

DISCOVERING

DANIEL

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FINDING OUR HOPE IN GOD'S
PROPHETIC PLAN AMID GLOBAL CHAOS

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BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *REVEALING REVELATION*

WITH DR. RICK YOHN

DISCOVERING DANIEL

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I dedicate this book...

to God, whose presence is the only source of perfect peace during the darkest of times.

to my family, friends, and ministry partners. It is your love, prayers, and support that give me the strength and resources to carry out that to which God has called me.

to the innocent civilians who were killed and those who were taken hostage by the terrorist group Hamas on October 7, 2023. I also acknowledge the sorrow and pain of my nation as we seek to heal from this twenty-first century holocaust. We will fight, we will heal, and, with the help of the one true God, we will emerge stronger than ever before. Hamas believed it could win this fight, but, as we can clearly see in the book of Daniel, God has a different plan.

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HOME IN A FOREIGN LAND

Hope. Such a beautiful word filled with excitement and anticipation. Hope feels like spring, like something new and better is on the horizon. Hope says that no matter how life looks now, you just need to be patient. You just need to endure. Soon enough, the situation will change, the tide will turn. Righteousness will prevail. The pain will disappear. Justice and peace will take the upper hand and all will once again be right for you and for everyone around you.

There was a time not long ago that hope was brimming all over our world. The Berlin Wall had fallen. Communism had collapsed. The Cold War was extinguished. Optimism was in the air. Old enemies started to become friends, then partners. Political disagreement existed but was carried out with an air of civility.

But that is not what we find now. Today, we are living in a world of hatred, disagreement, warfare.

Contrary to many times in our history, most modern wars are not fought on the battlefield. The conflicts do not involve bullets or missiles. Instead, the armies are unleashed in the entertainment industry, in the classroom, and on social media. The lines of division are

drawn up on many fronts. Subjectivity is pitted against truth. Relativism stands against absolutism. Aberration fights tradition, and individual expression wars against morality.

Because the fight is in the realm of ideas and standards, allegiances can be easily blurred. Those in the church often find themselves on both sides of the front, aiming their weapons at one another. Life used to be so much easier when we had an enemy that we could easily define. In those days, when we saw the enemy faltering, our hope quotient went up. When the enemy gained a victory, hope waned.

Today, in our world where the enemy is powerful but often clandestine, discouragement about the future comes much easier. We feel the adversary's forces all around us, and we can't help but see defeat after defeat at the ballot box, on the movie screen, in the television news, and on the streets of our cities. The enemy's victories are even reaching into the church as one denomination after another kowtows to public mores in the name of relevance and evangelism.

Daniel lived in a time when the enemy was much more tangible. They were easily recognized as the burly men with the swords who were bursting into your house, killing your father, kidnapping your sister, and absconding with all your possessions. Yet we find in the book of Daniel hope during the darkest of times. And even though Daniel's enemy was flesh and blood, Daniel's attitude and actions set a precedent for how we can deal with our foes despite them being cultural and spiritual.

What does it look like to live in a way that will bring you hope in this decaying society of moral relativism, subjective truth, and a total disregard for God's Word? And how can you get through to those on the other side when the animosity is so great? This is a question that believers must answer. The darkness of sin is a global phenomenon. The devil is at work in every corner of the world. But it is because of this darkness that hope shines so brightly.

Ramat Gan, near Tel Aviv, is the hub of Israel's lucrative diamond

industry. Beautiful stones from all over the world pass through the Diamond Exchange District on their way to jewelry stores. From there, they will eventually hang around the necks, clasp to the wrists, or encircle the fingers of men and women from all backgrounds and nationalities and ethnicities. When the purveyors of these gems want to show off their luster, they will often place a piece of black velvet on a table. Then, taking a pair of tweezers, they will carefully lift a stone and place it on the cloth. The stark contrast between the stone and the black background will cause the diamond to shine and sparkle, clearly showing its brilliance and beauty.

That is the hope and mission of the believer in this dark culture. When you find someone who truly has the light of Christ in them, the brilliance of their spiritual optimism draws people in. Why? Because others want it too. In this book, we will look at how we can live a life of hope in this confused world. And we will also see how we can shine that glory of Christ in us in such a way that we can lead family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, all those we love to find that same peace, joy, and satisfaction.

Is it possible to find hope for today in words that a prophet wrote 2,500 years ago? Absolutely, because the two key elements of this book are as relevant today as they were back then. In fact, today they are even more relatable. First, Daniel set an example through his life of standing strong for God when you are living surrounded by the enemy. Second, Daniel's prophecies of the end times only gain in significance as we rapidly near their fulfillment.

But before we can dig too deeply into the life and teachings of this great prophet, we need some background. In one of my previous books, I said that it was important for me to tell you where I sit before I tell you where I stand. In other words, learning a little about me will help you as you process what I am teaching. The same is true for Daniel. To truly understand what he wrote, we need to learn more about him and the times in which he was living.

The Thousand-Foot View

Daniel is different than most prophetic books of the Bible. Typically, what you'll find are men chosen by God to speak words of truth and warning to the kings of Israel and Judah. They were the "turn or burn" preachers of their day, passing on God's words to the Jews, saying, "Hey, you remember that covenant we made long ago when I said that if you obey Me I'll give you blessings, but if you don't then it'll be curses? Well, since you ditched obedience a long time back, here come the punishments."

Daniel's charge from God was different. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were already doing a bang-up job telling God's chosen people how they had failed and warning them that the hammer was about to come down. No need to add another voice to their ranks. Instead, God moved this young prophet into a unique position in which he had access to the most powerful king in the world at that time—King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The first eight chapters of Daniel's book are filled with words of warning to this great king, along with a couple other monarchs thrown in for good measure. His job was to remind them that there is a God in heaven who is truly in charge. Sure, these kings were pretty special, but there is One who is much, much greater than they.

Then, in chapters 9–12, Daniel left the present time completely. His focus shifted forward generations and then two-and-a-half millennia as he received directly from God His divine plan for the nation of Israel. But on his way to our era, Daniel made a pit stop during which he predicted with absolute precision the day that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on the back of a donkey. It's truly mind-blowing.

Throughout the book we are reminded that our God is sovereign. He rules over the affairs of mankind. He will set one ruler in place as He puts down another. As supreme over creation, He also has a purpose and a plan for nations and for individuals, and He carries

them out in His time and in His way. He is a faithful God who can and will fulfill all that He has promised.

But God is not just the Big Picture God. He also cares about each individual, particularly when those people are following Him. We see this in His loving care for Daniel and his companions. Daniel was a man who stood above his peers. He never compromised his convictions and never wavered in his faith. Because of his fidelity to the Lord, God gave him the amazing ability to understand and interpret dreams. Then the Lord miraculously placed this young man in the remarkable situation of using this gift to impact the Babylonian king.

The format and layout of Daniel is unique within the Bible—half historical narrative and half prophetic utterance. In this book, I will walk you through Daniel's writings chapter by chapter, just as I did in my previous book *Revealing Revelation*. As we go through, we'll come across some passages that are difficult to interpret. If there is any place where, even after careful study, the meaning remains ambiguous, I'll let you know that. I will not speculate without telling you that I'm doing so, and I will never be dogmatic about something that isn't clearly spelled out in Scripture. Ultimately, my prayer is that by the time you finish this book, the hope that you will find in this kidnapped exilic Jew will grant you peace and stoke your anticipation for the plans that God has for you and for all His people.

Invasion

Imagine a young teenager huddling with his family in the palace. The small closet is dark and cold. The only sounds are the whimpers of his younger sister, the soft prayers of his mother, and the screams of the people out in the street.

When newly crowned King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came marching to Jerusalem, Daniel and his friends had crowded along the top of the city walls to see this great fighting force and its mighty king. It had only been a short time since word had reached the royal courts

of Judah that Nebuchadnezzar, crown prince at the time, had secured a resounding victory against the Egyptians and the few remaining Assyrians in a battle at Carchemish in Syria. Babylon's King Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, had died soon after, and the most powerful crown in the world had passed to the man who was now approaching Jerusalem's gates.

Those with more common sense than a group of teenage boys had found them up on the walls and hurried them away from their exposed location to a place of safety. Daniel was of royal blood, so his place of safety was the palace. The growing screams from outside the luxurious dwelling were the first indication that Nebuchadnezzar had not come on a social call. Soon, young Daniel could hear a skirmish—metal on metal, metal on wood. Then the crash of doors being kicked in echoed through the palace, the sound bouncing from one marble wall to another. He began shaking, pressing tightly up against the side of his mother.

Door after door was slammed open. Still, Daniel jumped and cried out when theirs was flung wide. A soldier, his uniform splattered with blood, stepped in, and Daniel's mother began to plead for her children. Ignoring her, the soldier scanned their faces, finally locking eyes with Daniel. Stepping forward, he grabbed the boy by his wrist and yanked him to his feet. Daniel's sister screamed. Before he had time to turn and say goodbye, he was pulled out the door and dragged across the palace floors. That was the last time he ever saw his mother.

Daniel soon found himself on the city streets. The scene was awful. The bodies of men, soldiers, and civilians were strewn everywhere. Some had their wives and children weeping over them, others were alone, draped over a stall or splayed across stone steps. The path Daniel and his captor were taking retraced his earlier steps back toward the gates of the city.

As they neared their destination, Daniel spotted a group of young

men—all in their teens like he was. Each of them had some sort of connection to the crown, be it direct or indirect. They had all been lined up facing toward the gate. The soldier who was holding Daniel's arm roughly pulled him to the end of the line and indicated that he should stand there. Soon, several others were deposited next to him, extending the row even further.

Daniel sweated as he stood, partly due to the sun and partly due to fear. To his right stood his cousin, Azariah.

“Do you know what’s going on here?” he asked.

Azariah shook his head, then he motioned with his chin and said, “No, but look over there.”

On a raised platform beyond a phalanx of guards, a man in his mid-twenties sat on a travel throne. One after another, men approached him, dropped to their knees, said a few words, then were dismissed with a short comment or a simple wave. Having been raised around the royal family, Daniel had seen kings in the past. But none had the presence, the stateliness, the sheer power of the young man he saw on that throne.

Soon, several Babylonian men approached the line of Judean youths. They were not dressed as soldiers. Instead, they looked more like men of the court—soft and clean-shaven. One by one, they examined the teens. They had each pull at their hair and show their teeth. There were a few they had remove their tunics so that they could examine their physiques more closely. At the end of each examination, one of the men either pointed toward the gate or toward the city. Immediately, a soldier stepped forward, took hold of the young men, and removed them in the direction indicated.

The men came to Azariah. After a thorough examination, he was pointed toward the gate. Daniel saw terror in his cousin's eyes as he looked back before passing outside the walls. Then it was Daniel's turn. Behind him was the palace and his mom. But for some reason, he had an unshakable feeling that his place was through the gate.

Maybe it was because Azariah went that way, maybe it was because the soldiers who were taking teens back into the city seemed to be much rougher with them. Or maybe it was something bigger.

Ultimately, he didn't have time to analyze his feelings. The Babylonian pointed toward the gate, and Daniel was led through. As he passed the throne where Nebuchadnezzar sat, he turned toward him. For a moment, his eyes locked with those of the king, who just happened to be looking his way. A flood of emotion flowed through Daniel unlike anything he had experienced before. Something deep inside this teenage boy told him that this would not be the last time that he would stare into the eyes of this king.

God had given Daniel a mission: to be a light to the Gentiles. Chances are the teen who was deported from his comfortable life in Jerusalem to a court in a foreign land was completely unaware of this plan for his life. But what we do see with Daniel and his friends was that despite not understanding God's plan, they still trusted that He had one. So when God shifted their location and living circumstances because He needed them elsewhere, they didn't kick or scream. They accepted their new normal, remained true to God, and waited for opportunities to be used by Him.

Throughout Scripture, we see God using difficult times to accomplish His will. We never would have heard of Moses if God had not allowed the Egyptians to enslave Israel. Gideon would never have made the pages of the Bible if God didn't give the Midianites freedom to oppress His chosen people. And VeggieTales never would have made Jonah the lead asparagus in their first feature-length movie if the prophet hadn't spent three long, smelly days being digested by a fish.

God has given each of His followers a mission based on how He has created and gifted them. By mission, I'm talking about the reason that God placed each of us on this planet. You may have one great mission, or you may have numerous charges that change and

evolve as you go through life. Either way, what is clear is that we are here for a reason. Paul emphasized that point when he wrote, “We are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Daniel and his friends couldn’t accomplish their mission lounging in the comfort of the Jerusalem palace. In the same way, there are times when God needs to move us around or shake us up a bit to ensure we are perfectly staged to accomplish His will. Often, we don’t understand what God is doing or why. Usually it is only when we look back, in hindsight, that we can make sense of the difficult times.

Because of the struggles within my parents’ marriage, my brother and I were first sent to relatives, then into the foster care system. It was not an easy life. I was provided for and I had a roof over my head, but there was no love for me within my foster family. When I was a teen, this aloneness led me to despair, and I prepared to take my own life. But God stayed my hand, and it was at my lowest point that I was introduced to the true Messiah through the *Jesus* movie. If I had been reared in a happy, traditional home, I don’t know that I would have ever come to the point that I was ready to accept something as radical to a Jewish boy as faith in the Messiah. So while I do not relish those difficult days, I am so thankful for them because they brought me to the point of my salvation.

That’s why it is so important, particularly in the bad times, to be looking for God. Always He is there to walk us through the difficulty as a loving Father would. But we also need to keep our eyes and ears tuned in because He may be opening doors that will allow us to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

God moved Daniel, and He did so for a reason. But what was it that led to King Nebuchadnezzar marching on Jerusalem and stealing away the best and the brightest of the city’s youth?

A Promised Punishment

Israel had become a great nation under the leadership of King David and his son, Solomon. But the greatness was short-lived. For all the wisdom Solomon had been given by God, there was still one area in which he was a complete idiot—women.

King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David (1 Kings 11:1-4).

Solomon knew the rule. He knew the reason for the rule. He knew the potential consequences for breaking the rule. Yet he said to himself, “It’ll be different for me.” How many people over the millennia have approached sin with that same arrogance? Just one drink, just one kiss, just one look at that website. Solomon thought he could handle the temptations. Turns out he couldn’t, and he brought the nation down with him.

When Solomon died, he turned over his spiritually struggling nation to his spiritually bankrupt son, Rehoboam. The wisdom of Solomon was legendary, the wisdom of Rehoboam—not so much. It wasn’t long before the kingdom was split in two. Ten tribes rebelled against Jerusalem to form the northern kingdom of Israel. Two remained with the house of David to form Judah. The northern kingdom was

quick to reject the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, creating two golden calf gods and setting one each at the top and bottom of the nation for easy idol-worshipping access.

Despite their rebellion, though, God still loved the people of the north. He sent Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, and other prophets to tell His people to come back to Him. But Israel was having none of it. The Lord finally had enough, and, in 722 BC, He brought the Assyrians down on the kingdom. The result was utter devastation, and most of the Jews were removed from the land. In their place, Assyria's King Shalmaneser filled the population vacuum with Gentiles from other conquered lands. Soon, the region came to be known as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 9:1).

From their homes to the south, the people of Judah watched the demise of their sister, Israel. But rather than heed the warning and straighten up their ways, their attitude was, "Wow! Stinks to be them. Probably ought to go sacrifice a child to Molech in the Valley of Hinnom, just to stay safe." Once again, God sent prophets to turn them around. Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Joel all took their shots at bringing the nation to repentance. But the people didn't listen to them.

By this time in 605 BC, as mentioned above, the Assyrians were no more. In their place was the military juggernaut of Babylon. God tapped Nebuchadnezzar on the shoulder and pointed him toward Jerusalem. The king came, the city fell, and Daniel, along with many other Jews, was removed from the land and taken to Babylon in this first of three deportations spread over a period of two decades. It is during this event that the book of Daniel opens.

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STANDARD

DANIEL 1

Outside your window, the view is black as pitch. But what the night is lacking in light, it is more than making up for in sound. You can hear the rain pounding, followed by what feels like the clatter of a million BBs as hail pelts the roof. You huddle your family close together and try to calm your children by singing little refrains like, “We love the thunder ‘cause the thunder brings rain.” Every rural, small-town kid knows that rain is always a good thing.

Suddenly, a siren pierces through the din. Tornado! You and your wife each scoop up one of the little ones, while your oldest leaps to her feet. You scramble for the steps that lead to the basement. Just before you follow your wife down the stairs, you hear a growing rumble. It’s close. Once underground, you hold each other tightly in a small, protected cement alcove as what sounds like a freight train approaches. Soon, the noise is deafening, and you hear glass smashing and wood snapping overhead. The floor above you gives way and crashes around your hideaway. Rainwater begins to cover the floor. Your children are crying, your wife is loudly telling them it will be

okay, and you are praying with everything you have for the protection of your family.

Then it's passed. The blast of the tornado pulls away. The rumble of the thunder grows fainter. Soon, all you can hear is rain hitting the debris around you and the sound of dozens of car alarms. You tell your wife to wait with the children as you step out to explore. The view is devastating. You look up and see stars peeking through the clouds—stars where the ceiling of your basement should be. Your house is gone. Your possessions are gone. All that's left of your former life is huddled with their arms around one other in a corner of your basement. You pause for a moment and thank God for such a marvelous blessing.

I've never gone through a tornado. Dr. Rick Yohn, my writing collaborator on this book, has experienced several, and he has also seen firsthand the aftermath of some very devastating twisters. As he and his wife, Linda, drove through some recently hit areas and talked with survivors, many of whom had lost everything, they witnessed differing reactions. Some were in complete shock. Others expressed inconsolable sorrow. But there were many more who, despite their loss, were feeling incredible relief. "We may have lost everything," they would say, "but at least we have each other."

