contained the aristocratic strata of society and all of the skilled laborers and craftsmen. It also included much of Jerusalem's treasure, not to mention the holy artifacts from the temple (2 Kings 24:11-16).

In Scripture, the city of Babylon is both literal and figurative. Babylon runs from Genesis through Revelation. It is metaphoric of Satan's kingdom, whereas Jerusalem is metaphoric of the Holy City. Babylon represents the kingdom of darkness, confusion, and false religion (idolatry). Satan is often portrayed (allegorically) as the king of Babylon (Isa 14:4-19). It is important to realize this in order to appreciate what the captives were up against. There were tremendous temptations in Babylon; and these temptations give us some insights into the types of pressures that will confront God's people prior to the Second Coming.

When you consider the state of Jerusalem prior to this tribulation period, Jerusalem was very backslidden. There were idols at the head of every street in Jerusalem and the words of the prophet went unheeded. The

Chronicles summarizes Judah's condition like this: *“But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy”* (2 Chr 36:16).

The Good Figs Go to Babylon

In spite of Jerusalem's backslidden condition, there was a remnant there that God wanted to preserve and redeem. God always has a remnant, as feeble as it may be, or as few as it may be. As you will recall from the life of Elijah, Elijah thought himself to be the last true believer until the Lord responded by saying: “I have 7000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

We often view “captivity” with great disdain or perhaps as a sign of God's contempt. Yet, time and again we see that it was really God's means of redeeming a person or a people. It is like Hosea's unfaithful wife; the Lord compared her to backslidden Israel. His remedy for her was to hedge up her way with thorns and bring her into a captivity. It was in this place of anguish and trouble that the backslider would renew herself to her Lord.

In the case of the Babylonian captivity, God was sending the redeemable ones into Babylon to cleanse them and eventually restore them. The others were given to various forms of judgment with not a lot of promise of salvation. Jeremiah divides Jerusalem into two camps: the good figs and the naughty figs: Jeremiah 24:2-7:

“One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad. Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.”

It is an amazing concept; that God subjects a man to serve the very thing that he needs to be cleansed from. God took a people that had idols in their heart and sentenced them to the very seat of idolatry, where they were forced to serve idols. In effect, this worked such a revulsion of idolatry into their hearts, that when the captivity ended, Israel never again served idols.

The great Syrian general (Naaman) was a leper. The prophet's remedy was to wash seven times in the filthy Jordan to receive his cleansing. It is often in the place

of constant defeat, failure, and lack of victory that God does a deep cleansing in our hearts. And, it is something that we have to submit to in order to be clean.

Scripture proves that trials are for the purpose of purifying the saint, and thus qualifying him for greater advancement. The purpose of the Great Tribulation is to purify both natural and spiritual Israel. It is also to remove the tares from the Church. May the lord open our understanding as we consider the trial of the saints and the benefits thereof.

*But he knoweth the way that I take: when he
hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

Job 23:10



PART ONE

The Trial of the Individual

I am separating the ten trials of Daniel into two categories: The first six trials are focusing upon the individual. The last four trials are corporate trials – blanket trials that will affect all of God's people.

When a person is being tested, it generally involves other people as well. Everyone is being tried with the contestant, even if it is only something that they are thinking in their heart. May we always bear this in mind when a fellow-saint is in the fire.

TESTED IN THE COMMANDMENT

The Devil's Dainties

The First Trial – Chapter 1

The opening trial in chapter one sets the stage for all of the future events concerning Daniel and his friends. Daniel and his companions are being subjected to an alien diet – a diet which was in direct violation to the dietary laws of the Jews. These four young men distinguish themselves from all the other candidates by refusing the Babylonian diet and adhering to the sanctity laws that they had been taught.

If Daniel and his friends had failed this first test, then I doubt whether there would be a book of Daniel. This first trial proves the sterling quality of these young Hebrews and this holds true throughout the book. Daniel's band proves to be ten times wiser than all the other contestants; and God imparted special prophetic giftings to Daniel that resound over the next seventy years, and to this very day!

“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 favoured, and skilful 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. 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. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah" (Daniel 1:3-6).

Daniel and His Friends Have Convictions

Daniel and his teenage friends were among the first captives to arrive in Babylon *circa* 606 BC. Because they were exceptionally precocious, they were singled out to serve in the king's palace. They began their induction into the king's service by being emasculated. This had to be one of the most degrading or humbling experiences that any young man could ever know.

There first big test began with their new diet. Now we are not told precisely what this diet consisted of, only we know that the Jews were very diet conscious. (The word *meat* covers a wide variety of food; it also translates – “dainties.”) The Levitical diet was very comprehensive as to what was or was not acceptable. Although the Jews may not have understood some of the spiritual significance of the *touch-nots*, they did know that God's law forbade partaking of them.

The human rationale always makes concessions for such cases as these: “Well, if we don't eat this food, this could mean our lives...may the Lord understand this...” Daniel

and his friends had convictions that ran a bit deeper than this. We are told in verse eight: *“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.”*

Even their tutor was taking a risk by consenting to Daniel’s request. Daniel suggested that they be proven for ten days and be allowed to eat their own food. At the end of ten days, their master could judge their appearance and deal from thence.

Now this may sound very trivial – making an issue over their diet – and yet this was a very serious matter to these young men. These were young men that were very conscientious about God’s laws and did not take any of them lightly. May we recall from the book of the Acts an incident where Peter is requested to eat some meat that is dubbed “unclean.” Peter’s response was: *“I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean”* (Acts 10:14). This undoubtedly is one of the reasons that Peter was chosen as one of the twelve. Peter took God’s laws seriously.

I have often mused over this account in Daniel from the standpoint of a minister. These young men were being groomed to stand in the king’s palace. Is this not the role of the minister – to groom his congregants through the Word and by the Spirit that they might stand in the King’s palace at the end of days? As the account in Daniel ends, the appearance of these young men appeared far brighter and healthier than all the other candidates.

Present Day Diet

Let us now bring this into 21st century relevance: The king of Babylon represents Satan; and this 21st century king of Babylon also has a diet with which he would like to entice today's Christian youth. Let us consider some of this appealing meat. I have often said that when I get into some serious meditation of the Word, or if I am listening to a message that has some depth or substance, I find my mouth watering. In fact, I have found myself drooling as I was in deep contemplation of the Word. There are a few verses in Scripture that substantiate this strange behavior.

What kind of meat attracts you? The word *meat* is often a metaphor of one's desire. Jesus said that His *meat* was to do the will of God. He also promises *meat* in due season to the faithful. Christ is not talking about steak; he is talking about the desire fulfilled. As previously mentioned, the word *meat* also translates *dainties*. Let us use Israel as an illustration – the children of Israel were often lusting for the dainties and delights of Egypt. The psalmist also puts this into perspective when he says: “*Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity: and **let me not eat of their dainties***” (Psa 141:4).

The 21st century king of Babylon offers dainties and delights from his table that no other generation has been tempted with. He is like the Pied Piper, alluring the simple ones through his enchantments: through the internet; through the gadgets that can literally tap into

anything that delights the soul and takes away the heart. I think of the pilgrims going through Vanity Fair in the book, *Pilgrim's Progress*. As the story goes, the fair had been in operation for over 5000 years, seducing simple minded pilgrims through their wares. The venders in the fair offered anything that the soul lusts after. One could buy a title or a preferment. The fair offered every amusing trifle known to man, all to entrap the pilgrim in the fair.

Beware of the Deceitful Meat

*"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee... Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat."
(Prov 23:1-3).*

I think that many of these kinds of tests are preparing us, at least in some way, to withstand the temptations of the ever increasing antichrist spirit. I am reminded of another illustration from the Pilgrim's journey (*Pilgrim's Progress*), where the pilgrim is given a vision of two youths who are being offered the kinds of trinkets that delight the young. The condition was thus: they could take the enticing little inheritance now, however it would disqualify them from a much larger inheritance in the future.

In the vision, the one lad takes the bait. He is squealing with delight as he relishes in his bag of tricks and delights. He then turns and mocks the other lad who had determined in himself to wait for the better things.

In the end of the vision, the lad who had taken his good things “now” was very despondent and unhappy. The boy who was waiting for his good things was very joyful and confident.

Gadgets, Internet, Cell phones...

Undoubtedly, one of the major flaws in our generation is the lack of strength to deny self; and we of the older generation must claim some of the responsibility for that. The older generation wanted their children to have it better than they did; so they lifted many of the standards and disciplines that they had known. Now it seems that children’s rights are more important than parent’s rights. Society views the parent who interferes with their children’s activities as the villains. Young people think that they can conduct their private affairs and the parents have no right to interfere. “You have no right to read my diary...You have no right to check my cell phone messages...You have no right to check my internet friends...”

As our church services begin, we tell our congregants to shut off their cell phones. Yet, we see some of our youth jump up during the service and make a mad dash to the rest room – sometimes three times during the service. Our younger generation is obsessed with their friends, with their gadgets, and with the little dainties with which the king of Babylon allures them. I saw a documentary of a camp that was to rehabilitate young people who were obsessed with their gadgets. They were like lost sheep. They were like people that had lost their hands.

The Day of Special Effects

When I was a lad, the big thrill was to get some prize in the cereal box – or if you were really fortunate, to get one of those *Captain Midnight* walky-talkies. They were good for about 75 feet – if you held the string real taut. Today the world is at your fingertips.

I was talking to a young boy whom I had not seen in Sunday school for a while. I said, “Why haven’t you come?” He said: “Sunday school is boring!” Yes, Sunday school is boring because we can’t offer the special effects or the pseudo thrills that Babylon offers. When our young people feed upon the super powers of the Hollywood hero, how can we compete? Why on the big screen people can jump off buildings, run through explosions, or can evade or counter any opposition without a scratch! I told this young boy that hell was boring too! One sits in the dark, in his torments forever without any hope of getting out.

The Wine of Babylon

As we return again to one of our theme verses, we must note that Daniel and his friends not only refused the dainties of the Babylonian table, but Daniel also refused the wine of Babylon: “*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*..(Dan 1:8).

Again, Daniel was well aware of who he was and of the commandments concerning wine and strong drink. Let

us recall chapter one, verse three of Daniel: “*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...*” Daniel had royal blood in his veins – he was a prince. And, may I remind us that we are also called to be kings (Rev 5:9-10).

As a prince, Daniel was purposed to keep the proverb: “*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted*” (Prov 31:4-5).

The wine of Babylon could actually incorporate quite a study; but let us first consider the natural application here. We are talking about alcoholic beverages that delude the mind and cause people to do bizarre things. Let us also bear in mind that this trial was geared to four teenagers. It is amazing how many of today’s Christian youth have no qualms about drinking. In fact, one young man was telling me of a certain bar where many “Christian” teenagers would hang out... I guess I missed something here! When I was young, I was taught that when you become a Christian there were certain things that you did not do. One of them was drinking alcoholic beverages.

On this subject I should not have to spend a lot of time. The world is filled with unwanted children and poverty, accidents and premature death, broken homes and many ruined lives, because of wine and strong drink. This should be one area that defines the children of the kingdom from the children of the world. Yet, the worldly

youth mock those who do not partake of their delusion, and the simple bow to it. *“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: ...”*

The Wine of Fornication & Violence

In the natural, wine dulls the senses and can be quite addictive. The same is true in the spiritual sense. The (spiritual) wine of Babylon has similar intoxicating effects. The Scripture brings this into spiritual perspective when it speaks of “the wine of her fornication” (Rev 17:2). This is not only referring to the immorality of Babylon, but also the deluding effects of her counterfeit religion. Wine in Scripture can also allude to violence (Prov 4:17), which often times is the case in domestic violence, or in a pub.

The Intoxicating Effects of Fornication (or Pornography)

In the Proverbs, fornication is pictured as having the same effects as of one intoxicated – who then sleeps off his drunk, and then returns to seek it yet again: *“...When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again”* (Pro 23:30-35). May I also add pornography to this scenario; as one man described his delirium, he said that he accidentally clicked on an internet site (which is easy to do). He described the scene as intoxicating. It was like a narcotic that kept compelling him to come back. He finally had to go to his pastor to help break the grip of the “Babylonian wine.”

Do we understand the seduction of today's youth? The king of Babylon allures many Christian youth to his table. They become drunk with the wine of fornication. The world suddenly becomes different; they can no longer worship the Lord. Their parents become the enemy and the church has now lost all of its attractiveness... But Daniel and his friends purposed in their hearts that they would not drink the wine of Babylon.

"Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Cor 10:21).

The Wine of Violence

The Proverbs also picture violence as having intoxicating effects. When we consider history, the crowds in the Coliseum were described as being "intoxicated with a lust for blood!" In fact, it came to the place where the crowd could no longer be satisfied with just ordinary gladiatorial events; they wanted something spicier, such as dwarfs fighting with woman or different animals fighting each other – all to satisfy the thirst for blood.

We may think this a bit abstract to the here and now, but in actuality we can now bring the coliseum into our front room. And the king of Babylon still entices Christian youth with his wine of violence. The world has come to the place (spiritually) where just ordinary killing does not incite the crowd. It becomes more and more bizarre, more and more graphic until our sensitivity is gone. As one man described the beheadings in China after

the communist regime took control, he said: “At first, little children would become sick watching the graphic ordeal; but as time went on, these same children could bring their lunch with them and eat it as the victims were beheaded.” (The wine of violence dulls the senses.)

The Benefits of Having Godly Convictions

As we have previously noted, there are some wonderful benefits granted to the faithful contestants. In this first test, because Daniel and his friends wanted to keep the Lord’s commandments, the Lord imparted some tremendous gifts. We read in Daniel 1:17: “*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.*” God granted tremendous understanding to these holy young men.

Daniel later makes this observation: “...*He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding*” (Dan 2:21). Because these young men were wise and prudent in keeping the commandment, God gave them more wisdom and understanding. Herein is a principle that runs throughout the Word. God gives more to those who utilize what they have. In fact, Jesus Himself made this statement: “*For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him*” (Luke 19:26).

Nine hundred years earlier, Moses gave Israel a promise concerning wisdom. This was just prior to their possession

of the Promised Land. Moses said (in essence), “If you will keep these commandments that I am giving you today, they will set you apart from all other nations.” Let us pick up at Deuteronomy 4:5-6: *“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”*

Moses went on to say that they were to teach their children to teach their children to teach their children these statutes that they might dwell in the land, and that the nations might marvel at their power with God. As parents/pastors, we must instill the kind of principles that incite holy convictions. As Charles Wesley wrote in song:

*“I want a principle within of watchful, godly fear,
A sensibility of sin, a pain to feel it near. I want
the first approach to feel of pride or wrong desire,
To catch the wandering of my will, and quench
the kindling fire.”*

As the first test of Daniel concludes, the king finds Daniel and his friends ten times wiser than all the other wise men in the realm: *“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”* (Dan 1:20). So what are the benefits of keeping the commandments? They

will set us apart from the world and give us understanding of things that confound and baffle the world.

When we consider our nation (the USA 2010), we are a nation that has lost our sense of direction. We elect officials that are corrupt; we pass law after law that favors sin or gives our enemies another chance to strike us again. In short, we can't speak out against evil because we have become evil. And why is that? Because as a nation we have rejected The Ten Commandments, we have rejected the Word of God and the Crucified Christ. We have turned to secular humanism for our answers. Yet, God still has his "Daniel's band" here and there, and they shall make the difference in the days to come.



"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" (Dan 12:10).

TESTED IN FAITH

Petition or Perish

The Second Trial – Chapter 2

There are essentially two main areas that the church will be tested upon prior to the Lord's coming: firstly, obedience to the commandments, and secondly, living by the faith of Jesus. The apostle John bears this out in Revelation 14:12: "*Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*" In trial one, the Hebrews were being tested in the commandment (Levitical ordinance). The psalmist tells us, that in the keeping of the commandment there is "great reward" (Psa 19:11). Of course, this is borne out in chapter one; Daniel and his companions can now stand before the king.

Moving into chapter two, we find that the test now becomes a test of faith – keeping the commandments does not enter into trial two. The backdrop of chapter two concerns a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had. This was no ordinary dream. There was something unusual and compelling about it. When Nebuchadnezzar awoke from his dream he was greatly troubled and distressed in his spirit. Not only was the king distressed because the dream was extraordinary and unusual, but because the content of the dream had evaporated from his memory.

