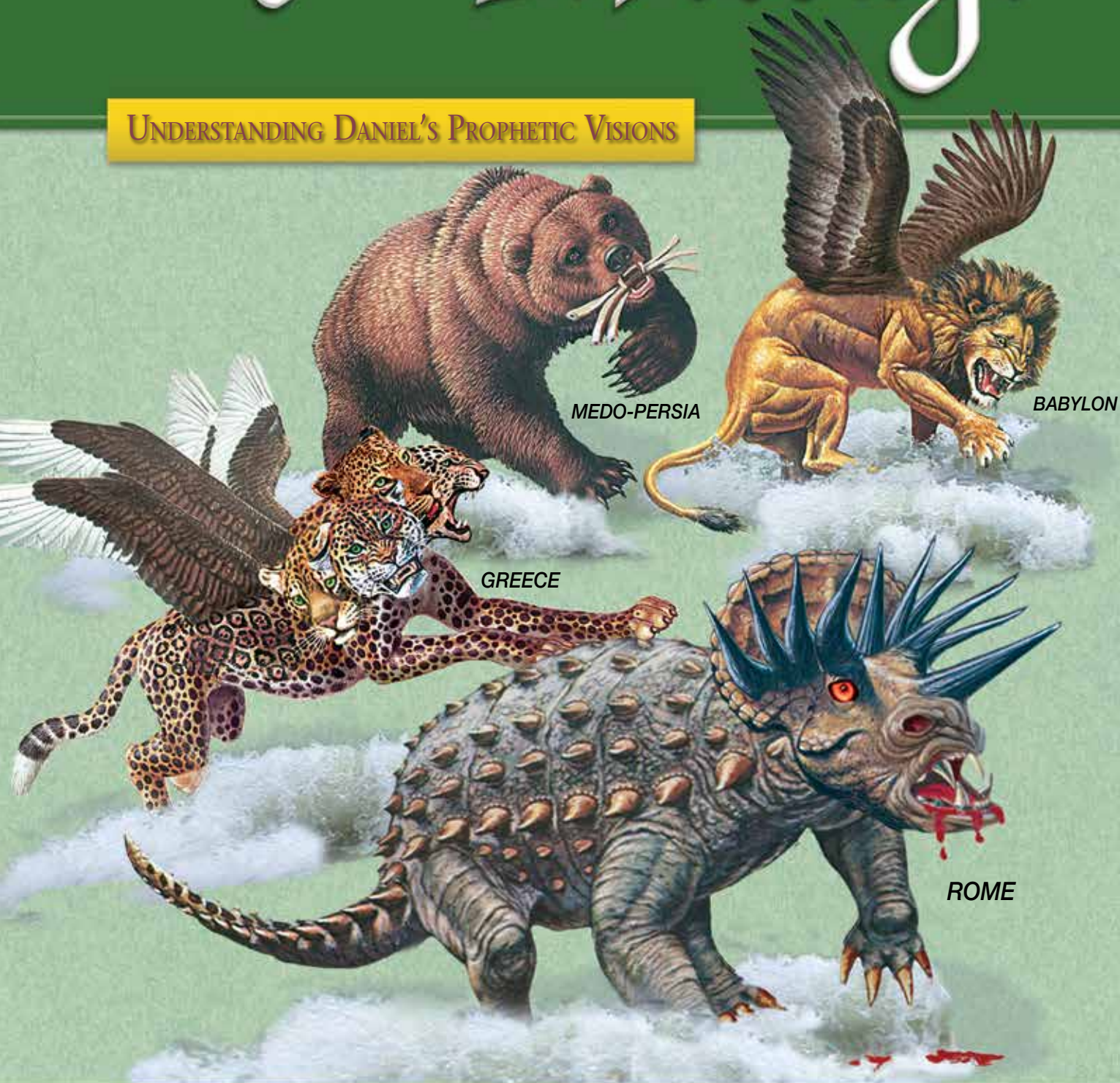


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Megiddo Message

UNDERSTANDING DANIEL'S PROPHETIC VISIONS



In prophetic visions, God revealed the coming of five world-dominating kingdoms when only the first was in existence.

by RUTH E. Sisson

TAKE CHARGE OF YOURSELF

Have you ever had the experience of being in a store, quickly picking up several items, then not being able to find a salesperson to pay?

One day, after roaming around looking for such a person, I finally approached a young man who looked official, and inquired, "Are you in charge here?"

As I spoke those words, their deeper meaning struck me, and I found myself looking at my own life and asking: "Who's in charge here?"

There are external situations over which none of us have any more than limited control. But if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we don't control as much of our lives as we could.

Everywhere are scores of people whose lives are tragically out of control. Whether the problem is drugs, or alcohol, or passion, or pride, they simply haven't taken charge of their lives to an extent where they

are able to say "no" to things that are damaging to health and well-being. The result is a moment of pleasure—and years of suffering and loss.

What is the solution?

Self-management, self-control, the art of coping—these qualities of human behavior cannot be purchased, nor are they the result of achieving such goals as more money, more knowledge, better position or a better job. They are acquired only as we take charge

of ourselves. When we fail to take charge of our feelings, our behavior, our lives, we fall victim to the forces of depression, cynicism and defeat.

The apostle Paul was taking charge of himself when he wrote, "*I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Cor. 12:10 NASB). He was content because he was in control. He was doing it for Christ's sake.

He wrote again, "*Don't you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master? You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval*" (Rom. 6:16 NLT). In other words, take charge, then choose to obey God.

The quality and success of our life depends on who is in charge, whether we give in to the culture around us or stay loyal to the God who created us. When we choose our master, we choose our destiny. When we choose God for our master, we choose life eternal.

The ultimate good will result from taking control of our lives and then turning that control over to the law of God. When we do this, chaos will yield to order, hate to love, fear to faith, defeat to victory, selfishness to generosity, and ultimately at Jesus' coming, He will change our lowly mortal state to be like His own glorified, immortal body (Phil. 3:20-21).

The benefits of taking charge of our lives mean receiving the approval and blessing of God. And who has more to give, even "*riches, and honour, and life*" everlasting! (Rom. 2:7). ■

*When we choose
our master,
we choose our destiny.*

WE BELIEVE...

- ★ **in God, the Creator** and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "*live, and move, and have our being.*"
- ★ **in the Bible** as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- ★ **in Jesus Christ**, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.
- ★ **in the Holy Spirit**, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- ★ **in life as the gift of God**, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- ★ **in humankind** as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- ★ **in ourselves** as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- ★ **in the promise of God**, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide Kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

Megiddo Message

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BDAG—Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature; **DBL**—Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains; **EDNT**—Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament; **GES**—Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures; **HAL**—Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M., & Stamm, J. J. (1999). The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament; **LSJ**—Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon; **LN**—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains; **SHG**—Strong, J. (1997). The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words. **THAYER**—A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889).

MEGIDDO MEANS...

"a place of troops" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon);
"a place of God" (Young's Analytical Concordance).
Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (2 Cor. 10:4-5).



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Born To Be The King

The fact that Jesus was born is proof positive that the remainder of the prophecies concerning Him and others will also be fulfilled.

Behold, you will...bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

Imagine the thrill in the heart of the astonished Jewish maiden when she heard those words directly from the angel Gabriel: "You will bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great"! She was to be the mother of the Son of the Highest? The promised Messiah to be her baby?! Then think of the impact of those other words, "The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David ... of His kingdom there will be no end." How was all this to be? Yet, those were the very words of that shining angel. Mary could only ponder these things in her heart.

Mary, like all faithful Jews, knew the Scriptures that foretold a Redeemer, a Deliverer, a King. With a thrill the promises of old must have flashed through her mind. What Mary may not have realized, however, was that many centuries would intervene before her Son's kingdom would be come.

In the still larger view, God was arranging that Christ would set up the heavenly Kingdom on earth, and earth would become another member of the greater family of the Father, He "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:14-15).

This promise of a coming King and Savior is repeated again and again from Genesis to Revelation. The Jews looked and longed for this Messiah. When Jesus was born, some recognized Him as the fulfillment of this promise. But when He didn't immediately claim the throne, they were disappointed and gave up hope.

Even His own disciples, just before He ascended to heaven, were still asking, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). In other words, Lord, isn't this the time? And once again Jesus explained that that was *not* the time, that many events had to come between.

Why were the promises so hard to comprehend? Why did so many misunderstand them and abandon hope? One reason is that very often those promises were bundled together. Many times the same prophecy spoke of His lineage and birth as well as His future, eternal kingdom. In Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, the Patriarch Jacob, as he blessed his son Judah, was inspired to speak prophetically about this King.

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will obey" (Gen. 49:10 NLT).

Jesus was born from the family of Judah, but the second part of the promise, that He would be "the one to whom [the scepter] belongs," "the one whom all nations will obey," is still unfulfilled. He has not yet taken His throne.

A few hundred years later, another man inspired by God foretold His birth and His kingly mission. "A Star [a shining one] shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter [one having authority] shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult" (Numbers 24:17). Again, this prophecy spans centuries to reach a complete ful-

Behold, you will...bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.
—Luke 1:31-33

*This Earth will yet have
one worldwide government
of peace and justice.*

fillment. The child was born. But the major part is still unfulfilled: He has yet to take “the scepter,” the symbol of authority, and “destroy all the sons of tumult.”

God’s prophet Isaiah also combined the promise of the birth of the child with His kingly destiny. “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders....His ever expanding, peaceful government will never end. He will rule forever with fairness and justice...” (Isa. 9:6–7 NLT). Here again is a prophecy only partly fulfilled. The child was born, but He has not yet taken the reins of government. For once He takes that government, it will “never end.”

God’s prophet Micah foretold the child’s birth and also that He would be a “future ruler.” “But you (Bethlehem) Ephrathah,...from you will come for me a future ruler of Israel whose origins go back to the distant past, to the days of old” (Micah 5:2 NJB). Again, only part of the prophecy has been fulfilled. The child was born, from the ancient Davidic line, but He is not yet a “ruler.”

The prophet Jeremiah also foretold that a righteous ruler, even a King, would come from the family of David. “Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth” (Jer. 23:5; see also 33:14–15). Even today this prophecy is only partly fulfilled. The child was born, but He is not yet a king administering justice.

