

FRONTLINE

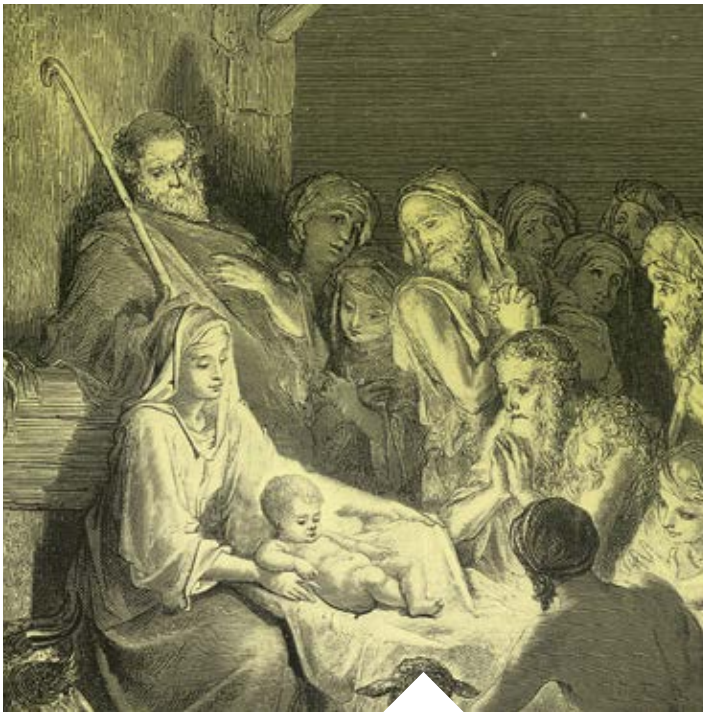
BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

Is the Bible a Supernatural Book? The Testimony of Fulfilled Prophecy

- ▶ Joseph's Prophetic Dreams
- ▶ Isaiah's Amazing Prophecy of King Cyrus
- ▶ The Fulfillment of Daniel's "Seventy Weeks" Prophecy
- ▶ Messianic Prophecies from the Book of Zechariah

FRONTLINE

Volume 32 • Number 3



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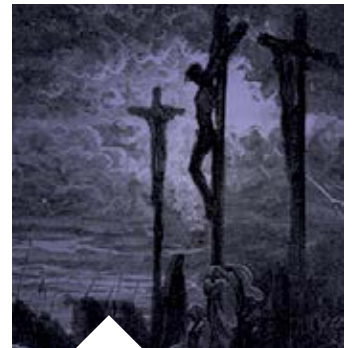
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Our sincere thanks to Dr. Ken Rathbun for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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How Does Fulfilled Prophecy Relate to the Believer?

Have you ever received a text or an e-mail telling you that you are the winner of a subscription, are eligible for a discount, or are the recipient of a gift card? More often than not those communications do not pan out. It is often not clear who sent them, and the messages ask you to supply personal information or to make a purchase, with the discounts or reimbursements promised to come later. I usually delete them without bothering to read them through. Why? “Consider the source” is a good rule to apply in these situations.

The Bible contains a host of prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled. They contain promises that matter to all who take the Bible seriously. These prophecies reveal to us characteristics of God, His priorities, His loves, and His plans. The prophecies still to come directly affect all of us because they disclose what will happen to us when we die and what will happen when the Lord returns. But why should we believe them? Consider the source!

WHY DOES THE PAST MATTER?

This issue focuses on Bible prophecies that God has already fulfilled. The purpose is to highlight what God’s prophets predicted in advance which then came to pass. We see the importance of this when we examine the details of these events and the fact that God’s Word predicted them clearly, specifically, and accurately ahead of time.

God called His people to understand what He can do (Isa. 43). It remains important for us to remind ourselves of that fact—and that God will do the same with prophecies that have yet come to pass.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue I am privileged to lead us on a visit to Joseph in the Book of Genesis (“Joseph’s Prophetic Dreams and Their Fulfillment”). Though Joseph interpreted the prophetic dreams of others, this article focuses on the ones God gave to Joseph himself.

Joseph’s faith, based on his teenage dreams, sustained him through decades of trials, tribulations, and ultimately, triumph.

Dr. Doug Brown gives us a precise analysis of Psalm 110, which is the New Testament’s most-often-cited Old Testament passage (“The Prophecy of the Eternal King-Priest in Psalm 110”). The encouragement it gave Christians in the first century is surely worthy of our notice.

We have also included two articles on the Book of Isaiah. The first is by Dr. Tim Little, who provides a careful explanation of one of the most-attacked fundamentals of the faith—the Virgin Birth (“The Sign: The Virgin in Isaiah 7:14”). The second examines a passage that has always intrigued me: the prophecy from Isaiah 44 and 45, which amazingly predicts the name of the man who would release the Israelite captives from their exile—150 years later (“Isaiah’s Amazing Prophecy of King Cyrus”)!

The fact that nonbelievers attack the Book of Daniel nearly as much as they do Genesis (the Bible’s most-attacked book) is a testament to Daniel’s prophetic pinpoint accuracy. So Dr. Alan Cole revisits “Fulfilled Prophecy in Daniel 2 and 7,” and Mr. Charlie Carter details the mathematical formula by which Daniel 9 predicted Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem hundreds of years later (“The Fulfillment of Daniel’s ‘Seventy Weeks’ Prophecy”).

And, finally, we include Dr. Keith Kobelia’s survey of selected “Fulfilled Messianic Prophecies from the Book of Zechariah.”

Each of these writers passionately communicates God’s truth. Pay particular attention to the applications they bring. And may your confidence in God be strengthened mightily as you review and revel in God’s sovereign control over events both past and future.

Ken Rathbun

THE TESTIMONY
OF FULFILLED
PROPHECY

Ken Rathbun

Joseph's Prophetic Dreams and Their Fulfillment



Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dream

FRONTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Genesis 37–50 records the incredible account of Joseph, his dysfunctional family, and God's faithfulness. Joseph's prophetic dreams during his youth sustained him in his making wise choices throughout his life. He had additional opportunities in the narrative to interpret dreams for the baker, the cupbearer, and for the great Pharaoh. But the ones we will focus on concern the dreams of his eventual exaltation above his brothers.

This prophecy of exaltation has several unique features. First, in a narrow sense, it was focused on just one person—Joseph himself. However, the dreams were not specific enough for Joseph to understand exactly what God had in mind. Joseph did not know when, how, or what God would accomplish as a result of his dreams.

Second, the fulfillment of the prophecy contained in his dreams had a wider scope than Joseph could ever have imagined. God's plan for its fulfillment was instrumental in preserving the lives of Joseph's entire family. And there was an even greater aspect to this prophecy that I will discuss at the end of this article.

God's faithfulness to Joseph's prophecy reminds believers that His plans and purposes are always best. This is true in spite of the many difficulties Joseph faced waiting for the fulfillment of his dreams. We will examine the difficulties that made waiting such a challenge and the prophecy's fulfillment and implications to us all. But first we will look closely at the prophetic dreams Joseph had.

ELABORATION OF THE PROPHETIC DREAMS

In Genesis 37 the juvenile Joseph was clearly the favorite of his father, the patriarch Jacob. Jacob demonstrated this favor by giving his favorite son a multicolored coat, which caused tension in the family, especially so since Joseph had previously given an "evil report" of his brothers to his father (Gen. 37:2).

Joseph aggravated the problem further when he boasted to his brothers about a recent dream he had: in the harvest fields Joseph's sheaf of grain prominently arose while his brothers' sheaves bowed down to it. His brothers' reaction was not positive. They immediately understood that Joseph was picturing himself in a position of authority over them (Gen. 37:7–8).

Whether Joseph had not anticipated the negative reaction in his brothers to his first dream, he had to be aware of the provocation his second dream would cause. But he told them anyway—and his father too: the sun, moon, and eleven (!) stars would bow to him. This news earned him a rebuke from his father; no one could miss the implications of priority of Joseph that his dreams described (Gen. 37:9–11).

This set the stage for how Joseph's brothers would respond to their hatred of their favored brother. By the end of the chapter Joseph found himself sold as a slave in Egypt by his own brothers, despite his pleas for help. Unknown to Joseph, his own father, thought him dead.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE PROPHECY

The surprising element in Joseph's new life was that he still believed in the truth of his prophetic dreams. He had faith that God would somehow, someway, sometime bring to pass this prophecy. Joseph believed in God's faithfulness. But there were at least two major problems that Joseph had to contend with continually about the fulfillment of the prophecy.

First, from Joseph's perspective, the prophecy was worryingly (and perhaps, provokingly) vague. What kind of exaltation could he expect? He knew he was to have some kind of prominence in his family. What would that look like? Would it include authority over anyone else or somewhere else? Also, how would that eminence come about? What was he supposed to do to make it happen? And perhaps most annoyingly, when would it happen? All of these concerns could have festered in Joseph's mind and brought doubts about whether his commitment to God's plan was the best direction he should follow in his life.

Secondly, the uncomfortable, unavoidable reality that faced Joseph every single day was that his new life circumstances did not seem to relate to his prophetic dreams in any way. No doubt Joseph quickly realized that the prophecy was not going to happen in a way he would have planned or preferred. Let us explore this aspect more in depth.

Genesis 39 details Joseph's rise to success as a slave in Potiphar's household. As his responsibilities increased, so did God's

GOD USED JOSEPH'S POSITION TO PRESERVE THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO WOULD BECOME HIS BELOVED AND CHOSEN PEOPLE, THE ISRAELITES. JOSEPH'S STEADFASTNESS TO GOD'S PLAN MEANT THAT JOSEPH BELIEVED GOD WOULD FULFILL THE PROPHECY HIS DREAMS HAD INDICATED. JOSEPH UNDERSTOOD THAT GOD HAD A PERSONAL INTEREST IN HIM AND HAD GUIDED HIM THROUGH ALL THOSE LONELY YEARS.

blessing. While being a slave was obviously not a role Joseph would have sought, at least his achievement brought some amount of satisfaction. We learn in Genesis 39:6–10 that Joseph’s first major temptation from Potiphar’s wife to compromise revealed his trust in God’s direction for his life. He refused to sin morally and forsake God’s plan—even though he did not know exactly what it was.

That decision came at quite a cost for Joseph. No matter how you look at it, a move from being a slave in Genesis 39 to a prisoner in chapter 40 is not a move upward. Joseph still persevered, and his descent into the dungeon became his path to the power and authority beyond his wildest imagination as the trusted premier of Pharaoh, who ruled one of the greatest kingdoms in the world at that time (Gen. 41).

THE TIMELINE OF THE PROPHECY

Joseph’s “quick” ascent in Genesis 41 does not adequately reflect the waiting he had to go through. When did the doubts come to him that he might not see his family again? The timeline below shows the years going by. One of the most difficult tasks in life is waiting for something to

happen, compounded by not knowing how long you have to wait. And Joseph did not even have certainty about what he was even waiting for. (*Italics in the timeline indicate estimations by the author.*)

OBSERVATIONS:

- Joseph worked thirteen years as a slave and prisoner without knowing how long it would last or what it was that God was preparing him for.
- Joseph had to wait until he was thirty years old to get married and start a family.
- Joseph had to wait twenty-two years to see his brothers, father, and family: from the time he was seventeen years old until he was thirty-nine.
- Joseph’s father, Jacob, died when Joseph was about fifty-six years old. That meant he would have lived nearly half his life (fifty-four years) in harmony with his brothers without the protection of their father. If Joseph had intended to do them harm, he had the power to do so.

FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECY

God used Joseph’s position to preserve the lives of those who would become His beloved and chosen people, the Israelites. Joseph’s steadfastness to God’s plan meant that Joseph believed God would fulfill the prophecy his dreams had indicated. Joseph understood that God had a personal interest in him and had guided him through all those lonely years.

Joseph’s response to God’s provision was to extend grace to those who had previously caused him pain. This was true when his father Jacob was living. Genesis 45:4–8 records him giving comfort to his brothers. Imagine that if you were in his place! But Joseph’s view of God’s provision and faithfulness to him extended also after Jacob died. Genesis 50:15–21 reveals Joseph having no animosity toward his brothers despite their ill treatment of him. The pain he experienced was part of God’s greater purpose.

Joseph also saw God’s greater good (Gen. 45:3–5) in the wider fulfillment of the prophecy that would allow God’s blessing of the future Nation of Israel and their eventual possession of the Holy Land. What Joseph might not have fully understood was that this nation would provide the blessing by which all the nations of the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3)—the eventual coming of the Messiah!

What does the fulfillment of Joseph’s prophetic dreams mean to us? My guess is that Joseph’s testimony to us would be something like this: *We can trust God to keep His Word to us—especially when life circumstances do not seem to reflect our expectations or understandings of what God is doing. God’s plan is always worth waiting for.*

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* The dates are adapted from John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 15. The dates assume Joseph lived from 1915–1805 BC. Other conservative scholars use slightly different dates but differ only by a year or two.

JOSEPH’S LIFE CHRONOLOGY*			
Historical Year	Reference in Genesis	Joseph’s Age	Event
1915 BC	NA	0	Joseph is born.
1909 BC	31:17–21	6	Jacob and his family move to Canaan.
1898 BC	37:2	17	Joseph is sold into Egypt.
1886 BC	40:14–15, 23	28	<i>The text indicates that at the time of Joseph’s interpreting of the dreams of the two prisoners he was two years from exaltation by Pharaoh.</i>
1884 BC	41:39–46	30	Pharaoh exalts Joseph to second in command of Egypt.
1878 BC	NA	37	<i>The seven good years of plenty end.</i>
1877 BC	47:13–17	38	<i>During the first year of famine the Egyptians use up all their money and animals to buy bread.</i>
1876 BC	47:18–21	39	<i>During the second year of famine Joseph buys land from the people.</i>
1876 BC	45:1–8	39	<i>Joseph’s brothers visit and he reveals himself.</i>
1876 BC	47:9	39	Jacob arrives in Egypt and has an interview with Pharaoh. Jacob’s stated age is 130 years.
1870 BC	NA	45	<i>The normal harvests resume.</i>
1859 BC	47:28	56	Jacob dies at age 147.
1805 BC	50:26	110	Joseph dies.

The Prophecy of the Eternal King-Priest in Psalm 110

The study of prophecy is always a favorite among believers. It is compelling and intriguing to see how prophets of God predict what will take place in the future. Fulfilled prophecy bolsters our faith and encourages us in the sovereignty of our great God. Only God has the omniscience to predict the future, and only God has the omnipotence to fulfill the prediction. Most prophecy in Scripture is directly tied to God's plan and promises. This is the case with the prophecy found in Psalm 110.

Psalm 110 is a royal psalm. The royal psalms are those whose subject is the king of Israel. The background to all the royal psalms is the Davidic Covenant found in 2 Samuel 7. Through the prophet Nathan, God promised David that He would establish David's dynasty forever (2 Sam. 7:12–14). God promised that one of David's descendants would eternally sit on Israel's throne. Psalm 110 builds upon this promise of God and provides further predictions as to how God will fulfill it. Psalm 110 proved immensely important for the Early Church, as it is quoted or alluded to over thirty times by New Testament writers to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah. In fact, Psalm 110 is the most-cited Old Testament passage in the New Testament.

INTERPRETIVE ISSUES WITH PSALM 110

Before we explore the predictions in Psalm 110, we need to explain two critical issues. First, who wrote the psalm? The authorship of Psalm 110 is critical for the proper interpretation. Though many modern interpreters doubt that David wrote the psalm, I believe that David is the author for these reasons. The first is the inscription of the psalm: "A Psalm of David." While it is possible to translate this as "A Psalm to David," the most common way to interpret the inscription is to understand David as the author. Second, Jesus affirmed that David was the author when questioning the Pharisees in the temple (Matt. 22:41–46; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44). This statement by Jesus settles the matter for me.

The second critical issue in understanding Psalm 110 is determining the subject of the psalm. Is Psalm 110 Messianic, or is it about David's immediate heir, Solomon? This issue is largely determined by the first line of the psalm: "The LORD said unto my Lord." The speaker in this verse is God, designated by His personal name, *Yahweh*. Most of our English translations indicate this name of God with "LORD" (in all caps). The critical issue, however, is the identification of the referent to "my Lord." The Hebrew word for "Lord" here is *ādōnī*. It usually refers to a human king or master in the Old Testament (in contrast to *ādōnay*, which always refers to God).¹

There are two schools of thought among conservative interpreters on the referent to "my Lord." Some Bible scholars believe "my Lord" refers to Solomon, the immediate successor to the Davidic throne. This would mean that the primary subject of the psalm would be Solomon and his enthronement as Israel's king (see 1 Kings 1). This line of interpretation culminates in a typological fulfillment with Jesus the Messiah as the last and ultimate son of David.² While this school of thought is possible, I believe that it is better to see Psalm 110 as a direct prophecy about the Messiah. In this case, "my Lord" in verse 1 would refer only to the Messiah. In other words, Psalm 110 is an oracular revelation from God to David about the future Messiah. This will become clearer as we look at the specific predictions in the psalm.