The king is so troubled by this phenomenal dream that he sends for his wise men and wants an interpretation. The

wise men respond by saying, "Tell us the dream and we will give you the interpretation." The king answers, "I have forgotten the dream; tell me what I have dreamed and the interpretation." The wise men respond again by saying, "There is not a man on the face of the earth who could comply with such a request..." At that moment the king becomes livid and in a rage he commands that all of the wise men in his realm be put to death.

It is at this point that Daniel learns that he and his friends are going to perish with the other wise men in Babylon. As you will recall, the Lord had imparted some unusual spiritual gifts to Daniel because of his faithfulness in the first trial (Dan 1:17). Daniel knew that he had been given an understanding in dreams and visions. Thus, Daniel appeals to the king for a little time, after which he would give the king the interpretation to his dream.

"Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation. 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." Daniel 2:16-18

*One lesson that can be observed from the king of Babylon is that he represents pride in its fullest. Pride is easily upset and often very vengeful. As observed in the book of Job, pride

is like the sea monster (Leviathan), whom none dare stir up because he is so fierce (Job 41). He breathes out fire and smoke. Thus is the king of Babylon: he is willing to see hundreds of men slaughtered because they cannot fulfill his impossible request.

May I again reiterate: had not Daniel and his friends made the first hurdle (“act one”) in chapter one, then we would never see them again in “act two.” Every trial in life is qualifying us for a greater trial and a greater place in the kingdom.

It is also interesting to note the statement that the other wise men made to the king: *“There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king’s matter... there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh”* (Dan 2:10-11).

The Declaration of Faith

In this second trial we find a beautiful example of how faith operates. Daniel knew that he had something in the Spirit and so he begins by making a declaration of faith: “...I will show the king the interpretation.” The other wise men had made their declaration: “It’s impossible!”

In the book of Job, one of the promises to the righteous is that they would decree a thing, and God would honor it: *“Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways”* (Job 22:28). This is a very interesting

observation throughout Scripture. We find time and again that righteous men would decree something before it became substance. In fact, many of the men of faith not only decreed something, but they invested their life into that statement of faith. Noah, for example; decreed the coming flood and spent the next 100 years preparing for the event.

Abraham, when told to offer up his only son on the altar, made this statement: “...*I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you*” (Gen 22:5). Abraham was so convinced of the promise that God had made to him concerning his son, that he believed that God would raise him from the dead. This is affirmed in the book of Hebrews 11:17-19: “*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*”

Confession is one of the faith principles. We confess things according to our faith or according to the promises that God has given or according to the giftings that God has imparted to us. Each experience that we go through successfully emboldens our faith for the next trial or circumstance. Daniel knew what he had experienced in his private life. David knew what God had done for him on the backside of the hill – where nobody saw. His statement of faith was: “...*Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them...*” (1 Sam 17:36).

I remember a prophecy that was given to a man through the means of a vision. It went something like this: In the vision the man was making an incredible jump, a hurdle that broke all records. However, there was no one there to witness this spectacular feat. Yet, the man was fully satisfied within himself to know that he had done it. I like that! Do you see that the true men of faith possess something out of a relationship; they know (in the spirit) what God can do.

Having the Right Confession

One of the disproportionate messages of today is along this line of confession. “Just confess what you want and so it shall be.” The danger of such a mentality is that it encourages the wrong motives for petition; it can turn into a faith of acquisition. It can turn into a “give-me” gospel that does nothing to promote the kingdom or glorify Christ. However, we do not want to discard the true message of faith in reaction to the false. Confession is still a true constituency of faith.

The apostle Paul tells us how essential the confession principle is. In Romans chapter ten (especially verses 6-10), Paul tells us that our confession is part of our salvation: “*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*” (Rom 10:10). Daniel’s confession was that God would give the king an answer, and his confession turned out to be his salvation.

*“The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth,
and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith...”
(Rom 10:8).*

The Key of Promise

I am again reminded of a segment of Pilgrim's journey (*Pilgrim's Progress*), where Pilgrim and his friend end up in the dungeon of the Giant Despair. The two sojourners spend a considerable time in this dungeon, being tortured; and they are despairing of their lives. The interesting thing is that they each have a key in their pocket that they had forgotten about. The key was called *promise*. The promises of God can only be activated by faith. It was not until the pilgrims put that key into the prison door that things began to move.

Praying Through

Now here is a term that the newer generation of Christendom is not so familiar with: "praying through." That means that you keep on praying until you have been satisfied with the answer. Confession may be part of the test of faith, but then there may need to be some intercession to bring it to pass. For example, Elijah decreed that the drought was over and he decreed rain from heaven. Then Elijah went to prayer to release that declaration of faith. In fact, Elijah prayed seven times before it came (1 Kings 18).

*Depending upon the circumstances of the prayer meeting, prayer can turn into a battle in the Spirit. When the suppliants begin to touch spiritual forces, there can be some real resistance. There are reasons why spiritual powers have the dominance; and we can never remove those

blocks unless we are in time with heaven. When the saints fight upon earth, angelic forces are released in heaven. When we quit fighting upon earth, the fight stops in the heavenlies as well.

I would like to recall a prayer service in our church, where the sounds of clashing swords could be heard in heaven. For a scriptural reference on this, I would like to summon up an incident from Judges 5:20, where heaven was fighting along with the saints upon earth: “They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.”

Daniel decreed an answer and then he and his friends went to their knees: “*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.*” This was quite a test of faith. Daniel made a declaration that would set a new precedent for his time in history. Joseph could interpret dreams, but no one had ever told a person what they were dreaming – at least there is no record of such an event. I believe that God does extraordinary miracles in times of extraordinary need.

Metamorphosis

Daniel’s band needed a breakthrough in prayer; they had to touch God or die. I remember an illustration our conference president gave at a watch-night service over

thirty years ago; he was explaining the metamorphosis of a butterfly from the worm, into the cocoon, and then the final breakthrough. Once the worm develops inside the cocoon it must break out on its own. Something is developed in the muscle structure of the butterfly in its struggle to break free. If perchance some good-hearted child comes by and tries to help that little insect out of its cocoon it will never fly.

There are times in our spiritual development when we must break through on our own. Nobody can help us – not the pastor or the eldership or our family. If we do not meet with God during such a time, we will never “fly.” I vividly remember such a time in my own experience. I had to have answers from the throne; I had to hear from God myself concerning His will for the future.

It Is God's Mercy

One thing that must be clearly understood concerning cases such as those mentioned. We cannot force God into an answer. We should take careful note of the way that Daniel and his friends petitioned heaven: “*They desired the mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret...*” There was no demanding or commanding, but rather a realization that the whole outcome was dependant upon God’s mercy.

Concerning the incident in my own life, when I desperately needed some answers, I was very determined that no matter what – swim, sink, survive or perish – I was going to meet with God. I took several weeks off

from work; I sent my family away; I took the phone off the hook; I closed all the curtains in the house; and I began to pray. The very first verse that the Lord gave me was from Romans 9:15-16: “...*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.*”

I must say that all of a sudden I felt very helpless. In fact, I felt a little sick. All the wind left my sails and I felt like a ship sitting out in the midst of the sea. “Do you mean that all of my efforts may yield nothing?” That was exactly what came home to me. Then in my helpless state I began to rethink my approach to God: “Lord, it is your mercies that we are not consumed! Lord, please be “mercy-seated” to me.” Thankfully, God did hear my prayer and it also taught me a real lesson.

The Lord Comes Through

The Lord surely is a rewarder of those who seek him. And, the Lord surely wants us to believe as we pray. I had to give the above illustration in order to balance the Word of God. There are elements within the church that think that they can demand God to do something and that God must honor His Word. Yes, God does honor His Word; however, there are examples in the Word where God did not answer, where God did not heal, and where God did not give the victory. In the final analyses, it is God who shows mercy on whom He will.

“Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven” (Dan 2:19). Daniel is given both the dream and the interpretation of the dream that had troubled the Babylonian king. One of the reasons that this dream was so disturbing to Nebuchadnezzar was because it was a divine dream. We must realize that God appoints kings, both the good and the bad, and God speaks to kings, both the good and the bad. This dream was giving a revelation of the kingdoms – both presently and those to come.

It is not our intention to get into the eschatological truths revealed in the dream. However, it must be noted that this dream is considered to be one of the most important keys to the end-time puzzle. The succession of kingdoms in this dream leads us into the final kingdom – the Kingdom of Christ; and His kingdom remains forever. Daniel’s wisdom is ever lauded because he understood the end-times and eternity.

Who Through Faith...

Hebrews chapter eleven records the many acts of faith. You will find Daniel and his friends there, though maybe not in name. One thing is sure, by faith they escaped the edge of the sword and wrought deliverance for many others in the same predicament. When Daniel revealed the dream and the interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face before Daniel and acknowledged Daniel’s God to be a God of gods:

“Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that

they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret." (Dan 2:46-47).

The End of Trial Two

How shall we assess the benefits gained from trial two? For one thing, this trial pressed Daniel and his friends into a greater anointing. The greater anointings generally come from being in a Gethsemane. As the old hymn goes: "*Have you had a Gethsemane, have you prayed the night through?*" Just recently, I gave a fellow-minister a word that I felt God impress upon my heart. This man had been through a very crushing experience. I told him that he was going to experience a new anointing in his life, one that he had never experienced before. Shortly thereafter, this man left for another country. Then the brethren there sent me rave reviews about the anointing that was flowing from this man's ministry.

Daniel was also promoted and given great gifts:

"Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king." (Dan 2:48-49)

For the faithful contestant, there is always an advancement. Now we see Daniel and his three companions in high positions in government. May I also insert here that God does have godly men in governmental circles. Ministers should not be involved in politics; however, there are those who are called to this field.

The trials in Daniel are symbolic of the types of tests that shall try the saint as this age concludes. Our faith is going to be tested in many ways. They may be small tests at first (perhaps we shall be tested in doctrine), but then the tests will come that will defy our faith. We will find ourselves being tested by situations in which our lives depend upon hearing from God. May we again be challenged to a fresh relationship with our Lord, whereby we live by the faith of the Son of God.



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 (Dan 12:10).

TESTED IN WORSHIP

Bow or Burn

The Third Trial - Chapter 3

Our third trial in the book of Daniel brings us to a test on worship. In chapter three, all nations are being forced to worship the image of the king of Babylon; to refuse to do so is at the cost of being thrown into a fiery furnace. Once more, we are reminded that the trials in Daniel are prototypes of the kinds of trials that shall purify God's people as this age concludes. As we examine this third trial, we shall again try to bring the setting from the abstract of the sixth century BC into twenty-first century relevance. Let us pick up at the giving of the decree to worship:

"Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." Daniel 3:4-6

Chapter three of Daniel gives us the detailed account of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. The

supposition is that this towering image that all nations must worship was an image of himself. As we have previously noted, the trials in Daniel give us a little glimpse of the types of trials that shall confront the saints prior to the Lord's coming.

Unquestionably, none of the trials in Daniel parallel the end-time trials as clearly as this one does. What Satan desires more than anything else is worship. Satan's offer to Christ was: "I will give you the world, if you just fall down and worship me." Of course, Christ did not yield to such a proposal. However, the antichrist will be the means through which Satan will receive the worship of many. Satan will enter this man and thus receive worship through this man and through the worship of his image:

"And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed"
(Rev 13:15).

Worshipping the King of Babylon

In a sense, the graphic nature of this test on worship tends to divert us from recognizing a far more subtle test – perhaps we don't see the image of the beast towering in the background, but in effect, the king of Babylon is receiving the worship. One thing is sure; heaven does not receive corrupted worship.

I shall justify this by recalling an incident that David Wilkerson (a well-known evangelist) relates. Wilkerson always felt very uncomfortable about certain forms of worship – namely, the so-called “Christian” rock band worship. He was quite vocal about this and labeled it (in effect) “anti-Christian.” To shorten the story, a certain colleague of Wilkerson challenged him to attend a “Christian” rock concert and to observe with an open mind.

Wilkerson reluctantly accompanied his friend to the concert. In the beginning, the lead singer came out in his subculture attire and he began to tell of the love of Jesus, His great compassion, mercy, and sacrifice, etc. Well, David Wilkerson began to have second thoughts about his stance against these types of groups. He began to think himself too hard, and that maybe he should modify his position. Then the music started. Puffs of smoke were coming out of the stage, and the young people began to open up their spirits in worship.

What was really happening here was a seduction of undiscerning Christian young people into an alien worship. What the audience did not see was the demons that were emerging from the puffs of smoke. Wilkerson said that he could literally see the demonic spirits seducing the hearts and minds of the worshippers. The music was coming from the pit and Satan was receiving the worship. Incidentally, the demons that John saw in Revelation 9:7-8 had the faces of men and hair like women.

The Power of Music

“Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image” (Dan 3:10).

The power of music is incredible. At the sound of the music they all fell down. This is the story of a large segment of Christian youth today. They are controlled by the music of the world; and in order to save today’s youth, the church has incorporated this form of music into their worship department in hopes of retaining the young people in the church. In short, the music is idolatrous. It originates from the pit; and the king of Babylon is looming in the background being extolled very highly.

*The unsanctified music of the world releases all kinds of unclean spirits. Likewise, when this kind of music is permitted in the church it does the same. I speak this from firsthand observation. In fact, one church that I know of (that catered to the worldly taste of the young people) had to close because there was such immorality. Even the pastor fell into immorality.

I had a music minister from a large church sit in my office one day and relate the following story. He said that he had just recently been dismissed from his position at his church. The pastor had called him into his office and

told him (in effect) that the music of David no longer met the needs of his congregation. The young people's needs must be met. "We must cater to the youth, the kind of music that they are used to feeding upon." The music minister was so overcome with shock that he had a heart attack on the way home.

*Incidentally, one Sunday morning I was looking for a particular church service on television, and as I was changing channels I happened across a very abhorrent rock group. As I was shaking my head in disgust, I suddenly realized that this was a "Christian" rock group, and it was coming from the very church that had dismissed the true worship.

Young Men with Conviction

Now as we are contemplating this third trial, we are again looking at some young people who refuse to bow to the wrong worship. Remember that refusal to worship this alien spirit was at the peril of their lives: "*And whoso falleth not down and worshipping, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace*" (Dan 3:11).

*I am calling these three men young, although the exact timing of this event is not certain. One chronologist put this event between the second exile (597 BC) and the third exile (586 BC). This would put these three men into their mid to upper twenties. Another chronologist's dating would

put them into their mid to upper thirties. Either way, they are still young from my perspective.

Daniel is not mentioned in this trial. However, Daniel's three companions are here; and although the whole audience has bowed to the sound of the music, Daniel's friends are standing erect. They would not bow to the music of Babylon. It is interesting how peer pressure among youth is so compelling. In truth, there are few young people who have the courage to oppose the consensus of their peers. When young people do not go with the flow of their peers they find themselves in the fire – being made objects of ridicule, contempt, or disdain.

*One of the keys to overcoming is to glorify God in the fires (Isa 24:15).

There seems to be an amazing love/hate attitude toward those with convictions. People hate them because they have not bowed and because their lack of compromise indicts those who have bowed. At the same time, there is often a deep respect which says, "I wish I had their courage."

The Indictment of Daniel's Friends:

"There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan 3:12). The three

men mentioned here are the same: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The Babylonians had dubbed the Hebrews with Chaldean names.

The king was enraged when he heard that these three young men had not bowed to the image. However, Nebuchadnezzar called these three men in for a personal interview and actually gave them another chance to acquiesce to his demand. He also told them that if they did not bow they would be thrown into the fiery furnace; “...*And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?*”

Not only did these three valiant men refuse to comply, but they also made a statement of faith: “*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*” (Dan 3:17-18).

This is quite an intriguing account, which continues through the remainder of chapter three. Firstly, the king is so infuriated by the remarks of *Shadrach*, *Meshach*, and *Abednego* that he commands the furnace to be heated seven times hotter. Let's not overlook that decree. I believe it gives us an indication of the intensity of the trial that is to try the last-day church. Bear in mind that in the last chapter of the book, Daniel foretells an unprecedented trial: “...*There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation*” (Dan 12:1).

