
THE BOOK of DANIEL

Introduction 'The Book of Daniel seeks to show the superiority of the God of Israel over the idols of the heathen nations. Although these nations had been God's instrument in punishing Israel, nevertheless they themselves would in time pass from the scene. In the latter days the God of heaven will erect a kingdom that will never be destroyed. Although the end of the Indignation will be a time of persecution for God's people, the Messiah will come, and the eternal kingdom will be established. Daniel, then, may be said clearly to teach the sovereignty of God in His dealing with human kingdoms.' (B.J. Young).

1) 1:1-21

The setting of the book of Daniel is given in the first two verses of its opening chapter. They tell of the historical situation of the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. Daniel and his companions are therefore in captivity. Psalm 137:1ff describes the situation very graphically: 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion'. It was therefore a time of trial and crisis for the people of God. The Psalmist continues 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' The book of Daniel gives the answer to that question.

A time of crisis, then. And, in times of crisis, what we call 'Apocalypse' tends to come into its own. For in crisis times, when all hell seems let loose, gigantic questions thrust themselves upon the minds of thinking men, questions about ultimate reality, which will not go away, and which, if not given an answer, lead men into meaninglessness and despair. One commentator says, 'In this age, when meaninglessness has become the great disease of the human race, far exceeding all other maladies; when suicide has become the badge of our despair, then happy the man or woman who has asked these questions and come to a positive answer. They have found some anchor for life, a lodestone which gives significance to existence. One purpose of the present book is to show that optimistic answers to life's inescapable questions are valid. The ancient volume we here investigate declares, 'There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known...what will be in the latter days (2:28).'

2) 1:1-21

As to the significance of our study, its importance and relevance today may be gathered from the fact that, because of the widespread malaise resulting from the current disease of meaninglessness, many twentieth century theologians have turned again to the study of apocalyptic - that type of prophecy found in Daniel and Revelation which claims to set forth in symbols the divine plan for the world. James Denney, in a notable passage in one of his books, asserting the reasonableness of the doctrine of the personal return of Christ as Judge of all at the end of history, says: 'Those who take a materialistic or naturalistic view of the world do not need to raise any questions about its end, it is an essentially meaningless affair for them, and it does not matter whether or how it ends. But if we take an ethical view of the world and of history, we must have eschatology: we must have the moral order exhibited, vindicated, brought out in perfect clearness as what it is. It is because the Bible is so intensely ethical in spirit that it is so rich in eschatological elements - in visions of the final and universal triumph of God, of the final and universal defeat of evil. It is not ethical to suppose that the moral condition of the world is that of an endless suspense, in which the good and the evil permanently balance each other, and contest with each other the right to inherit the earth. Such a dualistic conception is virtually atheistic, and the whole Bible could be read as a protest against it. Neither is it ethical to suppose that the moral history of the world consists of cycles in which the good and the evil are alternatively victorious. There are, indeed, times when that is the impression which history makes upon us, but these are times when the senses are too strong for the spirit; and as the moral consciousness recovers its vigour, we see how inconsistent such a view is with its postulate, that the good alone has the right to reign. The Christian doctrine of a final judgment is not the putting of an arbitrary term to the course of history; it is a doctrine without which history ceases to be capable of moral construction.'

3) 1:1-21

The commentator already quoted, in emphasising the significant references to Daniel in the New Testament and particularly in our Lord's own words, adds: 'The most profound words of the Book of Daniel consist of a series of divine promises; to restrain transgression, to make an end of sins, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to fulfil prophetic vision, and to dedicate a meeting place for God and man reconciled (9:24 paraphrased). The Good News for today's world is that these promises have already been fulfilled through God's unspeakable gift on Calvary and that they are soon to be filled full - consummated - in the advent of the King of kings and Lord of lords. And whosoever will may inherit the glory to come.'

Here, then, is an authentic gospel emphasis in the book. It would not be too much to say that Daniel is an Easter document, rightly understood, proclaiming that God, the eternal King, is in control, and that one day He will demonstrate this fact by winding up the present order of things. It is this indeed that the Easter message authenticates and seals, as Paul makes plain in Acts 17:31, and which is gloriously and awesomely unfolded in Daniel 7:9-13, in the great Judgment scene in which the Ancient of Days opens the books at the final Assize.

4) 1:1-21

As to the format of the book, we have six chapters of narrative, followed by six of apocalyptic, or prophetic revelation. The theme unfolded in the first half of the book, of conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem, between false worship and the true, between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God, is taught by prophetic vision in the second half, exploring and emphasising the fundamental issues underlying that conflict, in much the same way as is done in the book of Revelation, where the first eleven chapters deal with the conflict between the Church and the world, and the remainder of the book (chs 12-22) the conflict between Christ and Satan - the one a struggle on earth, with the church persecuted by the world, but avenged, protected and victorious, and the other a struggle in the unseen realm in which the Christ of God is persecuted by the dragon and his helpers but triumphs as King of kings and Lord of lords. This twofold emphasis and division is an important key to interpretation, and should be remembered as we go on in our study.

Such, then, is the pattern unfolded in the book, and in chapter 1 we have the seeds of all that follows in subsequent chapters. Someone has used Dickens' title, 'A Tale of Two Cities' as an apposite way of describing the theme. Jerusalem and Babylon, both of which are first mentioned in Genesis and finally in Revelation (Genesis 14:18; 11:9; Revelation 3:12; 21:2,10; 14:8; 16:19; 18: 2) feature in the opening verses of Daniel as a clue to the conflict between true and false religion that is to be subsequently unfolded. Hence the significance, for example, of the scene on the plains of Dura in 3:1ff in which all were to fall down and worship the golden image set up by Nebuchadnezzar, on pain of being thrown into the burning fiery furnace (cf also Revelation 13:11-15, and our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, Matthew 4:9, where the alternatives of true and false worship, and their consequences, are clearly delineated).

5) 1:1-21

If what we have been saying by way of background and introduction is valid, then we have to see that what is recorded here is no fairy-tale legend, from the story-books of the ancient world, but a record gripping in its dramatic intensity and its wide-ranging implications, portraying an 'existential' situation indeed. For the captive people are really 'up against it', in peril and jeopardy of their lives at the hands of their captors. The real parallel to this is the Nazi concentration-camp pattern or, later still, Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago - nothing romantic there but only grim and terrifying conditions. It is not for nothing that Walter Luthi, in the preface of his book on Daniel, 'The Church to Come' says: 'It should be noted too about the Book of Daniel that in any case we are not dealing here with a burnt-out crater. Daniel is an active volcano. Therefore if anyone thinks that it is a matter of playing with cold lava, for edification or otherwise, he should realise that he is playing with fire'. And what this chapter has to say about such a situation is to tell us very plainly who are the people who are most vulnerable and most at risk - the young generation! For here we see a programme of indoctrination, a 'take-over' bid for a whole generation of captives, in which they are told not only what they are to eat and drink, but also what they are to think! It is to be a re-education by which a complete change is to be made in them. They are to be made into a different kind of people. Modern examples of this are only too evident - we shall include in tomorrow's Note an excerpt from Leslie Lyall's book on China, 'Come Wind, Come Weather' as an illustration - but we have to recognise the existence of many sinister trends in the West today just as dangerous and as widespread. There are many hidden 'Nebuchadnezzars' in the world!

6) 1:1-21

Leslie Lyall writes: 'Ever since the Communists came to power they have been conducting the most thoroughgoing re-education of the whole population of China. The feat of organization involved is stupendous. For the task of re-educating a population of 600,000,000 people goes on daily. Every unit of society - workers in an office, children in a class at school, workers in a shop, at a factory, residents in a street, soldiers in a platoon - meet daily, in most cases out of work hours, and, under the guidance of an instructed Communist, study dialectical materialism in all its facets and its ever changing application to current events. One would need to be a very well taught Christian to maintain an unflinching stand after the first few weeks of the daily, incessant, inexorable bombardment of the mind with Marxist ideas. Yet Christians have been subject to this continually for over ten years now. Inevitably their thinking is, in many respects, being remoulded - unconsciously so. For no one can escape these regular 'study' sessions. Nor is it possible to hide one's true beliefs and convictions for very long from the leader of the group. The Christians soon become marked people. This kind of indoctrination has been the common lot of Christians and non-Christians alike. But for Christians it has been found necessary to institute special study classes, particularly for church leaders.'

7) 1:1-21

The truth of the matter is, two worlds are claiming the souls of our generation, laying claim to our allegiance. Humanism, materialism, permissiveness are everywhere at work in influential positions, in the publishing world, in universities, in the broadcasting media - and the extent of their influence is evident in the easy assumptions that are made in society today about major ethical issues - euthanasia, abortion, IVF, HIV and AIDS, assumptions made as a matter of course, as if there could be no reasonable alternative, in medicine, sociology, education alike, and patterns that simply would not have been countenanced even a few decades ago are now adopted as an acceptable way of life. This is where what we are told about Daniel in this chapter is of such enormous importance: he committed himself at the outset to a different pattern of living. Without such a commitment we are at the mercy of the currents of the world, and they will swirl us away. To be, or to become, a Christian means to stand out from Nebuchadnezzar's world, to be a nonconformist, to belong to a minority, and if necessary to stand alone, and to fight alone, with a testimony that makes us different, and requires us to be different. To be sure, this is a call for a lonely, costly stand which makes terrific demands upon us - indeed, it demands everything of us. Jesus said, 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life'. In Daniel we have a young man who saw the issues clearly, who saw in his day a sinister power at work to draw him down to destruction, and he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. That is the issue that we are confronted with in this book.

8) 1:1-21

The scenario that we have unfolded in the Notes thus far that of a crisis time - requires, however, something further to be said about it, not lessening the force of what has already been said so much as complementing the picture, and showing another aspect of it. A recent commentary puts it thus: 'The work is written as a message not primarily for those who are suffering in the midst of deadly persecution but rather for those who are living in a settled condition yet within an alien culture.... In this situation what is required is the steady pursuit of the good life as far as the environment will allow it, faithful co-operation with those in authority as far as conscience will permit, strict adherence to the customs of the law in spite of the opposition that might occur, the cultivation of regular habits of devotion, a pride in the nation's religious traditions and a willingness to listen to others telling their visions and dreams, and taking an active part in political life and even accepting high office.'

This, in one sense, is even more relevant for us today, for this is our kind of situation. We are faced therefore with a twofold possibility: on the one hand, as has already been said in the previous Notes, there is the battle for men's souls, the determined attack, deliberate and sustained, upon faith and morals, to capture the mind and culture of our people for secularism; on the other hand, however, this is the world we have to live in, and carve our career out of, and bring up our families in, and establish our homes. And - short of opting out of life altogether, and becoming recluses living in a ghetto - we have to establish some kind of 'modus vivendi', and decide just what our attitude is to be to all these insidious pressures. What are the options? In the main, three:

i) Forget about Zion, forget about spiritual values, and settle down in this 'Babylon';

(ii) No possible fraternisation with Babylon, which is essentially hostile in spirit to everything we stand for as the people of God;

(iii) Attempt to 'settle down', cooperate with the structures of Babylon as far as possible without compromise, living with a due sense of responsibility in the alien environment, yet retaining our communion with God. We shall look at these three possibilities in tomorrow's Note.

9) 1:1-21

The truth of the matter is that each of these possibilities mentioned at the end of yesterday's Note could claim some support from Scripture. And this is the problem. Consider, for example, what Jeremiah says (Jeremiah 29:4-7), 'Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare'. Did Jeremiah mean: Forget your calling to be God's separate people, forget your inheritance and your identity? Never! No one had been a more resolute non-conformist than Jeremiah. But this was a word of realism to the exiles to recognise their situation and submit to the discipline of it. It was an echo of the prophet's words 'Serve the king of Babylon and live'. By the same token, Jeremiah was abjuring the spirit of rebellion and revolt against Babylon, already evident in Zedekiah and others in Jerusalem, and evidently also simmering in the captives that had already been taken to Babylon, hence his letter sent to the captives, and therefore Daniel's and his companions' way - to work out a 'modus vivendi', cooperating within the structures of Babylon, its culture and politics, living loyally as citizens, yet retaining their integrity and refusing to compromise their position as the separated people of God, and preserving their unique faith and witness. It was in this way through simple, quiet, determined acts of protest and non-cooperation - that the faith and tradition of at least part of the nation was kept alive in a time of such testing.

10) 1:1-21

There are some hints in the book and indeed in this chapter that it was not like this with all of the captives, however. The wording in 1:10 'worse liking than the children which are of your sort' at least suggests that these 'others' were far more compromising, and that they had in fact compromised their distinctive testimony, as captives who yielded on the matter of principle for whatever reason. Here, then, is a challenge with regard to 'unconscious' or 'unwitting' or 'imperceptible' compromise and complicity which blunts and takes the edge off our testimony. Nor need we suspect were there wanting those who would have said to Daniel and his companions the kind of things that are so often said today, 'There is no need to be so extreme or strait-laced...'. Compromise with the ways of the world is a very insidious exercise. The following comment on the text of 1 John 2:15 is worthy of earnest consideration: 'It is for us who are trying to serve our Lord to treat the world not only in its corruptions but in its legitimate joys as a subject that we should touch with strict reserve and abstinence. If we are caught by its spirit or fed upon its meat, we shall not feel the breath of the highest, nor receive the manna that falleth from heaven. We are bound to look upon the world with all its delights and attractions with suspicion and reserve. It is not for us - not for us. We are called into a higher kingdom. It is not that our Lord forbids us this or that indulgence or comfort of our life: it is not that He is stern, making upon us the call of the ascetic: but it is that we who love our Lord voluntarily and gladly lay aside the things that charm and ravish the world, that, for our part, our hearts may be ravished with the things of heaven, and our whole being poured forth in constant and unreserved devotion in the service of the Lord Who died to save us.'

11) 2:1-49

From what we have seen in the first chapter of Daniel, it seems to stand as a kind of prologue, introducing the story of this man of God, and that it introduces the themes that subsequent stories and prophecies elucidate (just as the final chapter of the book forms a kind of epilogue, drawing all the threads together). We have already seen, in the opening verses of the book, the sovereignty of God underlined. This is one of the realities underlined and expounded in ch 2 in a very wonderful way. Not but that this is somewhat concealed on a first reading of it, just as the deeper significance of ch 1 became clear to us only when we probed behind the seemingly simple and straightforward narrative. It is so also here, for this also is a story of deceptive simplicity, in a long narrative of 49 verses, which on the surface is perfectly straightforward and uncomplicated: Nebuchadnezzar dreams a dream, and he wakes up troubled; he forgets the dream, but the uneasiness remains. He calls for his astrologers, who are unable to recover the lost dream for him, and he threatens to chop off their heads. Daniel, the hero of the story, intervenes, reveals both the dream and the interpretation to the king, and is advanced in the kingdom of the Chaldeans as a reward for his service. He is thus shown as vastly superior to his Chaldean counterparts, or rather, his God is shown to be the real and living God, as over against the powerless false gods of Babylon. The question is: What are we to make of all this, and what is its message for today? We shall seek to give an answer to this in tomorrow's Note.

12) 2:1-49

As an answer to the question at the end of yesterday's Note, let us consider the following: In the first place, let us think of the significance of this chapter for Daniel and his companions. We must not forget the enormity of the disaster that had overtaken the people of God. All that they had ever held dear, the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the Holy City - all was gone, and had come crashing down about their ears. God had forsaken them, turned His back upon them, and left them to their enemies. It was a dark and desolate time, and the bottom had fallen out of their world and questions thronged their minds and hearts. Of course they did! And they were intensified by what their captors were saying to them in mocking contempt, 'Where is your God now?' Where indeed! If this be thought an improbable interpretation, let us ask the question, 'How do we suppose the Jews that survived the Holocaust of Auschwitz, Birkenau and Thereisenstadt felt at the end of the second world war, and still feel today, fifty years on?' They are saying, 'How can there be a God, if He allowed 6 million Jews to perish in Hitler's gas chambers?' We need to read this back into the situation in Babylon after the Captivity, and into the words of Psalm 13, to get some idea of how these captives felt. And this is the point: into that sense of alienation and abandonment there came the realisation that, in spite of all that seemed to be the situation, God was still there, and that he was still on the throne, still in control, and that He was at work, and working out His sovereign purposes in history. When Daniel received the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream he said 'There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets...'. In saying this he was not merely announcing a fact to the king, he was making his own confession, and recognising - perhaps with a sense of awe and glory - that God was at work all the time, and at that juncture was speaking in the circumstances of the king's dream.

13) 2:1-49

But now, back to the beginning of the chapter and to king Nebuchadnezzar and his dream. It is remarkable to see the place and significance dreams are given in Scripture. There is always something happening when men dream dreams and, in significant places such as this, the message that comes through is that God is at work. One thinks of the story of Joseph in Genesis with the dreams which both revealed the kind of young man he was, brash and ambitious, and also the purposes of God in his life; of Pharaoh's dream of the fat and lean cattle and the fat and withered ears of corn, telling of God's purposes for the world, and all for the furtherance of His designs with and for the chosen people. Here, also, the king was put off his sleep with a deeply disturbing dream, and we see how God, the Living One, cuts the mighty down to size, and demonstrates to Nebuchadnezzar that in the ultimate issues of life he was not in control. Here was something which was beyond him, and how completely out of his depths he is seen to be, how disoriented and put out by the elusive dream, which he could not remember or recall, but which simply would not go away. There is something very important here, and it carries a very real message for our own day and generation. In the book 'By the Rivers of Babylon' we made the following comment: 'The world, the collective conscience of the world, knows there is something wrong, something that is making it uneasy and afraid, and it does not know what it is. But it wants to know, and it needs to know. Indeed it is clamouring to know. The world today is crying: 'Tell me my dream and the interpretation thereof. Ease this intolerable burden upon my soul.' It wants to know what its bad dream was. It cannot remember it, it is beyond its consciousness. But the effect of it, the oppression of it, is there, and the great sense of uneasiness and dread pervades the life of man.'

