

# Crossroads of Prophecy

## PRINCIPLES OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION-2

by Desmond Ford

*The prophecies of Daniel grow out of Daniel's sacred stories about God's deliverance of his people*

A

second illustration of the principles of prophetic interpretation is found in Daniel 1:1-2 (NIV).

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

### A Tale of Two Cities

Daniel's book is like Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. In fact, the whole Bible is a tale of two cities. In the first book of the Bible, we have Babel and Jerusalem introduced. We find the same two cities in the last book of the Bible.

The key to Daniel's book is here at the beginning of the book. In the first verses Babylon and Jerusalem are pictured in conflict.

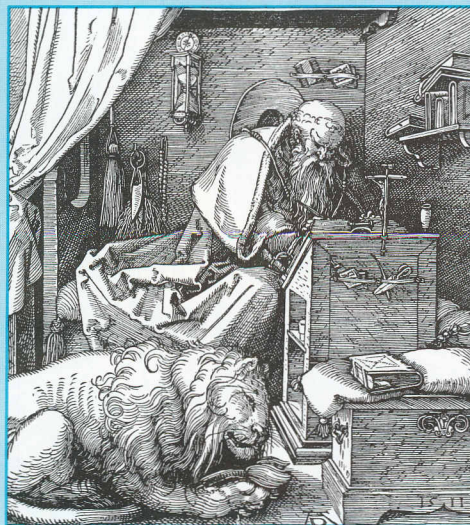
Daniel's book is about the followers of the woman (Jerusalem) and the followers of the serpent (Babylon), and the enmity between the two.

### Persecution and Deliverance

When we think of all the bad men in the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar,

Belshazzar, and Darius, they all have the same characteristics. They are idolaters, blasphemers, and persecutors.

In each of the stories in Daniel, the children of God are menaced and delivered. In chapter 3, the three men are thrown into the fiery fur-



nace. They lose only their bonds. Even in the fire of persecution, that is all we lose. The Son of God comes down and walks with them in the flames. The theme of deliverance recurs throughout Daniel. In chapter 3, God's people are saved from the flames; in chapter 6 Daniel is deliv-

ered out of the lion's den.

### Daniel's Sacred Stories

In "The Image of God and the Fiery Furnace" story earlier in Daniel, the king says, "Who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:15 NRSV). The three Hebrew worthies reply, "If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us" (3:17).

When the king sees the deliverance of the three from the fire, "Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him'" (3:28).

The same theme is found in the story of "Daniel in the Den of Lions" in chapter 6. The king desired the deliverance of Daniel. "May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!" (Daniel 6:16). Later, the king asks, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?" (6:20).

Daniel answers, "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths" (6:22). Daniel is delivered, and the king issues a decree identifying God as a great Deliverer (6:25-27).



## Daniel's Prophecies

When we arrive at Daniel's prophecies, the key is the stories of the earlier chapters. Prophecy always grows out of the sacred story.

In Daniel 7, when we read of the little horn, he has already been pictured in Nebuchadnezzar, the proud man, persecutor and blasphemer. What the Antichrist does is what Nebuchadnezzar did: he builds an image. (In Revelation 13.14 the beast builds an image.) The Antichrist will persecute the saints, just as Darius, Belshazzar, and Nebuchadnezzar did. But God delivers the saints out of the hands of the persecutors.

The connection between story and prophecy is also in Daniel 12:1. "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress, such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered."

Just before this, Daniel pictures the king of the North (that is, spiritual Babylon) coming down upon Jerusalem (symbol of the people of God) to destroy them. At this moment of crisis, Michael (the preexistent Christ) stands up and delivers his people.

## God's People Delivered

What is the book of Daniel saying to us? Only this. If we want to know what is going to happen at the end of time, the message is clear. In the last great conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem, between the people of the devil and the people of God, between this world and the citizens of heaven—God's people will be **delivered!**

God will deliver his people at the end of time, just as God delivered the three Hebrew worthies out of the fire, and Daniel out of the lion's den. The stories of Daniel are the key to the prophecies. The prophecies are Christ-centered, church-centered, and gospel-centered. It is God who does the delivering; and Christ who is the Deliverer.

## Prayer and Prophecy in Daniel 9

Let us look at one more example in Daniel, that of chapter 9. In verses

24-27 there is the great prophecy that Sir Isaac Newton called the cornerstone of the Christian religion.



These verses speak about the holy city, iniquity, righteousness, the prophets, and the sanctuary. But the key to

all this is in Daniel's prayer in the preceding verses (Daniel 9:4-19). All the great terms of the prophecy are in the prayer. If we want to understand the prophecy, we must first understand the prayer.

Daniel is studying what the Scriptures say about the number of years before the end of the desolation of Jerusalem (9:2). He then begins to pray, acknowledging, "We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws" (9:3). When he intercedes with God, he confesses, "We have sinned" (9:8); "We have rebelled," (9:9); "Transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you" (9:11). Daniel is praying for God to finish transgression, make an end to sin, and wipe out iniquity. All the key words and thoughts of Daniel's prophecy are in Daniel's prayer.

## Daniel and Christ

Daniel is a righteous man (against whom no sin is ever recorded in Scripture), a prince of the house of Judah. He takes the sins of the people upon himself. "We have sinned, we have been wicked, we have rebelled," he prays. This prince becomes a sin-bearer.

What happens as a result? An angel comes and comforts him (9:21-22).

When we move on six hundred years, we find another righteous Prince of the House of Judah becoming the sin-bearer. Jesus is in Gethsemane, and the Bible says he is "deeply distressed and troubled" (Mk 14:33). The Greek words mean 'beside himself.' He struggles with the guilt of his people as he takes that guilt upon himself. An angel comes to comfort him (see Jn 18:6).

Daniel was praying at three in the afternoon (Dan 9:20-21). Here, in the introduction to the prophecy, is an embryonic reference to the Messiah being cut off. Daniel enacts the Messiah's passion. As a sinless prince, Daniel takes the burden of Israel's guilt upon himself. He is beside himself. The angel comes to him with a message. It is the hour of the evening sacrifice—which is three in the afternoon, the hour of Calvary.

History, or the sacred story, is again the key to the prophecy. ❖