What is shocking about this statement is that David called his descendant "my Lord." Why would a king ever call his descendant "Lord"? Jesus picks up on this reversal of authority in His debate with the Pharisees (Matt. 22:41–46; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44). The opponents correctly identify the Messiah as the Son of David but cannot answer why David calls his descendant "Lord." The implications are

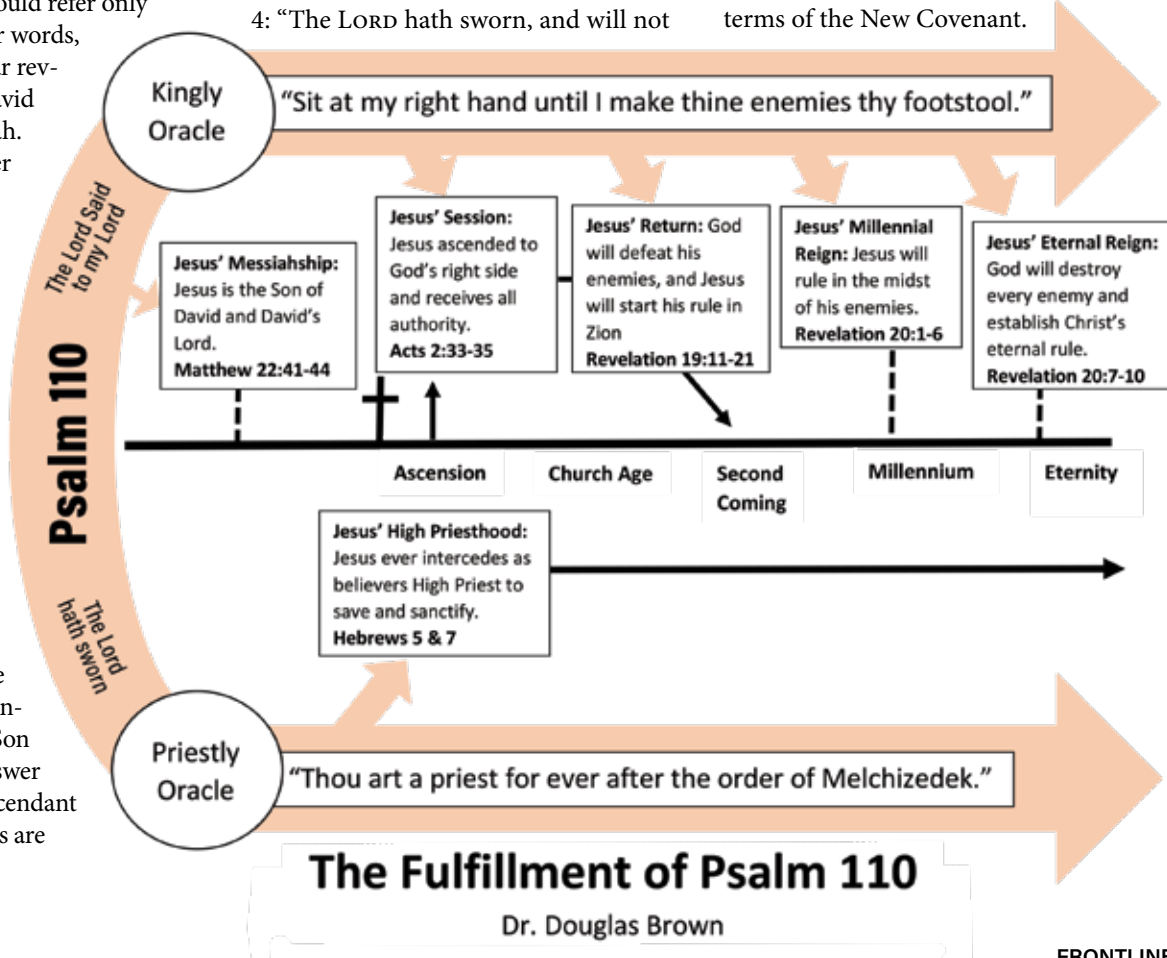
clear: Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus is greater than David.

THE PROPHECIES IN PSALM 110

Psalm 110 contains two oracles or divine declarations by God. The first oracle is found in verse 1: "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." This is a kingly pronouncement for the Messiah to sit at God's right side. The right side was a place of honor and respect in ancient Near Eastern cultures (e.g., 1 Kings 2:19). In the case of Psalm 110:1, it is also a place of elevated authority. Two shocking facts emerge from this oracle. First, the future Messiah will rule with God as His coregent. The authority and rule of the Messiah is unparalleled by any standard of earthly kings, even that of David himself. The extent of the authority of the Messiah will encompass all the nations (see Pss. 110:2–3, 5–6; 2:7–9). Second, God will subdue all the enemies of the Messiah sometime after He is exalted. So the exaltation of the Messiah to the throne of God precedes the defeat of his enemies. Normally just the opposite would be expected—exaltation would follow victory.

The second oracle is found in verse 4: "The LORD hath sworn, and will not

repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." This is a priestly pronouncement that is enhanced as a divine oath. God reveals more shocking details about the future Messiah. First, the king of Israel will also be a priest. Under Mosaic Law the Levitical priests exclusively administered all the sacrifices and temple worship in Israel. I think this is another clear reason Psalm 110 is Messianic and not merely typical of all of David's successors. Because David was from the tribe of Judah, he and all his descendants could not function as king-priests under Mosaic Law. Second, we learn that the Messiah will serve as a priest under a new priestly order—the king-priest Melchizedek. Melchizedek was both the King of Salem (i.e., Jerusalem) and "the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18). He received tithes from Abraham and blessed him in Genesis 14. Third, this oracle reveals that the Messiah will serve as a priest eternally. I believe that Melchizedek serves as a type of Christ, as explained in Hebrews 5 and 7. Only the Messiah could fulfill this eternal expectation outside of the Mosaic Covenant and under the terms of the New Covenant.



FULFILLMENT OF PSALM 110

"My Lord"	"Sit at my right"	"Thou art a priest forever"	"Until I make your enemies your footstool"		
Messiahship Psalm 110:1a	Session Psalm 110:1b	High Priesthood Psalm 110:4	Second Coming Psalm 110:2, 3	Millennial Reign Psalm 110:2, 3	End of Millennium Psalm 110:5-7
Jesus is the Son of David and David's Lord.	Jesus ascended to heaven and is entrusted with all authority.	Jesus ever intercedes as the believers' High Priest to save and sanctify.	God will defeat His enemies, and Jesus will start His rule in Zion.	Jesus will rule in the midst of His enemies.	God will ultimately defeat every enemy and restore rule over all creation.
Matthew 24:22-26 Mark 12:35-37 Luke 20:41-44	Acts 2:33-36 Ephesians 1:20-23 Philippians 2:9 Colossians 3:1 1 Peter 4:20-21	Hebrews 5:6-10 Hebrews 7:1-28 Romans	Revelation 19:11-21 Zechariah 14	Revelation 20:1-6	Revelation 20:3, 7-10

THE FULFILLMENT OF PSALM 110

Allen Ross succinctly summarizes the prophetic nature of Psalm 110: "This marvelous psalm is a prophecy of the coming victory of the Messiah over the world."⁴ So how and when are these prophecies fulfilled? Several layers of fulfillment emerge in Scripture. First, part of the prophecy of Psalm 110 was fulfilled in conjunction with Jesus' first advent. The New Testament writers repeatedly identified Jesus as the Messiah based on Psalm 110:1. Jesus was the ultimate Son of David who was also David's Lord (Matt. 22:41-46). In addition, the New Testament clearly sees the resurrection and ascension of Jesus as a fulfillment of Psalm 110:1 (Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:21-22). Consider Peter's sermon in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost. After explaining Jesus' resurrection and ascension, Peter cites Psalm 110:1 as evidence that Jesus has been exalted to God's right hand:

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33-36).

Theologically this is known as the session of Jesus, which completed His exaltation to God's right side. The authority

entrusted to Jesus at His session empowers the Church to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

Another fulfillment in conjunction with Jesus' first advent is the priestly office of Jesus. In Hebrews 5:6-10 and 7:1-28, the author of Hebrews explains that Jesus is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek and is perpetually and eternally serving as the believers' High Priest. Therefore Psalm 110:4 anticipates the redemptive nature of Jesus' first coming and the ongoing intercession of the Messiah. As King, Jesus rules with authority and justice; as Priest, he saves and sanctifies.

The second layer of fulfillment of Psalm 110 is yet to come in conjunction with Jesus' second advent. While God exalted Christ to His right hand at the ascension, God has not yet defeated His enemies. Hebrews 10:12-13 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 make this clear. God will defeat His enemies initially at Christ's return, and Christ will establish His millennial reign in Zion (Ps. 110:2-3; see Zech. 14). Yet God will continue to subdue His enemies throughout the kingdom as Christ rules in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2).

The final layer of fulfillment will occur at the end of the Millennium, as Satan rallies the nations in one final rebellion against God (Rev. 20:3, 7-10). Psalm 110:5-6 alludes to this violent and ultimate defeat of all of God's enemies. Interestingly, the psalm ends with the picture of peaceful restoration and final exaltation of the Messiah (Ps. 110:7). At the outset of Eternity, God will rule over

all creation, having vanquished every enemy.

CONCLUSION

Psalm 110 is a fascinating psalm. Its prophecies provide hope for believers as we continue to live as pilgrims in a world in rebellion to God's rule. We can rest assured that God will complete His unfolding plan to establish the Messiah's righteous rule on earth. Until then, we need to offer thanks to God for Jesus' empowering presence to complete the Church's mission, draw near to God through Jesus, and live in anticipation of His coming kingdom. Jesus truly is our divine King-Priest.



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¹ Robert L. Alden, "110," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 13.

² See, e.g., Gordon H. Johnston, "Messianic Trajectories in the Royal Psalms," in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012), 91-100.

³ See, e.g., Michael R. Rydelnik, "Psalm 110: The Messiah as Eternal King Priest," in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 673-91.

⁴ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90-150)*, Vol. 3, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2016), 358.

The Sign

The Virgin in Isaiah 7:14

According to the Gospel of Matthew, the virgin Mary was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit. Jesus the Messiah was miraculously conceived, and, several months later, God was with us. The birth of the Messiah took place in this way, according to Matthew 1:23, in fulfillment of a prophecy: “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

From Matthew’s account, the virgin birth of Jesus the Messiah is miraculous but simple and straightforward. When one reads the Old Testament context, however, that simplicity is quickly questioned. Some have questioned the validity of this prophecy, some have argued for two fulfillments, and others contend that Isaiah prophesied something he did not quite understand. This article argues that Isaiah prophesied a single prophecy with a single meaning—a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son, Immanuel.

HISTORICAL SETTING

The virgin-birth prophecy is couched in a specific historical situation that concerns three kings: Ahaz, king of Judah; Rezin, king of Syria; and Pekah, king of Israel. Rezin and Pekah allied themselves together against Assyria and sought the support of Ahaz. Ahaz refused. As a result, Rezin and Pekah prepared for war, seeking to supplant Ahaz and replace him with a king who would fight against Assyria with them. This military maneuver stirred great fear in Judah (Isa. 7:2).

The Lord sent His prophet Isaiah to assure Ahaz that Rezin and Pekah’s plan would come to nothing (Isa. 7:4–9). Isaiah told Ahaz, “Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted.” Ahaz simply needed to trust the Lord. If Ahaz failed to trust the Lord, then he would “not be established” (Isa. 7:9).

Even after this exhortation and promise, the Lord spoke to Ahaz again: “Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above” (Isa. 7:11). Ahaz, however, had already decided not to trust the Lord. Instead, he sent money to Tiglath-



Pileasar, king of Assyria (2 Kings 16:8). Ahaz refused the Lord’s merciful gift of a sign and replied, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD” (Isa. 7:12).

Tiglath-Pileasar did help Ahaz. He invaded Syria and Israel. Both countries’ capitals were taken and their people deported in the succeeding years. But Assyria did not stop its invasion. Assyria also invaded Ahaz’s country—Judah. Isaiah prophesied, “The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father’s house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria” (Isa. 7:17). Tiglath-Pileasar’s successor, Sennacherib, would conquer all of Judah except Jerusalem. Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, was pinned up in Jerusalem like a bird caught in a cage (Isa. 36–39).



The Nativity

THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY

Between Isaiah 7:12 and 15, Isaiah wrote the prophecy that the virgin would conceive and give birth to the Immanuel child. Because all of Isaiah 7 concerns a prophecy that applied to Ahaz and his political situation, many theologians and commentators have argued that the virgin birth prophecy must be some kind of double fulfillment. Jewish apologists mock and claim that Christians have ripped this verse out of its historic context and that the Gospel of Matthew has read a meaning into the text that was never intended. They claim this text has nothing to do with Jesus or any supposed “virgin” birth. Yet one argument in favor of the virgin birth comes from the nature of biblical prophecy. Two points should be noted: the significance of a “sign” and the

gaps between the two comings of Jesus the Messiah.

The Sign. The virgin birth prophecy is actually a sign. Signs were given to validate long-term prophecies. In Ahaz’s specific situation, Ahaz could have asked the sun to go dark or the earth to split apart. A short-term sign (e.g., darkened sun) would validate a long-term prophecy (e.g., two kings will be extinguished). First, the “sign” would need to be something miraculous. The conception of the Messiah by the Holy Spirit would qualify as a miraculous event. Those who believe in a historic fulfillment lack a miraculous event. Attempts to find a fulfillment in Ahaz’s wife or some other courtly “young maiden” are unconvincing. Young ladies have been marrying, conceiving, and giving birth since the beginning of time. The Hebrew article “the” denotes that this

virgin is a unique person—the virgin who gives birth to Immanuel.¹

Gaps. The Hebrew prophets did not see a distinction between the two comings of Jesus the Messiah. Isaiah 61:1–2 illustrate this truth. In Luke 4:18–20, Jesus picked up the Isaiah scroll and read Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down.” Jesus stopped reading the scroll right in the middle of a poetic line in Isaiah 61, “To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, *and the day of vengeance of our God.*” At Jesus’ Second Coming He will come in vengeance. Jesus did not read that section of the scroll at the Nazareth synagogue because it was not yet time for Him to proclaim the day of vengeance.

THE VIRGIN-BIRTH PROPHECY IS COINED IN A SPECIFIC HISTORICAL SITUATION THAT CONCERNS THREE KINGS: AHAZ, KING OF JUDAH; REZIN, KING OF SYRIA; AND PEKAH, KING OF ISRAEL.

Isaiah 7 contains a similar collusion of not only the First and Second Comings of the Messiah but also the first and second cataclysmic invasions of Assyria. An additional argument that Isaiah 7:14 was originally understood to refer to the Messiah comes from this collusion in Isaiah 8. The Immanuel prophecy continues into chapter 8: “The king of Assyria . . . shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel” (Isa. 8:7–8). Notice that this king of Assyria conquers Immanuel’s land. This Immanuel Child was not some inconsequential child born to a woman of the court. He is the owner of the land of Israel. Immanuel is the King. Isaiah and his original audience would have understood this point. Isaiah 8:10 confirms, “Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us [i.e., Immanuel].” This Immanuel Child is the reason the invading nations’ conspiring comes to nothing. The First and Second Advents of the Immanuel Child are found right here in Isaiah 7–8.

The king of Assyria provides the correspondence between Ahaz’s political situation and the Immanuel Child’s eschatological deliverance. Just as Ahaz made a foreign alliance which brought the king of Assyria into his land (Isa. 7), so also will eschatological Israel make a foreign alliance which will bring the eschatological king of Assyria into Israel (Isa. 10:20). The name “Immanuel” ties Isaiah 7:1–8:10 together and presents the child who will rule forever (Isa. 9:6–7). The virgin birth of the Immanuel Child is the sign (Isa. 7:14) which validates Immanuel’s eschatological deliverance of Israel (Isa. 8:10). The New Testament believer knows Immanuel will return and deliver Israel because Immanuel has already been miraculously born of a virgin.

THE MEANING OF ISAIAH 7:14

A careful analysis of Isaiah 7:12–17 reveals that Isaiah 7:13–14 concerns the entire house of David and the virgin birth of the Messiah, but Isaiah 7:15–17 concern Ahaz’s specific political situation. Two points support this deduction.

Pronouns and the House of David.

Because Ahaz rejected the Lord’s merciful offer of a sign, the Lord gave the entire house of David a sign. The Isaiah 7:14 sign is not even given to Ahaz; it is given to the house of David. The change in recipient is also apparent in the pronouns. When Isaiah spoke to Ahaz, he used the second-person singular pronoun, “you” (Isa. 7:11, 16–17). When Isaiah spoke to the house of David, he used the second-person plural pronoun, “ye” (Isa. 7:13–14). Those who see a historic fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 fail to recognize the change in pronouns and recipient of the sign. The virgin birth prophecy is not directed to Ahaz, but to the entire house of David.

Eater of Curds and Honey. Most translations and commentators argue that Immanuel is the eater of curds and honey in Isaiah 7:15: “Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.” Three points, however, argue against this interpretation. First, the purpose of the curds and honey is to teach someone right and wrong. Immanuel (God with us) is God and does not require moral instruction. Second, the curds and honey relate to Ahaz’s political situation and how the Lord instructs Israel. Curds and honey are not delicacies but the produce of a famished society which comes as the result of Ahaz’s failure to trust the Lord. The king of Assyria comes through the land and destroys everything, leaving a man with only a young cow and two sheep (7:21). Everyone who is left in the land will eat only curds and honey (7:22). The curds and honey in Isaiah 7:15 are *not* eaten by the Immanuel Child, but by the unspecified young man in verse 16 whose starving

stomach teaches him to trust the Lord and not foreign powers.

The actual eater of curds and honey is directly stated in Isaiah 7:16—the young man: “For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.” Because the Hebrew contains the definite article “*the* young man,” most believe that the referent is Immanuel, but the definite article could refer to Isaiah’s son Shear-Jashub (cf. Isa. 7:3; 8:4) or, more likely, a class of people—the young-man class of people (cf. Isa. 3:5). Isaiah 7:15–16 no longer addresses the house of David but Ahaz: “the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken.” The “you” in Isaiah 7:16 is singular and refers to Ahaz. The virgin birth sign was given to the house of David (7:13–14), but the prophecy that Rezin and Pekah’s lands would be deserted by the time a young man could discern right and wrong was given to Ahaz (7:15–16).²

Isaiah 7:14 prophesies that a unique woman, a virgin, will conceive and give birth to a son. The King of Assyria may conquer Immanuel’s land (Isa. 8:8; 10:13–15), but Immanuel will bring to nothing the conspiring of the eschatological enemies of the Lord (Isa. 8:9–10). **Immanuel is the child born to rule (Isa. 9:6–7), the light (Isa. 9:2; cf. 10:17) who breaks the yoke of the king of Assyria (Isa. 9:4; cf. 10:26–27).** Immanuel will regather the remnant (Shear-Jashub; cf. Isa. 7:3; 10:22) of Israel and rule forever from Jerusalem (Isa. 11:9). The virgin miraculously conceived and gave birth to a son—that is why we know that Immanuel will come again and God will once again be with us.

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¹ Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 39.

² Arnold and Choi, 39–40.

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Isaiah's Amazing Prophecy of King

That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

—Isaiah 44:28

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut.

—Isaiah 45:1

Imagine in 1830 that someone in the then fifty-four-year-old United States of America predicted by name *in writing* that a future president, who himself had formerly been a Hollywood actor, would be instrumental in ending the Cold War with the Soviet Union some 150 years later—in the 1980s! What do you suppose the people back in the early nineteenth century would have thought? Perhaps their first questions would be:

- “What’s a Cold War?”
- “What’s a Soviet Union?”
- “What’s Hollywood?”

And then, “How could an actor be elected president?”

The very idea would sound so fantastical as to be ridiculed. The reaction for those in the twenty-first century upon hearing such a *written* claim would be extreme skepticism as well: “No one could do that; the document was forged.”

