

The Glory of God — Ezekiel 1, Matthew 17:1-2



Marc Chagall, Ezekiel

Ezekiel presents a vision of God's glory which foreshadows John's visions of Christ in Revelation. God is seen as a glorious king with rather startling transportation. The visions incorporate movement, energy, a variety of creatures, and brightness.

The imagery recurs in Christ's transfiguration which is full of light, in Daniel, and in Revelation. Ezekiel, with his amazing visions, is shouting "glory to God!"

There are 313 references to glory in scripture, 50 in Psalms, 22 in Ezekiel, 20 in John's gospel, 14 in Revelation, and 11 in Exodus. All emphasize God seated on his throne in glory. Twice Ezekiel says God's throne is sapphire blue. In Exodus, when the elders had a meal with God, we are told that there seemed to be a pavement of brilliant sapphire. In Revelation the vision has a glow of emerald and a sea of shiny glass. In each case, colorful grandeur surrounds God in human form.

For centuries artists have tried to capture the glory of God in art, including in many stained glass windows that allow light to be part of the medium. In a church north of Manhattan Chagall made a stained glass image of Ezekiel and other prophets. As with most of his stained glass, a transcendent and very joyful blue predominates that seems to cry out "glory to God!" The artist said, "Stained glass windows represent the transparent partition between my heart and the heart of the world."



Canterbury Cathedral

Christian art has associated the four faces of the creatures in this text—man, lion, ox, and eagle—with the four gospel writers who served as messengers of Christ’s glory. Traditional associations are that Matthew presents Christ as a man (Messiah), Mark as lion (courageous), Luke as ox (sacrificial service), and John as eagle (ascending to God). Christ in Majesty, ruling in his glory, is at the center. In John’s vision in Revelation, Father, Son and Spirit appear with the same creatures.

Even more significantly for us, God’s throne is surrounded by multitudes of those who have believed and been brought inside this vision of glory. Christ promised, and the writers of the epistles repeated the promise, that glory awaits us. We will not merely be looking at this glory, we will become part of it.

Do I daily delight in God’s glory?

God's Scroll — Ezekiel 2-5, Mark 1:1



Marc Chagall, The Calling of Ezekiel

Christ adopted the name used to address Ezekiel, Son of Man, thus fully identifying himself as part of the prophetic tradition. God told him he was sent to people who would not want to listen, but to be fearless. Christ gave the same instructions to his disciples and to us, warning that being his message-bearers brings suffering and opposition. Ezekiel was given a bitter scroll to eat, full of sorrow and judgment. Similarly, Christ had a message of bitterness for the religious leaders of his day, and we still are to follow in his footsteps.

While already in exile in Babylon, Ezekiel warned of Jerusalem's coming destruction, a message his listeners found disturbing and discordant. Christ gave that same warning of coming destruction for Jerusalem and the temple in his time. These parallel prophets predicted parallel destructions. They were like watchmen seeing a dangerous coming reality, one full of suffering.

Ezekiel's message is much like a challenging and discordant work of art: he engaged in silent theater of the absurd to give his message of coming judgment.

Our artists and musicians often do the same. One modern musician, Schoenberg, left the rich cultural environment of Vienna as the Nazis arrived. Composed in a 12-tone scale that rejected traditional harmonies, his work can be hard to listen to. But there is one particular piece that touches me. In 1947 he wrote *A Survivor from Warsaw* which combines speech with plaintive discordant music for a little over six minutes. The climax is a portion of the Shema Israel sung in Hebrew. In the context of commemorating a time of terror, Schoenberg's music seems completely appropriate.

Ezekiel's dissonant message bears a resemblance to that music: challenging to read about, but deeply touching our souls. We need to have the stamina to take difficult spiritual medicine from time to time, to eat bitter but truthful words.

Am I willing to listen to hard and difficult messages, not avoiding hearing what is true?

The Glory Departs — Ezekiel 6-10, Luke 21:37



Tintoretto, The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

Ezekiel described God's glory leaving the temple, a sign of the coming judgment. Since Christ compared his own body to the temple, one could say that his death by crucifixion is the closest parallel to glory leaving the temple. The last week of his life, Christ taught daily in the temple, but when he left for the last time God's glory had departed.

