

September 15 : Scriptures Daniel 3-4

SUMMARY

Are you willing to die for Jesus? Are you *able* to die for Jesus, meaning do you have the mental, spiritual, moral, and emotional fortitude to put your life on the line for Jesus? Just think about it for a minute. If your death is assured, your decision will be a one-way, "life is completely over," no replays decision. *Finito!*

Christians around the world make that decision daily. We have it so good here in the U.S. Oh, we complain when a political party or someone with arrested development on *The View* or another lame talk show insults Christians. But there are men, women, and children who have watched their fellow believers hacked to death, raped, and burned before their eyes. Pick up a copy of *The Voice of the Martyrs* magazine and read how blessed you are if you dare (go to persecution.com). Then put *Voice of the Martyrs* on your financial support list!

Today's reading covers a very familiar story from our Sunday School years (given that we went to church as kids). Even if you didn't, many Christians know the story of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Nebuchadnezzar's humungous gold statue.

King Nebuchadnezzar builds an immense statue and commands everyone in his kingdom to bow in worship before it when the music plays. Those who refuse will be burned to death. Knowing their refusal will seal their faith, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remain standing. King Nebuchadnezzar explains the situation in a mafia-like Brooklyn accent voice. "Okay, boys, here's da drill. I understand you don't want to worship my gods or the bee-yoo-tee-ful statue dat I set up—tough beans. When da music plays, you fall down in worship. If not, you die. Capish?" (For you purists, the word is *capisce*, Italian for "understand," but the dictionary lets us use the alternative spelling – *capeesh* or *capish*. Capish?)

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have already decided. They ain't gonna do it! Why? *Because they know their God!* "If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up" (3:17-18). Their reply is brilliant because 1) should something miraculous happen, that would be a testimony to King Neb that his gods aren't as strong as the Hebrew teens' God, who will have shown Himself a second time to the king. Remember Daniel's words in chapter 2, "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (2:28)? 2) Should the boys be burned to a crisp, it's still a testimony to Yehovah

that He's worth dying for. Either way, King Neb will meet Israel's Sovereign God, who reveals mysteries and can preserve His people from death.

Oh boy, does their reply ever tick off the king! The nerve of his three assistant administrators to publicly defy him! The king quickly condemns his three newly installed Hebrew helpers to death. (I wonder where Daniel was during this time?) The furnace is heated so hot that those carrying the three bound young men die just getting close enough to throw them in.

Lo, and behold, the king sees Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walking around in the fire unharmed, and a fourth man, looking like "a son of the gods," walking around with them (3:25). The incredulous king calls them out of the furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego step out of the furnace with not so much as one hair singed, one garment toasted, and not even the smell of the fire on them. The king puts 3+1 together and declares, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and rescued his servants who trusted in him. They violated the king's command and risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I issue a decree that anyone of any people, nation, or language who says anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from limb and his house made a garbage dump. For there is no other god who is able to deliver like this" (3:28-29). This exclamation parallels what King Nebuchadnezzar said in the last chapter, "Your God is indeed God of gods, Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, since you were able to reveal this mystery" (2:47)

What King Neb said is extremely important. Do you see what the Lord is doing here? By sovereignly revealing mysteries that no other god can reveal and sovereignly protecting His servants from incineration, Yehovah gradually raises Nebuchadnezzar's eyes from earthly idols and false gods to the One True God of Heaven and Earth. As the leader of a world power, King Nebuchadnezzar is sovereign over his realm. All authority and power are invested in him, and he knows it. He has so much authority and power he can do the worst to people and take their lives at will. The Lord knows King Nebuchadnezzar needs to learn his place – at the feet of another LORD more sovereign than the king. Nebuchadnezzar needs to realize he rules only with Yehovah's permission.

Furthermore, Babylon is ground zero for many idolatrous gods, and many future religious systems will erupt from this ungodly region, leading humanity astray for millennia. Yehovah is planting His flag as the world's Sovereign God in the center of Babylon.

So there we have it, two situations that bring about two declarations (chapters 2, 3). King Neb is on his way to learning who's really in charge, and that's something we would do well to learn. Why do we fret when our current political climate turns against Christianity? The powers that be *have no idea who they're opposing*. Us? No. The God of Heaven and Earth! Live or die, prosper or suffer, let's do it for the Lord as living testimonies to Him.

We leave chapter 3 with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego promoted to provincial governors. Chapter 4 opens with King Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation regarding the incident he goes through in this chapter. Note how powerfully he was affected and his life changed: "I am pleased to tell you about the miracles and wonders the Most High God has done for me. How great are his miracles, and how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation" (4:2-3). What's the cause of his effusive praise to a foreign God? Well, if God were to run you through a traumatic process to squeeze the pride out of you, you might have the same response. Here we go.

Again, King Neb has a dream. The dream in chapter 2 did refer to him, but it was primarily about a train of empires to come. Just so you understand how profound the time scale is regarding the empire dream, we're talking about a prophecy that covers at least 2,500 years, with the bulk of it coming to pass just as Daniel interpreted. In this chapter's dream, it's all about the king.

King Nebuchadnezzar tells us he had a dream that greatly disturbed him (this seems to be a thing with the guy). Like chapter 2, King Neb calls all his dream interpreters together to help him understand it, but they're stumped (4:6. Yes, that was a pun.). So he calls in his "go-to guy," Daniel, for the interpretation, which, if you ask me, he should have done in the first place. When Daniel arrives, King Neb relates the dream of a magnificent tree that, at the command of a watcher (a spiritual being like an angel), gets chopped down, stripped of its branches, abandoned by its animal friends, and finally bound with iron and bronze band (4:14-15). At this point, we get a clue that this is about a human being, "Let his mind be changed from that of a human, and let him be given the mind of an animal for seven periods of time" (4:16). This decree and command comes via the watchers (part of God's spiritual counsel) for a specific purpose, "so that the living will know that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms. He gives them to anyone he wants and sets the lowliest of people over them" (4:17).

Have you ever had a friend that doesn't know the Lord but knows you have an active faith? They're in a pickle, and you know they could easily pray to Jesus for help, but they

ask *you* to pray because “you know the Man upstairs.” Am I right? They need a divine encounter directly with God that will change their entire perspective and help them immensely. Yup, that’s the case with ol’ King Neb. He’s had two remarkable encounters with Yehovah. The first was to introduce Yehovah and build His credibility. The second continued to build His credibility but also showed He has the authority and power to protect His own. Also, Yehovah is the One True God, and idols are stupid. This third encounter is meant to *zotz* Nebuchadnezzar directly. But first, it hits Daniel hard when he hears the dream.

Daniel doesn’t have to wait for the interpretation this time. God drops it on him so hard it stuns him (4:19). Daniel begins at the king’s urging. He wishes the dream was for King Nebuchadnezzar’s enemies because it portends great suffering and judgment. Daniel flat-out tells the king the dream pertains directly to him (4:22). Nebuchadnezzar’s influence and power have spread over the Fertile Crescent region as the tree’s branches spread out widely. Nebuchadnezzar has “become great and strong: your greatness has grown and even reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to the ends of the earth.” Now how do you think that has affected the king? If you guessed, “Pride” ring the bell. Apparently, King Neb hasn’t learned his lesson.