Something similar to this made-up scenario did happen in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah predicted that a king named Cyrus would allow the Jewish exiles to return to the Promised Land. There are so many “impossible” aspects to this prediction that a person could conclude only that the Bible is God’s Holy Word or that this story gives evidence that the Bible makes fraudulent claims.

We are going to see that Isaiah’s miraculous prediction of the Persian King Cyrus’s granting the exiled Jewish people release from captivity (Isa. 44–45) provides the believer assurance that God’s Word is trustworthy. To accomplish this, we will explore the following significances: of the prophecy’s context, of King Cyrus, of the prophecy itself, of the timeline, and of the implications to Bible believers today.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPHECY’S CONTEXT

Isaiah wrote the prophetic book which bears his name starting with the reign of King Uzziah (Isa. 6:1), who died in 739 BC. He continued his prophetic ministry to at least 681 BC, when the Assyrian king Sennacherib died in 681 BC (described in Isa. 37:38). During that time he wrote the prophecy concerning Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28–45:1. Conservative scholars estimate Isaiah wrote the prophecy some 150 years before its fulfillment in 538 BC.

That time in Judah’s history (739 to 681 BC) witnessed the decline and downfall of the Northern Kingdom, which was conquered and deported to the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. It was the Assyrian Empire, not the later (and shorter-lived) neo-Babylonian Empire, who were the terror in the minds of lesser kingdoms in Isaiah’s day. The Persian Empire was not really on anyone’s radar during that time.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KING

Ezra 1:1–4 mentions Persian King Cyrus allowing the Jewish people to return to their own land. It was a reversal of the Assyrian strategy of exiling conquered peoples to other parts of the Empire to prevent revolts. Cyrus’s motivations for changing the policy had religious overtones and reveal his desire to establish loyal buffer states around him:

The famous Cyrus Cylinder (538 B.C.), which records his [Cyrus’s] capture of Babylon and his program of repatriating his subject peoples in their homelands,

Cyrus

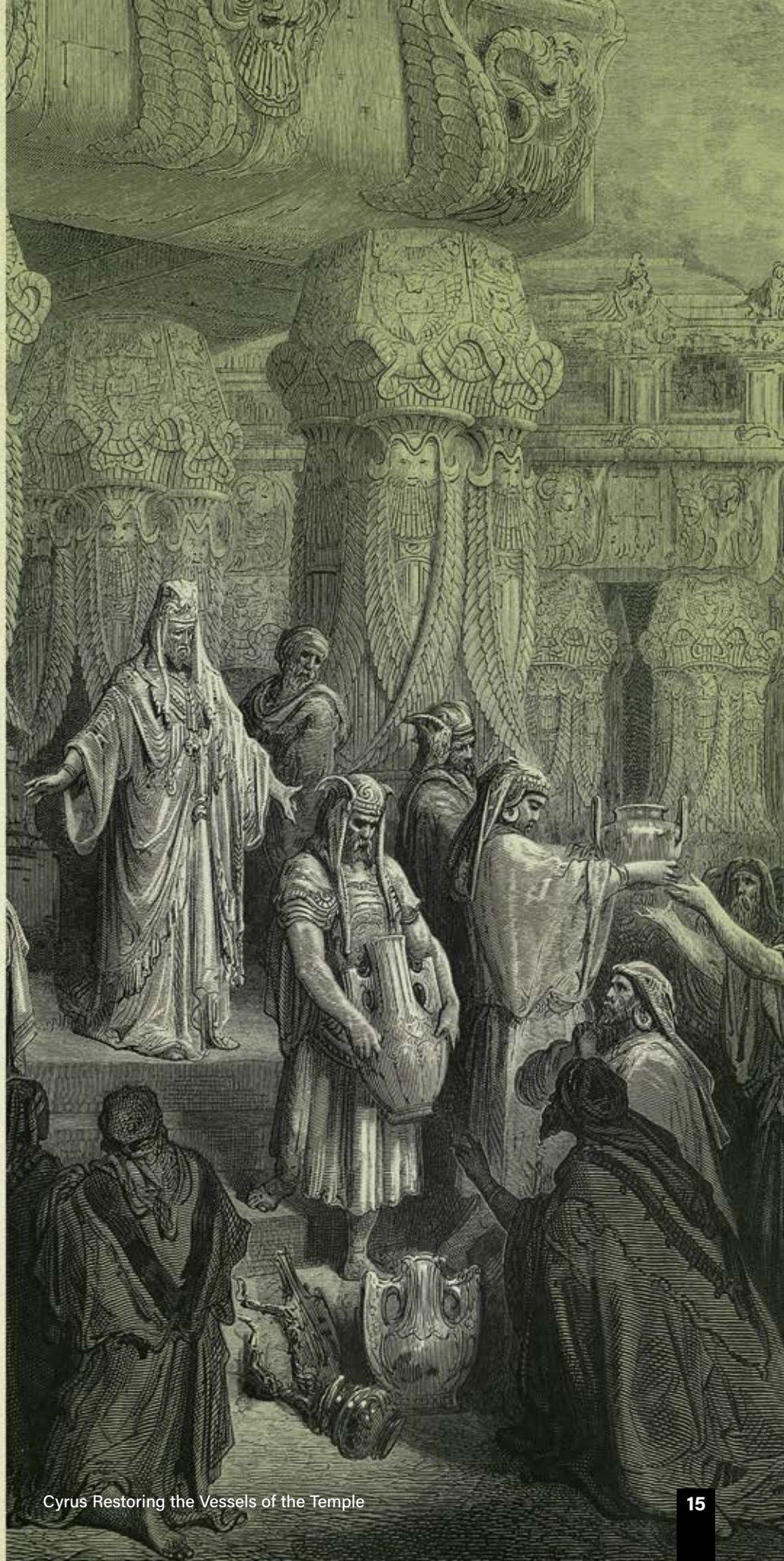
includes this statement: “May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities daily ask Bel and Nebo for a long life for me.”¹

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPHECY

The Jewish people living in Isaiah’s day were witnesses of God’s clear judgment on the Northern Kingdom, resulting in their exile to a foreign land. Some of them must have been concerned about the spiritual state of their own Southern Kingdom centered in Jerusalem and its growing idolatry.

Though the worship of the true God took place in the temple, there were those in the Southern Kingdom who were aware of the shortcomings of the people in their dedication to God. While some in the Jerusalem orbit might have taken security in the assumption that God would never allow His temple to be overrun by Gentile infidels, others realized from the messages of prophets such as Isaiah and, later, Micah that God would not tolerate their sin forever. These prophets had predicted Jerusalem’s fall and the temple’s destruction.

However, from the Cyrus prophecy, they could take comfort that God’s promises of His coming kingdom would not be forgotten. Though Jerusalem would fall, at some point the kingdom prophecy would be fulfilled. Jerusalem and the temple (both very much in operation during Isaiah’s time) would be rebuilt after a time of destruction and desolation (Isa. 44:28).



Further, the prophecy goes on to state that Cyrus, God's "anointed," would not only free the Jewish people but also to subdue the nations that had oppressed them (Isa. 45:1–2).

Does the prophecy sound fantastical? The context of these verses gives evidence of God's power that should quiet the doubters. Just after the prophecy, God declares through Isaiah (45:5–7):

I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

God identifies the object of His concern, calling Israel His elect. The context allows no mistaking or substitution of who are the objects of His declarations.² The previous chapter also speaks of God's exclusivity and power (Isa. 44:6–8):

Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

Do we dare doubt God? Can He predict the future years in advance through His prophets? This prophecy declares to us in no uncertain terms that our choice is to believe His Word.

Higher criticism adherents can resort only to the claim that the prophecy was a forgery, written after the events. This prophecy contributes to the fact that liberal scholars believe there were two or even three authors of this book, contrary to the Bible's claims.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TIMELINE

- 681 BC: Isaiah wrote the Cyrus prophecy before this date.

- 612 BC: The mighty Assyrian Empire is defeated by Babylon.
- ca. 605 BC: Jeremiah predicts that Judah will be exiled for seventy years (Jer. 25:1, 11–12).³
- 586 BC: Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem and carries the captives to Babylon.
- 559 BC: Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire, comes to the throne and reigns until his death in 530 BC.⁴
- 550/549 BC: Cyrus defeats the Medes and becomes ruler of the Persian and Median Empire.
- 547–546 BC: Cyrus conquers Lydia and Anatolia.
- 539 BC: Cyrus defeats the Babylonian Empire.
- 538 BC: Cyrus decrees that the Jews may return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. (2 Chron. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4).⁵

The timeline clearly shows that since the Bible is correct, it could only be a miraculous prediction. Within Isaiah's lifetime Assyria was the dominant empire. No one could have foreseen their defeat by the upstart Babylonians in 612 BC. Further, the quick demise of the Babylonian Empire (in one night) in 539 BC (which resulted in the new, powerful Persian Empire) demonstrates that world-changing events can happen very quickly.⁶

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IMPLICATIONS

What implications and applications did these verses have for those who read them in Isaiah's time? And what significance did they have for those who would suffer during the exile?

For people during Isaiah's time:

- God had a plan and purpose (though a difficult one) for sending His people into exile.
- God would not abandon His chosen beloved people—the Jews. His commitment to them was not based on their good works. God's steadfast love to His people was based on His grace.

For people during the Exile:

- God had not abandoned His people. Though many of them had

witnessed the unthinkable—the Jerusalem temple's destruction—God would allow the Jewish people to return and rebuild it. What an encouragement this was, not just for the exiles but also for their descendants during those seventy years!

- God's promises to Israel were dependent on His keeping His Word to them.

What about for believers today? Is there any lesson or encouragement that might help us? I think there is—first, because the God we worship is the same God as that of the Israelites. His faithfulness to us is also based on grace, not on our works. What He has revealed in His Word for our future (what we call the "End Times"), we can believe will happen as He said.

Why? Because we have a God who is all-knowing and all-powerful. He can and did make the most inconceivable predictions actually occur. What an encouragement it is to know that our Lord God has great plans for us—and has the power to bring them to pass.

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¹ John A. Martin, "Ezra," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 654.

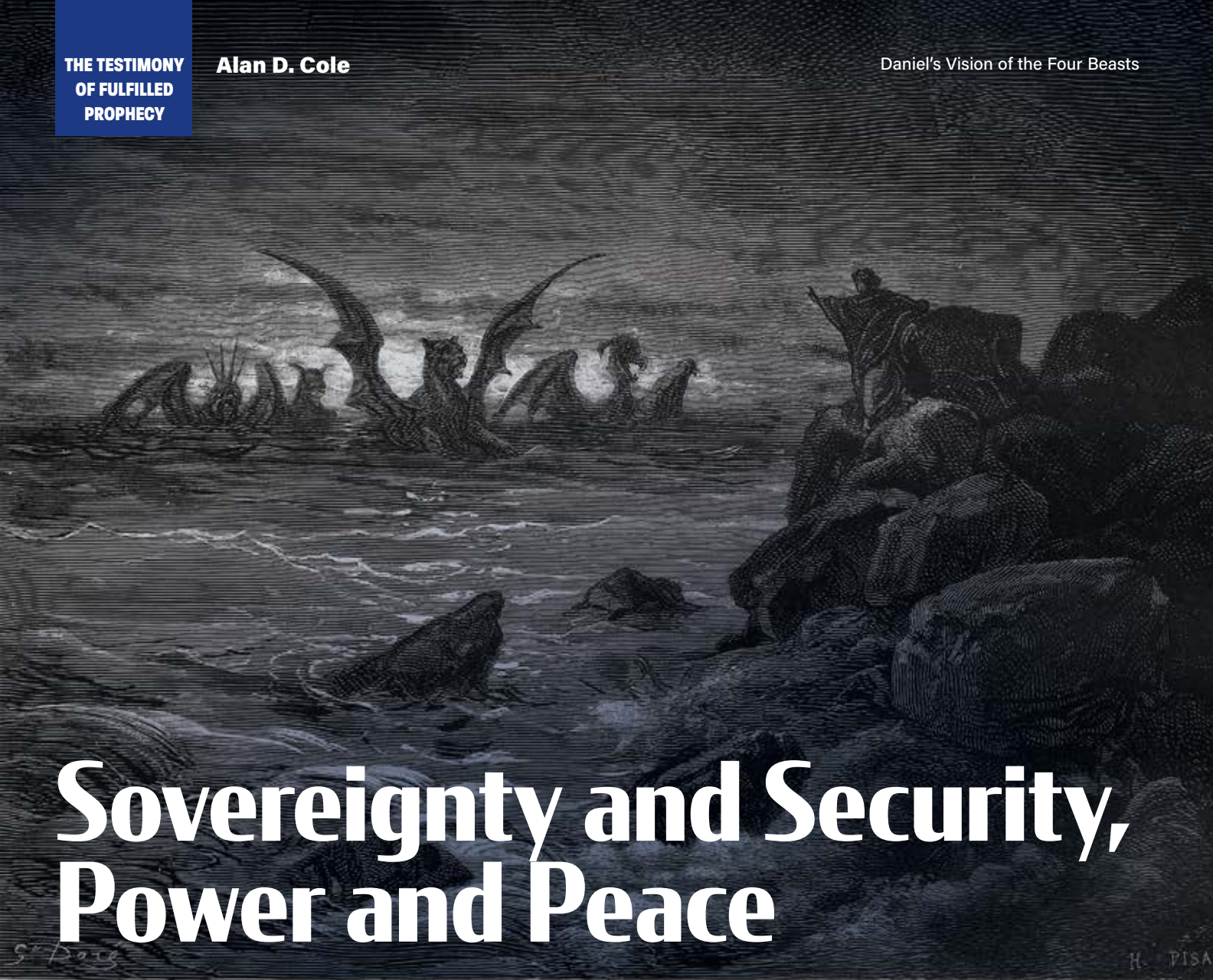
² There are those who might want to substitute the "church" here instead of Israel. But that would violate literal interpretation and is completely foreign to the context.

³ For dating, see the discussing in Charles L. Feinberg, "Jeremiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 530.

⁴ The dates from Cyrus's activities come from Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra–Nehemiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job*, Vol. 4, 601.

⁵ John A. Martin, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1099.

⁶ Another example would be the rapid fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.



Sovereignty and Security, Power and Peace

Fulfilled Prophecy in Daniel 2 and 7

The hiker who ascends the lofty mountain and pauses to view the landscape below him can see in one panoramic view the entire forest and its relationship to the landscape around it. The interpreter of the Book of Daniel is like this hiker. The student of this book receives a panoramic view of the forest of prophecy and how this forest relates to the theological landscape of God's sovereign plan. In essence, when one studies the Book of Daniel, the individual is looking at the big prophetic picture. As John Whitcomb states, "The book of Daniel stands at the very pinnacle of Old Testament prophetic writings, under girded

by the massive foundation stones of the books of Moses, most of the prophets, and the poetic books."¹

Daniel 2 and 7 especially present this sweeping view of prophecy's direction. These two chapters hold a significant role in understanding the Book of Daniel, and this role is demonstrated by the threefold structure of the book: chapter 1 serves as an introduction, chapters 2–7 focus mainly on the Gentile nations, and chapters 8–12 focus mainly on the Nation of Israel. The foundation for this understanding rests on the differences in the languages of the book, both Hebrew (chs. 1, 8–12) and Aramaic (chs. 2–7).² In the second section, chapter 2

relates to both history and prophecy and forms a parenthesis with chapter 7. Both chapters are parallel despite the differing details.

The rest of this unit also contains parallels. Chapters 3 and 6 relate to the Gentile persecution of the Israelites as demonstrated by the fiery furnace and the lions' den. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the visions of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and Daniel's interpretation of these visions.³ Daniel 2 and 7 are broad in their topics and lead to the central focus of chapters 4 and 5, in which Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar learn of God's sovereignty. The theological concept of God's sovereignty over kings

COMPREHENDING THE INTERPRETATION OF DANIEL 2 AND ASSIST THE BIBLICAL STUDENT TO UNDERSTAND THE BROAD SCOPE OF PROPHETIC REVELATION, THE “PROPHETIC FOREST.” AS ONE COMPREHENDS THE PAST, THE INDIVIDUAL CAN COMPREHEND THE FUTURE.

and kingdoms is the theme of the book. Nebuchadnezzar especially expressed this theme in 4:17 and 34–35. Each account or vision demonstrates God’s control and direction of the affairs of men to bring about His desired plan. Stephen Miller correctly states, “Every page reflects the author’s [Daniel’s] conviction that his God was the Lord of individuals, nations, and all of history.”⁴

THE GREAT IMAGE

Daniel 2 presents Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a “great image.” The first section of the chapter discusses the king’s demand for an interpretation of his dream (vv. 1–23). The second section presents the interpretation of the dream (vv. 24–45), and the final section presents Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction (vv. 46–49). The details of the king’s dream are as follows (vv. 31–35):

- Head of gold.
- Chest and arms of silver.
- Middle and thighs of bronze.
- Legs of iron.
- Feet of part iron and clay.
- Uncut stone that crushes the image
- Iron, clay, bronze, silver, gold that become chaff and are blown away by the wind.

Daniel interpreted the dream in verses 36–45. The head of gold is Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire. Verses 37–38 state, “Thou art this head of gold.” In prophecy kings and kingdoms are often linked. The Babylonian Empire was not very successful after Nebuchadnezzar’s death, falling to the Medo-Persian Empire about twenty-three years later.⁵ Daniel recorded in chapter 5 this takeover by Medo-Persia. This new kingdom is the one referred to in 2:39 as “another kingdom inferior to”

Nebuchadnezzar. Just as silver is secondary to gold and the chest is secondary to the head, the Medo-Persian Empire was secondary to the Babylonian Empire.⁶ The Medo-Persian Empire was inferior to the previous kingdom because its king did not have absolute power. He was bound by the law of the Medes and Persians which stated that, “No decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed” (6:15). The new empire lasted for about 208 years, dating from 539–331 BC.⁷

Daniel continued his interpretation in verse 39 by stating that a third kingdom would follow the second one. This new kingdom was Greece, which lasted from about 331 to 31 BC. Alexander the Great formed the kingdom but died in 323 BC. His kingdom was divided into four sections with each one being ruled by one of his generals, a point discussed in the seventh chapter.⁸ This kingdom did not have the authority or the power of the previous kingdom.

