

Bright Shining as the Stars

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[0 : 0 0] Just while you remain standing, friends, we'll pray. Father, please teach us from your word today. And having taught us, please be at work in our wills to form them into the likeness of...

well, to form them to do your will. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, friends, drawing from some historical background material, I'm going to tell you a story up front.

Parts of it you may find just a little gruesome, but I've really modified it significantly so that it's not too bad. So imagine the scene.

All the Jews from this local area are gathered together in the public square. They're standing there rather somberly, sullenly. They're waiting. And then the announcement comes.

Hear and obey. From this moment on, any Jew who refuses to accept Antiochus Epiphanes as the sole God, supplanting all others, including your God known as Yahweh, any Jew who persists in following the law of your prophet called Moses, any Jew who circumcises his son, or the Jew who refuses to place his hand upon the sacrificial pig, shall be arrested and dragged before the temple of Zeus.

[1 : 2 7] There he shall be scourged with 50 blows, after which he shall be placed on the ground so that his skin may be pulled away while he still lives. Thereafter he shall be slain, his body cut apart and thrown to the dogs.

Hear these penalties and obey. And the Jews hearing this are understandably shocked and astonished. They're herded back to the village square. There on the altar lies this large pig.

It's squealing, twisting in the sunlight. And one by one, the Jews file by. And each places his hand on the forbidden beast.

But one old Jew will not do it. One old Jew refuses. He will not honour the emperor's pig. And so a Greek soldier begins to manhandle him.

And the captain of the guard intervenes gently and he makes a point to the old man. He says, look, old man, you have not obeyed our god Antiochus. And the old man's beard testifies to the years he has studied Moses.

[2 : 3 4] And he draws back in disgust. And again, the captain says, dear friend, it will go hard with you if you do not obey this law. Again, the old man refuses.

And the captain indicates to one of his men and the whip is brought to him. And it's an awesome instrument. And its awesomeness is pointed out to the old man.

And he says, he's told, do you think you could stand up against such punishment? And the old man turns. And he faces the pig. And he draws his breath.

And the spit dribbles down the pig's rump. And the soldiers grab the man and they proceed as they'd been instructed. The old man is stripped naked. He's laid against the pillar.

And the punishment is taken out. And anyway, as it all happens, the guards hope, because they themselves see the fierceness of the punishment, they hope that the scourging will kill the man.

[3 : 43] Anyway, the old Jew has some sort of inner sense of, or in a profound source of resistance. He survives the scourging. Finally, he's thrown to the ground.

And people again are pleading for him to give up. But the men with sharp knives come forward. Anyway, when it's really thought that his death is close, he calls out this permanent prayer of all Jews.

He says this, this prayer that will identify Jews for all time. This quote from scripture. And it is this, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

And with those words on his lips, he dies. What I've done, and I've done it deliberately, I know it's harsh, but what I've done is to take you through a picture of the persecutions faced by Jews in the second century BC.

And these persecutions are hinted at by Daniel as he peers into the future and as he sees what is coming upon the people of God. Now, I've told you the story also to prompt some questions in your minds.

[4 : 57] You see, when I hear such questions, sorry, when I hear such stories, they draw out certain things from me. And the first thing that comes into my mind is revulsion at the gross brutality that is occurring.

The second thing that goes through my mind is probably the question that goes through your mind as well. And that is, how would I go if these things were happening to me?

Would I stand firm? And the third thing that happens is, I think to myself, how is it that God allows such things to happen to his people?

And where is he when such things happen? And the fourth is this one. If God is really in control, then when will he cause such things to end?

When will God act to end such evil, such suffering, and such brutality? Friends, those are the sorts of questions, I think, that must have gone through Daniel's mind as he listened to God's messenger in chapters 10 through to 12 of the book of Daniel.

[6 : 06] Now, I'm going to leave you to read the details. If you open up the outline that should have been given to you as you came in, you'll see in the middle, first on the outside, you can see the outline of what I'm going to say.

But in the middle, what I've done is, I have written down the predictions of Daniel on one side, and on the other side, I've written down the events as they were fulfilled in history.

And I've done that so that you can later on have a look and sort of work your way through chapters 10 to 12 if you'd like to do so. The broad details of the story of chapters 11 to 12 in particular go like this.