This lesson is one Yehovah has already decreed will happen. By the Lord’s hand, Nebuchadnezzar will be struck with insanity and live as an animal, outside and feeding on grass, for “seven times.” According to the description of the king’s animalistic appearance, it’s estimated that he suffered this way for *seven years* until his sanity returned. Yet, Yehovah promises to “leave him as a stump, rooted in the earth,” meaning his reign would be restored (4:26). Daniel graciously advises his king to repent of his pride in case there could be a reprieve from God (4:27).

Nope.

One year later, King Neb is walking on the roof of one of his three palaces and is overcome by the city’s grandeur. Pride has filled him and erupts to the surface. He then says the stupidest thing he could have ever said, “Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built to be a royal residence by my vast power and for my majestic glory?” (4:30). “I...my...my.” My, my, my, that wasn’t good. God’s judgment falls (4:33), and King Neb begins his sojourn in the Wild Kingdom. Imagine what he looked like as described in his transformation. Yuck. But God is merciful. At the end of seven years, He lifts the king’s punishment and restores Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity, and what follows is one of my favorite verses in the Bible, coming from the lips of a Gentile, all-powerful king.

"I praised the Most High and honored and glorified him who lives forever: For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and he does what he wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can block his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" followed by "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of the heavens, because all his works are true and his ways are just. He is able to humble those who walk in pride" (4:34-37).

So, do you think you're all that and a bag of chips? Let me ask you, "How do you like the outdoors?"

And so ends King Nebuchadnezzar's life lesson in humility with his Sovereign God as headmaster.

Do you see how chapters 1-4 flow together? They all reveal God's sovereignty to the Gentile world. Why is this important, you might ask? Glad you asked. The ancient world commonly believed gods were limited to locales, large or small. In one location, you were under the influence of that area's god(s). When you went to another region, the previous gods did not influence you, but a different god(s) now did.

Daniel 1-4 shows that geography doesn't limit God and His sovereignty. Daniel 5 shows that God isn't limited to human generations. Chapter 6 shows political systems don't limit God. And chapters 7-12 show God isn't limited by time or the machinations of people. He is the Lord of time and space and *is sovereign over all!*

INSIGHT

Have you ever wondered *why* King Nebuchadnezzar built his immense gold statue for his subjects to worship? Until I studied the entire book of Daniel, I considered each chapter a standalone event. Nope. Chapter 3 connects back to chapter 2 and forward to chapter 4. Regarding chapter 2, we're introduced to a mighty king at the center of the biblical world, a king whose forces took down two strong competitors, the Assyrians, and Egyptians. King Neb is at the cusp of power and influence. His highly influential city, with its massively thick walls, projected seemingly unlimited power and greatness. You'd think all that might have gone to Nebuchadnezzar's head, and apparently, you'd be right.

Remember how the Lord described the king and his empire in chapter 2? "Your Majesty, *you are king of kings*. The God of the heavens *has given you sovereignty, power, strength, and glory*. Wherever people live—or wild animals, or birds of the sky—*he has handed them over*

to you and made you ruler over them all. You are the head of gold" (2:37-38). It seems King Neb's statue was a tribute to himself, and he commanded that he and his empire would be worshiped in place of God Almighty.

But hasn't that been the case throughout human history? New nations, kingdoms, and empires rise, and because of humanity's fallen, sinful nature, they all eventually devolve into tyrannies that demand to be worshiped—the state over God. The king, the emperor, or the President, is the lord of all.

Because the U.S. Founders knew humanity's tendency toward consolidating power and inevitably using it selfishly and ruthlessly, they installed checks and balances to put the brakes on such national entropy as much as possible. But nothing lasts forever. Pride enters, and once again, the Lord must step in to establish a little humility to remind us exactly who is in charge.

National peace and favor for all are great, especially for Christians, because we get to spread the Gospel and disciple believers without opposition. But when opposition arises, we'll have to trust the Lord even more, even if it means standing against the powers that be and facing death. But don't worry. The only King that matters has us in His hands for eternity.

September 16 : Scriptures Daniel 5-6**SUMMARY**

Have you ever done or said something really bad, and you wished you could undo it or claw your words back? Yes, that's what chapter 5 is about. Our main character is the last king of Babylon. We started the book of Daniel with the foremost king, Nebuchadnezzar, and we end chapter 5 with the ignominious king, Belshazzar. Apparently, he didn't read the history books of the Babylonian kings. Had he done so, things could have turned out better for him. But there you go.

The chapter opens with a debauched drinking party of the Babylonian elite. After the wine flowed freely, the besotted King Belshazzar called for some "extra special" drinkware to entertain his guests – the cups and vessels from Yehovah's Temple in Jerusalem (5:2-3). Do you remember that chapter 1 talked about how God let Babylon take Jerusalem's treasures? I still contend that it was both material treasure and the learned, godly people who submitted to God's discipline. You know, like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

As the irreverent, soused king guzzles Babylonian swill and praises the gods made of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, a big spooky hand materializes and scribes four words on the wall (5:5). I chuckle at the description of the king's reaction. Bluntly speaking, he was so scared he soiled himself. Seriously. That's what it says. Belshazzar calls the entire team of Babylonian occult advisors to translate God's shorthand. (Get it? Short hand? I kill me! Well, it's going to kill the king, but let's not get ahead of ourselves.) None of the Babylonian knotheads are up to the task. However, the queen remembers King Nebuchadnezzar's most gifted sage, Daniel (5:11-12), and Belshazzar calls for him.

First, let me give you some background to orient you. This drinking party happened about 23 years after the madness of King Neb. King Neb died a few years after he recovered his sanity, and according to my Study Bible, "a series of intrigues and assassinations resulted in several obscure kings ruling Babylon until Nabonidus took the throne (556-539 B.C.)" (HCSB commentary). Belshazzar was the crown prince, and Nabonidus suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the encroaching Persians. Apparently, the 1,000-man drinking party was Belshazzar's way of shoring up support for himself. Okay, back to the party that's already in progress.

Upon his arrival, Daniel probably surveyed the scene and noticed the familiar Temple treasures being used in a disgraceful, "highly aggressive, and blasphemous way" (HCSB). King Belshazzar promises Daniel a boatload of reward if he can decode and

translate the words. Daniel replies, "You may keep your gifts and give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription for the king and make the interpretation known to him" (5:17). I wonder if Daniel said that in disgust after seeing the precious articles from His God's Temple being used for a debauched, drunken soiree?

But first came a rather bold rebuke from Daniel, "You should've known better." Daniel recounts Yehovah's dealings with King Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride and how the Lord allowed King Neb to be afflicted with insanity "until he acknowledged that the Most High God is ruler over human kingdoms and sets anyone he wants over them." King Neb acted in ignorance of the One True God. "But you, King Belshazzar, knew this history, refused to humble your heart and defied God. You exalted yourself against God (like your predecessor did, and look where that got him!). You also defiled the holy objects from the Temple belonging to Him and topped it all off by praising stupid, worthless idols while you denigrated Yehovah, who holds your life-breath in his hand and *controls the whole course of your life*" (5:22-23).

Daniel then translates the four words, which I think were "You're so done for!" I'm just kidding. The message to King Belshazzar was, "Your kingdom is at an end, you've missed the mark and failed as a king, and the Medes and Persians will take your kingdom."