Daniel moved to the next kingdom, the one “strong as iron” (v. 40). This empire was symbolized by iron, which has less value than the other metals. Rome followed the Grecian Empire, and the description was appropriate for Rome. Miller notes, “Rome ruled the nations with an iron hand and like a huge iron club shattered all who resisted its will.”⁹ He dates the Roman Empire from 146 BC to AD 395, when it split into the European and Western Empires.¹⁰

Up to this point in the chapter, all the prophecies have been fulfilled. This literal fulfillment enables us to interpret the rest of the chapter in a literal manner. The feet of iron and clay will be a future aspect of a Roman Empire but will not be completely unified. Iron and clay do not form a tight bond. The uncut stone will be the coming of Christ, who will crush the future Roman

Empire and establish a worldwide kingdom that we refer to as the Millennial Kingdom (vv. 43–45).

THE FOUR BEASTS

Daniel 7 presents Daniel’s dream of the “four great beasts.” The first section of the chapter discusses Daniel’s dream (vv. 1–14), the second section provides the interpretation of the dream (vv. 15–27), and the third section indicates Daniel’s reaction to the dream (v. 28). The details of Daniel’s dream are as follows (vv. 2–8):

- A lion.
- A bear.
- A leopard.
- A “dreadful” beast.

The lion of verse 4 had wings of an eagle, but the wings were plucked off. The lion then stood up as a man. The plucking of the wings corresponds to the insanity and humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4. The lion standing and having “the mind of a man” symbolizes Nebuchadnezzar’s return to sanity. Wood points out, “A humanitarian interest came to play a major role in his life, rather than the former ‘bestly’ lust for power.”¹¹ The second beast of verse 5 was a bear that was “raised up . . . on one side” and “had three ribs in [its] mouth.” As seen in chapter 2, the Medo-Persian Empire followed the Babylonian Empire. The Persian aspect of the empire was stronger than the Median aspect. This difference explains the bear’s awkward stance. The three ribs represent the three great conquests of King Cyrus and his son, Cambyses. These conquests are as follows:¹²

- Lydia in Asia Minor in 546 BC.
- The Babylonian Empire in 539 BC.
- Egypt (by Cambyses) in 525 BC.

The third beast was a leopard that “had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl” and four heads (v. 6). The empire that defeated the Persians was the Grecian Empire. The symbol of a leopard with four wings indicates the great speed with which the Greeks rose to be a world power. Alexander the Great began his invasion of the Persian Empire in 334 BC with an army of 35,000 men. He took just ten to eleven years to conquer the known world and reach India. He died in Babylon of a fever at the age of thirty-two or thirty-three (June, AD 323).¹³ Following Alexander’s death, the empire was divided among his

four generals, which fulfilled the symbol of the leopard's four heads. The divisions of the empire were as follows.¹⁴

- Babylon and Northern Syria—Antigonos and later by Seleucus I Nicator.
- Egypt—Ptolemy I Soter.
- Macedonia—Cassander.
- Thrace and Bithynia—Lysimachus.

The fourth beast is described as “dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly” (v. 7). The great strength is indicated by the iron teeth that provide an unbreakable weapon. This beast symbolizes the Roman Empire that defeated the Greeks. The iron of this animal parallels the iron of the legs and feet of chapter 2. Archer points out that “the mention of iron in the teeth suggests the legs and toes of iron in the image.”¹⁵ Verse 8 moves from the historical fulfillment of the Roman Empire (from our perspective) to the prophetic fulfillment of the future Roman Empire.

PROPHETIC PARALLELS

When we consider the prophecies of chapters 2 and 7, we can see the parallels between the two chapters. They are as follows:

- Babylon—Head, Gold, Lion.
- Medo-Persia—Chest, Silver, Bear.
- Greece—Midsection, Bronze, Leopard.
- Rome—Legs and feet, Iron and Iron/Clay, Dreadful Beast.

Comprehending the interpretation of Daniel 2 and 7 assists the biblical student to understand the broad scope of prophetic revelation, the “prophetic forest.” As one comprehends the past, the individual can comprehend the future. These two chapters contain portions of revelation that already have been fulfilled. Much of the symbolism in these chapters has found a literal fulfillment in an historical reality. This interpretative connection provides the reader with a framework to understand the unfulfilled portions in the two chapters. If the majority of Daniel 2 and 7 find their reality in political kingdoms, this connection leads the interpreter to believe that the unfulfilled portions of chapters 2 and 7 will also be fulfilled in the future by literal political kingdoms.

Finally, these two chapters demonstrate the sovereignty of God over past kings and kingdoms. This truth reassures interpreters that God has control over future political kings and kingdoms. This truth echoes throughout the entire Book of Daniel. Recognizing the sovereignty of God gives us security; recognizing the power of God gives us peace.

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- ¹ John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 9.
- ² See Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 17–19; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Interpretation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 15; Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1977), 107–14; J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton: SP Publications, 1985), 1324, 1327–28.
- ³ Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 18–19. Wood holds to a twofold division of the structure of Daniel. He notes this in one sentence on page 15. However, he spends two pages explaining the threefold division and refers to it as an “equally valid division” (ibid., 18).
- ⁴ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 50.
- ⁵ Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 7:46.
- ⁶ Wood, *Daniel*, 68.
- ⁷ Miller, *Daniel*, 93.
- ⁸ Archer, “Daniel,” 7.
- ⁹ Miller, *Daniel*, 95.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Wood, *Daniel*, 182.
- ¹² Miller, *Daniel*, 199; Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 95; Wood, *Daniel*, 183.
- ¹³ Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 95; Wood, *Daniel*, 210–11.
- ¹⁴ Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 95; Miller, *Daniel*, 200.
- ¹⁵ Archer, “Daniel,” 87.

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FrontLine magazine is the journal of the FBFI to provide a forum for God's people to reverently express a conservative Christian perspective on pertinent issues. In an effort to keep readers informed, quotes and references to many different individuals and organizations will appear. This does not imply the endorsement of the magazine or its board. Unsolicited manuscripts and artwork accepted for review.

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Mailbag

I have some questions regarding section 3 of the Article 2: statement of purpose with regards to closing and opposing apostasy and religious compromise.

- 1) Do you deem it acceptable for FBFI churches to sing the worship songs of false churches like Hillsong, and the songs of artists such as Chris Tomlin, who writes songs with Catholics and performs at their conferences?
- 2) Do you deem it acceptable for [an] FBFI pastor to allow men to preach and teach in an FBFI member church who listen to heretics teachers such as Steven Furtick, Craig Groeschel, John Hagee?
- 3) Do you deem it acceptable for an FBFI pastor to give Sunday school ministries to church members who celebrate Halloween and are anti Israel?

The heretics I mentioned teach as follows—

- Steve Furtick—little god theology, Jesus broke God's law for love, faith prosperity gospel, Jesus changed form when He ascended to Heaven.
- John Hagee—teaches Jesus did not declare Himself to be the Messiah to Israel and therefore the Jews did not reject Him as Messiah.

- Louie Giglio—teaches that Jesus burned and suffered in hell as part of the atonement and pays homage to the pope by visiting the Vatican and kissing the pope's hand.

These are some of the issues I oppose in my local independent Baptist church that is a member of FBFI.

I would just like to know your stance on these issues please.

Stephen Reynolds

Editor's Response: It is hard for me to answer these questions without knowing your particular local situation. I hesitate to answer because I do not know entire story here. I do want to make two points.

1. The FBFI does not have member churches. It is a fellowship of individuals. People can become members by signing the doctrinal statement.
2. Our positions on most of the issues you mention here are widely known and published in our Resolutions and Position statements. You may find them on our FBFI website. These include our positions on music, theology, Roman Catholicism, the SBC, Evangelicalism and New Evangelicalism, the Prosperity Gospel (John Hagee), and much more. I suggest you research these. It will answer your questions more effectively than I can here.

Thank you for your correspondence.

Kevin Schaal
President, FBFI

Every so often I write and ask permission for the use of certain articles in our *Wellsprings* pastors' publication. While I have men who write for the publication (along with myself) we do use those *FrontLine* articles as well—so some of the "thanks" in the following note must go to *FrontLine*. I received this note two weeks ago from a pastor (whom I don't know or have ever met; he lives on the other side of the country) who receives *Wellsprings*.

Just a note of thanks for your *Wellsprings* ministry. With very limited time in each day it is such a blessing to have something I can confidently pick up and know God has something for me in it! AND I don't have to wade through "fluff" to get to the blessing I need.

Just wanted you to know that I receive a blessing each time I read it. Usually more than one encouragement, rebuke, or seed for ministering the Word to others.

Again, some of what he reads comes from *FrontLine*—so a BIG thank you for the use of the articles.

I'm looking ahead for the next year or two at various topics/articles that we will prove a blessing. Subsequently, I have attached a permission form for several articles.

Tracy Minnick
Queensland, Australia

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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

FIRST PARTAKER

“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Tim. 2:6)

Fine Old Trowels for Despondent Builders

In 1865 Charles Spurgeon began a monthly magazine he titled *The Sword and the Trowel*. The first issue explained, *We would sound the trumpet, and lead our comrades to the fight. We would ply the Trowel with untiring hand for the building up of Jerusalem's dilapidated walls, and wield the Sword with rigour and valour against the enemies of the truth.*

For over thirty-five years, until his death in 1892, Spurgeon persevered in providing news of the Tabernacle's ministries, updates on church planters and missionaries, expositions, anecdotes, poetry, biographies, book reviews, transcripts of preaching and lectures, scriptural viewpoint on current events and issues among the churches, and many other useful kinds of content.

Below are two really fine encouragements, *old trowels*, if you will, for weary, spent, despondent builders. They comfortingly re-equipped tired hands in Spurgeon's day, and perhaps they may do so again.

AGAINST HASTENING TO REMOVE FROM OUR POST OF DUTY¹

He was a wise man who said, *The roundest peg seldom fits into the roundest hole without some paring*. There is no position in life which, at the first, has not something irksome and trying about it. Newcomers cannot expect to feel at home at once.

We remember our first wretched night at a school where we afterwards became supremely happy. Well do

we recollect the misery of the first few months of a calling which we afterwards valued and enjoyed. Our mind was sorely depressed on first coming into that sphere in London which has since been the delight of our life. Let no man, therefore, when he at first commences work in any place feel at all discouraged by the uneasiness which may come over him. It is natural that he should feel strange in a new position. The burden is not yet adapted to the shoulder, and the shoulder is not yet hardened to the load.

While feeling the irksomeness of a fresh position, do not be so foolish as to throw it away. Wait a little while, and time will work wonders. You will yet take pleasure in the very things which are now the source of discomfort. The very worst thing will be to hasten away and make a change, for the change will only bring trial in a fresh form, and you will endure afresh the evils which you have already almost mastered. The time which you have already spent at your new place will be lost, and the same weary first steps will have to be taken upon another ladder. Besides, you may readily leap out of the frying-pan into the fire. Change has charms to some men, but among its roses they find abundant thorns.

Has the minister just entered upon a fresh sphere, and does he miss the affectionate warmth of his old acquaintances? Does he find his new people strange and singular? Do they appear cold and distant? Let him persevere, and all this will wear off, and he will come to love the very people to whom he now feels an aversion, and find his best helpers among those who now seem to be utterly indifferent to him. The call of Providence has brought him where he is, and he must not venture to leave because of inconveniences: often it will be his wisdom to regard these as a part of the tokens that he is in the right way, for the appointed path is seldom easy to the feet.

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Has our young friend commenced teaching a class in the Sunday School, and does she find it far less pleasant work than she imagined? Are the children wild and careless and inattentive, and does her own power of teaching appear to be smaller than she hoped? Let her give double application to her holy toil, and she will come to love it. Should she leave it, she may incur the blame of those who put their hands to the plough and look back. The ice has been already broken; the edge has been taken off from the difficulty; let her persevere, and all will be well.

Does he find his new people strange and singular? Do they appear cold and distant? Let him persevere, and all this will wear off, and he will come to love the very people to whom he now feels an aversion, and find his best helpers among those who now seem to be utterly indifferent to him. The call of Providence has brought him where he is, and he must not venture to leave because of inconveniences: often it will be his wisdom to regard these as a part of the tokens that he is in the right way, for the appointed path is seldom easy to the feet.

There is no position in this world without its disadvantages. We may be perpetually on the move to our continual disquiet, and each move may bring us under the same, or even greater, disadvantages. We remember a Scottish story of an unfortunate family who attributed all their troubles to their house being haunted by mischievous spirits, known to our northern countrymen as *brownies*. These superstitious individuals became at length desperate; nothing prospered in house or field, they would therefore pack up all and be gone from a spot so mysteriously infested. All the household goods were loaded up, and the husband, wife and the bairns were all moving, when one of them cried out, *Brownie is in the churn! Brownie is moving too!*

Just so, the matters which hinder a man's success are generally in himself, and will move with him. And wherein it is not so, he may yet be sure that if by change of place he avoids one set of brownies, he will find another awaiting him. There is bran in all meal, and there are dregs in all wine. All roads must at times be rough, and all seas must be tossed with tempest. To fly from trouble will need long wings, and to escape discomfort will require more than a magician's skill.

It is wiser to *bear the ills we have, than fly to others that we know not of*. It is probable that our present condition is the best possible for us, no other form of trial would be preferable. What right have we to suspect the wisdom and the goodness of God in placing us where we are? It will be far more prudent to mistrust our own judgement when it leads us to murmuring and discontent. Occasionally it may be prudent to remove, or to change one's form of Christian service; but this must be done thoughtfully, prayerfully, and with a supreme regard to the glory of God, rather than out of respect to our own feelings.

A tree that is often transplanted will make but little growth, and bear but slender fruit. A man who is *everything by turns, and nothing long*, will be a sort of *Jack of all trades, and master of none*. An increase of spiritual strength by greater communion with God, and a more resolute determination to glorify him in every possible way, will usually conquer difficulties and win success. Double force will make easy that which now seems impossible. Do not, therefore, change the work, but change yourself. Attempt no other alteration till a distinct improvement in your own self has resolutely been carried out.

We speak thus because we believe that many are discouraged at the outset of a career which, if they could see its end, would fill them with thankfulness; and Satan raises these discouragements to tempt them to leave a position in which they may damage his kingdom and glorify Christ. Courage, dear friend, you have a great Helper; look to the strong for strength. Say with Nehemiah, *Should such a man as I flee?* Who are you that everything should be made smooth for your feet? Are you such a little babe in grace that only the slightest tasks should be allotted to you? Be a man, and play the man. Resolve that even at this present time, and where you now are, you will set up the standard, and hold the fort.

Many are the instances in which men have commenced their life-work under every possible disadvantage, and for months, and even years, they have seemed to make no headway whatsoever, and yet they have ultimately triumphed, and have come to bless the providence which called them into a place so well adapted for their gifts. It would have been their worst calamity if, under a fit of despondency, they had changed their station or relinquished their vocation. The church would have been the poorer, the world would have been the darker, and themselves the feeblers, if they had shifted at the first even to the most promising spheres which tempted them. That rock on which they stood, and mourned the hardness of the soil, was more full of the elements of fruitfulness than the softer soil at a little distance, which invited them to leave. Tarrying where they were, exercising indomitable perseverance, they have softened the granite, cultured it into fertility, and reaped a golden harvest.

If we desire to glorify God, we must not select the comfortable positions and the hopeful fields; it is best to make no selection, but to yield our own will to the will of God altogether. The hole is round enough, it will be difficult to make *it* any rounder; the proper plan is to round ourselves. If we will but adapt ourselves to our position, the position will adapt itself to us.

It may be that these lines will furnish counsel to a brother whose choice now lies between being a rolling stone or a pillar in the house of our God. To turn tail under present pressure may be the beginning of a cowardly career, neither honorable to God nor to man: to stand fast at this distressing juncture may be the commencement of an established position of supreme usefulness and honor.

LAID ASIDE. WHY?²

Mysterious are the visitations of sickness. When the Lord is using a man for His glory it is singular that He should all of a sudden smite him down and suspend his usefulness. It must be right, but the reason for it does not lie near the surface. The sinner whose every act pollutes the society in which he moves is frequently permitted year after year to spend an unabated vigor in infecting all who approach him. No sickness removes him even for an hour from his deadly ministry; he is always at his post, energetic in his mission of destruction.

How is it that a heart eager for the welfare of men and the glory of God should find itself hampered by a sickly frame, and checked in its utmost usefulness by attacks of painful disease? We may ask the question if we do so without murmuring, but who shall answer it for us? When the advance of a body of soldiers is stopped by a galling fire which scatters painful wounds on all sides, we understand that this is but one of the natural incidents of war; but if a commander should check his troops in midbattle, and proceed with his own hand to render some of his most zealous warriors incapable of service, should we not be at a loss to conceive his motives?

Happily for us our happiness does not depend upon our understanding the providence of God: we are able to believe where we are not able to explain, and we are content to leave a thousand mysteries unsolved rather than tolerate a single doubt as to the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father. The painful malady which puts the Christian minister *hors de combat* (out of action) when he is most needed in the conflict is a kind messenger from the God of love, and is to be entertained as such: this we know, but how it can be so we cannot precisely tell.

Is it not good for us to be nonplussed, and puzzled, and so forced to exercise faith? Would it be well for us to have all things so ordered that we ourselves could see

the reason for every dispensation? Could the scheme of divine love be indeed supremely, infinitely wise if we could measure it with our short line of reason? Should we not ourselves remain as foolish and conceited as spoiled and petted children, if all things were arranged according to our judgment of what would be fit and proper? Ah, it is well to be cast out of our depth, and made to swim in the sweet waters of mighty love! We know that it is supremely blessed to be compelled to cease from self, to surrender both wish and judgment, and to lie passive in the hands of God.

It is of the utmost importance to us to be kept humble. Consciousness of self-importance is a hateful delusion, but none into which we fall as naturally as weeds grow on a dunghill. We cannot be used of the Lord but what we also dream of personal greatness; we think ourselves almost indispensable to the church, pillars of the cause, and foundations of the temple of God. We are nothings and nobodies, but that we do not think so is very evident, for as soon as we are put on the shelf we begin anxiously to inquire, "How will the work go on *without me*?" As well might the fly on the coach wheel inquire, "How will the mail be carried *without me*?" Far better men have been laid in the grave without having brought the Lord's work to a standstill, and shall we fume and fret because for a little season we must lie upon the bed of languishing? If we were only put on one side when apparently we could be easily spared, there would be no rebuke to our pride, but to weaken our strength in the way at the precise juncture when our presence seems most needed, is the surest way to teach us that we are not *necessary* to God's work, and that when we are most useful He can easily do without us. If this be the practical lesson, the rough schooling may be easily endured, for assuredly it is beyond all things desirable that self should be kept low and the Lord alone magnified.