14) 2:1-49

In the light of what has been said, Daniel's response is very important. First of all, he appealed for time. There was no glib, brash, over-confident claim to be a know-all, but rather he sought a respite, for prayer. There is a great and significant symbolism in this. We sing 'Take it to the Lord in prayer'. It was Daniel's recognition that only God could help in this crisis, and only He could give the answer. It has been suggested by one commentator that there was in existence a believing, praying community in Babylon among the captives - a community out of which synagogue worship was born and flourished - and it may well be that Daniel gathered not only with his three companions but with a larger group, to spread the crisis situation before the Lord, for His answer and His dealing with it. And the extraordinary thing is that the dream that had so troubled Nebuchadnezzar was revealed to Daniel in a dream. Daniel dreamed the same dream! This is not so improbable, unlikely or apocryphal as it may first sound. One recalls the experience of a well-known 20th century writer in a European church, in which the service was conducted in a language he did not know and could not understand. During the sermon, he allowed his own thoughts to pursue a certain devotional line of doctrine, and later, when a friend told him what the preacher had said, he was dumbfounded to realise that what had been said was exactly what his mind had meditated upon during the sermon! It is not difficult to realise what Daniel must have felt when he received this information from God. For there is a sense in which it was a message to him before it was a message to Nebuchadnezzar. And what it said to him was that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, God was there, and working His purposes out, and controlling history for His own sovereign ends. What comfort and assurance it must have been to Daniel in his captivity to know that all that was happening to the captives in Babylon was in the plan of God and would work for the fulfilment of that plan in the fulness of the time!

15) 2:1-49

The message of the interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar was that he was simply a part of the historical process, and that his day, bright and unassailable as it then seemed, would pass and yield to another great power which in turn would also pass - and so on. But it was not so much the collapse of power through its own inherent weakness, as the intrusion of the 'stone cut out without hands' which would smash it and destroy it forever. This is undoubtedly the message of the kingdom of God breaking into the midst of this world's affairs, altering the course of history, and finally becoming established with Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords exercising universal sway. The detail of the image - the gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay - represents the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires, and these are followed by the coming of the kingdom of God breaking into history at the Incarnation (the four kingdoms are taken up again in ch 7, represented by four beasts, the lion, the bear, the leopard, and the beast with horns).

Well, our world today is crying out for an answer to its fears and dreads, and this chapter tells us that men do well to be afraid for there is something to be afraid of. Our generation has lived through times of terror and horror brought upon the world by evil powers, but we do well to remember that totalitarianism of the left is paralleled by totalitarianism of the right and both alike are represented in this grotesque image of Nebuchadnezzar, as indeed is any system that is built without God and is contemptuous of any spiritual dimension, whether corporately or individually - for we also as individuals have our little empires, whether in domestic, social or business lives. As individuals we are all caught up in the great mystery of life, and we confess to this great uneasiness and restlessness which often makes us cry out in agony and despair. This is the prevailing mood of our time. We are a generation of sick people, and we do not know what is the matter with us. But the Scriptures tell us why we are having bad dreams, whether at night or during our uneasy days. We have been building without God.

16) 2:11-49

Nebuchadnezzar 'got the message', but only partially responded to it (46-49), and he soon forgot the impression. The result was that he had to learn the hard way, as we shall see in ch 4. There is a very disquieting lesson in all this, for it tells us, as one commentator puts it, 'that sometimes a religious experience can stimulate an impressive response at a superficial level and yet leave us untouched in the depths of our being'. This is something delineated in our Lord's parable of the Sower, in what He says about the seed failing on stony places and among thorns, when initial hopeful evidences of growth peter out because of various competing influences. Well might He say, 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved'! It could have been so different with Nebuchadnezzar, if only he had allowed the message that he had undoubtedly heard from on high to sink deep down into his heart and determine his future conduct and attitudes. Calvin comments that considering the fierce pride of kings generally, it was remarkable to see him go thus far in giving this sign of piety and modesty. But such signs have to be improved upon if they are to be of any avail, and another word in the New Testament, from the pen of the Apostle Paul, seems to sum up the whole situation: 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called' (1 Corinthians 1:26).

17) 3:1-30

In this stirring and thrilling story of Daniel and his three companions, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, in the fiery furnace there are some introductory points that should be made by way of initial comment. The previous chapter ends with the response that Nebuchadnezzar made to Daniel's interpretation of his dream. It is fair comment to say that the king was impressed with Daniel's God and that his heart made some kind of response to the testimony that Daniel had given. He was brought to the gate of the Kingdom, so to speak. Opportunity had knocked for him, as it did centuries later for Pontius Pilate ('What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?') and Agrippa ('Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian'). There is a twofold warning here, a warning on the one hand expressed very solemnly in Hebrews 2:1ff, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip'. On the other hand, in such a critical time, when one does not make the most of it, something else happens. A reaction sets in. What we have to realise is that no one is ever the same after hearing the Word of God preached: either one is drawn nearer to God and to grace, or driven further away. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 2:16, the gospel is a savour of life unto life or of death unto death. And this is how it was with Nebuchadnezzar: the opportunity passed, the impression faded, and the result was that he was hardened in his attitude, and reacted all the more. And the Nebuchadnezzar we see in this chapter is harder, harsher, and very much more dangerously anti-God than before. This in itself is a reaction which indicates a certain measure of conflict within the man, not unlike the conflict that was certainly present in the heart of Saul of Tarsus, as he breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the people of God, because he was torn in two by the pressure of the Spirit of God upon his conscience. It is this that explains the perilous situation represented on the plains of Dura that day.

18) 3:1-30

The next issue that requires to be discussed is that of the miraculous preservation of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. It is this kind of story that makes people come to the conclusion that it is a legendary account, with no possible basis in fact. But this is to misunderstand the whole point; for in the first place, the Scriptures are not prodigal of the miraculous, but highly economical: miracles occur only at certain points in biblical history, and usually at times of crisis, as for example in the time of the Exodus, in the time of Elijah and Elisha, during the Captivity and in the gospel era, as seals upon the testimony of God's servants at critical points in history. Certainly the miracle here is foreign to anything in this world order - just as Peter walking on the water, and Lazarus being raised from the dead are. What happened in each of these incidents is that the powers of the world to come broke in upon the situation, and prevailed. This is the real explanation of what happened here also. What we need to remember is that the God that raised Jesus from the dead could hardly be thought to be put out by the idea of preserving men from the furnace! That being said, however, it has to be pointed out that the preservation of these men from the fire is not the central point in the story. The real lesson lies in the triumphant assertion of their faith before the king: 'Our God is able to deliver us'. This we shall discuss fully in a later Note, but in the meantime we must first look at some other points in the story itself.

19) 3:1-30

The first verse of the chapter is very stark. Lord Acton once said 'Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. This was very true of Nebuchadnezzar. He was the then ruler of the world, and his heart was raised in arrogance and pride in his own accomplishments. It is easy in such circumstances to fall into the temptation of arrogating to oneself god-like powers. It is this that is represented in the giant image that he erected on the plains of Dura. There are several things to be observed in this. For one thing, what Nebuchadnezzar did here is directly related, as has already been indicated, to the events of the previous chapter. As one commentator puts it he 'now reacts against the kingdom of God with the same degree of tension with which he previously felt drawn to it'. Furthermore, in such a state of reaction, it is very easy to make oneself believe what one wants. Daniel, in the interpretation of the dream, did say, it will be remembered, 'Thou art that head of gold'. And the king seems to have latched on to that, as a kind of commendation of his impressive empire-building, and was taken up with all it seemed to configure. 'Pure gold', he said, 'and I'll show all the world it is so. I'm the one, and all the world shall know it'. And it is idle to suppose that all he was doing was to set up a symbol of the world power he had established. The image he made was the image of a man - the Hebrew word used is said properly to mean 'an image in human likeness'. Whether he intended it to be the representation of a god, or of himself, it ended up (as all such attempts must necessarily do) as a deification of himself. It is a pity, is it not, that he did not also take into consideration the rest of Daniel's interpretation, particularly the part about the stone cut without hands out of the mountain! But then, we are very selective in what we take out of such things, considering only those things that exalt us and shutting off so far as any other consideration goes.

20) 3:1-30

We should recall the history and origin of Babylon as recorded in Genesis 11, with its record of the strutting, prideful arrogance of man that that passage portrays, to see how true the satanic temptation - 'Ye shall be as gods' (Genesis 3:5) has proved to be down the centuries, how true also, and inevitable, the divine judgment is always on such pride and arrogance. But in the meantime, before God brings it down, it can do a great deal of damage to the people of God - particularly to the people of God. This is the point here. Wherever there is such power erecting itself against God, trouble will come for believers. What we need to realise is that this is not a far-off story, of no relevance for our time, for Nebuchadnezzar is present with us today, in various forms and in many different guises. For some, indeed for many believers, he stands without much in the way of disguise at all - the dictators of this world, the totalitarian systems that have stolen so many freedoms from men, and put such pressures upon Christians, the systems that effectively prevent the children of believers from getting university education, or reasonable jobs in the professions or in industry; the systems where to stand for freedom of conscience may take you to a psychiatric hospital for 'correction'; the systems where to be a confessing believer may mean you will be knocked up at 3 o'clock in the morning and taken away from home and family, and you will just 'disappear'. There are others also, more subtle, less arrogant, but just as deadly. The tyrant of 'public opinion' puts many a man in the fiery furnace, if he dares to go against it, whether in society, in business, in industry or in the professions, where there is a pattern that dare not be gone against with impunity. The danger of compromise in such situations is often very subtle and deadly for who would not want oneself or one's children to get on in life, or find it easy to resist the temptation to compromise, if compromise meant an opening that would 'make' the future, or mean promotion? Often, it is not so much doing something wrong as something that is less than the highest you know. That so often is where the greatest danger lies.

21) 3:1-30

As to the experience of the three Hebrews in their critical test of faith, two things may be said, and first of all what the experience meant for Nebuchadnezzar. For him it was surely a moment of truth when the part of his dream recorded in ch 2 about the stone, shattering all before it, and representing the 'kingdom from beyond', was now 'coming to life'. As one commentator puts it 'Now it was no longer a mere picture in a dream, or words in a sermon, but was here before him as a political and personal force to be reckoned with in the affairs of his own realm...'. One readily recalls our Lord's words in Luke 20:18, 'Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder'. That stone is coming perilously near to him in the experience of the fiery furnace. What the experience must have meant to the three Hebrews was that it was a triumph of faith for them. What confidence and what submission are evident in their fearless statement, 'If it be so, our God...is able to deliver us...and He will deliver us. But if not...we will not serve thy gods...'. It is important for us to see that they did not at that point know what God purposed, and it was no easy confidence that they expressed. If they had known for sure that God would deliver them, it would have been easy to have expressed such confidence. But they did not; indeed, it seems almost as if they were resigned to the flames, and did not anticipate any deliverance. They were submissive to the divine will, even if it meant death for them. And they were prepared to be faithful unto death. There is a deeper truth, then, than deliverance from trials: it is deliverance in trials. As the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans 8:38ff: 'In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us'. This is what Christ offers to those who follow Him, and it is this that makes His people invincible. As the hymn says, 'God hath made His saints victorious'. Yes, indeed!

22) 3:1-30

We take one further look at this chapter to gather some further lessons. Nebuchadnezzar saw another, fourth, figure with the three Hebrews in the furnace. It was the presence of the Son of God with them, in fulfilment of the promise in Isaiah 43:1ff 'When thou passest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned'. Christ walked with them in the flames! It was a foretaste of the promise made on earth centuries later, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world'. Another and deeply significant - and symbolic - lesson is that they were loosed from their bonds. The fire burned them loose. And this is sometimes how our Lord sets us free from the things that bind us. It was His furnace, not Nebuchadnezzar's, and it was doing His will! This is why He sometimes does not set us free or deliver us from the trials of life, in order to set us free in them, from still greater bondage that we may hardly be conscious of. Many a man has gone into the furnace of sorrow or tragedy in bondage, bound by selfish, self-centred ways and attitudes, and has been set free there, in the fires, and made into a man with a heart that feels for the needs and woes of others, enlarged into humanity and compassion, pity and tenderness. And many a man has gone into the fire, and found Christ there, and come out having been touched by His mighty hand and saved by His grace. Finally, there was the impact on Nebuchadnezzar himself, as he blessed the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo.

A tall story, do we think? Could such a thing happen to such a Head of State? But did we not hear, a year or two ago, that General Jaruselski of Poland asked the Polish Bible Society for 20 copies of the Scriptures to give to his Cabinet because he felt it would be good for them in their government work to read them?

23) 4:1-37

This chapter represents the climax of the story of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It is integrally linked with the three chapters which precede it. It is a chapter of high drama, and begins with a remarkable statement of personal testimony from Nebuchadnezzar himself, in which he bears witness to God's dealings with him in mercy and grace, and constitutes a very striking and impressive evidence of the way in which the God of our salvation deals with men (1-3). We begin where Nebuchadnezzar himself begins (4). And the first thing we remark upon is this: Here is a man with problems, big problems. He has been dreaming once again! And, great and magisterial as he is, the man is terrified at what the hours of sleep have brought to him, and done to him. In the previous chapter, we saw the powers of the world to come breaking into Nebuchadnezzar's world, in the fulfilment of the earlier dream of the stone cut out of the mountain without hands (ch 2), and represented by the daring faith and confidence of the three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. There can be no doubt but that the king was deeply stirred and moved by this divine manifestation in connection with the fiery furnace. The trouble, however, with deep impressions is that they tend to fade, if an adequate response is not made to them. At least, they fade in human consciousness; but they do not really go away. They keep coming back, indeed, there is no escape from them. And the more they come back, the more insistent and urgent and inexorable - and frightening - do they become. This is how it was with Nebuchadnezzar. For it was God Who was breaking through to him. That is the point. And God always gets his man! There is no escaping Him!

24) 4:1-37

The message, then, of the chapter is: 'You cannot run away from God'. And one is bound to concede that there is something very ruthless, even merciless (we must not misunderstand this!) about the divine love. He is most likely to come at us when our defences are down, when we are at our most vulnerable, and when we least expect Him. What we mean is this: here is Nebuchadnezzar, now become a rather anxious, worried man, with all that has been going on rather unnerving him, and he seeks the oblivion of sleep - the sleep of which Shakespeare speaks of as that which 'knits up the ravelled sleeve of care' and 'the balm of hurt minds'. Ah, yes, but that is the sleep of innocents, and Nebuchadnezzar was no innocent, and such words were true for him only until the dream came. And come it did! And, if we mistake not, he did not really have to send for his astrologers and stargazers - or for Daniel either, for that matter - to give him the interpretation of the dream. He knew - or at least with sinking heart he must have suspected - what it meant. What he wanted them to tell him was not so much the interpretation, as to assure him that the interpretation he himself was placing upon it was wrong, and that his fears were groundless. For the dream was in the same idiom as the previous one - there it was the image that was brought crashing down: here, it was the great tree that was hewn down, with nothing but a stump left. What, then, was the message that was getting through to the man? We are not left in doubt about this, for three times it is underlined and asserted in the chapter, in 17, 25 and 32, in the words, '...that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men'. There are two important points to be underlined with regard to this, and we shall turn to them in tomorrow's Note.

25) 4:1-37

The first point to note, in what was said at the end of yesterday's Note is that there is clearly a pattern, a 'history' in God's dealings with this man. In ch 1 it was interest and impression; in ch 2, it was the stirrings of faith; in ch 3 it was the breakthrough and the confrontation as the powers of the world to come touched his life and his conscience. And now this, in ch 4, the urgent dream and the warning voice of God, bidding him take heed before it became too late. We do well to pause at this point to ask ourselves if there is any parallel to this in our own experience, in God's dealings with us. And if this be so, is it any wonder that we should be having bad dreams?

The other point is this: there was not only a 'history' in God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, but also a particular kind of dealing with him, for a particular reason. For here was a man, whose gifts and abilities and successes had made him arrogant and totally self-sufficient, and living in utter dependence of God. We have already in these Notes mentioned the story in Genesis 11 of the Tower of Babel, with its message of 'hubris' (Greek word for 'overweening arrogance') followed inevitably by 'nemesis' (Greek word for 'retribution'). We have only to consider the tone of his word in 30 - the arrogant pretensions of the man are really staggering in their enormity. Is it any wonder that he was struck down, especially after all the warnings he had had?

26) 4:1-37

There are many applications of solemn story that can with profit be considered, and it will be useful to pause for a little to consider one or two. Emil Brunner, the great Swiss theologian, speaking in his Gifford Lectures of the frightening development of modern technology, says, 'It is in this sphere of technical invention that man enters, so to speak, into human competition with the Creator of nature.... It is here that the motive of the Tower of Babel story is most apparent.... The multi-millionaire building titanic skyscrapers is, as a rule, no romantic but a realist who calculates exactly how much this building is going to bring in, in dollars and cents.... But, all the same, it is in these architectural structures that something of that dangerous titanism finds expression, which the narrative of the Tower of Babel has in mind. It is perhaps not so much the builders as individuals, but the generation which sees these colossi rise from the ground and sees also the greatest rivers bridged, the Atlantic ocean crossed in a day's flight and city of Hiroshima destroyed by a single bomb - it is this generation which is tempted with a feeling of God-like power.'

Little comment is needed on these words - written 40 years ago, and how much more true and relevant today than in the 1940s. The spirit of Nebuchadnezzar is still with us in our world today!