In Daniel 10, Daniel is fasting and praying in the third year of Cyrus. Verse 2 tells us that he's been mourning and fasting for three weeks. On the 24th day of the first month, he has a visionary experience and God sends a messenger to instruct him.

And the messenger introduces the topic in chapter 10, beginning at verse 20. Spells it out in chapter 11, verse 2. And he describes something along these lines.

[7 : 16] This again is a very brief summary for you. He describes how there will be three more kings who come, plus a fourth, a rich king in Persia.

However, that king will be overthrown by the mighty great warrior king, Alexander the Great. Verse 4 indicates that Alexander will die early. His empire will be divided among his four generals.

In verse 5, we hear that those two kingdoms will become prominent, Egypt in the south and Syria in the north. And in the succeeding verses, we hear that these kingdoms will wage war against each other.

They will attempt alliances with each other. They'll deal treacherously with each other. There'll even be a period of peace between them. Anyway, eventually, a particular king in the north will be murdered.

A natural successor will be prevented from coming to the throne by the quick actions of a usurper, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who I introduced to you over this past few weeks.

[8 : 18] He's referred to in verse 21 and look at his name. He is called a contemptible person. He is a contemptible person who will depose the current Jewish high priest and murder him.

He will seize rich lands and he will acquire great wealth. He will make two campaigns against Egypt in the south. The first will take place in 170 to 169 AD.

Although pretending to be a friend Antiochus will plot to overthrow his nephew in the south. He will also resolve to destroy those in Palestine who are legal to the covenant God made with his people.

And so on his way back from his campaign in Egypt, he will stop at the holy city of Jerusalem. He will enter into the temple. He will plunder its sacred treasures.

And then his second campaign in Egypt in the south will bring him face to face with the Romans. You can see them there. They're referred to, I think in verse 30 as, the ships of the western coastlands.

[9 : 20] That's code for, later on, what will come to be known as Rome. And they will stop him waging war against Egypt. Fresh from being stopped, he'll decide he'll strengthen his rule back at home.

He'll do this by making his citizens fully Greek. He'll start with any dissident Jews who have forsaken the holy covenant that God made with Moses. And you can see that referred to again in verse 30.

He'll sacrifice the daily, he'll stop the daily sacrifice in the temple. That's verse 31. And only faithful Jews, such as the man we heard about at the beginning, those who know their God will resist him.

And they'll resist under brutal persecution, pillaging, death, imprisonment. And the persecution, though, will just keep on going. Now, we've reached verse 36, if you're following with me in your Bibles.

And at this point, the picture, I think, becomes very fuzzy as the messenger story begins to move more and more into the distant future. Antiochus Epiphanes never quite disappears from the scene, but he becomes a pattern for many who will follow after him.

[10 : 27] His end becomes a pattern for those who will follow after him. Like all men like him who set their rule against the kingdom of heaven, this king will claim to be God.

He'll do his own thing. He'll do what pleases him. As verse 36 says, he'll become even successful until God decides that the time, even more successful until God decides the time for his end has come.

And at this point, the present becomes even more blurred. The telescope focuses even more on the long distant future. There will be opposition.

There'll be a great falling apart of nations. There'll be an affront against the people of God and the land of God's people. There'll be a retreat. And in the closing verses of chapter 11, we're told that this one who sets himself against the king of heaven and against the people of the king of heaven will come to an end and there'll be none to help him on that day.

In this great battle, there will be many deaths. The godly and the ungodly will die alike. Together they will sleep in the dust of the earth.

[11 : 34] Now I want you to look at chapter 12. Have a look at verse 2 in chapter 12. Together we are told, that is, the godly and the ungodly will awake from sleep to judgment.

The wise, that is, those who have feared God, those who have turned many to right relationship with the God of heaven, well, they will wake to everlasting life.

They will shine like the stars forever and ever. However, the godless, that is, those who have rejected the king of heaven, well, they will awake to everlasting contempt.

With that point, the narrative ends and in verse 4, the messenger urges Daniel to, you know, close up and seal the words of the scroll, you know, shut the book, put some seals on it and Daniel stands there beside the river and as he's standing there, he watches and he sees two other figures and they engage in conversation with his messenger and the point is clear.

There's a, there'll be a time and a place when persecution will reach an absolute maximum. There'll be a time and a place when the people of God will endure the greatest of agonies.