Many are the instances in which men have commenced their life-work under every possible disadvantage, and for months, and even years, they have seemed to make no headway whatsoever, and yet they have ultimately triumphed, and have come to bless the providence which called them into a place so well adapted for their gifts. It would have been their worst calamity if, under a fit of despondency, they had changed their station or relinquished their vocation.

May not our gracious Lord design a double honor when he sends a double set of trials? *Abundant in labours* is a high degree, but *patient in suffering* is not less so. Some believers have excelled in active service, but have scarcely been tried in the other and equally honorable field of submissive endurance; though veterans in work, they have been little better than raw recruits as to patience, and on this account they have been in some respects but half developed in their Christian manhood. May not the Lord have choice designs for some of His servants and intend to perfect them in both forms of Christly imitation? There seems to be no natural reason why both a man's hands should not be equally useful, but few men actually become ambidextrous, because the left hand is not adequately exercised.

A change in the mode of our spiritual exercises may also be highly beneficial and avert unknown but serious evils. The cumbering engendered by much service, like a growth upon the bark of a fruit tree, might become injurious, and therefore our Father, who is the husbandman, with the rough instruments of pain scrapes away the obnoxious parasite. The continuous exercise of a single virtue, called forth by peculiar circumstances, is exceedingly commendable; but if other graces are allowed to lie dormant, the soul may become warped, and the good may be exaggerated till it is tinged with evil. Holy activities are the means of blessing to a large part of our nature, but there are other equally precious portions of our newborn manhood which are unvisited by their influence. It is good for a man to bear the yoke of service, and he is no loser when it is exchanged for the yoke of suffering.

May not severe discipline fall to the lot of some to qualify them for their office of under-shepherds? We cannot speak with consoling authority to an experience which we have never known. The suffering know those who have themselves suffered, and their smell is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed. The *word to the weary* is not learned except by an ear which has bled while the awl has fastened it to the doorpost. "The complete pastor's" life will be an epitome of the lives of his people, and they will turn to his preaching as men do to David's psalms to see themselves and their sorrows, as in a mirror. Their needs will be the reason for his griefs. As to the Lord Himself, perfect equipment for His work came only through suffering, so must it be to those who are called to follow Him in binding up the broken-hearted and loosing the prisoners. Souls still remain in our churches to whose deep and dark experience we shall never be able to minister till we also have been plunged in the abyss where all Jehovah's waves roll over our heads. If this be the fact—and we are sure it is—then may we heartily welcome anything which will make us fitter channels of blessing.

Alas, there may be far more humiliating causes for our bodily afflictions! The Lord may see in us that which grieves Him and provokes Him to use the rod. *Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me* (Job 10:3) should be the prompt petition of the jealous heart. *Is there not a cause?* (1 Sam. 17:29). It can never be superfluous to humble ourselves and institute self-examination, for even if we walk in our integrity and can lift up our face without shame in this matter, as to actual sin, yet our shortcomings and omissions must cause us to blush. How much holier we ought to have been, and might have been! How much more prevalently we might have prayed! With how much more unction we might have preached! Here is endless room for tender confession before the Lord.

Yet it is not good to attribute each sickness and trial to some actual fault, as though we were under the law, or could be punished again for those sins which Jesus bore in His own body on the tree. It would be ungenerous to others if we looked upon the greatest sufferer as necessarily the greatest sinner; everybody knows that it would be unjust and unchristian so to judge concerning our fellow Christians, and therefore we shall be very unwise if we apply so erroneous a rule to ourselves, and morbidly condemn ourselves when God condemns not. Just now, when anguish fills the heart, and the spirits are bruised with sore pain and travail, it is not the best season for forming a candid judgment of our own condition, or of anything else; let the judging faculty lie by, and let us with tears of loving confession throw ourselves upon our Father's bosom, and looking up into His face believe that He loves us with all His infinite heart. *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him* (Job 13:15)—be this the one unvarying resolve, and may the eternal Spirit work in us a perfect acquiescence in the whole will of God, be that will what it may.

Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. His sermons are available at mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons. You can also access the last month of sermons in your favorite podcast app. Simply search for Mount Calvary Baptist Church and choose "subscribe."

1 Very lightly edited, from *The Sword and the Trowel: A Record of Combat with Sin and Labour for the Lord* (July 1880).

2 This consists of almost the entirety of the article from *The Sword and the Trowel: A Record of Combat with Sin and Labour for the Lord* (May 1876).

The New American Commentary

Preachers need to regularly make new friends. I am not referring to additional golf companions or Starbucks chums. Some of the most valuable friends a preacher can possess are found in his own library. Books in the preacher's library should significantly aid in the proper exposition of biblical texts. Proper exposition makes a preacher an accurate man, and an accurate man carries genuine authority into the pulpit. The accurate man's presentation of what Scripture actually says and teaches will be “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword” in the souls of his listeners. One relatively new tool for preachers entered the milieu of study aids about thirty years ago and now approaches completion. This tool should become a new friend for preachers who are not acquainted with it. Please meet *The New American Commentary*.

The New American Commentary (NAC) resurrects and rises far above the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century commentary, *An American Commentary*. The usage of this older commentary, except for its volume on the Gospel of Matthew by John Broadus, has largely slipped into oblivion. The NAC, produced by B&H Publishing, which is a division of Lifeway Christian Resources (the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention), reflects the convention's orthodox resurgence. The volumes of the NAC are written primarily by Baptists, many of them being part of the convention. (This article is not a commendation nor condemnation of the convention—it endeavors to simply give credit where credit is due.) Most of the volumes of *The New American Commentary* are complete. The only ones remaining to be completed are the volumes on Psalms 1–72 and Ephesians.

The NAC achieves a balance of scholarship, readability, and strong loyalty to the Scriptures. Each volume contains an identical “Editor's Preface,” which includes the promise that “all NAC authors affirm the divine inspiration, inerrancy, complete truthfulness, and full authority of the Bible.” Further, the editors affirm that “the commentary emphasizes how each section of a book fits together so that the reader becomes aware of the theological unity of each book and of Scripture as a whole” and “enables the reader to see the parts as well as the whole of Scripture.” While this is not a devotional commentary, the editors pledge that each volume “concentrates on theological exegesis while providing practical, applicable exposition.”

The NAC does not shy away from difficult passages. For example, the account in Joshua 10 concerning the battle of Gibeon has occasioned explanations ranging from liberal scoffing to “unverified accounts (of a NASA computer) . . . belonging to ‘urban legend’” (*Joshua*, NAC, 242). David Howard, the author of the Joshua volume, utilizes twelve pages to evaluate the various orthodox possibilities for understanding the passage.

Howard, through Hebrew exegesis and sound hermeneutical principals, then proposes his evaluation and conclusion.

While the NAC is a fine overall commentary on both the Old and New Testaments, this commentary finds particular value in its volumes on the Old Testament historical books. Finding commentaries on Old Testament history that contain depth, are scholarly and exegetical rather than critical or devotional, and refuse to engage in spiritualizing passages, is difficult. The NAC successfully navigates this difficulty.

While many who are reading this column may wish that I could break through and proclaim that this set handles all prophetic passages from a pure pretribulational and premillennial perspective, I cannot do so. For example, the author of the NAC volume on Thessalonians, after his discussion of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17, concludes that, among other things, “What our passage depicts is not the removal of the church but the early stages of the day of the Lord.” We are encouraged, though, when we read comments such as Paige Patterson's in his NAC commentary. In contrast to the growing trend among scholarly, evangelical, contemporary commentators on Revelation toward a nonfuturist view, Patterson writes that “the Revelation is essentially a prophecy of the end times to be fulfilled principally in the future, . . . [and this] is the perspective that will be developed in this commentary.”

While one recognizes that the nature of commentary sets trends to uneven quality in its different volumes, the NAC is still worth purchasing as a set. Even if it must be purchased “piecemeal” because of financial constraints, these volumes will become welcomed friends that a pastor appreciates more and more. Concerning finances, a search of prices for comparable evangelical commentaries demonstrates that the NAC commentaries, in general, are less expensive than other commentaries. While so many Christian products advertise themselves as “for the busy pastor,” the NAC balances the necessary and essential exegesis that every pastor needs for accuracy in teaching or preaching with a time-saving “compactness.”

When our son graduated from seminary, we wanted to purchase Logos Bible Software for him as a gift. We made sure we got the package that included the entire NAC series. In my personal experience, the NAC commentaries are a delight to study and a genuine help in exposition. *The New American Commentary* will be a worthy addition to any library and an excellent friend to know.

Carlos Galvan retired from full-time pastoral ministry in 2019 after pastoring Bible Baptist Church in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, for sixteen years. He has now transitioned into a pulpit-supply ministry.

Judge Not? (Matthew 7:1–5)

Matthew 5–7 is a record of Jesus’ most familiar sermon, usually referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Many people are aware of various statements in this sermon, and politicians are known to quote its familiar phrases in their speeches. Perhaps no other passage in the whole sermon requires more careful understanding than Matthew 7:1–5. That familiar phrase “Judge not, that ye be not judged” is often quoted by people who don’t really understand its teaching.

Speaking of the matter of judging others, which is the topic of Matthew 7:1–5, most people tend toward one of two extremes. Influenced by the powerful culture, some champion the word “tolerance.” They argue that every person’s view is equally valid, regardless of how misinformed that particular viewpoint might be. Believing there to be no absolute truth, they argue that anyone’s position must be tolerated as “truth” to that person.

The opposite of extreme tolerance is extreme judgment, or a spirit of judgmentalism. The more informed one becomes, the greater his tendency toward this extreme. For example, the trained English teacher may look at every word someone speaks or writes and evaluate it based on its grammatical correctness. Similarly, the trained musician may hardly get the blessing that others may receive because she listens intently with a skilled and well-trained ear. The studied preacher may evaluate every sermon or lesson he hears on the basis of a proper homiletical methodology. Since conservative Christians embrace a stricter standard, we may tend toward this extreme.

Of course, neither extreme is appropriate. The Christian wanting to make an impact for Christ on his generation must find the balance between an easy tolerance and a harsh judgmentalism. Matthew 7:1–5 is instructive toward achieving that balance. The passage may be explained in light of two commands, one found in the first verse and one in the last verse.

First, the Christian desiring to make an impact must stop judging others. Jesus literally commands in verse 1, “Stop judging.” Why does He command this? Because we are not the judge. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge and that is Jesus Christ. James 4:11–12 instructs us, “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” Further, John 5:22–23 teaches that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son.

Jesus isn’t commanding the Christian to dismiss his discernment. On the contrary, he must be discerning. Matthew 7 encourages discernment. How can one obey Matthew 7:6 without discerning people’s standing? Or what about Matthew 7:20, “By their fruits ye shall know them”? One must use discernment to detect false

teachers. Both Romans 16:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:9–11 encourage spiritual discernment when evaluating others. Indeed, the Judge has given us the Bible as a record of judgments He has already made. We must deal with ourselves according to His clear teachings, and at times we must deal with others on that same basis.

If Jesus encourages our discernment, then what exactly does He mean when He commands, “Stop judging”? The context provides clarity. In many places in this sermon, Jesus is telling us not to be like the Pharisees. Don’t act like them. Don’t pray like them. Don’t give like them. Don’t do your good deeds like them. Now He says, when you have to evaluate other people, don’t evaluate like them. The Pharisees were self-righteous, hypercritical. They adapted the Scripture to suit their own practices. Their traditions had replaced the teaching of Scripture. In Luke 18:9 Jesus accuses the Pharisees of “[trusting] in themselves that they were righteous, and [despising] others.” Why did they despise others? Because they found a speck in their eye. So they strained the gnats in others’ lives while swallowing the camels in their own lives. Sometimes people make their standard the priority and standard for everyone. Truthfully, we all consider ourselves to have the balanced position on just about everything, and we may view others who don’t share our position as having a “blind spot” in that area. Then, sometimes we pass critical judgments on these people and say things that don’t need to be said.

We stop judging, not only because we are not the judge, but also because we don’t want to bring judgment on ourselves (7:2). Jesus says you will be judged by the same standard to which you hold everyone else. Imagine yourself standing before God someday. At that moment, you want God to put the best possible light on all your weaknesses. You want His gracious understanding and compassion toward all the things you did that you knew were wrong. Rather than being scrutinized over specks, you want mercy!

Jesus commands not only that we stop judging others but also that we start judging ourselves (7:5). The illustration here is drawn from the carpenter’s shop. You see a tiny chip of wood or a speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye, but you don’t see the large timber (the roof beam) in your own eye. Jesus instructs us to learn to deal with ourselves first. Our pride causes us to exaggerate the sins of others while giving ourselves the benefit of the doubt. We would be wise to be harder on ourselves and easier on others. As a discerning disciple, deal strictly with yourself and generously with others. Dealing appropriately with ourselves will produce a humility when dealing with others.

Ron Allen pastors Bible Baptist Church in Matthews, North Carolina, where he has served for nearly twenty-five years.

Being Thankful Without Ceasing!

As we know, being thankful is not just practiced on the fourth Thursday of every November. Neither do we offer thanks and praise for just one thing. The Psalmist calls to us, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Ps. 100:4). Paul spoke to this when writing to the church at Thessalonica: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18). He also makes a connection between being thankful and having peace: "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col. 3:15). We are told who lives in the family of the unthankful: "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Tim. 3:2). Unthankfulness is rooted in human nature itself: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21).

Wise is the believer who comes to the conclusion that being thankful is much like praying—it should be done "without ceasing"! Often our busy schedule keeps us from our prayer closet, and from being thankful. Many things hinder our thanksgiving, with suffering and tribulation being at the top of the list. We get overwhelmed with the pressures of life. Satan uses our tribulations to remove being thankful from our heart, mind, and lips. This creates a loss of our peace with God, which cultivates doubt in the goodness of God. Good, well-meaning people often develop a wrong view of God out of their lack of being thankful.

Obviously, C. H. Spurgeon was concerned about this when he wrote in his exposition on Psalm 118:1 ("O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever"):

Here is a standing reason for thanksgiving. Although we may not always be healthy, nor always prosperous, yet God is always good, and, therefore, there is always a sufficient argument for giving thanks unto Jehovah. That He is a good God essentially, that He cannot be otherwise than good, should be a fountain out of which the richest praises should perpetually flow.

EDDIE

One of the most stirring stories about being thankful and showing it long-term is found in the life of a self-educated man from Columbus, Ohio, called "Eddie" by his friends. Intrigued with machinery and anything that drank gasoline and made loud

noises, his life became filled with various adventures and great achievements.

Eddie eventually became Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, a distinctive American patriot who, through the school of hard knocks, became a World War I ace pilot and the Commander of the 94th Aero Squadron. Born October 8, 1890, Eddie was part of the booming industrial revolution until he died on July 23, 1973, at the age of 83. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross a record eight times, the Medal of Honor, the Legion of Honor, and the Croix de Guerre by France. In my research about his life, I found a strong, stern, and stubborn man who somehow retained a humble spirit. He had a sense of the fear of God about him due to his Presbyterian upbringing.

In the sixties and early seventies, Rickenbacker lived out his retirement years in Key Biscayne, Florida. If you were in Key Biscayne at that time you could stroll along the beach on most any Friday evening, and you would see a tall, thin old man the community affectionately called "Old Ed." In my mind's eye I see him walk to the end of the city pier with a bucket of shrimp in his hand, and before long he is no longer alone. Soon the blue sky is dotted with scores of white seagulls all around him, their wings fluttering wildly in the breeze. The old man stands there tossing shrimp to the hungry birds. If you listen closely, you can hear him say with each toss, and a smile on his face, "Thank you! Thank you!" In a few minutes the bucket is empty, but the World War I ace does not leave. He stands there gazing across the ocean into the radiant orange sunset, lost in thought, as if he is transported back in time to another place. Invariably, one of the seagulls lands on the weather-beaten military cap that he's worn for many years. Finally, he turns and begins to walk back toward the beach, as a few of the seagulls hop along the pier with him until he gets to the stairs. As he slowly strolls in the sand, the gulls fly away. Old Ed makes his way down to the end of the beach to his home, where he lives with the wife of his youth, Adelaide.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

You might think he was just some old codger, perhaps with a touch of dementia, lost in his own world of bygone years. However, if you knew him and his story, you would appreciate why he feeds those seagulls every Friday. Old Ed was a true American with some amazing accomplishments in his life:

- Twenty-five aerial victories (twenty-one planes and four hot air balloons) while flying in the Army Air Corps from 1917–19.

- In 1920 he started the Rickenbacker Motor Co., selling advanced technology ideas for four-wheel brakes to car manufacturers.
- His love for automobiles and racing led him to purchase the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1927, over which he maintained ownership for nearly fifteen years.
- In 1934 he became the general manager of Eastern Airlines and later became president of the company.

In 1941 he closed the Indianapolis Motor Speedway because of World War II, claiming it was a waste of gasoline during war times. He later sold the speedway (1945) and pursued other interests.

But his story does not end there. In October 1942 he was asked by the US military to tour the air bases in the Pacific Theater to observe their operations, and to deliver a secret message from President Roosevelt to General Douglas MacArthur. For this mission the eight-member crew was given an older B-17, a weathered bomber called “The Flying Fortress.” They boarded the four-engine plane and began their long journey across the Pacific. Not knowing the celestial navigational instrument was defective, they strayed miles off course while on the way to a refueling stop on Canton Island. They were forced to ditch the plane in little-traveled waters of the central Pacific Ocean.

The crew miraculously survived the crash, though all of them suffered various physical injuries. They crawled out of the B-17, climbed into life rafts, and floated for days on the rough waters of the Pacific. Soon they lost one of the survivors. They fought both sun and sharks! Most of all, they fought hunger. By the third day they ran out of food, and five days later they ran out of fresh water.

No food. No fresh water. They were hundreds of miles from land, and no one knew where they were, much less that they were in danger. Starving, thirsty, and dying, they needed a miracle, and all of them knew it.

MIRACLE

One afternoon, Captain Eddie, a Presbyterian by faith, led a simple devotional service on his raft, and they all prayed for that needed miracle. They tried to nap. Eddie leaned back and pulled his military cap over his nose to shade his eyes from the sun. Time dragged on and on. All seemed lost! The hot afternoon sun beat down upon them, draining the life out of the men. With his eyes closed and his face in his cap the only thing Captain Eddie could hear was the slap of the waves against his raft. His thoughts went to his family and whether or not he would ever see them again.

Suddenly, he felt something land on the top of his cap. It was a seagull—was this the miracle for which they had prayed? Old Ed describes in his autobiography how he sat perfectly still, planning his next move. With a flash of his hands and a squawk from the gull, he managed to grab it and wring its neck. He tore the feathers off, and he and his starving crew made a slight meal from

the sacrifice of the seagull. And a slight meal it was!

