



# The Reflector

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by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

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## Daniel: Prophet of the Kingdom

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

**D**aniel was a teen-ager when Nebuchadnezzar invaded his homeland and carried him to Babylon. This was just the beginning of Babylon's captivity and ravaging of the Jewish nation. A few years later, a second wave of captives were carried away, Ezekiel being among them. Shortly after that, the final assault was made and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was virtually complete.

In Babylon, by the providence of God, Daniel rapidly arose to fame and power because of his godly character and wisdom (cf. Ezek. 14:14,20; 28:3) He was given responsible positions by the Babylonian rulers during their seventy years of power and by the Persians that followed.

Daniel knew how earthly kingdoms worked as well as their fragile and fleeting nature. His own nation, Israel, had once been great and prosperous under David and Solomon. It now lay in ruins. During his life time Assyria fell and Babylon ascended to greatness and fell. So, it seems fitting that God should choose him to prophesy concerning the "kingdom which shall never be destroyed". (2:44).

Daniel relates two significant dreams pertaining to the kingdom of God. The first was Nebuchadnezzar's dream during the second year of his reign. (chapter 2) The second was Daniel's dream during the first year of Belshazzar's reign (about 60 years after Nebuchadnezzar's dream).

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream he had seen a great

image with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron and clay. After the wise men of the country could not recall and interpret the dream, Daniel, by God's revelation did so.

The head of gold represented the Babylonian empire (606-536 B.C.) (chapter 2:38). The silver part represented the next kingdom after Babylon, the Medo-Persian empire (536-330 B.C.) -- a kingdom inferior to Babylon. The bronze portion represented the next kingdom that would rule over all the earth -- the Grecian empire (330-146 B.C.). The fourth kingdom was the Roman empire (146 B.C. -476 A.D.). It was to be during the days of these the kings, the Romans, that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed. (chapter 2:44).

In Daniel's dream, some sixty years later, he saw four great beasts come up from the sea. One like a lion, one like a bear, one like leopard, and a fourth one described as "dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong" with ten horns. These beasts represented the same four world powers as the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw. (chapter 7:15-27) The fourth being the Roman empire that was ultimately divided as represented by the ten horns. Then Daniel sees "One like the Son of Man" who "came to the Ancient of Days" to be "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is and everlasting dominion, which shall

not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." (chapter 7:13,14).

Jesus was born during the reign of the Roman ruler, Caesar Augustus. (Luke 2:1). After being crucified by Roman authorities and after His resurrection from the dead, just before His ascension into heaven, He declared that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him (Matt. 28:18). The Hebrew writer declares that, as Christians, we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken or moved (12:28). Paul says that those who have received redemption and forgiveness in Christ have been "conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love." (Col. 1:13,14 NKJV).

There can be little doubt as to when the kingdom of Daniel's prophecies was set up. It was when Jesus was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, thus being made both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:30-36). The things seen and heard on the day of Pentecost verified that this very thing had happened. (Acts 2:33). As Peter spoke, Christ was sitting on the throne at the right hand of God, having received "dominion and glory and a kingdom." While Peter says that Jesus was raised from the dead to ascend to the right had of God to sit on David's throne (thus, having receive a kingdom), Paul says he was raised to ascend to the right had of God to be head over all things to the church: "He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in heavenly places, far above all dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Eph. 1:20-23).

So, the God of heaven did set up his kingdom in the days of the fourth kingdom -- just like Daniel said He would. This kingdom (stone cut without hands) has filled the whole earth (cf. Col. 1:23) and still stands -- long after "the wind carried them (the four world powers) away so that no trace of them" can be found. (chapter 2:35 NKJV).

How did Daniel know all of this was going to happen? Let Daniel speak for himself: "But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets..." (chapter 2:28). Truly, Daniel was *God's* prophet of the kingdom.

(This article was originally written for *Christianity Magazine* at the request of brother Sewell Hall) ■

## There Must Needs be Heresies

Ed Harrell

After a few weeks study at St. John's University and Abbey, I am impressed by the perceptive Roman Catholic analysis of the weaknesses of Protestantism. They insist that Protestants are pressed between two unacceptable extremes. One extreme grows out of the assumption that man has an individual obligation to judge Bible truth. As a result, "a principle of disunity is embedded in the very essence of Protestantism." On the other hand, in order to escape this evil, Protestants are guilty of hacking away at the body of essential truth of Christianity until they "sap it of all conviction." (What Price Unity?" America, May 5, 1945, p. 95).

Of course, Catholics are not so perceptive in analyzing the appalling consequences of their own alternative to the Protestant dilemma. It hardly seems an improvement when one is asked to swallow a body of divine truth rooted in historical corruption, Biblical ignorance, and the intellectual intolerance of the Roman Catholic tradition. A Roman Catholic does indeed have his own certified brand of truth and unity, but he pays a staggering price.