27) 4:1-37

Nebuchadnezzar was afraid, yes (5). But he was not afraid enough. The point of the exercise was that he was meant to do something about it. And this he failed to do. In spite of the very real terror that gripped him, a whole year was allowed to elapse, in which he did nothing, at the end of which he was probably saying to himself, 'Daniel, you were wrong, nothing has happened to me, there is nothing going to happen to me'. And we see the proud monarch strutting about in his palace like a peacock, preening himself on his amazing accomplishments. Ah, but there is a price to be paid for such foolishness. A wise preacher once said, 'Every time you hear the gospel preached and refuse its appeals, you narrow down the circle of divine influences within which, for you, salvation lies. If the appeal of this message does not move you to repentance tonight, you will probably listen to other sermons on this subject but will not be moved to any degree. Some of you are making your own salvation more and more impossible because you are hearing the Word of God without obeying. To be gospel-hardened is a far worse thing than to be sin-hardened. That is what was happening with Nebuchadnezzar: opportunity had knocked, not once, but many times, and now the sands were running out for him, had he known it. And even as he mouthed his arrogant boast, the voice of God broke in upon him; and the same hour the unheeded warning was fulfilled. Solemn, solemn thought! God is not mocked, Nebuchadnezzar!

28) 4:1-37

The final verses of the chapter revert in their language to the first person singular, matching the introductory verses of the chapter (1-3) and elaborating them. It is an account in very personal terms of a religious experience in which his eyes were opened in an entirely new way, and in which his reason returned to him after what appears to have been a very severe form of madness. It is an astonishing change to have come over the proud and arrogant king, but we need not doubt its authenticity for, after all, this is what the gospel is all about. Lives are changed by the power of God, in every age, the proud humbled and brought low, the arrogant brought down to the dust. One commentator questions how deeply this change went, on the ground that the characteristic self-centred language reappears (36), but it does seem that the point the chapter makes is that 'the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men', and that He had His way with this proud and arrogant man. Indeed, the emphasis on the return of reason and understanding may be meant to suggest that we are truly in our right mind only when we begin to see things in the light of the divine will and in submission to it.

One final word about this chapter seems necessary. We must not assume that its message is that things work out well in the end as a matter of course. They did for Nebuchadnezzar, because he repented and believed. But the next chapter tells the story of Belshazzar, who refused to do so. And there was no happy ending for him.

29) 5:1-31

This chapter is really a companion piece to the previous one. Chapter 4 records the story of a man who could not make up his mind, and who brought judgment down upon him before finally he got right with God. This chapter stands as a healthy corrective to the almost incredible capacity in the human heart for believing that some things will work out all right in the end. Things did work out in the end for Nebuchadnezzar; but they do not always do so. They did not, for Belshazzar. It is possible to go too far; it is possible at the last to come to grief, and pass into the darkness of a night on which no morning will ever dawn. The old paraphrase says,

While the lamp holds on to burn,
the greatest sinner may return.

But at the last, when the lamp does go out, it does not light again for that soul. Here, then, is the story of a man who did go too far, and passed beyond the point of no return, and was eternally lost.

There is a time, we know not when,
a place we know not where,
that marks the destiny of man
in glory or despair.

There is a line, by us unseen,
that crosses every path,
the hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath.

30) 5:1-31

The story is full of drama. It opens with the account of a feast given by Belshazzar to a thousand of his lords. It was a dazzling, royal occasion, as such occasions were wont to be, and the feast went on with all the brilliance and splendour of the east, and men - especially the king - were waxing merrier and merrier in their cups when a sudden idea seems to have struck Belshazzar, and he called for the sacred golden vessels of the Jewish captives that had been rifled from the Temple in Jerusalem, and profaned them, committing a gross and ugly act of sacrilege by drinking out of them. This was a source of great merriment and hilarity and they pursued their wild debauchery to great heights until, without warning, the vast banqueting hall was reduced to a stunned, unearthly silence and stillness as one after the other they raised their eyes to the wall of the palace, to see the fingers of a divine hand writing the awesome words 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin', and their blotched, wine-reddened faces blanched ashen white - and none more so than the king's as mortal fear and dread gripped them. Thus quickly can the living God change a situation, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And suddenly, it was all up with Belshazzar, all up with his thousand lords, and all up with Babylon, for God had caught up with them and was now presenting His account. Daniel, called in to interpret the writing on the wall, pronounced the doom of the king; and before that night was out, Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, was a corpse in the palace of Babylon. There he sat, a lifeless huddle, at the banqueting table, a lost soul, 'weighed in the balances and found wanting'.

31) 5:1-31

We should recall what was said about Nebuchadnezzar and the judgment that came upon him, recorded in ch 4. It was not that he was a specially bad and terrible tyrant that judgment came upon him, although he was that, and worse. Rather, it came upon him because he had resisted the claim of God upon his soul, and that puts him on common ground with the rest of us. Men are not lost because they are gigantic sinners; they do not go to a lost eternity because of the enormity of their sins. There is a Saviour from gigantic, enormous sins. They go to hell because they finally resist God, and His claim on their lives. And this is true also with reference to Belshazzar. It was not his drunkenness or wantonness, or his godlessness or sacrilege that brought this terrible doom upon him. Drunkards can be saved, and wantons and blasphemers too. It was his continued impenitence, his turning from mercy, and his persistent and inexorable refusal of Daniel's testimony that became for him the sin for which there is no remedy or pardon. The rioting and drunkenness in Belshazzar's life was only the shell, the outer expression of his rebellion against God; and such rebellion can often take different forms, and express itself in different ways, some indeed very respectable and even religious, as well as the grosser manifestations. It would be perilous to allow oneself to be misled by the incidentals of this story and by the external expression of Belshazzar's rebellion as it is written in another place, man looketh on the outward appearance but God looketh on the heart. The hidden Watcher in the heavens, of whom we read in ch 4, was watching Belshazzar, taking stock, weighing him up, and it was not his outward debauchery, but the inward state of his heart, that was God's concern. For he was a man who had chosen to be without God. That is the issue in this story.

32) 5:1-31

Belshazzar was a man who had said 'No' to the claims of God upon his soul, as they pressed in upon him. This is the point of Daniel's words in 18ff, 'Thou knewest all this, and hast not humbled thine heart...the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified'. This is what made him lightweight in the scales of God.

The solemn writing on the wall tells the story and its meaning and interpretation, bearing a clear and solemn word about the need to take heed to eternal issues. H.S. Wallace, in his fine book 'The Message of Daniel', puts it thus:

'It is an unforgettable picture. The atmosphere of the day of final doom prevails as soon as the hand starts writing. It is because he senses this that Belshazzar's whole physical being is so badly convulsed. Daniel spells out the impending disaster as he reads and translates: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and UPHARSIN (v 25).

'The three words used here are interpreted by some to represent three weights in a descending scale - 'a hundredweight, a pound and an ounce', or 'a dollar, a dime and a cent'. The simple reading of these words in one of these ways would have been enough to warn the king that he was indeed on the path of degeneration and had lowered the entire status and worth of his kingdom to the point of its rejection by God.

'Having read the words superficially, Daniel then went on to take a further mysterious meaning by using the consonants making up each word and going back to their original root meanings. He therefore derived a further threefold meaning for Belshazzar:

MENE = numbered, and ready for sale

TEKEL = weighed, and found wanting in substance

UPHARSIN = divided, i.e. given over to the Medes and the Persians.'

33) 5:1-31

We look now in more detail at 'the writing on the wall'. The first word 'Mene' - 'God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it' - may be linked with words in the 90th Psalm where we read 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom'. The fact is, our days are numbered, and three score years and ten are the normally allotted time, but God reserves the right to shorten them as He will, and call us to account long before the allotted span runs out. This may well be related to another word in that Psalm: 'We spend our years as a tale that is told'. When one thinks of the sort of tale Belshazzar's life told, it does not seem surprising that it ended as it did. When one thinks that the shadow of grace - represented by Daniel's faithful testimony over the years in the court of Babylon - was upon him all through his life, one realises that opportunity knocked hard upon his door, both in mercy and judgment. And the long day of opportunity came to a close, and found him still refusing, by his repeated arrogance and contempt, the summons of God. As the hymn says, 'Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day', and God does not tell us beforehand when the evening will come: it comes suddenly and without warning.

The second word 'Tekel' - 'weighed...and found wanting' - indicates that, all unknown to Belshazzar, an unseen and silent Watcher had noted his actions, missing nothing, forgetting nothing. 'The Lord is a God of knowledge: and by Him actions are weighed' (1 Samuel 2:3). Our whole life is recorded in God's book, and weighed in His balance. And when grace is spurned, laughed at, and lightly esteemed, what is there left - what can there be left - but judgment? That is how it was with Belshazzar. As Jesus said in the parable, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required' (Luke 12:20).

34) 5:1-31

The final word is 'Peres' 'Thy kingdom is divided...'. The kingdom was taken from Belshazzar altogether. This literally refers to the kingdom of Babylon; but another kingdom was taken from him at the same time - the kingdom of God. This is the result of being weighed in the balances and found wanting. No one who reads the New Testament with care can fail to realise that this is something which our Lord Himself and His apostles emphasised repeatedly. Jesus' very words in Matthew 21:43 seem to take up Daniel's, 'The kingdom of God shall be taken from you' as He pronounced the doom of the Jews who, Belshazzar-wise, lived through days of opportunity but let them slip. This is the urgency of the gospel message. Right to the end it is offered to men; all down the long day, until it is evening, God offers his unspeakable Gift. But the evening does come, and life as we know it does not go on forever. And when it came for Belshazzar, it was already, it seems, too late. For this time, in contrast to what we read in ch 4 in Nebuchadnezzar's story, there was no appeal to him to 'break off thy sins by righteousness'. As R. Wallace puts it, 'To Belshazzar Daniel preaches as one standing on the other side of a great chasm.... To Belshazzar he preaches a sermon without the trace of any appeal. All he does is to relate the facts that justify the condemnation that has been pronounced in the writing on the wall. Belshazzar knew the truth that might have saved him, and did not obey it.... Belshazzar on his own part was adopting a position and choosing a fate towards which Daniel could not possibly let his heart and mind move with sympathy, and into which he could not enter in the Name of God'.

35) 6:1-28

The well-known story of Daniel in the lions' den - perhaps the best known in the book - raises a number of important introductory issues. On the one hand there tends to be preoccupation with the miracle of Daniel's preservation, which may be thought of as 'a rather tall story', and apocryphal, raising real question marks in the mind. On the other hand there may in contrast be a craving that similar spectacular happenings should mark Christian life and experience today. But both these attitudes and approaches tend to miss the point. It is not the miracle that is the centre of the story, but something else, namely, the certainty of a thorny path for those who take a stand for Christ. Indeed, preoccupation with the miracle of the stopping of the mouths of lions is really out of place - either in terms of calling the miraculous in question, for in fact we have already pointed out that the miracles in this book are evidences of the powers of the world to come, breaking in upon the human situation, and giving an anticipatory glimpse of the powers that redeemed man will one day exercise over brute creation; or, on the other hand, in terms of craving for the spectacular to mark Christian life - for this is simply a sign of lack of faith. In this connection we should not forget our Lord's words, 'Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe' - this was said to rebuke the unbelieving Jews of His day. We should not forget either the words in the parable of Dives and Lazarus spoken by Abraham; the rich man urged him to send to his five brethren, with a message of warning from beyond the grave. Abraham's reply to him makes it clear that it is the Word, not the spectacular or the miraculous, that is designed to convince and convert men to God. The chapter must therefore be looked at from the point of view of its teaching about the nature and implications of true and faithful discipleship.

36) 6:1-28

The first point of importance to note in the story is that Daniel is no longer a young man, but elderly, at least 65, and possibly considerably older (one commentator suggests he might have been in his eighties). One is reminded of the famous historical instance of the martyrdom of the aged Polycarp in the early Church, who in his dying testimony spoke of having served Christ for 86 years. This harrowing experience for Daniel took place in the evening of his days, after many years of faithful Christian witness. Two things may be said in this regard: one is the sadness and shame of putting an old man under such pressure. The book of Proverbs says that 'a hoary head is a crown of glory' - this was surely true in Daniel's case. Behold him, then, this noble Hebrew patriarch, standing firm to the end. The other thing is this: you do not suddenly find strength and grace to stand firm and true in a time of crisis: this is something born of a lifetime of faithfulness. If a man has lived a double life over the years, and made compromise the order of the day, he does not suddenly, when he is 65, become a spiritual giant. This stand was certainly the fruit of long faithfulness.

37) 6:1-28

Here, then, is Daniel prominent in the Medo-Persian court as he had been in Babylon. We may well ponder how this should have been, especially when we remember how different it was in another 'Daniel-like' figure in an earlier time, Joseph, who attained similar eminence in the court of Pharaoh. But with the coming of a new king in Egypt 'which knew not Joseph' (Exodus 1:8), ill-treatment and oppression were the result, for many generations. Here it is different, and it led finally to the return of the people of God from captivity. It is not so much that circumstances were different in the two cases, as that the sovereign divine purposes were different. We must therefore beware of making simplistic assessments, and assuming that what God did once He will do again, as a matter of course. He can do again what He once did, but He does not always do so, or in the same way. His ways are not our ways. What is the history and scenario of changing dynasties? History surely shows that while empires attain their iron might and power through hard and severe discipline, they have also gone into decline through moral decay and luxurious living, and have finally disintegrated, to be taken over by a new dynasty, which in turn has followed the same ugly pattern. In this kind of situation - and did Darius see the seeds of disintegration already in his own empire? - one can well appreciate the inestimable value of a man of utter integrity to be in control of the affairs of state, a man who could not be bought, a man who was incorruptible. There were no flies on Darius, he knew what such a man could be and do in his empire. More of this in tomorrow's Note.

38) 6:1-28

The evidences of corruption in the corridors of power are writ large on the pages of this chapter - a situation with an all too modern ring about it in the world of today, with the ruthlessness of big business, and the crucifixion of scapegoats, and faceless men behind the scenes manipulating events in their lust for power and money. This makes the Daniels of this world very vulnerable. And this Daniel stood in the way of Darius' princes and presidents, and therefore he had to be got out of the way. He got under their skin, of course: his testimony was too unwavering for it to be otherwise. He represented to them an unbearable challenge. This is why he was plotted against, for with his standards of honesty, honour and truth, he became the object not only of their jealousy, but of their bitter and murderous hatred. Men in this frame of mind can be very ruthless and very determined, and they must have spared no effort to find occasion against him, but all to no avail for Daniel was a man who lived his life inside out and was palpably and sincerely what he was thought to be. This made their eventual decision to 'frame' him all the more diabolical and horrible. They knew that Daniel was faithful to Darius because he was faithful first to his God, and that the one was the basis of the other. But suppose a conflict could be created between faithfulness to Darius and faithfulness to his God, what then? What would he do? They knew what he would do, and because they knew, they determined to create just such a situation. And so the plot was hatched. But it needed for its success one weak link, and that weak link was Darius himself. Darius must be got at, and softened by skilful flattery to give his unwitting assent to the plot against Daniel's life. Darius fell for the bait. His mind was blinded and his perception dulled by the flattery of his courtiers and he was 'taken in' by their specious words. How else could he have failed to see that there was something suspicious about the formulation of such a royal statute (7) that did not include Daniel's name among the presidents and governors?

39) 6:1-28

Daniel saw through their evil design immediately, and knew that he was being made a victim. And the thing that impresses us is that he was absolutely firm and unshaken and unmoved by his situation. He remained unchanged as a man of God, continuing to do as he had always done, praying towards Jerusalem three times a day. He knew that doing so in face of this decree might cost him his life; he knew that he did not need to court disaster, that it would come to him unbidden. And come it did. In such a situation what an inestimable resource his initial stand recorded at the beginning of the book (1:8), in which he 'purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat' must have been to him now, with the iron discipline that holding to that stand over the years imparted to him. There is an important lesson here for us: it is that our spiritual lives need above all else to be cultivated and protected by discipline and godly habit that maintain our communion with the Lord. These are the things that keep us going - and keep us steady when the going gets hard. It is of course true that regular habits of prayer and Bible reading can become mere habit and empty of spiritual significance, but they need not - and will not - if they are used aright as means by which we get through to living and vital touch with God. This is surely how it was with Daniel, and how it needs to be with us.

40) 6:1-28

A thoughtful examination of the chapter makes it clear that this conspiracy against Daniel was not the work of a single day, but developed over a period of time. Daniel continued in his habit of prayer, in all probability for a considerable period of time, during which his enemies set a watch over him, and one can well imagine the growing tension of the situation as they waited the opportune moment to take him. This was the context in which Daniel stood firm: he knew that all round his house spies and informers were hiding, watching, waiting to trap him. This was the real trial for him, more even than the den of lions. Indeed, there was another lion at work: the devil, as a roaring lion, was going about, intent on devouring him, not only seeking Daniel's life to destroy it but, more importantly, to destroy his testimony. Indeed, he was prepared to spare Daniel, if only he could break his testimony and discredit him in the court of Darius. This was the real test of faith, and God kept him in it. And this was a greater miracle than sending an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. And by remaining faithful, and thus by not being delivered from the ordeal of being cast into the lions' den, Daniel effectively escaped from the greater lion that he was facing. By standing his ground, he found that the way into the lions' den was the way out of the lion's mouth. The apostle James says, 'Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you'. This is how it was with Daniel.

41) 6:1-28

One further comment may be made before we leave this chapter. It has been pointed out that there seemed to be several echoes in this story of the greater story of the gospel. We have only to compare what is said in 4 with Matthew 26:59, or what is said in 14 with Luke 23:20, or what is said in 16 with Mark 15:30, or what is said in 17 with Matthew 27:60, and what is said in 19 with Mark 16:2, to realise that if these parallels are merely coincidence, then it is a very great coincidence indeed. But they are not coincidence: for the central affirmation of the Christian faith is that the cross of Christ is placed at the heart of history, and that it casts its shadow both forwards and backwards upon that history. Who shall say, then, that we are not seeing some reflections of a cross and an empty tomb in this story?