They came true, likely faster than King Belshazzar thought they would. He died that night, but only after he invested Daniel with great honors, setting *him up for the incoming Darius, the Mede*. Hey, before we go to chapter 6, do you want to know how the Medo-Persian army took Babylon in one night? (Yeah, I know I shared this before, but you might be jumping into *Cruisin' Through The Bible* right here.) The city of Babylon was built with a square footprint, and the Euphrates River flowed from north to south, dividing the city in two. When needed, river gates could be shut, the water diverted around the city walls to the west and east, and rejoined on the city's south side. When the Euphrates was at flood stage, it was nearly impossible to enter the north or south river gates. However, the Medo-Persian forces diverted the River upstream long enough to get enough men through the river gate and open the city gates for an incoming attack. Hence, Babylon fell in one night!

Here's another tidbit. Babylon's citizens welcomed the Persians, and the incoming regime promised religious toleration and stability, which they provided. You see this in the opening chapters of Nehemiah, where the Persian King, Cyrus, releases the Jews from their Babylonian, loads them up with treasure, and tells them to go home and rebuild Yehovah's Temple. "Be sure to pray for me! Bye-bye, everyone!" he tells the Jews as they

depart for home. This transition from Babylon to the Mede king, Darius, is where chapter 6 picks up.

Like the fiery furnace account in chapter 2, chapter 6 is another one of the well-known Sunday School lessons about trusting the Lord. It's Daniel in the Lion's Den.

After the Medo-Persian takeover, Darius does the intelligent thing. He enlists the previous administration's administrators to administrate his new kingdom, 120 satraps to be exact. He places accountability systems over them so they won't defraud him. Daniel proves himself from the outset, and the king plans to put him "over the whole realm" (6:3). Wow, not a bad promotion. See what doing your job well gets you? Plus, having God's favor and walking in His plan helps.

And as we find in all politics, the rest of the petty, jealous, covetous, and corrupt satrap administrators come to hate Daniel (that so-and-so goody-two-shoes!). They want to get rid of him, but Daniel is so squeaky-clean they have to concoct a plan to entrap Daniel into doing something worthy of execution. Nice guys, huh? Their plan is simple. Seeing that Darius the Mede is the new king in town, the question of allegiance is an important one. Therefore, a simple allegiance test could be "the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an edict that, for thirty days, *anyone who petitions any god or man except you, the king, will be thrown into the lions' den.* Therefore, Your Majesty, establish the edict and sign the document so that, as a law of the Medes and Persians, *it is irrevocable and cannot be changed*" (6:7 italics author). That's so innocuous. What could possibly go wrong?

Daniel spots it right away. Daniel faces a tough choice like his partners Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego so many years before. His faithfulness to God or his life. He chooses wisely. He keeps doing what he has always done – pray toward Jerusalem three times a day through an open window. The other satraps know Daniel's routine, and I'm sure they just "happened" to barge into his room during Daniel's prayer time. Busted! The petty tyrants run to their king and squeal on Daniel, reminding King Darius that his decree must be followed. Even though Darius tried to rescue Daniel (Darius knew he'd been tricked and liked Daniel), it was to no avail. Daniel's future was just as sealed as the lion's den doorway. For Daniel, it was bedtime with the lions.

I love that the king so liked Daniel that he anxiously paces all night, worrying about his trusted man. In the morning, he rushes to the den. In the background, I can almost hear the Lord say, "Hey, Rocky! Watch me pull a Daniel out of a lion's den." (That is a very

age-specific joke for those of more mature years. Just watch a Bullwinkle cartoon.) But for real, here is the exchange:

Darius: "Has your God, whom you continually serve, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

Daniel: "May the king live forever. God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths; and they haven't harmed me, for I was found innocent before him. And also before you, Your Majesty, I have not done harm." Hooray!!

But don't worry. The lions didn't go hungry. Angry King Darius feeds the scheming satraps and their entire families to the lions. Darius must have really hated being tricked to go so overboard on the retribution factor.

And the best part is another Gentile world power's king gives a glowing testimony to the God of all creation. "I issue a decree that in all my royal dominion, people must tremble in fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, and he endures forever; *his kingdom will never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end*. He rescues and delivers; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth, for he has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

Israel's God is sovereign over schemers, lions, and deceived kings, and as we read in chapter 2, Yehovah's kingdom will never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. Get ready because tomorrow's reading will launch us through time in a remarkable way. Do you remember that dream about an awesome statue that King Nebuchadnezzar saw in chapter 2? *It's back!* (But in a slightly different way.) Things start getting wild.

INSIGHT

Why do we worry so much about politics or other situations around us? For all Daniel knew, when he woke up on the morning of King Belshazzar's "party," it would be a day like any other day. "Ho-hum, another day in Babylon," he might have said as he prepared for his morning prayer time facing Jerusalem. I wonder what Daniel thought when Belshazzar's guards came to fetch the old man for an immediate audience with the king during his evening prayer time. How quickly things change when God wants them to.

September 17 : Scriptures Daniel 7-8**SUMMARY**

Are you sitting down? Coffee at hand? This chapter is a very challenging section of scripture. Such is the case with most apocalyptic literature (*apocalyptic*, "forecasting the ultimate destiny of the world," Merriam-Webster dictionary). The fancy theological word comes from "apocalypse," defined by the aforementioned dictionary as "one of the Jewish and Christian writings of 200 B.C. to A.D. 150 marked by pseudosymmetry, *symbolic imagery*, and *the expectation of an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom.*"

Daniel 7-12 is a glorious piece of apocalyptic writing on par with the Book of Revelation. In fact, Jesus' End Times teaching and the Book of Revelation refer to Daniel's book. Therefore, if we learn what Daniel says, it'll help us later as we go *Cruisin' Through the Bible* in those later End Time scriptures because they share similar themes, pictures, and prophecies.

Don't get me wrong. Just because I point out that Daniel 7-12 is apocalyptic literature doesn't mean that it's uninspired, not prophetic, or the ravings of a man who needs sleep. A lot of sleep. Prophetic revelation often includes apocalyptic/End Time elements. You saw that in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel when you read about the Day of the Lord and how he will break into human history to punish the wicked and reward the righteous. Tada! Apocalypse! Let's get into it.

This event happens before King Belshazzar's judgment in chapter 5. It's the first year of the king's reign, and Daniel has a strange dream with bizarre elements – beasts, a unique beast, a "little horn," a look into heaven, and how they fit together. Take a moment to read the "beasts from the sea descriptions" (7:1-7). In summary, they are 1) a lion with wings, 2) a lop-sided bear, 3) a 4-headed leopard with four wings, and 4) a terrifying, unidentifiable 10-horned beast that destroys everything. As Daniel's focus shifts to the last beast's ten horns, an 11th horn appears, and three of the previous horns are pulled out (7:8). The "little horn" had human eyes and a mouth that spoke "arrogantly" (greatly, boastfully, lord-fully). These beasts "rise out of the sea." As revealed in vs. 17, this is an idiom referring to the earthly domain, specifically from among the nations. We saw this same type of thing describing Egypt as a humungous creature wallowing in the waters with fish (other kingdoms) sticking to it (Ezekiel 29:4; Isaiah 27:1).

Next, Daniel's vision rises to the heavenly realm. He sees the Ancient of Days (God the Father) sitting on His throne. The white hair, clothing, and fiery manifestations reveal

God's holiness and purity, with which a Jew would be very familiar. Many beings are gathered in front of the King. Here's a key to what's happening: "The court was convened, and the books were opened" (7:10). Yes, this is a trial. Because this is apocalyptic literature, this is a trial that takes place at the End of Days. Remember what I wrote about the Day of the Lord when God interrupts the ordinary course of human history and steps into it to do His work? This is it. That Day of the Lord will be a Judgment Day.