The Babylonians swept through Jerusalem like a tornado. Death, destruction, and loss trailed behind them. By the time Daniel and his friends began their long trek to the capital city, they had nothing left of their former lives. And when I say nothing, I don't just mean they lost their possessions and their comfortable royal lives. After a tornado hits, at least there is the hope that between insurance money and some help from the government, people can rebuild their homes and their businesses. Maybe life can one day get back to normal again.

But for Daniel's gang, normal was a state of being that no longer existed. They had been in the line of nobility to become somebody

in the nation of Judah. They were being groomed for high positions, name recognition, and a life of power in their line of service. Those dreams were now shattered, and all that faced them was an uncertain future that might include slavery, servitude, or possibly a quick death.

One has to believe that the question of “Why?” crossed Daniel’s mind. Why would God have allowed a heathen nation like Babylon to invade and enslave God’s chosen people? But because of Daniel’s upbringing, the answer to this seemingly huge conundrum was quite easy. Daniel was brought up with a knowledge of the Word of God. He would be familiar with the warnings of the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. Being within the royal circle, he had seen how the kings since the days of Josiah had rebelled against the God of their fathers and were following pagan deities. What had been promised since the days of Moses was coming to pass. If the nation rebelled, God would bring punishment. And, as so often happens, the children were about to pay the price for the sins of their fathers.

Daniel and his friends could have been angry at God and bitter against the generations that came before them. That is how so many people react when they are innocent victims of other people’s sins. And, for those who have been victimized, it is totally understandable that they may descend into long-lasting anger and depression. But what Daniel shows us is that there is a better path. There is a way that lifts one up, rather than letting past circumstances grind one into the ground. It is the way of hope, the way of faith, the way of God.

Death March to Babylon

We don’t know what the journey was like for Daniel and his friends. Often, when prisoners were transported, they were stripped naked, chained together, and forced to walk the distance, likely barefooted. You may have heard the term *death march*, a forced march of

prisoners of war during which those who cannot continue are killed or simply left along the roadside to die. One of the most famous of these in recent history was World War II's Bataan Death March. In April 1942, 66,000 Filipino and 10,000 American prisoners of war were forced to trek 66 miles through horrific conditions. Those who fell by the wayside were beaten, bayoneted, or shot. Only 54,000 of the original 76,000 made it all the way to the destination.

Think of how violent and cruel that forced journey was. Now, let's look at the Babylonian death march. Instead of 66 miles, the straight-line distance between Jerusalem and Babylon is more than 550 miles. But nobody traveled in a straight line between the two cities, because lying in the gap was the vast Arabian Desert. Those making the journey were forced to travel north, then arc over the desert in what was known as the Fertile Crescent. Only then could one make the descent southward to Babylon.

So how long of a journey did they make? Rather than look at distance, the best way to estimate the length of the trip is in time. Somewhat less than a century after Daniel and company travelled east to Babylon, Ezra the priest brought a contingent of exiles back west, going home to Jerusalem. We read of his journey, "On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him" (Ezra 7:9). Feel free to check my math, but by my calculation, that was a four-month road trip. But Ezra and his cohorts were likely in much better shape than the prisoner-of-war crew that was being shuffled into exile. Daniel's trip probably took a little longer and cost many more lives. Were Daniel and his friends forced to walk the whole way, or were they carted in caged wagons because of their royal pedigree? That's a question we can't answer. What we do know is that it had to have been a world-shattering experience for these teens.

And the shake-ups didn't end when they arrived.

A Whole New World

Everything was different. Have you ever visited a foreign country on vacation, one with a different language, culture, and government structure? Very quickly, you realized that you had some challenges ahead of you. It's likely you had moments of stumbling through asking for directions or ordering meals. Your one consolation through the embarrassment was that you would soon be back in your own country, surrounded by people who thought like you and spoke your language.

Daniel and his friends didn't have that luxury of return. When they arrived in Babylon, they knew that this was where they would stay. They didn't even have the comfort of remaining with the rest of the Jewish exiles. Nebuchadnezzar had a plan for them, and holding on to their roots and their identities was not part of it.

Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans (Daniel 1:3-4).

Young King Nebuchadnezzar had done some traveling during his military campaigns. Something he had learned as he moved from city to city and culture to culture was that there were some very smart, high-quality young men out in the world. Their only drawback was that they were not Babylonian—yet. His plan was to take their best and brightest and make them his best and brightest.

Who were these cream-of-the-crop candidates? We see from the above passage that they were young men. Old guys need not apply.

Second, they had noble blood flowing through their veins. Sorry peasants and all you riffraff, you're out. Third, they had to be good-looking and without a blemish. The king's court had its standards, after all. Finally, they had to be some smart cookies. Nebuchadnezzar wanted young men who not only had a strong grasp on their own culture's wisdom and knowledge, but who had the ability to quickly pick up the Chaldean language and literature.

One qualification that was not included was that they had to adhere to a common belief system. They were welcome to hold on to whatever gods they worshipped back in their home country. The only caveat was that their old ways could not interfere with Babylon's new ways. Go ahead and worship your gods, as long as you worship our gods first. For most polytheistic pagan cultures, this was no problem. For the Jews, it was *the* problem. Written long before in the number one slot on those stone tablets was the command, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Deuteronomy 5:7). There was no wiggle room allowed, even if it was at the demand of a king.

There was another major change facing Daniel and his friends. This one was life-altering and permanent. Several generations earlier, King Hezekiah became sick with a terminal illness. He cried out to God, and the Lord graciously extended his life. At that time, a fledgling kingdom sent envoys with some letters and a present to the king, congratulating him on his recovery. Hezekiah was feeling a little full of himself and decided he wanted to show off to these foreigners. So he gave them a tour of Jerusalem, including his gold and silver, his spices, and his armory. The kingdom these men came from was Babylon.

Soon after their departure, the prophet Isaiah paid Hezekiah a visit. He told the king that he had done a very foolish thing by letting his pride get the best of him and putting all his treasures on display. Then Isaiah prophesied to Hezekiah of a coming time:

Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: “Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,” says the LORD. “And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” (Isaiah 39:5-7).

Daniel and his friends were the fulfillment of this prophecy. They were taken away to Babylon, where they would have been made eunuchs. As additional evidence of this fact, look back to Daniel 1:3. Who was it that was in charge of the young men at their departure? It was Ashpenaz, the master of King Nebuchadnezzar’s eunuchs. Not only were these young men taken from their homes, transported to a faraway land, and placed in a culture that was the polar opposite of righteous and monotheistic, but they were also sexually mutilated so that they would never be able to have children. All their dreams about being a father, passing on the family name, bouncing a toddler on their knee, all gone with a cut. If Job’s wife had been there, she would have concluded that they should just “Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9).

Yet still, we see Daniel and his friends holding on to their hope.

Acclimation and Assimilation

The king was now faced with a strategic decision. Here was a batch of freshly arrived Jerusalem eunuchs to join the ones he already had from Egypt and Assyria. If his plan were to work of using these young men as sources of wisdom and influence within his court, he had to make sure their loyalties lay with him. Assassination and intrigue were a constant within the halls of many palaces. If these guys were going to use their brains to plot and scheme, Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make sure they were plotting for him and not

against him. He had to find a way to separate them from the loyalty they felt to the homes they left and direct it instead to the land in which they now lived.

There was one great advantage Nebuchadnezzar had with his future advisors. They were all young. Youthful minds are easier to reprogram. They are adaptable. It causes far less grief for a child or teen to acclimate to a new situation than it does an adult. Whereas a captured soldier may need to be compelled at the point of a sword to serve, a young person can be persuaded with a harsh word or, better yet, an incentive. Thus, what we find in Daniel 1 is a strategy of reprogram and reward.

The first part of the reprogramming was a rebranding. These young men were no longer Jews, they were Babylonians. Thus, they needed Babylonian names.

Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego (Daniel 1:6-7).

Back in that time, names meant something. Today, few people understand the origin of their name or its meaning, beyond it maybe belonging to a family member, friend, or historical figure. In the time of Daniel, names were typically used to express character or, more frequently, to honor God. As part of the reprogramming process, Ashpenaz, chief of the eunuchs, instituted a significant change for these young Jews. Their names would still elicit praise, but to a different deity.

Marduk was the chief god of Babylon, the protector of the city. He was also known as Bel, which many might recognize from the Hebrew pronunciation of his name, Baal. His son, Nabu, was the god

of wisdom and literature. Mount Nebo, Moses' vantage point of the Promised Land before his death, bears the name of this "announcer" god. A third god who was worshipped in Babylon was the moon god, Aku. It is these three gods who find their way into the appellations of our newly minted Babylonians.

Daniel's name means "God is my judge." In its place, he was given Belteshazzar, "Bel protect the prince." Imagine this young man, while striving to remain true to his Lord, being labeled with the name of Baal, the one false god who had likely been the greatest stumbling block for wayward Jews over the centuries. Hananiah, who at birth had been given the God-affirming name "Yahweh has acted graciously," was rechristened with one that celebrated creation rather than the Creator—Shadrach, the "command of Aku." Mishael's name became Meshach. "Who is like God?" became "Who is like Aku?" So similar, but so very different. Finally, there was Azariah, whose name celebrated the true God who lovingly comes alongside His people—"Yahweh has helped." His name became Abednego, or "Servant of Nabu."

Did this rebranding work to separate these young men from their past? That we are studying the book of Daniel instead of the book of Belteshazzar gives us a hint. With just a few exceptions, whenever Daniel mentioned his Babylonian name, he used some version of the formula "Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar." The only times he didn't use that formula in his book was chapter 4, which is when King Nebuchadnezzar had taken the role of storyteller.

If Daniel insisted on using his own Jewish name in his book, why did he refer to his friends by their Babylonian names? First, we need to realize that there are only three contexts where Daniel talks about these three companions. One is when they are introduced, and we learn about their name conversions. The second is at the end of chapter 2, when the young prophet reveals to Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of his dream. At the end, we read:

Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king (Daniel 2:49).

This refers to official court business, so it makes sense that Daniel would use the court names of his friends. The final usage is the entirety of chapter 3, in which we read the tale of the fiery furnace. His use of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego there is just good storytelling. From a writer's point of view, having to remind the reader who is who as Daniel switched from his narrative to Babylonian character's quotes would make the account unreadable. So, like the great author he is, the prophet streamlined his story by using his friends' Babylonian names, and let us all sit back to enjoy the action.

When deciding whether to fight against these new names, it seems like Daniel and friends decided to go with the flow. There's nothing in the Mosaic law that prohibited a certain kind of name. And, since they were likely brought up with a knowledge of Jewish history, they would know that having a foreign god in one's name wasn't unprecedented. The great hero judge Gideon, after he destroyed the altar of Baal, was given the name Jerubbaal, which means "contender with Baal" or "Baal judges." Certainly that was a different context, but ultimately, Belteshazzar and Jerubbaal shared the same false god in their names. So these young men took the "Call me anything you like, just don't call me late for dinner" approach. It turned out, though, that dinner was where the true test of their commitment to God would come.

A Change of Diet

Being raised among royalty had many privileges, one of which was good food. Daniel has been portrayed by some health-conscious folks as a committed vegetarian. I would call his vegetarianism more situational, because the chances that he stuck to the green stuff before he was hauled away to Babylon are very slim. In the palace at Jerusalem,

food of all types was not a problem. King Solomon's spread was especially opulent:

Now Solomon's provision for one day was thirty kors of fine flour, sixty kors of meal, ten fatted oxen, twenty oxen from the pastures, and one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl (1 Kings 4:22-23).

Certainly the economic situation had changed since the Solomonic heyday, but I have no doubt that meat was still on the palace menu. Once he got to Babylon, Daniel became a vegetarian because he had to, not because he wanted to.

When Daniel arrived in Babylon, he wasn't thrown as a captive into a cell and fed bread and water. That would not work with Nebuchadnezzar's plan of having these young men "serve before the king" (Daniel 1:5). To get the best out of them, he needed them smart and healthy. So he ordered that these new court recruits be given "a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank" (verse 5). For most of those who had been taken with Daniel, eating this royal food was wonderful. Mealtime would have included meats, fish, and vegetables cooked into amazing dishes using spices from all over the world. Babylon might have begun to feel more like a foreign study program at a royal university than forced captivity. Well, except for the whole eunuch thing. But imprisonment in a distant land certainly could have been a lot worse.

But while everybody else was celebrating the menu, Daniel was faced with a dilemma.

Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself (verse 8).

God was very specific in the Mosaic law about what animals could and couldn't be eaten. There would have been much from the king's table that didn't meet up with God's standards. Some might ask, "Why didn't Daniel just eat around the bad stuff? If they served him surf and turf, couldn't he just shove the lobster to the side and eat the steak?" That wouldn't have worked because the problem was more than just a kosher one. Most meat in those days was offered to the gods before it came to the plate. In Babylon, it seems this was also true of the wine because Daniel decided to reject it also.

Was eating this food really that big of a deal? Think about it: Daniel had been uprooted from his comfortable home. He had been forced on a four-month journey. Then when he arrived, he had been mutilated and told that he was to serve the one responsible for his mutilation. All in all, it had been a lousy period of his life. Could he really be blamed if he partook in some of the few pleasures still available to him? What if he still prayed, read the Scriptures, and tried to always do the right thing? Couldn't he compromise in this one little area? It's not like there were any rabbis around to condemn him. Besides, wasn't it God who had allowed this whole upheaval to happen?

This takes me back to the Garden of Eden and the satanic logic used to seduce Eve into compromise:

[The serpent] said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes

will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-5).

First, the serpent challenged God’s word—“Has God indeed said...?” Then he challenged God’s character—“You will not surely die,” implying that God had lied. The enemy likely used the same tactic on Daniel. “Would compromising the dietary laws really be that bad, given your situation?” And, “God is the one who got you into this mess. See how He’s repaid your righteousness?”

This same kind of spiritual seduction is rampant today, especially in the church. “We’re grown adults, and we’ve both been married before. Is it really that big of a deal if we sleep together?” “God has let me get into this financial mess. Surely, He can’t expect me to tithe when I’m already just getting by.” There’s a reason we are admonished to be wise as a serpent (see Matthew 10:16). The devil is exceptional at using twisted logic to make sin seem not only okay, but beneficial and our right.

But righteousness is not fluid. Morality is not situational. God has called us to a standard, and when we flaunt that standard, it creates a barrier between ourselves and Him. Daniel was committed to ensuring that his actions were never responsible for driving a wedge between himself and God.

Though most of the captive Jews were unfaithful to God, those who placed Him first in their lives did not go unnoticed by their Father in heaven. After Daniel and his friends were confronted with the non-kosher, idol-sacrificed diet, we see two very important words: “But Daniel.” That beautiful conjunction “but” is so often used in Scripture to contrast the unrighteous with the righteous, the bad news with the good, destruction with hope.

Remember back in Genesis when God looked around the world and saw how corrupt mankind had become? It grieved Him when He compared the beauty of when it all started with the sinful ugliness of what it had become.

So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD (Genesis 6:7-8).

There was sin, sorrow, and impending destruction. Then came those future-altering words, “But Noah,” and with them came hope and joy and an incredible glimpse into how holiness and love are perfectly balanced in the character of God.

Daniel would not give in like the others. He would not defile himself with the king’s menu. He would stand for his beliefs. But he knew this was a risk. Standing against the orders of the king was a near foolproof method for getting yourself killed. So to pull this off, he and his buddies were going to have to be smart.

They formulated a plan.

But God was way ahead of them. Even before they had made their commitment, He was at work preparing their overseer to be open to their suggestion. “Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs” (Daniel 1:9). This is why we never need to fear doing the right thing. Before we are even faced with a moral dilemma, God knows whether we will say yes to righteousness, and He has already begun working out the situation.

The Boys Make a Stand

Daniel and his boys determined to stand with God and not eat the food. They knew the potential consequences, but to them, faithfulness was more important than life. How did they approach it? Did they go on strike? Did they march around the dining hall with chants and signs? Absolutely not. Instead of using a negative approach to a negative situation, they turned it around to a positive.

Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, “Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king’s delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.” So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days (Daniel 1:11-14).

The steward hesitated. He was afraid for his life. If anything went awry with his charges, it wouldn’t just cause him a reprimand or even his job. A downturn in the health of Daniel, et al., said the man, “would endanger my head before the king” (verse 10). That’s even worse than some of the punishments I and my fellow soldiers experienced in the Israeli Defense Forces, although only slightly. So Daniel made him a proposition he couldn’t refuse: “Feed us vegetables and water for ten days, then see how we are.” It was brilliant! No downside for the steward, only the potential of positive results. The man readily agreed.

Ten days passed, and it was time for the inspection. The steward looked the four young men over and saw that “their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies” (verse 15). So amazing were the results that the rest of the young men had their “delicacies” taken away and replaced with vegetables, instantaneously making Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego the most disliked members of the king’s training program.

God’s hand is so wonderfully evident in this account. A vegetarian diet can certainly bring noticeable changes in a person’s health over time. But for there to be that significant a difference in only ten days shows that God was there quite literally tipping the scales

in their favor. This takes us back to the point we discussed earlier. When we determine to do what is right, the Lord will be there with us 100 percent of the time. He won't just be watching us from a distance, rooting for us and hoping it all turns out okay. He will be intimately and intricately involved.

And the blessings for obedience are ongoing. God didn't just help out Daniel and his friends in this instance, then say, "See you around." As they kept their eyes on Him, He kept His eyes on them.

As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm (verses 17-20).

God caused them to excel through the program. Then, at graduation, they not only outshone the rest of their class, but these teens were far wiser than any of the seasoned wise men in the kingdom. Now, I'd like to attribute this to the fact that, like me, they were Jews of the tribe of Judah. However, quality of this type goes far beyond even that pedigree. These young men reaped what they had sown. They were faithful in their actions, and the Lord was faithful in His gifts and blessings.