But there is one decisive difference: for the greater than Daniel went into His den of lions, and no angel shut the lions' mouth for him, and the Son of man was slain. Daniel was preserved alive because of his innocence, as he testifies here, but it was precisely because of Christ's innocence that He was not preserved alive. He suffered, the just for the unjust, the innocent for the guilty, that man might be brought back to God. And, after all, the jaws of the lion could not and did not hold Him. And the stone was rolled away to show a greater miracle than the preservation of Daniel, to show that death had already given up its prey. 'He is not here, He is risen'. This is what makes the story of Daniel meaningful for us as Christians, because behind it and inter-penetrating it is the testimony of the Son of God Himself. This is what gives us hope, weak mortals that we are, frail and inconsistent, hope to believe that in the hour of trial, with Christ standing with us as He stood in the fiery furnace, we shall stand, and having done all, stand.

42) 7:1-28

We come with this chapter to the second half of the book of Daniel, which is very different from the narrative form of the first six chapters and, as one commentator says is 'less well known and decidedly more daunting'. He comments, 'It consists of a series of visions very complex in their nature, and often far from clear at first as to their meaning. Scholars debate, more fanciful minds revel in speculation, and the ordinary reader tends to look quickly the other way. Yet all the material is equally part of the Word of God and is able to instruct us for salvation.' We should note particularly the phrase 'more fanciful minds revel in speculation'. This is one way that Daniel has tended to be interpreted, and the result has been, at best to make people shy away from study of it, and at worst, to discredit the book and its interpretation as 'way out', odd, and belonging to the lunatic fringe of religious fanaticism. Which is a pity indeed, for this also is the Word of God and has a message for man today. But, if interpretation is not to be that, what is it to be? Well, when we studied the book of Revelation, we found that keeping away from the minutiae of interpretation, and steering a course through the centre of it all, grasping the principles being unfolded, we found the book most wonderfully and impressively relevant as a word for our times. And this is what we need to do - and must do, and can do - with Daniel. Indeed, there is a notable parallel between the two books in this regard. In both books the first half describes the conflict between God's people, the Church, and the world, whereas the second half describes a deeper dimension, the 'behind-the-scenes' conflict, between the Lord of the Church and the dark powers of evil. It is this that explains the contrast between the historical chapters of Daniel (1-6) and the apocalyptic (7-12). Behind the encounters with Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius, there is the deeper dimension and reality of conflict with evil and with Satan.

43) 7:1-28

The second thing to note is that this chapter, and the one which follows, deal with Belshazzar's reign in its first and third years - that is preceding the final sacrilege with the Temple vessels and the writing on the wall. We are thus taken 'behind the scenes' for an explanation of that writing (in the same way ch 9 has to do with the events of ch 6 and shows the real issues underlying the story of the lions' den). Thus, as was pointed out in our introductory studies in Daniel, the second half of the book seeks to teach by prophetic vision what had already been acted out in the narrative portion - the conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem, between false worship and the true, between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. This explains the recurring emphasis on the fact of tribulation, and that it issues in blessing for those obedient to the Lord. Thus, in the historical section, the saints are tested, the heathen apparently triumph, but God intervenes; while in the apocalyptic section, which begins at this point, this is shown as an abiding principle throughout all ages, and shown on a vaster scale, in terms of the ultimate conflict that will climax in the last days. The chapters of the second half of the book all tell the same story, with emphasis upon trial, vindication and reward, with the final chapter recapitulating the themes, climaxing with promises of glory for those who, like Daniel, are faithful to the one true God.

44) 7:1-28

Another point that we should certainly make is expressed in 15 and 28, which record Daniel's upset and 'headache'. If he was bewildered and confused, is it surprising that we should be also! What we have to recognise is this: if the visions have any relevance at all, then inasmuch as they purport to speak of world history and world situations, it is surely asking the impossible that they should be simple and uncomplicated. For world history, and especially the convulsions and incomprehensible movements of our world, can never possibly be said to be simple and uncomplicated. There are therefore two opposite dangers for us to avoid in seeking to interpret them. One is the confident and presumptuous attitude that some people have when they lay claim to a complete understanding of the minutiae of these visions and arrogate to themselves a monopoly in correct interpretations of the various symbols and images throughout; the other danger is that of despairing altogether of making the visions mean anything at all, and simply dismiss them as insignificant apocalypse. This will not do either because these chapters are the word of God, and assuredly they have a message for us if we are patient enough to meditate upon them and extract it. We have to seek to keep within these two opposite extremes: over-confident assertion on the one hand, and despairing dismissal on the other.

45) 7:1-28

And so to the vision described here, it's meaning and the lessons of the chapter. First of all, in 1-8, there is the vision of the four beasts issuing from the sea, the lion, the bear, the leopard, and the indescribable one, diverse from all the others. Then, in 9-14, we have the vision of the Throne and the Ancient of Days seated on it. In 15-18, we have the beginning of the interpretation of the vision by the angel, followed in 19-22 by a further query by Daniel as he sees 'the little horn' waxing mighty against the saints of the Most High; then finally, in 23-28, the interpretation of the little horn's activities. It can hardly be denied that there is an extraordinary variety of interpretation here. For one thing, a large number identify the beasts in terms of the vision in ch 2, indicating that they stand for the four kingdoms symbolised by the four metals in the image there, gold, silver, brass, iron. That is to say, the kingdoms and world powers surveyed begin with Babylon (represented by the gold in ch 2, and here by the lion) and deal with the following world empires, stretching down the history of the ancient world towards the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. But this identification of ch 7 with ch 2 is disputed by others who would maintain that this is a vision for the last days, for Daniel is told in 17 that the four beasts shall arise out of the earth, and in fact Babylon had already risen and was about to fall. These two very different interpretations make it clear that it is no easy task that we have on our hands when we seek to elicit the meaning of the chapter for today. But there are further disparities, as we shall see in tomorrow's Note.

46) 7:1-28

Almost all modern scholars, who dispute the early date of Daniel, and place it as having been written at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, identify the four beasts as representing Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Greece; whereas on the other hand, conservative scholars interpret them as the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires. And even within the conservative school of interpretation there are marked divergences of view, with one group referring the prophecies to a culmination from the first Advent of Christ, and another with equal force referring them to His Second Advent. All these very considerable divergences of opinion should teach us to beware of dogmatism in interpretation and make us prepared at least to examine other points of view than our own.

All this prompts the question whether precise identification is the most important thing for us in seeking to adduce a relevant lesson and a valid word from God for our own time. If, of course, what we are asking from the book of Daniel is a synopsis of ancient, modern and future history, then it is extremely important to come to a firm conclusion about which kingdoms are represented by each beast. But it is open to question whether this in fact is the point, and whether a relevant word from God really depends on such a precise identification. When we studied Revelation some time ago in these Notes, we found ourselves able, in spite of the welter of differing and opposing schools of thought, to steer a clear course to the heart of the book and to its perennially valid message. It is surely possible to do this also in the book of Daniel. We must beware of becoming unable to see the wood for the trees. We ought to look at what this chapter actually tells us in broad outline, leaving aside particular interpretations of detail. This we shall proceed to do in what follows.

47) 7:1-28

Daniel tells us that the four winds of heaven strove upon the great sea, and four great beasts came up from the sea diverse from one another. In 17 we are told that the four beasts are four kings arising out of the earth. The sea here symbolises humanity, the world; and these monsters are something that humanity throws up. This is the astonishing and startling thing, and it is exactly paralleled in Revelation 13, in the 'composite' monster spoken of there. What we are surely meant to gather from this is that it is a sin-cursed, guilt-laden, demonised humanity, adrift from God that throws up the merciless and cruel powers referred to in the vision. Every one of these monsters is recognisable as beasts or birds of prey, and it is their rapaciousness that distressed; and we ourselves, humanity adrift from God, have given birth to them. And the fact that John the apostle also sees this kind of vision centuries after Daniel must surely incline us to the view that, detailed interpretation aside, what we have here is something that strides across the stage of history again and again - in Daniel's day, in John's, and in our own day alike. One of the most impressive things in any contemporary study of prophecy is that these horrific visions are not nearly so horrific and fantastic to our thinking today as they would have been a hundred years ago, because we have lived through the convulsions of the twentieth century and have seen the horrific monsters, totalitarian monsters, striding across the stage of history making tremendous claims, and with mouths speaking great things. This is an adequate description of the terror that stalked Europe in the 1930s and 1940s with Hitler's Nazism, and it is just as adequate a picture of the grim, ruthless and rapacious monster, totalitarian communism, that has stalked the world of the post-war era.

48) 7:1-28

Another point to be noted is the connection between the emerging of the beasts with the striving of the winds on the sea. It is the action of heaven upon earth that produces these monsters. This is awful and terrible to contemplate, but nonetheless true, and emphasised more than once in the Book of Revelation. The coming of the heavenly message of the gospel into contact with the world of men leads ever to disturbance and conflict; it is the collision of the powers of darkness and light in the world and the consequent conflict and the frightful eruption of evil as it is drawn out by the winds of God and the judgments of the gospel, in order finally to be destroyed. It is certainly no accident that when Jesus came into Galilee all sorts of demon-possessed people seemed to come to the fore. His presence drew them out into the open. And this, of course, is the point of the next part of the chapter, because this 'little horn' - who, we need not doubt, represents the antichrist himself - is destroyed by the power of the Ancient of Days, in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The message is that these dark powers are come up for judgment (9): 'I beheld till the thrones were cast down...!'

We must now at this point ask what was the significance of this vision for Daniel. He was living in the first year of Belshazzar. It was an evil time, and the saints in Babylon were beleaguered. And, like John on Patmos, he was wondering just where it was all going to end. And he was given the same kind of assurance as John was given, centuries later: the persecution and the pressure, he was shown, was inevitable, and belonged to the very nature of the situation. It is never possible to have a witness to the Most High in a godless kingdom without convulsions in the world. That is the first thing: and the second is this: evil tends to get worse, and becomes incarnate in these evil monsters, but in reality it is being given its head, in order to draw it out so as finally to break it and destroy it. And, best of all, the Throne is set and even now towers over all things. God is on the throne. Such was the assurance given to Daniel and his companions in their fiery furnace and in their den of lions!

49) 7:1-28

Furthermore, we are also told in this chapter just how this turbulent sea is going to be finally stilled - by the coming of the Son of man - it is He to whom the kingdom is given, and who will establish it, stilling the storms by His mighty Word and bringing a great calm. In this connection it is impossible not to think of the sea of glass in the fourth chapter of Revelation, for this is the ultimate fulfilment of the vision given here, for there it is no longer a sea convulsed by storm and disgorging horrendous monsters, but one over which the Son of man has stood saying, 'Peace be still'. From this standpoint it does not greatly matter whether we nominate this to take place at the first advent of Christ or the second, for it is true of both, and the first gives the earnest and pledge of the second. But there is something more: not only is judgment appointed for the end - it is in fact operating now. The judgment of God operates throughout history as well as at its end. As Paul puts it in Romans 1:18, 'the wrath of God is being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men'.

All this helps us to see the significance of the fact that the saints of God are spoken of here both as taking the kingdom and reigning (18) and suffering persecution and affliction at the hands of the 'little horn' (21) and being overcome (25). The paradox is only seeming: both are true. Our position is that of reigning with Christ, and yet we are persecuted. We are kings and priests unto God, yet broken by the fury of the oppressor. We should not forget the vision in Revelation 11:7 of the overthrow of the church as a missionary organisation, as the climax of the age-long experience of tribulation - the 'time, times and a half a time' denoting the terrible climactic power of evil at the end-time prior to the coming of Christ. This is the lot of the church in the world in this age - but, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

50) 8:1-27

Chapter 8, on a first reading, seems much simpler and more straightforward than the previous one, with less possibility of misunderstanding, for the interpretation of the vision is given by the angel Gabriel to Daniel. Taken by itself and without relation to what precedes or follows it this certainly is the case, for what we are told about is the activity of the Medo-Persian empire and its overthrow by Greece (under Alexander the Great), the death of Alexander and the dividing of his kingdom - this is a matter that can be verified from history - between Ptolemy, Seleucus, Lysimachus and Cassander, and the emergence of the little horn, Antiochus Epiphanes, who tormented the Jews and desecrated the Temple in 168 BC in the time of the Maccabees. But there are several very real problems which arise immediately we begin to ask the chapter and its contents some questions, and we shall have to look at these questions in the first instance before proceeding to a consideration of its message.

51) 8:1-27

The questions that arise are as follows: What is the relation of this vision to the previous one? Is this saying the same sort of thing as that? In this connection, what are we to say about the 'little horn' in each chapter - is this referring to the same power or to two different ones? Furthermore, is the intention of the chapter and of the vision fulfilled in the interpretation given that obviously leads us to Antiochus Epiphanes? If so, what are we to make of the repeated emphasis in the angelic interpretation on 'the time of the end'? And what is the relation of such statements as we have, for example, in 10 - '...it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them' - to Revelation 12:4, which speaks of the dragon's tail sweeping down a third of the stars of heaven? Clearly John is echoing Daniel's words here; but if Daniel's words were fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC, how can John, in his words, be referring to the last days and antichrist, as he undoubtedly does? And if the 'little horn' prophecy here is fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes, what are we to say about the fact that Jesus takes a prophecy about this Antiochus Epiphanes - the abomination of desolation (9:17, 26; 11:31; 12:11) - and specifically refers it to the future, to the end days of the age, and to the time of antichrist? All these are considerations which make it necessary for us to look more deeply at this apparently straightforward prophecy, and learn that there is another and greater fulfilment of it than in the kingdoms of Persia and Greece (cf the words in Matthew 24:15, 'Let him that readeth understand', which may be interpreted to mean 'Look what a deep and sinister interpretation is now placed by our Lord on Daniel's prophecy about Antiochus Epiphanes.')

52) 8:1-27

We must look, first of all, then, at the relation of this chapter to ch 7. There seems to be a link between 7:28 and 8:1. Two years have elapsed, in which Daniel has meditated much on the meaning and significance of the first vision, and now he is ready for further light. It will be noticed that whereas in ch 7 we have the reality of the Throne of the Ancient of Days towering over the emergence of the beasts, here the power of the beasts is much more in evidence. Indeed, it is a vision of ascending power that we have here, while in ch 7 it is simply a question of one power succeeding another, without any notion of superior power. Thus the ram is overthrown by the he-goat. Furthermore, we are clearly meant to see that the 'little horn' is more sinister and devastating than any of the other beasts. He 'climaxes' the series, in a gigantic climacteric of evil and sin. Now, the he-goat certainly in the first instance refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, and this is the dark figure that did such despite to Israel in the time of the Maccabees. But from a world point of view, he could scarcely be regarded as a greater figure than Alexander the Great. And the point that is being made here is that it is not greatness and power as such, in themselves, but greatness of power as it is lined up against the people of God that is significant from the standpoint of divine revelation and the divine purposes. And this is the real subject matter dealt with in the visions.

53) 8:1-27

As an illustration of what is said at the end of yesterday's Note we may say that it was not so much Hitler's oppression of the nations of Europe during the Second World War, dark and terrible as that was, as his oppression and attempted destruction of the Jews as the people of God, which constituted his capital crime, and for which he was finally brought low. So it was here. Antiochus was terrible because he was terrible against the Jews, and therefore more terrible and sinister than Alexander, though as a world power he was less significant. This is the reason for the emphasis upon the 'little horn' more than the ram and the he-goat in this chapter. Compared with the ram and the goat this other power is 'little', but his significance is not that he reaches westwards or northwards, but upwards, challenging God Himself. One commentator suggests that there may be some evidence in all this of the divine humour at work. God speaks of the great ones of this world with a certain disrespect. History speaks of Alexander the Great - God speaks of a he-goat! The world speaks of the conflict of warring ideologies, but God speaks of a fight between a ram and a goat, with the one knocking the other's horns off. So unheroically, so inelegantly and unceremoniously, God speaks in His Book!

54) 8:1-27

Another point is this: Alexander the Great summed up in his empire all the genius of Greek culture and, from a world history point of view, there is no question about the enormous influence that the Greek empire had culturally upon the nations of the world in that time. But none of this vast richness of culture is even mentioned here. Greece is spoken of as a brutal, merciless force. This does not mean that Daniel was blind to cultural beauty (the same kind of charge has been made against the apostle Paul because he seemed to take no notice of the glory that was Athens when he visited there; all he could think of was the fact that they were worshipping idols. Daniel was not blind to culture, but he did recognise - and this is something that we need to recognise - that there are some things that are finally more important in life, and that have more value, than culture. If we apply this to our modern scene and to the clamour for more cultural interests and cultural recognition by some of the decadent aesthetes of our time, we begin to see in a rather different perspective. For if culture manifests and expresses itself in opposition to the things of God and to the people of God we must not be afraid to call it by its proper name and resist it with all our might. We should not forget that the roots of culture are said in the Scriptures to be traceable to the godless Cainite civilisation that gave expression to the pretensions and the proud arrogance of the Tower of Babel and the sins that led to the judgment of the Flood on the world.

55) 8:1-27

We must now look in more detail at the question whether the 'little horn' is the same in this chapter as in ch 7. There is a marked divergence of views on this, not only between conservative scholars and the critics, but also among conservative scholars themselves. If the four empires in ch 7 are the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman, with the 'little horn' of ch 7 arising out of the fourth empire, this would certainly seem to be a different figure than that in this chapter, which emerges from the he-goat, the Greek empire. But then, critical scholarship maintains that the fourth kingdom in ch 7 is Greece, in which case ch 8 would harmonise with it and both 'little horns' would refer to the same figure. But even among those who hold that the fourth empire in ch 7 is Rome, there are some who hold that the two are still the same, maintaining that the Roman Empire had two parts, western and eastern, and that the eastern part was the former Greek empire. It was from this part of the empire, viewed as Rome in ch 7, and here as Greece, that the 'little horn' sprang. Whether or not this suggestion commends itself, it is open to question whether we require to have recourse to this kind of detailed interpretation, for it is clear not only that the 'little horn' in ch 7 has 'anti-Christ' associations but also the 'little horn' of ch 8, even if its first reference is to Antiochus Epiphanes. There are important implications involved in this, and we shall continue to look at these in tomorrow's Note.