Then they used the intestines for bait. With it, they caught fish with their bare hands, which gave them food and more bait. From time to time rain would come and provide fresh drinking water! The cycle continued. God, in His sovereignty, was working a miracle!

Captain Rickenbacker and his men were able to endure the rigors of the sea and the scorching sun until they were found and rescued after drifting at sea for twenty-four days! Suffering hyperthermia, sunburn, dehydration, and near starvation, the men knew it was God who had heard their cries and answered their prayers. Captain Rickenbacker later completed his assignment and delivered President Roosevelt’s secret message to General MacArthur, which has never been made public to this day.

So, this man that the Floridians called “Old Ed” lived many years beyond that unbelievable ordeal! However, he never forgot the sacrifice of that first life-saving seagull that landed on his cap that dismal day in the Pacific. That’s why almost every Friday night “Old Ed” would walk to the end of the pier with a bucket full of shrimp and a heart full of gratitude, and feed the seagulls! And if you got close to him you could hear him say, “Thank you, thank you,” as he fed the family of gulls.

And every now and again as he strolled off the pier it was recorded that a seagull would land on his head and perch on that old and weathered military cap as if to say, “You’re welcome!” What a great illustration of being thankful without ceasing.

The words of John C. Hallett that he penned and put to music in 1917 is certainly fitting as we think on the title of his song, “Thank You, Jesus.”

Thank You, Jesus, for all You’ve done.
Thank You, Lord.
Thank You, Jesus, for victories won.
O thank You, Lord.

For Thy love and tender care,
For Thy Word and answered prayer;
Thank You, Jesus, for all You’ve done,
Thank You, Lord.

Thank You, Jesus, for love like Thine,
Thank You Lord.
Thank You, Jesus, for grace divine,
O thank You, Lord.

For Thy cross of Calvary,
For Thy blood that cleanseth me;
Thank You, Jesus, that Thou art mine,
Thank You, Lord.

Rick Arrowood served as a senior pastor for forty-two years and in 2020 became the executive director of Slavic Baptist Mission and part of the Interim Pastoral Ministry of Gospel Fellowship Association.

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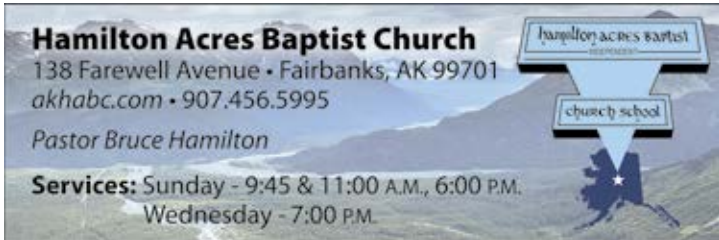
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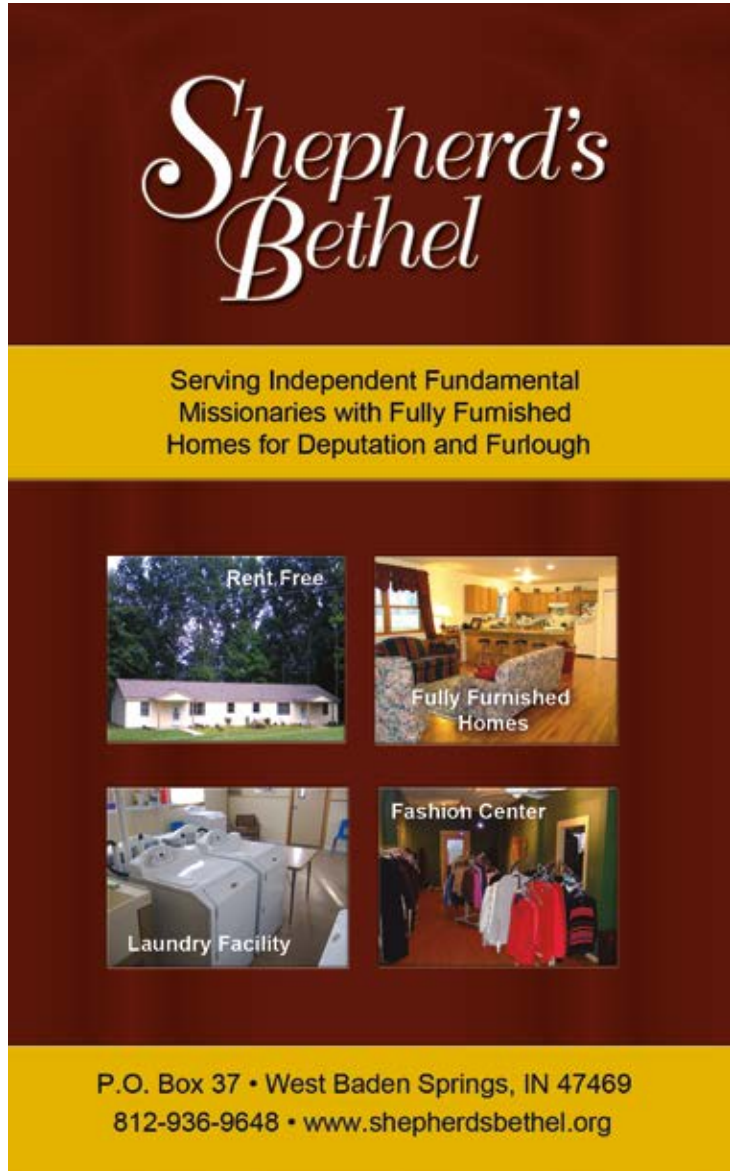
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The Fulfillment of Daniel's "Seventy Weeks" Prophecy

One unique and interesting facet of biblical literature is the existence of predictive prophecy. I am always encouraged by the cohesiveness of God's Word when I read in Scripture of a prophecy coming to fruition. One such prophecy is the coming and cutting off of the Messiah predicted in Daniel 9, referring to the arrival of the Messiah to His people and His subsequent crucifixion. As we survey this prophecy from Daniel 9 and observe its fulfillment in Luke 19, I hope we are mutually encouraged as we see that God's Word is true in predicting these two specific events relating to Christ.

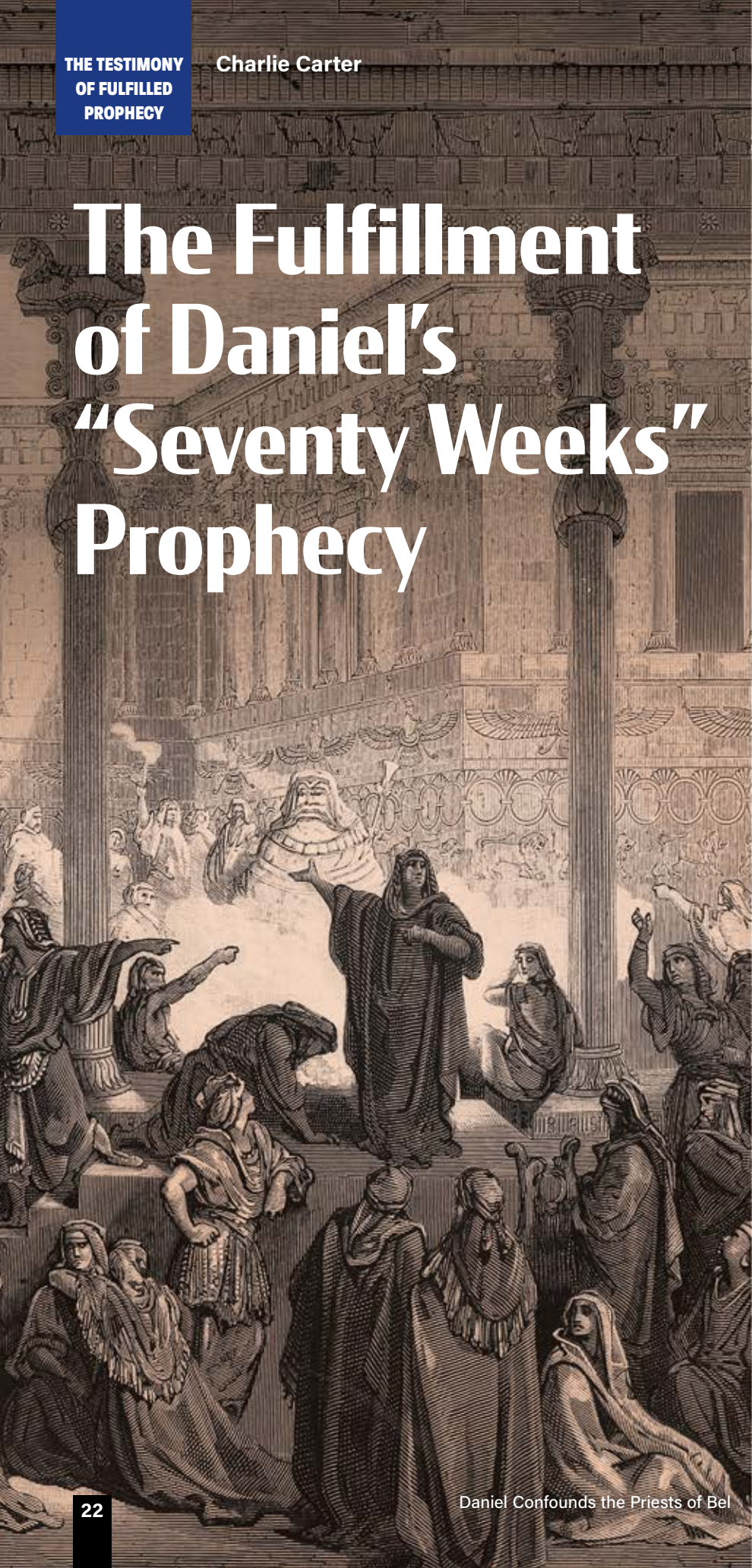
DANIEL 9: A SUMMARY

Starting with context is always helpful. At this point in the life of Daniel, the people of Israel are in captivity. Daniel received the words of this prophecy while in exile in Babylon. As verse 1 indicates, Daniel is reflecting on Israel's Exile. He is reading in the Book of Jeremiah, perhaps 2 Chronicles and Leviticus, and he realizes that the time of Exile is drawing to a close (Jer. 29:10). Daniel, realizing that this time is approaching, prays a prayer of repentance for himself and the people of Israel.

DANIEL 9: SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In response to this prayer, an angel of the Lord comes to Daniel and gives him the famous prophecy of the "seventy weeks" (Dan. 9:24-27). I encourage you to grab your copy of God's Word and read through these verses along with the following explanation. The prophecy states that "seventy weeks are determined" for Israel until God will "bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy [Place]." These statements in verse 24 are clear allusions to the future Messianic kingdom. A couple of questions we need to answer are, what is a "week"? How many *days* are in each "week"? And, what determines the time-frame of when these "weeks" are to begin and end? Our overview and answers to these questions is quite limited for the sake of the article's length; below, a few reference materials will be mentioned that would cover the topic much more thoroughly.

First, what are the "weeks" in the "seventy weeks"? Remember the context: Daniel had been reflecting on how *seventy years* of



Daniel Confounds the Priests of Bel

exile was almost completed. At the end of the *seventy years*, Israel would go back to the Promised Land and Jerusalem. Then the angelic messenger says there's *another group of seventy*, but we need to find out, "Seventy of what?" Is it another seventy years? What the text says literally is that there are seventy "sevens," or seventy groups of seven. There are a few options for what the "sevens" could refer to. The best understanding is that the text is referring again to years, like the original timing of the Exile. Thus the prophecy indicates seventy groups of seven years. Many translations use "week" in this prophecy because the years are grouped into sevens. So the prophecy is referring to a timeframe of 70×7 years, or 490 years.

The second question we need to answer is, how many *days* are in each "week"? More specifically, how long is each of these years? Syncing prophetic events with modern-day or historical calendars is difficult. Verses in Genesis 7–8 and Revelation 12–13 indicate that a month is thirty days, making the year 360 days.¹ With the number of days for each "week," we now need to determine the start of the seventy weeks to then determine the length of time until the coming of the Messiah and his cutting off.

What constitutes the beginning and end of these 490 years (seventy sevens)? Verse 25 determines a clear starting point, which is the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. What is important to note here is that this is the decree to rebuild the city, not just the walls or temple. The correlating verses containing this decree can be found in Nehemiah 2, where the decree is given to go back and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. If we can determine when this decree was issued, starting on that day and counting forward, we will also be able to determine the days that the Messiah was to come and subsequently be cut off.²

PROPHETIC FULFILLMENT IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The decree in Nehemiah 2 to rebuild Jerusalem was issued in Artaxerxes' twentieth year, which equates to 445 BC. If we count sixty-nine groups of seven years, with each year being 360 days ($69 \times 7 \times 360$) from that date, the count lands in April of AD 32.³ What did the prophecy say would happen in the sixty-ninth week and at the end? The Messiah was to "come" and be "cut-off." This is exactly what happens in April of AD 32. The "coming" of the

Messiah is Jesus Christ presenting Himself as the Messiah in his Triumphal Entry, and the "cutting-off" is His crucifixion. The prophecy predicts accurately when He would present Himself as Savior and then die on the cross for the sins of the world.⁴ Jesus alludes to His fulfillment of this prophecy in Luke 19. Luke 19:28–44 is Luke's recorded account of the Triumphal Entry. There's actually another prophecy that is fulfilled here, the fact that He came riding in on a donkey, but that's for Dr. Kobelia's article.

Notice Christ's response and words as He rides into the city. Looking at verses

41–42, Luke records for us that Christ is weeping as He rides into Jerusalem. Jesus' words in verse 42 explain why He was weeping: the people of Israel do not recognize that their Messiah has come to them.⁵ They should have known He would be coming on that day riding on a donkey, but Luke tells us they are blinded. Jesus weeps because His people do not understand that He is fulfilling this prophecy before them, and instead of arriving and setting up His kingdom, He is rejected and crucified. As we see when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus in John 3, even the teachers of Israel did not know what the prophets

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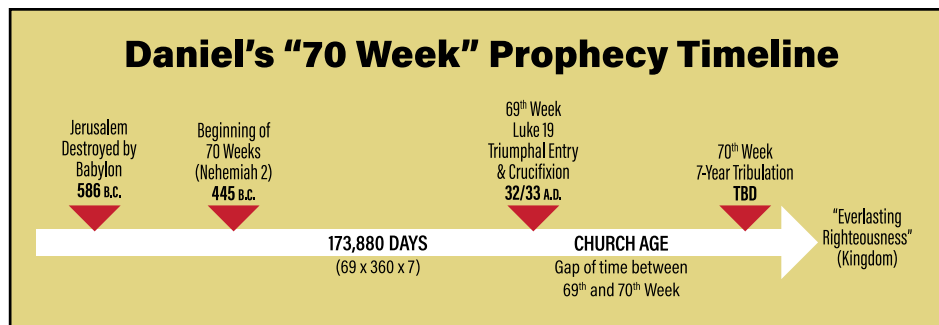
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predicted. This blindness was due in part to the sinful condition of the nation, but it was also providential in God's timeline for Israel. This blindness leads to a large gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of the prophecy. Israel's rejection of Christ leads to the time of the Church. The seventieth and last week of the prophecy, the Tribulation period, is still coming in future.

We are blessed to see the cohesive nature of Scripture in observing the fulfillment of certain predictions of Daniel 9. Both the "coming" and "cutting off" of the Messiah are specifically determined and fulfilled in their proper timing. While there are many corollary discussions regarding this prophecy, the main point is clear: The prophet said that Messiah would arrive in the sixty-ninth week and be cut off at the end of the sixty-ninth week. Starting the count from Nehemiah 2 (445 BC), we arrive in April AD 32, where the coming of the Messiah is fulfilled. On that day Christ rode into Jerusalem weeping, presenting Himself as Israel's Messiah. In the following days, Christ would fulfill the second prediction, being rejected by the people and condemned to crucifixion.

The accuracy of this prophecy concerning our Lord's death is astounding. But we should expect nothing less from the God of all the earth.

Charlie Carter is staff/adjunct-faculty member at Faith Baptist Bible College (Ankeny, Iowa). Prior to working and teaching at FBBC, Charlie served as



associate pastor at Harvest Baptist Church in Williamsburg, Iowa. In his free time Charlie enjoys reading good books, spending time outdoors, and watching the Iowa Hawkeyes. Charlie is also a coproducer of *The Thinkings Podcast* with two other FBBC faculty members, Andy Stearns and Tim Little.

¹ Compare the number of days from Genesis 7:11—the beginning of the Flood—to the end of the Flood from Genesis 8:4. Genesis references this timeframe as 150 days, which divides the five-month period into periods of thirty days. The same number of days per month can be deduced from verses in Revelation: Revelation 13:4–7 and Revelation 12:13–14 both describe amounts of time relating to the Tribulation Period. The Tribulation is the seventieth "week" of Daniel 9's prophecy. Using Revelation's information, we also arrive at a thirty-day month. This is commonly referred to as a "prophetic year"—that is, a year of 360 days.

² Both the coming and cutting off of the Messiah were to happen in correlation with the sixty-ninth week.

³ AD 32 is a number that McClain arrives at through his calculations. If you follow Hoehner's calculations, the year is AD 33.

Both were great biblical scholars, and it should be noted that AD 32 and 33 are both in a range of accuracy to compel confidence in the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 9. Hoehner's research is slightly more comprehensive, but this article will use AD 32, following McClain.

⁴ There are many good reference materials you could use to study this out further. Alva J. McClain's works provide a helpful overview of this prophecy and the kingdom, especially *Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 Weeks* and *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. See also Leon Wood's *A Commentary on Daniel*. Another helpful book to study the correlation of specific days relating to Christ (the exact day of His birth, the exact day of His death, why we use a 360-day calendar, etc.) would be *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* by Harold Hoehner.

⁵ Some people did recognize who Jesus was and understood His role as the Messianic King. The disciples clearly anticipated a kingdom to come (Acts 1:6). What was not clearly understood was the rejection of the Messiah and His crucifixion. The nation was blinded from seeing and receiving their Messiah, which is why the kingdom did not occur in Christ's First Coming.

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Fulfilled Messianic Prophecies from the Book of Zechariah

Among the most intriguing prophetic sections of the Bible are the prophecies of Zechariah, which are contained in the book that bears his name.

Zechariah is teeming with Messianic prophecies, recording some of the most detailed Messianic predictions.

