

Daniel, The Man Greatly Beloved

Dear Brethren and Sisters in Christ Jesus, Our thoughts this morning are with Daniel, the man greatly beloved. What a wonderful title and tribute to be heard from the mouth of an angel of God! The Book of Daniel opens at the time Nebuchadnezzar first came against Jerusalem in the days of King Jehoiakim. Nebuchadnezzar (verse 3) selected certain youths from the princes of Judah to attend him at his court, and four are especially mentioned (verse 6)—Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The latter three are better known by their Babylonian names (verse 7) of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Nebuchadnezzar was supreme ruler of the most powerful nation on earth. Daniel and his companions were captives. They were in the position to escape the common lot of captives and to achieve great benefit and advantage, if they gained the king's favor. "But (verse 8) Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat." Daniel could easily have convinced himself that the position he was in made a rigid adherence to the Law of Moses impossible, and that therefore, it would have been foolishness to jeopardize his life and that of the other Jewish captives by making an issue of meat.

Have we not often heard such arguments? But Daniel saw through all these weak deceptions of the flesh's reasonings. He knew that God had given a law, and regardless of danger or difficulty, he determined to obey it, as fully as he could under his captive circumstances. We notice (verse 9) he was in favor and tender love with his Babylonian overseer. How much this tells us of the character of Daniel, even at this very early age. Though of such strong determination, he must have been of exceptional gentleness and courtesy and pleasingness to have won the tender love of this man.

This is a striking picture, and there is a great lesson in it. Strength and firmness do not necessitate harshness and coldness. True godly strength of purpose is always accompanied by gentleness and kindness. The result of this faithful uncompromising stand was (verse 15) that God blessed the Hebrew children with physical health and robustness above all others, and in addition, with preeminence in wisdom and understanding. All things are in the hands of God. The main thing—the only thing of any importance is to sincerely seek to please Him. He can, as He sees fit, give health or wisdom or any other blessings in limitless abundance, or He can withhold it.

Chapter 2, which follows soon in time after chapter 1, records the famous dream of the great metallic image, which represented the course of history of the kingdoms of men from Nebuchadnezzar's day until ours. And how wonderfully and significantly all the details fit, when laid against the pattern of events as they have transpired! Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and divided Europe. And now we are in the last days of the vision.

Think of how much this one revelation in Daniel 2 has meant to us in understanding and confidence and assurance. It is not for us to tremble in darkness, fearful of the future, which seems so ominous to the natural eye, as evil and ruthless men threaten the world with atomic destruction. We watch current events with keen interest, seeing the overall picture wonderfully developing, as world tensions and rivalry center more and more upon the Middle East.

In the past twenty years we have seen the British and western power decline with unexpected speed in the Mid-East, and Russia suddenly loom as a major factor in the critical Palestine and Egyptian areas. Now events have taken a new turn. Russia is out of Egypt, and the United States is growing in strength and influence there, as it should be at the end. It is an exciting drama of the potsherds of the earth striving together for power and possession, unaware that the LORD God rules in the kingdoms of men and gives it to whomsoever He will—whoever suits His purpose.

Daniel, alone, is able to reveal and explain this vision to the king, and (verse 48) "the king made Daniel a great man, and...ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon...and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon." So ends chapter 2. But the favor of man is precarious.

Chapter 3 records the incident of the golden image and the fiery furnace. It illustrates the form of trials of which God's servants in all ages are subjected—pressure to conform and to give reverence to man-made objects of worship. Even today, in times of national danger, brethren have been faced with the same issues

and the same hazards. Patriotism and side-worship can become a frenzied cult in time of war, and we must be prepared, if necessary, to face this danger and test with meekness and restraint, but still inflexible determination to keep a clear and faithful allegiance to God alone, with our windows wide open to worship Him.

This test will also face us in many subtle and disguised ways. The world is full of things and principles, and men will try to pressure us to conform and, in a sense, to worship them.

Let us remember the inspiring example of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael. Our God is able (verse 17) to deliver us, even though it be not His will at this time to work a miracle on our behalf, still “Be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not worship the golden image that thou hast set up.”

What a calm and noble example of courage in the face of eminent peril! Again, the power of God was manifested to the confusion of the heathen and to the salvation of God’s people. That power will always be manifested eventually for His people, if they are faithful, though God’s purpose may require their present suffering and martyrdom. The final results will always be the same as here—salvation and deliverance.