Another interesting phenomenon that occurs during this fiery trial is that the furnace is so hot, the mighty men who are escorting the three Hebrews to their fate die because of the intensity of the heat. It must also be noted that these three men (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were attired with the fancy clothing that a minister of state would wear. As the king is observing the whole affair, he is astonished to see the victims rise up in the fire and then proceed to walk about in the furnace. To his further astonishment, he notices a fourth being walking with them.

As the prophet Isaiah had written over a century earlier: *“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee”* (Isa 43:2). To put it mildly, the king is overcome. He is smitten with awe – astonished beyond measure. Thus, he calls them out by name, recognizing them as the servants of the most high God.

To further astonish all of those present, the Hebrews had not even been singed, nor was there any smell of smoke or fire on them. They had fallen down bound into the furnace, and the only thing that was burned off was their bondages.

*We could almost pause for a moment and relish the true purposes and benefits of a trial. In fact, we could spend a lot of time just on this one trial – bondages are broken; there is enrichment; great

honor is bestowed; and again, another precedent is set. Consider that there is no one else recorded in Scripture who has walked through the fire! In the book of Revelation, the overcoming saints will stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire. Why are they permitted to do that? It is because they have walked through the fiery trials here in this life.

“And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them” (Dan 3:27).

True Worship

Let us come back to the thought of worship again. These young Hebrews were very worship conscious, because the Law of Moses was very precise about the type of worship that God receives. God gave specific instruction as to how His people were to approach the altar of worship. The Lord also gave very specific warnings about false worship.

The book of Leviticus is a book of worship. It is a book that teaches God’s people the difference between the holy and profane, between the clean and the unclean. The word *holy* is mentioned 94 times in this book – the point being, that God is very particular about the type of worship He receives. God is holy, and He only receives sanctified worship.

Nadab and Abihu

Let us consider an incident that took place in Leviticus chapter ten. God had just given very particular instructions to the priests as to their approach to worship. One of the instructions was that when they burned incense to the Lord, they were to take coals from the brazen altar. The Lord himself had ignited the brazen altar and it was never to go out – it was holy fire.

It was almost immediately after these instructions and the spectacular igniting of this altar (Lev 9:24), that Aaron's two sons offered incense with *strange* fire:

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace”
(Lev 10:1-3).

Strange fire

God's attitude toward worship has not changed. The true worshipper still worships in spirit and in truth. These Old Testament lessons were to convey spiritual truths. God

only receives worship through clean vessels (or sanctified vessels). God set a precedent in this act. These two sons of Aaron died for offering strange fire. Did this happen again? No, we shall never see a similar occurrence and yet there has been a lot of “strange” fire offered up since that time. Ananias and Sapphira lied in church and were struck dead. Did this happen again? No, and yet there have been many people who have lied in church since and have not died – at least physically. The point is that God was making a statement that resounds to this day.

What does strange fire speak of spiritually? It speaks of the source from whence that inspiration was received. Where Nadab and Abihu filled their censers with hot coals we are not told. Perhaps it came from the oven in their tent? The cardinal point is that it was not holy fire and it was not received in heaven. The incense was good; it was pure; but the fire was strange. This is why Satan seeks to corrupt the worship department, so that he might receive the worship.

Perhaps the words to the worship are pure; they are true; they might even come from the Scripture – but where did the music originate? Is it from the kingdom of Babylon – Satan’s kingdom? This is why we need to consider the source (the inspiration). Consider the lives of the people from whence the music originated. Consider the appearance of those from whence the music originates! The Lord said: *“I will be sanctified in those who approach me.”* This is one of the reasons why David’s first attempt to bring revival to Jerusalem failed; the musicians were unsanctified (1 Chr 13 and 15).

As you study Scripture, you will find similar principles where the words are true but the source was false. For example, in Acts 16:16-18, there was a girl governed by an evil spirit of divination, and she was following the apostle Paul. This is what she was saying: *“These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.”* What this girl was saying was true – but what was the source of her inspiration? It was an evil spirit, which Paul finally rebuked, rendering the girl powerless. The same standard applies to worship and praise. It also applies to unsanctified musicians!

I am reminded of an incident in which a certain established prophet happened into a church where there was a stage full of unsanctified, long-haired musicians. When the pastor recognized this elderly prophet, he immediately invited him to the platform. The man of God said: “First tell these musicians to come off the platform and I will come up.” The pastor then motioned for his worship team to come down and they sheepishly complied.

*It is quite an interesting perspective; Nadab and Abihu died in the fire for their unacceptable worship. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego walked through the fire for refusing unacceptable worship.

The Golden Image in the 21st Century

Thus we have this same trial in the twenty-first century. The king of Babylon still exists spiritually, and many of God’s people still bow down when they hear the sound of his music. I have been informed by some young

people that music is a matter of preference. The question is – whose preference? Let me repeat this: **true worship is directed to the throne; it is not directed to what excites the audience.**

When I was young I listened to the music of the world – which drew my heart in the wrong direction. When I consecrated my life to the Lord, I knew I had to sever myself from the worldly music. Here is the trial “twenty-first century style:” If we do not sever ourselves from the music of the world (if it is still an idol in our hearts) then surely we shall welcome it into the church and we shall continue to bow to the “King of Babylon.”

Divided Worship in the Church

Even in Israel (for a time) there was divided worship. When we think of Israel we think of God’s people. After Solomon, during the time of Jeroboam/Rehoboam the kingdom split (2 Chr 10-11). Jeroboam took the northern ten tribes, and to keep them from returning to Judah (where there was still true worship), Jeroboam instituted an idolatrous form of worship – they even imitated the true worship of David. As Amos said (6:5): “...*And invent to themselves instruments of music, like David.*”

Well, what happens to undiscerning Christians that are beguiled into an alien worship? Many of them are drawn right back into the world and are lost! Many others are duped out of any reward that they might have had. Paul affirms this in Colossians 2:18:

“...Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels...”

***They Did Not Bend; They Did Not Bow;
They Did Not Burn.***

Daniel's companions refused to bow down to the wrong spirit. Thus they were taken to the fiery furnace where they set a precedent that has never been equaled.

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 make 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. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon. Daniel 3:28-30

As the pressure mounts in these last days to bow to the wrong spirit, let us remember that there is great reward for those who refuse to bow. As Jesus said: *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* “Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone;” or, as in this case, dare to be a friend of Daniel. These three saints were

true worshippers, and their convictions stand out as a testimony for time and eternity.



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 (Dan 12:10).

TESTED WITH SUCCESS

Seduction of Success

The Fourth Trial – Chapter 4

Chapter four brings us to our fourth trial in the book of Daniel. In this fourth trial, it is not Daniel or his companions who are being tested, but rather the great king Nebuchadnezzar. What makes this trial rather interesting is that the king of Babylon is writing some of this account in his own words – and it is now the captive (Daniel) who is declaring the sentence over the captor (king Nebuchadnezzar). Actually, this is one of the honors entrusted to the faithful saints. As the psalmist penned so eloquently:

“To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD” (Psa 149:8-9).

I don't think that you will find a greater example of this verse in Scripture than in the book of Daniel. Daniel declares the judgment which is written in heaven concerning the king. Although this trial concerns a worldly king, there are many applications from this incident that the saint should observe – that is, if he is going to continue his call to sainthood. We are called to be kings; and that is why we *study* the kings – both the good and the bad. Sometimes we learn more from the negative than the positive.

Power Corrupts

Sir John Dalberg-Acton (Cambridge professor – 1895-1902) made a statement that has lingered for several generations: “Power tends to corrupt; and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The greatest test of the saint is in the temptation that comes with success and achievement. We are far more prone to seek God in the time of trouble, than in the time of blessing. The psalms of David prove the point. David’s greatest error was not committed in the place where there was just a step between him and death, but rather in his pinnacle of success upon Mount Zion.

Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 30:6: “*And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.*” Herein is the tendency of man during a time of success. He thinks, “I am here forever; I have earned this; I am indispensable....” Moses also warned God’s people concerning the dangers of success. When Israel entered into the promised inheritance and had the abundance of all things, they were not to forget who brought them there:

“When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is

multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage... And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth..." (Deut 8:10-18).

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

Let us now come back to the worldly king that has been given the throne and the kingdoms of this world. King Nebuchadnezzar knew very well from his first dream that God had given him the kingdom (Dan 2:37-38). But now the king is given another dream (Dan 4:10-17); and again the wise men could not interpret this dream. Thus, the king calls for Daniel to give him the interpretation. Here is the dream:

The king sees a mighty tree that fills the earth. The leaves of this tree are fair, and the fruit of this tree nourishes the beasts and the fowls of the air. In short, this tree sustains life for the inhabitants of the earth. The king then sees a *holy watcher* come down from heaven and make a decree that this tree is to be cut down; yet the stump of its roots was to be fettered to the earth. This stump was also to be wet from the dew and it was to be given a beast's heart until seven times (seven years) had transpired. The *holy watcher* then states that this decree was to prove that the Most High ruleth over the kingdoms of men, and that He appoints whom He will; even setting over it the basest of men.

*The holy watchers are a council in heaven that execute certain decisions upon earth. Obviously, they must fit into the angelic realm, as the book of Daniel takes place before heaven was opened to the saints.

Daniel Interprets the Dream (Dan 4:19-27)

Daniel mulls over this dream for about an hour, and he is apparently troubled in his spirit. Finally, the king encourages Daniel to speak. I don't think Daniel was silent because he did not know the interpretation, but rather because he did know it. You almost get the idea from this passage that Daniel had developed a rapport with this king, maybe a certain empathy for him. Kings do not have many friends, and perhaps Daniel saw something redeemable in this king.

Daniel responds: “...*My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies*” (Dan 4:19). Daniel is going to have to tell this king that he is the tree whose dominion has extended to the ends of the earth, through which much of the earth was being nourished. Yet, the decree from heaven was that the tree would be cut down and the stump would remain fettered to the earth for seven years.

Daniel further tells the king that he would be given a beast's heart. He would also be turned out to pasture and would eat grass like the oxen until he knew that the Most High rules and reigns in the affairs of men and that He appoints those who sit upon thrones. (God appoints

kings and even ordains the very lowest of men.) Daniel also points out that the stump was to remain as a symbol that there was a hope of restoration in the end.

Daniel's Counsel

There is actually more to digest here than one chapter allows. However, as we look at the whole context of this chapter it is not hard to see why this king was about to be cut down. The king was infected with a “God complex.” Success, accomplishment and power had gone to this man’s head. He was filled with pride and arrogance in spite of the fact that he had witnessed some very sovereign acts of God. Nebuchadnezzar had been shown (in a sovereign way), that God had given him what he possessed (Dan 2:37-38).

The King on Trial

Daniel now gives counsel to the king: *“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”* (Dan 4:27). Daniel was saying, “King, if you will just humble yourself and repent of your sins, and begin to reverse some of your actions; perhaps the Lord would forestall some of these judgments.”

Daniel is living up to his true name: “God’s judge.” Daniel is proclaiming the judgment written and also giving the king a chance to amend his ways. I think of what Jeremiah once wrote concerning the destiny of

Israel. Jeremiah proclaimed: *“If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them”* (Jer 18:8-10). The Lord said, in essence, “If they repent, then I will repent of the evil which I thought to do unto them.”

So now the king is on trial. What will he do with the warning? What will he do with the chance that will possibly avert his demise? I was once conducting an altar call where God was holding out the possibilities of averting some seemingly inevitable disasters. After the service, I said to an elderly minister who was present: “Well a number of them seemed to respond!” He said, “Yes, but now let us see which direction they will go.”

The King Determines His Fate

It would appear as though the Lord gave this man a whole year to prove himself. This was the outcome: *“At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the 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 honour of my majesty”* (Dan 4:29-30)? It was at that moment that his fate was sealed. Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom was taken from him, and the Lord gave him over to an evil spirit which took away his sanity.

This is recorded in Daniel 4:33: *“The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws.”* Often times Christians wonder why God allows evil spirits to exist. They exist to carry out judgments such as this; and there are other cases in Scripture to substantiate this fact. I have heard stories of African witchdoctors who could transform themselves into animals. In fact, some of these cases have been documented.

Twenty-first Century Relevance

Once again, we want to bring this test from the ancient times into the here and now. Satan still seeks for the prideful heart – pride allows the “beast” to reign in our heart. We often think that God’s people are exempt from the type of pride displayed by the king of Babylon. But unfortunately, we find godly men in Scripture, who after a certain measure of success were infected with a very satanic pride.

For example, we think of king Uzziah. Here was a man that God marvelously helped; but then after he became strong, he turned into another man. The Scripture says this of him in 2 Chronicles 26:15-16: *“...And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.”* This man did

not have a good end. In fact, he was humbled by leprosy, and yet we find no record of any repentance.

There has been many gifted ministers who have fallen prey to the same spirit as Uzziah, or Solomon, or David – who said at the pinnacle of success: *“I shall never be moved.”* Yet, the truth is that there are very few who can handle blessing or success. Some very gifted men get into the place where they feel they are indispensable. They look at their mega church or their television ministry or their university and say: “Is not this great empire of my doing? Why they are calling for me from the ends of the earth!”

The Temptations of Success

Let me tell you about one of these “famous” ministers that I hear stories about as I travel. This particular minister feels as though he is so special that he deserves the best of everything. Nothing is too good for him. In one city where I was ministering, the host pastor said to me after dinner, “I want to take you to a seven star hotel for dessert, but dessert would be all we could afford there.” (There are only a few hotels in the world rated with seven stars.) After we had taken a little tour of this hotel and had our refreshment, the pastor said: “The reason that I wanted you to see this place was because a very “famous” minister was here recently and he demanded the whole first floor for himself and his entourage.”

What the actual cost of this hotel bill was, I do not know. However, I think it would be safe to say that it was in the hundreds of thousands. How can we justify such

extravagance? How can we justify a minister accumulating properties and holdings estimated in the tens of millions, or homes worth twenty-five million dollars?

We are considering the deceptiveness of success, which is the temptation to exalt self, or to think self so important that he deserves the very best. To add to this, the minister feels no twinge of conscience as he solicits money to support his extravagance, even taking from those who are living in substandard conditions.

Can we see the temptation to exalt self? He has been used by God. He feels that he is God's special gift to men. He feels that his ability has gained him special privileges. He looks out at his vast television empire, thinking, "If I were not here, this would not be." His blessing and prosperity and success all seem to validate whatever he does. He then begins to compromise and break the rules; he begins to think that he is above the law. After all, people still get healed; people still get saved or delivered.

Thus, he justifies himself like Samson, who led an immoral life, but could still rip the city gates off the wall. Samson forgot that his anointing was a gift. He also forgot that his anointing resided in his sanctification (vow of separation). Is not this the very thing that Moses had warned about in Deuteronomy 8:11-14?

"Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou

hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God....”

What Can We Take Credit for?

Let us consider for a moment what we really have to boast of:

- Our looks?
- Our wit?
- Our ability or talent?
- Our gifts?
- Our calling?
- Our position?
- Our income?
- Our lot in life?
- Our success?

Can we control who sits on the throne or who wins the battle or even the roll of the dice? (That is, unless God has commissioned us to intercede in a matter.) Nevertheless, we can play a part in our own election. We can play a part in our physical appearance. We can play a part in our gifting. We can use what God has given us, or we can neglect it. However, in every circumstance in life; it is God who determines the outcome. It is God who made us the way we are. It is God who gives us the power to get wealth or to just get by; and God does everything in His mercy. As the psalmist said: “*The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy...*” (Psa 119:64).

Our Looks, Our Wits, Our Ability

Psalm 139 makes it clear that God fashions us in the womb. All of our features are written in the book. Jesus also said that the very hairs of our head are numbered. The book of Job tells us that God puts within the hand of every man his ability: *“He sealet up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work”* (Job 37:7). (This is speaking of natural ability; however, it carries over to our spiritual ability as well.) Isaiah confirms this (Isa 28:25-26), and Christ also confirms this (Matt 25:14-15).

“And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?” (Ex 4:11)

Our Gifts, Our Calling, Our Ministry

Paul had to set the Corinthians straight on this subject. The Corinthians thought that their gifting was something that flowed from their own natural ability. Paul puts it to them like this: *“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”* (1 Cor 4:7) Holy Spirit gifts are given according to the will of God (1 Cor 12:4-11). Ministry gifts are given by the will of God (1 Cor 12:28). Every good and perfect gifts comes down from the Father (Jas 1:17).