In case you're wondering, there's more than one Judgment Day and more than one judgment. There are judgments for the wicked (re: salvation – Revelation 20:15) and the righteous (re: works – 1 Corinthians 3:13-15). Daniel's chapter 7 Judgment Day/Day of the Lord will be at the close of human dominion on earth (at the end of the Tribulation and the start of Jesus' messianic kingdom). Another final Judgment Day will happen at the end of Jesus' messianic reign and the beginning of the new heavens and earth and into eternity (Revelation 20:11-15). Okay, back to Daniel.

'The court was convened, and the books were opened.'" Who is on trial? The next verse tells us, "I watched, then, because of the sound of the arrogant words the horn was speaking. As I continued watching, the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to the burning fire" (7:11). The last beast is being judged and it receives a death sentence. However, the rest of the beasts remain but are stripped of dominion.

Daniel next sees another event. Someone that looks human arrives with clouds surrounding Him. He's escorted to God's throne and receives an imperishable, eternal dominion over every human dominion (7:13). Wow, is that ever an eyeful!

Daniel is very distressed by what he sees. This insightful, spiritually gifted, wise man is perplexed after seeing the last beast, a talking animal horn, and God Almighty on His throne. In his dream, he approaches a heavenly being for understanding, which he gets.

Here is the summary:

- The four beasts = four world empires (7:15). However, God's people ultimately will possess the earth forever.
- The 4th beast = a final empire that's completely different from the previous three empires because it's bent on the total destruction of all in its way (7:23).
- 10 horns = ten leaders ruling at the same time within the last empire. The 11th horn will take out 3 of those rulers (7:24).

- The 11th/"little" horn will blaspheme God and oppress His people. At this point, Daniel would understand that as the people of Israel. Since this is an End Time prophecy, we can assume this leader will persecute Jews and Christians. He will try to change "times and seasons and laws" (7:25). "Times and seasons" can be an idiom that refers to God's commanded days and feast celebrations: the Sabbath, the New Moon observance, and the seven Feasts of the Lord. This leader will have free rein to persecute God's people for 3 ½ years, but it has its limit.
- God's court will convene, God will strip the last empire's leader of his power, and his empire will be destroyed (7:26). God will hand over all remaining kingdoms and nations on earth to His people. Those dominions will be incorporated as part of God's global kingdom.

Daniel is so terrified by what he's seen and learned he's overwhelmed and decides to keep it to himself (7:28).

Daniel's dream of the four beasts relates directly to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2, Daniel's vision in chapter 8, and his revelation from Gabriel in chapters 9 and 11. The book of Daniel shows a progression of primary empires representing humanity's dominion on earth. Remember, God's dominion is and always will be over the entire world because He created it. He delegated dominion with authority and power over the earth, with humanity ruling over His worldly creation as His viceregents on His behalf.

At the Fall, we rebelled against our King. However, God never lost His absolute dominion over the earth and never revoked our commission as His viceregents. Humanity rebelled against God and now rules the world as if it belongs to us. After humanity was kicked out of Eden, people began to collectivize for survival. Those with the lust for power and control and the ability to draw people to themselves gradually created dominions, kingdoms, and empires, as we see with Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-12, please read this) and the later Tower of Babel debacle (Genesis 11).

So, what God reveals to Daniel is a series of empires from his day to the end of humanity's global dominion when God will step in and, through His agent, end human dominion on earth and reestablish His reign through humankind once more.

With all this in mind, here's how the revelations of chapters 2 and 7 connect. I'll include more details as we go through the rest of Daniel:

Statue layer	Beast
Gold	Lion with wings
Silver	Lop-sided bear
Bronze	4-headed leopard with four wings
Iron	Terrifying, 10-horned beast that destroys everything
Iron/clay mix	(Also the 4 th beast)
Stone, not cut by human hands	God's kingdom

In chapter 8, Daniel gets another vision two years later, and this vision is also related to the empire revelations. Daniel is in Susa, in the province of Elam (aka Persia, Iran today), which makes sense since he's a top administrator in the Medo-Persian empire per King Darius. He sees a ram with lop-sided horns charging west, north, and south (8:4). No one can stop him.

A goat with one conspicuous horn appears to attack the ram, defeating it and breaking its two horns in the process. The goat becomes arrogant and powerful. Suddenly, the single horn breaks off, and four new horns grow to replace it, pointing in four directions (8:8). From one of the four horns, a little horn (sound familiar?) grows and leans toward the south and east toward "the beautiful land." The little horn challenges God's army, defeats some of the soldiers, challenges God's Prince, stops sacrifices, and wrecks a sanctuary. The little horn prevails over the "beautiful land" for 2,300 evenings and mornings. Whew! Got that?

God tells Gabriel (His messenger) to explain the vision to Daniel. This explanation gets a little tricky because the vision is on two levels. It reveals what will happen in the near future and hints at what's coming at the End. Let's look at the near future explanation first and how it was fulfilled.

The Ram with two lop-sided horns = Medo-Persian empire. Persia is stronger than the Medes.

The Goat with one horn = the soon-to-rise Greek empire with Alexander the Great as its leader.

Alexander led the Greek army against the Medo-Persians and defeated the M-P empire. The Greek empire covered the territory from Greece east to the borders of India and Tibet today, and it extended south through Israel and into Egypt. Alexander died at age 33 in 523 B.C. The Greek empire was divided into four parts. Again, an online search of

"Alexander's divided empire" will get you a good map to help you understand what's coming in the vision.

Two of the four Greek empire divisions were the most significant: The Egyptian part, led by the Ptolemy family line, and the Syrian part, led by the Seleucid family line. The Syrian part covered vast land stretching from Turkey's eastern half to India. The Egyptian and Syrian parts butted up against each other in the Middle East, specifically Israel, the "beautiful land." These two divisions/families became deep rivals, continually trying to conquer the other, and to do so, their respective armies marched back and forth through the land of Israel. This situation put Israel in a terrible position. If the Jews supported one side, they risked being attacked by the other.

As time passed, a succession of kings rose on both sides. Daniel 8:23-26 focuses on one particularly nasty king from the Syrian/Seleucid Greek empire division – Antiochus IV, "a ruthless king, skilled in intrigue." Was he powerful? Yes. Was he a destroyer? Yes. Daniel's vision doesn't go into further detail, but here's what happened briefly. Antiochus IV exalted himself, asserted his rule over Israel, opposed God, desecrated the rebuilt Temple in 167 B.C., and ran roughshod over the Jews for 2,500 evenings and mornings (1,250 days). He died in 164 B.C.

What Daniel saw and recorded as a prophecy did indeed come to pass. We'll get even more details shortly. However, Antiochus IV is a type of a man to come, a future ruler of the final beast empire, the empire that must destroy all who oppose it, who will stand against God and persecute God's people – the Antichrist. We'll see this later in Daniel and again when we come to Jesus' End Times talk in the Gospels.

What's impressive is Daniel's accuracy in this vision. He received a prophecy that came to pass over 386 years (550-165 B.C.) about the 2nd (silver/lop-sided bear/ram/Medo-Persian) and 3rd (bronze, 4-headed leopard/goat/Greek) empires. Do you see how they relate? Just wait. It gets better!