Some of Zechariah's prophecies await future fulfillment (e.g., Zech. 14:1–4). However, many of Zechariah's Messianic prophecies relate to the First Advent of Christ, and the Gospel writers specifically identify them as being fulfilled in the events surrounding Christ's Passion.¹

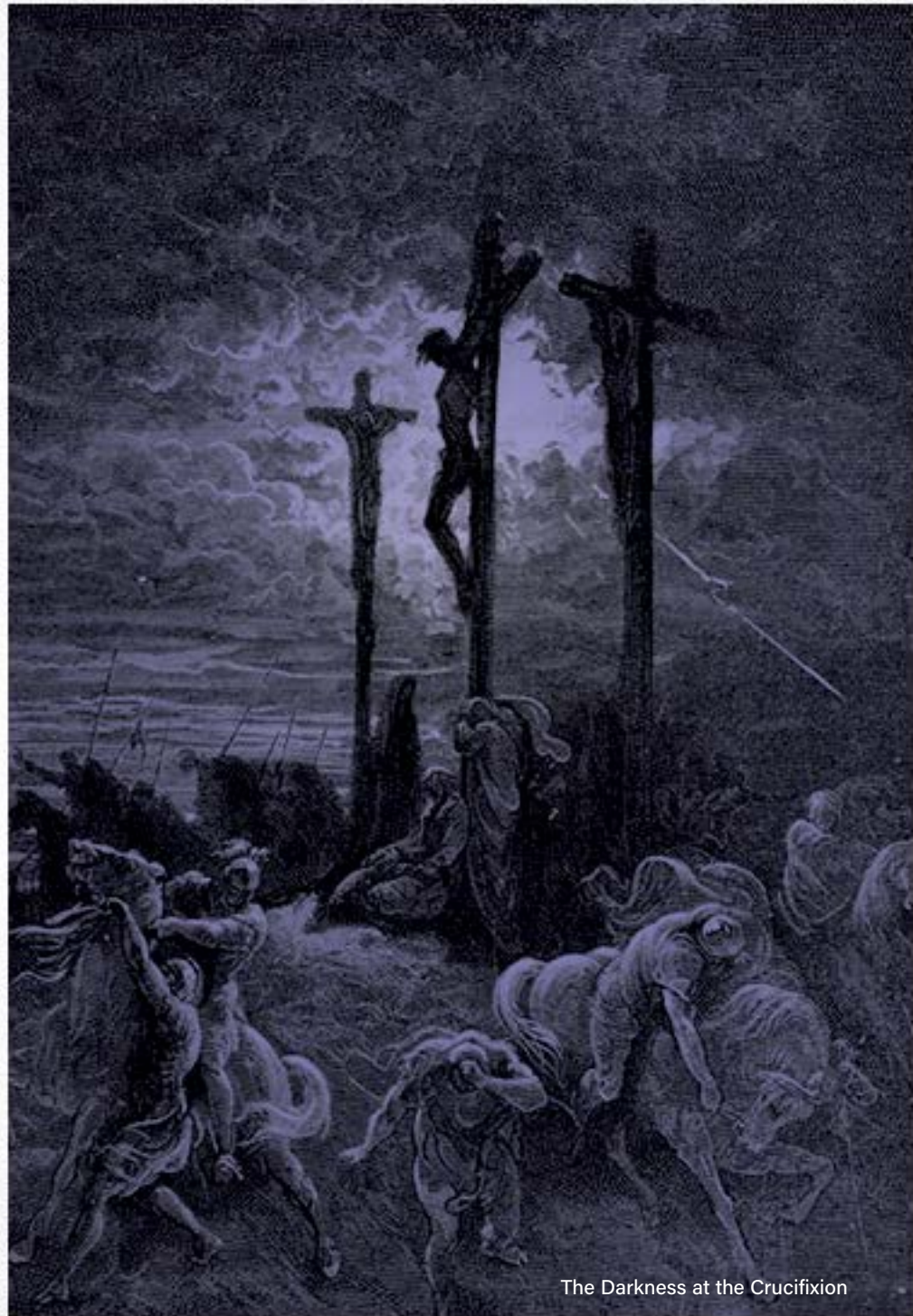
Our modest goal is to survey Zechariah's fulfilled, First-Advent Messianic prophecies and to offer some principles that we can learn from these passages. Studying how Zechariah's First-Advent prophecies have been fulfilled provides insight into the nature of biblical prophecy and provides us with confidence in God's future plans.

ZECHARIAH 9:9

The first of the Messianic prophecies that we will consider is Zechariah 9:9, which is the well-known prophecy of the Triumphal Entry. Zechariah 9:9 states,

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem:
Behold, thy King cometh unto thee:
He is just, and having salvation;
Lowly, and riding upon an ass,
And upon a colt the foal of an ass.

This promise is found in a succession of prophecies dealing with a Messianic Ruler, who will bring perfect peace (v. 10) and restoration (v. 12). The people of Jerusalem are called to rejoice at the arrival of the King, as He comes bringing justice and salvation, humbly riding on a donkey. After



The Darkness at the Crucifixion

highlighting the humble presentation of the King, the text shifts to discuss His reign (vv. 10–17).

Turning to the New Testament, this prophecy is connected to Jesus' Triumphal Entry. In Matthew 21 Jesus gave instructions to two of His disciples to go and bring a donkey and her colt to Him (v. 2). The disciples did so (v. 6), and Jesus entered Jerusalem with royal fanfare (v. 8) and very definite Messianic accolades (v. 9; cf. Ps. 118:26). Matthew specifically ties the Triumphal Entry to Zechariah 9:9 with a quotation formula and citation (v. 4).

John in his parallel account of the Triumphal Entry likewise quotes Zechariah 9:9 to affirm its fulfillment (John 12:15). As these events were unfolding, the disciples did not realize it (v. 16), but afterward they clearly understood that Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled in the Triumphal Entry.

Aspects of Zechariah's prophecy were fulfilled very specifically and literally, namely the humble entry of the King into Jerusalem on a donkey. However, some aspects of Zechariah's prophecy were not fulfilled at that time. The prophecies concerning the perfect rule of the Messiah were not identified as fulfilled by the Evangelists and await a future fulfillment. In this case, the Old Testament prophecy does not clearly distinguish between the two advents of Christ.² The fact that the Messianic rule was not immediately established does not diminish its validity. It is, in God's perfect plan, reserved until the Second Advent.

ZECHARIAH 11:12-13

The next Messianic prophecy relates to Jesus' betrayal, specifically to the price paid to Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus: "thirty pieces of silver." In Zechariah 11, Zechariah is instructed to act like a shepherd as part of a prophetic word from the Lord (vv. 4–11). In this prophecy, a number of prophetic details are given, including the breaking of the staffs of "Beauty" (v. 10) and "Bonds" (v. 14), apparently prophesying about the dissolution of the Nation of Israel as a consequence of their rejection of the Lord. In verses 12 and 13 Zechariah asks for his wages, which are weighed out at thirty pieces of silver (v. 12). He then proceeds to throw it to the potter in the house of the Lord (v. 13).

In the New Testament these details correlate to the betrayal of Jesus. Judas had

contacted the chief priests to see what they were willing to give him to betray Jesus, and they agreed upon thirty pieces of silver (Matt 26:14–15). While this passage lacks a formal quotation formula, it clearly reflects the prophecy of Zechariah, and it sets the stage for Matthew 27:9–10, which does include a quotation formula.

Judas did indeed betray Jesus (Matt. 26:47–50), and Jesus was eventually tried and condemned by the chief priest and elders (Matt. 27:1–2). Apparently, Judas did not think Jesus would be condemned, so when Jesus was condemned, Judas was filled with grief (not a genuine repentance), and he threw the silver into the temple treasury (27:5). Since it was the price of blood, the chief priests were unwilling to put the money into the treasury (v. 6). Instead, they purchased the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers (v. 7). Matthew 27:9–10 states that this action fulfilled prophecy.

In his fulfillment identification, Matthew merges details from Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 19:1, 4, 6, 11) and Zechariah. Because of the prominence of Jeremiah, Matthew attributes the prophecy to him in this passage (Matt. 27:9).³ Nevertheless, some of the wording is taken from Zechariah and is fulfilled in these events.

The fulfillment of this prophecy is remarkably specific. The amount of the betrayal price, the rejection of the wages, and the reception of the money by the potters are details that are intentional and are fulfilled in a literal way. While the historical fulfillment of these details may seem surprising, these parallels were within the intended meaning of the divine Author and are fulfilled very literally in the historical outworking of God's plan for the Messiah.

ZECHARIAH 12:10

A third significant First-Advent, Messianic prophecy in Zechariah relates to the "piercing" of the Messiah. Zechariah 12:10 states,

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
The spirit of grace and of supplications:
And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced,
And they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son,

And shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

This passage discusses a future attack upon the city of Jerusalem (Zech. 12:2–5). At this time, the Lord will supernaturally intervene and save the people of Israel (vv. 6–9). The nation will acknowledge the Lord. They will turn to Him with mourning, apparently recognizing that they had rejected Him and spurned His grace. While the nation had rejected Messiah, they would now receive with mourning the One whom they had pierced.

In John 19:37 the piercing of the Messiah is specifically correlated with the piercing of Jesus' side (v. 34). Trying to hasten the death of the crucified, the soldiers broke the legs of the other prisoners, but Jesus was already dead (v. 33). Thus, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, verifying that Jesus was dead (v. 34). John points out that this fulfills the Scriptures that no bones would be broken (v. 36; cf. Ps. 34:20) and that "they shall look on him whom they pierced" (v. 37).

The piercing of the Messiah is a small detail within a larger prophecy concerning the Messiah. However, the piercing of Jesus' physical body was an important and necessary preliminary fulfillment anticipating that yet-future fulfillment of the prophecy connected with the events surrounding Christ's Second Advent (cf. Rev. 1:7) and the repentance of national Israel.

ZECHARIAH 13:7

The fourth and final Messianic prophecy that will be part of our survey regards the stricken shepherd and the scattering of the disciples. Zechariah 13:7 states:

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,
and against the man that is my fellow,
Saith the Lord of hosts:
Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered:
And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

This is another prophecy that pertains to future judgment upon the nation of Israel. Two-thirds of the people will be destroyed (v. 8), and the last third will be purged and refined (v. 9). Those who remain will acknowledge the Lord and will be called His people (v. 10).

Continued on page 37

Following Only Christ

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (Col 2:8–9)

These verses are Paul's stern charge that the Colossians not be attracted to or taken captive in their minds by ways of thinking or religious systems that deny the fullness of the gospel and salvation by faith in Christ alone. These competing ideas are called "vain" (worthless) and deceitful because they lead religious people to hell rather than to God.

SELF-AFFIRMATION . . . OR REPROOF?

About the same time I was studying this passage in my devotions, I came across something that illustrated the danger of some religious writings. There is a great difference between *Scripture* and what people *say* about Scripture. I saw a meme that referred to Galatians 1:10 (the verse itself was not written out) and had this takeaway: "Don't live for the approval of others." The full verse reads, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Maybe you interpreted this verse the way I did at first—"Just do what you think is right." But when I looked up the verse, I realized that Paul's point is a little different from that perspective.

Paul has just sternly reproved the Galatians for being drawn to a different gospel than the one he preached, to one that requires Jewish rituals for full salvation. He doesn't shrink from possibly offending the Galatians because his motive in reproving them, what drives him, is that he seeks only God's approval. He must

warn them because their wrong thinking has dire consequences. It is God who must get the preeminence. Somehow, though, whoever created that meme picked this verse and turned it into a self-affirmation. Five other verses from Galatians were referenced as well, and four of the takeaways were also self-affirmations. None of the statements made any explicit reference to salvation, works, or faith—main points of Galatians. I know that there are many applications from Scripture that can encourage us, and I don't judge the motives of the one who created the meme or anyone who shared it on social media—but why reduce the weighty teaching in Galatians to this sort of subtle therapeutic deism?

Moralistic therapeutic deism describes a set of beliefs that seem spiritual, seem Christian, but focus on doing good to others and feeling good about yourself. It ignores the true riches in Christ—that I am a sinner, but Christ died for my sin—and, in brief, substitutes mere moral living and striving for happiness by telling yourself that you really are a good person after all. Paul was not warning the Colossians about this precise philosophy, but it is also a vain deceit.

Scripture wasn't given merely to create a just society and make people happy. It was written so that we could know God and His ways, so we could know who we are without Christ, so that we would repent of our sins, and so that we would know how to live for Christ and not for ourselves.

PAUL'S CONSISTENT MESSAGE

Colossians 2:9–15 details our spiritual riches in Christ, and Paul concludes his thought (vv. 16–23) by warning the Colossians against certain practices. Why be drawn back into Jewish rituals which only

picture spiritual realities when you have already received the fulfillment, which is Christ? Why be drawn into speculations about angels and visions, trying to find a greater spirituality by exploring your own thoughts and dreams rather than holding fast to Christ alone? Why be drawn into asceticism, which implies that our fleshly nature only expresses itself in external things that we can control? The mere practice of these things cannot bring spiritual growth or confer spiritual merit with God. Paul's consistent message in Colossians and Galatians is that Christians must not be drawn away by any sort of practice that adds anything to faith in Christ for salvation.

Be discerning as you read things other than the Bible for spiritual encouragement. Ask yourself whether what you're reading focuses more on you or more on Christ. Is the teaching actually based on Scripture? Is the author being honest with what the referenced verses really teach in their context? You may not know if you have not delved deeply into those Scriptures yourself. Real spiritual growth happens as the Holy Spirit guides, convicts, and illuminates us as we read and meditate on the Word, pray, look honestly at our terrible selves, repent, and have true fellowship with Christ. Don't be deceived by anything less. Don't be satisfied with anything less.

Linda Shumate is the wife of David Shumate, the director of Mexican Gospel Mission International. Now that their kids are grown, Linda enjoys having time to travel with David, help with office work at MGMI, study Bible and music at International Baptist College and Seminary, spend time with grandkids, and hike the mountains around Phoenix.



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“Embarrassing”

The New Testament,” wrote C. S. Lewis with characteristic candor, “contains embarrassing promises that what we pray for with faith we shall receive.” What makes them “embarrassing” is that their ostensibly unqualified extravagance often doesn’t seem to match our experience.

How is this astonishing promise to be reconciled with the observed facts? . . . Every war, every famine or plague, almost every deathbed, is the monument to a petition that was not granted. . . . I’m not asking why our petitions are so often refused. . . . The real problem is different; not why refusal is so frequent, but why the opposite result is so lavishly promised.

I have begun both of these columns by quoting Lewis’s *Letters to Malcolm* at length (and borrowing his unsettling adjective, “embarrassing”) not because he is a theological authority but because he bluntly articulates what almost any observant and thoughtful Christian has wondered.

In the previous column, we particularly explored the prayer promises recorded in John’s Gospel (14:13–15; 15:7–9, 16–17; 16:23–24). As absolute and unqualified as they may sound when isolated from their context, Jesus’ promises regarding prayer include built-in qualifications that are often overlooked. When read in their fuller context, it’s clear that they are not blanket promises of blank checks in prayer. Jesus never promises, “As long as you are a Christian, you can get anything you want from God; all you have to do is ask.”

PRAYER PROMISES IN JOHN’S EPISTLES

Even beyond the context provided in the Book of John, however, we are not left to interpret those promises in John’s Gospel on our own. Jesus directed the Spirit (cf. John 16:12–15) to provide, through John’s first letter, an inspired commentary on those prayer promises recorded in his Gospel. Here’s the first:

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (1 John 3:21–22).

“Obedience is the indispensable condition, not the meritorious cause of answered prayer” (Stott, *Letters of John*). That “indispensable condition” is twofold: “the first calls for obedience to his commands” and “the second implies a spontaneous activity motivated by love, freely undertaken because Christian love recognizes them as ‘those things that are pleasing in his sight’” (Hiebert, *Epistles of John*).

This requires theological clarification. We have *access* to God, who hears our prayers, only because of Christ’s righteousness alone and our union with Him. But we have *answers* from God, who hears our prayers, “because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” But we still need to unpack this promise further so we don’t misconstrue John’s statement by isolating it from his context.

Do we *ever* come to God in perfect and complete obedience? Does God *ever* answer our prayers (for protection, provision, etc.) even when we are in disobedience? Those are rhetorical questions, and rhetorical questions are merely camouflaged declarations. Every believer knows the answers to those questions are no and yes, respectively. If that’s the case, then there is not a precise, formulaic, legalistic correlation between my obedience and my Father’s willingness to answer *any* of my prayers.

John links several concepts in 3:21–23: *confidence* → *receiving what we ask* → *keeping His commandments* → *believing on Christ and loving one another*. Earlier in the chapter John made a point of *practicing* [i.e., *habitual*] obedience, not *perfect* obedience. That never excuses disobedience; it frankly acknowledges our fallenness. We need to maintain both sides of scriptural truth—even obedience does not *merit* either my access to God or God’s answers to my prayer. It’s *all* of grace.

I’m drawing an admittedly fine distinction between *meriting* and *causing* answers to prayer. But John’s point is that obedience gives us additional confidence in God’s pleasure, and gives God additional cause to answer our requests. Children always have access to their father not because they are always obedient but because they are *children*. Still, the father is more inclined to grant special requests to a child who demonstrates a habitually obedient and submissive spirit and has no unresolved areas of disobedience.

It seems, then, that John’s “bar” of obedience is this kind of *habitual obedience of believing Christ and submitting to His commandments*—especially with regard to the love for one another that he repeatedly emphasizes as marks of the genuine believer. (This emphasis on loving one another in conjunction with the prayer promises, you may remember from the previous column, is consistent with Jesus’ original prayer promises; see John 14:15; 15:9, 17). The teaching on prayer is intrinsically intertwined with this teaching. It is not an isolated point to create anxiety about whether one is being obedient “enough” to get one’s prayers answered; nor should it generate a legalistic mentality that roots my confidence in a sense of earning or deserving answers to my prayers.

Prayer Promises? (Part 2)

John circles back around to this focus on prayer in 5:14–15.

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Both passages in this letter combine to present two conditions for otherwise unlimited answered prayer: “The two conditions set forth are the human [*our obeying and pleasing God*, 3:21–22] and the divine [*according to His will*, 5:14–15] aspects for effective prayer” (Hiebert, *ibid.*).

Answers to prayer do not depend on a right diagnosis or analysis of the problem as we pray, but on a childlike submission to the Father, knowing that he will give what is best *according to his will*. If he were to answer on any other basis, which of us would ever dare to pray again? We do not have that sort of wisdom (Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters*, cited by Hiebert).