Our Station, Our Income, Our Success or Failure

“The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and he hath set the world upon them” (1 Sam 2:6-8).

The song of Hannah proves this point very well. God promotes; and God puts one down and exalts another, whether it is in the secular world or in the spiritual. The Scripture is filled with examples where God promoted people, even if they were just to serve as instruments of judgment. This was the case with many of the northern kings of Israel and with the king of Assyria, and with Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, in every case, God puts whom He will on the throne to fulfill a unique purpose – both the good and the bad. *“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth” (Rom 9:17).*

Battles and the Casting of the Lot

“For the battle is not yours, but God’s...” (2 Chr 20:15). This was a word spoken to God’s people; yet we often tend to think that God does not intervene in worldly battles. However, the Word again categorically denies

that concept. In Scripture, we see battle after battle fought between the nations of this world, yet the Lord had already determined the outcome. For example, God had commissioned Pharaoh Necho to fight at Charchemish (Hittite capitol), and King Josiah tried to intervene. Necho warned the godly king not to interfere because he was commissioned by God: *“Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo”* (2 Chr 35:22).

Even the casting of the lot was determined by God. This practice of casting lots was not unique to Israel. The Persians cast lots and the Romans cast lots. But according to Proverbs 16:33, God determines the outcome: *“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.”*

*Casting lots was essentially an Old Testament practice. However, you do find exceptions in the New Testament, for example, Acts 1:26. There are still a few Christian groups such as the Mennonites that cast lots in their decision making. Testament we are to be guided by the Holy Spirit. The problem with this is that it can become a snare – (see Judges 8:27).

Of What Can We Boast?

Having thus proved that we have nothing to boast of, let us consider Christ, who is the antithesis (reverse) of pride. Christ said: *“...Learn of me; for I am meek and*

lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls...” (Matt 11:29). The amazing thing about Christ is that He could have legitimately boasted about everything. He was the Co-Creator; He made the worlds; He made the angels; there was not anything that was made that He did not make. He opened the Red Sea for Moses, and I think we get the point. Yet, He made Himself of no reputation. He even took on the form of a servant (Phil 2:7).

*We should take note of the recommendation that Christ gave that we might be spared the consequences of pride. In Luke 20:18, we read: “Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” Here are the two options: fall upon the stone (Christ) and be broken (humbled), or let the stone fall upon you. The first option is a decision. The second is a consequence!

Christ was totally dependant upon the Father for His every move. Christ was not “free lance.” He carefully moved in synch with the Father in heaven. Please do not misunderstand this: Christ could have moved at His own behest and the Father would have granted it. Consider Matthew 26:53-54: *“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”*

The Trial of Every Saint

Every true saint must be tested (at least in some measure) along this line. In Psalm 73, the righteous man who

seeks to do everything right is struggling. He looks at the wicked who are prospering and this is almost his slipping point. Satan tries to convince man that it pays to serve him. He tries to feed man's ego and tell him that he is "something" or has something, or deserves something – and that he needs to be recognized. He seeks for gullible hearts that he might have a residence. Christ, on the other hand, says: "But this is what I am like: I am meek and lowly (humble) of heart." The king of Babylon says, "Look at all this great kingdom that I...." The Prince of Peace says, "Not mine but thine...."

Nebuchadnezzar Has a Conversion

The end of the story (Daniel 4) is quite astonishing. After seven years of insanity and demon possession, living out in a pasture like an animal, Nebuchadnezzar is reinstated to the throne. Let us read the account in Daniel 4:34-37:

"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 honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom,

mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors 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 honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

The king had failed his test and his chance of possibly averting the judgment. Yet, God mercifully judged this man, reducing him to the lowest life form of humanity. It is so intriguing to see how God works. God always warns people; but will they take that warning seriously? In this case, God judged the king and it brought about his repentance. This is not always the case. God does not always grant repentance, as we shall see in the next test.

As I was reflecting upon this whole scenario, I was reminded of a place where I once preached in Guatemala. Antigua is an old village settled by the Spanish conquistadors in 1543. It is a tourist attraction and located in a valley that is about a mile above sea level, and thus it can become quite cool at night. The church where I was invited to preach was right on the perimeter of the village dump.

It was a starry night and quite frosty. As we approached the church we could see people burning rubbish in the dump, trying to keep warm. There was even a circle of very gaunt looking dogs sitting silently as though they were in some kind of séance. I said to the minister, “Why

don't you invite these poor people in?" He said: "Oh, we have; and would you believe that a large number of them were once prosperous ministers!"

The End of the Trial

Well, we hope that some of those in the dump will turn out like Nebuchadnezzar, who after being humbled was granted repentance. Nebuchadnezzar was restored, and excellent majesty was added to his kingdom. The end of this trial/judgment transformed the king into a new man. Nebuchadnezzar reigned for over forty years and there is no record (after his conversion) that he ever oppressed or conquered again.

May we take heed to the examples that we find in Scripture. May we realize that anything that we have or accomplish is because God has granted us the privilege. May we also know the mind of Christ, as the apostle exhorts in Philippians 2:5-8:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."



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 (Dan 12:10).

TESTED ON THE BALANCES

Warned, But Wanting



The Handwriting on the Wall

The Fifth Trial – Chapter 5

The fifth trial in the book of Daniel brings us to the year 639 BC. Cyrus the Persian had besieged the city of Babylon, and yet Babylon did not seem overly concerned. Perhaps it was because the city was virtually impregnable. Perhaps it was because the city was self sustaining. There was a powerful army within the walls. There was plenty of water, plenty of food – and thus there was no great alarm.

This appears to be the spiritual state of every nation just before their demise. It is as though God gives them over to the spirit of slumber; a sort of stupor or drunkenness seems to pervade the land so that they cannot discern

the times. That was the case in Nineveh before they fell (Nah 3:18). Their shepherds were slumbering, and they had become very dull.

Judged in the Light of the Candlestick

Such is the case in the opening scene in Daniel chapter five. Belshazzar (second main ruler of the empire), is hosting a huge banquet of wine to a thousand of his lords and their women. This is not just an ordinary celebration. They are praising the gods of Babylon, and at the same time they are mocking the true God who made all things.

In fact, Belshazzar and his party are praising the gods of stone as they are drinking wine from the vessels that they had plundered from the Temple in Jerusalem. To add to their offense, they were doing this in the light of the golden candlestick. The seven branched candlestick was a very sacred piece of furniture in the Temple. The seven candlesticks represent the Seven Spirits of the Lord, which have also been called the seven eyes of the Lord. The candlestick also speaks of the living Word.

As Belshazzar and his lords are drinking and mocking God, a hand appears in the midst of the hall and begins to write upon the plaster. Let us read the account in Daniel 5:5-6:

“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."*

Belshazzar was smitten with a fear that only one standing at the judgment seat could know. He was shaking like a leaf in the wind. Although, I have never experienced anything quite like this, let me share a similar incident that changed my life (going back forty plus years ago). I was not living for the Lord at that time, in spite of His many dealings with me, and in spite of promises that I had made, which I had not kept.

One warm September afternoon, I decided to go dove hunting at a gravel pit, where I had hunted many times. As I was sitting there on the bank waiting for some birds to fly by, a great quaking came upon me. I was shaking so bad that I was trying to hold myself down. I then began to cry out to the Lord, "O God, what is happening to me?" It was as though I heard a voice saying to me: "Danny, you are going to hell!"

I could never fully explain what that incident did for me. However, it was the turning point of my life. I made a commitment to the Lord that day that has never changed to this day. God mercifully gave me yet another chance; but for Belshazzar it was judgment day.

Belshazzar Seeks for the Interpretation

Belshazzar now seeks unto all of the worldly wise men and the astrologers, but they could not interpret the handwriting on the wall. His queen, however, suggested that they send for Daniel. Daniel had been in Babylon for sixty-seven years of his life. He must have been in his mid to upper eighties and he must have been a well known figure. In fact, Daniel was a legend in his time. The prophet Ezekiel draws a comparison between Satan and Daniel. He said that Satan was even wiser than Daniel. Actually, that is quite a complement to Daniel. Daniel was known for his wisdom because he knew the future (as Satan does).

“Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee” (Ezk 28:3).

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel.

Once again, Daniel is going to declare the judgment that was written. In this case, the adage from Psalm 149:9 is quite literal: *“To execute upon them the judgment written...”* What makes the trial unique is that the defendant is brought right to the bench for sentencing. In other words, there was no second chance; there was no time to amend or repair or to repent. This king had been on trial because of his knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar’s trial. Belshazzar had heard the testimony of Nebuchadnezzar. He knew what judgments had befallen Nebuchadnezzar. He had undoubtedly heard the story of the Hebrews who walked through the fiery furnace. When Daniel pronounces sentence over Belshazzar, he reminds him

that he was fully aware of all of these events. Let's read the account from Daniel 5:20 – 23:

*“But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: 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 ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, **though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven;** and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:”*

Daniel Interprets the Writing

Daniel does not mince his words as he addresses this king. Again, we must realize that Daniel is not only operating through revelation, but he is demonstrating the spirit of might. To bind a king or to decree a sentence over a king, one must be endued with the spirit of might. In a sense, this is like binding a principality (an angel).

The expression, handwriting on the wall, has come to be a cliché. Even worldly people use this proverbial expression when the end of a matter seems to be apparent.

“Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. 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” (Dan 5:24-28).

God Limits a Day

The day of reckoning had come for Belshazzar. God limits a day (Heb 4:7). God often tolerates people’s ingratitude and bad manners and rebellion for a time and a season. God (in His omniscience) even gives chances to people who will not take heed. It is so that every mouth may be stopped on the Day of Judgment. Man cannot accuse God of injustice; man cannot say: “Well, you didn’t give me a chance...I didn’t know...”

As previously mentioned, Belshazzar had been fully cognizant of some irrefutable signs. He had seen God’s judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar, and yet in direct opposition to those warnings he crosses a line for which there is no redemption. Belshazzar not only pushed aside the warnings, but he proceeded to defy God as he praised

the gods of stone whilst drinking from the sacred vessels. God is not mocked (Gal 6:7).

On the news recently, there was a report that a man had drowned. This man was swimming in a place that had developed some strong riptides (undercurrent). The life guards had warned this man not to go past a certain depth, but the man took no heed to the warning and was lost. God has His limits. Once a man or a people pass that limit, they have passed the point of no return. Belshazzar was slain that very night (Dan 5:30)!

Today!

Since we are bringing this series of trials into present tense reality, let me draw a few analogies from some personal experiences. I have been in the ministry long enough to see a few people cross the line. I have seen people being warned for their very last time – both by myself and by other ministers.

In one case, a guest minister ended his service like this: “There is somebody here who needs to respond TODAY.” The minister would not let up. Even after a few responded, he continued: “There is somebody here who needs to respond TODAY.” Well, I knew who he was speaking to; and the man did not respond. That man was dead about a week later. He had crossed the line. I myself have urged people to turn to the Lord within several days of their death. One man was forty-two; he said he would give his heart to the Lord when he retired. Within two days he was dead.

However, there is one case that stands out from all the others. This young man was a member of our church. He was a talented singer; he served in a deacon position; and he would share from the pulpit at times; but then he went off into sin. He even joined a demonic rock band. At times, some of our members would bump into him at a store or a market and they would try to encourage him to come back. He would mock them! A few years went by and I ran into this man. He was very alone and despairing and at that time he wanted to return to the church.

To be concise, the man came back and I continually tried to speak words of conciliation and healing and repentance – all to no avail. He could never feel any relief; he could never feel any witness of pardon or forgiveness. He once told me that he was the man in the iron cage from (Pilgrims Progress). The overwhelming sense that he had crossed the line became an everyday agony. He was lost because he had crossed the line and he was not granted repentance. He finally took his own life.

May the lessons gained from Belshazzar, and from this sad incident speak to our hearts. Growing up in the church where there is sound doctrine and where there is a move of the Spirit puts us into a far more responsible position. We have heard the Word. We have been a witness to God's judgments. However, some believers would think that they can go off and then return whenever they wish. When anyone takes this road and then further offends by mocking God, he is crossing a line. One can plead and cry out for mercy and promise to repent, all to no avail.

When God “writes somebody off” there is absolutely no way back. Therefore, knowing the terror of God, we plead with men to consider eternity very carefully.

Thou Art Weighed in the Balances

The dictum that was interpreted to the king was: “*Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.*” Let us consider this thought of being weighed in the balances:



The lives of all men are recorded very carefully in a book. Those books are to be opened at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:12-13). The Scripture indicates that we are being tried every moment. For a reference, let us consider Job 7:17-18: “*What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?*”

It would appear from these Scriptures, that God observes our every move, our every thought and action. Actually, this is stated in Psalm 139:1-4: “*O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*” David continues in this psalm

to say that there is no place where we can hide from His presence.

The Song of Hannah also attests to the fact that God weighs our actions: *“Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed”* (1 Sam 2:3). The Lord carefully records (weighs) our responses throughout life. Let me recall another example: Our fellowship has an associate church in Singapore. The pastor of this church was giving an altar call one Sunday, and as he was doing so, his eyes were opened up in the Spirit. What he saw was an angel of God writing down the response that people were making in their hearts.

The Lord states in a number of Scriptures, that He hates a false balance, but He loves a true weight. Although this concept may apply to the scale at the meat counter, it has far greater spiritual implications. God weighs all of our actions, motives and the true intent of the heart.

The End of the Story

Not only is Belshazzar being judged in the light of the Divine candlestick, so are we. The Word is the lamp, and we are judged in the light of His Word. Jesus said this in John 12:48: *“...The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”* The Word searches us out. It divides soul and spirit. It is like a sword that pierces and divides the joints of the bones, and it exposes every part of the human nature. It is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The apostle Paul said

this in Hebrews 4:13: *“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”*

Belshazzar’s actions had been weighed. He had crossed the line – the point of no return. Daniel, on the other hand, was again honored and His God was magnified. Daniel was not only honored for his prophetic insights, but also for his courage. Daniel had to tell the king that his kingdom was being forfeited to the Medes and the Persians (which came to pass that night). Interestingly, Darius, the Median king immediately promoted Daniel.

May we again take heed to this divine lesson. We are being tried every moment and we are especially being tried in the light of the revelation that we have had. If there was ever a generation that is to be scrutinized, it is ours. We are a harvest generation. We are a generation that has had every opportunity to be exposed to the light. What shall we do with it? When our day of reckoning comes, will we hear the words: “Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting”? Or, will we hear those blessed words: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant”?



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 (Dan 12:10).

TESTED IN THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Devotion or the Devourer



"Daniel in the lion's Den" by Briton Riviere

The Sixth Trial - Chapter 6

We have now come to the most famous trial in the book of Daniel. Even the world has heard the story of Daniel in the lion's den. This trial is the last of the personal trials (trials that have names attached). The last four trials will fall into the category of corporate trials.

In the opening scene, Darius, the Median king, has been given command of the kingdom by King Cyrus. Darius almost immediately sets up a government that incorporates one hundred and twenty princes. These princes would preside over the kingdom, and over them were three chief presidents, of whom Daniel was chief.

Daniel's reputation must have been well known by this time, and Darius had a special fondness for Daniel.

Herein is an accepted spiritual principle: when people of the world love a person who is a Christian, it is because they love the Christ in you. In fact, Jesus said this: "*He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me*" (Matt 10:40). The opposite of this is true also. Chapter six of Daniel will bear this out. Daniel's influence with the king was about to stir up a lot of enemies. Let us read the account from Daniel 6:3-4:

"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. 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."

The Spirit of Envy

There is a big difference between envy and jealousy. Jealousy can be legitimate. That is one attribute that God ascribes to Himself: "*For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*" (Ex 34:14). The Lord reiterates that at least ten times. The apostle Paul also conveys a holy jealousy over God's people when he says: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy..." (2 Cor 11:2). There can be a

legitimate jealousy of a man over his wife or family. He does not want to see them corrupted.