It is unlikely that any of us will face a life-and-death decision over righteousness. But we do face situations every day when we have the

choice to say yes to God or yes to ourselves. Some of these may be big decisions, but most will be small. In those lesser times, the enemy may whisper in our ear as he did to Eve, “It’s really no big deal. Just this one time.”

Every decision as to whether we sin or not is a big one, because every sin is big. Not only does it separate us from our closeness with God, but it has a cumulative effect. Jesus told His disciples, “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10). I have seen far too many believers shipwreck their faith after giving in to little sinful compromises.

Peace comes from knowing you are right with God. Hope comes from holding on to the promises the Lord gives to us when we are right with Him. Daniel experienced a bounty of spiritual blessings because of his faithfulness. In the next chapter, we’ll see that faithfulness take him into the throne room of the king.

But an obstruction-free path that avoids the biblical absolutes of holiness does not lead to God—at least, not the real one. Instead, it creates a progressive god of one’s own making—a beautiful idol cast in the image of culture rather than the words of the Bible. As Paul said in Romans 1:22, “Professing to be wise, they became fools,” and they are leading far too many people into a false sense of spiritual security based on their foolishness.

The message that Gabriel brought would bring to an end Israel’s penchant for purposely acting contrary to the statutes of God’s covenant. It had taken the people 70 years to pay for their transgressions. But now the slate was clean. The land had its Sabbaths. It was time for the Jews to return to their land, but this time, with the commitment of following God’s law.

Purpose Two: To Make an End of Sins

The second word that the messenger uses for sin is *חַטָּאת* (*chataat*). This means “to miss the mark, to offend.” It has the same sense that Paul held when he wrote, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Gabriel told Daniel that God was about to put an end to the people’s continual falling short of His standard.

Not many generations had to pass after Abram’s calling before the people of Israel ceased measuring up to what God had expected from them. He had purposed for them to be a light to the Gentiles. Instead, they preferred the darkness of the surrounding nations.

How could there ever be an end of sin in Israel? Daniel would have had no idea how to answer that question. But Gabriel made it clear that it would happen within that 70 weeks of years. If only Daniel had the benefit of reading the New Testament, the details about the fulfillment of this promise would have been made clear to him. Quoting the words of Isaiah, the apostle Paul gave new insight to them by writing,

I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

“The Deliverer will come out of Zion,
and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
for this is My covenant with them,
when I take away their sins” (Romans 11:25-27).

A day was coming when not only would Israel's sins be atoned for, or covered over, but they would be taken away. All the rebellion and idol worship and immorality would be forgiven, removed, and cast away “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12). The Son of Man whom Daniel saw descending in the clouds to the Ancient of Days would provide the pathway for this total reconciliation through the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. This was still far beyond the time of Daniel, but the event would fit perfectly into the prophetic layout of the 70 weeks.

Purpose Three: To Make Reconciliation for Iniquity

The word the NKJV translates as “reconciliation” in Daniel 9:24 is better understood as “to atone.” Gabriel was saying that within these 70 weeks will be found the atonement, or covering over, of iniquity. The Hebrew word used for sin in this phrase is אָוֹן (*avon*), and it means “to twist or bend.” This is a perfect word to apply to the Jews of Daniel's time because they had been living a bent lifestyle for generations.

When the prophets proclaimed the words of God, the people would “bend” their pronouncements to suit their personal lifestyles. Even the religious scholars of their time bent the law to remove the concepts of mercy and grace, leaving only criticism and judgment.

A time was soon coming, however, when provision would be made for a once-for-all sacrifice for sin. This one act by Jesus on the cross would be the ultimate atonement, opening the door for Israel's reconciliation to the One who had given them so much but had received so little in return.

This perfect and complete atonement would affect not only Israel, but the entire world. While Daniel had to look forward to this event, we need to look 2,000 years backward. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world paid the ultimate sacrifice, putting an end to the power of sin in the lives of those who receive Him as Savior and Lord.

As we move to the next three purposes found in the weeks, we'll quickly realize that the fulfillment of this "end to sin" promise will not come for the Jews until a time that is still future from ours today. They will see their completion when the sacrificial Lamb returns as the Lion of Judah and the great Warrior King of all kings.

The Threefold Purpose of Jesus' Second Coming

Purpose One: To Bring in Everlasting Righteousness

Everlasting righteousness. Where on this spinning globe of ours can you possibly find that? There are flashes here and there of righteous acts. One might even find great shining examples of righteous people. Billy Graham was a man who daily served his Lord. The testimonies of hundreds of thousands of believers include walking forward at one of Graham's crusades to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But if you spoke with Billy's daughter, Anne Graham Lotz, you would likely hear from her that her father was a great man, a godly man, a man after the Lord's own heart. You would not hear from her, however, that he was a perfect man. And that is no knock on Billy Graham. He would have told you the same thing! There is no righteousness in God's creation that can be considered everlasting. Only the righteousness of God Himself is capable of living up to that descriptor.

But today, all around the world, people are attempting to appear righteous before God and man. They go through the rituals, they say the prayers, they run down the checklist of what godliness looks like and they make sure they tick each box—twice. But so many of these people are only expressing a form of godliness while denying its power. Just as Jesus accused the Pharisees of spiritual emptiness, these “look at me” religion followers are “like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:27-28).

Today, in Israel, you can still find a culture of empty, it’s-all-about-me religiosity. What Jesus said in the first century is still true today. “But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’” (verses 5-6). But what God told Daniel through Gabriel is that within the 70-week period, the people of Israel would turn aside from their religiosity and sinful indulgences. Instead, they would desire a true righteousness that is everlasting, and they will receive it.

When will this everlasting righteousness be brought into the world? It will be that day when the One who is everlastingly righteous, from eternity past to eternity future, makes His return to this earth. That is when all humanity will finally see Him for who He is. And that is when the Jews will recognize and mourn for the One “whom they pierced” (Zechariah 12:10). When Jesus the Messiah returns, bringing righteousness to the earth, Jeremiah’s great prophetic statement will be fulfilled:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD,

“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;

a King shall reign and prosper,
and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.
In His days Judah will be saved,
and Israel will dwell safely;
now this is His name by which He will be called:

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”

(Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Purpose Two: To Seal Up Vision and Prophecy

Once the nation of Israel recognizes Jesus as their Messiah, there will be no more need for vision or prophecy. Finally, the Lord’s chosen nation will be perfectly fulfilling its role of reflecting the character of God. His love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, long-suffering, justice, and faithfulness will all be expressed in the reality of a formerly rebellious nation once-and-for-all-time reconciled to its Creator.

Does sealing up vision and prophecy mean that there are no more prophecies that will need fulfillment? Definitely not. There will still be a millennial kingdom to enjoy, in which Jesus the Messiah will rule from a throne in Jerusalem. The devil will still need to be released from his 1,000-year lockdown to deceive the nations into rebelling against the King of kings. The final battle must come, which will be followed by the Great White Throne judgment. Once all humanity has been properly sorted out between those with their names in the Book of Life and those not included, God will trigger a demolition of the current heavens and earth to make way for the new model that will be free of all sinful taint.

What is being sealed up is the need for any new prophecy. All that is to come has already been predicted. And, in the millennial kingdom, any questions that need answering can be taken right to the Lord, who will be ruling in Jerusalem. Prophets, priests, and mediators of any kind will be relegated to the unemployment line.

Purpose Three: To Anoint the Most Holy

While this could be referring to Jesus Himself, the phrase “Most Holy” is not typically used of a person. Most likely, this is referring to the fourth temple.

“Woah, woah, woah, Amir! We don’t even have a third temple built yet, and you’re already talking about a fourth one?” I am, and let me tell you why. The temple is a place that represents God’s presence with His people. It is not His home. There are no magical powers hidden within the structure. It is simply the place that God designates to be the center of worship to ensure that everyone is keeping on the religious straight and narrow.

This was essential in the monotheistic world of Israel after the people entered the Promised Land. At that time, the tabernacle represented God’s presence with humanity. If instead of one primary place of worship they had 57 of them spread across the country, that’s 57 places where theology and worship could go wrong. This was especially true in those times before phones, the internet, and ease of transport. So God had Solomon build the first temple as the center of worship. It served its purpose until the people forgot what the temple was for and began using it to worship idols. Hence, Daniel and his buddies ended up in Babylon and the first temple was destroyed.

After the exile, when the people returned to the land under Persian rule, they built a second temple. This time, they were determined to do it right. No foreign gods, no idols—this was God’s home and it would stay that way. Initially, the second temple was small and plain compared to the size and flash of the original, but when King Herod the Great came along, he fancied it up quite a bit.

Unfortunately, by the time of Herod’s upgrades, the people had once again forgotten that the temple was to be a place of true sacrificial worship of God. Instead, it had become a center of rules, traditions, and commerce. This was the reason for Jesus’ righteous indignation when He overturned the tables of the money changers and the sellers,

saying, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves’” (Matthew 21:13). Because the people had removed the real God from the temple, God removed the temple from the people. It was destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans.

As we saw in an earlier chapter, in the middle of the seven-year tribulation, the Antichrist will desecrate the temple. I am no great logician, but it seems to me that for the Antichrist to desecrate the temple, there needs to be a temple to desecrate. Hello! Not a tough concept. That is the third temple—the tribulation temple. Why would the Jews, who are notorious for not giving allegiance to anyone not Jewish, possibly make their commitment to some European guy? Let me tell you: The first man who offers to work out a deal to put a temple back on the Temple Mount could run for king of the world and easily take the Jewish vote.

Is this temple the “Most Holy” that Gabriel spoke to Daniel about? It’s anything but. It will last only until the end of the tribulation, when an earthquake will demolish much of Jerusalem, including this temple.

But by that time the Messiah will have come, returning to the Mount of Olives with His church in tow. And, once again, we are speaking of a literal return of the physical Jesus standing with real feet on the genuine Mount of Olives. This is not an allegorical event. This is a real event that all will see with their eyes as the feeling of impending doom fills the chests of Jesus’ enemies. Jesus will defeat the forces that originally gathered in the valley of Armageddon and marched to Jerusalem. The Antichrist and false prophet will be tossed into the lake of fire, and Satan will be locked away in the abyss. At that point, it will be time for us to settle in for 1,000 years. Ezekiel saw a vision of this coming millennial era, during which he was lifted high up on a mountain. Below him he could see a massive city spreading for miles and miles. Within that city was an enormous temple.

A man joined him on the mountain and said to him, “Son of man,

look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you were brought here so that I might show them to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see” (Ezekiel 40:4). The man had a measuring rod with him, which he then used to conduct a very detailed measurement of this fourth temple. This is the “Most Holy” temple. It is this house of God that will be built and anointed at the end of the 70 weeks. And it is in this holy place that people from all over the world will gather to worship the Savior King who is on the throne in Jerusalem.

Remember this as we seek to piece together the order of the 70 weeks. The millennial temple is the only one that fits the “Most Holy” category. It will not be completed until after the seven years (one week) of the tribulation. Something has to happen that gets us from Daniel’s historical time to the millennium’s future time.

Now that we understand the *why* of the 70 sevens, Gabriel is ready to explain the *whats*. Up until now, the prophecy has all been straightforward. However, now God’s messenger is about to take Daniel and us into some very unexpected places.

CHAPTER 9c

SEVENTY WEEKS ALL ACCOUNTED FOR

DANIEL 9:25-27

Several months back, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu was interviewed on one of the major news channels. He handled himself very well, despite it being evident that the man asking the questions was not a fan of his. Once the segment concluded, the scene shifted to the studio where a panel awaited the interviewer. As they talked back and forth about the problems of the region and the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, I realized that their understanding of the geopolitical factors affecting the Middle East was surprisingly limited. This was due to them seeming to have no grasp of the spiritual aspect of the region. They were treating Israel and the surrounding nations as they would any other place on the globe.

But Israel and the Middle East are not like every other region in the world. To truly understand the ins and outs, one must dig deeper. Because we read the Bible, we are allowed that deeper view. We are given access to peek behind the curtain to see what others

cannot see and to understand what others lack the capability to comprehend. God has chosen the nation of Israel, and the city of Jerusalem in particular, as the center of all that He has planned for the remainder of this world's existence. This is no surprise to anyone who is a student of God's Word. Jerusalem has been at the center of God's focus ever since He gave the city to the Jews back in the time of King David.

Now Gabriel was about to open Daniel's eyes to God's future plans for Israel, beginning with the first seven weeks.

Know therefore and understand,
that from the going forth of the command
to restore and build Jerusalem
until Messiah the Prince,
there shall be seven weeks (Daniel 9:25).

The First Seven Weeks of Years Identified

As opposed to the dates, like that of the rapture, that are kept beyond our reach, the beginning of the initial seven weeks of years is a moment we can accurately pinpoint. At the time of Gabriel's answer to Daniel's prayer, Jerusalem was a mess. The temple was destroyed, the walls were down, the city was leveled. The once-beautiful creation of David and Solomon, admired and visited by dignitaries from far away, was now a heap of ruins.

If you'll recall God's words to the exiles through Jeremiah, He promised, "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10 *ESV*). Some of the older Jews had been in Babylon for the full seven decades. They had taken seriously God's command given through Ezekiel to make a life for themselves there. And now that Darius had gotten rid of the last vestiges of the crumbling Babylonian Empire, their prospects were improving even more.

For these established exiles, leaving their settled lives behind to return to a pile of rubble would have been a hard sell.

This didn't change much even after the rebuilding had begun in Jerusalem. Years later, when Ezra had gathered a volunteer group of exiles to make the difficult return, he "looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there" (Ezra 8:15). You would think that of any of the Jews who would want to return to Jerusalem and the temple, it would be the Levites, who had responsibility for the worship of God. Ezra was forced to send out a special delegation to convince some of the priestly class to leave what they had in exile and migrate back home.

But the exiles who were homesick were ready to return, despite Jerusalem being in shambles. They just needed the go-ahead.

They got it.

"Perfect, Amir! Now we just need to look for the first time a king commanded them to go home and rebuild Jerusalem, and we've got the timing of Gabriel's message." You're exactly right! Only it's not quite as easy as you think. There were five decrees issued in connection with the return of the exiles and the restoration of Jerusalem. Each has been identified by one scholar or another as the one Gabriel was referencing. But for the timing to be proper, there can only be one correct decree. Thankfully, Gabriel was very specific about this order. The command must be for the restoration and building of Jerusalem.

Here are our options: First, King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree in 538 BC. In it, he wrote, "All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah" (Ezra 1:2). That certainly looks promising, until you see what he is looking to build. He is sending the Jews back to build a house for God—a temple. A temple is not a city. Scratch this one off our list.

Second, King Artaxerxes I issued a decree regarding the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which initially sounds promising. The returned

exiles were facing opposition from people in the surrounding provinces with regard to the restoration of the temple. These antagonists wrote lies to the king, who bought into their deception. So he issued a decree in which he wrote, “I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it...Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me” (Ezra 4:19, 21). So yes, this is about the rebuilding of the city. But it is the opposite of what we want. This decree *stopped* the rebuilding of the city, rather than *started* it.

Third, at the prompting of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the returned exiles under Zerubbabel and Jeshua defied the Persian monarchs and recommenced construction of the temple. This was around 520 BC. The surrounding governors had fits when they saw the construction begin. Immediately they wrote to the king, who was now Darius I. King Darius had his team do some investigation, and they turned up Cyrus’s original decree from nearly two decades back. Rather than backing the bad guys, it fully supported the Jews’ activities. The king then wrote to the governors, telling them, “Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site” (Ezra 6:7). Then, to add insult to their injury, he ordered that they provide the Jews with whatever they needed for construction and for their sacrifices. It’s a beautiful story of those who come against God’s people getting what they deserve. But it’s not the decree we’re looking for. Once again, it’s directed toward the temple.

Fourth, when 458 BC arrived, the rebuilt temple had been in operation for more than five decades. That means that this next decree couldn’t be about the temple again, right? Wrong. Ezra was about to lead a contingent of people home to Jerusalem. King Artaxerxes was convinced of the great power of the Jewish God, so he wanted

to make sure that He was happy with him. What better way to make a god happy than to give him a bunch of stuff. So he sent Ezra off with gold and silver and all sorts of gifts, all of it “given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay for it from the king’s treasury” (Ezra 7:19-20). What an amazing God we serve, who can, as Ezra put it, “put such a thing as this in the king’s heart” (verse 27). Sadly, for our purposes, this decree was still all about the temple.

But fear not; we still have a fifth option. About 13 years pass until we find Nehemiah, who was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah had a brother named Hanani, who lived in Jerusalem. When his brother came back to the Persian capital city of Shushan, Nehemiah asked about the welfare of Jerusalem. Hanani gave a very negative report, saying, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire” (Nehemiah 1:3). This broke Nehemiah’s heart.

The next time Nehemiah went before the king, Artaxerxes noticed his distress. He asked his favored servant what the problem was, and after a quick prayer, Nehemiah answered, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it” (2:5). And there you have it. He didn’t want to go to rebuild or resupply the temple. His heart was to rebuild and restore Jerusalem. I find it quite amusing that the one decree we were looking for is the only command that is not written out in the text, but only alluded to.

In 444 BC, King Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah permission to leave his court position, commissioning him to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its walls. It was now time for the clock to start ticking. Nehemiah took a team to Jerusalem, got the city officials organized to do the work, and miraculously rebuilt the city’s wall in only 52 days.

“Wait, Amir! Fifty-two days is not 49 years. What about Gabriel’s first seven weeks?” I’m so glad you remembered. The wall was the priority because it gave protection from outside forces. It also gave Jerusalem legitimacy as a real entity. No self-respecting city of that time was without a wall. But then the hard work began. Remember, Jerusalem was a metropolis when Nebuchadnezzar rolled in and levelled it. There was a lot to clean up and rebuild. The people had no bulldozers or debris-removal trucks. Everything had to be broken down by hammer and carted out by foot or by donkey. The restoration and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem began in 444 BC and was completed in 395 BC.¹³ That’s 49 years, or seven sets of seven.