Ezekiel saw a vision of great evils being done in the temple. Seventy leaders worshipped among walls engraved with snakes, lizards, and hideous creatures. In the inner courtyard men faced east, worshipping the sun. The indictment is that God's people had done evil, and would be scattered among the nations. Love of money led them astray, but Ezekiel prophesied that money would become like trash

to them. The point of the judgment is that the terrible consequences for their sin would cause them to “know that I am the Lord” a phrase repeated six times in these chapters, and over 60 times in the book.

We see that after Ezekiel’s vision of God’s glory in Babylon, he saw the gradual move of glory from the temple and finally even from the city.

First vision in Babylon (1:28)
Exclamation over God’s glory (3:12)
Second vision in Babylon (3:23)
God’s glory in the Temple (8:4)
Glory moved to the Temple entrance (9:3)
Glory moved to the Temple door and filled the courtyard (10:4)
Glory moved to the east gate (10:18,19)
Glory moved to an eastern mountain (11:23)
Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed (33:21)

The exit of God’s glory and destruction of the temple is a tragic moment in the story-line of scripture. Fortunately, this is not the end of the story. A promise that God’s glory would return to the temple.

Future glory: giving Israel victory (39:13, 21)
God’s glory will return to the Temple (43:1-5, 44:4)

Christ fulfilled that promise when he was brought to the temple at his birth, and continued in childhood visits and several years of teaching there. The greatest victory came at Christ’s resurrection, the full demonstration of God’s glory.

Do I focus on the glory of God when I am at worship?

Idols in their Hearts — Ezekiel 11-15, Matthew 23:27



James Tissot, The Pharisees question Jesus

Ezekiel accused Judah's prophets and leaders of hypocrisy, and Christ did the same. They both used the image of whitewashed walls. Four times Ezekiel accused them of hypocrisy, and then accused them of having idols in their hearts. Christ said that it was out of the heart that evil things come that contaminate us.

The phrase "idols in their hearts" helps us identify with the problem. Many things can become a substitute for God in our hearts. Even good things can be placed higher than him. In my own life I most often do this with relationships, and do not realize this until the relationships began to fail me. Work, romantic love, pleasure, religious ministry, money, and pleasing others can elbow out God's primary place. Even our own image of ourselves and desire to perfectly live up to cultural ideals can be idolatry.

Dr. Timothy Keller's book *Counterfeit Gods* makes this point. Idolatry is such a strong theme in the Hebrew scriptures, but we are tempted to think that was a problem of primitive cultures and we do not have a problem today. Keller effectively shows us that is not the case.

But there is a beautiful antidote promised. God says he will remove all their idols "and I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart." (Ezekiel 11:19) This is what Christ promised and actually does for each one of us who come to him.

Is God changing my heart?

Parables — Ezekiel 16-19, Mark 4:13



San Clemente, Italy

Ezekiel's gift of teaching with parables and imagery prefigured Jesus' use of parable and imagery in his teaching. Jesus drew an image of judging between sheep and goats, and transformed it into the magnificent parable that tells us he separates them based on their compassion or lack thereof. Christ as the good shepherd is contrasted to other dangerous and unworthy shepherds. The story of the lost sheep he seeks and finds is also from Ezekiel.

In Babylon Ezekiel warned of coming tragedy by using street theater, acting out the siege of Jerusalem and the process of going into exile. He used a series of parables to warn the exiles of what would happen in Judah. Judah was like God's unfaithful wife who caused grief. Great eagles taking pieces of a vine warned of political consequences for not respecting the power of the empire. A lion in a cage referred to the capture of Judah's king. Two beautiful sisters prostituting themselves were like sinful Judah and Israel. The fall of a giant cedar was like the fall of mighty empires. Unfaithful shepherds represented failures in spiritual leadership. And dry bones coming to life represented the restoration of the remnant of the people.

This style of story-telling teaching is one that Christ adopted and that is available to us. Sometimes the way to our spiritual growth is through a good movie or a good novel that touches our hearts.

What books, poems, theater, movies, etc. have had a deep spiritual impact on me?

Son of Man — Ezekiel 20-24, Mark 8:31



Duccio di Buoninsegna, The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel

God addressed Ezekiel as “Son of Man” 92 times. This prophetic title was adopted by Christ more than any other. The phrase occurs 86 times in the New Testament, and has various connotations: Christ’s incarnation as a poor man, one offering friendship to unworthy people, a forgiving prophet, a teacher, a man who would die and rise from the dead, and one who would return in glorious triumph.