However, when we consider *envy*, we are considering a work of the flesh – even an evil spirit. God does not ascribe to Himself envy. There is nothing that anybody has that Christ would envy. Anything that a person has came from Him. Those who are envious hate a person because that person has something that they want. Envy is venomous; it is like poison, and it can stir a lot of trouble. Envy can even be glad at another's misfortune or death. Joseph's brothers hated him because Joseph had the father's favor and because Joseph was something that they were not – he was righteous. Genesis 37:11 says: "And his brethren envied him..."

One of the most treacherous enemies of Christ whilst He was on earth was the spirit of envy. It was the spirit of envy that delivered Christ up to be crucified. Pilate knew the reason that the religious leaders had brought Christ to trial. It is recorded in Mark: 15:10: "*For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.*" Christ had the goods; Christ had the anointing; and the people were listening to Him rather than to their religious leaders.

*Even in a church split, you will generally find that the root cause is envy. Somebody got promoted, somebody was recognized, or somebody was given a position – whilst the offended party thought that the position should have been theirs. Then the wounded spirit turns into envy; and that

spirit begins to gather support and get others to take up the offense until it quenches the Spirit of the Lord.

The Plot

At the moment, it is Daniel who is being plotted against. However, Daniel was punctilious in all of his affairs of state; thus his adversaries had a difficult time faulting him. Hence, they conclude that the only way to find fault with Daniel was to discover something questionable regarding his personal life. After a little surveillance, the collaborators discovered that Daniel was a man of deep devotion to his God. Thus, the princes appealed to the king's vanity, and the unsuspecting king buys their line. Let us read this from Daniel 6:6-9:

“Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, 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. Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree.”

The Devotional Habit

Daniel was a man who had spent a lifetime doing the right thing. When Daniel heard the edict forbidding prayer to any God, it didn't alter a thing. He continued his devotional practice as usual. Daniel went to his room, with his window opened toward Jerusalem, and prayed as was his custom. Let us read the account from Daniel 6:10: "*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's practice of facing Jerusalem was actually a fulfillment of Solomon's prayer when he dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8:46-50). Four-hundred years earlier, Solomon had petitioned the Lord concerning future generations – that if one were carried away captive, and then became repentant and prayed toward the temple, God would hear.

Daniel's spiritual lifestyle never deviated. Somebody once said that a liar has to have a good memory. This is not so with a truthful man, because his story never changes. The same principle applies here. A righteous man does not change with the weather. Daniel did not even try to conceal his actions. He was a man of a disciplined spirit. In fact, Daniel is the only man recorded in Scripture as having an *excellent spirit*. An excellent spirit translates: "*a cool spirit*; a spirit that is collected, disciplined, or one

that is in control of self.” It has been said that it generally takes about six weeks to form a habit (either positive or negative). Daniel had been practicing his devotional routine for about seventy years; and his convictions had become lifestyle habits.

Daniel Is Reported

When Daniel is finally turned in, Darius is grieved exceedingly, not because of what Daniel did, but because he recognized the treachery of his accusers (and because he realized that he had been duped). Daniel had made an irreversible choice to go to the den, rather than to forsake his devotion to God.

The law of the Medes and Persians was immutable. Once a law was signed, it could not be changed – though Darius tried. Here is an interesting concept: If the contestant continues his religious devotion, he will be subject to the physical lions. Yet, consider: If one forsakes his devotion to God, he is subject to the spiritual lion who seeks to devour the unconsecrated believer. There are many lion-like spirits just looking for weak prey – for those who are out of touch with heaven.

Though Darius cannot save Daniel, and the sentence must be executed; Darius speaks a word of faith to Daniel, even as he is being lowered into the den of ravenous beasts: “...*The king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee*” (Dan 6:16).

21st Century Relevance - Employment

Let us again bring this test into present day perspective. Whilst there may not be (at this time) those who threaten the practicing Christian with bodily harm, the far more subtle threat exists. For example, there is the job that now demands your services on Sunday. This is not a duty that is absolutely necessary on Sunday; however, if you do not comply with your employer, then, it means the “unemployment den” on Monday. There are jobs that make it almost impossible to make it to the prayer meeting or to even have a quiet moment of devotion. One has to be clicking the keys of his lap-top as he is riding the subway to and from work.

The Church or the “Divorce Den”

Sometimes, one’s devotion to Christ is challenged at home. There are many countries where this is becoming a very serious choice. Even in America this trial has relevance in the family. One man particularly comes to mind. He greatly loved our church with all of its activities, and especially the Bible studies. But his wife told him: “If you continue to fellowship at that church, I will leave you!” The man sadly left the church. It was either his devotion to the church or the divorce den. I am not condemning the man. He is dead now; and I believe he made it to heaven, but any spiritual fruit that he might have had was devoured.

Our Testimony or the “Rejection Den”

Herein is a choice that could be taken into many areas. People so desperately want acceptance, and especially young people. They have to have acceptance from their peers at all costs. Unfortunately, it is often at the cost of their Christian testimony – if they have any. The den of being ostracized or rejected is a greater fear than to lose the witness of Christ. The proverb says: “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” So the choice becomes apparent: either the friendship of the world or friendship with Jesus.

Jesus made a statement that would fit in right here. We are quoting Matthew 16:25: *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”* This is actually repeated about six times. A slightly different slant on this verse comes from John 12:25: *“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”* The paradox is: those who choose the den, rather than losing their witness, always come out on top – if not in this life, always in the next!

One story is told of a Russian school boy who would not join the communist youth club (Young Pioneers). This meant that he would ever be denied access to any Russian university and thus would always remain in the working class. Many promotions have been denied for the same reasons. The Puritans in England could not fill any governmental positions because of their faith. Through the centuries people have chosen death and

prison rather than to forsake their witness. The author of Pilgrim's Progress spent twelve years in prison, when he could have been released by signing one agreement. All he had to agree to was that he would not preach again.

The list could go on and on. Many saints have chosen some “den” of persecution rather than forsake their devotion to Christ. As the author of Hebrews tells us: “...Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb 11:35).

We may not literally be thrown into a physical den of lions, and yet because we choose the path of righteousness we may experience the den of lions. David said in Psalm 57:4: “*My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.*” Our refusal to forsake our devotion to God and to His ways may bring us into the kind of circumstance that David is describing. We are dwelling in the midst of people who are tearing us apart with their mouths.

There are many types of “Dens” that threaten our faith:

- Den of loneliness (no friends)
- Den of unemployment
- Den of rejection
- Den of divorce
- Den of persecution
- Den of deprivation
- Den of imprisonment

However, the worse den is for those who seek to save their lives by forsaking their convictions and their faith. For them it is the Den of Damnation!

Daniel Still Lives

Coming back to our story of Daniel, King Darius spent the night fasting and mourning for his faithful governor. Early the next morning, Darius rushes to the mouth of the den and cries out in a very broken voice: “O Daniel, is thy God able to deliver thee...? Then from the den below comes a familiar voice: “O king, live forever....” Let us read the account in Daniel 6:20-24:

“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."

To reiterate a cardinal truth: Those who seek to save their lives at the cost of compromise shall lose them. Daniel, who was willing to lose his life for conviction's sake, gained his life. His accusers were not so fortunate. They all were torn to pieces before they hit the floor of the den.

Again, Daniel's good witness and testimony inspired king Darius to proclaim to all nations the saving power of the God of Daniel:

"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 stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. 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" (Dan 6:25-27).

The Faithful Witnesses

As we contemplate all of the trials that we have studied thus far, we find yet another truth: the impact that the faithful contestants left upon the world then and the world now. Their witness was impacting kings and nations. I do

not think that we realize the many witnesses that observe the faithful: the silent witnesses that can say, “I knew one whose character impacted my life for eternity.”

At the end of each of these personal trials, the true God was magnified. Even in the case of Belshazzar (after the handwriting upon the wall), the God of Daniel was greatly feared.

- Trial One, Chapter 1 – The Hebrew captives were proclaimed 10 times wiser than all of the wise men of the world.
- Trial two, Chapter 2 – The king’s testimony: Daniel’s God was a God of gods and a Lord of lords.
- Trial three, Chapter 3 – The king’s decree to the nations: That if any people or nation spoke anything against the God of the three Hebrews, they would be cut in pieces.
- Trial four, Chapter 4 – Nebuchadnezzar praised and honored the King of heaven whose works are truth and His ways are judgment.
- Trial five, Chapter 5 – Daniel pronounced sentence upon the king of Babylon, and the incoming king immediately promoted Daniel.
- Trial six, Chapter 6 – The new king makes a decree that throughout his kingdom men were to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel.

Liddell Wins the Race without Running

In 1981, the movie: *Chariots of Fire* won four Oscar awards. It was a true story about a Scottish missionary to China. However, that was not what made him famous. Eric Liddell just happened to be a very fast runner; in fact, he was so good, that he qualified for the 1924 Olympics. Upon his arrival in the host city of Paris, Liddell discovered that he was scheduled to run his race on a Sunday. He immediately refused the race because of his convictions about the Lord's Day.

Today, we know the name of Eric Liddell, not because he won a race, but because he refused a race. His habit of devotion was to honor the Lord's Day; and thus, he is honored today. His test was: "Shall I run the race against my convictions and win the coveted Olympic gold medal, or shall I honor my convictions and be an unknown?" Again the point remains: when we honor God by our devotion, it not only brings honor to God, but in time wins us the crown that fadeth not away.

"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible"
(1 Cor 9:25).

Let Us Rekindle Our First-love Relationship

One of the greatest temptations today is to allow our first-love relationship with the Lord grow cold. Such was the case in the early church, by the end of the first

century; their relationship with the Lord was cooling off. This cooling off was not out of treachery or betrayal, but was rather a very subtle departure. As the case was in Ephesus, in Revelation 2:4, the church was doing all of the right things. They hated evil and opposed the false teachers; they were laboring (and were probably very evangelistic). Yet, the communion life was dying.

The warning to this late first century church was to rekindle the relationship and thus prevent their candlestick from being removed. The Lord's warning was that they were going to lose their place in God. May we also take heed to this exhortation! There are many legitimate activities which can crowd out any private time we have with our Savior. I remember a minister once praying, "Lord we seek You for the messages, but not for yourself. . . ." That prayer still convicts me. Let us return to the devotional habit which Daniel practiced. Even the threat of death did not divert his attention from his abiding place in his communion with the Lord.



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 (Dan 12:10).

PART TWO

The Corporate Trial of the Saints

In the first six chapters of this exposition, our focus was upon the trial of the individual. There were names affixed to each trial. In the second part of this commentary, we are going to consider the trials that concern the corporate church of our day (21st century). There are four major trials that deal with the church, or God's people. I say four major trials, because these four trials can actually characterize a number of trials. We shall consider trials that wear out the saint; we shall consider the false prosperity and we shall consider the message of the flatterer. Finally, we shall consider the great tribulation – the trial that involves literal persecution and will ultimately separate the tares from the wheat.

It would be good for us to understand right from the beginning how this all plays out. Yes, for a while the powers of Antichrist prevail, or seem to have the upper hand, but in the final act, the saints take the kingdom. Let us compare this to those few dark moments wherein Christ was betrayed and crucified. Christ told his adversary: “...*This is your hour, and the power of darkness*” (Luk 22:53). Satan had entered into Judas, and then Jesus actually released Judas to do his iniquitous work: “*Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.*” Thus it shall be at the end. Satan shall be given his moment to “seemingly” triumph; but it is short lived.

The Antichrist

Both Christ and the Antichrist have a double advent. Christ literally lived upon earth, and He promises to return. The Antichrist also is an historical figure from the past, who will return to fulfill his mission. This man (the Beast) returns from the bottomless pit (Rev 11:7 & 17:8). Both the Antichrist and the false prophet have been in hell many centuries, but now they have one more role to fulfill.

As we study the Book of Daniel, we realize that many of the trials that are projected for the end of the Church Age were already enacted centuries before Christ came (BC). Much of what Daniel foresaw had a double advent. In fact, much of the trial that Daniel saw took place during the time of the division of Alexander's kingdom. (Please understand, these events were precursory – shadows of things to come.) For example, *the abomination of desolation* spoken of in Matthew 24:15 – The Jews fully understood that term because it was part of their history. You will find the historical account of the *abomination* in the second book of the Maccabees.

The Maccabees is not divinely inspired; nevertheless, it is history. The abomination was an atrocity that took place in the temple in 167 BC, instigated by Antiochus Epiphanes (IV). Antiochus was part of a dynastic family going back to the division of the kingdom, under Alexander the Great.

The future Antichrist will again commit sacrilege in the temple. (There must be a rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem for this to happen). Antiochus is not the coming Antichrist; he was simply a figure or a type from history. The point is, in Matthew 24:15 Jesus is talking about something in the future. It had occurred in the past, yet it was only a figure of something that shall be. I have said all of this to point out that the corporate trials that we see in Daniel – though once fulfilled, are “snapshots” of things to come. And, as in the first six trials, we shall attempt to bring them out of the “abstract” of history, into twenty-first century reality.

Qualifications to Reign

I was driving into New York City some years ago, with a message on my heart that I was going to preach. This message was focused on the ten trials that Israel had to experience in order to qualify them for the Promised Land. As I was negotiating my way through the traffic, a car pulled right in front of me with a license plate that read: “On Trial.” Well, I do appreciate confirmation on the message; however, the sobering truth is that every generation must qualify for their eternal place. The older generation – the generation that came out of Egypt – died in the wilderness. Following them, there was a new generation, many of which had been born en route. They too had to be tested. The interesting phenomenon is that there was a repeat of all of the ten trials in the fortieth year.

As we continue into these last four tests, let us ponder them very carefully. We are in the last days, and we have

already seen the spirit of antichrist at work. Yes, the spirit of iniquity is presently working! Although many Christians today think to escape tribulation, the purpose for tribulation is to qualify us to reign with Christ. We live in a generation that wants to “jump” from Egypt into the Promised Land. We live in a generation that wants the benefits of sacrifice without the sacrifice, or the treasures of darkness, without going through the darkness. However, it is the *faithful* saints, the saints that take the *old path*, which shall in the end take the kingdom.



TESTED IN WEARINESS

Seeking or Sleeping

The Seventh Trial - Daniel Chapter 7

The backdrop of the seventh trial takes place in the form of a vision wherein Daniel sees the succession of kingdoms. However, at the very end, the kingdom of Christ comes, and the saints possess the kingdom. Although this vision is ultimately pointing to the time of the Antichrist and the Second Coming, this vision has double fulfillment; it came to pass, and it shall yet come to pass.

In Daniel 7:21 and 7:25, the prophet describes the Antichrist like this: *“I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them.... 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.”* (The time, times and half a time, are pointing to the three-and-a-half-year tribulation.)

Antiochus, a Type

As we mentioned in introducing the last four trials, the (above) verses clearly point to the Tribulation period; yet, we can still find glimpses of this Tribulation from some of the earlier kingdoms. For example, in the third empire (mentioned in Daniel 7:6), we find an

allusion to the empire of Alexander the Great. When Alexander was dying, he divided the empire among his four generals. Seleucus was one of his generals, and thus begins the Seleucid Empire. Out of this dynasty comes a descendant by the title, “Antiochus Epiphanes IV.” This man very much fulfills some of the verses in Daniel 7, as we shall see.

Antiochus has been described as a mad man. He was a man who would go on rampages. He is known in history for his campaign against Egypt, and especially for his assault on the Holy Land. To really appreciate some of his evils, you would have to read the fifth and sixth chapters of the II Maccabees. This man truly made war with the saints. Antiochus forbade the Jews to keep their religion. He changed their times (feasts days) and customs – even the practice of circumcision. He enforced much of the Greek tradition upon them, even the worship of Zeus. In fact, he put the image of Zeus in the Temple and then offered swine’s blood. This act came to be known as “*the abomination of desolation.*” Antiochus also slaughtered thousands of practicing Jews because they would not conform.

War with the Saints

In staying with our theme, we see that the Antichrist makes war with the saints and that he shall wear out the saints of the Most High. These images from the past help us to realize the types of pressures that are beginning to emerge in our time. As in some of our previous lessons, some of these “precursory trials” can be very subtle. (I say

precursory, because the Antichrist has not yet come.) Yet, the spirit of antichrist is working. The spirit of antichrist is the spirit of lawlessness and anarchy. The spirit of antichrist seeks to denigrate God's laws and standards. Even in our own nation, the Ten Commandments have been discarded.