What must we conclude? Will God leave all these prophecies only partly fulfilled? Never! The fact that Jesus has been born is proof positive that the remainder of the prophecies will also be fulfilled. Jesus Christ will be King! This earth will yet have one worldwide government of peace and justice. In the words of God’s prophet Zechariah, “The Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one Lord—his name alone will be worshiped” (Zech. 14:9 NLT).

When Jesus started preaching that He was the Messiah, the fulfillment of the words of Israel’s prophets, Jewish people grew hopeful. Here was the Redeemer! Here was their King! Here was the one who would oust the hated Roman overlords, take the reins of government, and do away with injustice, poverty and oppression.

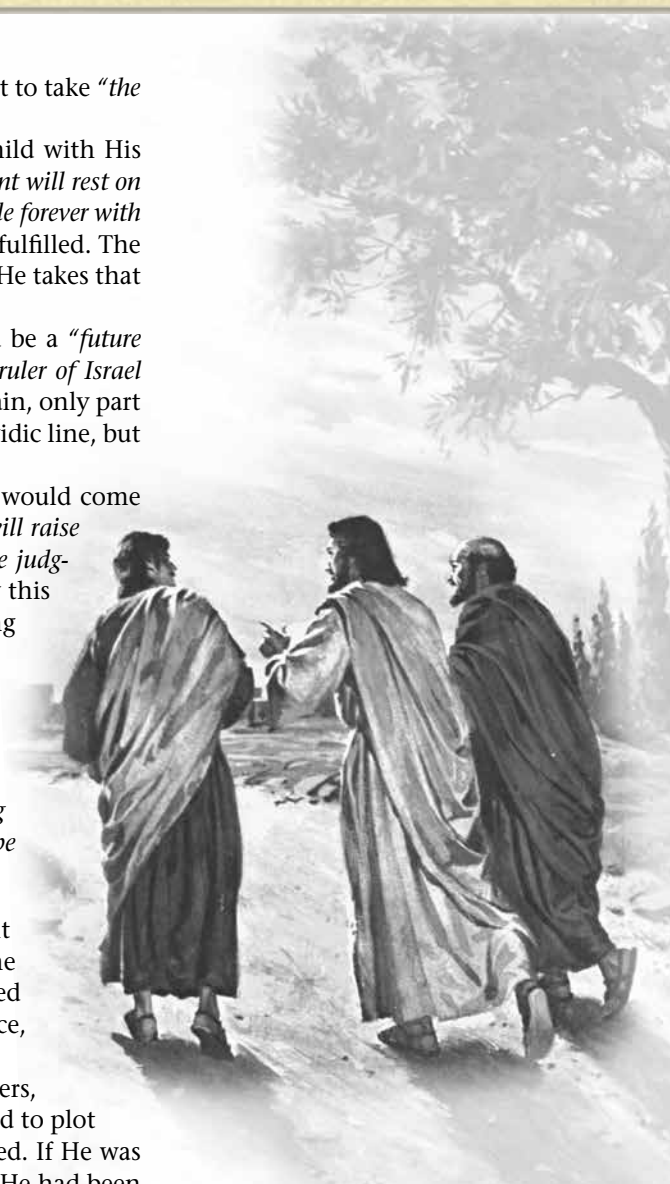
But then, as they watched, the tide turned against Him. The Jewish rulers, who had been watching with jealous eye as the crowds followed Him, started to plot and scheme. Before long Jesus was in their hands, condemned, and crucified. If He was the promised Messiah as He claimed, what now? What about the Kingdom He had been preaching? The words of two of His disciples after the crucifixion expressed the disappointment many felt. “We were hoping,” they said, “that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). Their hopes died with the crucified One.

What was the problem? The problem was not with the prophecies but with their understanding of those prophecies. They could not comprehend the timeline of those prophecies. They failed to understand that Jesus had to be born, be tested and tried (Heb. 2:9–10), had to “suffer many things, and be rejected,... and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9:22), be taken to heaven, and then in the far future return to set up His kingdom. Jesus had said it, but they did not comprehend the time.

In His parable of the Pounds Jesus tried again to explain. “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:12). Matthew’s account adds “after a long time...” (Matt. 25:19). But they could not see beyond what they were expecting. They missed the picture of all that was to intervene before Jesus could set up His kingdom. They even missed Jesus’ careful explanation because they heard only what they expected (or wanted) to hear: that eventually He would redeem them from their oppressors!

Yet the promise was firm. When Jesus was standing before Pilate, He said again that He was a King, also explaining that His Kingdom was yet future. Pilate asked him, “Are you a king?” Jesus’ answer was solidly affirmative. “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world” (John 18:37). He even explained to Pilate that the time for His kingdom was future. But “My kingdom is not of this world” [this cosmos, this present arrangement] (v. 36). If He were to have taken His kingly role at that time, “then

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



The primary focus of the Old Testament prophecies was on Christ the Messiah, the King who would set up the Kingdom of God on earth. Once glorified, Earth will belong to the Father’s far reaching family that already fills the heavens.

—Eph. 3:14–15

FIVE WORLD-DOMINATING KINGDOMS PROPHESED

In two prophetic visions, God revealed the coming of five world-dominating kingdoms when only the first was in existence

"There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to **King Nebuchadnezzar** what will be in the latter days...The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure." (Daniel 2:28, 45)

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM OF THE GREAT IMAGE IN DANIEL 2

1st KINGDOM OF BABYLONIA (626 BC–539 BC)

INTERPRETATION: Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar: "You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory;...you are this head of gold." (2:37–38b)

2nd KINGDOM OF MEDO-PERSIA (539 BC–331 BC)

INTERPRETATION: "After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours" (2:39)

3rd KINGDOM OF GREECE (331 BC–168 BC)

INTERPRETATION: "Then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth." (2:39)

4th KINGDOM OF ROME (168 BC–476 AD and forward)

INTERPRETATION: "The fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others." (2:40)

Feet of mixed iron and clay (various states following breakup of Empire): "Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided... they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay." (2:41, 43)



KINGDOM OF JESUS CHRIST

5th

KINGDOM OF GOD AND OF JESUS CHRIST

VISION: "A stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces....And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." (2:34–35)

INTERPRETATION: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (2:44)

COMMENT: The "stone," representing the Kingdom of Christ, cut from the mountain without human hands (it is God-ordained) will displace all human governments, and spread until it covers the whole earth. (2:35)

The **head** of the image, made of **fine gold**, represented the superior power of Babylonia under Nebuchadnezzar. His weak and unstable successors set the stage for her downfall.

In 539 BC, Cyrus II the Persian conquered Babylon and her realm with hardly a fight. According to historical records, he diverted the Euphrates River into an abandoned lake above the city. This allowed the Medo-Persian army to march through the river bed, under the wall and through the unprotected river gates. See Isaiah 44 and 45 for specific prophecies concerning this Cyrus, called by his name over 100 years before his birth.

In 12 lightning years beginning in 332 BC, Alexander the Great of Greece conquered the kingdom of Persia, extending his kingdom from Egypt to the Indus River.

Rome ruled the world with an iron hand from 168 BC to 476 AD. Over time, the Roman Empire weakened due to conflict and degeneration within and invaders from the outside. Political power was maintained under the authority of the Roman Church.



DANIEL'S TWO VISIONS

THE FOUR BEASTS IN DANIEL 7

INTERPRETATION: "The **FOUR BEASTS** are **FOUR KINGS** [KINGDOMS] who shall arise out of the earth." (7:17-18)

VISION: "The first (**BABYLON**) was like a **LION** (very strong), and had **eagle's WINGS** (great speed). I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to **stand** on two feet **like a man**, and a **man's heart** was given to it." (7:4)

BABYLON

VISION: "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a **BEAR**. It was **raised up** on one side, and had **three ribs** in its **mouth** between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!'" (7:5)

COMMENT: The second beast (**MEDO-PERSIA**) was like a **BEAR** raised up on one side (Persia was stronger than Media), and having **3 ribs** in its mouth (Persia conquered 3 nations: **Lydia, Babylon and Egypt**)

MEDO-PERSIA

VISION: "After this I looked, and there was another, like a **LEOPARD**, which had on its back **four wings** of a bird. The beast also had **four heads**, and dominion was given to it." (7:6)

COMMENT: The third beast was a **LEOPARD** (**GREECE**) with **four heads** (the four generals who took over the kingdom after Alexander's death) and **four wings** (symbol of Alexander's great speed in conquering nations)

GREECE

VISION: "After this, a **FOURTH BEAST** (**ROME**), **dreadful and terrible**, exceedingly **strong**. It had huge **iron teeth**; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was **different** from all the beasts that were before it, and it had **ten horns**.

"I was considering the horns,...a little one, coming up among them,...in this **horn**, were eyes like the **eyes of a man**, and a **mouth** speaking **pompous words**." (7:7-8)

ROME

Unlike all kingdoms preceding it, the **FIFTH KINGDOM** will bring:

The **END** of **WAR**

He "causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear in two" (Ps. 46:9 NLT).

The **END** of **PAIN, SORROW and DEATH**

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

The **END** of **VIOLENCE**

"Violence will disappear from your land" (Isa. 60:17 NLT)

The **END** of **FEAR and INSECURITY**

"Righteousness will bring peace. Quietness and confidence will fill the land forever" (Isa. 32:17 NLT).

THE RAM AND MALE GOAT IN DANIEL 8

VISION: "Then I lifted my eyes and saw,...a **ram** which had **two horns**, and the two horns were high; but **one was higher than the other**, and the higher one came up last.

"I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that **no animal could withstand him**;...and **became great**.

"...suddenly a **male goat** came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, **without touching the ground**; and the goat had a **notable horn between his eyes**.

"Then he came to the **ram** that had two horns,...and ran at him with furious power.

"And I saw him confronting the ram;...and **broke his two horns**...but he **cast him down** to the ground and **trampled him**;...

Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the **large horn was broken**, and in place of it **four notable ones came up** toward the four winds of heaven." (8:3-8)

MEDO-PERSIA

GREECE

INTERPRETATION: "The **ram** which you saw, having the **two horns**—they are the **kings of Media and Persia**.