[12 : 45] There'll be a time when they are tortured, unjustly tried, foully treated and at that time God will act and he will deliver, he will rescue, just as he did with Shadrach, Daniel, Meshach, Abednego.

Daniel wonders, of course, how, how it will all end and it's not revealed to him. What is revealed is that wickedness will continue to be part and parcel of the world that he lives in.

Suffering will continue to be part and parcel of the purifying process through which the people of God pass and the wise, well, they will continue to understand this. Even so, Daniel wants to know what we want to know.

He wants to know how long and what the outcome of all of this will be and the answer that comes in verse 9 and 10 is an obscure one. I think what it's saying is persecution is going to keep going.

It'll seem unlimited but it is not. It is limited. Stick it out that extra little bit. God will come. God will deliver. God will end it and God will vindicate his people.

[13 : 51] Friends, there is a flying survey through the last three chapters of this book. Now, I want you to come away from this with two great spiritual truths so let me tell them to you now.

The first one is this. Friends, the world we live in is a real world filled with real people but it is shaped by eternal realities and eternal spiritual realities.

You see, behind us, as it were, or in the heavenly places, there is God and his armies. On the other side in the spiritual places is the evil one and his armies.

The evil one has his forces on the ground and God has his forces on the ground here on earth. And the forces of God are his saints, his people, those who line themselves up with his purposes in his son, Jesus Christ.

That is us if we are Christians. We are the forces of God here on the earth. We are the primary focus and object of those heavenly forces and their representatives.

[15 : 06] Friends, do not be received. Please be aware of this. God's church is the focus of a cosmic conflict. The followers of Jesus who line themselves up with the king of heaven will be under attack.

If you are God's child, then you will be under attack by the evil one. This is an eternal and true reality. This is one that must not be ignored.

And for some people in our world, we know that the attacks of the evil one on them by the representatives of the evil one will be open and ferocious. People die this day opposed, tortured, destroyed by the representatives of the evil one.

People who are Christians. For others of us, the attacks upon us will be subtle and crafty. However, no matter which they are, it is an eternal and true reality.

We are in the crosshairs of a cosmic conflict happening this very moment and we ought to expect trouble. However, I want to tell you, if that's the first spiritual reality, there is another spiritual reality, a greater spiritual reality and that reality is that the devil has already been cast down.

[16 : 34] He has been cast down in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is a defeated enemy. Colossians 2, verse 15 puts it this way. It says, The Lord Jesus Christ on the cross disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them.

He triumphed over them in the cross. Friends, those spiritual resources of God are ours. Ours to call upon, ours to rely on, ours to turn to.

The devil, and I'm going to now paraphrase from 1 Peter chapter 3, you might like to look it up later on, the devil and his hosts prowl around seeking the godly to devour.

However, Peter says, resist him. Be like the saints in Daniel, stand firm in your faith and as you do so, know that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced wherever people call upon the name of Jesus and God promises us as he promises Daniel that after a little while the God of all grace who has called us to his eternal glory will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish us.

And Peter says, to him be dominion forever and ever. Amen. And friends, just while we're on this note, let us keep praying as we have already today for those for whom the attacks of the evil one are very real and come with weapons that hurt and maim.

[18 : 13] Let us keep praying for them as we do regularly here. Friends, we've reached the end of the book of Daniel and I hope you've enjoyed the journey. Well, enjoy may not be the right word for certain places within Daniel, may it.

Let's close the book by seeing if we can summarise. On the back page of the outline, I've got a little summary of what I think we can learn from Daniel. You see, my thought is that the book of Daniel is primarily a book about the kingdom of God.

It is the only Old Testament book to deal with the kingdom of God in such a frank and full way. The understanding of the kingdom of God presented in the book of Daniel can be summarised in this way.

So let me have a shot. First, as the creator of the world, God is its one true king. You see, you can find that anywhere throughout the book of Daniel.

We're constantly hearing throughout Daniel about a king of heaven, the God of gods, the king of kings. He is the one who created this world, who controls history. He's the one who began the world and the one who determines its course and its end.

[19 : 16] As the creator of the world, God is the one true king of the world. Point number two, God's rule of his world is characterised by justice and mercy.

The Bible, the book of Daniel are clear. You see, God is not a tyrant. He always has the best interests of his world in mind, always merciful, always kind, always just, and always firm against those who resist his rule, whether they be his people or outsiders.