Thus, the true saint (the saint who tries to uphold the standard of Christ) is subjected to a lot of pressure. I might also add, that the church that seeks to uphold God's standard is also under attack. The unfortunate truth is that some of the attack comes from fellow churches – churches which have already compromised the standard. The church that I grew up in was much different than what I see today. In those days, it was recognized that sinners went to hell. Today, many churches do not label sin as sin; and some of the churches that do, usually have the smaller congregations. They might also be labeled as “legalistic”, or “puritanical”, or “uncharitable”, etc.

Indeed, there are pressures coming against the saint that cause an unnatural weariness. Isaiah prophesied of such a day in Isaiah 40:30: “*Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall...*” Many times I feel a weariness come over me that is not natural. There are unseen pressures that ministers or leaders experience, even though all may seem to be well. Often times when I travel, I commit the flock to my elders, who always tell me they are happy when I return, because they have been under such pressure.

The Pilgrim is Growing Weary

I am reminded of the pilgrim on his way to the Celestial City in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Toward the end of his journey, Pilgrim and his companion are overcome with an unnatural weariness that seems to assail their limbs. They desperately want to sleep, but Pilgrim discerns this place as the *Enchanted Ground*. The shepherds had warned them of such a place, and they feared that if they slept on that part of their journey, they might never awake.

It is interesting that this “Enchanted Ground” was toward the end of the journey. This gives us a picture of the weariness that shall assail the Church of the last day. There shall be pressures from within, pressures from without, supernatural pressures to conform to world ideology. I am reminded again of the Pilgrim who is going through Vanity Fair. All of the venders at the fair are trying to get Pilgrim and his friend to buy their merchandise. Pilgrim and his friend are trying to get through the fair unnoticed; they have pulled their collars up over their ears and they respond: “We buy the truth!”

Well, that was all that these worldly venders could take; they immediately caused such an uproar that the pilgrims were incarcerated. This little scene in Bunyan's narrative is very illuminating. The fair is a picture of this vain world. The pressure in this fair is to *buy a bill of goods*. This expression means: “To accept something untrue or undesirable” – in other words, “phony goods.” The venders at the fair continually confronted the travelers

with the admonition: “Buy...buy...buy!” Thus we see a picture of the types of pressures that weary the saint.

Be Not Conformed...

There has never been a time in history, when Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12:2 can be more appreciated: “*And be not to be conformed to this world....*” The god of this world (2 Cor 4:4) wants us to buy his (antichrist) ideology. The popular new phrases are *political correctness* and *globalization*. What these phrases infer is that we must conform to world mentality and not say anything that upsets the status quo. We must accept all religions. We must accept all lifestyles (i.e. homosexuals).

The bottom line: We are being pressured to accept things that deny our faith, our convictions, and our standards in the name of tolerance. The world sets the “dating” standard. They tell us that we should allow our children to have this freedom, and that we should not try to interfere in our children’s private lives. And those who do not conform to such (ludicrous) mentality are not with the times. Consequently, those who seek to uphold the godly standard are subjected to world ridicule.

21st Century Pressure

There are many forms of twenty-first century pressures and anxieties that weary the saint. We could actually label some of these pressures as *bondages*. One of the definitions of the word *bondage* is: “a state of subjection

to a force, power, or influence.” Israel was in bondage to a system that would give them no rest. In type, Egypt represented the world system.

Somehow, many of God’s people have found themselves again enslaved to the world system. The pharaoh (god) of this world is subtly bringing everything into conformity – into a mentality that says, “This is how things are supposed to be. The new normality is that both parents have to work to keep up with today’s standard. The children are in constant activity: the kind that demands breaking up any kind of home atmosphere. The jobs come home with the employee. The preschool sets the new standard of acceptance and tolerance; and the television absorbs what is left of the day, showing us that the family we see portrayed by Hollywood is normal.

A few years ago, at least the family had supper together. Now, these rare occasions might only take place on Sunday or some holiday. There is a psalm that identifies some of this scenario as a judgment. This judgment comes upon the “saints” that do not put His kingdom first. Thus they find themselves in servitude again. Psalm 107:11-12 says, *“Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.”*

Pressures that Weary the Saint

The following is a list of some of the kinds of pressure that weary the saint or the congregation. This is all a

part of the subtle warfare that the antichrist enemy wages against the Church.

- Pressures to adapt world opinion (ideology)
- Pressures from the government – (Canada forbids preaching against the sin of homosexuality.)
- Pressures from family members to compromise 1) to abandon devotional times, 2) to attend a church with lower standards, 3) to allow children to attend *detrimental* worldly activities.
- Pressures (weariness) in prayer (or pressures and time restraints that keep the Christian from prayer.)
- Pressures from the job to commit more time to work
- Pressures from fellow employees to compromise values
- Pressures that come from the everyday trials
- Pressures that seem to deny what God has said or promised (such as illness)
- Pressures that come from doing the right things, yet without seeing any visible fruit
- Pressures that come for economic reasons
- Pressures that come from taking on too many responsibilities (even though they are praiseworthy)

Pressures from within the church:

- Contradiction of sound doctrine; pressure to lower the standard of worship – (such as bringing in “Christian rock music” to accommodate the youth)

- Pressure to accept divorce/remarriage
- Pressure to modify the Gospel message (such as pressure against preaching holiness)

The two camps are definitely taking shape; those who accept the new standard and those who do not. The Scriptures call them *the children of the day* and *the children of the night* or *the children of light* and *the children of darkness*. There are pressures being brought to bear that will define the two groups. The world fights against the truth because they love darkness rather than light. The carnal-minded Christian also contradicts the truth.

Consider Christ

The apostle Paul reminds us to consider Christ, who was constantly contradicted by His rivals. Hebrews 12:3-4 says: *“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”* There was pressure from those who wrested and twisted the words of Christ. Then in Luke 22:44, Christ literally fulfilled these verses (Hebrews 12:3-4) as He sweat blood resisting the thought of becoming sin.

There is tremendous pressure (in the spirit) that comes against people who are fighting against sin. Even when people are speaking against you from miles away, it releases evil spirits that attack your mind. I remember particularly on one Sunday morning, as I was driving to church, I could feel an assault coming against my mind. It was a beautiful sunny morning with no reason for

anxiety. Then I felt the Lord show me that there were some former members of the church who were “having me for breakfast.”

We Shall Reap If We Faint Not

The scripture exhorts us a number of times not to faint. We are admonished not to faint when we are rebuked of Him (Heb 12:5). We are not to faint as we continue to sow good works (Gal 6:9). We are not to faint at tribulations (Eph 3:13). In fact, Jesus gives us the remedy to keep us from fainting in Luke 18:1: “*And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*”

Many years ago, I was working in the meat business. One day as I was cutting some pork chops on the power saw, it seemed to me that the saw began to sway. Actually I was getting dizzy. That dizziness persisted the next day and it continued until I finally had to go to the emergency room. At the hospital, they put me through all kinds of tests. As I was lying on one of the examining tables, the Lord quickened a verse to me, which said: “*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*” In the mean time, the doctor had made another appointment. I told my wife, “I’m not going; I believe that God spoke that I was to pray it through.” After I obeyed the Lord and prayed, I returned to work and found the dizziness was gone.

Sleeping for Sorrow

Let us go back to the time of Christ. The last day of His life as a mortal was like the Great Tribulation encapsulated.

As Christ was being pressed out of measure in the garden, His disciples were sleeping. Now we could tend to be a little hard on his disciples for their lack of participation; however, there is a verse that we often overlook. Luke 22:45 says: *“And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow.”*

I am sure that they were wearied physically from the long day; however, there was also an emotional weariness that had overcome them. They were overcome with grief. Christ had spoken some very heavy things that night, things they did not understand; and now they were sleeping off their sorrow and discouragement.

*We are considering the kinds of temptations that will challenge us in these final days of the age.

But They that Wait upon the Lord

Perhaps one of the most effective weapons in the enemy arsenal is discouragement. In *Pilgrims Progress* there were pressures to cause the saint to surrender on the *Enchanted Ground*. Yet, those who wait upon the Lord make it through this stretch of ground. Let us read the entire verse from Isaiah chapter 40:28-31:

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have

no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

This promise not only applies to individuals, but I believe this applies to congregations as well. Even congregations grow weary from fighting the good fight; yet, there is a promise to them also that God will send a plentiful rain to confirm his inheritance when it is weary (Psa 68:9). I believe that this especially applies to a church with an ongoing vision. Psalm 84:7 declares: *"They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."* What this verse really says is: they shall exchange their strength in Zion. A church that is not moving upward will succumb on the "enchanted ground."

Joy Is Strength

There is also another aspect of sustaining power that we should consider: That is joy! Hebrews 12:2 says of Christ: *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross..."* What caused Christ to endure the cross? He had a vision of the reward of His sacrifice. Having a vision of eternity helps to keep us through the rough times.

Early in my Christian experience, I had a dream of coming before the throne at the end of days. The Lord

said to me: “Enter into the joy of thy Lord, thou good and faithful servant.” Well, something was transmitted to me in that dream because I awoke with “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” I can only describe it like this: you could not have beaten it out of me. What is the key to joy? Being faithful!

God will have a congregation that will be faithful. They shall see the land afar off. They shall have a joy and a strength that enables them to overcome the weary land, and they shall possess the everlasting kingdom. Amen!



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 (Dan 12:10).

TESTED WITH *FALSE* PROSPERITY

Avarice or Approbation

The Eighth Trial – Chapter 8

“By prosperity shall destroy many....” Herein is another facet of the Antichrist, or the antichrist spirit: the seduction of worldly-minded Christians through a corrupted message of prosperity. As we examine this verse in Daniel 8:25 (KJV), we find that the word that is used (substituted) for prosperity is *peace*. “By *peace* shall destroy many.” Darby’s translation uses the word prosperity in Daniel 8:25. This word in Hebrew (*shalvah*) has a few other connotations: It has the sense of security, and it has the sense of quietness, abundance and prosperity. Jeremiah uses this same Hebrew word (*shalvah*) in Jeremiah 22:21; however, here it is also translated *prosperity*.

The point is, when the Antichrist makes his debut, he appears to have the answers to the economic woes and the much turmoil that shall exist at the time. However, as time shall prove, he is found out to be the great deceiver. Herein is an interesting Scriptural concept: To every truth there is a counterfeit. For example, the Scripture speaks of true holiness. What does this imply? It implies that there is a false holiness. The Scripture speaks of the true grace or the true riches. What does this imply? It implies

that there is a false grace and there are false riches (the kind that disappear). There is a true prosperity and there is a false prosperity.

“And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by (prosperity) shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand” (Dan 8:25).

The Prosperity Message

We may think that the prosperity message is a late twentieth century phenomenon. Actually, this message is as old as the path to the Celestial City, and as old as Demas’ silver mine (*Pilgrim’s Progress*). Demas still stands along the highway saying: “Turn aside! You’ll be rich!” And the simple wayfarers are still seduced, in spite of the many warnings. Proverbs 1:32 is a good example: *“For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.”* In other words, many are turned aside by the get-rich promises of shallow-minded Christians. The glitter of material blessing draws many a pilgrim down another path.

Jeremiah had to contend with the prophets that prophesied peace and prosperity when they should have been preaching repentance. The Hebrew word that Jeremiah uses in this instance is (*shalowm* H7965). *Shalowm* also has the sense of welfare, health, and prosperity. Let us consider his message in Jeremiah 6:14-15:

“They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.”

These verses are repeated in Jeremiah 8:11-12. The prophets were prophesying a false peace – a false prosperity. The kingdom was on the verge of judgment, and instead of calling the nation to repentance they were preaching peace and prosperity. Furthermore, they were attacking Jeremiah because he was preaching captivity. Jeremiah was exhorting them to amend their ways and their doings that they might live.

In chapter twenty of Jeremiah, Jeremiah was put into stocks for warning the people of what was really going to happen. The man who was responsible for Jeremiah’s incarceration was Pashur, one of the chief priests. The day following Jeremiah’s arrest, Jeremiah told Pashur (by the Spirit) that his name was no longer to be called Pashur, but his name was to be called *Magormissabib*. Again, these names have significance. Pashur means “liberty.” I have also seen some translations that interpret his name to mean “prosperity.”

Either way, Pashur was one who endorsed the peace and prosperity message. Jeremiah said to him, “Your future name shall be called *Magormissabib*, which means a

terror.” The prophet then elaborates on this by saying that the Lord would give him over to the spirit of terror, and that he would also see his friends taken with him into Babylon where they would be slain. Pashur’s ending depicts the end of the minister who derails his flock with the false prosperity message. (See Jeremiah 20:1-6).

Satan Can Bless the False Prosperity

Recalling our text verse, it begins: “*And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand...*” What does that mean? He shall cause *craft* to prosper? That means that he shall cause deception to prosper. In other words, it is a false message that seems to bear visible fruit. I have had people tell me about supernatural experiences that they have had: visions, angels and things of that nature. I have no doubt that they actually saw those things – but what was the source?

Back in the fifties, the pastor of the church that we attended would often relate the following story: It was about a minister that he had come into contact with in New York City. The man’s name was Father Divine. Divine claimed that he was the reincarnation of Christ, and he backed up his message with miracles. Our pastor said that he watched Divine actually speak food onto the table. The miracle was real enough, but what was the source? Paul calls them *lying wonders* (2 Thess 2:9).

The Mount of Temptation

Satan is not afraid of the prosperity message as long as that message circumvents the cross. In fact, he can bless

such a message as long as people are being diverted from the cross. Please understand that there is a legitimate message of prosperity; however, it is for those who can be entrusted with it. Proverbs 20:21 says: “*An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.*” People can receive something before their time, and in the end, the blessing has evaporated. Such was the case of the prodigal son. He demanded his inheritance now. He wanted his best life now; and his father granted him his request. He then lived a life of indulgence and dissipation, and in his latter end he is eating swill with the hogs.

Most people cannot be trusted with prosperity – especially those who have never known the dealings of God. The Lord said to Israel that He had brought them into the wilderness that He might humble them. He allowed them to be deprived; He suffered them to hunger – all for the purpose of doing them good at their latter end (Deut 8). God brings us into circumstances that are humbling; yet by means of these circumstances, He is teaching us wisdom. Only wisdom can manage an inheritance.

When Christ was taken up on the *Mount of Temptation* (Matt 4:8-9), Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world, if...! Satan’s real concern was that Christ would fulfill His ultimate mission- that is to go to the cross. Many people are diverted from the true calling and the true inheritance when they come to their *Mount of Temptation*. There are many names that we could summon up that you would recognize. They are famous because of their talents or athletic ability. What may

not be known about them is that they were raised in the church. Some even developed their talents in the church, but then they had their *Mount of Temptation*, where the Antichrist offered them the world.

Bypass Meadow

For those who have read *Pilgrim's Progress*, you will remember a place called "Bypass Meadow." This lush meadow ran parallel to a very difficult part of the path en-route to the Celestial City. Of course, there was a stile (steps over the fence) conveniently located there, which enticed many a pilgrim to take an easier way. Many a minister stands at the stile directing his vast audience into the green pastures of temporary blessing. The problem with this alternative route is that it does not lead you into the real purposes of God, nor will it yield a crown at the end of life's journey. Worse yet, it robs many of eternal life.

*There are many illustrations gained from Bypass Meadow.

The Prosperity Preacher

I have been privileged to travel to many countries; and I have heard firsthand stories of some of these prosperity preachers. Of course, they must first experience their own message! By that I mean that they must fare very sumptuously! One of these preachers was invited to come to a certain church. He said, "Well, I have to have at least a five-star hotel and a twenty-five thousand

dollar payment upfront.” Of course, he was expecting much more after the services were concluded. Does this compare to anything you read in the book of Acts?

One prosperity lady was handed a little check for \$6000 after a few days of service. She said, “What is this?” In other words, she meant “What is this meager little offering that you have given me, after I have rendered you so great a benefit?” The pastor had also provided some very nice accommodations for her during her stay. Nevertheless, the pastor, being a gracious man said: “Well how much did you want?” She then named a price, which the pastor gave to her. Unfortunately there are actually worse stories than these. Some of them are preposterous.

We have to ask ourselves, “Why do people even follow such ministries?” They are following for tangible blessing. Many followed Christ for the bread and fishes; but when Christ spoke of the cross, the crowd dissipated. When Christ told them they must eat His flesh, (experience the Word made flesh) they went away (John chapter 6).