The Next 62 Weeks of Years Identified

As many of you likely noticed earlier, I cut short Gabriel’s pronouncement about the weeks in Daniel 9:25. The full quote reads:

Know therefore and understand,
that from the going forth of the command
to restore and build Jerusalem
until Messiah the Prince,
there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;
the street shall be built again, and the wall,
even in troublesome times.

We’ve accounted for the first seven weeks. Now we’ve got to figure out the other 62. For those of you who aren’t fans of math, stay with me. As numbers go, these are pretty exciting ones. Once we solve the equation, the payoff is amazing—Messiah the Prince! In other words, looking backward from our modern vantage point, the sum of 7 plus 62 equals Jesus.

Let’s check this out. Adding 7 and 62 gives us 69. Then we multiply that 69 times 7 (the number of years in a “week”). Let me get

my pencil and some paper. We've got 3, then carry the 6, and add it to the 42. Got it—483 years! So if we add 483 years to our 444 BC starting date when King Artaxerxes commissioned Nehemiah to rebuild the city, we get AD 38.

“Wait, Amir. By the year 38, Jesus had already been gone from the earth for more than half a decade. Please don't tell me we need to go back and look for another decree!”

Relax! It's okay. We've got the right kingly order.

It all comes down to the calendar. If we chart the date using our Gregorian calendar of 365 days per year, then we are going to overshoot the time that Jesus was walking this earth. But the Jews didn't use the Gregorian calendar. They used the lunar calendar, which has only 360 days per year. You may be saying, “Okay, Amir, but that's a difference of only five days a year. You flew past your target date by a full six years.” But when you multiply it out, you find that days do turn into years. With the Gregorian calendar, we're looking at 176,295 days. But if we convert it to lunar, then we're looking at 173,880 days.

This is where we're going to have to get a little deeper in the math. To do so, I'm going to bring in a friend of mine, Sir Robert Anderson. Well, maybe not exactly a friend, since he's been dead for more than a century. But I'm betting that if Sir Robert were alive today, we'd both enjoy sitting down and sharing a bowl of hummus.

Sir Robert Anderson was the second Assistant Commissioner (Crime) of the London Metropolitan Police from 1888 to 1901. He was a prolific writer, an intelligence officer, and a theologian. In 1894, Anderson wrote *The Coming Prince*, in which he so graciously worked out our mathematical equation, naming the day the 69 weeks was fulfilled as April 6, AD 32. It was this day “on which the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9; when, for the first and only occasion in all His earthly sojourn, He was acclaimed as ‘Messiah the Prince the King, the Son of David.’”¹⁴

Now if that isn't chills-worthy, I don't know what is. God's words

always come to pass. Through Gabriel, He informed the world of when the Savior King would come riding into Jerusalem. Almost half a millennium later to the precise day, He did just that!

Messiah Will Be Cut Off

Gabriel does not leave much time for celebration. The good news has been revealed. Now it's time for him to disclose the bad news:

After the sixty-two weeks
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;
and the people of the prince who is to come
shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
The end of it shall be with a flood,
and till the end of the war desolations are determined
(verse 26).

The Jews were looking for a great warrior Messiah. They were expecting a hero like the one John later described in Revelation 19. This mighty leader would come riding in on a white horse to defeat the oppressive Romans. “Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (verse 15). This was the man they wanted. Under His authority the Jews could not only defeat Rome, but they might even take over the empire.

But instead of Revelation 19, they got Isaiah 53. In place of the mighty warrior, they got the suffering servant. There was no soldier on a white steed. They witnessed instead a rabbi on the foal of a donkey. But they weren't discouraged—at least, not right away. Maybe this was His way of tricking the Romans. Maybe He would pull a rope-a-dope, catching the oppressors off guard when He whipped off His robe to reveal armor and weaponry. But instead of picking up

a sword, this Rabbi picked up Scripture. Instead of going after the Gentiles, He used God's words to slice and dice the Pharisees, Sadducees, and teachers of the law.

Then, worst of all, this unaffiliated teacher with no formally sanctioned religious education who had somehow managed to escape rural nowhere Nazareth had the audacity to talk about them like He was one with authority. In a series of seven vicious accusations we can read about in Matthew 23:13-36, He shredded the religious leaders, calling them hypocrites, blind guides, and fools. Then placing Himself in the position of God, He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (verse 37).

It's no wonder that the religious establishment wanted to kill Jesus. They didn't have the insight or capacity to understand that when He put Himself in the position of God, He was simply expressing His rightful authority. By midweek, not only were the Jewish leaders hostile, but the people were becoming disillusioned. The more they listened to Jesus' teaching, the less He sounded like a warrior. By all appearances, this miracle-working phenom from Israel's north was going to turn out to be all talk and no action.

Finally, the time came when the religious leaders struck out at this so-called Messiah. The crowds were more than ready to back their play. They had gone all in for Jesus, and He had let them down. "Crucify Him," cried the Pharisees. "Crucify Him," cried the Sadducees. "Crucify Him," cried the teachers of the law. "Crucify Him," agreed the people. The word Gabriel used that is translated "cut off" means "to exterminate." That is what the Jews of that time did to their Messiah:

He has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed Him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
the chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
and by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned, every one, to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all
(Isaiah 53:4-6).

Jerusalem Will Be Destroyed

The Messiah had come. Then the Messiah had gone. Gabriel continued with a warning about what would happen soon after Jerusalem's mistreatment of the Chosen One. A "prince who is to come" would bring his army in and destroy both the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

Less than four decades after Jerusalem exterminated the Messiah, God exterminated Jerusalem. Titus, the princely son of Roman emperor Vespasian, besieged Jerusalem. Four months later, his army breached the walls, massacred the people, leveled much of the city, and destroyed the second temple. Prophecy given, prophecy fulfilled.

The Seventieth Week of Years Identified

Some of my favorite words in Scripture seem rather common and innocuous. But when you see them in context, they can be momentous. Earlier, I mentioned one of those words—"but." For instance, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Our future is hopeless because our sin has earned us death. But the gift of God! Everything changes with that one little conjunction. "For" gives us reasons, "so that" leads to purpose, and "therefore" offers application.

Now we come to another huge little word. Gabriel said, “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week” (Daniel 9:27). There is a whole lot wrapped up in the temporal adverb “then.” In fact, up until today, it’s been nearly 2,000 years of “then” in that little word.

It is often difficult to nail down the timeline of biblical prophecy. There are certainly those times when God makes it clear, like when Gabriel told Daniel that the ram would be Medo-Persia and the goat would be Greece. But often, looking forward to the fulfillment of prophecy is like looking at a mountain range. Dr. Rick, my collaborator on this book, lives near Denver at the foot of the majestic Rockies. He is an avid photographer and often hikes in the mountains to find his shots. There have been many times when he has seen what looks like back-to-back rises or peaks. But upon reaching the top of the near one, he is surprised to find that the second peak is actually miles away.

That is what we find hidden in Gabriel’s “then.” We assume a short time frame to the word because that is its most common usage. However, when we look at the context, we quickly discover that the next peak must be a long way off. This is evident when we hold back on our urge to focus on the words “one week” and instead consider the confirming of the covenant. Who is the “he” of Gabriel’s words, and what is the “covenant”? Those words do not at all fit the context of AD 70 and Titus’s destruction of Jerusalem. In fact, there is no time, even during the brutal reign of Antiochus IV, that this description fits. Therefore, we must accept that it is yet to come.

The Ruler Confirms a Covenant for Seven Years

So who is the “he” in this passage? To understand this, let’s look at the full text of the verse:

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for
one week;

but in the middle of the week
he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who
makes desolate,
even until the consummation, which is determined,
is poured out on the desolate (verse 27).

Remember, the context of Gabriel's words is a message for the Jewish people. The fact that there is sacrifice going on tells us two things: First, Jerusalem has been reestablished and is inhabited by Jews. Second, as we saw earlier, the temple has been rebuilt. The former has been true for just over 75 years, formally beginning in 1948. The latter has yet to occur. Because of what we've already learned about the beasts and the temples, it is no big leap to recognize that the "he" is speaking of the Antichrist. He will make a covenant with the Jews at the beginning of the tribulation that will include the rebuilding of the temple.

When Daniel 9:27 speaks of "covenant," we come to another amazing word. The word that the prophet uses here is *הגביר*, *hegbir*, which means "to increase, enhance, amplify." If I were to ask my son to turn up the volume on the television, I would use the word *hegbir*. What this tells us is that this is not an ordinary covenant. It is not just a promise of peace, or a commitment to the normalization of relationships with other countries. What the Antichrist will offer to Israel is something much bigger than that. It will be so turned up that the Jewish people can't help but sign on the dotted line. What is it that could be that momentous? A temple.

When the beast paves the way for the temple to be reestablished, the Jews will join the rest of the world in celebrating him. After the incredible instability following the mysterious disappearance of all the followers of Jesus in the rapture and an unsuccessful attack on Israel by Russia, Iran, Turkey, and others during the Ezekiel 38 War,

a man of peace who can bring stability and unity to the globe will immediately garner the allegiance of most nations.

The Ruler Sets Himself Up as God for the Final Half-Week

The peace and harmony brought by the Antichrist will last only for so long—three-and-a-half years, to be precise. Gabriel warns, “In the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (verse 27). The Antichrist will tire of playing the kumbaya game. His true agenda will be enacted. Satan has always wanted the worship of mankind. Now he has his opportunity by empowering the Antichrist so that the world will worship him through his proxy. The Antichrist will go along with it, believing he deserves humanity’s adoration. Most of the world will jump on board the worship of this man, but, as we’ve seen before, the Jews just can’t seem to let go of their monotheism. Like Antiochus IV before him, the Antichrist will unleash terror on the Jews and will profane the temple by making it a place to worship him. Sacrifices and offerings to God will cease, and the beast will place an image of himself in the Holy of Holies to be worshipped.

As we saw in an earlier chapter, the Antichrist will be aided in this endeavor by the false prophet, who will insist that everyone worship his master. This servant of Satan will ensure that loyalty to the Antichrist is demonstrated by causing all people “both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:16-17). What is that number? 666.

Jesus spoke of this violent time to His disciples, saying, “When you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him understand), ‘then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains’” (Matthew 24:15-16). Paul said that the Antichrist’s action will be unexpected, taking

people off guard. He wrote in warning, “When they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

Praise the Lord that those who have given their lives to Jesus will not be around for the insanity of the tribulation. Remember, even as all this political intrigue is taking place, natural disasters ordained through the judgments of God are wiping out hundreds of millions of people. But there is even more going on than that. In the spiritual realm, there are battles being fought. And that is where Daniel’s next vision takes us.

CHAPTER 10

THE UNSEEN WARFARE

DANIEL 10

A young computer programmer is working in his cubicle. His attention is drawn to someone stepping into his workspace. It's the FedEx man with an envelope. The programmer, Thomas Anderson, signs for his package, opens it, and finds a phone. Immediately, the device rings, startling Anderson. Nervously, he answers. On the other end is a voice he recognizes.

“Morpheus?”

This brief phone encounter launches a series of events that ultimately lead the programmer into the presence of the mystery man from the phone call. As they talk, Morpheus offers Anderson a choice in the form of two pills. If the young man chooses the red pill, all will be revealed of what Morpheus calls the Matrix. The blue pill, however, will erase Anderson's memory, allowing him to go back to his former life, blissfully ignorant of reality. Anderson chooses the red pill, which is the beginning of his transformation into the sci-fi hero Neo, and how Hollywood has managed to make well in excess of \$3 billion in worldwide sales from the four-movie Matrix franchise.

I couldn't help but think of this movie as I approached Daniel 10. In *The Matrix*, people live their lives quite normally, contentedly ignorant that there is so much more to reality than what meets the eye. What they think is their day-to-day life is simply a computer program designed to keep them distracted while an intelligent computer system feeds off humanity as an energy food source. In other words, they think they know reality, but there is so much more to this world than what their five senses can pick up.

This is not far from the truth. While there is no Matrix, there is a whole world surrounding us that most people are completely unaware of.

"Wait, Amir, how can you be sure there is no Matrix? Have you ever taken the red pill?" No, I haven't, and based on your question, I would highly recommend you cancel your Netflix subscription because it doesn't seem to be doing you any favors. And while I haven't taken the red pill, I have read the red letters of Jesus' words in my Bible. In fact, I've read all the black-lettered words too. And what they tell me is that there is a spiritual world surrounding us in which angelic and demonic forces are doing battle. God's Word also makes it clear that what happens in the spiritual realm can often have great ramifications in our natural world.

The Enemy and His Army

How do we account for all the chaos in the world? If God created everything perfectly, why is there so much anger, hatred, deception, and misery, and why does it all seem to continuously be getting worse? People may blame a person or a culture, a government or a legal system. But to do so would be to focus on the symptom rather than the disease. There is one entity in creation who has done everything in his power to lead the nations into sin, to destroy the people of Israel, and to turn humanity away from God. He is the one who Paul calls "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and who Jesus refers to as "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44 ESV).

We have heard him referred to by many names: Lucifer, Satan, the devil, the enemy, and others. But despite him being “the god of this age,” he is neither omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (everywhere at once), nor omnipotent (all-powerful). Those qualities belong to the God of all ages, the one true God, alone. But that doesn’t mean that we should underestimate Satan. He is powerful and clever, and Jude compared those who arrogantly go up against Satan and his minions to irrational “brute beasts” (Jude 10). Still, our enemy is a created being. As with all that is created, he is less than his Creator. He is less powerful and less wise, and he is subject to the One who formed him and gave him life.

The devil is not alone in his work. He has an army of minions who, like him, have fallen from their exalted position as servants of the Almighty. And in their role as lackeys of the enemy, they are committed to carrying out his unholy purposes. Their goal is to suppress the truth of God, to exchange that truth for a lie, and to deny all that God says is best. Chief amongst their targets is the salvation that is found in Jesus the Messiah. They seek to suppress the knowledge of the hope that God offers so that the devil can take with him as many as possible to eternal separation from the Lord. Why would he do that? Because he knows that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). It hurts God to see His creation making choices that will have negative eternal consequences. Causing that sorrow is all the power that vanquished foe still has.

It is in this intersection between the supernatural and the natural that spiritual warfare takes place. Satan has his spiritual horde constantly influencing decisions and actions in the natural world, while God allows His angels to fight those actions on the side of good. This is the battlefield that Paul referred to when he wrote:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not

wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Ephesians 6:11-13).

The heavenly places are those spiritual realms where the battles between good and evil forces are continuously taking place. The effects of those skirmishes influence governments, corporations, social media platforms, religious groups, the press, and each one of us. In his fourth vision beginning in chapter 10, Daniel is confronted with the world beyond touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. Then for the final three chapters of his book, he will walk us through what he witnesses in the unseen realm of this final vision.

The Time of the Vision

Daniel began by situating his next vision. He wanted to ensure his readers knew the timing of the event and the strange circumstances leading up to the revelation. He began by writing, “In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar” (Daniel 10:1).

The year was 536 BC, and it had been less than three years since Cyrus had put an end to stand-in King Belshazzar and the much-weakened Babylonian Empire. It had also been just a couple of years since the Persian king had issued a decree announcing God’s command to him “to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah” (2 Chronicles 36:23). Included in that decree was an invitation for any of the Jews who wanted to return to Jerusalem from their exile to feel free to do so.

This occurred in a time of transition and upheaval for the Jews. There would have been great optimism in the air, and possibly some

division between those who chose to risk all by going back to their decimated capital city and those who decided to stay in the land of exile. Daniel likely had little choice in what he would do. Whether by divine will or royal fiat, the old prophet and court-wise man remained where he could best serve his God and his king.

The Prophet Is Shaken

We now come to another place where I am forced to wonder what the translators of the King James and the New King James Versions were doing. I am a big fan of the NKJV and I use it for all my teaching, but there are a number of places in Daniel where I disagree with their decisions. The second part of verse 1 reads this way in the NKJV:

The message was true, but the appointed time was long;
and he understood the message, and had understanding
of the vision.

The problem here is that the phrase “the appointed time was long” is not in the Hebrew text. Instead, you will find the Hebrew word *ṣava* (צָוָה), which means “military service or military campaign.” As a result, the ESV translates the phrase, “The word was true, and it was a great conflict.” The NIV words it, “Its message was true and it concerned a great war.” Both of these options much better communicate what the text is actually saying.

The revelation to Daniel of a great conflict of some kind was very disturbing. It shook the prophet to such an extent that he went into a three-week period of mourning. “I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled” (verse 3). Because of the source of the vision, Daniel had no doubt as to its truthfulness. He also understood that it had to do with great amounts of warfare. What he didn’t know

was its meaning. Who were the actors in this great military drama? When would this take place? How do the Jews fit into this vision?

He mourned. He prayed. He waited.

In His time, God answered.

The Messenger Arrives

It had been three weeks since the vision. Three weeks of Daniel expecting God to show up. But after 21 days of anticipation, the great interpreter of other people's dreams had nada when it came to his own. Following the wisdom of "When all else fails, take a walk," Daniel cleaned himself up and headed outdoors.

Because of his age and position, it isn't surprising that he had an entourage around him. Those of you who live by a river know that there are few places more beautiful to enjoy God's creation than by the water's edge. Thus, it was as Daniel strolled along the banks of the great Tigris with his assistants nearby that the Lord's messenger arrived.

Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude (verses 4-6).