"And the **male goat** is the kingdom of **Greece**. The **large horn** that is between its eyes is the **first king**.

"As for the **broken horn** and the four that stood up in its place, **four kingdoms shall arise** out of that nation, but **not with its power**" (not among his posterity, see Daniel 11:4; 8:20-22)

COMMENT: The fourth beast (Rome) was an empire stronger than any before it, overpowering Greece and assuming primacy during the second century BC. When it began to weaken from within during the third century AD, a "little horn," Papal Rome, united the divided empire under a combined religious-political authority. The Roman Church remained the dominant power for the next thousand years.

INTERPRETATION: "The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, **even forever and ever**." (7:18)

INTERPRETATION: "Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. **His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom**, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him." (7:27)

KINGDOM OF GOD AND OF JESUS CHRIST

"And it shall stand forever"!!

My servants would fight,” He said, *“so that I should not be delivered to the Jews”*—His servants would not have allowed Him to be crucified. The time of His coronation was yet future.

WHEN WILL JESUS TAKE THE THRONE?

If the people in Jesus’ day had understood the Old Testament book of Daniel, they could have known why Jesus was not taking the steps at that time to make Himself king. The book of Daniel contains prophecies that give amazing details of the events that would intervene before Jesus would set up His kingdom. These prophecies span centuries, reaching from the time of Daniel (about 600 BC) to our day and beyond. They also help us by setting Jesus’ kingdom into a timeline we can comprehend because we can recognize the prophecies fulfilled. And just as these events came to pass as foretold, so we can know with certainty that the rest will as surely be fulfilled.

Two prophetic visions recorded in the book of Daniel, chapters 2 and 7, tell of the rise and fall of four world-dominating kingdoms, to be followed by a fifth, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. A third vision in Daniel 8 gives us additional details of those kingdoms. The territories of these four kingdoms deal with those parts of the world where the people lived who, through their faith in God and their knowledge of the Bible, could benefit most from the prophecies.

FIVE KINGDOMS TO COME

In two Divinely given prophetic visions, recorded in the Old Testament book of Daniel, chapters 2 and 7, God gave Daniel insight far into the future. The prophecy states that God was making known *“what will be in the latter days”* (Dan. 2:28).

Using symbolic pictures the prophecies span the centuries from the then dominant kingdom of Babylon all the way to the setting up of Christ’s worldwide Kingdom *“in the latter days.”* The prophecies tell of four world-dominating Kingdoms that would succeed one another, to be followed by a fifth—the kingdom of Jesus Christ—that would *“stand forever”* (Dan. 2:44). These visions contain remarkable, unmistakable details, showing beyond any possibility of doubt that the knowledge came from God, who alone knows the future.

COLUMN A

THE VISION OF THE GREAT IMAGE—DANIEL 2

The second chapter of Daniel tells about the dream of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. The king had a dream that left him very troubled, so troubled that *“his sleep left him”* (Dan. 2:1). When the king woke up, he called in his magicians and wise men and demanded to know the meaning of his dream. Of course the magicians were helpless even to guess because the king could not tell them the content of the dream.

In his desperation, the king threatened to have all the wise men put to death.

At this crisis point, Daniel, a Hebrew captive who was living at the king’s court, stepped forward and asked the king for time to seek the answer from his God. That night God answered Daniel’s prayer and gave Daniel the dream and its interpretation. Then giving all credit to God, Daniel delivered the prophecy that is recorded in Daniel 2. *“There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets,”* he began, *“and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days”* (Dan. 2:28).

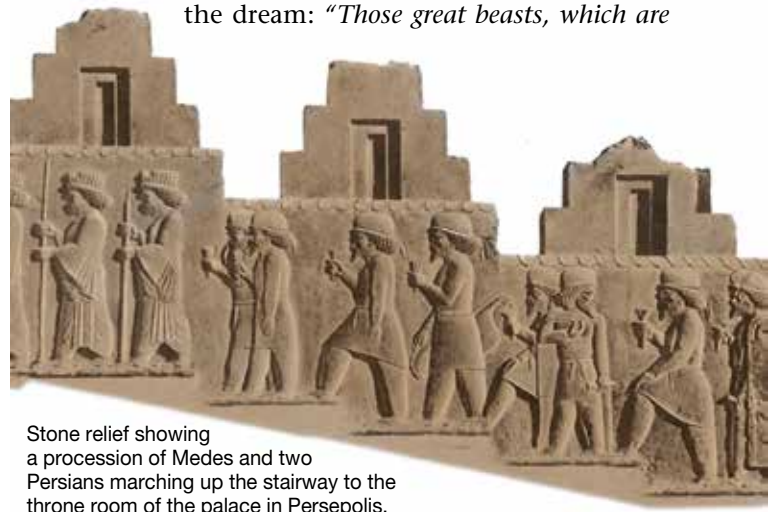
Daniel was not guessing. He was delivering God’s revealing of the future. God gave the information to Daniel, and Daniel relayed it to the king, also writing it down so that we have it today.

COLUMN B

FOUR BEASTS—DANIEL 7

In Daniel 7, the same prophecies are symbolized by the four beasts of another vision. The Prophet Daniel sees these four beasts rising *“out of the sea,”* which is followed by the setting up of the kingdom of Jesus Himself. Are we guessing that these beasts represent four great empires?

God gave Daniel this very interpretation of the dream: *“Those great beasts, which are*



Stone relief showing a procession of Medes and two Persians marching up the stairway to the throne room of the palace in Persepolis.

COLUMN A

"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image!" Daniel explained, and he continued to describe the *"great image, whose splendor was excellent, and its form awesome"* (Dan. 2:31). The image had a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

What happened to the image? *"You watched,"* Daniel said to the king, while a supernatural stone *"cut out without hands,...struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth"* (Dan. 2:32–35).

Daniel was not speculating. He knew because God had revealed it.

What Did the Dream Mean?

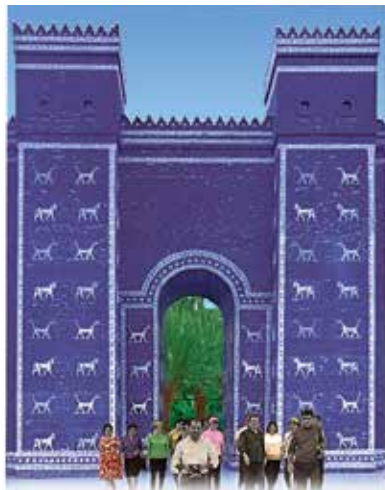
In the verses that follow Daniel explains with all confidence the meaning of the dream as God revealed it to him. The explanation is precise and amazing in its parallel with recorded history. God was revealing to Nebuchadnezzar—and us—a succession of four major, world-dominating kingdoms, to be followed by a fifth power that would sweep away every remaining vestige of the former powers and fill the earth.

COLUMN A

1st: HEAD OF GOLD—BABYLON



Daniel identified Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom with these words: *"You are this head of gold"* (Dan. 2:38). Under Nebuchadnezzar and his successors, the Babylonian Empire extended its authority through the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin with speed and power from the time the prophecy was made (about 605 BC) until its downfall in 539 BC.



Ishtar Gate of Babylon
(reconstructed)

The Processional Way into Babylon passed through the Ishtar Gate. The surface of the gate was decorated with moulded images of bulls, lions, and dragons (right).

COLUMN B

four, are four kings [kingdoms] which arise out of the earth" (Daniel 7:17).

What can we learn about each beast? The description of the beasts is amazingly parallel to the kingdoms they represent. Daniel said, *"I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea [the "sea" represents nations—see Rev. 17:15]. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other"* (Dan. 7:2–3).

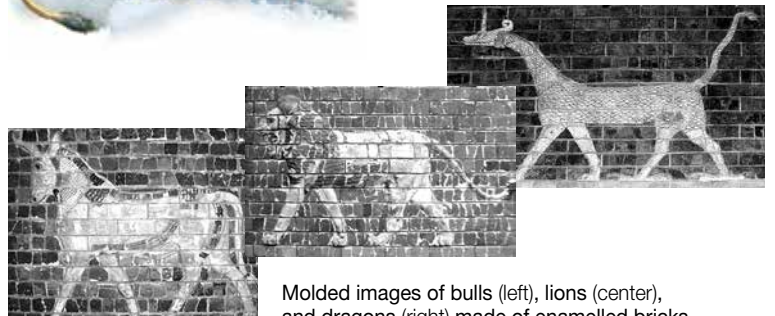
The interpretations of these visions in the book of Daniel are precise and amazing in their parallel with recorded history.

COLUMN B

1st: WINGED LION—BABYLON



What was the first beast like? *"The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings"* (Dan. 7:4). The picture is of a powerful, often ruthless, rapidly conquering nation, a meaningful description of the nation of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar.



Molded images of bulls (left), lions (center), and dragons (right) made of enameled bricks adorned Babylon's walls and gates. Each brick was fabricated with a number showing its exact position in the finished structure.

COLUMN A

2nd: CHEST OF SILVER—MEDO-PERSIA



Then Daniel tells the proud king about a successor kingdom: “After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours” (Dan. 2:39a). This kingdom was symbolized in the image by the breast and arms of silver, a representation of the Medo-Persian kingdom.

While Babylon’s power was declining, the kingdoms to the south, east and north were being united under Cyrus II. In 539 BC, Cyrus marched against Babylon. The Bible gives us the “inside” story, from the Babylonian side. The Babylonians, confident of their strong walls, their large store of provisions against military siege, and their proven military might, were enjoying a night of revelry and partying, when suddenly a mysterious hand wrote words of Divine judgment on the wall. “God has numbered your kingdom and finished it,” said the writing. “Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” That very night the Medo-Persian army marched into the city through the river bed and took it without a fight (Dan. 5:26–31).

The fact that the kingdom of Medo-Persia followed the kingdom of Babylon can easily be verified by secular history. The famous Cyrus Cylinder, uncovered by archeologists and kept in the British Museum, records a policy of the Persians, describing how Cyrus the Persian took over captive peoples and let them return to their homelands. The Medo-Persian kingdom survived from 539 BC until about 331 BC, when another conqueror appeared on the stage of history.