The Antichrist Promises a Good Economy

Economy and temporal blessings sway a lot of people. Hitler became popular for his promises to amend the economy. Germany sold out to a devil, all for the prospects of a better economy. Hitler fixed the economy all right; but it was a false economy. It was an economy only recognized in Germany. There was no gold to back up the currency.

Our last election in the United States (2008) shows how people could vote for the Antichrist. It was as though economy was the only issue. The nation's thoughts were, "Forget the background of the man. Forget his religious associations; forget his dubious friendships; forget his political views, and his moral views. Yes, even overlook some of the anti-American and racist views. Even overlook the fact that he could not pass a national security test." The economy was the focus. People will sell their soul in the end for the sake of a better economy. (Just for the record, our church is not a "political" church; we do not preach politics here.)

Selling out to the Beast

I remember an incident some years ago concerning an older lady who began attending our church. She was a "Christian." However, this lady had a problem; she was living with a man. In short, she was living in adultery. When I finally confronted her over the issue, she told me that her pension was not sufficient to live on; thus she was forced into these arrangements.

I urged this lady to find other accommodations. I urged her to trust God and that God would meet her need. I also told her that if she continued to live the way that she was, she was (in effect) selling out to the Beast. She was selling out morally, all for a better standard of living. This lady violently reacted to my insinuation that she was selling out to the Beast. She became quite venomous with her words. Thus, she left the church; and as I recall, she died very soon thereafter, maybe within six months. Was it worth it?

God Determines Economy

One thing that we must understand is that a nation's economy is determined in heaven. God even allows wicked nations or people to have a good economy for their time in history. Many evil nations were prosperous – nations such as Egypt or Babylon or Assyria. Yet, the day comes when God removes their prosperity. Egypt, for example, was renowned for their economy and wealth, but later their prosperity was removed. For a sample verse, let us read Ezekiel 29:14-15:

“And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations.”

Even though God determines a nation's economy, a nation can play a part in the process. For example, even ungodly nations that honor certain aspects of God's law can also experience a certain blessing. However, for a nation that is called by His name (a Christian nation), God demands more. One of the greatest examples of how to repair the economy is found in 2 Chronicles 17:3-13. King Jehoshaphat sent teachers throughout the kingdom who taught God's people the law. The result was that the fear of God fell upon the nation. Then there was much business in the cities, and other nations feared to meddle with Judah.

A nation's agriculture is also determined in heaven. God promised Israel that if they would walk in His ways, then He would send them rain in its season. Contrariwise, if they walked away from Him, He would also stop the heavens that it might not rain.

"If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit" (Lev 26:3-4).

In Revelation chapter 6:5-6, we are given a picture of where the economy is determined: *"And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."* The voice that is determining the price of food is coming from heaven. Incidentally, what this verse is saying is that it will take a day's wage for a day's supply of food.



The True Prosperity

Moses saw all of the wealth and glitter that Egypt had to offer, and yet he saw something that was far more valuable. Let us consider what is said about Moses through the eyes of the Scripture: *"Choosing rather to*

suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward... for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb 11:25-27). Moses saw the eternal riches.

James tells us about the poor of this world that are actually rich. James 2:5 says, “*Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?*” It is interesting how God views wealth. The Laodicean church, for example, thought that they were rich. They were evaluating their wealth by a monetary standard. However, God looked at this church and called them poor and wretched (Rev 3:17-18). He exhorts them to go through the fire that they might be rich. On the other hand, the church at Smyrna thought that they were poor. God looked at them and declares them to be rich (Rev 2:9). The church at Smyrna was going through great tribulation.

Some years ago, I was preaching in a little village church in Honduras. They were very poor, and they seemed awed by the fact that an American would visit their humble little chapel. (Many third world countries view Americans as super beings, with endless resources.) I was preaching on the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16). The climactic point was that the rich man was actually poor, whereas the poor man was actually rich. If you could have heard them pray and sing, you would have understood how apropos the message was.

They also gave my wife and me some very rich prophecies as we departed.

There is another little proverb that says: “*There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches*” (Pro 13:7). The interpretation to this proverb relates to those who give and those who try to keep. There are many applications to this verse, but I would like to apply this to the church. Some churches would never surrender their members to God’s work, because they might deprive themselves of their finest teachers or musicians or talents.

Then, there are churches who make themselves poor (in that sense) by giving their best talent to the mission field. In actuality, the latter example turns out to be the richest, because they have reproduced themselves in many places. At times, I have had to encourage churches on the mission field to do just that – to release some of their members that they might be rich.

We Shall All be Tested with Economy

In some form or fashion, we shall all be tested with money or with provision or economy. Jesus calls this the “unrighteous mammon;” it has also been described as the “deceitful riches.” In the parable of the *sower*; the riches that can only be produced through the Word are choked out by the false riches. The temporal riches are deceitful because they only endure for a time. Paul calls them *uncertain* riches. The only thing that we can carry out of this world with us is the invisible wealth,

the divine nature. The divine nature is produced through fiery trials and a working of His grace. We must be faithful in the area of money and things in order to inherit the true wealth.

“If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches” (Luke 16:11).

In Summary

The true riches are not tangible, and yet we need a measure of tangible wealth in order to fulfill the mission that we are assigned. I like how the psalmist addresses this issue in Psalm 67:1-2:

“God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.”

The psalm ends: *“God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.”* We need to have the blessing of God in order to take His saving health to the nations. I really believe that God wants to entrust wealth to His people; however, He must have people who have their perspectives and priorities right. The riches of the kingdom are for the saints that live by the *“Kingdom first”* policies. *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33).*

We live in an hour when the false message seems to prosper (Dan 8:25). We live in an hour when the minister says that we can get to the Heavenly City by shortcutting through *Bypass Meadow*. However, the time will soon come when there is great economic woe and great shortage; then will come the temptation to compromise. Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. May God spare us from forfeiting eternal life in exchange for the bread that perishes.



*“He that overcometh shall inherit all things;
and I will be his God, and he shall be my son”
(Rev 21:7).*

TESTED WITH ANOTHER GOSPEL

Fickle or Faithful

The Ninth Trial - Chapter 11

“...But he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries” (Dan 11:21). Herein is yet another cameo of the Antichrist; he is a flatterer. He is very suave; he is so smooth that he is disarming. He knows what to say to make people feel good.

To place this verse into a literal setting, we are looking at the nation of Israel and we are applying this to the final deception. Israel as a nation will reject the two prophets sent from heaven; and so it is only fitting that they will receive the false prophet (Rev 11:3-12 & Mal 4:4-6).

Although these verses have their literal fulfillment in Israel, the Church needs to take heed. Natural Israel is a sort of gauge as to what is happening in spiritual Israel (the Church). As the apostle said, it is “first the natural and then the spiritual” (1 Cor 15:46). The two prophets from heaven represent a great revival that is taking place just prior to the great tribulation. These prophets preach in Jerusalem for three and a half years, but in the end Israel rejects them.

The two false ministers (the Antichrist and the false prophet) also preach in Jerusalem. These two personify

the counterfeit message, and they give us a picture of a counterfeit message which shall also be infiltrating the Church. For example, the cross-less “Gospel” – the “feel good about yourself” message. It is the message that never deals with sin or the need to repent or the need to change your lifestyle.

The Flatterer

The proverbs warn time and again of the flatterer. The flatterer has a motive: “*A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet*” (Pro 29:5). What is the motive of the Anti-Christ? His name says it all. Satan wants revenge on Christ. Thus, his message is to divert as many into his deception as possible.

Here is yet another character that the pilgrim encounters en route to the Celestial City – the *Flatterer*. In fact, this occurs toward the end of the journey; and in spite of the warning from the shepherds, the pilgrims fail the test. Their response (after the angel mercifully delivers them from the net) is: “We could not believe that this fine-spoken fellow could be the villain.”

The apostle Paul warns that in the last days, many would desire the kind of preaching that would humor them or make them feel good. Second Timothy 4:3 says: “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.*” What this really is saying is that the congregant wants to be humored. They want their ears tickled with cute little stories – and nothing

that convicts. How different it was in the days of the early Puritans; they demanded the kind of preaching that convicted them of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

*Note again: The man of sin personifies the message and yet there are many that re-echo his words. Daniel 11:34 says: "...But many shall cleave to them with flatteries." The inspiration comes from the wicked one.

The flatterer speaks words that make you feel good. He humors you; he makes you feel at ease (even when you should not). He doesn't condemn you; he justifies you, and he guides you with ease around the cross. In fact, he makes the reproach of the cross to cease. The flatterer has a smile that makes you feel loved and appreciated; and you will never leave the service feeling guilty (or convicted). What really disarms you is that he is quite fluent in the Word! He continually quotes the Word – at least, the part that he is promulgating.

Daniel 11:23 says that this man of sin works deceitfully and that *he shall become strong with a small people*. The "*small people*" has a variety of interpretations. However, (spiritually) I think that "the small of character" says it the best, or as Proverb designates them: *the simple*. The message of the man of sin especially impresses the "small people." This seems to be confirmed In Daniel 11:32. It is the lawbreaker who is impressed with the non-condemning message: "*And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries.*"

The Popular Message

The popular message today is the “*feel good about yourself*” message – the Gospel with no sting to it. I once had a lady attend our church that had been married several times and had six daughters. She was also involved in another relationship on the side. After attending our services for a while, she decided to attend another church – which she obviously liked much better. The testimony she gave concerning our church was this: “Every time I went there, I always felt cut.” She went on to say that her present church made her feel good about herself. Here is a woman living in sin; and her new church made her feel good about herself!

An evangelist once told our audience this: “If you can come to service after service and never feel cut, you had better find a church where you do!” The Word is a double edged sword; and one of the intentions of that sword is to circumcise our hearts. Spiritual circumcision can only take place by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word. The sword exposes and cuts away the flesh – that is, for those who yield to it. The biggest problem with the Church of 2010 is that we have a generation that has never experienced the message of circumcision. (I will expound on this a few page hence.)

The False Balance

In Scripture, a false balance is called an abomination: “*A false balance is abomination to the LORD...*” (Prov 11:1). That is a pretty serious indictment. Of course, we are relating this to the Word. As Paul told

Timothy: "...*Rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Tim 2:15). To relate half of the truth, distorts the truth. Just to prove this to myself, I would purposely listen to some of these positive preachers and try to fault them; however, I was not having a lot of success. Then, I decided to listen to one in particular, a very popular preacher who is known for his positive message. I tried to be open-minded and have a right attitude toward the man. My final conclusion was this: as with the others, he had not really said anything wrong.

What then was the problem? The problem was not in what he said; the problem was in what he did not say. Jesus was clear cut on this from the very way that He preached. Christ preached "both sides" of every topic; and if there was any imbalance, Christ preached about hell far more than he preached about heaven. Even in the Law, if there was an imbalance, the cursing of the law far outweighed the blessings!

The Trend

The new trend in many churches has veered from trying to convict men of sin and judgment. In fact, one popular minister boasts that he never preaches on sin. This is all for the sake of the big audience. It is wonderful to have a full house; but if it is at the price of compromise, it will all be for nothing. Compromise puts many into hell – and the preacher has to account for his flock.

For myself, it was not the desire for blessings that brought me to a conversion. It was the fear of being lost forever. If the preacher never addresses the sin

issue in his church, then nothing changes. The Lord has impressed upon me on several occasions that the minister must warn the righteous as well as the wayward. Ezekiel put it like this: *“Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul”* (Ezk 3:21).

I have had congregants who have backslid, and I have thought to myself, “These have grown up in the church! They know the consequences for living in sin!” However, the Lord impressed upon me my duty to warn them. If we do not do this and they die in their sin, then that is on our record. Ezekiel was told that the watchman’s duty was to warn the both the righteous and the wicked. This is not just some Old Testament truth, because even the apostle Paul tells of the solemnity of preaching the whole counsel of God:

“Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:26-28).

What Do We Want to Hear?

I am accentuating these truths about warning the righteous and the wicked in conjunction with the test that is presently trying the Church, and that which shall try the Church of our

day. Many years ago, I heard a teacher make a statement that has stayed with me, concerning the counsel that we receive. God will allow us to hear the kind of counsel that we desire. If we come to the prophet asking counsel, whilst we still have something in our heart that we do not want to surrender, that prophet will tell us exactly what we want to hear. In Ezekiel 14:4, we read:

“Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols...”

In other words, his idolatry will be “justified by the prophet.” I have found this to be true in my own experience as a pastor; people will seek out the ones that will confirm their heart’s desire. This is also what draws people to the “lopsided Gospel.” They are only interested in a particular part of the message. What the preacher is saying may be true, but it’s not the whole story. It is like a courtroom trial in which the defendant’s life is dependant upon the witness. But the witness does not tell the full story. What he has said was true; however he leaves out the facts that would have saved the defendant. Thus, the defendant is judged guilty.

Separation of the Sheep and Goats

Although we shall consider this thought of *separation* again in the final chapter, here is the message that will separate

the sheep from the goats: the sheep will go to the cross; the goats will not. The goats will gravitate toward the crossless message of the flatterer, who says: “Jesus paid it all; there is no cross for you to bear. There is therefore no condemnation. We must all sin every day.” The antichrist message will eventually lead to anarchy (lawlessness).

The central message of Christ was upon the way of the cross. No, it was not about the physical wooden cross *persé*, but rather, the everyday death to self. What Christ was teaching His followers is, “The way up is down; and to be great in the kingdom you must be willing to become a servant. If you want to be first, be willing to be last. If you want to save your life, be willing to lose it.” Jesus said, “If you want eternal life you must eat My flesh (John 6:53) – The Word made flesh. The life of Christ is not a life of living for self.

Are we getting the message here? The message of antichrist is the antithesis of this. It’s all about “you” – your life, your happiness and your prosperity. There is no sacrifice in his message, no denial of self, no going the extra mile. There is no fight to be right (righteous). When Jesus reveals the crux of His mission – to give His life and the call to follow Him, many departed from Him. Then Jesus asks the twelve: “*Will ye also go away?*” (John 6:67)

The Uncircumcised Generation

When Joshua finally brought Israel across the Jordan, it was a generation that had never experienced the knife

(circumcision). The older generation was now dead; and all of those who were forty years old or younger had never been circumcised (Josh 5:4-5). Circumcision was very important to the Hebrew; it separated them from other nations, and it qualified them for the promises of Abraham.

The spiritual significance of this is made very clear by the Apostle Paul. Circumcision speaks of the cutting away of the flesh (the nature that we are born with). The real circumcision is that of the heart and spirit, which obviously has to be spiritual (Rom 2:28-29). How is this accomplished? By the sword of the Word! The sword of the Word exposes and cuts away the old nature – that is, for those who submit to it.

The promises given to Abraham were to be realized through his seed; that is, through “the circumcision.” All the others were to be cut off from the promise: *“And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant”* (Gen 17:14). Circumcision (physically) does not take place when a child is born; it takes place afterward. We are not circumcised (spiritually) when we are born again; it takes place afterward. It takes place by constantly submitting to the sword of God’s Word.

Israel had produced a generation that had not experienced the knife for forty years. In a similar figure, we live in a generation of Christendom that has not heard the *death to the flesh* message. Rather, they

have heard a message of unqualified blessing, with no need to change your lifestyle.

Hell, a Refreshing Message?

Several years ago, I was called upon to conduct a Christian funeral. These people were not the kind of people who attended church, but they wanted a Christian burial. The service took place in a club, and there were quite a few unsaved people there. Thus, I was careful to present the Gospel, illustrating both heaven and hell. After the service, a lady came up to me and said, “O pastor, it was so refreshing to hear you speak on hell; I am so tired of the television evangelists who are always promising blessing and never mention hell.”

“...But many shall cleave to them with flatteries.” Who is it that cleaves to the false message? It is those who do wickedly against the covenant – those who break the commandments. These are the ones who embrace the message of the flatterer. You may ask: “But how can we discern the true doctrine?” Well, Jesus gave a key in John 7:17-18: *“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.”*

The key to discerning correct doctrine is given to those who sincerely seek to do the will of the Father. Similarly, the key to discerning him that is true is found in the same way. The true minister also seeks the Father’s will and

seeks to glorify the Father. May the Church take heed! The promises are to the “circumcision;” and it is the true circumcision that will discern the true from the false. Amen!