Notice the number of times Daniel used the word "like." I feel for him. He was doing his best to describe the indescribable. This is a hallmark of apocalyptic literature. In Daniel, "like" is found 28 times. In Revelation, John used it 63 times. But the king of "like" is poor Ezekiel, who needed 92 uses of the word to describe the four

creatures, the wheels, the seraphim, and all the other elements of his visions.

Daniel saw this incredible personage coming toward him, but the men who were with him saw nothing. However, they felt something:

I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground (verses 7-9).

Imagine standing by a river with some friends, when suddenly someone in your group jumps up and stares at the sky. At first you think it's a joke, but then you see the fear in his eyes. What would you do? We know what Daniel's companions did. They ran.

Daniel remained, but his body was incapacitated. He couldn't have joined the flight of his friends even if he wanted to. He dropped to his knees, then all fours, before finally stretching flat out with his face to the ground. He slipped into a strange world of slumber in which his body slept, but his mind was still able to register the words being spoken around him.

A similar collapse took place with John on the Isle of Patmos. When confronted with the man who had appeared to him, the disciple "fell at His feet as dead" (Revelation 1:17). What roused him? Exactly what brought Daniel back to his feet. It was a touch.

John felt the hand of the man upon whom he had leaned at the Last Supper. It was his friend, his teacher, his Savior. For Daniel, however, the voice that accompanied the touch he felt was not that of God, but of a messenger who was bringing God's words to him.

Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, “O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.” While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling (Daniel 10:10-11).

“Man greatly beloved”! I get a little misty when I read those words. Here was this old man who had lived a long life of servitude. He had done his best to do the right thing. When opportunities arose for him to make a stand for God, he had done so, even at the risk of his own life. He was probably fairly confident that he was okay with the Lord, but you just never know for sure.

Then came those words: “O Daniel, man greatly beloved.” What I wouldn’t give to someday hear “O Amir, man greatly beloved.” I hope I will, particularly at the bema seat judgment when those in the church receive their reward. But Satan has a way of sneaking into our thoughts to make us doubt our service to the Lord and His love for us.

Daniel Prayed, God Responded

“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). So said James, Jesus’ brother and leader of the Jerusalem church. There is a wonderful cause and effect to prayer. When Jerusalem was about to experience the onslaught of Assyria’s King Sennacherib, Judah’s King Hezekiah prayed. God then sent Isaiah to Hezekiah to tell him, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him’” (Isaiah 37:21-22). The prophet then went on to share the promise of God’s deliverance of the city.

The same relationship between prayer and response can be seen with the priest Zechariah. He and his wife Elizabeth were unable to

have children, so they prayed fervently. The Lord heard their prayers and sent Gabriel with a message, saying, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John” (Luke 1:13 *ESV*). The prayers of this couple led to the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah.

I depend on that cause-and-effect relationship to prayer. Daily, so many people pray for me and for the Behold Israel ministry. All of us on the team are truly humbled by such love and faithfulness. Great things are accomplished not because we are great people. Instead, we are just normal believers like you who can do great things because of the power of prayer.

This new and visually awe-inspiring messenger told Daniel that because the prophet had prayed, he had been sent by God:

He said to me, “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words” (Daniel 10:12).

Daniel prayed, and the messenger was sent, but it took him a long time to arrive.

The Reason for the Messenger’s Delay

Remember that wonderful little word “but”? So often it refers to a positive change in circumstance. But not always. As it found its way into the angelic message, the “but” meant a delay:

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to make you

understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come (verses 13-14).

Twenty-one days passed from the time God heard the need to the time the answer came. Why the delay? Many of us find ourselves asking God that same question. How many times have you prayed, then waited for God's response? And waited. And waited. Days turn into weeks, which turn into months, which become years. When that happens, it's tempting to conclude that your prayers have fallen on deaf heavenly ears. But when we stop to consider it, we know that's not who God is. If there is a delay, there must be a reason.

Sometimes God delays because we are not ready to receive the answer. Maybe there needs to be a maturing in us, spiritually or emotionally. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Thus, we can be assured that the time of His answer is always the best time for us, even when it doesn't feel that way.

Other times there are attitudes, relationships, or behaviors that we need to deal with before God is ready to say yes. When the Israelites were being oppressed by the Egyptians, they cried out for a redeemer. Moses, believing he was that redeemer and that the time had come for him to step forward, struck down an Egyptian who was oppressing one of his countrymen. He "supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand" (Acts 7:25). They thought they were ready. Moses thought they were ready. But God knew they weren't yet ready.

Sometimes the delay is due to circumstances not quite being right. God may still be moving all the pieces into place. He is answering, but it is a work in progress. Other times, God is testing us. As we saw with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, faith grows best in fiery places. And there are times when the answer is coming, but it hasn't arrived yet. Think of waiting for a package to come. You received an

email that it shipped, but now you must patiently endure the travel gap between sending and delivering.

But there is one more reason for delay to occur, and it is one that we don't necessarily expect. This is the reason that Daniel found himself in God's waiting room. Sometimes our answer is interrupted due to spiritual warfare.

The Spiritual Battle to Suppress Prophecy

There are doctrinal areas where I feel on solid footing. Biblical prophecy is one of those. The gospel and the plan of salvation is another of my confident subjects, as is the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. In fact, in most topics, I feel very comfortable in my level of knowledge and understanding. The reason for my assurance is because I am a student of the Bible. And typically, the level of my doctrinal security is commensurate with the amount of God's Word devoted to the subject. A lot of Scripture, a lot of confidence. A little Scripture, much less conviction.

As I approach this passage on spiritual warfare, I will be telling you what I believe. However, because this passage is the only place we get this kind of detail on this specific aspect of the spiritual realm, any dogmatism I sometimes express will now be replaced by "what seems right."

Daniel's time of praying and fasting was the same duration as the messenger's delay. The holdup had to do with "the prince of the kingdom of Persia." Who or what is this prince? It appears that there are angels who are designated to specific countries. In this chapter, we learn that there is a prince of Persia (verse 13), a prince of Greece (verse 20), and "Michael your prince" (verse 21), who we can assume to be the prince of Israel. Isn't it interesting that Michael, the chief of all angels, has been assigned to Israel? This is one more proof that God has not rejected the Jews. They continue to be His people, and He puts them under the care of His best protectors.

This messenger angel, possibly Gabriel, had been battling against the angel of Persia. Once he completes his mission with Daniel, he will rejoin that battle. When that happens, both sides will be reinforced—Persia by Greece, and the messenger by Michael.

What did this battle look like? I wish we knew. It sounds fascinating, and a little bit scary. The fiction writer in me thinks of all the exciting scenarios I could create within its parameters. But this is nonfiction, and we need to keep our interpretation on the straight and narrow. What we can ascertain is the purpose for the warfare. The prince of Persia did not want Daniel to hear or know God's plan for His people. Isn't it interesting how the more things change, the more they stay the same? This very same battle is taking place even now as I write this, 2,500 years after Daniel's vision.

There are demonic spirits today that do not want anyone to know God's plan for Israel, the church, or the nations. In most churches, it is rare for a prophetic sermon to be preached. So many pastors who consistently teach on other Bible doctrines treat Bible prophecy like it's a chocolate sundae at a keto convention.

It's understandable, though, because only a handful of seminaries today have any courses on prophecy. And when it comes to Bible tools, aids to understanding prophecies and their fulfillment are few and far between. In the largest Bible software program available, you have to purchase the most expensive premium version before you will find a book on prophecy. Eight thousand books are included in that ultimate upgrade, only two of which are prophetic in nature.

You won't find much information in most study Bibles either, because the vast majority of biblical scholars who contribute to these tools do not interpret prophecy from a literal perspective. The excellent Jeremiah Study Bible, Ryrie Study Bible, and Tony Evans Study Bible are welcome exceptions to the allegorical and symbolic interpretive riffraff that is found in most.

Through Daniel's fervent prayers and the angel's determined fight, the messenger was finally united with his messengee. He told the prophet that his goal was to help him "understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come" (verse 14). What Daniel will hear will not take place any-time soon. This has nothing to do with the Jews who have returned to Israel, nor will it deal with anything else during Daniel's lifetime. It is for "the latter days," a phrase repeated 15 times in the Bible. Typically, it refers to the end times. Isaiah said that a major geological shifting of the mountains in Jerusalem will occur "in the latter days" (Isaiah 2:2). Through Ezekiel, God prophesied to Gog that "it will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land" (Ezekiel 38:16). Hosea spoke of the day of Israel's ultimate return to the Lord "in the latter days" (Hosea 3:5). These are all events that are yet to occur.

The Old Prophet Is Overwhelmed

We don't know the reaction the messenger expected from Daniel, but it was likely not the one he received.

When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, "My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me" (Daniel 10:15-17).

The messenger had tried to encourage Daniel with his words, telling the prophet not to be afraid and letting him know that God Himself had dispatched an answer to his prayer right away. But the

old man was having none of it. Overwhelmed by the vision he had seen and by the messenger's words, Daniel turned his face back to the ground and shut his mouth. I have a friend whose Miniature Schnauzer tucks herself into a corner and faces the wall every time she goes to the vet. It's as if she is thinking, *If I can't see them, then they can't see me. And if they can't see me, then maybe this will all just go away.*

It doesn't work for the dog, and it didn't work for Daniel. The compassionate messenger understood that the old man was overwhelmed, and he stepped in to help:

Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!" So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me" (verses 18-19).

I am so thankful that God understands my weaknesses. He is not upset at my limitations. As the Creator, He put me together and knows better than I do what I can easily accomplish and what I'm going to struggle with. That is why He reaches into my life and strengthens me. Sometimes it is through prayer, and sometimes through His Word. Often it is through a friend or a pastor. Other resources the Lord uses are the tremendous number of letters, emails, and messages that I receive every day from faithful followers of Behold Israel. I can't tell you the times that just the right words are written by a person whom I've never met and who is living in a place I've never been. The result will be like hitting a light switch, and I'll turn from tired and discouraged to energized and joyful. That is the "one another" living that Jesus and the New Testament writers emphasized. God placed us in fellowship with each other so that we can encourage one

another, support one another, strengthen one another, and, most of all, love one another.

Once Daniel had been strengthened and presumably was back on his feet, the messenger spoke:

Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince.) (verses 20-21).

I find it interesting that the messenger began with a question that he never answered. Instead, he went right into what was next on his agenda. But because we are all about context, we are not going to deal with that in this chapter. Even though these verses conclude chapter 10, they even more so open chapter 11. So we'll save them for then.

CHAPTER 11

THE LONG JOURNEY TO THE ANTICHRIST

DANIEL 11

We all have our preferences in life. Some people like warm weather, and some like cold. There are those who prefer little to no meat in their diets, and others who don't feel it is a real meal unless some formerly breathing animal is involved. And there are those who love history, and those who would rather hike up Mount Everest barefoot than read an ancient account of long-dead kings and past battles.

If you are of the latter category, let me give you fair warning. This is the most history-ish of history chapters in the entire Bible. However, I would still encourage you to read it. The dual prophecy fulfillment it contains makes it well worth it. However, if I notice you skimming a little here and there, I won't be offended. Daniel 11 has likely been the source of more naps during seminary lectures than any other chapter in Scripture.

So why do we study it? Because everything that God has included in the Bible contains information He has deemed important for us

to know. In this chapter, the Lord speaks through His messenger to tell us significant information about our past and the world's future. That alone makes it of great interest.

On the other side of the history coin, for those of you who are like me and love to delve into the past, this is a fascinating chapter that looks into a window of bygone years that is rarely opened. But remember, our past was still Daniel's future, which makes this portion of his book that much more amazing. Imagine me describing for you the next series of Israeli prime ministers up through the year 2250. That is akin to the supernatural feat the messenger of chapter 11 pulls off.

“Wait, Amir, you're contradicting yourself now! I've heard you say we are in the last generation before the rapture, but now you're talking about prime ministers for the next two hundred and more years.” Relax, my dear friend. Yes, I believe the rapture is imminent. Yes, I believe we are in the last generation. I am giving a hypothetical illustration designed to highlight the miraculous nature of this chapter. In the messenger's words, we will find a timeline of how God has ruled over the affairs of Gentile countries for the purpose of carrying out His plans for the nation of Israel. Then, as a bonus, we'll also get a glimpse of how He plans to continue His work through today and into our future.

But first, we need to take a brief look at world history as it relates to Israel.

The Assyrian Empire

During the period of Israel's united kingdom under the rulership of Kings Saul, David, and Solomon, we don't read about any of the other world powers besides Egypt. They were around, but they were also irrelevant to God's work with Israel. But once the kingdom divided into the northern nation of Israel and the southern nation of Judah, we begin to learn about the significant empires that are developing in the area.

Located to the northeast of Israel and Judah were the Assyrians. They were a ruthless, violent people. It is no wonder that Jonah ran the other way when God told him to go preach repentance in the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. In the prophet's mind, the best thing that could happen to Israel was for the Ninevites to be on the receiving end of a heavy dose of God's judgment. When this vicious people responded to the prophet's message with repentance, the unexpected success of his mission sent Jonah into a depressive tailspin.

The Assyrians were originally friendly with the northern Israelites. However, they soon began to sour on them. King Tiglath-Pileser invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and carried a bunch of the people off to exile. Then in 722 BC, after a three-year siege, Tiglath-Pileser's son Shalmaneser took the capital city of Samaria and deported the rest of the northern kingdom's Israelites. This was all part of God's plan of judgment against the vile, idol-worshipping rebels. He had warned them through the prophets that He would do it, then He did it.

About a decade passed before King Sennacherib of Assyria, likely the grandson of Tiglath-Pileser, decided to have a go at the southern kingdom of Judah. It didn't end well. Hezekiah prayed, God acted, and the Assyrian king lost 175,000 of his soldiers in one night. That'll leave a sizable gap in any army. He hurried back home, where he was soon assassinated by two of his sons. Couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

Then the glory of the Assyrian Empire began to fade. As it did, a new kingdom moved into ascendancy.

The Babylonian Empire

We've already dealt with the rise of the Babylonian Empire in an earlier chapter. In 612 BC, King Nabopolassar stomped Nineveh, effectively ending the empire. Then in 605 BC, crown prince Nebuchadnezzar killed off any pesky remainders of the Assyrians at the Battle of Carchemish. That same year, Nebuchadnezzar ascended to

his deceased father's throne, taking the reins of what had become the new biggest, baddest bully on the block.

For Daniel and his peers, Babylon was their generation's empire. He was able to watch from the inside the ascendancy and decline of the kingdom Nebuchadnezzar built. After that great king had exited the scene, the power of the bloodline began to thin. Sooner than anyone could have expected, it was gone.

The Messenger Transitions to His Message

Moving forward, we need to begin with those final verses of Daniel 10 that we put off to this chapter. They combine with the first verse of chapter 11 to form one thought:

Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince. Also in the first year of Darius the Mede, I, even I, stood up to confirm and strengthen him.)" (Daniel 10:20–11:1).

As we mentioned before, the messenger presented a question, then declined to answer it.

"Know why I'm here?"

"No. Tell me."

"So, here's why I'm leaving..."

The messenger said he had to go because of a battle in which the spiritual princes of Persia and Greece were fighting against Michael and himself. Then he shifted from spiritual beings to a flesh-and-blood one, saying that after Darius overcame Belshazzar and quashed the

Babylonians in the first year of his reign, the messenger had strengthened “him.” The question is, who is “him”?

There are two options. First, it could be that the messenger supported Darius. Grammatically, this is the best choice. Maybe he’s saying that as part of God’s punishment against the Babylonian Empire, it was this angel who helped to ensure that Belshazzar and his army were drunk and unprepared for the invasion by Darius. Or maybe to fulfill God’s plan laid out in Nebuchadnezzar’s statue dream and Daniel’s ram-and-goat vision, the Lord sent this angel to protect Darius from harm as he was establishing his leadership.

The other option is that the “him” this angel strengthened was Michael the Archangel. This interpretation would see Michael and this angel teaming up to protect Israel from hostility. In a time of transition from the Babylonian to the Persian Empire, there would be numerous opportunities for Israel’s enemies to plot revenge or act on personal grudges. Haman’s genocidal hatred of the Jews only decades later, as told in the book of Esther, is an example of the potential harm one powerful man can cause when he has a personal vendetta against God’s people.

Unfortunately, we don’t know for sure who “him” is. Either possibility fits, and both options demonstrate the same truth. God sees His people, and He takes care of them. This protection is taking place in the physical realm as well as the spiritual.

The Persian Achaemenid Empire Is Born

The Medes were originally allies of Nabopolassar and Babylon back during their defeat of the Assyrians. But when that alliance ended, the Medes began looking south for friendship. Below them were the Persians, who lived in what is now modern-day Iran. A close partnership formed between the Medes and Persians, and their joint empire grew. But the Medes weren’t as advanced culturally as the Persians, and eventually Medo-Persia became just Persia. The

hard-to-spell name Achaemenid is simply a dynastic indicator of the Persian Empire based on an ancestor of Cyrus the Great, who was named Achaemenes. This is the combined empire that marched into Babylon that fateful evening when the hand wrote on the wall.

As the messenger began his explanation of Daniel's vision, he said, "And now I will tell you the truth: Behold, three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece" (verse 2). These four kings are easily identifiable as Cambyses (529–522 BC), Pseudo-Smerdis (522–521 BC), and Darius I Hystaspes (521–486 BC), followed by the uber-wealthy Xerxes I (486–465 BC), also known as Ahasuerus.

Chances are that when you read that list you didn't find yourself saying, "Oh yeah, Pseudo-Smerdis! One of my favorite Persian kings!" However, it is possible that the name Xerxes may have sounded familiar. This monarch had a wife, Vashti, who publicly embarrassed him, so he went looking for a new queen. After a drawn-out search, he settled on a Jewish orphan named Esther.