Christ used the term to speak of the opposition he received, similar to the opposition Ezekiel experienced. This emphasis on his humanity, his role as a prophet who followed in the tradition of being killed and opposed, is one side of the coin. The other side is his identity as Son of God.

The Nicene Creed captures the essence of his role as a man: “I believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ...Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.”

As fragile humans we struggle to be prophetic messengers, able to endure the suffering that may come in opposition to our message. Ezekiel endured the costly call not to grieve over the death of his wife, his dearest treasure. He kept preaching. But he also teaches us that God acts to protect his own honor, can display his holiness in us, and that though he may purify us by putting us through a fire, or allow us to be defeated, this is not the end of the story.

Does it help me to endure suffering to know Christ as a person, a human man, who endured suffering?

A Fallen King — Ezekiel 25-28, Matthew 11:21-22



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Fall of the Rebel Angels

The judgment on the King of Tyre in Chapter 28 bears an uncanny resemblance to a much more spiritual figure, and tradition holds that this describes the fall of Satan, Christ's opponent. God says he had ordained an angel as a mighty guardian who had access to God's holy mountain, and was blameless until evil was found in him. Here, then, is the root of the idea that Satan is a fallen angel whose rebellion introduced evil into the world.

Satan tempted Christ with the offer of power over the nations of the world in exchange for his worship. Christ not only rejected this, his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming return are his method to regain sovereignty over all nations.

In these chapters, condemnation came for the nations' response to Judah's suffering: Ammon's scoffed at the desecrated temple, Moab denied Judah's uniqueness, Edom and Philistia avenged themselves, and Tyre rejoiced. We are told that God will humble proud nations and proud rulers.

Three chapters warned Tyre of coming judgement. A great commercial city on an island, it dominated Mediterranean trade, but Nebuchadnezzar besieged it for 13 years after the fall of Jerusalem, finally conquering. The Persians conquered it in

539 BC, and Alexander the Great destroyed it in 332 BC. These conflicts fulfilled the prophecy of attack from many nations. Alexander fulfilled prophecy by taking stones, timber and soil from the mainland and putting it into the sea as a land bridge.

We are called to be part of the battle between Satan and the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of Christ. Our small part may be prayer, service or testimony, but it gives meaning to our lives to see we have a role in a much larger battle. Our ultimate enemy is Satan, but we have the confidence that Christ has defeated him.

Do I live with confidence that Christ has won the victory?

Message to the Nations — Ezekiel 29-32, Matthew 25:31-32



Ezekiel warned that nations would be judged, and Christ warned of judgment on all nations at the end of time. In the interim, God raises and lowers the fortunes of nations, destroys idols, and destroys arrogant nations. His judgment on the nations teaches them who he is.

Egypt, often used symbolically for the world in its disordered and unjust state in contrast to God's coming kingdom, is warned in these four chapters. One emphasizes the underworld so central to their culture. Up until this point, Egypt had been a great empire, but she was told she would never again dominate other nations. Egypt fell to Nebuchadnezzar after he subjugated Tyre, it fell to the Persians in 343 BC, and the last Pharaoh, Cleopatra, was subjugated by Rome in 30 BC.

Today international political chaos alarms us and in a world where we have nuclear weapons we can too easily imagine total disaster. The prophets repeatedly offered the message that God is in control of seemingly out-of-control politics. We must confess our fears about political realities and declare in faith that Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Do I hold on to the political perspective that God is above all human leaders and can exercise control over their injustice?

The Good Shepherd — Ezekiel 33-34, John 10:14-16



Henry Ossawa Tanner, The Good Shepherd

Ezekiel prophesied against the shepherds of Israel and said that God himself would become their shepherd, a prophecy Christ applied to himself. God promised to find his sheep and rescue them from where they were scattered, to bring them home and to give them good pasture. We can claim the promise to the sheep that they will lie down in pleasant places in peace.

In the twelfth year of captivity in Babylon, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came and told Ezekiel the city had fallen. Ezekiel's tongue was loosened the previous day so he could explain this to the people.