Circumcision (spiritually) speaks of the cutting away of the old nature – the nature we were born with. This takes place through the sword of God’s Word. There are four principle areas in our lives that need to experience a circumcision:

*The heart (Acts 7:51)

*The human Spirit (Rom 2:29)

*The ears (Jer 6:10)

*The Lips (Ex 6:12)

These four areas make the difference between the carnal man and the spiritual man.



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 (Dan 12:10).

THE TRIAL OF THE AGES

Triumph through Tribulation

The Tenth Trial - Chapter 12

Chapter twelve of Daniel brings us to the final test of the Church Age and to the final redemption of Israel. This test is above and beyond anything that the Church or the world has ever experienced. Daniel 12:1 speaks of this trial: “...*And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.*” Of course, Daniel is referring to the *Great Tribulation*, which is a compilation of many hues of trouble, both natural and spiritual. (Daniel has already given us a preview of some of the types of trials that are coming.)

Israel Takes the Brunt

As we examine the context of Daniel 12:1, we must conclude that the nation of Israel is taking the main brunt of this ordeal. The primary reason for this is because Israel will receive the Antichrist and will reject the two prophets sent from heaven (Rev 11). The Antichrist then sits in the (newly constructed) temple in Jerusalem, proclaiming himself to be God. However, after his sacrilege (*the abomination* [Matt 24:15]), Israel realizes their folly, and must now endure the greatest persecution of their existence as a nation.

Where does the Church fit into all of this? The Church (and the world) is not exempt from the storm that follows. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Israel is a spiritual barometer for the Church. When there is a move in natural Israel, there is a move in spiritual Israel. Both Revelation and Daniel attest to the fact that the person of the Antichrist makes war with the saints – thus the saints are still on earth. Although some would purport that the saints are not here, and, that “the saints” are in reference to Israel – the fact is, Israel (as a nation) does not receive Christ until they see His nail-pierced hands (Zec 13:6). That event does not take place until the Second Coming, which is at the end of the trial.

The Tares and the Wheat

The purpose of the tribulation is twofold. It is to purify Israel with great judgments; and it is to purify the saints. We read in Daniel 12:10: *“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.”* The wise shall understand this; and the whole of Scripture agrees to the fact that there will be a purging out and a separation of all of the offenders in the kingdom. The parable of “the tares and the wheat” is a good example of this. Jesus explains this parable in Matthew 13:37-43:

“He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the

wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

*Tares are "counterfeit" wheat. They have every semblance of wheat until the time of harvest. What distinguishes them from the real is that the wheat is bowed over with grain. The tares are standing tall, in arrogance and without fruit. They are first gathered out by the angels (or messengers).

The concept of the tares and the wheat is nothing new. God always allows a trial to come prior to a fresh move, or a revival, in order to remove the people who are not real or wholehearted. For instance, consider the generation that was about to enter the Promised Land. This new generation actually had a rerun of all ten trials that their fathers had failed thirty-eight years earlier. Many of them were eliminated at Baalpeor (Deut 4:3) for idolatry and immorality. Interestingly, it was the counsel of Balaam (an unrighteous prophet) that instigated this particular snare.

Balaam represents the type of minister (messenger) that is used to remove the tares from the Church. Balaams have always existed; however, in the final purge of the Church they will play a dominant part: *“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication”* (Rev 2:14).

Minister Gathers Out Tares

I once heard a pastor share a story from the pulpit that went something like this: There was a certain minister, in a certain city, who felt that God spoke to him about another minister in the same city. The Lord said, “I want you to invite this man to speak in your pulpit.” The good pastor said to the Lord, “Lord, I know this man; and he is not upright.” The Lord responded, “I know him too; but I want to do something new in your church; so I want you to invite him to speak.”

Thus, the good pastor obeyed, and the man came to his church and spoke. After the service, the guest speaker left, taking about a dozen members with him. When the good pastor asked the Lord what the purpose was in all of this, the Lord responded: “I just removed the tares from your church.” *“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father....”*

The interpretation of this seems very apparent; and it gives us a good idea of how things play out at the end of the age. The Lord has ordained many shakings to sift

out the true Church. The Apostle Paul describes the final presentation of the Church as spotless: *“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:27).

All Must Measure to the Stone

Isaiah also foretells of a doctrinal shaking. The prophet describes a storm that will sweep away any material that does not measure to the *stone*. Of course, he is speaking of the chief cornerstone. In the ancient building process, the chief cornerstone was the stone that every other stone in the building had to square to – vertically and horizontally. Every other stone that does not measure to the standard is swept away.

*The “Cornerstone” speaks of the doctrine of Christ. He is the chief Cornerstone (1 Pet 2:5-8).

“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place” (Isa 28:16-17).

The Shadowing Wings

Everything that is shakable will be shaken in these last days. That includes spiritual things as well as physical

things. A few years ago while I was ministering in Mexico, I experienced several dreams, which I took to be divine. One of them was concerning a very dreadful storm. This storm was so fearful that it seemed as though the whole world was shaking, and I was shaking. I am not a fearful person, but in this dream I was trembling and saying to the Lord, "Where can we hide?" Then, it was as though a shadow came over me, all fear and anxiety left, and I had perfect peace.

I found myself being overshadowed by the covering wings of the mercyseat. This is the secret place that the psalmist spoke of in Psalm 91:1: "*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*" Spiritually, the secret place is speaking of the holy of holies. There are three positions revealed in the tabernacle – and they were to convey spiritual truths. The secret place of the Most High is within the veil, where there is Ark of the Covenant. The ark contained the tablets that speak of the New Covenant. (The New Covenant is the law written upon the heart.)

Little Children, Young Men, Fathers

Jesus gave us the key to abiding in His love in John 15:9-11: "*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*" The key to abiding in the love of Christ is to allow Him to write his laws upon the fleshy tables of our heart.

This is not something that takes place when we are saved; at salvation we are simply forgiven. Salvation brings us into the outer court, where we begin to understand the first principles of the Gospel. However, we must progress from the *little children* stage of our experience unto the *young men* position.

*Please note: abiding in the secret place does not exempt one from martyrdom. It is generally the choicest of saints that are chosen to lay down their lives for the kingdom.

The young men have overcome temptation and are strong in the Word. Yet, there is a deeper experience for those who allow the flesh to be crucified with its lusts and affections. It is in this place (or experience) where God begins to write His higher laws upon our hearts. The law does not offend those who have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal 5:24). Here is an abiding place that we want to remain in – the “father position,” or we could say the Holy of Holies position.

- Little children – Outer court
- Young men – Holy place
- Fathers – Holy of holies (See 1 John 2:12-13.)

The unfortunate truth is that many are content only to know Christ as their Savior, and they never move away from the gate of salvation. Salvation is only the beginning of our experience; and if you think that the salvation experience completes your Christian tenure, then most of the ensamples (or types) used thru Scripture

will not benefit you. In fact, you could probably survive on one book. There is no covering in the *outer court* and that is why we must proceed.

Message Not Received

Several years ago, I was ministering in a church in an Asian country. The pastor of the church was not really happy with my message; and in reflection I would have to conclude that it was a bit deeper than what the congregants were used to hearing. During the interval, the pastor said, “In the next service I only want you to speak for fifteen to twenty minutes.” I always comply with the pastor, but I was feeling a little grieved because I knew that he had not received the message.

As I was sitting there, I had a little vision. I saw the Lord shaking hands with me after the service. Thus, for the remainder of the interval my mind was occupied with what that meant. Well, after the conclusion of the next service, a man came walking up to me to shake hands. This is what he said: “My Word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it!” Then it seemed as though one after another confirmed that word. One man was a missionary on his way to Bangladesh. I said, “What will you be teaching?” He said: “I’m going to teach what I heard here today.”

The House that Stands

These are the days to press into God, before the evil day comes. These are the days to find the abiding place, the

place that will be a shelter in the time of storm. The Lord spoke of such a storm, and then compared two houses that were subjected to that storm (Matt 7:24-27). One house stands, and the other house collapses. The house that stands is comprised of those who hear the Word and do it! The house that falls is comprised of those who hear the Word and do not do it!

Jesus Reiterates Daniel 12:1

The Word of God is quite redundant on this point; there is coming a storm of tribulation that shall exceed anything that has been. In Jesus' Olivet discourse, He confirms the words of Daniel when he declares: "*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be*" (Matt 24:21). Jesus categorizes some of these troubles in the same chapter – both the spiritual troubles and the natural troubles:

- Jesus spoke of great deception coming that will shake the very elect.
- Jesus spoke of false Christs, false prophets, and lying signs and wonders.
- Jesus spoke of great persecution for His name's sake.
- Jesus spoke of betrayal and trial and martyrdom.
- Jesus spoke of wars and civil unrest.
- Jesus spoke of natural cataclysms: earthquakes and even heavenly shakings – stars falling and various omens in the heavens.
- Jesus spoke of famines and pestilence (epidemics).

Although we are not going to try to elaborate upon the various types of trials spoken of in the Olivet discourse, the Scripture is quite clear that there shall be great loss of life. In fact, the book of Revelation speaks of a great percentage of the earth's population being wiped out. It seems that everything that could possibly shake the faith of the saint will take place; and thus, only those who stand the test remain in the house. Or to put it another way, only those who endure to the end shall be a part of the *Glorious Church*.

Revival precedes Judgment

One thing that we can take comfort in is that great revival precedes the *great tribulation* (Matt 24:14). That has always been the pattern in Scripture. Israel experienced their greatest revival under King Josiah and Jeremiah just prior to the Babylonian captivity. The problem was that God's people were not getting the message into their hearts. They were not grasping the fact that their ultimate redemption was to submit to the captivity that was coming. Jeremiah compares the people of Judah and Jerusalem to broken cisterns that could not hold water.

Submit to the Fire that Ye May Be Rich

The message that the Spirit of God spoke to a spiritually impoverished church (Rev 3:18) was to submit to the fire that they might be rich. What our Master desires to accomplish is to reproduce His image in us. The Lord is compared to a refiner of silver and gold in Malachi chapter three. Silver is the most redeemable metal that

there is; it can be refined to 100% pure. The refiner monitors the heat until he sees his reflection in the silver; and then he immediately removes the metal from the heat. Job recognized that he was in a trial and that at the end he would emerge as gold (Job 23:10).

Richard Wurmbrandt was a Romanian minister who ended up in prison for his faith (during the Iron Curtain days). He became quite renowned through the many books that he wrote, including one called “*100 Prison Meditations.*” Wurmbrandt was incarcerated by a communist party member who later lost favor with the party and ended up in prison with Wurmbrandt. While this former enemy was in prison, he became very sick. Wurmbrandt ministered to the man, and shared his meager rations and warmth with his old enemy and he helped him get around.

One day, when Wurmbrandt was sharing Christ with this man, the man finally said to Wurmbrandt: “What is He like?” Wurmbrandt responded, “He is like me.” The man responded, “Well, if He is like you, then I love Him!” Herein is a picture of true overcoming. Overcoming is not rebuking the trial (as many have been taught). Overcoming is being faithful in the trial and thus being made qualifiers for the crown.

Many Hues of Trial – Many Hues of Grace

Our conference president has often contrasted several passages from Peter concerning trials and grace. In first Peter 1:6, Peter speaks of the *manifold* temptations.

The word manifold has the sense of many colors or many hues; in other words, many “varieties” of trial. In the second passage (1 Pet 4:10), Peter speaks of the manifold grace of God. To put this into perspective, for every hue of trial there is a unique hue of grace! Grace is Divine enablement.

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ...As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet 1:6-7, 10).

Grace is a Divine substance. The faith that we possess is by grace. In fact, whatever is achieved (whatever redounds to God’s glory through this mortal body) must be ascribed to God’s grace. God’s grace determines how far we go in His kingdom. Indeed, Paul gives us the key to reigning in life – to reigning over circumstances, and over every enemy. It is by receiving the abundance of grace!

“For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17).

- It is by God's grace that we are saved.
- It is by God's grace that we discern the true from the false.
- It is by God's grace that we endure and stand up in the test.
- It is by God's grace that we have a vision for the hidden treasure, or seek for the Pearl of great price.
- It is by God's grace that we hunger and thirst after righteousness.
- It is by God's grace that we have a holy fear, etc.

We have traveled to foreign countries for about twenty-four years. Some countries where we minister are on a yearly cycle. Just recently, I was asked by one of our foreign students: "What has kept you on course all of these years?" I immediately responded: "The fear of the Lord." Yes, it truly is the fear of the Lord that keeps us from deviating from the good path. Yet, in reflecting upon that statement, I should have gone a step further. We are kept on course because of God's grace!

Beulah Land

One of the promises to the righteous is that they shall see the land that is afar off (Isa 33:17). To have a glimpse of eternity, or a foretaste of glory, helps us to make it through some very difficult times. When I was a boy, my brothers and I ended up in a children's home for about a year of our life (1954-1955). The *Gerry Homes* was a Free Methodist home, and it was very well run; but it was still a captivity for a boy. Nonetheless, there were certain little events that caused me to forget the captivity

and almost make me glad that I was there. One of these events was our evening devotions.

Every evening after supper we would take our dishes into the kitchen and then we would line up our chairs around the dining room for devotions. We could share a Bible verse or a testimony, and then we would sing various hymns. The all-time favorite hymn – the one that we sang every night was: “*Dwelling in Beulah Land.*” As we sang that old hymn, it was as though we were transported to another land and the present distress was forgotten. This reminds us again that we must see past our circumstances and see the eternal hand at work. As Jesus said: “...*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33).

Signs of the Times Are Everywhere

There is no question about it; the signs of the times are everywhere. Things are beginning to shake; institutions are crumbling, and the hearts of men are beginning to fear. The world is on the threshold of a great revival, followed by a Great Tribulation (and many shakings in between). For those who have prepared themselves, they shall go forth in the coming revival. To all others, may they take heed to the warning that shall be proclaimed!

May God grant us all an obedient ear, and a desire to seek meekness and righteousness as the prophet Zephaniah exhorted: “*Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness,*

seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger” (Zeph 2:3).

For those who pass the grade, they shall shine as the stars forever and ever, and they shall be a part of the government of Christ upon earth. Amen!



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 (Dan 12:10).

Dwelling in Beulah Land

[C. Austin Miles 1911]

Far away the noise of strife upon my ear is falling.
Then I know the sins of earth beset on every hand.
Doubt and fear and things of earth in vain to me are calling.
None of these shall move me from Beulah Land.

Refrain

*I'm living on the mountain, underneath a cloudless sky.
I'm drinking at the fountain that never shall run dry.
O yes! I'm feasting on the manna from a bountiful supply,
For I am dwelling in Beulah Land.*

Far below the storm of doubt upon the world is beating.
Sons of men in battle long the enemy withstand.
Safe am I within the castle of God's Word retreating.
Nothing then can reach me—'tis Beulah Land.

Refrain

Let the stormy breezes blow, their cry cannot alarm me;
I am safely sheltered here, protected by God's hand.
Here the sun is always shining, here there's naught can
harm me. I am safe forever in Beulah Land.

Refrain

Viewing here the works of God, I sink in contemplation.
Hearing now His blessed voice, I see the way He planned.
Dwelling in the Spirit here I learn of full salvation.
Gladly I will tarry in Beulah Land.

EPILOGUE

In conclusion of this commentary, let me again recall a promise from Daniel 12:3: *“And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”* These verses depict the life of Daniel and they have always meant a lot to me...I hope that I can claim them throughout eternity.

I was teaching in the Dominican Republic several weeks ago and I was renewing some acquaintances with a couple that were from Persia (Iran). When I told them that I was writing on a theme from the book of Daniel, they said: “O we have been to Daniel’s tomb in the ancient city of Susa (Shushan).



Well, I am sure that we have not met too many people that have been to Daniel’s tomb. However, I am reminded of a verse from the faith chapter that says: *“...And he being dead yet speaketh.”* Daniel’s life still speaks: He still inspires men to be holy; he still inspires men to stand by

their convictions; he still inspires men to be true to their God. Indeed, Daniel's sterling character shines as one of those stars of righteousness that we can still take our bearings from.

May we (by God's grace), be some of "the wise" who brighten the heavens during a dark time; and illumine many with the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen!