

The Corona Chronicle.

Being Church in Partial lockdown.

Sunday April 11th

West Worthing Evangelical Church. Rugby Road

Every Knee Shall Bow

Exploring the Book of Daniel

Please read Chapter Three



A popular theme in science fiction films is an asteroid or planet on a collision course with earth which will mean total disaster and annihilation. This chapter of Daniel is all about what happens when worlds collide - but not planets. Rather, it is the collision between King Nebuchadnezzar and his culture and the counter-culture of God's people.

The chapter highlights

1. The pressures God's people face. This image measured ninety feet high and nine feet across and was totally covered in gold plate. It was a great state occasion – the military, judiciary, civil service, anyone who was anyone was there. Also there was the massed Babylon Royal Philharmonic Orchestra! The constant repetition of the dignitaries and the musical instruments is deliberately described, reiterated and spelt out to bring home the dignity and power of the king, the authority of the state and the overwhelming greatness of this occasion. It aimed deliberately to put people in their place. Nebuchadnezzar may have enjoyed putting on a show but he also lays on all the razzmatazz to impress and to stress the seriousness of this event and his importance.

Then the declaration vv 4-6. This immediate compliance by the vast crowd was unsurprising, given the alternative. So what about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – God's servants, who worship the one true God? Immediately they are brought into conflict with Nebuchadnezzar and his world view, his public policy for the nation. So the pressures are on! What are they?

(a) The intolerance of the king. He would be surprised to be accused of intolerance! He wasn't ruling out worship of other gods, just insisting everyone worshipped his god first. There is, no doubt, a political element to his edict. Verse 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 14, 15, 18. make very clear the image is indissolubly linked with the king, the seat of government. Compliance, therefore, was a mark of loyalty to the state, of being a good citizen. To refuse marked one out as undesirable and untrustworthy, someone "agin the government". New Testament believers faced a similar problem – burn a pinch of incense on the altar and say "Caesar is Lord" – then it's fine to worship your own gods. And they couldn't do it for only Jesus is Lord.

Today, many countries regard Christians with suspicion and hostility; many take action against them. Persecution steps up in many lands: prison, torture, death. We cannot afford to be complacent in this nation. There is an increasing tendency amongst some sections of society to vociferously attack people, and especially the church and individual Christians, who disagree with and reject some of the moral trends seen in our society today, The right to free speech in their view is limited to agreeing with them. It remains to be seen how our own government reacts to the demands of militant pressure groups.

But our society is at odds with Christianity in a wider sense. Tolerance is there providing we accept its presuppositions, values, standards. When we diverge is when the tolerance ends!

(b) The scrutiny of their peers. v8. Seems likely they had a shrewd suspicion that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would not obey. "Maliciously" indicates their motivation was self-interest, jealousy, having noted their way of life, integrity of their dealings, honesty of their speech. Their faithfulness to their God provided the opportunity to get rid of them.

2. The stand God's people take.

(a) It was distinctive. These three men were not just being awkward! To obey the king would be to disobey Exodus 20:3-4, so a vital issue. They served this God so led a life that was different and that led to behaviour that was different. Natural consequence of a constant and faithful walk with God. NB the importance of everyday discipleship; Matthew 5:13-14 emphasizes the difference - this what makes the impact. It is our lives that the world notices most; what message does ours send out?

(b) It was consistent. Reaction of king – v13 but significantly he gives them a second chance v15! Why? Recognized Chaldeans' motivation? Valued these three Jews therefore v15? But Nebuchadnezzar is ratcheting up pressure with an unexpected chance to avoid an awful death. They had shown the flag, made stand, shown feelings, why not capitulate now, then be able to carry on serving God. Maybe another reason Nebuchadnezzar giving a second chance – he would gain more by their capitulation than by their death – a public acknowledgement his god superior. Worth remembering whenever we're tempted to compromise - every moral lapse, petty dishonesty, adopting of world's standards is such an acknowledgement. Our world is able to reassure itself - "You see, when comes down to it, no different." But these believers stood firm.

(c) It was principled. NB answer to king's question in v 15(b): v17-18. Disappointing? Lack of faith? Hardly! Not unsure of God's ability but his intention, not his power but his purpose. They didn't pretend to know more than they did. Nor did they think in selfishly narrow way. God may have larger purpose which means no deliverance. Either way their responsibility is to remain true: a response grounded in principle. See mystery of God's dealings in Hebrews 11:32-35(a) then v35(b)-38. Church history teaches same lesson– some died, some lived, some martyred, some delivered. In a sense irrelevant. Essence of faith is to live by what God has revealed, whatever the consequences. We don't do it just because there's a percentage in it for us.

3. The presence God's people enjoy. As Nebuchadnezzar settles to enjoy the screams and the smell of burnt flesh he is jolted out of his fury and vengeful satisfaction v 24-25. Who is this mysterious Companion – an angel? Or a theophany: the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus, as in other places in the Old Testament? I believe the latter. This is a precious truth and an important lesson we need to treasure: that though they were in the fire God was there with them – a literal example of God's promise in Isaiah 43:2. So he is with all his faithful, suffering people though not relieved or rescued from situation: see Acts 9:4; Acts 7:55-56; II Timothy 4:16-17. Remember Matthew 28:28(b). Always true.