56) 8:1-27

With regard to the implications of what was said in yesterday's Note, we must note two things: on the one hand, there is the fact of Daniel's mystification recorded in the last verse of this chapter, and his lack of understanding even after the vision had been interpreted to him; on the other hand there is the repeated emphasis on 'the time of the end', in 17, 19, 23, 26. This could be taken to mean that so far as Daniel was concerned the time of Antiochus Epiphanes was the time of the end, and that the great crisis of history would take place then; in which case we must remember the 'telescoping effect' of Old Testament prophetic vision in general, when the final 'last time' and intermediate 'last times' merge together in the view of the seers. This ambiguous 'viewing' of the future is inevitable: and it explains why again and again earnest students of the Scriptures have thought to see 'end-time' figures and events in what later have proved to be only 'crisis times'. For the 'crisis times' are in fact true reflections and adumbrations of the final 'end time', and bear all the characteristics of the end, even if only in embryo. Thus John the Apostle, viewing the Roman empire of his day; thus the Reformers, viewing the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church in their day, thus 20th century believers, thinking of Hitler or Communism - all are false yet true; and the truth in them is greater than the falsity.

57) 8:1-27

What has already been said explains why the words in 10 about the 'little horn', having first and perhaps clearest reference to Antiochus Epiphanes and the events of 168 BC, are also echoed by John in Revelation 12:4, perhaps about the emperor Nero, and certainly about the final antichrist. For it is the demonic pretensions against God, reaching up to heaven that are the characteristics of the anti-Christ principle in the world of men - whether in Antiochus, Nero, the Pope, Hitler, Stalin, or any other, and especially in the final antichrist. Hence the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, hence also what is said of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14, and the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28. This general pointing to the latter days of the final 'end time' is confirmed by Jesus Himself in Matthew 24:15, where He makes the Antiochus prophecy refer to something beyond the days of the Maccabees - to the days associated with the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and further still, to the last days of Antichrist himself (cf also 2 Thessalonians 2:4, where the very language is similar, and the ideas expressed even more so).

We should note in all this the hidden implication throughout (as it was explicit in ch 7) that all is in the control of God. In 24 there is a certain ambiguity in the words 'not by his own power'. This could mean, in terms of Revelation 13:2, that the dragon gives him power, but it could also mean that it is power permitted by God and given by Him, in terms of Revelation 17:12-17. Both of course are true and the deeper truth is that God controls it all and that He gives the power, so long as it is in His will and purpose to do so.

58) 8:1-27

The fate of the 'little horn' is described in 25 as being 'broken without hand', that is without human hand, but by the unseen hand of God. We may compare these words with 2:45, 'the stone cut without hands' and with 5:5, 24, the hand of judgment writing on the wall. These references are to the coming of the kingdom of God, to which we have already been pointed in ch 7. A number of striking and suggestive ideas arise here worthy of consideration: 8:16 may be compared with Luke 1:19, 26 - the only two occasions in which the angel Gabriel is mentioned in Scripture. The reference to the horns in these chapters may be compared with Luke 1:69, which speaks of 'a horn of salvation', referring to Christ. This is God's answer to the 'little horn' in Daniel. And we may stand the apostle John's words in Revelation 5:5, 6, with their reference to 'the lion of the tribe of Judah' and 'a lamb as it had been slain' alongside the symbolism of the ram, the he-goat and the indescribable monsters. The comparisons are very striking and suggestive, and immensely comforting, as we see God's answer to them. And what of the wise men from the east in Matthew 2 - astrologers by habit and profession - whence their knowledge of prophecy? Well, Daniel was made the chief of the astrologers and wise men in Babylon. It would be strange if none of his school learned from him, would it not? None understood it then (27), but some did, in the fulness of the time!

59) 8:1-27

One final word on this chapter. We are told in 27 that Daniel fainted and was sick with the intensity of the vision, then that he 'rose up and did the king's business'. It is well that this word is recorded for us. Prophecy can exercise a fascination on men, and many Christians have been completely beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ by their preoccupation with prophetic teaching. It has, for them, become a speculative exercise instead of what it was always meant to be, a moral challenge to be up and about the king's business. It is significant that at the end of our Lord's teaching on this subject in Mark 13:33-35 we have precisely this moral challenge to be up and doing; in that passage in Mark the words 'To every man his work' could never be emphasised overmuch. We too are committed to the King's business and, visions of the end notwithstanding, there are moral duties to be fulfilled in the interests of the kingdom and we must never allow ourselves to be sidetracked by prophetic teaching - or by anything else - and be drawn away from weightier matters. Let us be content therefore to take from this chapter the vision of the Throne, and make this our hope and confidence and be diligent in the work committed to us.

60) 9:1-27

We have seen in our study in the last two chapters (7, 8) that they related to Belshazzar, and served to explain the judgment of the 'handwriting on the wall'. In the same way, the reference to Darius in 9:1 takes us back to chapter 6 and the story of the lions' den, underlining this, and explaining the confidence with which Daniel bore his faithful testimony. The fact is, if a man gets a perspective on the divine purposes, as Daniel got here, nothing is going to move him, not even the hazards of a den of lions. God is able!

In this chapter, however, we are out of the apocalyptic and into historical narrative once again. We see Daniel searching the Scriptures and engaging in earnest and agonising intercession. It may well be that we should see a link between what is said in the opening verses of this chapter with the final verses of the previous one. There, as we saw, he had been the recipient of perplexing and baffling visions, and we saw him astonished, perplexed and bewildered, in spite of the revelation and interpretation that the angel Gabriel had given him. We may be meant to see that it was this perplexity that drove him to his knees, and to earnest searching of the Scriptures. He is here reading the words of the prophet Jeremiah, seeking to interpret the events of his time, and the exile that he and his people were suffering in the light of the Word of God and the divine purposes. This is the context and background against which the chapter requires to be interpreted, and this has important implications for us as we shall see in tomorrow's Note.

61) 9:1-27

For all who know anything about prophecy and prophetic interpretation, it is perhaps natural and inevitable to be particularly preoccupied with the interpretation of the 'seventy weeks' mentioned in 24-27, and the events associated with them. These verses have been the subject of the most varied and often improbable interpretation, as we shall see when we come to them. But it has to be pointed out very firmly that the lessons of the chapter do not all lie in these final verses; and it is safe to say that, perhaps unwittingly, many fall into the temptation, warned against by our Lord in Mark 13, of making speculative interest a greater concern than - not to say a substitute for - the moral challenge contained in the chapter as a whole. And it is salutary for us to remember that, although the New Testament makes many references to the prophecy of Daniel, borrowing its imagery, ideas and even numbers, there is no emphasis on, or even mention of, the 'seventy weeks' of Daniel at all, either in the apocalyptic passages or elsewhere. In view of the astonishing preoccupation in the minds of so many Christians with these 'weeks', this to say the least is surprising, and should make us pause for reflection. It is, after all, so easy to get things out of perspective in our thinking. How careful, then, and how cautious we ought to be about making rash pronouncements about the prophetic 'timetable', as if the particular views we hold were beyond the possibility of contradiction!

62) 9:1-27

Daniel has been studying the prophecy of Jeremiah (cf Jeremiah 25:10, 11; 29:10-13) and the divine promise that when the seventy years of captivity were accomplished, he would be enquired after, and sought and found by those seeking Him with all their hearts. It was this promise and prospect that drove him to prayer. The seventy year period of exile would seem to require to be taken as a symbolic figure (cf Zechariah 1:12; 2 Chronicles 36:21) since historically, none of the ways of reckoning the years of exile come exactly to seventy years (historically the exile began in 587/6 BC and the return from Babylon was in 538 BC). As one commentator points out, it is possible to be so preoccupied with numbers as to miss the essential truth which these numbers declare. We need to think beyond the numerical to the theological and ethical realm. Daniel knew that for his people the present was rooted in the past, and that the future would grow out of the past through the present; and the more he meditated on these things the more he realised that the affairs of his people were reaching a turning point. But it was not so much a turning point relating to a particular date in history, but about something much more important, namely the spiritual state of his people. Hence the extraordinary moving prayer that occupies most of this chapter, a prayer which God was wonderfully to answer, giving Daniel an assurance about the future without, as one commentator puts it, allowing him to become preoccupied with calendar matters. There can be little doubt that the cryptic message about the 'seventy weeks' must have presented as much ambiguity and perplexity to Daniel as to ourselves today. The commentator already quoted says, 'As if to encourage us all to get our priorities right and always to centre our prayers on the important issue, the cry for assurance is answered freely, with glorious certainty and fresh insight'. That this does not satisfy some good folk, in their obsession with the minutiae of interpretation, is a reflection not so much on the integrity of the divine revelation as on their own distorted and obsessional determination. Is there not a place for, and should we not be content sometimes with, not knowing all the answers all the time?

63) 9:1-27

Here then is a man driven by the desire to understand the meaning of the tragic history of his people, and in searching the Scriptures for an answer, he learns some very startling things. He sees - and this is something new in the prophecy thus far - that as well as the dark powers being responsible for the pressures and afflictions upon the people of God there is another reason - the sins of the people of God themselves. This is what he learns from the Scriptures. One readily thinks of a passage such as Leviticus 26:14ff, which is explicit in its warning about what befalls a disobedient and rebellions people. Daniel learned the meaning of the captivity as lying in the persistent sin of the people, and this leads to confession (cf Leviticus 26:40ff). Daniel's prayer expresses sentiments that are very reminiscent of King Josiah's reaction to the recovery of the book of the Law in the Temple, and we may say that this is always the effect of the Word in men's lives when it is studied in a serious way. Daniel poured out his heart before God, speaking to Him (4-10) of His faithfulness and mercy, and deploring the transgressions of the people from the highest in the land to the lowest, and recognising in these transgressions (11-14) the fulfilment of the 'curse and the oath' written in the law of Moses in Leviticus 26. He appeals to God by his past mercies and deliverances (15-19) to turn away His wrath and to pity the reproach of His people. Until this was learned, no further movement was possible in the divine purposes with His people. And here is Daniel the representative of the faithful remnant, confessing the sin of his people and beseeching the blessing of God for them.

64) 9:1-27

We may learn from Daniel's intercession that this is the function of the remnant of the faithful in any age. A whole nation will never cry to God for mercy; this is the task that the faithful in the land must take upon itself. God generally works with and through minorities, and when He finds a minority who in their own heart takes and feels the sin of the whole nation, then there is the prospect of a way out and of blessing. We need not doubt that lying behind the earnest intensity of Daniel's prayer was the very real dread that it might perhaps already be too late, with all the questions and doubts that this inevitably would raise in his heart: 'Have we as a people forfeited by our sin the privilege of playing a part in the divine purposes?' At was in answer to such questionings that the angel Gabriel was sent to him with an answer of peace. This is surely one central and fundamental lesson this chapter has to teach us and it would be a thousand pities if through undue preoccupation with the 'seventy weeks' prophecy at its end we missed such a lesson. Let us seek to learn it, and let us assume the stewardship of prayer committed to us as a faithful remnant in the darkening scene of the last decade of our twentieth century!

65) 9:1-27

An issue of some importance must now occupy our minds. Jeremiah's prophecy of the restoration is in Daniel's mind in the opening verses of the chapter, and we may also think of other prophecies of the restoration particularly Isaiah's chapters (40-66). The full flowering of these promises indicated that when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, it would be the consummation of all things, so to speak, and the bringing in of the kingdom. This is what the people of God were led to expect. But we know in fact that it did not happen that way, when the exiles returned to Jerusalem. It was a difficult time for them, not a millennium. This does not mean that the prophecies were proved false; but it does mean that they had another, more far-flung, interpretation and this is the point of the 'seventy-weeks' prophecy at the end of the chapter. It is an interpretation - and one may say a re-interpretation - of Jeremiah's seventy years prophecy, to make them seventy weeks of years. And we do not understand these seventy weeks aright until we recognise that it was in relation to the prophecy that Jeremiah made, and that Daniel was meditating upon in prayer, that the angel Gabriel came to him and said in effect, 'Daniel, you have not quite got it right. In one sense you are right (for the time appointed did come and the exiles did return), but I have come to reveal to you a deeper meaning in that prophecy'. And Daniel's thoughts are projected into the future, to the time of the coming of Christ, indeed both to His coming at Bethlehem and His coming in glory. In this connection we may refer to Isaiah 40, for an example of the near and the far inherent in Old Testament prophecies, with the partial fulfilment of the prophet's wonderful words at the end of the captivity in Babylon and the further and real fulfilment in the Advent of Christ.

66) 9:1-27

At will be noticed that the prophecy in 24-27 is in two parts with, first of all, a general statement in 24, followed by a particularised amplification in 25-27. The interpretations of Gabriel's words have been legion. Even in the early Church there were variations; Jerome instances nine different ones as a sample of the possibilities. The fact, however, that there has been such a bewildering variety in interpretation does not mean that we cannot get any clear message from these verses. Indeed, there are some very wonderful truths that may be grasped and rejoiced in, not least this: There is a clear indication given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel about Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years' captivity, and it is this: Daniel was thinking of the end of Israel's captivity in Babylon naturally and inevitably, and very understandably. But in 24 it becomes clear that he is having his eyes and his vision lifted up to the further horizons, to a greater deliverance, of which the deliverance from Babylon, glorious as it was, was only a faint shadow. And this is where we see how wonderfully the Old Testament prophecies 'fit in' to the sovereign, divine purposes of redemption for the world - 'to finish (the) transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy'. What an utterance! This is the gospel of the grace of God and the heart of all the divine revelation, that wonderful redemption, God's remedy for sin. And Daniel is invited, as it were, to see his life slotted into that redeeming purpose, and to realise that it was in this that he had been given a part to play. And if Daniel saw this, it is not surprising that he was able to endure the trial of the lions' den. For to see oneself caught up in such a divine enterprise does something to a man, it imparts a dignity and a stature that makes a man invincible.

67) 9:1-27

What was said at the end of yesterday's Note is surely a message for us today. When one thinks of the aimlessness and lack of direction in so many lives, and the futility and meaninglessness that bring such bleakness and despair, and then one thinks of what happens when the hand of God touches such a life, saving it into purpose and direction - this is salvation indeed, worthy of the name! We may recall the words spoken to Saul of Tarsus by our Lord, '...I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister...to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins...'. Ah, to see oneself caught up in this - what dignity, what thrill of joy and purpose, to have a part to play in the outworking of this glorious purpose!

Another lesson is that in 24 there seems just as clearly a twofold reference, both to the first coming of Christ and to the second, at the consummation of history. This is in line with a great deal of Old Testament prophecy, particularly the messianic passages. And we must certainly allow that both comings indicated in these verses for the bringing in of everlasting righteousness are something that belongs properly to the time of the consummation of history, when Jesus takes His power and reigns. But we must allow that there was also given to Daniel a word about his more immediate situation, and that in some respect and measure what is said in 25 had a more immediate fulfilment in the return from Babylon under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah - as the words 'to restore and to build Jerusalem' surely indicate. The pattern therefore that emerges is a threefold one - the return to Jerusalem from Babylon under Zerubbabel in 538 BC; the Incarnation and Atonement of Christ; and finally the consummation at the Second Coming of the Saviour - and all gloriously and significantly intertwined and inter-connected, with the return from Babylon foreshadowing and illustrating the others.

68) 9:1-27

The differences of interpretation of the words in 25b-27 revolve round the matter of identifying the date of the 'going forth of the commandment', and the identification of the various characters that are mentioned in the prophecy. It is not, for example, as clear as the AV might suggest that the Messiah the Prince refers to Christ, because in the original, it is simply 'an anointed one', not 'the anointed one'. In Isaiah, Cyrus of Persia is called 'the anointed one' (the 'Messiah'), and some scholars believe that the reference in 25 is to him, not to Jesus. Nor must we dismiss this as ridiculous: Isaiah did not think it ridiculous to speak of Cyrus in this way. Others think that it refers to Joshua, the son of Josedech, of whom we read in Zechariah 3. The arguments of the scholars are very cogent for this supposition. Others say that this personage was one of the high priests in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, murdered by that evil man. Others think the reference is to Christ. The other figure, the 'prince who shall come' (26) has been variously identified as being Antiochus, or the anti-Christ, or our Lord. Obviously proper identification in these matters is important. If we take the trouble to read the commentaries, we will find that the arguments adduced for each suggestion are not only credible, but sometimes very persuasive. All this should be enough to show us what a bewildering variety of interpretation has always surrounded this passage. At the same time, however, it is possible to sum up the interpretation along three main lines, the traditional, orthodox view; the modern view of critical scholarship; and the millenarian, dispensational view. We shall look at these in turn in the Notes that follow.

69) 9:1-27

The traditional, orthodox view is that the reference is to Christ and His advent as Redeemer. This view has been held by the main stream of biblical teaching down through the early Church, through the Reformers, to the present day. In this interpretation, the count is from the date of the issuing of the command to rebuild Jerusalem given by Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 454 BC (this is an approximate figure), and the period of time stretches, with correct arithmetic, for four hundred and eighty-three years (seven times sixty-nine years) to AD 29, which we may take as the approximate date of our Lord's life and ministry and crucifixion; and then, in the seventieth week the crucifixion itself and the ceasing of Temple worship because Christ abolished the sacrifices. On this interpretation, v 27, 'He shall confirm the covenant with many', is referring to Christ, not to any dark and sinister figure, whether Antiochus or Antichrist; and this is not nearly so controversial as might be thought, because an examination of v 26 and v 27 makes it plain that, grammatically at least, 'he' in 27 must refer back to 'Messiah' and not to the 'prince that shall come' in 26. The subject in 27 is not 'the prince'; it is the people of the prince that are being discussed in 26 and 'he' in 27 must refer back to 'Messiah'. It is he who 'shall confirm the covenant with many for one week'. (In this connection it is suggestive to notice the reference in Leviticus 26:42 about the Lord confirming the covenant with His people). One objection to this interpretation is that the prince that shall come is referred to as Titus, the Roman emperor, and what he did in the sack of Jerusalem which took place in AD 70, and could hardly be said to be within the seventieth week, the seven year period, associated with the death of Christ.