In this context selfish shepherds were castigated for feeding themselves, letting their flocks starve, allowing the sick to be uncared for, not seeking the wandering, being cruel, scattering the sheep, and allowing them to be prey. Their invalid leadership resulted in their removal. God said that he would search and find his sheep himself. Christ came and declared himself to be the promised good shepherd.

Henry Ossawa Tanner so loved the theme of the good shepherd seeking his sheep that he painted it many times in a style unusual for religious paintings, that of impressionism. Each painting is a tender homage to the love of Christ who seeks each one of us. There is comfort in knowing that it is not our searching for God, but his searching for us that is the basis of our faith. I want to be a sheep carried by the shepherd, not one who wanders. Most importantly in the light of this chapter, I

want to be a good shepherd with those around me rather than a selfish, irresponsible one.

Am I comforted by knowing that Christ is my shepherd?

Dry Bones — Ezekiel 35-37, Matthew 24:3



Francisco Collantes, The Vision of Ezekiel

God promised Israel a glorious future after suffering, and we have become part of that glorious future in Christ. While he established his kingdom at the first coming, its completion is still ahead of us. God promised to give his people new hearts with new and right desires, filled with his Spirit. We have become recipients of these promises.

In our days we have seen unexpected literal fulfillments of renewal for Israel, even to such details as great fruit crops and harvests from fruit trees. While the parable of dry bones restored can be applied to any miraculous move of God, it is particularly poignant as prophetic of the state of Israel in the light of the holocaust.

The dry bones of those sent to gas chambers have not been forgotten. There are at least 175 Holocaust memorials and museums world-wide. Israel established the

Yad Vashem museum in the midst of a forest near Jerusalem which honors those who died, including non-Jewish people who saved Jewish lives. A half hour west of Jerusalem is the Martyr's Forest, a place where six million trees were planted in memory of holocaust victims.

At the forest, impressive art work includes a sculpture of a torah scroll with one side commemorating the holocaust and the other Israel's independence. A metal chestnut tree commemorates the tree Anne Frank could see outside her hiding place in the Netherlands.

Christ also took the dry bones of sinful mankind and through his own resurrection gave us life. We have moved from death to life thanks to his mighty power.

Am I living this new and abundant life?

Israel's Future — Ezekiel 38-39, Matthew 24:6-7



17th Century Russian manuscript, Devil, Gog and Magog attack the Holy City

Ezekiel and Christ taught that upheavals and wars would characterize our world. Though God would allow enemies to invade his people, he planned to display his holiness and glory to all nations by giving his people victory.

Most interpreters link Gog and Magog to Russia which keeps us alert to their interaction with Israel today. Mysteriously, London has two statues with these names that are periodically carried in procession. Regarding their future defeat, it is said these enemies join with all nations. Whoever they are, God will win.

God promises he will pour out his Spirit on his people, and we need not fear political upheaval, because God cares for us. Christ already began the kingdom, we are on his winning team, and we know that final victory is ours. This winning perspective keeps us positive, and as Christ said, we do not need to be fearful.

Watching the news or reading about the latest terror attacks can be stressful and alarming. The stream of negative events is unending, and with today's media, we can be kept up to date on more than we can take in. Knowing this, selecting healthy media consumption can be part of keeping our minds focused on Christ so that we are aware but not panicked.

Do I face the world's political upheavals with God's peace?

God's glory returns— Ezekiel 40-43, John 2:20



James Tissot, Reconstruction of Temple of Herod Southeast Corner

Ezekiel's vision of a lavish future temple points to Christ as coming into the temple, bringing the glory of God.. Ezekiel's warnings of corruption inside it, and his vision of the removal of God's glory from it climaxed with the sorrowful news that twelve

years into their exile, the city of Jerusalem, including the temple, had fallen. God's visible presence with his people was gone.

Fourteen years later and twenty-five years into captivity, Ezekiel had a long and detailed vision of an immense and beautiful temple. And into this temple God's glory returned from the east, the same as his previous visions, and the whole landscape shone with his glory. When Christ was born, the radiance of God's glory surrounded the shepherds. When Christ was taken into the temple, Simeon said, "he is the glory of your people Israel."

Ezekiel's dimensions for the entire temple area were 1000 square feet. The inner courtyard was 200 feet square, and the temple building was inside that. When Christ came he entered a temple complex 1000 feet square, with a porched area 150 feet square, and the temple building within that. While, as far as we know, the details did not perfectly match Ezekiel, the overall dimensions and layout bear a distinct resemblance. The wailing wall, still revered by Jewish people, was actually a retaining wall built to make the larger complex possible.

Starting in 20 BC, King Herod, though not a believing Jew, tore down the smaller temple Ezra had built. The temple proper was completed in a year and a half, and more courts and cloisters had been built when Christ was taken there as an infant. When he went there as an adult, it had been under construction for 46 years and construction continued until only six years before its destruction in 70 AD. The white marble building with gold plating rose in terraces, and Josephus compared it to a snow-covered mountain, dazzling from every side. It was magnificent.

Christ was the full expression of God's presence and his glory in the temple. Now we have become his temple, the place where he is present and glorious. We may get lost in the details and measurements, but the New Testament is firm in letting us know that we are God's temple, bearing the glory of God to the world today.

Is Christ more beautiful to me than a beautiful building?

Glory Restored — Ezekiel 44-48, Matthew 4:16



Benjamin West, Christ Healing the Sick in the Temple

Ezekiel 40-48 are notoriously difficult chapters to interpret, ranging from the extreme of an early Jewish controversy as to whether the book belonged in the canon at all, to today's Temple Institute preparing to build a temple using these architectural plans. One question is to what point in time this occurs, with many expecting a literal fulfillment in Christ's Millennial reign with temple and sacrifices commemorating his past work. Others, because of the sacrifices, see this as having been fulfilled symbolically in his first coming, and then continuing with the growth of the church.

Our theme of finding Christ in every passage lends itself to the latter interpretation, even if other views are valid. The critique of priests who welcomed sacrifices from non-believing foreigners fits the time of Christ very well according to Josephus. Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, was one of the godly priests descended from Zadok. John was ascetic, as the passage describes, and a priestly forerunner of Christ.

Christ fulfilled numerous images in the passage including the arrival of God's glory which caused Ezekiel to fall face down on the ground. Peter and John were similarly overcome by seeing his glory at the transfiguration. Repeatedly people came to Christ and fell at his feet.

Christ taught in the temple, and he fulfilled every sacrifice. Fruitful luxurious trees serve as resurrection and kingdom imagery, and his Spirit is described as living water flowing out into the whole earth. The Eucharist is the sacred meal. Gifts of land and the land itself forecast a kingdom where Israel is completely restored and membership is open to all nations in the new community of God.

Dimensions of a holy city surrounding the temple are repeated twice, highlighting its importance, and the people living there are a kingdom of priests. Christ and his disciples traversed the land, making it something we today still call the "Holy Land."

Do I see Christ as Prince of Peace?

Christ Appears — Daniel 1-3, John 1:51



J.M.W. Turner, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Daniel's images of Christ in every chapter contrast sharply with the world's pride and the world's idols. In these first three chapters we see Daniel and his friends realize that God is still with them even though they have been ripped away from their homes and culture. They are able to continue their own ways of eating in an alien environment, God responds to their prayer for wisdom though they are far from the temple, and then God appears to them in their suffering.

Chapter 1—**Wisdom:** Daniel, wise advisor to three kings, is like Christ in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He was a faithful witness to many kings, just as Christ was a faithful witness to the rulers of his day. Daniel gave advice “ten times better” than any other advisor. Daniel maintained his faith and integrity in the face of a hostile culture, and is one of the few characters we never see fall into sin, pointing toward the sinless Son of God.

Chapter 2—**Rock:** When Nebuchadnezzar could not recall his dream, Daniel prayed and received an interpretation of coming kingdoms in a statue made of different metals. The statue was destroyed by a rock growing into a mighty mountain representing an eternal kingdom. Christ is that rock.

Chapter 3—**Divine being:** Having dreamt of a great statue, Nebuchadnezzar decided to make an immense one. When Daniel's three friends refused to worship it, they were thrown into the fiery furnace. They said God could rescue them, and a divine being, Christ himself, rescued them from the fire.

These images of Christ inspire me to have confidence in his wisdom, the greatness of his kingdom, and his presence with us in the midst of suffering.

Is Christ with me giving needed wisdom, giving me stability, supporting me in suffering?