INSIGHT

The idea of a final Day of Judgement did not begin with the New Covenant scriptures and didn't originate with what became a Gentile-oriented Christian church. Like everything in the New Covenant scriptures, it originates or is influenced by the Hebrew scriptures. Daniel reveals a behind-the-scenes look at the beginning of Judgment Day, albeit in a very general form. Who is this "one like a son of man... coming with the clouds of heaven" who receives from the Ancient of Days the right to rule the earth (8:13-14)? Jesus, of course. He is His Father's agent who will conduct Judgment Day.

Whether we're saved or not, born-again or not, we *will* get our Judgment Day. Our spiritual state determines where we end up – with the Lord or not.

September 18 : Scriptures Daniel 9-10**SUMMARY**

We now go back to when the Medo-Persian empire conquered the Babylonian empire and King Darius ascended to the throne. During this changing of the guard, Daniel “happens” to be reading Jeremiah, where he comes across Yehovah’s prophecy about the Judean exile lasting 70 years (25:11-12, 29:10). After doing a little math, Daniel realizes it’s time for the Jews to return to their home. Not only did the math work out, but the end of the promised Babylonian punishment confirmed it. As we see at the end of 2 Chronicles and the beginning of Nehemiah, Persian King Cyrus released the Jews and sent them home with enough resources to rebuild the Temple. But before that happened, Yehovah prompted Daniel to pray for his fellow citizens’ release.

Daniel’s prayer begins with praise (9:4) and moves right into confession (9:5). Not only have God’s people sinned against their righteous God, but their long-established sin has done nothing but shame them in the world’s eyes among the nations to which the Israelites were banished (9:7-8). Let’s pause for a minute. This is so true. When we sin, we shame ourselves, especially if we claim to follow Jesus because being a disciple means learning to act like our Rabbi, our Master. When we sin, we smear Jesus with that reflection and tarnish our testimony and reputation. But what if nobody sees? Riiight. Like Jesus can’t see our sins, and His indwelling Holy Spirit doesn’t have a front-row seat in our lives. Yes, there are positive reinforcements to help us not sin, like feeling clean, pure, and experiencing open communion with the Lord. But negative reinforcement, like the pain of shame, shouldn’t be ruled out. They work, too. Knowing how we will feel after we disobey can help us turn from a potential sin (or lots of them).

Daniel is so right to give God the glory in the face of Israel’s punishment. God is good, and *we’re* the ones who are guilty (9:9-10). The covenant curse fell as promised (9:11), and God’s not at fault. That’s what Israel agreed to. All of Israel knew the covenant punishments for breaking their covenant with God. I know it’s a long section of scripture, but you would do well to take a moment to read Deuteronomy 28:15-30:10. This is *precisely* what Daniel is talking about and doing. He’s interceding for His people, standing in Israel’s place and praying for them, according to God’s word that spoke of Judah’s punishment and return and their 70-year exile coming to an end. Praying this way is best to intercede according to God’s word and led by the Holy Spirit. Why? Because if we pray according to God’s will, what He wants, then He promises to act (1 John 5:14) even though it may take some time in His plan.

Daniel concludes his prayer with another confession and his request for Yehovah to end His wrath against Jerusalem and the Temple. His appeal isn't based on Israel's righteous acts (because there are none) but solely on God's compassion. The word for "compassion" is *racham*, which means "womb, great and tender mercy," etc. "And please, Lord, don't delay!" (9:19).

God answers Daniel in part. He quickly dispatches Gabriel to give Daniel an understanding of the Israel Exile and Return topic (9:22-23) because Daniel is one of God's treasured people! So, here it comes.

First, a quick quiz. How long were the Jews in Babylon? (*Jeopardy theme here.*) Right. 70 years. That takes us right into God's answer. There's another set of 70s coming, but rather than 70 years, it will be 70 "weeks" of years or 490 years (9:24). Why? God knows more judgment, refining, and other significant parts of His plan of global redemption need to happen, and Israel is at the hub of it all. Daniel's vision pertains to two specific things: God's people (specifically the Jews/Israel) and God's city (Jerusalem) (9:24).

Gabriel reveals that it will take "Seventy weeks" to accomplish God's plan. It seems like completing God's plan will take until the End, the transition point between humanity's dominion being ended (when the stone smashes the statue's feet) and the start of God's messianic kingdom (Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45). God's plan is "to bring the rebellion to an end, to put a stop to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place" (9:24). Did you catch all that? God's plan will end humanity's rebellion, eliminate sinning, clear away the guilt of all sin, establish righteousness forever, fulfill all vision and prophecy, and create a most holy place (a temple or other?). Since these are final things, this pertains to everything that will lead to the End Time and the radical transformation coming to humanity and the earth.

I'm so tempted to deluge you with the details, but I'll boil it down because we're *Cruisin' Through the Bible*, not *Creeping Through the Bible*. Here's what Gabriel reveals:

There will be 483 between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the appearance and cutting off of the Anointed One (Hebrew – *Messiah the Prince*).

After Messiah (the Prince) is cut off, "The people of the coming ruler will destroy the city and the sanctuary" (9:26).

When the End comes, it will come in like a flood (Hebrew – *deluge, outrageously, overflowing*), a time of war and desolations that the Lord has decreed.

The final week (70th week, i.e., the final 7 years) will start with a covenant sealed by the ruler of the last empire (a person like the “little horn” of the terrible beast, a leader of the iron/clay empire).

3 ½ years into the covenant, he will break it, stop the morning/evening sacrifice (the 9 am/3 pm lamb sacrifice that opens and closes the day’s sacrificial service in the Temple), and set up an abomination (Hebrew – *filthy, usually an idolatrous object*), something that desolates (Hebrew – *devastates, stupefies, makes waste*) the Temple or the Temple Mount (9:27) until the final destruction comes.

Pretty amazing stuff, isn’t it? No doubt you’ve heard some of this before, and I hope this clarifies things more. To summarize, before we go to chapter 10, there will be a 483-year period followed by a time of unknown duration leading to a final 7-year period and then the transition at the End.

Chapter 10 jumps from King Darius’ first year (539 B.C., Daniel is around 81 years old) to King Cyrus’ 3rd year (536 B.C., Daniel is around 84 years old). Daniel is fasting and mourning, likely because the work of restoring Jerusalem and the Temple had received so much opposition (10:2, see also Nehemiah and Ezra). Daniel likely hadn’t made the return trip because of his advanced years, so he stayed behind. He could remain a favored Jewish representative to the Persian king and a prayer warrior for his people from Persia.

Daniel looks up and sees a magnificent person, but his companions don’t. However, Daniel’s companions are terrified by what’s invisible to them, so they run and hide (10:7). Daniel faints (10:9). This isn’t a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus because He wouldn’t need Michael’s help against the supernatural being overseeing Persia. We’ll talk about these beings shortly. This person is likely Gabriel again, but the text isn’t clear about that.

The messenger’s purpose is to tell Daniel what’s to come and much of what he shares in chapter 11 deals with the Ram (Persia) and Goat (Greece) conflict (10:20-11:2). The rest of the chapter deals with the breakup and internal fighting of the Greek empire, specifically the northern (Syria/Seleucid) and southern (Egypt/Ptolemy) parts of Greece’s four-part empire who will battle back and forth over Israel’s territory.