(left) Persian archer holding bow.



Persian archers from enameled brick walls of King Darius’ palace at Susa. Images are almost life-size.

COLUMN A

3rd: THIGHS OF BRONZE—GREECE



Then, said Daniel, “after you shall arise... another, a third kingdom of bronze” (Dan. 2:39b), represented by the thighs of brass or bronze. This “bronze” power was Greece, begun by Alexander the conqueror.

The Greeks ruled from 331 BC until about 168 BC, when they were defeated by the rising “iron” monarchy of Rome.

COLUMN B

2nd: LOPSIDED BEAR—MEDO-PERSIA



The next world kingdom, in Daniel’s God-given dream, Medo-Persia, has a singular description. The prophecy pictures the nation vividly: “Suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: ‘Arise, devour much flesh!’” (Dan. 7:5).

How did the kingdom of Medo-Persia come about? And what were the three ribs in the mouth of this “bear”? Only God could have foretold how it would be.

During the power struggle of the sixth century BC (involving Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and Media), the Persians were insignificant vassals of the Median Empire. The prophecy in Daniel speaks of the Persian rise to power as “sudden” (Dan. 7:5), and it was. “Suddenly” rising from obscurity, Cyrus II united the Persians and, as though led by some mighty power, began to conquer one nation after another before those nations could rally to each other’s aid. First, by defeating the Median king Astyages, Cyrus added the vast Median Empire (rib “1”) to Persia, hence Medo-Persia. Next, moving quickly, he took the kingdom of Lydia (Turkey today), which was an ally of the Median king (rib “2”). Then in 539 BC, Cyrus went on to take Babylon (rib “3”). Cyrus prepared to take Egypt, but died before Egypt was added to the Empire (Cyrus’ son took Egypt).

Why was this Medo-Persian empire described as a bear “raised up on one side”? Because the kingdom was the result of a uniting of Persia and Media, Persia being stronger and greater. This same detail is noted in another vision of Daniel’s (chapter 8), where the Medo-Persia empire is represented by two horns on a ram, one higher than the other, and the “higher one came up last” (Dan. 8:3). The second (Persia) was stronger than the first (Media).

COLUMN B

3rd: FOUR HEADED & WINGED LEOPARD—GREECE



Then came the conqueror Alexander the Great, represented in Daniel’s vision by a winged leopard. “After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it” (Dan. 7:6).

Why a leopard with wings? Wings

COLUMN A



(above) Stone relief of a battle scene of Alexander the Great from a sarcophagus.



(above) Marble head of Alexander the Great



(right) Image of the god-king. After Alexander's death, Greek coins appeared with Alexander wearing the ram's horn and a diadem of a god.

COLUMN A

4th: LEGS IRON & FEET MIXED IRON & CLAY—ROME



Speaking of the Roman Empire, Daniel said, *"And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others"* (Daniel 2:40).

The Roman Empire grew under the Caesars to be a strong, ruthless dominion. It remained strong from its rise to dominance in the second century BC to the third century AD.

After the legs of iron came *"the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron"* (Dan. 2:41). What did Daniel say about this part? *"The kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay."*

Rome, having decayed from within, was overcome by invading barbarian tribes from the north, falling officially in 476 AD.

The divided remnants of the Roman Empire remain today in the various independent states of Europe. True to the prophecy, *"They will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay"* (Dan. 2:43). There has been no successful effort to unite the broken fragments across Europe.

Many would-be conquerors have tried to be that fifth world-dominating power. Napoleon tried, and failed. Mussolini tried, and failed. Stalin, Hitler, and every other would-be conqueror have failed.



Bas-relief of Marcus Aurelius' conquest



Stone statue of Emperor Tiberius

COLUMN B

suggest speed, and Alexander worked swiftly. Beginning from almost nothing, Alexander united contentious Greece and went on to conquer Persia in twelve lightning years. Before his 33rd birthday he was the holder of an empire extending from Greece to the Indus River.

There is another detail in Daniel's prophetic picture, also true to reality: This leopard had four heads. Why? When Alexander died, his four generals each took a portion of the empire. Cassander took Macedonia and Greece; Lysimachus took Thrace and much of Asia Minor; Ptolemy took Egypt, Cyrenaica and Palestine; and Syria and the east lands went to Seleucus. This detail was also included in another prophecy in Daniel, which compared Alexander to a *"broken horn,"* and four horns would stand up in its place, even stating that the four horns represented the four kingdoms to come from the one, *"but not with its power [not among his posterity]"* (see Daniel 11:4, 8:20–22).

COLUMN B

4th: FIERCE & POWERFUL BEAST—ROME



The fourth beast in Daniel's vision is pictured as a beast incredibly fierce: *"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking*

in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet" (Dan. 7:7). While Greece was still very strong, another power was developing in the west, and in due time came to dominate the Hellenistic kingdoms. The Roman Empire that succeeded Greece was the largest and strongest of the four, and stood the longest.

At this point in the prophecy God introduces a completely new element: a *"little horn."* When the Roman Empire began to decline in the centuries after Christ, another power was quietly growing to world dominance. That power was the Roman Church. The Churches that had been founded by the Apostles of Jesus very soon started to change their teachings to appeal to the people, just as the Bible predicted (see 2 Tim. 4:3–4; 2 Thess. 2:1–4). In spite of early persecution, this new apostate Church grew rapidly, having *"eyes like the eyes of a man"* (Dan. 7:8); but its authority was human, not Divine, and as it grew stronger and larger, it *"cast truth down to the ground"* (Dan. 8:12).

This little horn power would *"speak pompous words against the Most High"* and *"change times and laws"* (Dan. 7:25). From Constantine (314 AD) forward, the Roman Emperors began to use the Church to unite the empire. Out of the power of the Roman Church grew a vast political-religious system that squelched all opposition and dominated western civilization for the next millennium. For a time it was called *"the Holy Roman Empire,"* united under the head of the Church, politically united under the emperor.

COLUMN A



A Roman bireme (a galley with two banks of oars). Rome's sea power in the Mediterranean had a strong impact on her longevity.



Statue of a Roman Centurion, a surviving symbol of Rome's majesty.

COLUMN A

5th: SUPERNATURAL STONE—CHRIST & SAINTS

What next? Will there ever be a fifth world-dominating kingdom? Daniel's answer from the God of heaven is a resounding "Yes!" Listen to his words: *"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever"* (Daniel 2:44).

How is this fifth kingdom represented in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar? By a rock cut out of the mountain *"without hands"* (vs. 34–35). This next kingdom will not depend on any human agents to bring it into being. God Himself is behind it, for this will be the kingdom of Jesus Christ. And just as Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, it will result in the removal of the last vestige of human misgovernment, and will grow, and grow, and grow until it fills the whole earth (see Ps. 72:7–8; Isa. 52:10; Zech. 14:9; Psalm 2).

How sure is this prophecy? Notice that it has two seals on it: *"certain"* and *"sure."* Daniel 2:45 reads: *"...the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."* ■

KINGDOM OF GOD AND OF JESUS CHRIST

"And it shall stand forever"!!

COLUMN B

Then, like all the powers before it, it declined. The Reformation forced vast changes in the Roman Church, but it was not overthrown or superseded.



Symbol of Papal authority

As in Daniel's vision, no fifth beast was seen coming from the sea to overthrow it. This absence of a fifth power is significant. In time the Roman system, both political and religious, became less and less dominant, just according to the *"partly iron and partly clay"* prophecy in Daniel 2. But it has not disappeared.

The Roman Church is still a voice in the world and its leader is still respected. This situation is destined to continue until the arrival of Jesus Christ.

COLUMN B

5th: ANCIENT OF DAYS—JESUS CHRIST



The narrative in Daniel 7 reveals the presence of remnants of this Roman system still surviving when Jesus Christ returns as King. Daniel said, *"I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days [Christ] came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom"* (Daniel 7:21–22).

Jesus Christ is coming! The promise of the angel to Mary before Jesus' birth will yet be fulfilled. *"He will be great,...and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David...and of His kingdom there will be no end"* (Luke 1:31–33). He will come as King of kings, and Lord of lords. He will come to set up a worldwide dominion of peace and righteousness (Isa. 32:17–18), and **reign forever and ever.**

Now is the time to get ready to live in that Kingdom, because it IS coming. The God of heaven has decreed it.

Whether you or I choose to believe or disbelieve does not change God Almighty's plans. Our Lord is coming just as He promised when He went away (Acts 1:10–11). He may not come this year. On the other hand—He may!

He is coming! ■

DEVELOPING “NEW” TASTES

One striking measurement of our spiritual growth in Christ is a check on our tastes. We might call it the “taste-test.” What do we really like? What “tastes” good to us? What do we consider right or wrong? What are our standards? Are they those of the common run, or do they reflect the influence of God’s Word on our lives?

In Paul’s prayer for the Philippian church (Phil. 1:9-10) he exhorts them to abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment that they may “*approve things that are excellent*,” and he prays to that end. This “*approving*” requires the developing of a sense of taste, the powers of discrimination to know bad from good and—most importantly—better from best. This “*approving*” process was used also for assaying metals. It implies the ability to recognize real worth.

The great Apostle would have us develop an appetite for those things that are excellent or “best.” Learning to desire and love the things that are excellent and best, acquiring a taste for them, is an essential part of growing into holiness. We are not naturally strong in this; we do not naturally love and approve what God approves, or despise and dishonor what He despises and dishonors.

It was a problem in the first century Church; it is a problem now. Human nature has not changed. The pagan environment of that day, like our own, offered something for every taste. When one reads a description of a moral climate such as is reflected in Romans 1, with its unbelievably low moral tone, he cannot help hearing overtones of our present century’s culture. There was—and there is—great need for discrimination and the cultivation of proper tastes—tastes for the highest.

Paul reaffirms the same concern a little farther on in his letter (Phil. 4:8), where he says, “*Finally, brethren, whatever is true...honorable...right,...pure,...lovely...of good repute...if there is any excellence...let your mind dwell on these things*” (NASB). The word translated “*think*” in our Common Version involves more than a fleeting thought or an occasional consideration; it implies steady attention over a span of time. Specifically, it means a “habit of thought.”