Chapter 4 gives the dream of the cut-down tree and the seven-year madness of Nebuchadnezzar that was represented by it. Nebuchadnezzar reigned 43 years—from 605 to 562 BC, as closely as we can determine. Babylon was the head of the image that represented the kingdom of men, so there was a special significance in what was divinely caused to happen to her and her rulers. The lesson in this chapter is expressed in verse 17, “To the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” A fact just as true today as then.

In a dream the king saw a mighty tree in the midst of the earth, lifting up to heaven, visible to the ends of the earth, harboring all the birds of the sky in its branches, and sheltering all the beasts of the field under its shadow. At the height of its prosperity, a watcher—a holy one—descends from heaven and issues a decree (verse 14), “Hew down the tree...but leave its stump, and bind it with a band of iron and brass...and let seven times pass over it.”

The vision appears to have a three-fold significance. First to Nebuchadnezzar himself, seven years; second to Babylon, seventy years; and third, to the kingdom of men as a whole, 7 times 360 years, or 2520 years. Its immediate and typical fulfillment was in Nebuchadnezzar. Just a year later at the peak of his pride, he was divinely struck with madness, and for seven years roamed the fields like an animal eating grass.

The full scope of the vision is obviously greater than this, as further indicated by the binding of the stump of the tree with the band of iron and brass. The constitution of the kingdoms of men, since the fall of the Babylonian Empire, is just as pictured here—the Babylonian stump bound with a band of Roman iron and Grecian brass. All, in any way familiar with history, are aware that our present-day civilization is principally bound by the customs, principles, and heritages of Greece and Rome in language, government, philosophy, art, architecture, law, science, literature, etc.

But there are fewer who recognize the basic Babylonian fleshly and religious stump. Students of God’s Word know that the modern religious world is fundamentally Babylonian, and that **BABYLON THE GREAT, MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH** is the title that the scriptures give to this modern system. Such documentary books as Hislop’s Two Babylons expose the pagan Babylonian origin of the world’s principle religious observations and traditions and festivals as Christmas, Easter, Halloween, etc. God’s people can have absolutely nothing to do with any such Babylonian corruptions.

Verse 16, “And let seven times pass over it.” Seven times in the scriptural symbol of months, on the larger scale, is 7 times 360 years, or 2520 years. Our day, which we know from world conditions to be the time of the end, lies just this length of time from the period of the Babylonian Empire. Seven times, measured from the beginning of the Babylonian head of gold, comes to approximately 1914. Seven times, from the end of Babylon, comes to approximately 1984. That is the 70 years of Babylon carried forward seven times, or 2520 years, covers the period 1914 – 1984.

At the end of his madness, Nebuchadnezzar, typifying the kingdom of men cured from his present delusions and brought to the true knowledge and worship of God, declares (verse 35), “All the inhabitants

of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say to him, What doest thou?"

This is the great value of Daniel for us today—the great truth we must keep in our minds, as we watch the futile maneuverings of the great sin-powers of the earth, as the final crisis approaches. Even a proud and terrible God himself, God says, “I will turn thee back...and I will bring thee forth.” Russia, of whom the world is increasingly afraid, is merely fulfilling God’s will and preparing the things for the manifestation of God’s glory. We have nothing to fear.

Chapter 5 describes the last night of the great Babylonian Empire. Daniel is now an old man over 80, and the king is Belshazzar, who is apparently the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. This chapter was long used by critics in an attempt to discredit the Bible, for it did not fit in with the fanciful legends of heathen historians. The critics said there was and could be no such king—no such circumstances, but archeology has completely justified the Bible account.

This destruction of literal Babylon by Cyrus is typical of the destruction of symbolic Babylon by Christ. Even as the enemy surrounds the city, King Belshazzar, confident of this power and defenses, (verse 1) makes a great feast unto his lords, and in their drunken revelry (verse 3) he makes sport of the holy vessels of the temple, drinking to their own heathen gods out of them. So the Babylonian Harlot is drunken with the blood of the saints, and all nations are drunken with the wine of her fornication and follow all her customs and festivals. He says, “I sit a queen and am no widow,” at the very time that her destruction strikes.

Suddenly, (verse 5) Belshazzar’s merriment is silent, and the revelers are struck with terror by the appearance of the fingers of a man’s hand, writing on the wall. The king (verse 7) calls for all his wise men and offers great honor to any who can interpret the supernatural message.

Daniel is not at this time in public prominence, but his fame is well known. The queen reminds Belshazzar of him, and Daniel is called (verse 11). And he spells out the meaning of the divine message (verse 25)—MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. Numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided. The handwriting is clearly on the wall today. But the blind nations cannot read it. In that night (verse 30) was Belshazzar slain, and Darius, the Mede, took the kingdom.

Chapter 6—the lion’s den—is a lesson and an inspiration in many ways. It is not always God’s purpose to miraculously intervene and close the lion’s mouth. Many faithful men have sealed their testimony with their blood, but the lesson and the comfort of this chapter is not diminished. In the end, all who are His will stand eternally before Him, delivered from the lions—all the lions.

The events of this chapter occur in the reign of Darius, the Mede. The prominence of Daniel and his godly separateness leads, of course, to jealousy. His enemies realize (verse 5) that they would not be able to find any thing against him, unless they could create a situation where he must choose between service to the king and service to God. So (verse 7), they flatter the vain king into making a foolish decree that none may ask a petition of any but him for 30 days.

The course that Daniel follows is a striking illustration of the principle that a lit candle is not prepared to be put under a bushel—not even temporarily for convenience sake, and it is a standing rebuke to all who on a plea of prudence hide their divine light that is meant to illuminate the world. When open confession of the principles of Christ is dangerous or inconvenient, how often do we hear it quoted that we should not toss our pearls before swine? Daniel’s conduct puts such a misapplication of scripture to shame. “Ye are the light of the world. Let your light shine.”

Daniel makes no attempt at concealment, though he knows that he is walking into a planned trap and is exposing himself to a cruel death. How easy it would have been to shut his windows, and thus, make sure that his prayers were unobserved! What harm would it have done to use a little caution in this way? But Daniel, the man greatly beloved (and we can see why), could see the issue so much more clearly than that. He saw that such a course would have been weakness, cowardice, failure, and defeat. And so all generations since that time have been strengthened by the power of his fearless example—

Dare to be a Daniel!
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm,
And dare to make it known.

Verse 10, “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”

Chapter 7 begins the great prophetic visions of Daniel himself, which now continue right through to the end of the book. They were all at the end of his life in the short reigns of Belshazzar and Darius and the first three years of Cyrus. Chapter 7 is about the vision of the four beasts that parallels the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. But the symbolism here is much fuller and more striking. That was for a heathen monarch; this is for the servants of God. There the kingdom of men was as a great man-like image; here it is shown as savage destroying beasts. Here we have the deeper details—of the little horn that prevailed against the saints, of the Ancient of Days, the Son of Man similitude of God-manifestation, coming with the clouds of heaven, the opening of the books of judgment, the ten thousand times ten thousand standing before him, and the saints taking the kingdom under the whole heaven. These were vast and mighty things for a mortal man to see and to carry alone in his heart.

Daniel says (verse 28), “My thoughts much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart.” The more terrible things were yet to be revealed to the man greatly beloved. He was to see the long centuries of the desolation of his people, the restoration, and then the destroying again of the city and the sanctuary, the cutting off of the long-awaited Messiah—visions and revelations that overwhelmed his spirit and caused him to lie sick many days.

Chapter 8 contains the vision of the Persian ram destroyed by the Grecian goat. After the goat had destroyed the ram (verse 7), its great horn (Alexander) was broken (verse 8) and four horns took its place—the four-fold division of the Greek Empire under Alexander’s generals. From one of these horns (verse 9) came a little horn—the Roman power that was to wax great against God’s land and sanctuary and to take away the daily sacrifice. And the vision (verse 14) was to be for 2300 days, “then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” The vision throughout concerns the he-goat and what develops from it, and the appearance of the goat, coming like a whirlwind from the west under Alexander, is the first specific action in the vision. Therefore, counting 2300 years from the brief 9-year period of Alexander the Great—332-323 BC—we come to the period 1969-1978. Of the end of the period, we are told (verse 14), “then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.”

Chapter 9 occurs in the first year of Darius, right after the Babylonian oppressor had been destroyed. Daniel understood (verse 2) by the prophecies of Jeremiah that the captivity of his people was to be for seventy years. This first year of Darius, as closely as we can determine, was 69 years from the beginning of the captivity.

And Daniel sets himself (verse 3) to seek by prayer and fasting and supplications for the gathering and blessing of his people. Even though the end of the time had come, and the destroyer had been destroyed, Daniel does not take the regathering for granted, or merely wait for God to move.

Prayer, supplications, fasting, sackcloth, and ashes (verse 3) indicate the fervent urgency of his appeal for his people. With such intense desire, God is well pleased. He desires those, and only those, who burn with intense longing for the fulfillment of His promises.