But what of the Protestant predicament? I am not a Protestant, but it strikes me that there is a lesson for Christians to learn by examining the apparent incompatibility of truth and unity. The core truth of the lesson is that a belief in individual responsibility means one also believes in division. I unabashedly accept that conclusion. Protestantism, as a system of human religion supposedly reflecting the wisdom of good men, is indeed

vulnerable to the taunts of Rome. Protestants ought to be ashamed that they can do no better. But Christians should understand that a rigorous search for truth necessitates that "there must be also heresies among you." (1 Cor. 11:19)

The Bible clearly teaches that division serves a useful and necessary function in the church. The acceptance of unity at any price will eventually "leaven" the whole body — such unity levels all to the lowest common denominator. (1 Cor. 5:6-7) Division is necessary so that "they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (1 Cor. 11:19) If the only vestige of the true church that existed today was the liberal Christian churches, I believe it would be impossible to distinguish the church of the Lord from every other form of religion. In the same way, if there is to be a church of Christ in another fifty years, it will be in the conservative churches today. Whatever might be the intention and hopes of many of those associated with liberal churches of Christ, it seems historically absurd to believe that after one or two more generations these churches will offer a distinctive alternative to the chaos of Protestantism. Finally, division is necessary to preserve the peace and sanity of the kingdom. (Rom. 14:1). A group united in the "same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10) — and only such a group — can take to the world a message of hope and peace.

This is not to say that division is good in any absolute sense. It quite obviously is not, and Jesus prayed fervently that his disciples would be one. (Jn 17:11) He made it quite clear that Christian division would be a source of confusion to those who were not disciples. But if religious unity among all men of good will is desirable, the Bible never intimates that it is a practical end to be expected by Christians in history.

It is true that a Christian is obliged to work with both a love of the truth and a desire for unity. It is true also that Romans 14 teaches that under some circumstances two can walk together who do not agree and that a Christian is always ready to en-

gage in dialogue about what is "essential" as a basis for doctrinal unity. There is no easy formula which answers all of the questions one must face in a lifetime. A Christian will take the issues one at a time, day by day, person by person, and weigh the respective tugs of truth and unity.

One could miss the central truth in this lesson, however, by gagging over the unpleasant day to day confrontations which arise. Practical problems should never obscure the very real Bible principle that truth is divisive. Again and again, those who start with a commitment to truth become weary along the endless trek through barren deserts of debate, bickering, and Biblical legalism and opt for peace and unity. Some become too sweet-spirited to stomach the bitterness that is a part of division.

Some become tired of the long and tedious discussions of seemingly trivial subjects. Some long for the enlightened company of those who do not honor the truth. Some become exasperated by their human inability to find a final resting place, to fight the last battle and lay their armor down. They retreat in dismay. So many are overwhelmed by the responsibility for division which every man shoulders when he picks up his Bible to read it as the literal and comprehensible word of God.

Over and over again in the history of Christianity the weary have dejectedly begun the long and fruitless journey toward compromise and unity. In the minds of nineteenth-century Disciples of Christ, the quest for peace came quickly and logically to exclude the concept of the "restoration" of true religion. The renewed interest in "unity" movements in the church today stems, I believe, from the same mentality. It is a mind which has lost its spiritual toughness, which can no longer tolerate the consequences of a belief in individually perceived religious truth. Although we tend to see all of our differences in terms of case studies the ever present and argumentative "what would you do if" — they are generally, I believe, much more a matter of mood. Some come to love too much the sweet fruits of unity and to hate unreasonably the

purifying exhilaration of strife. One who feels in mortal danger on one horn of the dilemma proposed by Roman Catholics is likely to be gored by the other.

I am not ashamed to admit that my teaching is divisive. Jesus came with a sword. I have helped to divide churches; I expect to divide more. I have also helped to unite churches that were needlessly and shamefully divided. Unity is wonderful in the truth of God; division is needed when the truth is at stake. It would be more comfortable if the dilemma were not there — but it is. We must live life as it is. If you have deep convictions, you must be prepared for careful, courteous, certain confrontation. ■

Just Thinking about . . .

## The Relevance of Local Churches

It seems to me that local churches are fast becoming irrelevant to a lot of Christians. This God-ordained arrangement for Christians to jointly conduct worship assemblies and do spiritual work — all under the direction of spiritually qualified men called elders/bishops/pastors and supported out of a common treasury, is being supplanted by other joint arrangements.

It is not uncommon to hear of groups of brethren going on some kind of outing and “taking the supper with them” and taking time from their outing activities to have their “own service” rather than attending the assembly of a local church in the area. I have heard of a few youth camps who do this as well.

Some brethren form joint arrangements specifically for the purpose of doing spiritual work with their own treasuries and oversight. These are human arrangements, often called *ministries* and *societies*, that displace God’s arrangement.

Other brethren legitimately form joint arrangements for business or humanitarian purposes. The business organizations sell their products and services to any who desire to buy them. The hu-

manitarian organizations offer various secular and social services to any who need and want them. All is well and good. Then they sometimes, as organizations, branch out and take on the spiritual work given to local churches such as conducting public worship assemblies and/or supporting evangelistic works, even sometimes on a larger scale than local churches do.

With all of this going on, local churches will become more and more irrelevant.

All of this is a far cry from a Christian, either alone or *concurrently* with another, inviting folks over for a singing, or a period of prayer. Or personally sending support to an evangelist. Or a Christian having a study with other Christians or his non-Christian neighbors. There is no joint arrangement with common oversight nor a common treasury doing this work. It is simply Christians doing things individual Christians may and should do in areas that often parallel that of local churches. Non of this supplants God’s *joint* arrangement for spiritual work — the local church.

EOB ■

## Psalm 1

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.