Appetites are not developed by occasional exposure but rather by continuous and repeated experience. If I give my attention to spiritual matters one day a week and fill all the other six days with secular concerns, can I expect to have a deep hunger for things sacred? Likewise, if I fill my mind with music and entertainment that does not glorify God, or that appeals to the low and base, I will soon find that I have little taste for that which is God-glorifying.

If we are seeking what God offers us, we will avoid any-

thing that cheapens things sacred or dishonors God or godliness. If we do less than this, we run the risk of losing our taste for things Divine.

A woman who was seeking to be spiritually perceptive once wrote: “Whatsoever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes from your relish of spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of your body over mind, that thing for you is sin.” John says the same: “*Sin is the transgression of the law*” (1 John 5:4).

Unfortunately, it is possible for us to be fooled like the grocer who bought butter that was tainted with leeks. A farmer whose cows had inadvertently gotten into leeks was concerned how he could sell the leek tainted butter. On the way to sell the butter, his wife picked some leeks

*Are my “tastes” like
those of Jesus Christ, who always
pleased His heavenly Father?*

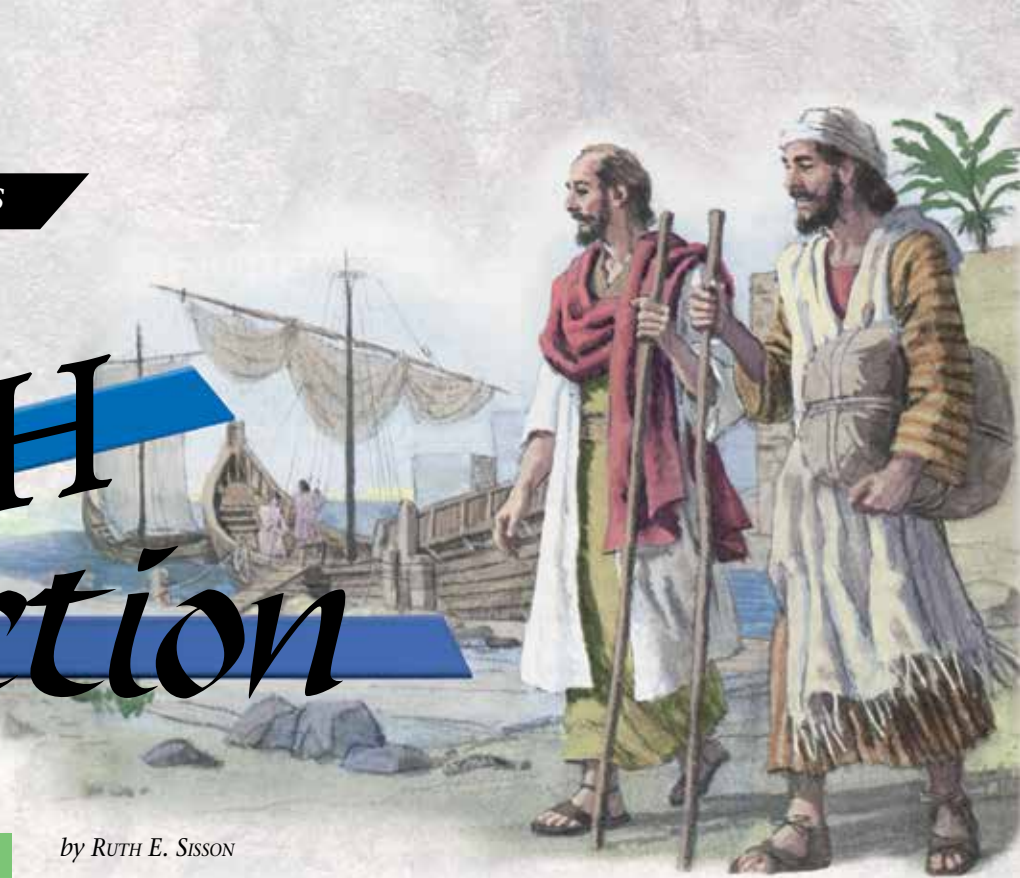
which she gave to the store owner and asked him to evaluate their flavor—which he did. She then offered him their butter to also taste. Because he was unable to detect the leek flavor in the milk, he bought the off-flavor butter. Sin is much the same. At first we sample just a little, then the next sin sample doesn’t seem so bad, and soon we have no sensitivity to even great sins. To make matters worse, we lose our sense of taste for what is good.

It is possible to have our judgment so tainted that we do not sense the “*exceeding sinfulness of sin*.” Consequently we may come to approve, without even realizing it, things that are hateful to God.

This has happened to many of our youth today. They grow up in an amoral, secular culture and receive their education in a climate of permissiveness that ought to be appalling. But they are not appalled—because they have never known anything else. The result is that more and more come to share the moral values of their society.

How shall every God-fearing person counteract this insidious influence? By concentrating on those “*things that are excellent*” until one’s appetite demands the very best—a pure heart and a pure mind. ■

FAITH *in Action*



by RUTH E. SISSON

Bible Text: Acts 4:1–4 NIV

1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

5 The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family.

7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!

9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed,

10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

11 He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone."

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

REACTION

 READ ACTS 4:1–4

Peter's preaching brought reaction from the authorities. Did they hear what Peter was saying? They did, and while the people listened eagerly, the authorities decided to put a stop to it.

Those leading the opposition were priests and Sadducees—the priests opposed because of *where* Peter was preaching, and the Sadducees because of *what* Peter was preaching.

What about Peter's preaching offended the Sadducees? Mainly his teaching about the resurrection (Acts 3:15). The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection (Matthew 22:23), and Peter proclaimed positively that Jesus whom they crucified was *alive*!

So they arrested Peter and John, and locked them up.

1. What was the immediate effect of the preaching of Peter and John? _____
2. Can you give three reasons why the priests and Sadducees—and not the civil authorities—opposed the Apostles? _____

In spite of their arrest, the enthusiasm for the Apostles' preaching ran high. The whole city must have been humming with the news. Just think how you would feel. First you hear the report that the lame man—whom you have seen dozens of times—is leaping and praising God! Then you hear excerpts from Peter's sermon—how outspoken he is against those who crucified Christ. Then you find out that some of your friends—even your own family—have joined the cause of the Apostles! What a stir there must have been, now that the number of new believers was "about 5,000" (4:3–4). Arresting Peter and John did little to squelch the enthusiasm!

A MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIN

 READ ACTS 4:5–13

The next day, *“the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family”* (4:5–6 NIV).

What an impressive crowd it was! All focused their attention on two Galilean fishermen. Luke emphasizes the pompous occasion by linking each with the word *“and.”*

Wouldn’t you think Peter and John should have felt intimidated by those impressive surroundings? Who were they but a couple of country born commoners, standing in the nation’s supreme court, facing the richest, ablest, most educated and powerful men in the nation? Wouldn’t you expect them to be shaking in their shoes? No, rather, they stood as those who had an ultimatum to give. The Sanhedrin would have to marshal their defenses. The attitude of Peter and John was that which Paul later put in these challenging words: *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Rom. 8:31).

It was time for cross-examination, and the Sanhedrin carefully framed each question, thinking what the Apostles’ response might be. The new movement was already spreading like wildfire. The last thing they wanted was to put these men on trial and let them give formal testimony to the momentous events that had shaken Jerusalem—and get more people persuaded in the process!

These officials didn’t want to know the facts. All they wanted to know was enough to convict them.

After much deliberating they had their question: *“By what power or by what name have you done this?”*

Actually, they could not have asked a better leading question. Peter answered powerfully. *“Filled with the Holy Spirit, [Peter] said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and everyone else in Israel. It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed’”* (Acts 4:8–10 NIV).

Feel the boldness in his words! What have we done wrong? he asks. Is it wrong to do a good deed? Is it wrong to heal a lame man? (Would you think so if you were that lame man?) Who did it? Jesus did. From Jesus came the power that made this lame man leap. It came from Jesus of Nazareth, a name you know well enough—*“because you crucified him”*—that would offend the Pharisees and the two high priests—*“and God raised him from the dead”*—that would infuriate the Sadducees.

Not waiting for the court to reply, Peter went on with his sermon, seizing an opportunity to deliver his message. He went to the Scriptures, which they knew only too well: *“He is ‘the stone you builders rejected’”—a prophecy they all recognized. Were they the builders? Yes, and the stone which they rejected ‘has become the capstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved’* (4:11–12 NIV).

They Marveled

 READ ACTS 4:14–22

The Sanhedrin were shocked—likely speechless—*“when they saw the courage of Peter and John,”* men whom they knew to be *“unschooled, ordinary men.”* They could only marvel at them: how clearly they could see the character of Jesus in these two men! (Acts 4:13).

No higher compliment could have been paid them. Simply by observing them, their enemies identified them with Jesus and *“marveled.”*

There was no denying that these men had been with Jesus. The priests, the Sadducees, and many who heard the Apostles had known Jesus and were



A closer look

Who Were the Sadducees?

A key Jewish sect in New Testament times, they were wealthy and influential. The high priest was usually a Sadducee. At this time, the Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin, the official voice of the Jews. In their beliefs they denied the supernatural, and of course the resurrection. Quite naturally, after Jesus’ resurrection they hated Him, they hated His very name, they hated Him because He was alive. At this point their anger was focused on Peter and John, who were publicly preaching Jesus and the resurrection.



Did you know...

The Sanhedrin...

was made up of 72 members, the high priest presiding.

Notice that Annas the previous high priest was present, along with his son-in-law Caiaphas. Remember, only a few short months earlier, that unscrupulous pair had led the movement to get rid of Jesus. Now they wanted to get rid of the Church.

At this time it seems that the Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees made up a powerful minority.



Insight

The “New” Peter

Was this the same Peter who a few months ago had trembled when a young girl questioned him about his acquaintance with Jesus, and Peter had denied his Lord with oaths and curses? Was this the man who was frightened lest he, too, be arrested and crucified?

Was this the man who, just then, heard the cock crow, and looked up to see His Lord being led to trial—and fled out into the darkness?

What had happened? The resurrection! Only the resurrection of Jesus could bring such new boldness, faith and thrust power to Peter.