The messenger had said to Daniel that this fourth king would stir up people against Greece. Xerxes was a warrior and a conqueror. Greece had become wealthy, and the Persian king wanted some of their stuff for himself. He invaded and was able to take control of Athens. However, he couldn't hold it long term and was forced to retreat. Later, he gave an invasion of Greece a second shot, but this time he was repelled.

The Greeks bore the scars of the Persian invasions, and when they began to grow in power, they decided it was time to settle old scores. They traveled east, attacked Persia, and crushed their enemy. We've already heard of this battle, both in dream and interpretation. The arrogant ram of Daniel 8 was trampled by the swift and powerful Greek goat—Alexander the Great. Here, the angel described the coming scenario by saying,

Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these (verses 3-4).

This is another one of those amazing nexus points where we see the perfect meeting of the prophetic future in Daniel 8, the prophetic future in Daniel 11, and the world's recorded history. Sometimes we get so used to the perfect accuracy of the Bible that we forget how remarkable it is. What other book ever written about the future has 100 percent accuracy? Or maybe 50 percent? Do I hear 25 percent? I'm starting to feel like Abraham bargaining with God for the salvation of Sodom. There is nothing that has ever been written that comes even close.

Alexander was a powerful conqueror, but he died young. If you'll remember, he had no succession plan, so his kingdom was divided four ways between four of his generals. Cassander ruled over Macedonia and Greece. Lysimachus was given Thrace. Ptolemy I, the bodyguard of Alexander, took Egypt. And Seleucus ruled over Syria.

Because this is all ultimately about Israel, you can say goodbye to Cassander and Lysimachus. They're out west and are thus irrelevant to the angel's message. The focus now is the kingdom of the north, the Seleucids of Syria, and the kingdom of the south, the Ptolemies of Egypt. If you're able to picture in your mind Syria and Egypt on a map, you'll know what lies directly between the two: the nation of Israel.

The Kings of the North vs. the Kings of the South

Now we come to a portion of Scripture that is truly extraordinary. We are about to read a detailed history book that was written

before any of the events actually took place. In fact, it is so accurate that liberal theologians tear their hair out trying to prove that this portion of Daniel was written centuries after the rest. But it wasn't. How could this be? Our God, who exists outside of time, had already seen these events take place. So as He gave the message to the angel to pass on to Daniel, He was only relaying what He had witnessed before it had happened. It's quite beautiful and amazing.

Let's walk through the angel's message of future history:

The king of the South shall become strong, as well as one of his princes; and he shall gain power over him and have dominion. His dominion shall be a great dominion (verse 5).

Here we see the formation of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic Empires. Ptolemy I Soter was one of Alexander's powerful generals. This "king of the South" was able to establish himself and his empire quickly. It wasn't so for Seleucus I Nicator. He had to fight hard for his territory. At one point, another of Alexander's generals, Antigonus, decided he should have Babylon instead of Seleucus. He attacked Seleucus's home base and came close to taking it. But before he could gain a victory, Ptolemy I rode in from the south and helped to drive Antigonus out. Soon after, Seleucus I was solidly established in his newly built capital city of Seleucia, where he began to grow in his "great dominion," just as the messenger spelled out in verse 5.

About six decades passed. Kings came; kings went. There was a battle here, a murder there. You gain a little territory; you lose a little territory. The one constant was the friction between Egypt and Syria due to their proximity to each other. After years of sniping back and forth, the two empires had a brief moment of common sense. They realized they had two options. They could either continue with their endless and fruitless battling, or they could formalize an alliance. They decided to try the latter.

At the end of some years they shall join forces, for the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North to make an agreement; but she shall not retain the power of her authority, and neither he nor his authority shall stand; but she shall be given up, with those who brought her, and with him who begot her, and with him who strengthened her in those times (verse 6).

Welcome to this week's episode of *As the Eastern Mediterranean Turns*. Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt and Antiochus II Theos of Syria hated each other, which made them perfectly matched to become in-laws. To keep themselves from destroying each other's empires, and their own in the process, they determined to "make an agreement." Cross-empire treaties were often sealed by marriage, so a big ceremony was planned. Ptolemy's daughter, Berenice, was blessed with the great joy of getting wed to Antiochus. The only problem was that Antiochus already had a queen, Laodice.

To Laodice it was explained that sometimes you just have to take one for the team. But the queen wasn't really a "take one for the team" kind of gal. Laodice knew people who could, wink wink, get stuff done. Chances are that if Berenice had read Daniel before her nuptials, she would have become a runaway bride. Soon, Berenice, the "daughter of the king," lay dead on the ground. Needless to say, that put a hamper in her retaining "her authority." Not long after, Antiochus was mysteriously poisoned. Now in control of the kingdom, mother-of-the-year Laodice placed her son, Seleucus II Callinicus, on the throne.

Was this the end of the whole sordid incident? Not even close!

From a branch of her roots one shall arise in his place, who shall come with an army, enter the fortress of the king of the North, and deal with them and prevail. And

he shall also carry their gods captive to Egypt, with their princes and their precious articles of silver and gold; and he shall continue more years than the king of the North (verses 7-8).

Remember, the “her” refers to Berenice, not Laodice. The “branch” of the dead short-timer queen was her brother Ptolemy III Euergetes. He was none too happy with how Laodice had done his sister wrong, and he set out to avenge her. The Egyptian king invaded Syria, killed Laodice, and made off with a pile of “silver and gold” and other spoils of war. Seleucus II attempted a campaign to the south to get all his shiny stuff back but failed. A decade-and-a-half later, while preparing for a campaign in another part of Asia Minor, the northern king fell from his horse and died, allowing Ptolemy III, the king of the South, to “continue more years than the king of the North.” The Bible is always 100 percent accurate, even down to the historical details.

Also the king of the North shall come to the kingdom of the king of the South, but shall return to his own land. However his sons shall stir up strife, and assemble a multitude of great forces; and one shall certainly come and overwhelm and pass through; then he shall return to his fortress and stir up strife (verses 9-10).

As we just saw, Seleucus II, the king of the North, launched a southern invasion, but was sent packing. After he died, his son Seleucus III Soter took over. But this 18-year-old was kind of sickly and didn’t live up to the gruff, thick-armed military leader standard expected by the generals of the army. So they killed him after just a couple years and replaced him with his brother, Antiochus III, another son of Seleucus II. In this new king, the military found the manly general they were looking for. He had a gift for “stir[ring] up strife” with

his great forces, then “overwhelming” and “pass[ing] through” any cities he came across.

Judea Comes into Play

Over the next years, there was a whole lot of back-and-forth between Egypt and Syria. The South had a new leader, Ptolemy IV, installed sometime after Antiochus III came to power. Antiochus III decided to take a shot at him, and it was now that another group joined the Seleucids against the Egyptians. Daniel was told that “violent men of your people shall exalt themselves in fulfillment of the vision, but they shall fall” (verse 14). Some pro-Seleucid Jews joined forces with the king of the North. The last part of the messenger’s words indicates that it didn’t go so well for them. Antiochus got turned back before he could do too much damage to the Egyptian Empire.

On his way back home, Antiochus III remembered the loyalty of the Jews. It was then that the king stood “in the Glorious Land with destruction in his power” (verse 16). Judea was now content to be part of the Seleucid Empire.

Antiochus III was strong, but a little bored. Egypt was a pain, but the payoff of another invasion wasn’t worth the cost. He needed a new challenge. After all, conquerors need to conquer. It was then that another nation piqued the king’s interest. But he couldn’t go after them as long as Egypt could develop into a threat to the south. So he figured it was time for another treaty based on wedded bliss.

He shall also set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, and upright ones with him; thus shall he do. And he shall give him the daughter of women to destroy it; but she shall not stand with him, or be for him (verse 17).

Antiochus gave his daughter, Cleopatra I, to marry Ptolemy V in 197 BC. Now, for those of you whose minds immediately went to

Elizabeth Taylor being pulled into Rome by hundreds of slaves on a massive Sphinx land barge, I'm sorry to disappoint. You're thinking of Cleopatra VII, who didn't show up for another 150 years or so. This Cleopatra was not even Egyptian. She was a Syrian treaty wife, and once again, the marriage didn't work out. The peace through matrimony failed, but by that time, Antiochus III had moved on to his new target—Greece.

After this he shall turn his face to the coastlands, and shall take many. But a ruler shall bring the reproach against them to an end; and with the reproach removed, he shall turn back on him. Then he shall turn his face toward the fortress of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found (verses 18-19).

It started so well. The Seleucids moved in and conquered the isles on the coast of Asia Minor. Antiochus III was Athens-bound, but then Rome intervened. While they weren't the big, bad Roman Empire yet, they were still formidable enough to sway the fight. Antiochus III was soundly defeated. After returning home, he was trying to mollify his wounded pride by capturing some tribute in Persia when he was killed. As the messenger said, "He stumbled, he fell, and he was no longer found."

Antiochus III's son, Seleucus IV Philopator, took his place. He is known for little, save for imposing "taxes on the glorious kingdom" (verse 20). Under a financial burden from Rome after his dad's defeat, he looked for a source of income to refill his coffers. The Jews were that source, and the heavy taxes he levied were oppressive. His reign was short-lived, though, and he was assassinated by his chancellor after only nine years.

Antiochus IV—Foreshadow of the Antichrist

Imagine hearing the trombones and percussion of Star Wars’ “The Imperial March” sounding as we begin this next section. The trumpets would then begin their punctuated notes, and you would see Antiochus IV Epiphanes striding in, dressed in a black helmet and mask. Cloaked with a black cape, his breathing would sound loudly over the music—inhalé, exhale, inhalé, exhale.

The fact that Darth Vader existed in a “galaxy far, far away” makes it highly unlikely that he and our new antihero, Antiochus IV, ever had a chance to meet. However, they both would fit well Gabriel’s description to Daniel of the rise of “a vile person” (verse 21). Actually, Darth might look at this new Seleucid king and say, “Hey, I may be vile, but come on...”

They don’t get much more contemptible than Antiochus IV, who we’ve already met back in chapter 8. The ram-killing goat had lost his horn. In its place grew four more horns, and from one of those four came a small, obnoxious, egotistical horn that turned out to be the forerunner of the Antichrist. In the same way that this book, *Discovering Daniel*, has an accompanying workbook that gives you more detail than we have space for here, chapter 11 now gives you additional facts that the prophet didn’t include in Daniel 8.

Antiochus IV was not in line for the throne, but he usurped it from his young nephew, seizing “the kingdom by intrigue” (verse 21). A few years after he took power, the Egyptians declared war on the Seleucids. But Antiochus was up to the challenge. He turned the attack around and plowed through Egypt, causing the Ptolemaic armies to “be utterly swept away before him and broken” (verse 22 *ESV*). He stopped short of Alexandria, though, possibly due to threats by or respect for the Roman army. Turning his army around, he marched back home. On his way was Judea.

Antiochus IV was not a fan of the Jews. The whole matter of heavy taxation on the temple by his brother Seleucus IV had not gone well.

There was hatred by the Jews for the oppressive assessments, and there was resentment by many in the Seleucid court for how difficult those in Judea felt they had to make everything.

The level of Jewish hatred toward Antiochus IV grew even more when he began meddling in their religious affairs. Onias III was the high priest at the temple, but the king removed him. This “prince of the covenant” (verse 22) was deposed in favor of his brother, Jason. The story goes that Antiochus IV auctioned off the position of high priest to the man who promised the most tribute. Jason outbid his brother, so he got promoted in 175 BC. That worked well for the new high priest until a man named Menelaus outbid him four years later. Not quite the system that Moses had presented to the Israelites all those centuries before.

Over the next years, there were ongoing battles between Antiochus IV and the Ptolemaic Empire down in Egypt. Some resulted in victories, allowing the Seleucid king to return “to his land with great riches” (verse 28). However, in 168 BC, the evil king went against the Egyptians one time too many.

At the appointed time he shall return and go toward the south; but it shall not be like the former or the latter. For ships from Cyprus shall come against him; therefore he shall be grieved, and return in rage against the holy covenant, and do damage (verses 29-30).

Antiochus IV went south into Egypt. What he didn't know was that sailing in from Cyprus was a contingent from Rome. The king made it all the way to Alexandria, when he was met by a Roman consul named Gaius Popillius Laenas. The man demanded that Antiochus turn around. The Seleucid ruler, in an attempt to save face, asked for time to consider Rome's order. But Laenas used his staff to draw a circle in the dirt around Antiochus and said, “Before you leave this

circle, you must give me a reply for the Roman Senate.” Antiochus had no choice but to give in. The Seleucid king retreated.

Terror Unleashed Against the Jews

Unfortunately for the Jews, they were once again on Antiochus’s homeward route. Humiliated, he took out his fury on Jerusalem, venting his “rage against the holy covenant.”

He shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation. Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering. Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue. And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time (verses 30-35).

Gathering his troops, Antiochus IV joined with many of the Hellenized Jews who were in the city. These were Jews who had given up on the Torah and the ways of God. They had become secularized and more concerned with joining in the sins of the rest of the world than with remaining holy and separate.

If you were to go to Tel Aviv today, you would find a population of modern-day Hellenized Jews. Immoral, spiritually apathetic, and corrupt, they remind me of the lost masses Paul describes as

filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:29-32).

In the same way that you find in these liberal Jews an active hatred for the religious and cultural traditions of Israel, Antiochus IV found a ready-made alliance of those who wanted to tear down the old systems as much as he did. And just as Antiochus IV is the forerunner of the coming Antichrist, the progressive left in Israel will readily accept and support the coming one-world ruler.

The terror brought upon Jerusalem was appalling. Here's how the Jewish historian Josephus described it:

For Antiochus the unexpected conquest of the city, the looting, and the wholesale slaughter were not enough. His psychopathic tendency was exacerbated by resentment at what the siege had cost him, and he tried to force the Jews to violate their traditional codes of practice by leaving their infant sons uncircumcised and sacrificing pigs on the altar. These orders were universally ignored, and Antiochus had the most prominent recusants butchered.¹⁵

It is from this terrible time that we get a pivotal piece of information. Jesus told His disciples on the Mount of Olives, “‘Therefore when you see the “abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him

understand), ‘then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains’” (Matthew 24:15-16).

This “abomination of desolation” occurred when Antiochus stopped the Mosaic sacrifices and replaced them with the slaughter of a pig on the altar. He then erected a statue of Zeus in the temple, dedicating the building to the Greek god. When Daniel heard of the “abomination of desolation,” it was a prophecy about the future. But for Jesus, it was both past and possibly twice in the future. It had been 200 years since it had been fulfilled by Antiochus IV on the Temple Mount just below where Jesus was teaching His disciples from the Mount of Olives. But His words were “when you see,” once again making clear the possibility of a dual fulfillment of this biblical prophecy. In AD 70, the Roman general Titus would burn the temple to the ground. There are conflicting accounts as to whether the conflagration was unintended or it was part of a full-blown desecration carried out by the general. What is unquestionable, based on Jesus’ description, is that a final desolation will occur in the future, which will be perpetrated by the Antichrist.

Because of what Antiochus did by his violent and disgusting acts in the temple, a man named Judas Maccabeus led an uprising against the Seleucid Empire. He was “strong” and carried out “great exploits.” Thousands were killed in the process, but the temple was recaptured and purified.

Now we come to a shift. Before verse 36, the messenger was speaking primarily about Antiochus IV. But this next section through to the end of the chapter are mainly centered on the Antichrist. I purposely use the words *primarily* and *mainly* because throughout, you can often see shadows, if not full outlines, of both.

The Coming Antichrist—Horror Beyond Imagination

On October 7, 2023, around 3,000 Hamas terrorists and Palestinian civilians invaded Israel from Gaza. The atrocities they committed

shocked the world. Jews were indiscriminately shot in their homes, on the streets, at a music concert. Towns and kibbutzim were assaulted. Hamas terrorists and Palestinian civilians broke into houses and tortured and slaughtered entire families. Parents were brutalized and murdered in front of their children, and children were brutalized and murdered in front of their parents. Two mounds were found in one location. Upon examination, each contained the bodies of ten children who had been rounded up and burned alive. Hundreds of people who were not killed were kidnapped and taken across the border into Gaza to be kept as hostages. There, the women in particular endured the most brutal horrors—worse than you can ever imagine.

In the past, when I would read about the evil that would be perpetrated upon the Jews once the Antichrist broke faith with them, I thought about the Holocaust. But while what was done to the Jewish people of Europe by Hitler and his Nazis was overwhelming in its numbers and brutality, what took place on October 7 took sheer barbarism to a whole new level. Now I have a new standard in my mind when I think of the hell that will be unleashed on the Jews. I understand Jesus' call in Matthew 24:15-18 for them to run without even returning home to get their things. I feel the depth of His "woe" spoken to women who are pregnant and those who are nursing (verse 19). Hamas introduced the world to just how deep depravity can go.

When the Antichrist comes, he will take it even deeper.

I just can't imagine...

Our world today is in a freefall. Not only do we have wars and rumors of wars, but we have chaos throughout the nations of the world. There is a vacuum of strong, righteous leadership that can lead us toward peace, stability, and unity. The mindset of most of the world is toward globalism. It's "Why can't we just get along?" on a worldwide scale.

Nations used to look to America for stability, but now the

exclamation mark of America's strength has been replaced by a question mark. The abandonment of Afghanistan and a slow response to Ukraine's cry for help has left Western allies nervous, wondering if an alliance with the US means that they may have to stand alone when the going gets tough or the politics become inconvenient. It is true that they came to Israel's aid in a big way after the October 7 attack. But Ezekiel 38 makes it clear that there will come a day when Israel will no longer be able to count on America. Is there anyone who has the character and charisma to give people hope again? I believe there is. I believe that he is alive, and our generation will see his rise. But even though it's my generation who will see him, I don't plan on being one of them. Neither should you.

Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done. He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all. But in their place he shall honor a god of fortresses; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things. Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which he shall acknowledge, and advance its glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain (Daniel 11:36-39).

This lawless one will come to power by speaking words of comfort and peace. But there will come a time when his true colors show. As the messenger in Daniel foretells, he will exalt himself and speak against God. He will demand fealty and will ruthlessly put down any

rebellion against his rule. But the defiance will be minimal because the world will be duped, at least for a while. As Paul wrote:

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

There are groups who will stand against him. One will be those who realize the error of their ways and give themselves to Christ. When they are found, they will be executed, and they will join the rest of the tribulation martyrs in the security of God's throne. A second group will be the Jews who will flee to the mountains to escape the wrath of this modern-day Antiochus IV. But there are others—nations—that will not fully buy into this leader, and that is part of what the rest of this chapter talks about.

The Tribulation's Final Battle and a Possible Scenario

Up to this point, the history in this prophetic passage has been easy to trace for the most part by comparing the words of Daniel with the historical events between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. Verse 36 transitioned us to the future Antichrist, leading us to details that are not quite as easy to nail down. Now that we are arriving at verse 40, it is impossible to find these events in any historical record because they have not yet occurred.

When this new king of the North establishes his throne, there are those who will not be ready to give up their own power. Battles

will be fought. But because he carries the power of the prince of this world, the Antichrist will overcome.

At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels. But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him (Daniel 11:40-45)

What is going on here? I believe that what we are seeing in this passage is part of an incredibly sinister plot between Satan, the Antichrist, and the false prophet to try to stop the second coming of Christ. Now, let me say this as I begin to spell this out: We are fully in the area of speculation. I've always promised you that I'll tell you the difference between what is crystal clear in Scripture and what I'm surmising from my years of studying Scripture. There is plenty of wiggle room doctrinally in the passage above and in my particular scenario because the Bible doesn't say a whole lot either way. So take this not as what is, but as what may be. Okay, qualification done. Let's go.

The Antichrist will rule from Jerusalem. The Jews will have fled

by this time, and he will have established Antichrist-worship in the temple. Not every nation will be on board with this, but what will he care? Because of his satanic backing, no one on earth will be powerful enough to mess with him. But those words “on earth” are a huge caveat. The Antichrist and false prophet serve Satan, and Satan knows the words of Scripture likely better than any theologian in any seminary on earth. He knows the tribulation will come to an end. He also recognizes that when it does, Jesus will come back, his two minions will be tossed into the lake of fire, and he’s getting a 1,000-year hiatus from doing nasty things while he’s locked away in the abyss. The only possible chance of preventing that collapse of his evil empire is to stop Jesus from taking over in Jerusalem. Satan knows he can’t stop the second coming. But what if he is able to take out Jesus as soon as He gets here?

That’s a big task. Satan managed to kill Jesus once, but that plan kind of backfired. Maybe if he did it a second time, it would stick. But to do that he would need an army—a huge army. The problem will be that the nations will have started to tire of his guy in Jerusalem. But what if he could turn their Antichrist-fatigue to his advantage? Imagine Satan comes up with a plan and reads the Antichrist and false prophet in on it. The Antichrist is a little miffed at first. Are there really people out there who don’t like him? And, if there are, can’t he just have the false prophet go and kill them? Eventually, though, he sees the big picture and comes on board.

The plan is implemented:

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of

demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty...And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-14, 16).

The armies are gathering in Armageddon. But who are they gathering to fight? There is only one king in Jerusalem in that time, and that is the Antichrist. So the armies march on Jerusalem, just as the triumvirate of evil intended. Why would the Antichrist have joined in sending out the unclean froggy spirits to stir the people up to come and attack him? Again, he sees the big picture. He doesn't care how many Jerusalemites are killed. He just needs a ready army nearby. Zechariah prophesied about the violence and destruction that will occur when the army attacks the holy city:

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming,
and your spoil will be divided in your midst.
For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem;
the city shall be taken,
the houses rifled,
and the women ravished.
Half of the city shall go into captivity,
but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off
from the city (Zechariah 14:1-2).

The combined armies of the nations will be enjoying their easy victory when an event will occur that will take them utterly off guard. But it is what Satan's three-part axis of evil had planned for. Satan understands the Scriptures, so he knows that at the Feast of Tabernacles, seven years after the advent of the tribulation, Jesus the Messiah will return. This time, He will come as Revelation's Lion of Judah

rather than Isaiah's suffering servant. The nations, having been duped into coming to Jerusalem, will now be forced to align their militaries with the armies of Satan and the Antichrist to battle Jesus and the host that has returned with Him.

It was a bad plan from the beginning. Satan came up with it out of desperation, but he was doomed to fail. No one can go up against the Almighty Creator and win.

I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit (Revelation 19:19–20:3).

As it was prophesied, so it was done. Is my scenario the right one? Maybe. But maybe not. What we do know for certain is that the Antichrist will rise. People will flock to him, including the Jews. Halfway into his seven-year stint, he will show his true colors. The Jews will run and hide, but most of the world will celebrate him. However, over time, the nations will sour against him. At the end of the tribulation, armies will gather to march on Jerusalem. They will

attack, Jesus will return, the nations will be defeated, the Antichrist and false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire, and the devil will go into the abyss for 1,000 years. That is what you can take to the bank because that is what the Bible clearly prophesies.

Seems like we could wrap it all up right here in a nice, clean little package. But the messenger is not quite done talking. That means Daniel is not quite done writing. And if Daniel isn't done writing, then we are not done reading. We've still got a couple more people to meet and a few more numbers that need to be dealt with.

CHAPTER 12

A FINAL MESSAGE OF HOPE

DANIEL 12

When I guided tours through Israel, I always liked to leave the visitors on a high note. Often, journeys through Israel begin with Jerusalem, then head south toward the Dead Sea, north to Galilee, and, finally, west to Caesarea. My preference was to reverse that order so that our final days were in Jerusalem. As the pilgrims wrapped up their time in the Holy Land, I would take them to the Garden Tomb, which I believe is the genuine site of the resurrection of Christ. It is inevitably a spiritually moving time. We would sing hymns and take communion. Then I would allow the folk to spend some time quietly enjoying the presence of the Lord in that powerful place. For many, it is that experience that stays strongest with them as they return to Ben Gurion Airport for their flight home.

We are now entering the final leg of our tour of Daniel. We have heard great stories of faith, seen the protective power of God, witnessed spectacular visions, and been invited to share in the wisdom of heavenly interpretations for the wildest of dreams. We've celebrated

God's faithfulness, marveled at His understanding, been awed by His power, and felt tremendous gratitude for the saving nature of His grace. But we are not done yet. God still has a little bit left before He's ready to call this prophetic book a wrap. And, if He's saved it for the end, then it is undoubtedly a message He wants us to remember.

As Daniel 12 begins, it does so with a warning:

At that time Michael shall stand up,
the great prince who stands watch over the sons
of your people;
and there shall be a time of trouble,
such as never was since there was a nation (verse 1).

Michael, the protector of Israel, will get to his feet. He will not stand to stretch his legs or to better see the view. He will rise because the enemy is attacking, and he is in for a battle of the ages. He knows his enemy. We know of at least one time in the past when Michael contended "with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses" (Jude 9). That is one of those little tidbits of insight into the spiritual world upon which I wish the Holy Spirit had elaborated. John also speaks of a time when Michael will fight "with the dragon" (Revelation 12:7), leading to Satan being cast down to earth.

The setting in which the archangel finds himself this time is one when God's chosen people will face incredible punishment and sorrow. The great tribulation is coming, and its purpose is to shake up the Jews to such an extent that they will be ready to repent and turn back to God:

Alas! For that day is great,
so that none is like it;
and it is the time of Jacob's trouble,
but he shall be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:7).

Michael will need discernment and an open path of communication with the Lord so that he can know what happens to be the Father's discipline of His children and what is simply a vicious attack from an enemy who wants nothing more than to annihilate the Jews.

The Tribulation—Israel's Great Distress

As we addressed in the previous chapter, the people of Israel have experienced many times in their history when they became the victims of those who hated them just because they were Jews. But all those other times, including that of October 7, 2023, will pale in comparison to what awaits them during the tribulation. The persecution of Israel will be on a level “such as never was since there was a nation.” The history of the Jews includes destructions by Assyria and Babylon, Antiochus IV and the Roman emperors, the Holocaust and the Eastern European pogroms, and, once again, the heart-tearing atrocities perpetrated by Hamas. While the entire population of the world will suffer under the righteous judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, Jews around the globe will additionally have all the forces of evil out to get them. That is what this chapter is about.

The center of global attention will not be Moscow, Tehran, Beijing, Istanbul, or Washington, DC. The world's focus will be on Jerusalem. All the major networks, all the social media news sources, all the bloggers and YouTubers and Telegrammers will gather in that city. They'll go there looking for answers. What happened to the millions of “religious people” who suddenly disappeared? Were they kidnapped by aliens, or taken underground in some global government action? For some reason, many will believe that the answers lie in Israel's capital city.

Whatever it is that draws them to Jerusalem, they cannot be in a better place to report on the action. That is, if they survive:

[The beast] was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:5-8).

In the middle of the tribulation, an already-turbulent world will have its violence meter cranked up to high. Those who oppose the Antichrist will face a buzzsaw of punishment. The postexilic prophet Zechariah described the horrors that will be directed specifically at the Jews, writing,

“It shall come to pass in all the land,”
says the LORD,
“that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die,
but one-third shall be left in it:
I will bring the one-third through the fire,
will refine them as silver is refined,
and test them as gold is tested.
They will call on My name,
and I will answer them.
I will say, ‘This is My people’;
and each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God’”
(Zechariah 13:8-9).

Ready for some tragic equations? If we are considering only the 7.2 million Jews who are currently living in Israel,¹⁶ that means

4.8 million will be killed during the time of Jacob's trouble. When we expand it to all 15.7 million living worldwide,¹⁷ we're looking at 10.5 million Jews who won't survive the seven years. The blood will flow in the streets. There are times when I make the drive from my home to Jerusalem, and I try to picture what it will be like in those days. Then to think that they are not that far away! There are people who I see on the street during my drive who will be subject to the terrors of this biblical prophecy. The thoughts can get so overwhelming that I am forced to turn on the radio to try to distract myself.

The one hope we can cling to for that time is that there will be 5.2 million Jews who will survive the time. It is they who will call on God's name, receive Him as Lord and Savior, and hear the voice of the Almighty say, "This is My people." These are the ones of whom the messenger said, "At that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book" (verse 1).

A 1,000-Year Leap

There is a time gap between verses 1 and 2 of Daniel 12. Leaving the tribulation, the messenger jumped forward 1,000 years to the conclusion of the millennium. He told the prophet, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (verse 2). That people are returning to life tells us that we are dealing with a resurrection. The fact that it is a mixed company of saved and unsaved souls identifies the specific resurrection. There is only one resurrection when the unsaved will be given their incorruptible bodies, and that is just before the final Great White Throne judgment.

For years, I've been accused by tour groups of moving too fast. So before I hear any of you pleading, "Slow down, Amir!," let me hit the brakes here. Daniel's messenger is talking about a general resurrection—a resurrection of all who are dead, whether saved or unsaved.

There is only one of those. All prior resurrections are for believers only. Paul laid out the timeline:

Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:20-24).

When Jesus rose from the grave at the Garden Tomb, He inaugurated the first resurrection in which believers are given new bodies like His—the upgraded models that are incorruptible and untainted by Adam's sin. The first time these bodies, prototyped by Jesus, will begin their wider distribution is at the rapture, when “the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thesalonians 4:16-17). After that, there will be a series of resurrections involving the two witnesses during the tribulation, and the Old Testament saints (including Daniel) and tribulation saints at the second coming of Jesus. Those are all elements of the first resurrection.

The resurrection that the messenger is referring to is the one that Jesus spoke of when He said, “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29). Included in this group are the believers from the time of the millennium and the unbelievers from all time. This is the event of which John wrote:

I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:12-15).

There are some whose names will be found in the Book of Life. But because this is the time when those who rejected God throughout history will be judged, the vast majority will not receive the mercy that will be accorded to those whose names are listed. This is a truth that so many people simply do not understand. Resurrection is not just for believers. All are destined to rise again into a body that will endure for all time. The only question is whether they will forever experience the joy of God's presence in heaven, or the torments of eternal damnation in hell? I shudder when I think of that.

The Most Important Decision of Your Life

Has there ever been a sleep from which you have not awoken? That you are reading this sentence tells me that the answer to that question is no. The very nature of sleep includes an end point. When your eyes first open and awareness creeps back through your brain, your first thoughts will likely differ depending on what's awaiting you for the day. Maybe you're on vacation and you know that the day ahead will bring wonderful times of making memories with your family. As you lay there you may feel joy, excitement, or anticipation.

But maybe you are filled with dread as you face a difficult day ahead at a job you don't like, working for a tyrannical boss. Or possibly you

have just lost a spouse or a child, and those first moments of awareness bring a flood of sorrow, hopelessness, and the dread of being alone. There may be those mornings you lay in bed wishing you could go back to sleep, but you know you have to get up. So often, these difficult mornings are the result of situations beyond our control. Life has caught up to us, and we just have to move forward.

The Bible often compares death to sleep, as does the messenger in this passage. And, before I get letters, let me say that in the following paragraph I am in no way advocating a doctrine of soul sleep in which we are essentially “unconscious” from the time of death to the time of our resurrection. Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus, as told in Luke 16:19-31, is evidence enough that we have full awareness after our death.

What Scripture teaches us is that a time is coming when we will experience our final, great wakeup. It is then we will open our eyes to experience our eternity. Where this return to consciousness differs is that what we wake up to is entirely our choice. Actually, let me phrase that better: What we wake up to then at the resurrection is entirely based on our choice now. If we choose to receive the free gift of salvation that Jesus offers to us by grace through faith, then our resurrection will be like waking up to the best morning of the greatest day ever. But if we choose to ignore Jesus or reject Him, our resurrection will mean waking up to guilt, regret, and a knowledge that we are about to receive the just punishment for our rebellion against our Creator.

The only time allotted for making that eternal decision is in this life. The writer of Hebrews tells us that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (9:27). That means that at the moment our temporal life on this earth ends, our spiritual life in eternity has been determined.

Because deciding whether to follow or reject Jesus is the most important decision a person will ever make, the Lord has always

kept His witnesses in the world. The truth of His gospel has continuously been extant, and the reality of His existence has always been “clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that [people] are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

God will even extend His witness through the tribulation. Into the insanity of the Antichrist’s world, He will send “one hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel” (Revelation 7:4) to spread the gospel. These are the ones that Daniel’s messenger said will “shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

Box It Up Until Later

The messenger’s interpretation of Daniel’s vision was coming to a close. As he wrapped up, the angel said something quite surprising. “But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (verse 4). What is that about? Did God send the messenger with an interpretation of the vision that was solely for the prophet’s personal consumption? And did Daniel sin against God by making it available to the masses?

The answers to the last two questions are no and no. God’s intention from the beginning was for the truth of this vision to get to the world. The admonition to Daniel was for him to protect and preserve the contents of the angel’s message until a time came when it could be clearly understood. This was not a command to hide the truth; it was a recognition that the truth will not be fully understood until God reveals more of the puzzle.

Suppose you order a jigsaw puzzle online. When it arrives, it is in a plain brown box. *Strange*, you think. But still, you’re excited as you pull off the plastic wrap and work to lift up the box’s lid. Puzzle

pieces spill out, and immediately you begin to sort them. As you do, however, you quickly discover that all you've been sent are the edges. Immediately, you call the company to complain. The representative apologizes. They've had some manufacturing problems. They'll have the rest of the pieces sent to you in three weeks' time. As you begin your wait, what will you do with the edge pieces you've already been sent? Will you leave them spread out on the kitchen table? No, you'll dump them back into the box and put on the lid so that they will remain protected while you wait to receive the rest of the puzzle.

This is the angel's admonition to Daniel. Seal up this vision in the puzzle box. In the future, more pieces will come. At that time, you can once again pour out the edges and see how they fit into the big picture. When will that time be? Well, hopefully by now you'll have caught on to the unbreakable link between Daniel and Revelation. While the messenger of Daniel said, "Seal the book," John's angel said, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand" (Revelation 22:10). With the added insight of John's revelation, we can finally understand Daniel. And with Daniel's vision, we can lay a foundation for the apocalyptic experience of John.

There is one last aspect to address from the message given to Daniel. The angel stated that "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (verse 4). The words translated "run to and fro" are the Hebrew *ישׁוֹתֵטוּ רַבִּיּוֹת* (*yeshotetu rabbim*) and depict wandering around without purpose. This picture of people scurrying aimlessly is seen elsewhere in the Bible. In the book of Amos, we find a prediction of this same thing happening:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD,
 "that I will send a famine on the land,
 not a famine of bread,
 nor a thirst for water,
 but of hearing the words of the LORD.

They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD,
but shall not find it” (Amos 8:11-12).

The prophet Jeremiah speaks similar words, saying, “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know” (Jeremiah 5:1). What are they wandering around looking for? The Word of the Lord. There have been many times in history when there was a famine of the Word of God. People may have wanted it, but could not find it. Even today there are many people groups who do not have the Bible in their language.

But for most of the world, the Bible is readily available. We have the full canon of Scripture that we can access in print or on our computers or from our smartphones. We can even listen to it played through our car radios on our way to work. The problem is that so few people are studying it. Our world today has more knowledge available to it than at any other time in history. Yet people are more lost and confused than ever. The greatest challenge to our culture today is living in a world filled with technology and information, yet in the midst of all that, focusing on the things that matter.