4. The vindication God's people receive. vv26ff Complete turnaround because things have changed -Nebuchadnezzar's plan frustrated, his determination to have his way brought to nothing, and his pretensions exposed: remember all the emphasis on Nebuchadnezzar setting up his god, his power, "who can deliver?" His bombast is revealed for what it is – empty rhetoric. And this is the truth finally about all human kingdoms and rulers. Not always see immediately but day coming when truth revealed, when all God's people will be vindicated as Jesus brings in the fulness of his kingdom. A day when, according to the Apostle Paul, "...the saints will judge the world." (I Corinthians 6:2). Maybe that means that on that great day of judgement part of the final assessment will focus on how the world has treated God's people.

This story calls us to see beyond the power exercised in this world, the values that ignore what God has decreed for our good and wellbeing, the injustices and horrors that seem to avoid redress. See beyond to the eternal God who is in charge, who can be trusted and will bring in perfect justice and wholeness one day and the total vindication of his people. This is assured through Jesus, the stone (2:34; 42-46) who brought in the kingdom of God NB Acts 17:30(b)-31. The One who lived, died and rose again to bring the love and forgiveness of God to all who trust him and give their allegiance to him is the same One who then will expose the hollowness of our world's vaunted power as he brings the final and inescapable judgement.. So the burning question for you and me is: on that day will it be vindication or condemnation for us?

Dennis R. Read

Jesus told a story about a man who hired worker for his vineyard. Some worked all day and some came at the end of the day and only worked a short time, ut the man paid them all the same wage. What did Jesus have to say about this?

| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | W | B | O | I | B | T | E |
| 2 | A | A | D | R | S | S | T |
| 3 | L | N | L | T | S | B | L |
| 4 | F | E | W | A | L | H | T |
| 5 | T | H | L | L | S | L | S |
| 6 | S | E | I | A | T | T | E |

A-6 C-1 D-3 B-5 G-6 E-4 A-2 F-2 G-4

C-4 C-6 F-5 D-5 B-1 G-1 A-4 C-6 D-2 E-3 G-2,

D-6 B-3 C-2 E-6 F-4 B-4 A-4 C-6 D-2 E-5 F-1

A-1 D-1 C-5 G-3 F-3 B-6 A-3 B-2 E-2 G-5

1 At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess Him king of glory now;
This the Father's pleasure, that we call Him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty word.

2 At His voice creation sprang at once to sight,
All the angel faces, all the hosts of light;
Thrones and dominations, stars upon their way,
All the heavenly orders, in their great array.

3 Humbled for a season, to receive a name
From the lips of sinners unto whom He came;
Faithfully He bore it spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious when from death He passed.

4 Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures to the central height;
To the eternal Godhead, to the Father's throne,
Filled it with the glory of His triumph won.

5 Name Him, Christians, name Him, with love strong as death,
But with awe and wonder, and with bated breath;
He is God the Saviour, He is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.

6 In your hearts enthrone Him; there let Him subdue
All that is not holy, all that is not true;
Crown Him as your captain in temptation's hour,
Let His will enfold you in its light and power.

7 With His Father's glory Jesus comes again,
Angel hosts attend Him and announce His reign;
For all wreaths of empire meet upon His brow,
And our hearts confess Him king of glory now.

Jubilate Hymns version of 'At the name of Jesus', Caroline M
Noel (1817 - 1877)

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Bible Readings Daniel 3

Hebrews 11:32-40

English Standard Version

³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell
of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and
the prophets— ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, en-
forced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of li-
ons, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the
sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in
war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their
dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept
release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and
imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they
were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep
and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— ³⁸ of whom the world
was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains,
and in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not
receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided some-
thing better for us, that apart from us they should not be made
perfect.

Judge eternal, bringer of justice,
hear the cry
of those who suffer under the lash of heartless political oppres-
sion;
those who languish in prisons and labour camps, untried or
falsely condemned;
those whose bodies are shattered,
or whose minds are unhinged by torture or deprivation.
Meet them in their anguish and despair,
and kindle in them the light of hope,
that they may find rest in Your love,
healing in Your compassion a
and faith in Your mercy.
In the name of Him who suffered,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

GIVING GOD THE GLORY

From 1 Peter 5

To the God of all grace,
Who called us to His eternal glory in Christ,
Be the power and the praise
For ever and ever. **Amen.**

Night Prayer

1 All praise to You, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light.
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
Beneath the shelter of Your wings.

2 Forgive me, Lord, for this I pray,
The wrong that I have done this day.
May peace with God and neighbour be,
Before I sleep restored to me.

3 Lord, may I be at rest in You
And sweetly sleep the whole night thro'.
Refresh my strength, for Your own sake,
So I may serve You when I wake.

4 Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Thomas Ken