But first, we learn that Yehovah dispatched His messenger to Daniel as soon as he started praying (10:12). However, the messenger was hindered by another opposing spiritual being that was in charge of Persia until the archangel Michael arrived to take on the Persian principality, freeing the messenger to complete his mission (10:13).

The Bible talks about principalities and powers. According to Dr. Michael Heiser (*Unseen Realm* – an excellent book), the Bible talks about God and other spiritual beings in the supernatural realm. According to the Bible and Jewish tradition, when the nations rebelled against God at the tower of Babel, God assigned spiritual beings to guard and guide the nations created via the scrambled languages. God would miraculously create a new nation, Israel, and be that nation's guardian. Having Almighty God taking care of you is not too bad, right?

However, most of these overseeing spiritual beings (principalities and powers) wanted to be worshiped as God was, so they enticed the nations to worship them. Hence, this is how the "gods" were "created," with their physical representations, idols. God and His crew (Gabriel, Michael, and the other allied supernatural beings) are opposed to and fight against these rebellious supernatural beings over the nations (the Princes of Persia/Greece). After the angel/supernatural being completes his mission of revealing what's to come to Daniel, he has to return to the fight against the Prince of Persia until the Prince of Greece comes. We see that the Persian empire is in power as long as its "principality" is in control. When the Prince of Persia is defeated, that will open the way for Greece to be strengthened and grow as an empire with the help of their supernatural principality.

Tomorrow's reading will deal with the great conflict and the events leading to the End.

INSIGHT

God has a plan and invites us to participate in it. The Lord calls us to pray, do His work, and then give Him all the credit because He is the author and finisher of our faith. Our Heavenly Father initiates and completes all we do in our lives for Him, so we take no credit.

September 19 : Scriptures Daniel 11-12**SUMMARY**

Chapter 11 begins with the messenger's declaration that he was the spiritual being helping (strengthening and protecting) King Darius when he became the Mede king over Babylon (11:1). Can we assume nothing less for other world leaders of our day? This revelation definitely puts a different spin on how to pray for our leaders, doesn't it?

What follows is a prophetic summary of the Ram/Goat vision Daniel saw in chapter 8. After Darius, three more kings will arise, and the 4th will be rich and powerful, stirring the people up against Greece. Big mistake! Such antagonism caused the Greeks to move against the Persians, leading to the Medo-Persian empire's downfall.

Sidenote: The revelations that follow are *remarkably* accurate. This level of accuracy has led some scholars to say the book of Daniel couldn't possibly have been written before the actual events occurred. Well, if God is omniscient (all-knowing – and He is), this is no problem, and it simply reveals the accusatory scholars' lack of faith in God. I'm resisting the urge to explain how these events were fulfilled because it would take too much space and bog you down.

Many good online sources can give you the details: gotquestions.org/King-of-the-South.html and enduringword.com/bible-commentary/daniel-11.

What I do want to summarize is the tricky part starting at 11:35-36. These two verses appear to be a prophetic shift from Antiochus IV Epiphanes (*Epiphanes* is a nickname that means *Manifestation of God*) to a future "king of the north" like Antiochus IV. Why? Because of the phrase, "*until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time*" (11:35), the focus turns from the near future to the far future/End. "Then the king..." (11:36). When? "Then" – the "time of the end" verse 35 just noted. Therefore, some scholars believe this is where Antiochus IV becomes the paradigm for the coming Antichrist. Here's some information from my notes from *The Book of Daniel*:

"Through Daniel, we see that Antiochus IV is the picture of the End Time Antichrist. Antiochus is used to describe the Antichrist's nature and future actions. Because the vision halts with *the king of the north's* work and moves off into the end of time, appointed time, and Antiochus IV is dead, this new king is a *final king of the north, like unto Antiochus.*"

Here's what Antichrist will do along with his description and religious beliefs (11:36-39) (from Joel Richardson's *Mideast Beast*).

(36) Antichrist's description: He will do as he pleases or according to his will. He will be self-exalting and highly arrogant. He will blaspheme every god (except one, as we will find out). He will especially speak against Yehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He will be unstoppable until his time is up and Jesus returns to destroy him and his "beast" kingdom.

(37-38) Antichrist's faith – four essential points: He will reject *the God of his fathers* (the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). He will deny *the desire of women* (an idiom for Israel's Messiah). He will reject *every other god* (there is no other god except the Antichrist's god). He will affirm and honor *a god of fortresses/forces* (the Antichrist's god is a god of war). Therefore, the Antichrist and his followers will be warlike and use their faith to justify war with complete domination. *ALL* will submit to their god).

It sounds like radical Islam today, doesn't it?

Here's my take at this time, given the current situation about how this might be fulfilled, but don't hold me to it. I'll let you know when we get there.

(*Daniel Study*) "What can we anticipate? The Antichrist will arise from a reborn Islamic Caliphate and come from Turkey, Syria, or Iraq, where the Seleucid empire centered. A leader will arise from the South who will fight a big war against the Antichrist. Egypt will fall to the Antichrist along with Libya and Sudan (by force or allegiance) and perhaps seven other nations from the region (such as Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.). The Antichrist's empire will incorporate a "mixed" people (Aramaic *arav*, English *arab*, the feet of iron and clay that have a tough time holding together, Daniel 2). These are the same people groups who contributed to the Roman forces that destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple Mount under the Roman assault in 70 A.D. There will be ten rulers supporting the Antichrist (Daniel 7). 'This will be the final, Antichristic empire that will crush the people of God throughout the region and in much of the earth before being completely destroyed by Jesus the Messiah' (Joel Richardson, *Mideast Beast*)."

At last, we come to chapter 12! We reach the end of the matter. The Antichrist/the Little Horn has *planted the tents of his palace* in Israel, awaiting his demise. Now what, Daniel? This event will take place *at that time* (12:1), the time of the End when the Antichrist is running amok. Israel's defender, Michael, will rise to defend Israel against the Islamic Antichrist and the Islamic empire's principality, Allah, that gives power, strength, and

protection to the Antichrist/the Caliph. All of these events will happen in a time of great tribulation (12:1), and some of the people of Israel will be saved in the midst of it. A great resurrection will happen – the righteous to life and the wicked to eternal damnation (12:2). Those who can discern the times and what's going on will stand out, and those who lead people to salvation at that time will shine (12:3).

But!

Even though Daniel gets the revelation, the angel tells Daniel to “keep these words secret and seal the book until the time of the end,” meaning the understanding of what the last revelation means and how it will play out will not be understood until we reach the end time.

“Many shall run to and fro” is a way to describe people who pour over the scriptures to learn and gain understanding, not an increase in travel as many prophecy experts teach. *“And knowledge shall increase”* means that understanding these prophecies will grow as time and further study pass. This makes perfect sense since history confirms prophecy. Only when we see the fullness of history combined with proper interpretation of the scriptures can prophecy be rightly understood” (*Daniel study*)

However, Daniel does get a few more clues for the End Time people. This terrible time of the off-the-leash Antichrist will only last 3 ½ years (similar to Antiochus IV's control of Jerusalem, c. 168-165) (12:7), and by the end, the Jewish people's power will be smashed. In other words, it sounds like the Israeli Defense Forces will be utterly defeated, and if Jesus doesn't return to help His people, the Jews will be exterminated.