70) 9:1-27

The interpretation made by modern critical scholars is that it is the time of Antiochus Epiphanes that is referred to. According to this view, the seventy sevens - which, in years, are four hundred and ninety years - begin with the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC when, in fact, God promised that there would be a restoration. That is to say, the issuing of the commandment is by God, not by a heathen emperor. As you will notice in 26 there are seven weeks, then three score and two weeks (making sixty-nine weeks) and then the seventieth week. The first seven, that is forty-nine years - from 587 BC to 539 BC (539 BC was the time when Cyrus released the people of God and they returned to the Promised Land); the second section -sixty-two weeks - from that date, 539 BC to 170 BC, the time of Antiochus Epiphanes; and the final seven years from 170 BC to 164 BC being the reign of terror when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple and made the sacrifice and the oblation to cease. On this view Messiah is Onias III, who was murdered by Antiochus, and 'the prince who shall come' is Antiochus, and the events related to 26b, 27, those concerning Antiochus' desecration of the Temple. This interpretation has the advantage of fitting into the historical pattern as none of the other interpretations appear to do. But it has one very real objection, which is that the sixty-two weeks (that is to say, four hundred and thirty-four years) which are placed between the return of the exiles in 539 and the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, do not fit the interpretation. The period 539 BC to 170 BC is only three hundred and sixty-nine years. The explanation given to this discrepancy is that Daniel had got his figures mixed up. But this is hardly an adequate explanation; can we really suppose that the angel Gabriel was so deficient in arithmetic that he could not count properly?

71) 9:1-27

The third interpretation of the 'seventy week' prophecy is the millenarian. According to this view, the promises made in 24 were not, however, fulfilled in Christ's first coming, therefore the seventieth week lies still in the future, and is regarded as due to be fulfilled after the return of Christ for His Church. The prince of 26 is Anti-christ, who will make a covenant and break it halfway through this seventieth week (27), i.e. after three and a half years, and this will begin the great tribulation for the rest of that period, after which Christ will return with His saints. The fatal objection to this view lies in the completely unwarranted suggestion that such a gap of centuries could be said to exist between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth week; there is nothing to suggest any such gap or any such interval. In any case, when Christ returns again that is the end of the story - how could there be anything after the end?

It seems, then, that every view has considerable problems associated with it, and it is hard to see how we can legitimately, in our present state of knowledge, say much more than general things by way of interpretation of this difficult passage. If, down the centuries, interpretations have been legion, why should we suppose that it would suddenly be simple for us?

72) 9:1-27

In view of all that has been said, it may well be that we are meant to take these figures symbolically rather than literally - seven being a symbolic figure in Scripture. We have already suggested that the 'seventy weeks' of Jeremiah's prophecy may be meant to be taken as a symbolic and even mystical figure, representing the fact that God will fulfil His wrath to the full against His people. If this is admitted, the way lies open to interpret the 'seventy sevens' as a round figure also, representing the fulfilment of God's purposes in His people. This may be why there seems to be several fulfilments of the prophecy, foreshadowing not only Antiochus' desecration of the Temple in 170 BC but also Titus' sacking of Jerusalem in 70 AD and beyond both these - the final end coming. Is the point, then, simply to stress that God's promises are always fulfilled, and that no dark powers in the world and no sin in His people will prevent the fulfilment of His purposes. What God has promised, He will surely fulfil and perform. 'Be sure of it, Daniel,' says Gabriel, 'this is the message of the books; soon or late, God will have His way, and nothing shall fail of all His faithful word. Not in the immediate future, Daniel; not in seventy years, but in seventy times seven; not in your own time, Daniel, but in centuries to come; but be sure of this, you have played your part, you have been caught up in the divine purposes. Stand firm as you have been standing, Daniel, and all will be well.'

73) 10:1-21

This is a wonderful chapter, full of deep and mysterious things, yet gleaming with light, and teaching us many lessons about the disciplines and rewards of prevailing prayer. The chapter, in fact, stands as an introduction to the next two chapters, and 10:1-21:13 form one whole, giving a vision which he unfolded at considerable length and in great detail. There is much to say about it by way of introduction, so as to give a true understanding of what lies behind it. Here is the prophet Daniel mourning and fasting for three full weeks. And this, in itself, when one begins to understand the historical setting of the chapter, raises important questions in our minds, and we must first of all look at its message in this light. The historical setting, we are told, in 1, is 'the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia'. If we look back to Ezra 1:1-3, we see what happened in the first year of Cyrus (so also 2 Chronicles 36:22ff). Cyrus' proclamation was to the effect that the captives in Babylon should be set free, and allowed to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of their God there. This links with the words in 9:25, 'the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem...'. This took place in 539/538 BC. The exiles, then, have returned to Zion (cf Isaiah 44:24-28; 45:1-3; 48:20, 21; 49:13-23; 52:1-8; 52:9-12). And this is now the third year of Cyrus, 537 BC. But what is Daniel doing in Babylon? Why has he not returned to Zion? And why is he mourning and fasting, instead of rejoicing, in the spirit of Isaiah 40-49? One can only assume that the Lord had kept him there, so that he might remain a power behind the throne on behalf of his people, to exercise a continuing influence for good (perhaps this may be taken as one of the meanings of Isaiah's words in 52:12, 'The God of Israel will be your reward').

74) 10:1-21

The question still requires to be asked, however: why was Daniel mourning and fasting, instead of singing psalms and praising God for His great deliverance of His people from captivity? Two things may be said about this: for one thing, it is clear, from the book of Ezra, that only a comparatively small number of captives had availed themselves of the privilege of returning to Zion - 42,360, as Ezra 2:64 indicates (one whole book of the Old Testament - Esther - is devoted to the ongoing story of the many who opted to stay in the land of their captivity, having acclimatized to Babylon and the lifestyle there). For another thing and this is the most important consideration of all - the news from Jerusalem was not good. The early enthusiasm and joy of the returned exiles had been dampened by strong and determined opposition (see Ezra 4), and representations were made by that opposition to Cyrus, by letter, and ultimately - for the opposition continued all the days of Cyrus - the work of rebuilding was stilled, for a considerable number of years. It was this - with the attendant spirit of discouragement that it brought, and near despair that so grieved and troubled Daniel. This, then, was what 9:25 had predicted - the rebuilding would be 'in troublous times'. Little wonder that Daniel should have been mourning and fasting!

75) 10:1-21

One of the all-important lessons in Ezra 5, which follows this period of discouragement among the returned exiles, is that God raised up Haggai and Zechariah the prophets to challenge the returned exiles, and their ministry galvanised them to a new activity and to rebuilding. And, on the larger, international level, that ministry had repercussions in the change of heart shown by the emperor, as he negated the charges made by the enemies of the returned exiles, and insisted that the work of rebuilding be allowed to continue unhindered. But that, in fact, was some years later. And we can surely see the significance of Daniel's intercession here, which paved the way for the prophets to be raised to re-energise the discouraged people to new endeavour. It is true that Haggai and Zechariah were God's answer to the discouraging situation, but behind that answer was the prayer and intercession of Daniel. And in a wonderfully graphic and significant way we see 'behind the scenes', as it were, to the hidden influences at work, bringing about immense and far-reaching changes on the world scene, and God's sovereign purposes being fulfilled for His ongoing work of accomplishing the redemption of the world. This is the setting and the significance of Daniel's intercession and this is one great lesson of the chapter. God hears prayer! And prayer changes things - and people!

76) 10:1-21

Another lesson of the chapter is this: we saw in 9:24, in relation to the glorious statement about the work of the gospel - 'to finish intercession, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness' - how Daniel was being invited, as it were, to see his life and ministry and testimony as slotted into the redeeming purposes of God and to realise that it was in this that he had been given a part to play. And here, in this chapter, he is shown something of the implications of that 'being caught up', in the travail of intercession, and the costliness of it, and all it involved, in terms of spiritual warfare in the heavenly places - a warfare which 'rubs off' on those who are involved in the warfare on earth. This is the remarkable and impressive thing about this chapter, as it portrays the invisible conflict between the good and evil angels in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Is this how we see our involvement in the divine purposes? Do we accept the implications of that involvement, in terms of the acceptance of the responsibility of the stewardship of prayer and intercession? For this is - inevitably - what it involves!

77) 10:1-21

In relation to what was said at the end of the previous Note, it should not be surprising that at the outset of the chapter we are told that 'the word was true, and it was a great conflict' (RSV). The NIV has 'its message was true, and it concerned a great war'. If we follow the RSV, the meaning would be that it was to be a great conflict for Daniel; if the NIV, it would mean that it relates to a long warfare for the people of God in the future. Perhaps both ideas are present; for what was to be told him was certainly to be a long time of conflict for the people of God (both in the short term, in Jerusalem, and in the longer term, in the future history of the people of God); and this would surely be the cause of the conflict for Daniel, in that he would share in the travail and agony of his people.

The substance of the chapter may be said to deal with two distinct matters - one, the assurance given to Daniel about his prayer being answered, and the other, the reason for the delay in that answer coming (i.e. the resistance made by 'the prince of the kingdom of Persia') being itself made the basis of a revelation to him of more far-reaching issues, namely the things that would befall his people in the latter days (14). We shall look in turn at these two aspects of the chapter's teaching in the Notes that follow.

78) 10:1-21

One lesson that stands out very prominently in both the immediate and also the further-reaching issues is the fact of angels and angelic activity. This is something that is all too seldom spoken of or heard about in our time. It is also something that tends to be regarded as a legendary accretion not to be taken spuriously. But this kind of attitude and criticism simply bears witness to the loss of the sense of the supernatural in the mind of the Church, and in the understanding of the gospel by the Church. And it is perhaps significant that with this loss has come a loss of real and deep spirituality in the Church's life. It is an incontrovertible fact that angelic ministrations in the scriptural record are generally associated with men who have walked with God and who are 'far ben' in the spiritual life. A number of things do seem to go together in this realm: men who are 'far ben' with God, men mourning and fasting, men agonising in prayer, men visited by the angels of God; and when there is a lack of the first, there is usually a lack of the others. This may be the very simple reason why the angels of God are discounted today. We do not live near enough to God to be visited by His angels. That is the whole point. Daniel was a man 'greatly beloved', he walked with God; he was 'far ben' with Him, and in this chapter (as we saw also in the previous one) we see him wrestling and agonising before the living God in prayer. It is to such a spirit that the angels of God come.

79) 10:1-21

The Bible in fact has a definite doctrine of angels, both good and bad. The good angels are ministering angels, sent forth to minister to them who are heirs of salvation; and they are said to be guardians of individuals and of nations alike. Michael, the archangel, is said here to be the tutelary angel of the people of Israel (21). In the same way, evil or fallen angels are said to be in control of evil men and evil powers on earth. This is the real pattern of the situation that must be recognised, and needs to be recognised, if we are to understand in any real way, at depth, the issues in this chapter and in the deeper reaches of the spiritual life.

Another point that is just as important and significant - and just as much neglected or disregarded as myth or legend - is the reality of spiritual warfare in the heavenly places. Something of the mystery of Daniel's conflict lies in the fact that he was fighting with principalities and powers and was caught up into the unseen conflict being waged by spirit beings in the heavenly places. This is how the Scriptures invite us to look at world situations; and discerning minds are probably less inclined to be sceptical today about the suggestion that there are dark powers abroad in the world than our forefathers might have been seventy years ago, when the world to them seemed to be getting better and better and everything in the garden was lovely. For we have lived through a time in which demonic forces have gripped this broken world of ours, and the simplest and most comprehensive explanation of the sheer devilishness of modern civilisation is surely that it has become demonised by dark powers which former generations relegated to the limbo of legend and myth, and which have come home to roost in our time.

80) 10:1-21

With what has been said as a background, we may now look at what the chapter teaches us about prayer. And the main lesson is this, that when answer to prayer is delayed, there may very well be reasons for this that lie in the unseen, spiritual realm of heavenly warfare; and we are meant to take heart from this and be encouraged to go on praying until the victory comes and God's mighty answer prevails. One recognises, of course, that there are other possible reasons for prayer not being answered. The Psalmist said, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me'. Sometimes this is why our prayers are not answered; if a man is not right with God, he need not expect his prayers to be answered. The only prayer that God will hear from him in that state is, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner'. That is the prayer by which a man gets right with God. Sometimes people try prayer as a kind of heavenly insurance policy, and they should not be really surprised when it does not work. But, given a heart that is right with God and in fellowship with God, then prayer is a reality. But there can be delays in answer to prayer; Daniel prayed for three full weeks before the answer came. But he was assured by the angel that from the outset his prayer had been heard and the answer dispatched from the throne of God (12). What a rebuke to our lack of faith! How easily we become discouraged, and how frequently we tend to give up in sheer discouragement, not realising that God is a prayer-hearing God Whose ear is ever open to our cry. This should teach us to expect God to answer prayer. He loves to be trusted.

81) 10:1-21

Daniel did not however have this assurance to begin with, and so he wrestled on, battling and agonising for three full weeks till the assurance came. But, paradoxically, the fact that we do have this assurance written for us in the word of God does not mean that we can sit back in complacency; on the contrary, it involves us also in the sharp discipline and battle of prayer, with the wrestling and agony that it involves, for although we fight and battle from victory yet that battle is never a fiction but real, and we must continue in it until the answer comes and the victory is ours in experience. Indeed, part of the discipline and agony of prayer is precisely that in the waiting time our faith is often tested to its very limits and we begin to doubt whether God is hearing our prayers at all. It is not surprising that Daniel should have been conscious of a great struggle and conflict in his soul as he prayed; the consciousness of resistance and of difficulty in battle is enough to make any man discouraged! This is a large part of the discipline, and it is the crucible in which victories are forged. But the battles and the agonies are surely infinitely worthwhile if, in the end, they bring down the mighty angels of God to move among men. God hears and answers prayer, and although the battle may seem long we may take it as read that He has heard our cries from the beginning and that the delays belong to that heavenly warfare in which we are called to engage and to take our part. When we do take our part we shall certainly suffer: engaging in heavenly warfare always costs and hurts. But this is the calling of the Christian.

82) 10:1-21

There are dangers, of course, inherent in the idea of our being able to move the hand of God by our prayers, and this danger is finely expressed by the Swiss preacher and scholar Walter Luthi. He says: 'There is such a glory about this insight into the affairs of the world beyond that it can harm the human heart. There is an imminent danger here, danger of delusion and of presumption. The man who prays is shown what amazing power lies in folded hands and bended knees, and may begin to grow self-important, and to look in on himself instead of away from himself to the messengers of God, and away beyond the messengers of God, to one Lord of all the legions of angels. But watch! God knows of this danger. And so He never wearies of showing us throughout this whole chapter that it is not to Daniel, the pious man of prayer, that the power, the possession and the accomplishment belong. There is a good reason for this chapter being one of the most personal in the Book of Daniel. There is a good reason why we should get the personal side-light on the prophet precisely in this place. Take a look at the behaviour of this man here - at this very point, where what one might call his triumph as a man of God reaches the stars! In the beginning of the chapter we read that he is 'mourning three full weeks'. Then before our eyes he sinks 'into a deep sleep with my face toward the ground'. But when the hand from above touches him, he is able to rise up again, and is at least able to cower on the ground on his hands and knees. But in the course of his conversation with the angel, he is so feeble that he loses even the power of speech. It is as if his breath is slowly giving out: 'For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? For as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me'.'

83) 10:1-21

A word must be said now about the far-reaching issues. The angel did say after all, that he had come 'to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days.' As has already been indicated, the vision that the angel gives is contained in ch 11 and part of ch 12; but we can learn something about it in this chapter. What we see is a principle that is being unfolded, and that principle can be put with the utmost simplicity: 'Daniel,' says the angel, 'this wrestling and this battling that you have experienced in these three weeks are a parable of what awaits your whole people in the coming days: affliction and testing, discipline and battle awaits you in the future as the people of God.' This is the main lesson of the whole Book of Daniel: that, in the world, the people of God will have tribulation. As soon as a man turns to Christ and casts in his lot with the people of God, he guarantees for himself a life of discipline, conflict and suffering. This is the pattern for the people of God right down the stream of time. What awaits the faithful in any age is spiritual conflict, wrestlings and battlings with unseen powers, waiting upon God, mournings and fastings, movings of the hand of God, abundance of revelations, thorns in the flesh, out of weakness being made strong.

84) 10:1-21

The last verses in the famous eleventh chapter of Hebrews make this only too clear, when they speak of the faithful having 'trial of cruel mocking and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments...'. This is the force of what the angel says to the prophet: 'Daniel, there is a conflict with the prince of the power of Persia, and when that battle is done another will come, and another'. We have already seen this in the earlier visions: Babylon is succeeded by Medo-Persia, Medo-Persia is succeeded by Greece, Greece by Rome, Rome by another power, right down to the end of time, and at the last there will come the great personification of all dark powers in the Antichrist himself. It could be said therefore that this chapter gives the most accurate description that we could have, outside the New Testament, of the realities involved in the Christian life. Here is Daniel wrestling and battling, discouraged it may be, afflicted, mourning for three full weeks, with perhaps doubts and misgivings. But the mighty angels of God come down and there is a breakthrough, and God reveals His love with power and makes our hearts rejoice. That is the Christian life. Thank God for the disciplines and thank God for the rewards, the triumphs and the victories of grace. It is to such a life that Christ invites men.