A Tree Cut Down — Daniel 4, Luke 13:7



Rembrandt van Rijn, Belshazzar's Feast

Christ compared the unrepentant in his parable to trees that needed to be cut down. Similarly, God sent a dream to Nebuchadnezzar of a large and fruitful tree which was felled. Daniel interpreted the tree as being Nebuchadnezzar himself, and urged him to repent, warning that if he remained proud, God would cause him to lose his mind. Daniel urged him to be merciful to the poor. He did not listen and went mad, but in time God graciously healed him.

Here we see the power of Daniel's faith as he influenced the most powerful ruler of the world, with the result that the message of God went out freely. Nebuchadnezzar, once healed, sent a message to every culture, urging them to worship God. As a repentant man, he preached that God's kingdom would last forever.

Though Nebuchadnezzar was repentant, his unrepentant grandson Belshazzar lost the kingdom completely. Belshazzar desecrated the cups captured from the Jewish temple to honor idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Daniel reproached the king, reminding him of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation. God found him wanting, and brought his kingdom to an end.

Historical records of precisely how the Persians conquered Babylon vary. The last king of the Babylonians was Nabonidus who apparently entrusted the kingdom to his son Belshazzar as co-regent when on military campaigns. Thus as a reward for interpreting the warning of doom, Belshazzar could make Daniel third highest in

the kingdom, since he was second himself. Cyrus, who would liberate the Jewish people, conquered him.

The dream of the tree is a vivid image of how beautiful a peaceful and prosperous kingdom can be with fresh green leaves, lots of edible fruit, birds in its branches, wild animals in the shade, and feeding all the world. But built on man's pride, it needed to be cut down. The Kingdom of God is a tree cut down in the cross, now flourishing in the resurrection.

The word of God went to the whole world in this ancient story, and it has gone to the whole world in ours. Am I doing my part to make sure every person hears?

The Lion's Den — Daniel 6, Matthew 28:6



Henry Ossawa Tanner, Daniel in the Lion's Den

Daniel in the lion's den is an image of death and resurrection, foreshadowing Christ's rise from death. Daniel was placed in the lion's den by enemies who betrayed him, manipulated the king into punishing him, and placed him in a death trap, all of which happened to Christ as well. A stone was laid over the mouth of the den, just as a stone was laid over the mouth of Christ's tomb. Angels appeared in both stories.

Darius' confession acknowledging God's protection of Daniel prophesied Christ's eternal kingdom. Daniel is a truly admirable model of faith, and someone whose spirituality remained strong and uncompromised even in the midst of the temptations of power and wealth in a non-believing environment. He served at the

highest level of three governments: Babylon, Medes, and Persia. His faithfulness in this complex environment inspires anyone called to work in government.

This story had particular meaning to the African-American Christian painter, Henry Ossawa Tanner who painted it twice in the impressionist style he learned in France. For him, it spoke of the recent freeing of slaves in the United States Civil War, and served as an image of any suffering and rejection responded to with hope and faith and ultimately, triumph. We can make the application to our own suffering, or that of others, and pray in hope of protection and rescue and testimony.

Is there something in my life that feels like I am in a lion's den?

Son of Man and Son of God — Daniel 7-8, Matthew 26:63-64



Icon from Pathmos, Son of Man

In the midst of his visions of the future, Daniel saw a vision of a glorious Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, being led into the presence of God with authority, honor, and royal power over all the nations of the world. Christ who took the title of Son of Man to himself and repeatedly predicted he would fulfill this vision and come in glory and power. Both Ezekiel and Daniel were addressed as Son of Man. Daniel also refers to the Son of God entering the fiery furnace. Daniel brings these together.