Now Peter was indomitable. The stone (Cephas) had become a rock.

“Should we obey you, rather than God?”

—Peter and John,
Acts 4:19 paraphrased



A closer look

“They perceived that they...had been with Jesus”

Can people who see us recognize that we have been with Jesus, that we belong to Him? Can they tell by our truthfulness, our courage, our faith, our steadfastness?

Can they tell because we are becoming more and more like our Master?

What a challenge to live so that Christ's life shines through us!



Insight

By Whose Authority?

It is the duty of Christians to “be subject to the powers that be,” because *“the powers that be are ordained of God”* (Rom. 13:1). Jesus taught, *“Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's,”* even though the Caesar might be a Nero, or a Tiberius or another despot. But He also added, that we must render *“unto God the things that are God's”* (Matt. 22:21).

When the ruling authority interferes with one's rendering to God what belongs to Him, the believer's first obligation is to firmly but respectfully refuse to obey the dictates of the human authority, and to accept whatever punishment is assigned, even to imprisonment or death. In that way the Christian is being *“subject to the powers that be,”* and not violating the law of God.

qualified to make the comparison. These men talked like Jesus had talked. Their loyalty was to the same God whom Jesus had proclaimed and defended.

And who was there, close by, but—the poor lame man who had been healed! The lame man dared to stand with his new friends even when they had become prisoners, hoping he could help the situation, hoping his presence might do something to release them. He could easily have vanished into the crowd and not been seen again. But he wanted to be with the Lord's people. Were they at risk of being persecuted? He was not afraid to suffer with them. If in any way he could help with their defense, he was ready.

3. Who showed themselves strongest in character at the trial?

Who was the defense? Who was the offense? _____

4. Why did the lame man stay near the Apostles? _____

What personal risk was he taking by being with them? _____

What qualities of character did he show? _____

The rulers were in a dilemma. They had expected an easy victory over these nobodies, but instead, the nobodies had taken control of the situation and the powerful Sanhedrin had to figure out what to do next. *“So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ‘What are we going to do with these men?’ they asked. ‘Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it’”* (Acts 4:15–16 NIV).

It was all out in the open. The miracle was the talk of the town. Everybody knew the particular beggar who had been healed—they had seen him begging at the temple gate for years and years! Now he was as well as anyone. How could *he* be silenced?

The simplest thing would have been to deny that the man was healed—but nobody would have believed them. They had a big problem. The people were definitely on the side of Peter and John, and were not ready to be told otherwise.

The Sanhedrin got the point and decided to *“let them go.”*

The best (or worst) that they could think of was to threaten the two men, in hopes of frightening them into silence. *“Don't preach any more in this name Jesus,”* they ordered.

Were Peter and John frightened? They answered with the same boldness with which they had delivered their sermon: *“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:19–20 NIV).

If the authorities thought they were stifling the young Church by commanding the men to be quiet, they were in for a surprise. Peter and John asked, in effect, Who do you think we should obey: a human authority or the God of the universe?

5. What Old Testament person showed the same qualities of character that these Apostles had? _____

6. Think of a situation in your life where you had the opportunity to say, *“I must obey God, not man.”* _____

7. What evidence did the Apostles have to affirm that they were doing right? _____

“They came to their own company”



READ ACTS 4:23–31

Where did the Apostles go when they were free? They went to their own people and held a prayer meeting (4:23–24). Reporting all that the chief priests and elders had said to them, the whole group *“lifted up their voice to God with one accord”* and prayed.

What did they pray for? Not for escape from these experiences, but for

power to meet them, to go on preaching, and take the consequences.

Their prayer was answered immediately. We read, *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly"* (Acts 4:31 NIV). Could anyone doubt that God was with them?

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." Now not only Peter and John were ready to speak with boldness, but all who were present! Their courage was contagious!

Sharing with One Another



READ ACTS 4:32-37

As well as defending the Gospel and preaching Jesus and the resurrection, the Early Church in Jerusalem had practical issues to address. Some of their people were in need, through no fault of their own. Some were hungry.

What was the solution? Could those who had plenty stand by and see their needy brothers and sisters and not offer to help?

They could not! Even without a direct command, these intense believers seemed to take charge of the situation. They felt intensely responsible for one another. They had a deep desire to share and share alike.

And so they designed a system of pooling their resources, that all might have sufficient.

Who started it? The instigators must have been those who had extra. They realized God had blessed them, and they wanted to help their brothers and sisters in Christ.

What does this tell us about these early Christians? They were ready to apply their faith to everyday needs. They were ready to give of themselves and their substance to help the cause. For by helping fellow believers they were supporting the Apostles.

The Bible mentions only one hearty supporter of this movement, but he is enough to show us the spirit of the Church. His name was Joses, whom the Apostles liked to call Barnabas, meaning "Son of Encouragement." This devoted brother from the Island of Cyprus voluntarily sold his land and brought the proceeds to the Apostles. Was he offering his own personal support to the cause in which he believed? There was no question about his sincerity.

We are not told, but perhaps he moved from the island of Cyprus to Jerusalem so that he could be the Apostles' right hand helper.

1. When a believer gives, what does God value most? (2 Cor. 9:7) _____
2. What would be the most likely problem arising from the use of a common treasury? _____ What would have been the Apostles' solution? _____
3. What else do we know about Barnabas from the Bible record? (see Acts 11:25; Col. 4:10) _____

There is no evidence that selling one's goods and giving to a common treasury was any more than a local, voluntary plan. We know only that it was practiced in Jerusalem, and perhaps as a need arose, people sold property and brought the money to the Apostles, and it was distributed to those in need. Joining the Christian cause did not require one to dispose of his property and give the proceeds. But when one was both willing and able to give, the Apostles accepted the gift and left it with God to bless. ■

Bible Text: Acts 4:32-37 NIV

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.



Take heed

Be an Encourager!

The Church in every age needs more Barnabases, those who are willing to encourage and lend a hand. Everyone may not have property to sell and money to give, but everyone can be an encourager.



Insight

Communal Living?

How did it work to have people sell their property and bring the money for general distribution? Only because the Apostles were receiving the money and distributing it (Acts 4:35). And the Apostles had special power from God and could know who was honest and who was not. Without that power, the administrators could easily have ruined the system and the Church. God was looking out for His people.

The original Greek does not say that all who had property sold it, but rather suggests that as there was need there were those who sold their property and provided for the need. Clearly these early believers were all out for God and His people. Even persecution did not discourage them.

Bible Time Line

HISTORY Has DIRECTION

History has been defined as the biography of the human race. From the standpoint of Scripture, it is a written record of the outworking of the plan of God as, step by step, it progresses toward its ultimate goal, the establishing of the Kingdom of God on earth. This was the promise of Jesus in His prayer: *"Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

History has direction. It is not a meaningless succession of happenstance events. Its goal is the worldwide Kingdom of God. The prophet Isaiah, speaking by divine authority, described that goal in these meaningful words: *"For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited"* (Isa. 45:18).

Because our lifetime as individuals is so brief and the plan of God so vast, it is often difficult for us to perceive its direction, much as a fish swimming in the ocean cannot understand its tides and currents. With our small minds we are able

The God of the Bible is monitoring history to see that nothing interferes with His long-term plan.

to comprehend only a very small interval of time. But this does not change the purpose of God.

In so much of the record of history, the Creator is forgotten or unknown and His purpose overlooked. Blind, humans foolishly disregard their Creator, the Great Eternal God who gives them everything they have. *"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein"* (Ps. 24:1). All is His, all is subject to His will, all is serving His purposes, even though mankind for the most part has rejected God's authority, preferring to pursue its own dastardly course to destruction. In spite of human negligence, *history has meaning.*

God is directing. This does not mean that He is intervening in every great and small event. But He is watching, so that nothing interferes with His purposes. How can we know?

At the present time, our only knowledge of His work comes from the Bible, the written Word which He has provided to tell us what He is doing. But it is a great source of information, revealing all we need to know. As someone has said, *"The Bible is a window in this prison world through which we may peer into eternity."* Through the Bible we

learn of the plan of God. Though it has borne many attacks, it has emerged unscathed, an anvil that has worn out many hammers. Men and nations change, but God's Word stands unshaken, and we today can rely on it just as firmly as could believers in the second or third centuries.

God does not mean for us to wander in darkness or ignorance. He has given us a way of escape. He has prepared a "great salvation" for all who faithfully heed the warnings and commandments He has written.

And when the time is right, God will act. He will *"send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"* (Acts 3: 20–21).

This is God's way of working. He lets events take their course for a period of time, then when conditions suit His purpose He intervenes. This happened when He sent Christ, as a babe born of the family of David according to prophecy. *"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son"* (Gal. 4:4). Since that time He has allowed some two thousand years to elapse, while men and nations pursue their courses of life without consulting Him. But very soon He shall intervene again, this time dramatically, forcefully, and all the world will know. *"Behold, he is coming with clouds; and every eye will see him"* (Rev. 1:7).

Someone may ask, If God is really in control of events, how do we explain the evil in the world? God is not the author of evil, but the time has not yet come for Him to act. When it does arrive, all the forces of evil will be conquered. Jesus Christ is coming with authority to put down *all* that opposes Him, and to inaugurate a kingdom of righteousness and peace that will extend from *"sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth"* (Ps. 72:8) and all iniquity shall *"stop her mouth"* (Ps. 107:42).

The major problems that confront the world today — grinding poverty, economic crises, increasing violence and terrorism, dissipating morals, frustration and fear — all will be solved with the advent of Christ when He comes to make *"all things new"* (Rev. 21:3–5).