Three, God is a God who delegates his kingship to human beings. We've seen this throughout the book of Daniel. It's clear that when God makes humans, he makes them in his image to exercise his rule.

Human beings are God's representatives on earth. They are to rule the world under the overarching rule of God and on God's behalf. And man, human beings, are to copy God's rule.

Their rule on earth is to be like the rule of God, a rule characterized by justice and mercy. Point number four, every human being must recognize that any rule they have is delegated.

[20 : 34] Any delegated rule in this world is subject to a higher authority. The authority it is subject to is the primary ruler of this world, the Most High, the God of Heaven, and all rule must act with him in mind.

A fifth point is this. Human beings can be divided into two groups, the wise and the foolish. The wise.

The wise are those who understand there is a creator who is king of all the earth and who fear him. They know that he is where reality is found.

They live in this world with the understanding that this reality undergirds everything they do and they say. They make practical everyday choices about life based on this understanding.

Sometimes the choices they make are easy. Most of the time the choices that they need to make are hard because it throws them into opposition to a world that sees reality differently.

[21 : 39] Most of the time the choices are hard because they result in persecution and even death. But the wise person you see knows like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, the persecuted saints, the wise know that there is no alternative in the end.

God and God alone is where reality is found. And what about the foolish? Well the foolish on the other hand are those who ignore the reality of God.

That is they say in their hearts there is no God. They make their decisions their choices based on a premise of no God. And in doing so what do they do?

They make themselves God. Because that's what you're doing when you say there is no God. You're saying I am God. And in doing so they set themselves against the God of heaven and against the people of the God of heaven.

So sixth point is the kingship of God is both a promise and a threat. You see God is the only real king of heaven. And that kingship offers two alternative ends for the people of this earth.

[22 : 47] Let's go through it again with the wise and the foolish. The wise they've realized God is king. They've aligned themselves with that God. For these people the kingship of God offers a promise.

The promise is you will be on the winning side. God will win. And when he does he will vindicate you his people. Sometimes the saints of the most high will experience his winning in the present life.

Like Daniel Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego snatched from death right in the nick of time. Sometimes however they will not experience until after they die a martyr's death as the wise ones in chapters 7 through to 12.

However no matter when vindication comes in this life or in the life to come it will come. They will experience it and they can be assured that even if they do have to suffer the king of heaven will be with them as he is with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and Daniel.

On the other side the kingship of God offers a threat if you are the foolish. You see the kingdom of God comes to those who will not fear God who act as though they are the king the queen who act as though there is no king of heaven or no God and the kingship of God threatens such people and it threatens them if I can put it this way with extinction.

[24 : 17] God will act against all fools of this world who do not acknowledge him and he will bring them to an end. Some will see apparent success in victory as we see with the people throughout this book.

They will appear to get away with scorning and ignoring God. In the end however be assured of this and Daniel says this clearly in the end God will judge them and bring them to their end.

However others will see their end very swiftly God will not delay he will bring them to a speedy end. Seventh point there will be a time when all rivals to God will be done away.

As the creator of the world God will act one day in history he will act to destroy all human kingdoms he will bring an end to all of those who set themselves against God and against his people and he will set up a new kingdom.

It will have as its leader one like a son of man that is a true human being a true human being who lives under the rule of God always consistently he will be a Jewish human king who has lived under God's rule a perfect wise man a perfect wise man who will be given authority glory and sovereign power and all peoples all nations all people of every language will worship him and his dominion will be an everlasting dominion and it will not pass away and his kingdom will never be destroyed it will last into eternity and his name is the Lord Jesus friends that is where God is going he has announced his king already and he will consummate his king's kingdom and on that day only those who have stood with him and with his king will last so friends be the wise line yourself up with God and his king let us pray

[26 : 24] Father God we thank you for the Lord Jesus the perfect human being and the perfect saviour thank you that you have delegated all rule and authority to him thank you that he is our king our lord our master please help us father to make right decisions help us to be like him help us to submit to your rule even as he did and should you require it please help us to be obedient to the point of death even death on a cross that is may we take up his cross and follow him father please help us in this and again we pray for our brothers and sisters throughout the world who experience a persecution that we cannot even imagine please be with them this day please as you are with

Daniel Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and with the saints of the most high please be present with them and please vindicate them father we we pray these things in Jesus name amen