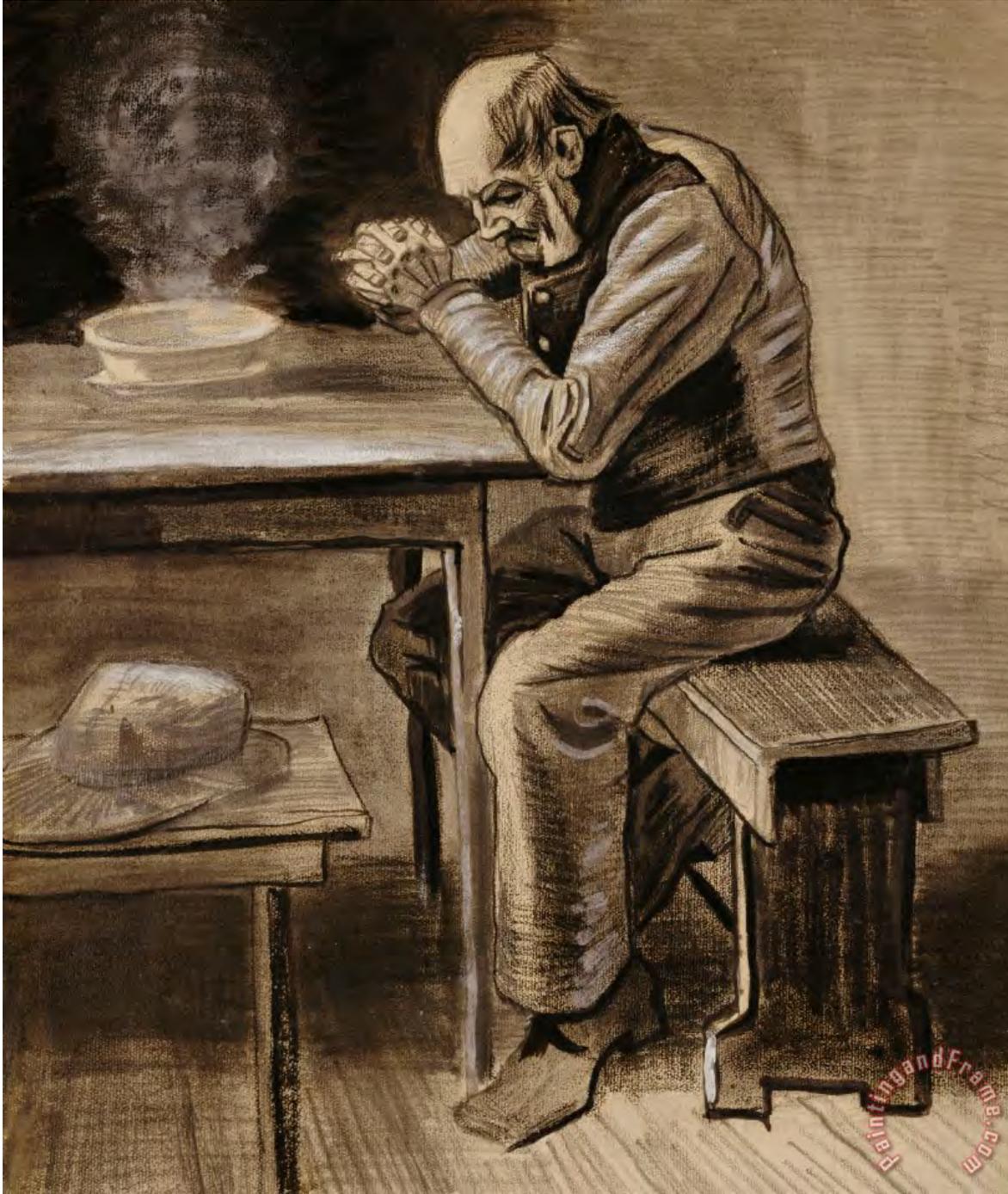
Daniel saw a vision of the future kingdoms under the guise of different animals that symbolized coming historical kingdoms: A lion with eagles' wings for Babylon, the

bear for Medes and Persians, and a leopard for Greece. A monster with huge iron teeth is unnamed, but prefigured Rome accurately. In chapter 8 the animal figures change: a ram for Media and Persia, a goat for Greece, the large horn on the goat as Alexander the Great later replaced by the four horns of his kingdom divided into Asia, Egypt, Thrace and Macedonia, the explanation offered by the angel Gabriel. A subsequent ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, oppressed the Jews and ordered the worship of Zeus in the Temple, as foreshadowed here.

Christ came into a world in political conflict. His power as both Son of Man and Son of God allowed him to transform politics by establishing a new kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Is my hope for myself and others firmly fixed on Christ and his kingdom rather than any of the kingdoms of this world?