By this time, Daniel is having a hard time understanding the revelation the messenger has given to him. “My lord, what will be the outcome of these things?” (12:8). “Nope, Daniel. You're getting nothing out of me about that. But I will tell you one more thing. From the time the *Tamid* sacrifice is stopped (the 9 am/3 pm lamb sacrifice) until the end will be 1290 days (about 42 months or 3 ½ years). Blessed are those who make it another 45 days” (12:11-12). But don't worry, Daniel. You're going to die, but you'll surely get your reward at the resurrection at the end.”

INSIGHT

There are other references to the resurrection of the dead in the Bible. Isaiah 26:19 says, “Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust! For you will be covered with the morning dew, and the earth will bring out the departed spirits.” Daniel's prophecy of the resurrection of the dead in 12:2 is one of the clearest.

The Antichrist, the Tribulation, the Resurrection of the Dead – many people think these are New Testament (New Covenant) new revelations. *Au contraire, Pierre!* Much of what we have in the New Covenant scriptures is introduced in the Older Covenant scriptures. Surprise! We'll see more when we get to the Gospels, the Epistles, and especially the Book of Revelation.

September 20 : Scriptures Hosea 1-4**SUMMARY**

Welcome to the first Book of the Minor Prophets. Nope, they're not "Minor" because they're unimportant. They're *very* important. They're just much shorter than Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Hosea is a very personal and autobiographical book. Hosea is a work about sin, repentance, unrequited love, persistent grace, and mercy based on the prophet Hosea's troubled marriage and prophetically-named kids. God forges His best messages in the lives and experiences of His messengers. After reading the other prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and now Hosea), ask yourself, "Do you want to be Yehovah's prophet?"

Hosea focused on the northern kingdom of Israel, which he often refers to as "Ephraim," whose capital was Samaria. Hosea's ministry covered about 40 years, from Israel's King Jeroboam II to sometime during Judah's King Hezekiah's reign. My study Bible says he likely ministered to Israel until it fell and then moved south to Judah. In Hosea's day, Israel was affluent, militarily strong, and had national stability (HCSB). Although Syria made waves, the rising Assyrian power kept Syria in check and initially helped Israel. After King Jeroboam II died, Israel became chaotic. As you may remember, a bunch of kings followed on the heels of their predecessors through a series of assassinations and usurpations. A weakened Israel was an easy target for the brutal and exile-prone Assyrians.

Israel had four problems according to God: 1) Israel violated God's covenant (likened to a marriage covenant at Mount Sinai) and spurned their God. 2) Israel was immersed in idolatry. 3) Israel refused to trust God and instead trusted in human strength. 4) Israel had become an unjust nation that was lawless (refusing to follow the Torah's commands). What is Hosea's message? Stop, or you'll get it – God will divorce you and send you into exile. But Hosea also offers words of hope and restoration. As we get into Hosea's message, we understand that his life was the basis of his message. His marriage to an unfaithful wife was how God regarded Himself and Israel. Hosea's children had prophetic names to reinforce God's intentions. As you read through the text, note the husband/wife language and references.

As we start chapter 1, may I ask a personal question? Are you a spouse that's been betrayed by infidelity? Then you'll likely resonate with God and Hosea. Were you the one who cheated on your spouse? Then you'll likely resonate with Israel and Gomer,

Hosea's wife. If you were divorced and remarried after a time of separation and forgiveness, this book might speak powerfully to you. However, I know it will speak to all of us *because we've all betrayed our Divine Spouse at times*. After all, we are called the Bride of Christ.

God tells Hosea to marry a woman that both He and Hosea know to be a promiscuous woman. The "children of promiscuity" are called that because of Gomer's nature. My study Bible makes a great point that Gomer's promiscuity brings the children's paternity into question, which was a *huge* deal in ancient Israel. If a child couldn't prove paternity, they had no inheritance. Further, a promiscuous woman's child bears her shame for having such an **ahem* wanton woman* for a mom (and everyone knows what she's wantin'). The neighborhood knows she's a loose woman. This doomed marriage is how God begins to build His message into Hosea. Yehovah's point is that He's married to Israel, a people who love to chase after other lovers – gods and national alliances – with whom they should have no business. By doing so, Israel abandons her Husband (1:2)

Hosea's first child – a son, Jezreel (*God plants*) – is named for the sizeable fertile valley in the middle of the nation. Jezreel's name is a prophecy against Israel's King Jehu. Jehu had killed off King Omri's wicked family line. However, King Jehu had fallen off the same spiritual cliff, and now it was his turn to get judged. It will happen in a war in the Jezreel Valley (1:5).

Hosea's next child – a daughter, Lo-ruhamah (*No compassion*) – is so named because the compassionate Yehovah will no longer have compassion on Israel but will on Judah, for now. God's compassion has run out on Israel, and "she's" going to get judged.

Hosea's third child – a son, Lo-ammi (*Not my people*) – reveals that as His people have turned their backs on Him, Yehovah will turn His back on them. And yet, God holds out a tremendous promise that echoes His covenant with Abraham ("the number of the Israelites will be like the sand of the sea," Genesis 22:17) and hints at His prophecy that will come through Ezekiel (God regathering Israel and Judah, and making them on under one king again, Ezekiel 37:20-24). Hosea ends chapter 1 with references to his children's names. God will again plant the Israelites, He will have compassion, and they will be His people.

Chapter 2 is filled with dual imagery, and it's almost like watching a dramatic scene from a daytime soap opera. "You (*insert invective for a loose woman here*)! Wipe that promiscuous look off your face and stop cheating on me!" (2:2). Yehovah threatens to strip Israel naked

and drop her in the desert to die of thirst as well as ignore her children of questionable parentage.

Israel cheated on God because the people believed their idol gods had brought rain, fertile land, and tremendous produce. Baal (*lord*) was the Canaanite's rain god; without rain, the ground dried up, and there was no food. Yehovah says the Israelites ran after their "lovers" for provision but failed to realize it had all come from their God, their husband, in the first place (2:8). So Israel's Husband will take back all He gave her, so she'll realize who really is her Provider (2:9-13).

And yet, her Husband's mercy is boundless. After she experiences Trouble (Valley of Achor), Israel will experience Hope (*tikvah*). (FYI – Israel's National Anthem today is called HaTikvah, *The Hope*.) When Israel experiences God's mercy, she will respond to God as a repentant woman responds in love to her forgiving husband (2:15). Israel will call God, husband (*ish*, "eesh"), not lord (*ba'al*), which is a Hebrew pun. In other words, Israel will call out to God and not Baal (2:16-17).

On the day Israel finally responds to Yehovah, He will respond to Israel. (Is it getting warm in here?) Israel, God's wife, will be the wife He wants her to be, a people who forever will be righteous, just, loving, compassionate, and faithful. And when that day comes, Israel's land will burst into productivity (2:21-22) as God plants His people on their land again, and in His compassion, Yehovah will reclaim His people as His own, and they will reclaim Him!

In chapter 3, Yehovah has Hosea live his message even more. Hosea buys his adulterous woman (not "wife" because their marriage was broken) from the man she's hooked up with. I know of women who have "struck a bargain" with a sugar daddy on shameful hook-up/"dating" sites, and this sure sounds like what Gomer's done. Hosea becomes the highest bidder and reclaims her. Once in Hosea's house, the prophet lays out his terms. "You will live with me for a long time and won't chase after other men. We'll live together, but not as a married couple." This arrangement is how Yehovah will live with the Israelites in an estranged arrangement. However, this will change "in the last days," *acharit yom*, a Hebrew idiom referring to the End. Israel will eventually "return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come with awe to the Lord and to his goodness" (3:5).