85) 11:1-45

At the beginning of our study of chapter 10 we said that it was the prologue to the final vision of the Book of Daniel, and that it was introductory to the message of chapter 11 and part of chapter 12. It also gives us something in the way of a key to what follows in chs 11 and 12, in that it unfolds the deep underlying principles that are active in all history, and indeed dictate its course. What we suggested then, in speaking of the introductory nature of ch 10 was that what follows in the remainder of the book does, in fact, unfold for us the pattern of the future for the people of God, giving a graphic picture of the history of the ancient times, from the Persian Empire down to Antiochus Epiphanes. But, as we have already seen in the earlier chapters (e.g. 8:1ff) this prophetic picture yields further and deeper meaning, and points to the end-time, as the angel in 10:14 says, in the words, '...what shall befall thy people in the latter days; for yet the vision is for many days'. This further, onward look is also implied in 10:20, in the announcement that the Prince of Grecia will come after the prince of Persia. The fact is, what Daniel's experience proved to be, was in effect a pattern for all that the people of God in any and every age will experience, when immersed in the conflict of the ages. In other words, right down the stream of time, what awaits the faithful people of God is spiritual conflict, wrestling and battling with unseen powers, waiting upon God, mournings and fastings, movings of the hand of God, abundance of revelations, thorns in the flesh, out of weakness being made strong (cf 10:18).

86) 11:1-45

Having revealed the principle, in ch10, drawing back the curtains to let us see the unseen principalities and powers, the angel now shows the unfolding and outworking of the principles in the events of history, from Daniel's time down to the Maccabees, and Antiochus Epiphanes and beyond. This general line of interpretation is important for several reasons, as over against an over-preoccupation with prophetic minutiae. For, in fact, widely different interpretations of the angel's message do exist, and if we were not able to see the general principles at work here as pointing to the timeless and perennially valid message, we might despair of ever making much of what is here written. But with an adequate grasp of these general principles, we can gather a very great deal from this chapter. First of all, however, something needs to be said about the differing interpretations. On the one hand, the moderns and the critics hold that what we have here is not prophecy at all, but history, and that it is history written not by Daniel but by a much later writer, about 168 BC. To believe and accept this view, however, we would have to assume that such a writer committed a deliberate deception, pretending that he was Daniel and that he was prophesying when in fact he was merely writing history, and passing it off as prophecy. The moral questions that are involved in such a practice present much too grave and difficult an issue for us to be happy with such a view. On the other hand - this is the second line of interpretation - if we take the contents of the chapter at their face value, as prophecies, we do recognise that they seem to portray with remarkable accuracy and detail the history of the times from the Persian empire down to Antiochus. And there are those who are content to take this, for the most part, as the meaning and message of the chapter. It must be maintained that this is surely the first and primary meaning of the words. It is only when we come to what is said in 40 that there seems to be a further outreach into the far future, 'the time of the end', that could be obviously interpreted as futurist, eschatological writing.

87) 11:1-45

We cannot, however, remain satisfied with this second line of interpretation either, even although history itself validates the prophecies as having been fulfilled to the letter in Antiochus Epiphanes - for this good and compelling reason, that our Lord Himself interprets it differently, and refers it to the End-time (cf Matthew 24), and that the Early Church followed His blessed example. And apart altogether from the fact that His interpretation must in the nature of the case be decisive and definitive for us, we must also recognise that the early Church lived much nearer to God than the Church does today, and that they were much more likely to have got to the truth and the heart of the Scriptures than we, with all our impressive scholarship, can possibly do. This reference to the future made by our Lord, therefore, opens up the possibility of futurist interpretations of the prophecy. And there are more possibilities; and even along this line, there are remarkable divergences of view. On the one hand, for example, there are those who maintain that vv 5-20 are a detailed prophecy of the conflicts between Egypt and Syria following the division of Alexander's empire, extending to the reign of Antiochus; and that, from v 34 onwards, the prediction passes on to the end of the time, and to the sinister figure of Antichrist himself, of whom Antiochus Epiphanes was only the type and illustration. Others maintain that the 'interval' lies between vv 4 and 5, not between vv 20 and 34, and that at v 5 the thought passes directly from the days of the Greek empire to the last days, with vv 5-20 giving an account of the political events that will lead directly up to Antichrist, and v 21 right to the end giving the details of his career. These, of course, are completely divergent views, and we will always get into deep water of interpretation, and never come to a satisfactory conclusion one way or the other, so long as we try to state categorically that what Daniel is saying refers specifically to the last days, or indeed say that Jesus said it specifically refers to the last days. This last statement will require some elucidating, which we shall attempt to give in the next Note.

88) 11:1-45

What was meant by the last statement in the previous Note is this: We must take into consideration the fact that this message of the angel to Daniel must have had some relevance for Daniel's own experience and time. We have already seen how the prophecy had a remarkable fulfilment in history, in the period from the Persian Empire down to Antiochus Epiphanes. If, then, as the last given interpretation suggests, these verses really give the details of the career of Antichrist, we are forced to the conclusion that history must repeat itself because they have already been fulfilled once in history, in the career of Anthiochus Epiphanes. But we do not think that this is what we are meant to understand by them; we do not think that history repeats itself in that literal fashion. If what Daniel says to us here was fulfilled in 168 BC and is to be fulfilled again in the future at the end time, as Jesus indicates to us, then I believe we are meant to realise that what we are dealing with here is a constant principle that is at work in every age, expressing itself in different forms, but with ever the same essence. It is the conflict of principalities and powers breaking into history again and again, and coming to its last horrible climax in the end time.

89) 11:1-45

Jesus could not have been unaware of the fulfilment of this prophecy in the time of the Maccabees. It was a glorious part of the more recent history of His people, and He had the books of the Maccabees to show Him that the Maccabees themselves regarded what they passed through as a fulfilment of this word in Daniel. If so, then to say that it was to have another fulfilment in the future commits us to speaking of it in terms of a recurring principle. It is therefore not so much a question of history literally repeating itself, but rather a recurrent principle of conflict between good and evil constantly inserting itself into history. It was true in 168 BC, in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes; it was true in AD 70 when the Roman armies desecrated the altar again and placed the Roman eagle in the Temple of God. It will be true again in the end-time and it is also true in between times also. Indeed, our own modern history of the 20th century abounds in examples. It is hardly surprising that God's people under the oppression of the Communist yoke - in China, in Russia or in Eastern Europe - have tended to believe that they have been living through the last times, for the depth and extent of the persecution and torture that so many have endured has been truly appalling. And the fact that in recent days there has been such an amazing reversal of their situation, with the seeming collapse of Communism as a political force in so many places, does not so much invalidate the thoughts that Christians have had about their passing through the last days as simply to indicate that their sufferings have illustrated the constantly recurring principle that has operated in every age, and indeed will do so until the end.

90) 11:1-45

It is therefore the unfolding of this recurrent principle that makes the Book of Daniel so relevant for today. It is possible, of course, to look at the book from a purely speculative point of view, and go into all the various ramifications of some extraordinary schemes of prophetic teaching with regard to futurist interpretation; or, we can take it as having a vital word to speak to us from God in our day and generation. This is what we must grasp, and this is the real relevance of the chapter before us. We see in it the fulfilment of ancient history from the reigns of Cyrus and Xerxes the Persians, right down to Antiochus Epiphanes. But we can also see that that fulfilment was but one fulfilment of a principle that is constantly breaking into history, as we have seen in our time and will see again and again, till at the last it shall be revealed in all its intensity, malignity and horror.

Having said this, and recognised that what we have before us is the enunciation of principles that constantly operate in history, we may now consider some general lessons that may be drawn from the chapter, and these we shall consider in the Notes which follow.

91) 11:1-45

The first important lesson we may learn from this chapter is that there is a religious basis to history and that there is a religious explanation of history; that is to say, history as we know it is to be understood and interpreted in religious terms and categories. It is the arena for the conflict between good and evil and for the ultimate triumph of God. History is His story in the fullest sense of that term. 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,' said Christ, 'but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' This is in marked contrast to some modern interpretations of history. The noted historian, H.A.L. Fisher, for example, is on record as having said, 'I am unable to find any meaning in history'. Well, leave out this spiritual dimension which we have been discussing, and there is no meaning to history; bring it in, and you have both meaning and purpose, and final vindication.

That history has a fundamentally religious basis is true even when evil seems to be most rampant, and the course of events most seemingly meaningless, and indeed flying in the face of every suggestion that it could possibly be in the control of God. One can think of many different situations in history, in which individuals, groups and even whole peoples have suffered unspeakably, in situations seemingly out of all control, whether human or Divine - the holocaust in Europe during the Second World War, or the terrible sufferings of the Church in China in recent decades, to name but two examples - to see how relevant this issue is. To say, in such situations that history is in the control of God would surely prompt the response 'There is not much sign of it, is there?' But the testimony of Scripture is, as the hymn says, that 'God is on the field when He is most invisible', and that 'He is least seen when all the powers of ill are most abroad'. We will continue this thought in the next Note.

92) 11:1-45

It is impressive to see how little sign there is of God throughout this chapter. It is almost as if He had left the field to the powers of evil altogether. If we had not had the earlier chapter to instruct us, this is the conclusion we might have been tempted to draw and the day may well come when we will be in such a position, when God will seem to be dead, when it will be extremely difficult to believe in the reality of His existence, when our world comes tumbling down about our ears. This is the point at which the exercise of faith becomes such a terrific challenge - to believe, when everything flies in the face of such belief, that God is there, and that He cares, and that He is in control.

The silence of God in this chapter - and this is its second important lesson - corresponds to the silence of God for the three weeks in chapter 10, when Daniel was wrestling in prayer, and the heavens were as brass and nothing seemed to be happening; and we must learn to interpret the long silences in history in the way we interpreted chapter 10, and realise that God is there, working out His purposes in history - in the same way as in personal life He is busy at work fulfilling His perfect will in us, even when He seems to be most silent and far away. One thinks of the sufferings of Job and the silence of God concerning them. What would we think if we did not have the two opening chapters of that marvellous book to explain to us the meaning of that agonising history as the fulfilment of God's sovereign purposes in the patriarch's life?

93) 11:1-45

The New Testament extension and counterpart of this is seen in Romans 8:28ff, in the words 'All things work together for good to them that love God' - whether tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword - and in all these things God's people are more than conquerors. And what is more - and this is the third important lesson of the chapter - God does not leave Himself without a witness in the darkness, as we see from the words in 32, gleaming like a light in the gloom: 'the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits' - or, as one felicitous translation has it '... shall be strong, and get on with it'. And what they 'get on with' is the task of witness. Here is the light in the darkness - the witnessing Church. It is not easy for them; indeed it is costing them their life's blood, but they are the soldiers of the cross, and the sacramental evidence that God is still in control, still on the field, the evidence and assurance that on the darkness of the world He will make the Son of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.

Here, then, is the suffering Church in the midst of the conflicts of the world. This is her calling, to suffer, in bearing witness to the Light, and it is to this that the gospel calls men today. Here is the true understanding of the call of the gospel - not to happiness, not to an easy time; least of all to a refuge and to escape from the world, but a call to blood and toil and tears and sweat for Christ's sake and the gospel's.

94) 11:1-45

Such is the message of this chapter: the possibility of faith in the midst of persecution and anarchy, not only maintaining it, but spreading it. The words that follow 32, 'and they that understand among the people shall instruct many....' (33) are taken by some to refer to instructed believers ('they that are wise') who are able to pass on their faith, while others take them to refer to those who are called to teach the people. They are not mutually exclusive interpretations, for both are true. Is not this a wonderful picture - in the midst of persecution, in the midst of pressure, a teaching Church propagating itself. It has happened many times down history; it has happened in China in our own time, where in face of the most incredible persecution and suffering the Church has multiplied in an amazing way, defying the might of totalitarian communism and bringing countless men and women into the kingdom of God. We should pause a little to reflect just how much these verses must have meant to the suffering people of God in that great land of China, and remember them even now in the new pressures that have come upon them since the massacre of Tiananmen Square.

This, then, is the great clarion call that the chapter makes: faith is possible in the midst of unspeakable pressures and difficulties and persecutions; and advance is possible. The wonderful thing in this chapter is that there is absolutely no thought of defence here; the Church is not cowering in fear and terror; it is not drawing in its lines of defence, and there is no retrenchment here! The Christian Church is going forward, mighty in Christ, instructing even at the cost of life itself, and the blood of the martyrs - as it has down the ages - is proving to be the seed of the Church.

95) 12:1-13

We come in this chapter to the final movement of the last vision of Daniel which, as we have seen, begins in ch 10. We saw how in his remarkable experience in prayer he was given an insight into the unseen realm where battles and conflicts are fought, and shown the principle of all that would come in the future (10:1ff). Then, in 11:1ff, we saw the unfolding and outworking of this principle in the events of history from the time of the Persian empire down to that of Antiochus Epiphanes, and indeed to the end of the age; and we saw how the message that comes through to us is that there is a religious basis to history, which can be fully understood only on that basis. Now, in this final chapter of the book, what strikes one forcibly is this: as at the beginning of the vision (in ch 10) we have the message and assurance of the angel Gabriel, so now at the end of it, we have a word about Michael the Archangel. One clear implication of this, and this is the assurance given us in the Word, is that history, with all its convulsions and all its hazards for the saints, is bounded on all sides by the angels of God. At the beginning and at the end alike there is this heavenly activity. We are never left to fight alone: we are not sent to this warfare on our own charges. As to the lessons of this final chapter, we need to see that there are two definite realities underlined. On the one hand, there is mystery: Daniel himself is hard put to grasp the significance of the revelation, and we should realise in view of this that it becomes us to be humble and submissive in our attempts to interpret the words of the angel. Much is shrouded in mystery, and will be, until the end-time itself. On the other hand, however, there are definite points that we can understand, and we must not be so preoccupied with probing into dark secrets, the meaning of which is not vouchsafed to us, that we miss the force and significance of the things that are revealed, and revealed clearly, to us.

96) 12:1-13

It should be clear that 1-4 really belong to the body of the vision unfolded in chs 10 and 11, and form the climax to it, and that 5ff constitute almost an epilogue to the whole book. These first four verses speak of the end time, the culmination of the whole movement unfolded in the rest of the vision, which merges into the far-flung future, as Christ Himself indicates in Matthew 24. It is impossible not to be impressed with the great similarity in the thought and even the language of that chapter with what we read here in Daniel. It is in relation to this particularly that Daniel asks the angel, in 8, 'What shall be the end of these things?' Our first concern relates to the mysterious series of numbers mentioned in this chapter. The angel speaks in 7 of 'a time, times, and an half'. This is a virtual repetition of the words in 7:25, which we took as a mystical figure of three-and-a-half times or three-and-a-half years and, if we reckon a year in terms of 360 days, this would mean 1260 days, a figure which has already been before us and which is repeated on more than one occasion in the Book of Revelation. Then, in 11, we have another figure, 1290 days, and in v 12 another, 1335 days. What do these figures mean? Well, although many commentators are dogmatic about the meaning of 1260 days, few have anything definite to say about the other two, and can only hazard guesses that they refer to undisclosed prophetic events. And we should probably be content to accept the mystery as Daniel was content to do, in the knowledge that understanding of them will come with understanding of all things at the end. The sorry fate of many confident predictions of the precise date of Christ's coming again, when history has proved them so fatuous and ridiculous should teach us to beware of entering into such religious arithmetic because this assuredly is not the real point. We really must be content to accept that there is mystery here.

97) 12:1-13

If the reference in Daniel's question to the angel was to the more immediate fulfilment of prophecy (and we have seen that there are two fulfilments in view) in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the three-and-a-half years might well be a literal fulfilment of the period between the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus in 167 BC and its re-consecration and re-dedication under Judas Maccabaeus in 164 BC. From that point of view, there is no mystery: here is a literal fulfilment of the three-and-a-half year period, with subsequent events thirty days later and forty-five days later, giving us the 1290 and 1335 days. But, if there is - as we have been led to think - a further and deeper fulfilment of this word at the end time, it is more likely that we should take these periods as symbolic of a short time during which the persecution of Antichrist will be at its height. In this connection, we may recall that Jesus once spoke of these terrible days, indicating that, unless these days were shortened, no one would be saved, but that, for the elect's sake, they would be shortened. The reference to this short period here may be similar.

To say, as we appear to be really obliged to say, that only God knows what it means is not an admission of despair and futility. For God does know, and He has decreed that the time, however long or short, will be just as He says, and this means that it is in His control. And this is the ultimate assurance in the matter. The evil is appointed by Him, and He has set its bounds and its limits. And this is why we can be content, like Daniel, to 'go our way till the end be' (13). For it is in His hands, and will remain there. The lesson, then, is once again on the sovereignty of God.

98) 12:1-13

But if we are left in mystery about these figures, dates and numbers, there are other matters in the chapter that are abundantly clear, and we are going to turn to them now. First of all, we learn from v 1 'That there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time.' The language here makes it clear, surely, that what is referred to is the last final quickening and intensification of evil that is everywhere prophesied to take place in the last days before the coming of Christ. This period of trouble, or tribulation, as it is sometimes called, is simply an intensification of the tribulation that is part and lot of the believer's experience in every age. There is no real evidence on linguistic grounds in the New Testament for supposing that the great tribulation - as prophetic students sometimes call it - is anything special or distinct or different from the tribulation that besets the people of God in every age, except that it will be greatly intensified in the last days. An examination of the scriptural reference to the word 'tribulation' and its cognates, 'affliction', 'burden', 'anguish', 'persecution', 'trouble' (they all translate the same Greek word), obliges one to come to the conclusion that tribulation is simply an integral part of the experience of God's people and that, at the end time, when the devil knows that his time is short, there will be an intensification of it so that it will be harder to stand than it ever has been before. It is to this that Daniel bears witness here. Our Lord Himself associates the abomination of desolation with this time of unparalleled trouble and distress in Matthew 24. This is the last, final convulsion of evil, its death-throes as it were, for following it there will be the coming of the Son of Man in clouds of glory to take His power and reign (Matthew 29:30).