That's why the example of Jesus in the garden is so important: “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Prayer is not a convenient device for imposing our will upon God, or for bending his will to ours, but the prescribed way of subordinating our will to his. It is by prayer that we seek God's will, embrace it and align ourselves with it. Every true prayer is a variation of the theme “your will be done” (Stott, *ibid.*).

In addition, prayer is the prescribed means of *communicating* our needs and desires to God. It is not a matter of “informing” Him, since He already knows before we ask (Matt. 6:8); but He nevertheless wants us to bring our needs and desires to Him. Why?

First, because it is in that fellowship of minds that is prayer, as we examine and express our own needs and desires, that we submit them to the light of the examination of His will revealed in His Word. It is in that sense that, as Stott says, “It is by prayer that we seek God's will, embrace it and align ourselves with it.”

Second, because it reminds us not to presume on God or to assign to coincidence what is in fact God's provision. In short, He likes to be asked. No one illustrates this better than C. S. Lewis in *The Magician's Nephew*. Aslan sends Digory and Polly on a mission, appointing as their mode of transport a flying horse named Fledge. When they halt their travels on the first evening, Fledge begins tearing up mouthfuls of grass for his supper. The children suddenly realize that no one thought to bring or provide food for *their* supper. Fledge, invites them to dive in and enjoy the grass with him.

“But we can't eat grass,” said Digory.

“Hm,” said Fledge, speaking with his mouth full. “Well—hm—don't know quite what you'll do then. Very good grass, too.”

“Well, I *do* think someone might have arranged about our meals,” said Digory.

“I'm sure Aslan would've if you'd asked him,” said Fledge.

“Wouldn't he know without being asked?” said Polly.

“I've no doubt he would,” said the horse (still with his mouth full), “but I've a sort of idea he likes to be asked.”

CONCLUSION

The echo of Jesus' original promises is clearly audible in these passages in John's first letter. If we meet the conditions built into the promises, what we ask is certain to be in line with and submitted to the will of God and, hence, sure to be granted.

If we are (1) abiding in Christ (persevering), (2) letting Christ's words remain in us (feeding), (3) bearing abiding fruit (growing), (4) asking in Jesus' name (relying on his merit, not mine, for access and answers), (5) keeping Jesus' commandments (habitually obeying), (6) seeking the things that please God, and (7) submitting our requests ultimately to the Father's will and wisdom . . . then we can truly ask *anything* with absolute confidence that there are no limitations to what God can do (Mark 11:24; Matt. 17:20) and that the Father will certainly hear and grant our request. The list may look like an obstacle course that mocks the open-ended simplicity of “ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” In reality, it simply describes the normal daily life of any believer seeking to walk with God.

This is not doubletalk, hermeneutical sleight-of-hand, or a cheap attempt to explain away otherwise “embarrassing” prayer promises. It is confronting those promises fairly, honestly, entirely (conditions and all), and contextually (including the Spirit's explanations of them)—applying all we are told about prayer, so that we come to mature conclusions rather than irresponsible assumptions, isolated applications, and disillusioned disappointments.

Dr. Layton Talbert is professor of Theology and Biblical Exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.

A Brother's Witness

"My wife has been killed in an accident." The news sent a shockwave through my system. On the other end of the phone was the voice of Shane, a man in his late twenties who had gotten saved a year earlier.

He was working out of town and was on his way home. He asked if I could meet him at their house when he arrived home in about three hours. I told him I would, and I arrived early to join immediate family members who had also arrived to provide support.

That morning Shane's wife had agreed to drive their carpool due to a coworker's car not starting. On their way to work, they were hit head on by a gentleman who was high on marijuana.

Shane's wife and a coworker in the front seat were killed on impact. The coworkers in the back seat were seriously injured but survived. The driver who was high on marijuana was not injured at all. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police used this case to set a standard of driving impaired while high on marijuana.

When Shane arrived home that night, he immediately asked me to step into their bedroom and through frantic tears said, "Tell me where she is." I reminded him of a conversation we had had at their kitchen table just a year earlier.

Shane was a driller. At that time, he was sent all over the world to drill oil wells. He was drilling down in Cuba and something went wrong and an explosion took place, blowing him off the platform he was on. He sustained no injuries and no burns—in his words "a miracle." His brother had gotten saved earlier and had been witnessing to him, and up to that point, Shane was not interested. However, now he was very interested as he felt God had spared his life.

As I sat at their kitchen table that night, he and his wife Tammi related how they had been married for several years. She was a chemical engineer, and he was a successful driller. Financially they were set and hoped to start a family within the next couple of years. However, though they had everything going for them from the world's perspective, neither was sure what would happen to them after they died.

Shane said he had seen a change in his brother's life, and his brother said I could answer their questions. I asked if I could show them from the Bible what a person needs to believe in order to be saved. As I started in Romans 3:23, they easily acknowledged that they were both sinners. I explained why Christ died on the cross to pay for their sins and that He rose again conquering sin and death. I then explained that they needed to be done doing things their way and be willing to do them God's way. They looked at each other and then at me and stated they both believed in their hearts and they wanted to confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus. They began coming faithfully to church and inviting friends and family to join them.

I reminded Shane of these events and looked him in the eye and told him his wife was in heaven—not because I wished she was there but because she had done what the Bible says a person must do to be saved. He hugged me and thanked me and then stepped out to talk to the rest of his family gathered there.

The funeral was huge, as it often is when a younger person dies. Shane asked me to share what I had shared with him and his wife so that the attendees could know that they would go to heaven when they died. I was struck at that moment how God used a near-death experience to bring

Shane and Tammi to Himself—while He knew that Tammi would not live long after she was saved. How different and hopeless that funeral would have been had Shane's brother not been witnessing to him!

In Luke 16 Jesus tells us about the rich man and Lazarus. In hell the rich man cries out and begs to go and witness to his five brothers. His request is denied, and he is told that if his brothers will not listen to God's Word, they will not be persuaded by someone coming back from the dead. The rich man waited too long to care about his own soul, let alone his brothers' souls.

I wonder if there are people in our towns or neighborhoods who are begging God to send someone to witness to them so they do not go to hell. Would you be willing to be the answer to someone's prayer by building relationships with those around you so you can share who Jesus is and what He has done? May we be like Shane's brother, taking the word to the world. It makes a world of difference.

Jim Tillotson has served as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, since June 2015. Previously he was the senior pastor of Meadowlands Baptist Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, for eighteen years. During his time in Canada he led Meadowlands Baptist in planting three new churches and helped start a Christian school and a Bible institute.



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Bethel Baptist Fellowship
2304 Voorhies Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11235
718.615.1002
(Coordinator: Matt Recker)

October 15, 2022

New England Regional Fellowship

(Meeting with the New England Foundations Conference)
Heritage Baptist Church
186 Dover Point Rd.
Dover, NH 03820
(Coordinator: Taigen Joos)

October 17-18, 2022

Central Regional Fellowship

Wheatland Baptist Church
1139 McKinley
McPherson, KS 67460
(Coordinator: David Byford)

2023

January 31, 2023

Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship

Westside Baptist Church
6260 West 4th St.
Greeley, CO 80634
970.346.8610
(Coordinator: Dan Unruh)

February 6-7, 2023

FBFI Winter Board Meeting

Colonial Hills Baptist Church
8140 Union Chapel Rd.
Indianapolis, IN 46240

March 6-8, 2023

South Regional Fellowship

Keystone Baptist Church
15 Keystone Ln.
Berryville, VA 22611
(Coordinator: Tony Facenda)

April 23-24, 2023

Northwest Regional Fellowship

Monroe Baptist Church
1405 West Main St.
Monroe, WA 98272
(Coordinator: Greg Kaminski)

June 12-14, 2023

FBFI Annual Fellowship

Faith Baptist Bible College
900 Northwest 4th St.
Ankeny, IA 50023

2024

March 11-12, 2024

Northwest Regional Fellowship

Westside Baptist Church
1375 Irving Rd.
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News From All Over



CH (COL) Mike "Pops" Shellman
retired from the US Army on February

24, 2022, completing an illustrious military career of twenty-two years. His retirement ceremony was conducted at the prestigious Memorial Chapel on Joint Base Myer in Arlington, Virginia. The presiding officer for the event was MG Allan M. Pepin, the commanding general of Joint Task Force-National Capitol Region, US Army Military District of Washington. Mike was the command chaplain of this same unit for the past few years. Mike was accompanied by his wife, Cheryl, and their three daughters and their families.



Dr. Mark Batory
retired from being the executive director of Gospel Fellowship Association



Missions on May 6, 2022. Mark and his wife, Paula, will take their forty-five years of experience to mentor God's present and future servants and share the joy of a lifetime of service to the King of kings and Lord of lords.



Jon and Andrea Crocker, missionaries in Mexico City, have accepted God's redirection in

their lives as Jon becomes the new Executive Director of GFA. Jon is uniquely prepared for this challenge and will begin in this role immediately, though the Crockers will remain in Mexico City for some time to provide for a smooth transition for that ministry.



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FRONTLINE

Regional Reports

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Dan Pelletier

The Northern California FBFI Regional Fellowship took place on Thursday and Friday, March 24–25, 2022, at Calvary Baptist Church in Marina, where Tim Knauf serves as the senior pastor. They were a wonderful host church, providing a wonderful tri-tip and grilled chicken dinner on Thursday night, breakfast both days, and lunch on Friday. Childcare was also provided for all of the sessions. Their church musicians provided special music and accompanied our group as we sang for the services and a time of singspiration and testimonies on Thursday evening.

Dr. Rand Hummel was the keynote speaker with workshops presented by Dr. David Innes, Pastor Ron Perry, Dr. Dale Seaman, Mrs. Jennifer Knauf, and Mrs. Chris Pelletier. Approximately sixty attended the meeting, which focused on the theme of “Times of Refreshment.” New pastors and wives were introduced to the FBFI, and everyone left encouraged!

ALASKA REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Bruce Hamilton

The April 25–27 meeting of the Alaska Foundations Baptist Fellowship was hosted by Pastor John Craven and the people of Soldotna Baptist Church of Soldotna, Alaska.

Pastor Craven and his wife, Becky, did a wonderful job making everyone feel a warm springtime welcome. The delicious meals and comfortable lodging only added to the hospitable atmosphere for which this church is known.

The theme of the conference was “Holding Fast at the End of the Age.” The excellent teaching and preaching provided a twofold balance: Instruction regarding the believer’s biblical response to the culture’s ungodly promotion and acceptance of the homosexual and transgender movement (daytime sessions) and encouragement to trust in our great God and His inspired, infallible Word (nighttime sessions). Expository, Christ-exalting sermons thrilled the heart of every participant.

In addition we were moved to tears by the powerful testimonies of African missionaries Josiah and

Esther Wambua (Kenya) and Saada Onyango (South Sudan), all with International Baptist Missions of Chandler, Arizona.

The Alaska FBFI meeting saw an increase in giving and attendance this year, and we anticipate this pattern continuing into the future, Lord willing.

We praise the Lord for the faithful men who brought this fellowship to our state, and after the 2022 meeting we are now more committed than ever to “Holding Fast”!



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Michael Shellman

Be Strong in the Lord

My wife and I can't believe that it is now time to retire from the military. My retirement is mandatory due to my age: I turn sixty-two this fall. I have served twenty-two years as a United States Army Chaplain. Of course, it seems like yesterday when I began this military ministry.

I'll never forget the first day I reported for active-duty service. The date was September 11, 2000. I had many fears and uncertainties that first year, even to the extent that I thought I had made a mistake and was doubting God's will. But God clearly confirmed my calling as a military chaplain exactly one year later on September 11, 2001. That date changed so many things, and it certainly changed my ministry. I'll never forget that evening when I gathered my family together for family devotions. I stated to them that life would never be the same again as we knew it. As a family, we called upon God to use me in military ministry, even if it meant deploying with my Soldiers in combat. Little did we know that I would be the first Army Chaplain to deploy in the Global War on Terrorism. And sixteen combat deployments later, I thank the Lord for the opportunity to have served our nation in this capacity.

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer. 33:3). Serving as an Army Chaplain has certainly shown me tremendous challenges and spiritual victories. I praise the Lord for affording me the opportunity to have led many Soldiers to the Lord and for using me to strengthen their faith. The Lord has blessed me with great assignments, allowing me to serve "on the tip of the spear." I was just an ordinary minister who desired to serve a powerful God who can do extraordinary things. God used me as His servant in ministry to impact lives for eternity.

"God can do extraordinary things with ordinary people." My ministry theme has always been "Be Strong in the Lord." This theme has carried me even through times of extremely difficult ministry. God never said it would be easy. But He did say that He would go with us. What a tremendous promise that gives me the strength I needed each day!



"Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:9). As I look back on my military ministry, I believe it was my strong Christian values that guided my career. God led me to these values during my early military years. These values shaped my focus and my identity as a Chaplain. I've shared these values throughout my military career to all my subordinate Chaplains. I've also shared these values with the Soldiers I've served. I wanted everyone to know what was important to me and inspired me to be the best chaplain I could be.

- **Faith** in God is my foundation in life and ministry. I strove to live my faith to my best ability each day. I knew that one of the best things I could do for my Soldiers was to live a life for them to follow. Of course, it wasn't all about my life—it was

all about Jesus. And I strove to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Whether on the battlefield or back home in training, I prayed that God would use me to lead others to Him.

- **Family** plays an important role in military ministry. The real hero in my home remains my wife. Through thick and thin, sunshine and darkness, she has been an inspiration to me and my family. Prior to my entering the military we had so many questions and wondered if God could use us in this capacity. But God called both of us and prepared us for this unique ministry. "Whom God calls, God prepares."
- **Freedom** is what I want for our country. America is truly blessed because of our God-given freedoms. And we should never take our freedoms for granted. I always told my Soldiers that God was using them as instruments of His justice. But most of all I told my Soldiers of the freedom from sin and bondage that we could have through Jesus.
- **Fitness** always remains a priority. The military places high value on physical fitness. Soldiers must be prepared and physically fit, always ready to where our nation needs us. But I also strived to be spiritually fit and always prepared for ministry opportunities.
- **Fun** is fun! I asked the Lord to help me to show up each day with a smile on my face and love in my heart for my Soldiers. I wanted my Soldiers to know that I loved them, to laugh with them and cry with them. And most of all to share the love of God.

Lastly I wish to thank our FBFI family for all your prayers and support. It's been quite a journey, and I thank you for partnering with my family and me.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Fulfilled Messianic Prophecies from the Book of Zechariah

Continued from page 27

In prophesying details about His arrest and betrayal, Jesus informed the disciples that they would all forsake Him. In Matthew 26:31 Jesus cites Zechariah 13:7 to validate this prediction. While the disciples, especially Peter, objected to this prediction (vv. 33–35), they did indeed forsake Him after His arrest in Gethsemane (vv. 47–56). This affirmation of fulfilled prophecy is likewise affirmed in the parallel account in Mark 14:27.

This fulfillment is interesting, because it represents an analogy to a larger fulfillment in the tribulation period, which precedes the purging of national Israel. What is fulfilled in the disciples fleeing after Jesus' arrest anticipates a greater fulfillment of the Jewish people in the Tribulation before they acknowledge their Messiah.⁴ Nevertheless, an aspect of this prophecy is fulfilled in the arrest of Jesus and dispersion of His disciples.

IMPLICATIONS

As we conclude, I would like to highlight two very important implications from our brief survey.

(1) God's prophetic Word is trustworthy. Several prophecies of Zechariah are specifically identified as fulfilled in the New Testament. These prophecies are a testimony to the accuracy and reliability of prophetic Scriptures and reflect the faithful and trustworthy character of God.

While some of the details in which the prophecies are fulfilled may be surprising, these details are intentional, within the intended meaning of the divine Author, and they are fulfilled in very specific ways. No matter how chaotic the world scene becomes, God will fulfill His plan for the ages, just as He has revealed in biblical revelation.

(2) The details of God's prophetic revelation are significant. What may seem to be obscure details from the human perspective can reveal significant aspects of God's future plan. Prophetic details such as those from the Book of Zechariah show that God will fulfill the specific details of His revelation literally, just as they were intended.

These examples of literal fulfillment affirm an important principle in the interpretation of biblical prophecy: when

specific details are given, they will be fulfilled in a specific way. This is particularly important as we interpret prophetic passages that are unfulfilled. I believe that the same exactness of fulfillment that characterized the prophecies of Jesus' First Advent will characterize the fulfillment of the prophecies related to His second.

Keith A. Kobelia (PhD, Dallas Theological Seminary) has taught in the Bible and Theology Department at Faith Baptist Bible College since 2014. He, his wife, Elizabeth, and their six children reside in Ankeny, Iowa.



¹ See David A. Jones, *Old Testament Quotations and Allusions in the New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009).

² F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983–85), 1:1563.

³ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983–85), 2:86.

⁴ Lindsey, "Zechariah," 1:1569.

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Comforting Others in the Ministry

One of the greatest blessings we can experience as a child of God is being a comfort to others in the ministry. We read in Colossians 4:11, "These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me." Here the apostle Paul expressed his deep gratitude for those who had been a comfort to him. We know that the Scriptures declare in 2 Corinthians 1:3, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." He is indeed our God all comfort! His comfort is greater than any human being's comfort. The psalmist said of the Lord in Psalm 23:4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." In Psalm 94:19 we read, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul." We read what the apostle Paul said of our Lord in 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." What a profound truth that must be embedded in our hearts! God will always comfort His children.

And along with our Lord and Savior's comfort, we also have the comfort of the Holy Spirit. This truth is greatly empha-

sized in the following verses. The Lord Jesus said in John 14:16, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." Again, Christ said in John 14:26, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Also, the Lord stated of the Holy Spirit in John 15:26, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." Then our Lord said in John 16:7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Is it not wonderful that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter; who abides with us forever; brings all things to our remembrance; that He is the Spirit of truth, and that He indwells us!

So we have the comfort of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But we also have the comfort of the Scriptures. We read in John 15:4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." What great comfort the Word of God brings to us. It calms our fears, strengthens our confidence,

and removes doubt and despair. The Scriptures are our comfort that the Lord will always intervene for us. Psalm 119:114 says, "Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word." We read in Psalm 119:43, "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights." Psalm 119:165 declares, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

Last of all, we can be used of the Lord to be a comfort to other individuals. The apostle Paul told the saints at Ephesus of a man who would be a comfort to them. This man's name was Tychicus. Paul said of him in Ephesians 6:22, "Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts." I personally can voice how grateful I am for people who have been a great comfort to me in times of difficulties. They have a special place in my heart because of their love and kindness during my trials. Now I want to comfort others in their dark hours. There could not be a greater admonition than what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

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