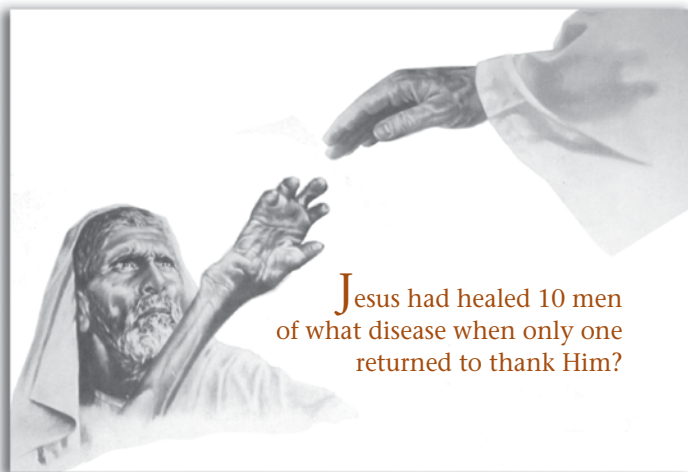
We are not creatures of chance. We are not in the struggle alone. Existence has meaning because God is at the helm. Silently, God is working. His wisdom is beyond our fathoming, but we know that He is in control. History has direction and destination. All that we can do is stand in awe of His power and watch and pray, while we busy ourselves getting ready, bringing our lives to His standard. Then, when the goal of history is realized, we can have part in the new creation which will continue ages upon ages, world without end.

Indeed, history *does* have direction. ■



ALTARS

1. Who, following God's instructions, built an altar and laid his son on it as a burnt offering?
2. Who, while waiting for two friends in Athens, saw an altar with the inscription, "To the unknown God"?
3. Who was given the nickname of 'Jerubbaal' after he knocked apart the altar of Baal?
4. Which King, while visiting Damascus, saw an unusual altar and had Urijah, the priest, build one just like it in his hometown?
5. Who built an altar out of stones on Mount Ebal and wrote each of the Ten Commandments on the stones?
6. Which King, because he disobeyed God's command and burned incense on a holy altar, was stricken with leprosy?
7. Which general of David's army murdered two generals, and was slain at a tabernacle altar as punishment?
8. Which angry King's arm became paralyzed after he threatened a prophet who said an altar would split apart with its ashes spilled to the ground?
9. Who, after building an altar at Beersheba, had his servants dig a well?
10. Which king had bones taken from mountainside graves, and burned them on an altar at Bethel to defile it?



Jesus had healed 10 men of what disease when only one returned to thank Him?

ABOUT THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

1. Who directed that the Ark of the Covenant be built? Who actually built it?
2. What materials were to be used in making the ark?
3. What items were placed in the Ark of the Covenant?
4. How was the ark to be carried?
5. What was the cover of the ark called? Of what material was it to be made?
6. How many gold cherubs were to be built to hover over the mercy seat?
7. What was the purpose of the mercy seat?
8. During the conquest of the land of Canaan, the Ark of the Covenant was carried around and around what city?
9. What happened when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and placed it in their pagan temple before their idol?
10. What happened to the Philistine people while the Ark was in their country?

ABOUT DISEASES

1. Jesus healed the man with the _____ hand.
2. The sick, _____, _____ and _____ came to the Pool of Bethesda hoping to be healed.
3. Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, before healing a man of _____?
4. When Moses scattered ashes toward heaven, God sent a plague of _____ on the Egyptians.
5. Four men suffering from _____ went to surrender to the Syrian army but found the Syrians had abandoned their camp.
6. King Asa of Judah died due to a severe disease of his _____?
7. Elisha healed Naaman, commander of the Syrian army, of _____?

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Picture: Leprosy (Luke 17:11-19)

ALTARS

1. Abraham (Gen. 22:1, 2, 6-9)
2. Paul (Acts 17:15,16, 23)
3. Gideon (Judges 6:27-32)
4. Ahaz (1 Kings 16:10-11)
5. Joshua (Joshua 8:30-32)
6. Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16-21)
7. Joab (1 Kings 2:5, 29-34)
8. Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:1-5)
9. Isaac (Gen. 26:23-25)
10. Josiah (2 Kings 23:15-16)

ABOUT THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

1. God commanded that it be built (Ex. 36:1); Bezaleel built it (Ex. 37:1)
2. Acacia (shittim) wood, overlaid with gold (Ex. 25:10-11)
3. The stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed; a golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod (Ex. 25:21; 16:32-33) (Heb. 9:4)
4. Using gold covered poles slipped through gold rings that were attached to the sides of the ark (Ex. 25:13-14)
5. The mercy seat, made of pure gold (Ex. 25:17-18, 21)
6. Two (Ex. 25:18)
7. "There I will meet with you." (Ex. 25:22)
8. Jericho (Josh. 6:1-16)
9. The next morning, Dagon, their idol had fallen on its face in front of the Ark (1 Sam. 5:3). The second

morning the idol fell again—this time its head and hands were broken off (1 Sam. 5:4-5)

10. The people were struck with a plague of tumors (1 Sam. 5:6, 9)

ABOUT DISEASES

1. Withered (Matt. 12:10-13)
2. Blind, lame, and paralyzed (John 5:3)
3. Dropsy (Luke 14:1-4)
4. Boils (Ex. 9:8-10)
5. Leprosy (2 Kings 7:3-5)
6. Feet (2 Chron. 16:12-13)
7. Leprosy (2 Kings 5:9-14)



by GERALD R. PAYNE

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

"Rightly dividing the word of truth" -2 Timothy 2:15

WHY NO DINOSAURS IN THE BIBLE?

"I consider myself a man of science, and wish to be a man of God, however, I cannot find a way to believe the Bible, for nothing in it is certain. Man continues to prove it wrong.

So I set a threshold. I will once again restore all faith in God and the Bible if anyone can point out where it explains the dinosaurs. The Bible says man was first, why does science say these massive lizards [were even earlier,] that the Bible never mentions?"

Your observation is well founded. Science and what many people claim the Bible teaches about the order of the creation are contradictory. However, I believe that a large part of the problem is caused by theories that are not supported by the Bible.

To address this subject, it might be helpful to define a few terms:

- ◆ **theory:** any hypothesis that has not been sufficiently tested; unproven speculation.
- ◆ **erroneous theory:** any theory not proven and still subject to speculation, and contradicting Scripture.
- ◆ **scientifically confirmed:** any theory or observation that has been thoroughly tested and confirmed accurate using approved methods in an approved setting.
- ◆ **scientific fact:** any theory which has been scientifically confirmed, as well as Biblically validated.

After many years of Bible study, I have confidence that the Bible is in agreement with that part of science that is scientifically confirmed. Much science, as I am sure you will agree, belongs to the realm of theory and unproven speculation. However, I am convinced that there is no contradiction between the Bible properly understood and scientifically confirmed observations.

Unfortunately, much theology, like science, is also built on theory, and this fact is responsible for some (probably most) of the confusion. One prominent theory, for example, claims that dinosaurs must have lived no more than 6000 years ago because they believe the entire universe, including the earth and all on it, was created during a literal 6-day period about 6000

(or 10,000 or 20,000) years ago. However, if we recognize that the Bible does not assign a time or give us any details about the literal creation of the earth or the universe, we do not have to believe that Adam and Eve were the first humans on the earth, or that there was no death before Adam sinned, and we can easily believe that the earth is far more than 6000 years old. So there is no contradiction to say that dinosaurs and many other prehistoric creatures could have predated Adam and Eve by perhaps millions of years.

While I am not trying to harmonize the Bible with science, it seems important to realize that many theories have been advanced that are not supported by the Bible. When the Bible is properly understood, and if your knowledge of dinosaurs parallels what I have read about them (that they existed much longer ago than 6,000 years), I think you probably already have your answer regarding dinosaurs. And the Bible does not contradict. However, if you are looking for the Bible to "explain the dinosaurs," you are looking in the wrong place. The Bible is not a book of science. Nor is it a book of scientific theory. However, it does mention certain facts that science has verified.

I do not claim to know a lot about science, only what I need to know to satisfy my own needs regarding the Bible. So further discussions will be limited to the Bible, its people, and the languages in which it was written.

When studying the Bible, one must bear in mind that the author is God. Though His messages were recorded by human hands, He was the Mind behind the message. The Bible explains it by saying that *"holy men of God spoke as they were moved on by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Pet. 1:21). He is a supreme Being in every aspect of supremacy. So when we read the Bible, we are obtaining information from One who knows infinitely more about His creation than any humans.

Also, the Westerner has an additional disadvantage in understanding the Scriptures because of the differences between the way Westerners think versus the way the Easterner thought during the time the Bible was being written. They thought in metaphors and symbols, while we think along the line of details, numbers, and statistics.

For example, we hear the Psalmist saying that his God is a rock (Ps. 18:2). He does not mean

that God is a literal rock. The desert dweller often took refuge under rocks for protection against high winds and swirling sands, and for a hiding place from the enemy. Therefore “rock” was a symbolic figure of speech for protection. So the Psalmist was really saying that his God was a protector (Ps. 31:2). Similar symbols are used among the English-speaking people. For example (and this is probably borrowed from the Bible), “apple of my eye” is used to mean “one highly cherished” (Deut. 32:10).

The people who wrote the Bible were not strangers to parables, allegories and the like. As a matter of fact, it is said that Christ taught the multitudes in parables only (Matt 13:34). But many of His hearers having their own preconceived ideas, which they were not willing to give up, did not understand. We are very grateful that He sometimes explained these parables to His disciples later, and that these explanations were recorded. By reading, we, too, can understand.

So it is with much of the Bible. But to understand it, we have to pay attention to the language of the time, a detail which many Bible students, even scholars, are not willing to do. However, the symbols used are explained in the Bible so we can understand. The Bible interprets itself if we let it.

When we read a passage in the Bible, we may or may not come to a correct conclusion—we cannot know until we have carefully compared it with other passages of Scripture. We must be sure that our conclusions are in harmony with the general teaching of the Bible. As a man of science, you surely feel at home with testing hypotheses. Actually, that is what we are doing with Scripture when we obey the command: “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” (1 Thess. 5:21). So when we discuss a Bible topic we try to consider it in light of all the Bible has to say on that topic, not just the one isolated text, though this process may not always be obvious. And once a theory has been thoroughly tested we must adjust our thinking to harmonize with what we have learned.

To understand the dinosaur problem, let’s look briefly at the creation account in Genesis, a much-debated

topic of Scripture. We believe that the Genesis creation account is more understandable when taken as an allegory. Why do we say this? One of the reasons is that taking it literally does not make sense, as you have observed (the dinosaurs lived less than 6000 years ago?). A second reason is that we find contradictions when the Bible is understood literally in every instance. Another reason is that when we consider the explanations given in the Bible text for the terms used, all fall into agreement with the general teachings of the Bible, and—yes—even agree with the facts of science.