99) 12:1-13

Of this tremendous climactic time it is said in 7 that the power of Antichrist will accomplish the scattering of the power of the holy people, i.e. the Church. What this means is that there will be an overcoming of the godly in the earth, and this will be seemingly complete; but then Christ Himself shall intervene to judge and save. This is what our Lord Himself refers to in Matthew 24:22 when He speaks of the shortening of the days - but for this no flesh would be saved. It is also the subject in Revelation 11-13 in the reference to the destruction of the 'two witnesses' after the 42 months (1260 days), and also here in 7-10, referring to the destruction of the Church as an organised witness to the gospel, with only individual believers left. The Church, as a missionary organisation, and its public and official testimony, shall be silenced. This does not mean, of course, that there will be no witness to Christ - of course there will be, for He will never leave Himself without a witness in the world; it is the corporate witness and testimony of the Church that is in view. And, at that point, when everything is in darkness, when Satan will seem to have conquered, the heavens will open, and the Son of God in His power and glory will come forth, thousands and thousands of saints attending Him, and Antichrist and the powers of darkness and hell will be broken once and for all and forever. This is the glorious picture that is suggested here; and, that having happened, the great and final Assize will be instituted. The coming of the Lord to redress the wrongs of the Antichrist will usher in the judgment day of God, the final Assize and the Great White Throne (1b-3).

100) 12:1-13

It is good that we should be confronted with the certainty of this solemn vision, because it is so little thought of in our day (although it was constantly in the mind of our forefathers) and the whole temper of our age is against it. People live in this world, in the atomic age, as if they will be here forever when we are sitting on the edge of perdition all the time; and it just needs one trigger-happy madman on the one side or the other to plunge the whole world in a sea of fire with nuclear bombs. This is the age in which we have decided that we will live forever - how ironic it is! If there is anything the Scriptures are unanimous about it is the reality of final judgment; both the Old Testament and the New Testament agree: prophets, apostles and Christ Himself all speak with the same voice on this matter. A day will come when there will be a final separation between good and evil, saved and lost, sheep and goats, on the right hand and on the left. Nothing is so clear in the Scriptures as this testimony.

101) 12:1-13

We look now at the component parts of this tremendous teaching. In the first place we are told that there will be a general Resurrection at the end-time. This does not merely mean that there is such a thing as life after death - this is not the point, for we do not need the concept of a general judgment to believe that. It means rather that death itself is vanquished. When a victorious conqueror sweeps through enemy territory, all the enemy's prisoners are set free from the prison camps. The bands of death, we are meant to understand, are to be broken and destroyed, and death will give up its captives and its prey. Furthermore, this will be a time of final sifting and separation. Not all will inherit blessedness and everlasting life, but only some; the others will rise to shame and everlasting contempt. Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life (1) will be saved. This is not an isolated verse but something taught by our Lord Himself in His parables of judgment (and cf Revelation 13:8 and particularly 20:11-15). The Scriptures speak of this book of life in two ways: sometimes of names being entered into it, to signify eternal life, and sometimes of names being blotted out of it, signifying eternal loss. There is no contradiction here; both are true, and are simply different views of the same reality - one emphasising man's response of faith, and the other stressing man's final refusal of God. Both alike are solemn reminders of the cruciality of the challenge of the gospel: the only thing that is of final importance in time or eternity is that our names should be written in the Lamb's book of life.

102) 12:1-13

In the next place, we should notice what it says about those who receive the special reward mentioned in v 3, 'And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.' 'They that are wise' are the teachers already mentioned in 11:33 as those 'that understand among the people', the teachers of the Church raised up by God to spread the faith in time of persecution. Why should they have particular reward? It is significant that in Matthew 24, where Jesus speaks about tribulation and oppression, He tells us that false Christs and false prophets will arise in the world. The point being made here is that it is an inestimable blessing that there should be faithful teachers of the Word in the midst of dark times, and when men to whom this work is committed prove faithful to their stewardship, they shall shine as the stars forever. They will have their reward. 'John did no miracle,' said the Pharisees, 'but all things that John spake of this man were true.' And because this is so, he will shine as the brightness of the firmament.

103) 12:1-13

What is of immediate practical importance for us is that we should note that the contrasts and differences which distinguish and separate believers and unbelievers now will remain and be fixed: 'Many shall be purified...but the wicked shall do wickedly...' (10). When this is compared with Revelation 22:11, 'he that is unjust let him be unjust still...' we see that the association of ideas is very striking, and tells us that even now, men are making their future destiny. The direction in which we are moving, whether Godward or away from Him, will be eternalised at Christ's coming. The old Scottish paraphrase tells us that 'While the lamp holds on to burn, the greatest sinner may return'. But, when the lamp stops burning at the end of time, that fixes every man just where he is. If the return of the King takes place when we are turned away from Christ we shall be fixed and petrified in that position for all eternity. The stopping of a cine-film, turning it into a still picture, is a good illustration of what Daniel's words mean. This is what will happen when time will be no more. One thinks of the story of the rich young ruler, who went away sorrowful from Christ because he had great possessions. What if time had stopped then, for him? He would have been fixed in his attitude of turning away from Christ, and that is how it would have been for him to all eternity. How very solemn.

104) 12:1-13

The last word spoken to Daniel by the angel (13) is also a word to us: 'Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days'. In this connection we may recall our Lord's words, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 25:34). What is in view is this: Daniel is now an old man (some commentators reckon he was nearly ninety), and in the nature of things it could not be long before he died. And now it is said to him, '...thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days' - that is to say, the purpose for which he was created and raised up in the world had been gloriously fulfilled, and his destiny had been achieved; and now he was entering into his lot, his portion in eternity, the place appointed for him from the foundation of the world in the counsels of eternity, and prepared for and fulfilled in his earthly life. This is the one thing that is of final importance, to enter into the destiny for which we were created and, in the end, to stand in our lot as a monument to the grace and mercy of God. Let us ask ourselves whether we will have this said to us? If the Day dawned now, would it, could it, be said of us, have we entered into our real destiny, or are we still without a sense of direction in our lives? That is a good question, indeed, it is the question of questions, for each and all of us. Let us see to it, then, that we shall so live that it has an affirmative answer.

105) 12:1-13

What was said at the end of the previous Note takes us right back to the beginning of the Book of Daniel, and the words in 1:8, where we see that Daniel took his stand at the outset, when he entered into the destiny that God had for him. All his lifetime he stood firm and faithful, and at the end, this that we read in 13 was said to him. The well-known hymn says, 'Soon, soon, to faithful warriors cometh rest' - ah, yes, but the rest is only preparatory to the great Assize. On the great day, God says to Daniel, 'This is your place, this is your lot, this is your portion; I have prepared it for you from the foundation of the world, and you have prepared it by grace in living faithfully. Enter into the joy of thy Lord.' When it is put like that, it should be clear that nothing else in the world is of any ultimate interest or importance. Entering one's destiny does not simply mean living decent and useful lives, because many people do this, yet completely miss what God has for them, very often without being even conscious that they have missed it - and that is a still deeper tragedy. But we cannot be unconscious of missing it if we read the Scriptures, because there is only one true destiny for us, and it is in Christ and in the will of God. Are we there? We can be there, thank God, by taking our stand and committing ourselves, as Daniel did, to God, and living in dependence on divine grace. We can enter into our destiny and ensure that, at the last, it will be said to us '...thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.'

106) In Retrospect

The Book of Daniel. Having concluded our detailed study of the chapters of the book, we now add some readings 'In Retrospect', by way of summing up its general message. These are taken from the concluding chapter of the book, 'By the Rivers of Babylon', published a number of years ago and now hard to come by.

We take two verses in particular as the basis of this retrospective view: in 11:32, we have the words 'The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits'; and, in 12:3, 'They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.' These two verses belong to one another essentially, and the second depends on the first, and, indeed, amplifies and explains it; on the one hand, it is only those who know their God who will succeed in turning men to righteousness; for this is to turn them to Him, and how can you introduce others to God whom you yourself do not know? On the other hand, the nature of the exploits mentioned in 11:32 is meant to be indicated in 12:3 - the teaching of the truth and the imparting of knowledge of salvation so as to turn many to righteousness.

107) Book of Daniel

We have already seen in the course of our studies the kind of background against which the life of Daniel is set, and this reminds us - and we need to be reminded of it - that Christian witness is always in the context of opposition and difficulty. There are no ideal conditions in which to witness a good confession or wage the Christian warfare, and it is idle to wish for them. It will never be easy. But it is not only possible, it is gloriously possible, and living faith flourishes in dark and difficult circumstances. Let us consider, then, the teaching of these two verses that contain so much that is of importance for the Christian life. And, first of all, since everything really depends on knowing God, let us think of what this means. It is the people that know their God of whom all this is true. Clearly, this speaks of a real and personal knowledge of God, as distinct from any mere intellectual assent to a doctrinal position. Let us ask ourselves whether our grasp of the doctrines of the Faith is just a grasp, or a living, transforming experience. This is what is at issue here. What is the use of knowing all the doctrines of the Faith if we do not really know God? It is one of the perils of our time to substitute a formal, official, intellectual grasp of the truth for a living encounter with the Son of God. The two things are not the same, and we must not, at our peril, confuse them.

108) Book of Daniel

How does one get to know God like this? How does one get to know God at all? Is there anything in the story of Daniel that might give us an answer to these questions? Let us recall what was said about Daniel in the first chapter of this prophecy. We read that, 'Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat.' Do we see the full significance of that statement? It is this: whatever may have been Daniel's beliefs and convictions in the past, up to this point, he was now confronted with a specific and crucial issue in which he had to make a stand and make up his mind in a categorical, once-for-all fashion about God and the things of God. No one reading the story could fail to recognise that, for him, this point in his experience was absolutely decisive; if he had not done what he did on that occasion, we would not have had the book at all, and he would have lapsed into oblivion without ever figuring in the divine history. For Daniel this was the beginning of things, and this is how God became an overwhelming reality to him. Circumstances so dictated it that God Almighty stood inexorably before him, as it were, in all His majesty and power, and obliged him to give a verdict on how he was going to live and what he was going to do and to be. He was put on the spot.

This is how it often comes about with us also: opportunity suddenly presents itself to us in which it becomes clear that sides must be taken, and that there is no longer any possibility of 'sitting on the fence', maintaining a benevolent air of interested neutrality. We see, in a blinding flash of illumination, that we must take sides. And, in that awareness in which the issues become plain and unmistakable, we suddenly find ourselves confronted with a living God who demands a verdict from us; and when, by the grace of God, we are able to make a stand for Him, this is the beginning of that knowledge of Him that enables us to 'be strong and to do exploits'.

109) Book of Daniel

Let us think in practical terms of what it means 'to be strong and do exploits'. This may be usefully divided into two aspects, both for Daniel and for all who are called to witness for Christ and for God. These are underlined by our Lord Himself in the Sermon on the Mount, in the twofold word about the salt of the earth and the light of the world. There is such a thing as indirect witness as well as direct witness; the one is represented by the 'salt of the earth' metaphor; the other is represented by the 'light of the world' metaphor. There is indirect witness in the sense of standing firm and bearing witness to the standards of God in society and exercising a restraint upon sin by our very presence in the midst of it. And how needful this is today, to purge society of some of its ugliness and shame!

Then there is the direct witness to the gospel, as light, in the winning of men to Christ, influencing them decisively and leading them to the Saviour, and into everlasting life. This twofold witness of salt and light is what it means to be strong and to do exploits. Have we been strong like this? Are there places that are the purer and cleaner for our having been there? Have we acted like salt? Do our lives tell like that where we go? Are there lives that have been influenced and won because of our testimony to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, why not? There will be a reason, will there not? Has the possibility of a positive influence been drained away because of a leakage of spiritual power?

I 10) Book of Daniel

One thinks in this connection of Samson, judge of Israel, in his witness among the Philistines. Samson was a Nazarite, separated unto God; but there came a time, after he had repeatedly dabbled with the forbidden things, that it had to be said of him, 'Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him'. And leakage of spiritual power was directly traceable to a death that Samson refused to die. God challenged him again and again with it, but he balked at the challenge and the discipline that it involved until the Spirit of God sadly departed from him.

Is it unknown for the fine edge of consecration to disappear like this from a believer's life? One has only to think back a few years to those earlier days in some lives when they burned out for God, when they agonised in prayer, when they laid hold upon Him, when the most important thing in the world for them was the salvation of a soul, and compare those days with now, to see that the fine edge has been blunted. How was it that Samson crashed so appallingly? It was an undisciplined, emotional life that was his downfall. Is this our problem? Is this why we have lost our spiritual testimony? Is this what needs the touch of the surgeon's knife in our lives?

III) Book of Daniel

But there is the possibility of renewal. Samson's consecration was restored and he wrought mightily again against the Philistines and, in his latter end, did more harm to them than all he had done during his earlier life. The word of the Lord came to him a second time as it had come to the prophet Jonah. But at a price! 'Samson did grind in the prison house', and it was there, in that woe and desolation, that he came to himself. And, sometimes Christians let themselves go as far as that before they learn the ways of God. Let us remember what Jesus once said, 'For their sakes (meaning the world) I sanctify Myself', and, for Him, that meant the cross. Can it mean less for us than it meant for Him? We must be prepared to die many deaths in order to bring life to others and how essential it is to see this grand and glorious thought that God holds before our eyes, 'They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever'. Heaven's greatest concern and heaven's greatest and richest reward has to do with turning many to righteousness. If only we could see this! Jesus said, 'Lay up treasure in heaven'. This is the way; this is what He means. 'Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone'.

I 12) Book of Daniel

We look now at the second of these central verses, 12:3: 'They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever'. This refers to the great enterprise of soul-winning. We have already seen that the phrase, 'they that be wise' refers to the 'teachers' in 11:33, who instruct many and influence them by their teaching. We need not confine this to preachers of the Word in the accepted sense of the term; it is just as true of Sunday School teachers, and of parents of children. One thinks of Susannah Wesley and her faithful teaching of her children. Look what she gave to the world! John and Charles Wesley, who swept England with the fire of God in the eighteenth century, were led to Christ by a loving and earnest mother. And the sons will not shine more brightly in glory than their mother will. But the reference is not only to the teachers and preachers of the Word. This is something to which we are all committed. Archbishop Leighton, the godly divine of the seventeenth century, once said, 'It is the responsibility of every Christian first to be enlightened and then to shine'. That is the task that is laid upon every one of us. Do you remember what is said about the apostle Andrew? He was never in the forefront of the apostolic testimony, like Peter; but every time we read about him in the New Testament he is bringing somebody to Christ (cf John 1:41; 12:22).

I 13) Book of Daniel

As an example of soul-winning, the following account of a young student's testimony makes the point eloquently. He shared digs with five other students. He was the only Christian. He was not a brilliant boy; he was not a preacher either (he is a lawyer now). But he took these five companions of his on his heart before God and he said, 'I am going to lead them to Christ'. And, one after the other, these youngsters were led to Christ. One of them today is a distinguished consultant physician in a big hospital; another is the headmaster of an important and influential Christian school; another is in Government Service abroad; another is an Anglican rector in the south of England. These men were all brought to Christ by the holy determination of a young lad who realised that the greatest thing in the world was to win souls to the Saviour. Have we ever done anything like that? Have we ever led a soul to Christ? Have we ever been burdened about leading souls to Christ? Have we ever even taken anybody to Church with us to hear the Word? This is one of the challenges that the book of Daniel leaves with us.

I 14) Book of Daniel

What is needed for this is vision. We need a passion for souls. The Apostle Paul had it, burning in his heart like a fire; and because he had it, he was driven across the face of the ancient world, spending himself and being spent for Christ's sake and the gospel's. The saintly Samuel Rutherford once cried out:

'Oh were one soul from Anwoth
Meet me at God's right hand,
My heaven would be two heavens,
In Emmanuel's Land.'

Is that the language we speak? Or are we not interested in souls like that? 'They that turn many to righteousness...'. A day is coming when it will be seen that the only thing of final importance in life is to have sought with all our hearts to lead others to Christ and into ways of righteousness. Jesus once said - and we may gather from His words what value He put on a soul - 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' There is no loss like the loss of a soul, and we will be called to account if we have been careless about the salvation of souls in our Christian testimony.

I 15) Book of Daniel

Our final word must be one to those who, having read these Notes, and in spite of all that has been written, are still not Christ's or found in Him. The question that requires to be answered is, 'Are you on the Lord's side?' The origin of this well-known phrase lies in a story in the Book of Exodus. When the children of Israel made the golden calf and prostituted themselves before it, Moses came down from the mount of God and hurled it into pieces in his anger, the righteous anger of the Lord burning in his soul. He thus precipitated a crisis among the people, and challenged them to a new consecration, to come right out for God, and these were the words he used, 'Who is on the Lord's side?' And, when Moses used them, it was not an intellectual matter, nor a theoretical exercise. What he meant and what he required was that the men who heard what he said should do something about it. He said, 'Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come here'. In other words, he obliged them to make a stand.

And this is what the Book of Daniel obliges us to do also: we also must nail our colours to the mast, and let it be known that we do so. We must take a stand and, in the doing of it, let it be recognised that once and for all and forever we are standing for Christ and for righteousness, and for the kingdom of God and for glory, as over against hesitation and sitting on the fence, and hiding our light under a bushel. Who is on the Lord's side, who will serve the King? In Moses' day those whom he challenged had to step out and show themselves to be on the Lord's side. It cannot but be like this for us also. God does not want 'disembodied' consecration, it has to be real and visible. God grant us all grace to make it so!