Chapter 4 begins Hosea's prophetic case against Israel and Judah and continues through chapter 7. God's first indictment comes against Israel's priests and people. Yehovah says there's no truth, faithful love, or knowledge of God. Instead, there's rampant law-

breaking, "cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, and bloodshed," most of which are part of the basic Ten Commandments (4:1-2).

The adulterous priests and people had abandoned God and His truth. Yehovah's rebuke is aimed mainly at the priests who failed to educate God's people (4:4). Because God's people lacked the truth, it was destroying them (4:6). Yehovah rebukes the priests for abusing the sacrificial system to feed themselves (4:8, the word for sin, *chatta'at*, is the same for a sin offering). They ate the sin offerings, but what did they do about the people's sins? Nothing. Did they give them God's word? No. Did the priests lead God's people in the right paths? No. They led them to other lovers, pagan gods (4:10-11). As for the people, they're all lost in their idolatry, and "People without discernment are doomed" (4:12-14).

God warns Israel about leading Judah into the sin of idolatry. He told the Judahites not to go to Gilgal or Bethel, renamed Beth-aven. Why? Because Gilgal and Bethel had become centers of idol worship which is ironic because Bethel means "House of God" (Where Jacob/Israel personally encountered Yehovah during the Stairway to Heaven dream, Genesis 28:12), and Beth Aven means "House of Disaster." Yehovah calls Judah to avoid Israel because of their unrestrained debauchery and idolatrous ways (4:18). The wind that will carry them off is the growing threat of the Assyrians (4:19).

INSIGHT

All of us born-again disciples have a message that God has built into our lives through our experiences. Those messages can be a source of comfort for others (2 Corinthians 1:4). They can be a rebuke for those living in sin, as Hosea's life message was. Your life message could be an ongoing encouragement to those who are downcast or suffering – "See how the Lord healed me, touched me, saved me, restored me, delivered me, or gave me peace," and on and on. What's the message God has built into you?

September 21 : Scriptures Hosea 5-7**SUMMARY**

Chapter 5 begins with a reproach against Israel's priests and leaders. They're ultimately to blame since they haven't led the people to God but away from Him. Hosea's rebuke against Mizpah and Tabor is because they are a site where there was an illegitimate temple to the Lord (Jeremiah 41:4-6) and a high place. Making Tabor a high place makes sense because Mount Tabor in the SW Galilee is a tall mount. Check it out online. It's impressive.

Though Israel didn't know God, He knew them very well (5:3). In the context of the marriage relationship, to "know" your mate means intimacy and experiential knowledge. While God knew his "wife," Israel, she did not know Him the same way, nor did Israel have any regard for Him. She's been sleepin' around and defiled herself, and because she's defiled, how can Israel/Ephraim return to her husband? She will trip up because of her sin, and God knows Israel will lead Judah down the wrong path, too (5:5). Because of Israel's idolatry, Yehovah has withdrawn from her, so she can't find Him. Plus, she's produced illegitimate children – people who don't know God because they haven't been taught about Him. Therefore, like Hosea's son, they are Lo-ammi, "Not My People" (5:7).

What is Yehovah's punishment for wayward Israel? War. Judah's leaders are no better because they're also corrupt – moving boundary stones is stealing someone else's family land, and Yehovah isn't too fond of that. It's strictly forbidden in His Torah. "The one who moves his neighbor's boundary marker is cursed" (Deuteronomy 27:17).

Both Ephraim/Israel and Judah are wounded. Their respective nations have deep, festering problems. So, how does Ephraim choose to deal with it? By sending a delegation to Assyria, looking for a man-centered solution when they should have been seeking God. So their punishment is this: Yehovah, like a young, strong lion, will tear both nations apart (war) and "carry them off" (exile) and then leave them until they realize their sin and search for them in their pain and distress.

In chapter 6, Hosea responds to the Lord's promise to shred, exile, and turn His back on Israel and Judah by calling them to repent. Already, the two kingdoms have experienced tremendous grief. If they would but turn back to God, He will heal and raise them again so they can live with His presence in their midst. That would be wonderful because God's presence to them is sunshine and rain, crucial elements to their agricultural survival.

Yehovah returns to the scorned husband language in 6:4. Israel and Judah's covenant love (faithfulness to God) is as brief as the light morning fog that quickly dissipates as the sun rises. Because of that, Yehovah sends them prophets whose words of truth call out their adulterous behavior, releasing God's judgments.

This next verse (6:6) is well known, and Jesus quotes it in Matthew 9:13, 12:7. Is God interested in automatic religious works, even if He has commanded them? Not without the proper foundation – covenant faithfulness. In a sense, what Israel and Judah are doing is like a marriage where the wife is unfaithful and thinks her husband should be happy and will continue to support her because she cleans the house and cooks the meals. But there is no commitment, intimacy, friendship, or communication – only humiliating her husband by shamelessly cheating with other men.

Israel and Judah have broken their covenant with God just like Adam did – by choosing to go their own way. Like an unfaithful wife, they have betrayed God. Israel is already under judgment, and Judah's harvest of judgment is ripening (approaching) (6:8-11).

Chapter 7 shows us that God knows what His people are doing and will reveal it when He acts on their behalf (7:1-2).

Yehovah now switches from the marriage metaphor to an oven illustration. The people of Israel's evil actions please their leaders, and they're always ready to sin, like ovens that hold their heat as the dough rises. The king allows his princes to be drunk and entice the people into sin (7:5). They, in turn, draw the king into their sin (7:6). Hosea describes the leaders as being in a state of constant burning, hot with passion for wickedness. Because of their neglect, Ephraim has become spiritually half-baked (7:8), burned on one side and raw on the other, a mixture of Yehovah and idol worship. Israel's illegitimate alliances "consume his strength, but he does not notice," but it can be outwardly seen in their society as one can see grey hair sprout on an aging and weakening person. And yet, Israel doesn't care and won't return to God. Instead, Israel/Ephraim is like a bird-brained dove, flitting between Egypt and Assyria for help. But God will throw a net over the bird and bring it down under His hand (7:11-12).

Yehovah's cry of sorrow is that Israel has rebelled and refuses Yehovah's offer even though He's more than willing to forgive and help them. They don't seek their God. Instead, they "slash themselves," a form of pagan worship, blood-letting, as an offering to a god to entice it to respond (see 1 Kings 18:27-29 – Elijah and Baal's prophets). Israel is as unreliable and useless as a faulty bow. Therefore, Israel's leaders will fall, and Egypt will mock them.

INSIGHT

Time for a heart check. How's your relationship with the Lord? Does it consist of automatic rituals (worship services, good works, etc.), or is it a daily living relationship where you spend time talking and listening to the Lord? What comes first for you – *being* with Jesus or *doing* things for Jesus? There's a massive difference between the two.

And here's some more meddling: Are you *doing* things for Jesus yet disregarding how He taught you to live? Do you live to please yourself even if that means sin? If so, you're in Israel's shoes (6:4, 6-7).

Maybe it's time to sit, think, and pray, especially if He's been hammering you to get your attention and respond to Him. He's speaking to you. Don't let this moment pass.