For example, take the word “day,” (used in Gen. 2:4), which is translated from the Hebrew word *yom*. Chances are you were taught that this was a 24-hour earth-day (it is generally assumed). And thus God created everything in 6 literal days. But if we look at the meaning of the original word translated “day,” we find something very different. We learn that these 6 days together are referred to as a day, “in the day,” an indefinite time period (see *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew Old Testament*, and other sources). We use “day” similarly in English (e.g., the day of the horse-and-buggy is long past). According to the Hebrew definition, it is sometimes used without reference to a specific length of time.

It is further explained that this day consisted of “generations” (Gen. 2:4). Now we have generations in one day. And again, this “day” is further defined when Peter tells us that “*one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*” (2 Pet. 3:8). Using Peter’s definition, the 6 days of creation become 6000 years.

Further study will disclose that this 6000-year day of creation is not about a literal creation at all but about a process of spiritual creation that is still in progress, nearing completion. The Psalmist tells us that God has been engaging in this special creation process through an eternity past and will continue through an eternity future. There have always been individuals somewhere in God’s vast creation to receive His mercy and to keep His covenant. As we read, “*But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to*

everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them” (Ps. 103:17–18).

Now where does this put our dinosaurs? Wouldn’t you say they are pretty insignificant in God’s total plan for this earth? Is this perhaps a good reason why He was not interested in telling us about them? He has something in store

*I am convinced that there
are no contradictions
between the Bible properly
understood and scientifically
confirmed observations.*

for His people in the future that is far more grand.

And this is what the Bible is about. It is about God’s plan for the future of the earth and its inhabitants, and how God is guiding, supporting and developing those who will be given eternal life. This is the creation process we refer to as the “spiritual creation” of Genesis.

Some teach that the earth will be destroyed. Isaiah, speaking for God, said, “*For thus says the Lord, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited.*” God did not create the earth in vain, He created it to be inhabited. And Isaiah ends this phrase with a challenge and a warning to any who dare to discredit these words, “*I am the Lord and there is none else*” (Isa. 45:18). Just in case you may have thought we were implying that God is not a literal Creator, I think you will see from these last statements that He really is!

If you are interested in a more in-depth study of this subject, see our booklet, “*God’s Spiritual Creation.*” We would really like to help you believe and become a man of God. ■

*F*aultfinding is one talent that ought to be buried.

T rue prayer is not asking for what we want;
 it is asking God for His will to be done.

I give ME more trouble than anyone else I know.

*C*ommon honesty needs to be more common.

BEAUTIFUL ANGELS

*A*ngels a record are faithfully keeping
 Of every word that we speak;
 Whether we're watching our conduct, or sleeping;
 Whether we're haughty or meek.
 Known unto them are the thoughts that we cherish—
 Nothing is hidden or sealed;
 Their record tells if we live or we perish,
 When at the Judgment revealed.

*A*ngels have ministered down through the ages,
 When they found one who would hear;
 Often they visited prophets and sages
 Who lent a listening ear.
 Abraham, Joshua, Daniel and Moses—
 As they the narrow way trod—
 Jesus, and others, the Bible discloses,
 Talked with the angels of God.

*W*onderful angels! Who would not be like them?
 Sharing the joys that are theirs;
 Theirs is a glory and beauty resplendent
 With which no mortal's compares.
 Years in their flight they have long ceased to number,
 Going from strength unto strength;
 Having no fear that in death they shall slumber—
 Theirs is eternity's length.

*A*ngels will strengthen our faltering footsteps
 If we desire to obey
 Jesus' commandments revealed in His precepts,
 Lest we should faint by the way.
 And when at last we approach the fair portals,
 There to receive our reward,
 We, like the angels, shall be made immortal,
 Ever to be with our Lord.

by Liot L. Snyder

*L*ord, for tomorrow and its needs
 I do not pray;
 Keep me, my God, from stain of sin,
 Just for today.
 Now, set a seal upon my lips,
 For this I pray;
 Keep me from wrong or idle words.
 Just for today.
 Let me be slow to do my will,
 Prompt to obey.
 Keep me, guide me, use me, Lord
 Just for today.

*I*f today were your last day of living,
 do you know what would be your worth?
 It wouldn't be in the wealth you left
 but in what you did for Christ.

*Y*ou cannot have a full and happy life
 with jealousy in your heart.

*W*anting to make peace? First make peace within.

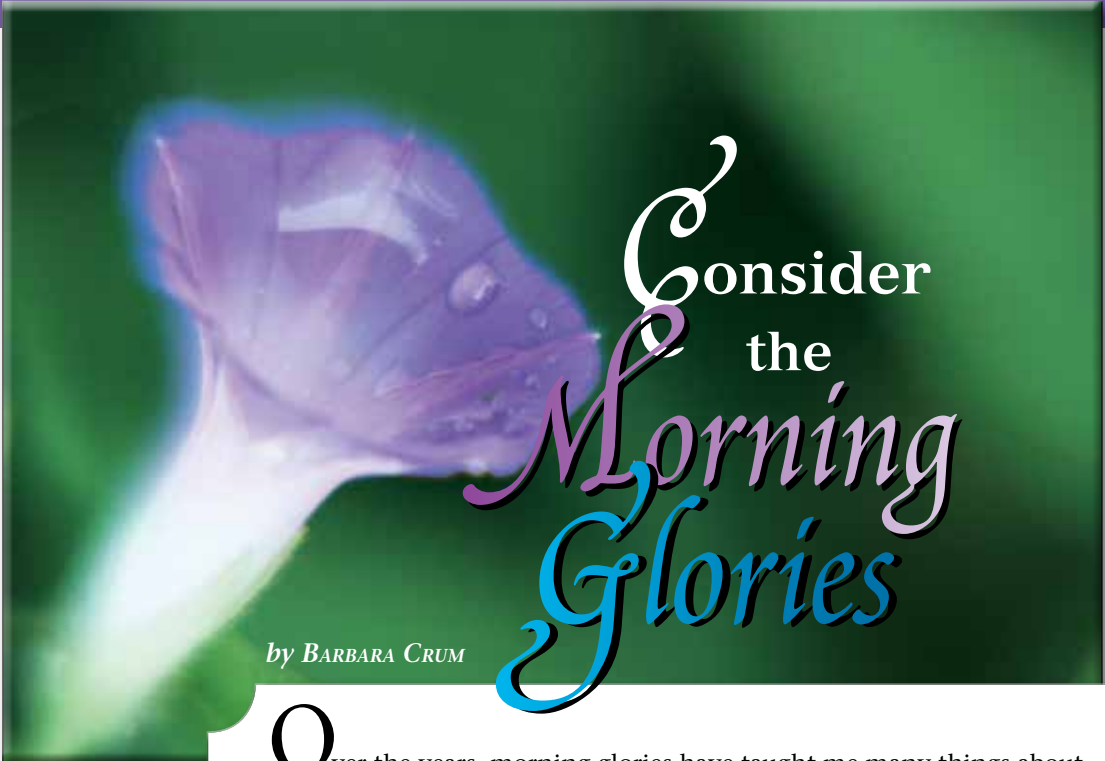
*W*e have heard of many people who
 did too little for God; but have you ever heard of
 anyone who did too much?

Yesterday is a canceled check.
Tomorrow is a promissory note.
Today is ready cash, spend it wisely.

*W*e show our character in nothing more clearly
 than by what we like.

*T*he most unprofitable item ever manufactured
 is an excuse.

*N*o one can do good work or think clearly when fires of
 jealousy or revenge are burning inside.



Consider the Morning Glories

by BARBARA CRUM

Over the years, morning glories have taught me many things about life. Here are a few of my favorite lessons.

"Bloom where you're planted."

You see, morning glories thrive even under the worst circumstances. Too much rain...poor soil...suffocating summer heat—nothing seems to stop them from reaching for the sky.

Mine even flourish out by my mail box where the salt and sand left by winter road crews would doom less tenacious plants. Their example inspires me to make the best of every situation I face, and always ask the Lord for guidance.

"Keep trying when adversity strikes."

I have witnessed a patch of tiny morning glory seedlings wither and droop as if the plants weren't even capable of beginning their upward climb. Several things could cause this—a soggy spring, or an errant weed trimmer. Or maybe I just clumsily stepped on them with my garden boots.

Nonetheless, within a few days or weeks, the loyal morning glories are as spirited as ever, spreading their vines and tendrils far and wide to every object within reach. Seeing how they hold on during times of tribulation or mishap, how could I do anything less in my own life?

"When things look the worst, hold on—it will be all right."

A few years back, we rebuilt the deck on our house. Unfortunately, before we stained it, I grew impatient and planted morning glories around the base.

By the time we were ready to stain the deck, the plants were already clinging to the railings. But they had to go. We tugged, pulled, snipped and clipped the plants until there was nothing left.

Or so we thought.

Then one morning a few weeks later, I happened to walk past the side of the freshly stained deck. Peering out cheerfully from the bottom edge of the deck was a lone blossom—a fortuitous survivor of the massacre.

With only a few sparse leaves surrounding it, that single morning glory looked as priceless as a pearl in a bed of seaweed.

Thanks, morning glories, your lessons have not gone unnoticed. Each day, I now make sure that I keep growing and blooming in my spiritual life, just like my favorite garden flowers! ■

INTERPLAY

*The weaving of sunshine and shadow
Forms the intricate patterns of life;
A blending of joy and of suffering,
Glowing peace with the darkness of strife.*

*This contrast of gloom with bright radiance
Like the dancing of shade 'neath a tree
Forms a delicate, balanced designing
That we sense but just faintly can see.*

*The harmonious whole is so fashioned
That the edges look misty and dim;
As it ebbs and it flows without focus
As if moved by some purposeless whim.*

*Yet viewed from above it has purpose,
And a master design starts to form,
As the beauties of goodness and mercy
Every angle and crevice adorn.*

*All of life is a blend of the sunshine
With the grayness of trial and pain;
But if we could discern the grand pattern
We would thank God for sunshine and rain!*

—Author unknown