Daniel's Prayer — Daniel 9, Luke 11:1



Vincent van Gogh, The Prayer Painting

Daniel's prayer includes elements that Christ taught in his prayer: worship, repentance, and a desire for God's kingdom to come. Daniel realized the 70 years of captivity were reaching an end, having himself been one of the first captives. (605 BC) Under the Medes who had just conquered Babylon, there was hope for a change, and it soon came with Cyrus' decree. (538 BC)

Daniel's prayer is a deep, humble, and beautiful model which can serve us well as a model of repentance for our sins and those of our nation. How much difference did Daniel's prayer make? Would the captivity have ended with God faithful to his promises anyway? In Jeremiah's prophecy the end of the captivity had been linked to prayer: His prayer was, at the very least, an expression of faith that an unlikely prophecy would be fulfilled.

Daniel asked for a return to the land, but the answer brought by the angel Gabriel promised much more. Ezra was given a decree to rebuild Jerusalem in 458 BC and 483 years (7x7 plus 62x7) later in 25 AD, John the Baptist started his ministry, announcing the Messiah. The promise to Daniel was that God would bring an end to sin, atone for guilt, bring in everlasting righteousness, confirm the prophetic vision, and anoint the Most Holy One. The Messiah would be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, but in reality having begun a kingdom that has spread through the world.

Daniel wanted Israel's restoration, but God promised the restoration of all things through Messiah. Christ is the ultimate answer to every prayer, even one for freedom and national restoration.

What can I learn from Daniel's prayer?

Daniel's Fasts — Daniel 10, Matthew 6:17-18



Peter Paul Rubens, Archangel Michael defeats the fallen angels

Daniel prayed and fasted, wearing dark clothing and putting ashes on his head, pleading for a return to the land. He then chose a vegetarian/no sweets/no wine diet for three weeks. Christ encouraged us to fast as a private practice by dressing normally.

Perhaps the provocation for Daniel's fast was the opposition to rebuild the temple that arose in Cyrus' third year and kept things at a standstill for sixteen more years. Even this was providential because the rebuilt temple was thereby dedicated exactly 70 years after it had been destroyed. (586 BC to 515 BC)

Daniel realized that the Jews would be dominated by various kingdoms, but would eventually have their own ruler. His visions remind us of Christ's end-times teaching. We glimpse a mysterious battle between good and evil angels, and learn that our prayers are part of this battle. When waiting for an answer to prayer, the answer Daniel received encourages us. He was told not to fear, and that God heard his request on the first day. He was told he was precious to God and was encouraged to remain strong.

When I returned to Guatemala I was surrounded by people who take for granted the necessity of fasting. Daniel's example of a 21- day vegetarian fast is a practice encouraged at church as each year begins. Thanks to this and many other examples, I learned to see fasting as a humble, valuable form of prayer.

Can fasting intensify my prayers?

End Times — Daniel 11-12, Matthew 24:5



Drost, The Vision of Daniel

Daniel's vision and Christ's teaching prepare us for the end times. Both make references to more immediate political crises, and then describe Christ's return. The man in white linen giving the explanation is thought to be Christ himself. Both taught us that God will be with us in the midst of suffering and that God purifies through these trials.

Chapter 11 begins with Persian kings and Xerxes' war against Greece, moves on to Alexander the Great, and the break-up of his kingdom into four: Asia (Seleucids), Egypt (Ptolemy), Thrace, and Macedonia. It then gives us much more detail on the period of struggle during the intertestamental period. The kings of the North are the Seleucids, and the kings of the south, Egypt. Their power-struggles and drama are outlined here, and various commentaries explain the historical details. It is a head-spinning introduction to political chaos. The story of Hanukkah is once more referenced here in the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes.

Into this chaos came Christ who raised people from the dead, and filled them with wisdom and light. Though political chaos continues, the end will come. The three and a half years mentioned have several possible meanings: the length of Christ's ministry, the length of the Jerusalem siege before the temple was destroyed, and a time of testing described in Revelation.

An explosion of knowledge is mentioned and we are living in it. Until 1900, human knowledge doubled each century, but by the end of World War II it doubled every 25 years. Knowledge now doubles every year and increasing. The time of Christ's coming is surely drawing closer. We have the privilege of living in the times that Daniel prophesied.

Is Christ with me in this world's struggles?