And then we note how Daniel identifies himself with his people and their sinful condition. There is no superior self-righteousness, but a loving sympathetic desire to stand for them and plead for them. Repeatedly, he says, We have sinned. We have rebelled. We have not obeyed. We have not made our prayers.

As he prayed (verse 21), a gracious answer came to him. The angel Gabriel, who had appeared and explained the vision of the he-goat, stood beside him again. This was the angel who appeared to Zacharias to announce the birth of John the Baptist and to Mary to announce the birth of Christ. He appears to no one else in scripture—just to Daniel, Zacharias, and Mary. It is here at the end of his life that Daniel is first addressed in verse 23, as the man greatly beloved. The beloved Daniel is the Old Testament counterpart of

the beloved John. Both in their old age received marvelous apocalyptic revelations. Love is the key to the deep knowledge of God.

Gabriel's message at this time is brief, but it is one of the most striking prophecies in the Bible, perhaps it could be called the central prophecy of all. Verse 24, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and the prophecies, and to anoint the most Holy." What depth of meaning is contained in these words! How beautifully and wonderfully all was fulfilled in Christ! Here is the hope and salvation of mankind—to make an end of sin. Here is all the law and the prophets.

But Gabriel continues in verse 26, "The Messiah shall be cut off, and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary." Daniel is left with the enigma of the end of sin, reconciliation made, everlasting righteousness brought in, the covenant confirmed, and then the Messiah cut off, the holy city and the temple destroyed. We can see now, in the wonderful working out of the eternal purpose, how all this fits together and was fulfilled in Christ. But what would Daniel's thoughts and feelings be? Here is glorious accomplishment associated with utter defeat and desolation. Things were the things the angels desired to look into.

The next vision, chapter 10, occurs in the third year of Cyrus, apparently about three years after the foregoing. It is clear that Daniel's great concern in the meantime has been to learn more of the things in store for his people and regarding Messiah the Prince. As this chapter 10 opens, Daniel has set himself (verse 2) to mourn and fast and seek unto God for an answer to his searching. He had been fasting and mourning three weeks, when (verse 5) he sees a vision of a man that corresponds in striking detail to the Son of Man similitude that appeared to John on Patmos—the multitudinous Christ. Like John, he fell at this man's feet, as dead (verse 9). And like John, he is caused to arise and is given courage and strength, and is told (verse 14), "I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days." Chapters 11 and 12 contain this final revelation.

Chapter 11 is a detailed history of the conflicts between the king of the south and the king of the north—the two parts of Alexander's Empire—Egypt and Syria—between which lay Palestine—the Holy Land—their common battleground, just as today. As time passes on, nations come and go. And Rome enters the picture, as the king of the north, by the conquest of that territory. The Roman power develops into the Papal power, into whose hands the people of God are given for 1260 years. Much history is telescoped into a few verses.

In verse 40, our attention is turned to the time of the end. There is still a king of the north and a king of the south. The ancient enmity still exists, and God's land is still the crossroads and the battleground, just as we see today.

As the final crisis arises (verse 40), the king of the south pushes against the king of the north. Then the latter, the king of the north, comes forth like a whirlwind and carries all before him. At the zenith of his power, he meets his end, (verse 45) between the seas in the glorious holy mountain.

Chapter 12 is the final picture. This time of the great power and the final destruction of the king of the north is described (verse 1) as a time of trouble on the earth such as never has been. But it is also a time of great deliverance, "Thy people shall be delivered." It is the time (verse 2) of the awakening of the dead and the rewarding of God's faithful servants of all ages. "They that be wise (verse 3) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament."

We know that this great day is even now upon us. Are we among the wise? Are our lives filled and dominated by the consciousness of these great things? Do we put all present things in the background—meaningless? Do we feel the intensity of Daniel's yearning and supplication?

"But thou, O Daniel (verse 4), shut up the words, and seal the book, even till the time of the end." Here, as one asked another (verse 6), "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?"

They speak of the 1260-, the 1290-, and the 1335-year periods. Here again a final 75-year period is indicated related to the rebirth of Israel, and we are in the midst of it, obviously. At the moment these periods appear to run our successively, in 1917, 1947, and 1992. But it is not for us to know, only to be wide awake to the possibility and to recognize that it is certainly the time of the end.

Daniel heard the mystic reply—he heard but he understood not (verse 8), for the vision was not for Daniel. The aged prophet had now come to the end of his long exile. His weary years of prayer and concern for his people were now over. “Then said I (verse 8), O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end...Go thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.” May it be our lot to stand with him, the man greatly beloved.

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