This is as true in the church as it is in the secular world. How much time do Christians spend looking at their screens? Don't get me wrong; there is much great information that is available through digital media. But are we using that screen time well, or frivolously? Are we succumbing to sensationalism and clickbait? Are we following after conspiracy theories and sloppy biblical interpretation? Are we using our time to attack other Christians because they may disagree with us on an issue that has nothing to do with salvation?

Instead of running to and fro, Paul said we must “walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). This means being intentional about how

we spend our time and exercising care over the kind of information we take in during our limited waking hours.

Once again, we are blessed to live in a time when we are surrounded by an abundance of biblical resources. There is no excuse for any believer to be biblically illiterate. Let me encourage you right now by acknowledging that the very fact you are reading this book says a lot about your passion for the Word of God and your desire to know His plans for this world. Well done, truth seeker—keep up the good work!

How Long?

The angel had said all he had been sent to say, so he began his departure, leaving Daniel to ponder over all that he had heard. But before the messenger could fly off to help Gabriel in his fight against the princes of Persia and Greece, a voice stopped him. Daniel looked toward the river “and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank. And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, ‘How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?’” (Daniel 12:5-6).

How long, Lord? This is the answer we always want to know. How long until I am well again? How long until my family is reconciled? How long until I’m out of this financial mess? We know God is faithful and that He loves us. But we’re ready for that fatherly compassion to express itself in a more tangible way. This cry echoes the prophets and the psalmists who longed for the day when God’s hand of discipline would be replaced by His hand of mercy.

The old saying goes, “The devil is in the details.” If the enemy is the opposite of all things God, then I suppose we can assume that “God is in the lack of details.” That certainly plays itself out in the nature of faith being the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). We don’t see God’s calendar, we don’t know His agenda, we can’t observe Him physically as He works—which is why we must trust that He is there.

That is why it is so wonderful that Daniel's messenger stopped above the waters of the river to give the old prophet an answer:

I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished (Daniel 12:7).

The angel swore an oath, confirming the truthfulness of what he was about to say. Then he gave us a window of time that by now is familiar to us all: “a time, times, and half a time,” or three-and-a-half years. Daniel and Revelation, once again showing us that they are BFFs. This is speaking of the same time pointed to by John's bizarre sign of the dragon and the eagle-winged woman. The dragon (Satan) persecuted the woman (Israel), but she escaped to hide in the wilderness, where she was taken care of “for a time and times and half a time” (Revelation 12:14). But while she was hidden away, “the rest of her offspring” (verse 17)—the Jews who were not safe with her—were severely persecuted. This future persecution will take place until “the power of the holy people has been completely shattered” (Daniel 12:7). At that time, the end of the tribulation will come.

You've got to feel for Daniel with what happened next. Maybe you're reading this book, saying, “Okay, Amir, I get it, but I don't quite get it. It's certainly clearer than it was before, but we're still talking old aquarium water as opposed to pure Rocky Mountain snowmelt runoff.” That's totally understandable, and I promise to attempt to clarify, as much as possible, the answer that the angel gave to Daniel.

Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things?”

And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand” (verses 8-10).

When the old prophet asked for a little more clarification, the angel responded, “Off you go, Daniel. I’ve said all I’m going to say.” And you can’t blame him. Michael the Archangel was waiting on his help. But then the angel pulled the oldest trick in the preacher handbook. He said, “Oh, I see my time is almost done” before going on for another 20 minutes. I, for one, would never do that. I try to limit my going-over cheat time to 10 minutes max.

I love the angel’s next words. They are so obvious, but so wise. He tells Daniel that the end times will produce two groups of people. There will be those who realize the truth, repent, are forgiven, and become part of God’s family. Then there will be the wicked, who will keep doing the same stupid stuff they’ve always done.

There are two ways to interpret the second part of verse 10. One sees in the angel’s words the fact that the wicked ones won’t understand why all the bad tribulation stuff is happening to them. “It’s not fair. I don’t deserve this. God is just mean.” They’ll be angry and bitter, but they’ll never quite get to the point where they realize that it’s all their fault. As you may have heard people say, “Stupid is as stupid does.”

But the wise ones will understand that there are consequences to one’s actions. When a person rejects God, they should expect repercussions. It is that Holy Spirit-level understanding that leads to repentance and salvation. King Solomon made the angel’s point centuries before when he wrote, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7). Like Nebuchadnezzar, when he finally looked up to God

from his animalistic state, it is when we are looking upward that we can see what is really going on around us.

That interpretation certainly works, but there is another that just might fit the context better. Daniel's angel divides the Jews into two groups. There are those who will be "purified, made white, and refined," and there are the wicked. For the first group to come to that future point of salvation, they must be the ones who escape Jerusalem when the Antichrist reveals his intentions. Wisely, they will see what's coming, understand that they have only a short time to flee, and escape to the wilderness while the getting is good. But the wicked will have no understanding. They will have no discernment. They will stay in Jerusalem, holding on to the hope that the Antichrist will remain true to his original word. They'll stay until their deaths.

The angel then referred to that horrible time of genocidal persecution, saying,

From the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" (Daniel 12:11-12).

This is the third time that phrase "abomination of desolation" is used in Daniel's book. Once again, it refers to the time when the Antichrist removes the sacrifice of God from the temple and places himself in the position of the recipient of worship. From the time of the removal of the sacrifice to the time of the end there will be 1,290 days.

We've seen three-and-a-half years. We've seen 42 months, 1,260 days, and time, times, and half a time. All of those are different ways of saying the same number. But now, right before the end of the book, the angel suddenly drops 1,290 and 1,335. Really, Mr. Messenger? What is up with that?

Once again, we are forced into the realm of educated speculation. The best explanation I've seen was written by Ron Rhodes, president of Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries:

A 75-day interval apparently separates the end of the tribulation period from the beginning of the millennial kingdom. During this brief interim, a number of significant events transpire. For example, the image of the antichrist that had caused the abomination of desolation at the midpoint of the tribulation will be removed from the temple after 30 days. "From the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days" (Daniel 12:11). The last half of the tribulation lasts only 1260 days (or three and a half years), so the abomination that makes desolate is removed from the Jewish temple 30 days after the tribulation ends. An additional 45 days must also be added into the prophetic timetable: "Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days" (verse 12). The 1335 days minus the 1290 days means another 45 days are added into the mix. Apparently, this is when the judgment of the nations takes place (Matthew 25:31-46). The Jewish survivors of the tribulation period will also be judged.¹⁸

Whether the inclusion of these extra days made sense to Daniel, we don't know. Still, the old prophet faithfully included these details into the record, as instructed, so that they could be better understood at a later day. Then as he departed, the angel left Daniel with a wonderful promise. Knowing that the wise man's time on earth was coming to a close, the messenger said, "You, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days" (verse 13).

Daniel was separated from his family at a young age, raised in a foreign land, and forced to serve idol-worshipping king after idol-worshipping king his entire life, all while being denied any opportunity for experiencing the joy of marriage and fatherhood. He had accomplished much, but it was always for someone else. Knowing this, the angel had promised him that a time of rest was coming his way. Death would take him, but it would not keep him. Resurrection would come, and when he arose, it would be to the spectacular inheritance he had earned through being a servant of the true King as well as His Son.

This reminds me of my father-in-law, Hanan Lokes. For years, he was a leader of the church in Israel. He touched so many lives and sacrificed so much. When he passed away in 2022, he left a gaping hole in our family and in the Israeli church. Still, we rejoiced for him, knowing that after his dedicated sojourn on this earth, his inheritance was waiting for him in heaven.

Each of us should have that same level of commitment and sacrifice. What are you doing for the Lord? How are you serving Him? Daniel was a man no different than us. He just had a determination not to waste his life chasing the things of this world. When God presented him an opportunity to serve, he jumped at it. As a result, he accomplished great things. The Lord is ready to use each of us the same way.

A Final Message of Hope

What a tour this has been! We've enjoyed amazing stories of God's faithfulness and experienced wild visions that point to the time of Daniel and to our generation as well. Most exciting of all, we've seen the deep ties that exist between Daniel and Revelation. Both have great portions of encouragement and application. Both explain clearly various aspects of God's scenario for the end times. However, as thorough as they may be in certain areas, neither book is comprehensive in its coverage of biblical prophecy. But bringing the two together fills in most of the gaps that one or the other may leave on its own.

God wants us to understand His plans. That is obvious by the large percentage of Scripture that He commits to informing us about what He is going to do. I like Paul's exhortation, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). What a blessing it is to realize that we have everything we need to know about the end times right in our Bibles! According to Paul's words, that truth is a source of hope and of comfort.

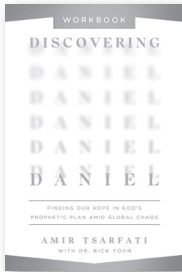
It is those words that reveal the true purpose for the prophecies God gave in Daniel and the book of Revelation. The Lord wants you to be able to look around at the insanity of this world and say, "I won't be afraid, because I know that God has a plan." When horrors take place like what happened in Israel on October 7, 2023, you can rest assured that evil does not win. God has shown you that as a believer, you will be taken up to Him at the rapture. How do you know He won't forget you? Because He has made it clear how, through the tribulation, He will not forget His people Israel, and how, at the end of the seven years of discipline, He will bring them to Himself. He is a promise-keeping God—He has demonstrated this throughout history, and He has assured it into the future.

So hold on to your hope, my friend. Trust in the Lord. Don't lean on your own understanding of what is taking place in this world. In all your ways, live for Him as your Lord and Savior, knowing that when the time comes, He will open that path straight into His presence.

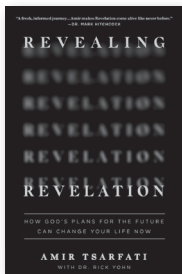
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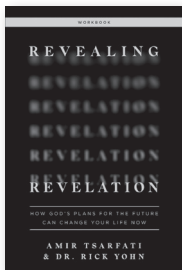
OTHER GREAT HARVEST HOUSE BOOKS BY AMIR TSARFATI



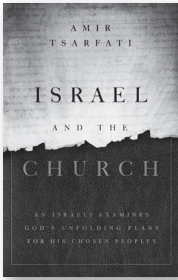
This workbook companion to *Discovering Daniel* offers a wealth of additional content to further enrich your study of Daniel and will help you apply this book of the Bible to your daily life, emboldening you to live with hope and confidence.



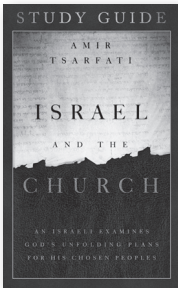
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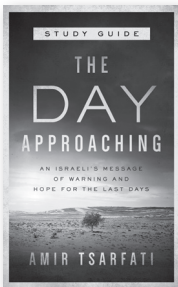
In *Israel and the Church*, bestselling author and native Israeli Amir Tzarfati helps readers recognize the distinct contemporary and future roles of both the Jewish people and the church, and how together they reveal the character of God and His perfect plan of salvation.



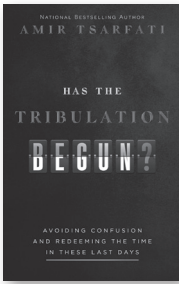
To fully grasp what God has in store for the future, it's vital to understand His promises to Israel. The *Israel and the Church Study Guide* will help you do exactly that, equipping you to explore the Bible's many revelations about what is yet to come.



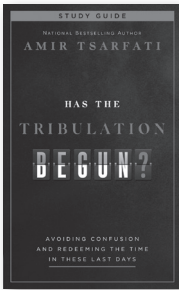
As a native Israeli of Jewish roots, Amir Tzarfati provides a distinct perspective that weaves biblical history, current events, and Bible prophecy together to shine light on the mysteries about the end times. In *The Day Approaching*, he points to the scriptural evidence that the return of the Lord is imminent.



Jesus Himself revealed the signs that will alert us to the nearness of His return. In *The Day Approaching Study Guide*, you'll have the opportunity to take an up-close look at what those signs are, as well as God's overarching plans for the future, and how those plans affect you today.

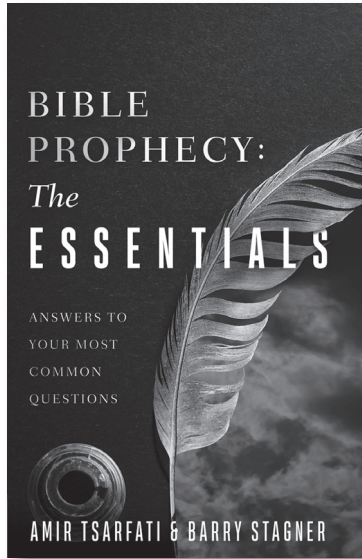


Bestselling author and native Israeli Amir Tsarfati provides clarity on what will happen during the tribulation and explains its place in God's timeline.



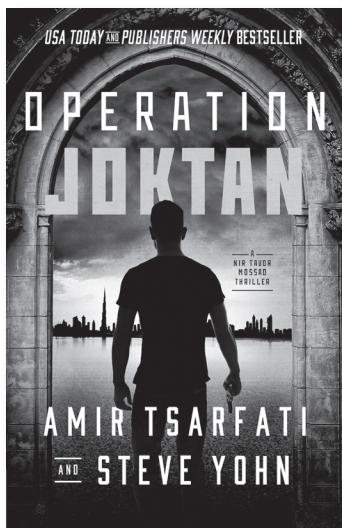
With this study guide companion to *Has the Tribulation Begun?*, bestselling author and prophecy expert Amir Tsarfati guides you through a biblical overview of the last days, with thought-provoking study and application questions.

AMIR TSARFATI WITH BARRY STAGNER



In *Bible Prophecy: The Essentials*, Amir and Barry team up to answer 70 of their most commonly asked questions, which focus on seven foundational themes of Bible prophecy: Israel, the church, the rapture, the tribulation, the millennium, the Great White Throne judgment, and heaven.

AMIR TSARFATI WITH STEVE YOHN



Book 1

"It was the perfect day—until the gunfire."

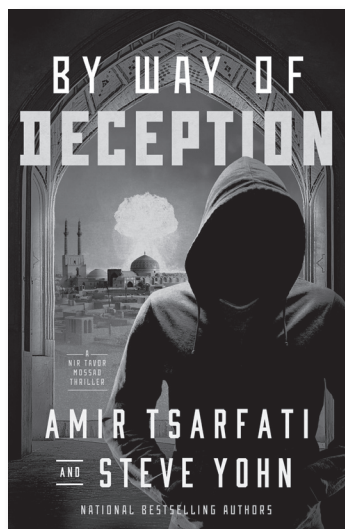
Nir Tavor is an Israeli secret service operative turned talented Mossad agent.

Nicole le Roux is a model with a hidden skill.

A terrorist attack brings them together, and then work forces them apart—until they're unexpectedly called back into each other's lives.

But there's no time for romance. As violent radicals threaten chaos across the Middle East, the two must work together to stop these extremists, pooling Nicole's knack for technology and Nir's adeptness with on-the-ground missions. Each heart-racing step of their operation gets them closer to the truth—and closer to danger.

In this thrilling first book in a new series, authors Amir Tsarfati and Steve Yohn draw on true events as well as tactical insights Amir learned from his time in the Israeli Defense Forces. For believers in God's life-changing promises, *Operation Joktan* is a suspense-filled page-turner that illuminates the blessing Israel is to the world.

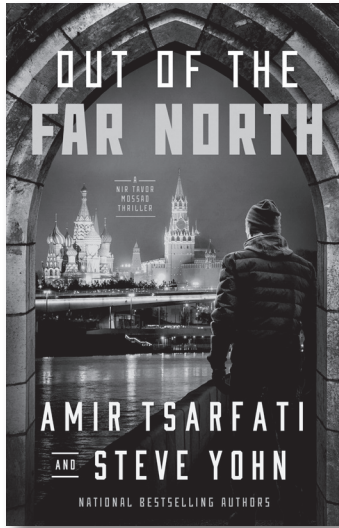


Book 2

The Mossad has uncovered Iran's plans to smuggle untraceable weapons of mass destruction into Israel. The clock is ticking, and agents Nir Tavor and Nicole le Roux can't act quickly enough.

Nir and Nicole find themselves caught in a whirlwind plot of assassinations, espionage, and undercover recon, fighting against the clock to stop this threat against the Middle East. As they draw closer to danger—and closer to each other—they find themselves ensnared in a lethal web of secrets. Will they have to sacrifice their own lives to protect the lives of millions?

Inspired by real events, authors Amir Tsarfati and Steve Yohn reteam for this suspenseful follow-up to the bestselling *Operation Joktan*. Filled with danger, romance, and international intrigue, this Nir Tavor thriller reveals breathtaking true insights into the lives and duties of Mossad agents—and delivers a story that will have you on the edge of your seat.



Book 3

Tensions are at a breaking point. The Western markets that once relied on Russian gas have turned to Israel for their energy needs. Furious, Russia moves to protect its interests by using its newfound ally, Iran, and Iran's proxy militias.

As Israel's elite fighting forces and the Mossad go undercover, they detect the Kremlin is planning a major attack against Israel. Hunting for clues, Mossad agents Nir Tavor and Nicole le Roux plunge themselves into the treacherous underworld of Russian oligarch money, power, and decadence.

With each danger they face, le Roux's newfound Christian faith grows stronger. And battle-weary Tavor—haunted by dreams from his past—must confront memories and pain he'd sought to bury.

In this electrifying thriller, hostilities explode as Tavor and le Roux fight to prevent a devastating conflict. Will they be able to outwit their enemies, or will their actions have catastrophic consequences?



Behold Israel is a nonprofit organization founded and led by native Israeli Amir Tsarfati. Its mission is to provide reliable and accurate reporting on developments in Israel and the surrounding region.

Through Behold Israel's website, free app, social media, and teachings in multiple languages, the ministry reaches communities worldwide.

Amir's on-location teachings explain Israel's central role in the Bible and present the truth about current events amidst global media bias against Israel.

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