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# 1

## DANIEL THE PROPHET

### I. The Captives In Babylon

*But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. —Daniel 1:8*

I always delight to study the life of Daniel the Prophet. The name *Daniel* means "God is my judge." God is my judge—not my fellowmen, but God. So Daniel held himself responsible to God.

Some may ask, Who was Daniel? About six hundred years before the time of Christ, the sins of the kings of Judah had brought down upon them and upon the people the judgments of God. Jehoiakim had succeeded Jehoa-haz; and Jehoiachin had succeeded Jehoiakim; and he again was succeeded by Zedekiah; and of each of these kings the record runs just the same: "He did evil in the sight of the Lord."

No wonder that in the days of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was permitted of God to come up against Jerusalem and to lay siege against it and overcome it. It was

probably at this time that Daniel, with some of the young princes, was carried away captive. A few years later, Jehoiachin being king, Nebuchadnezzar again came up against Jerusalem, and overcame it; when he bore away many of the temple vessels and took several thousand captives.

And still later on, when Zedekiah was king, Nebuchadnezzar came a third time against Jerusalem to besiege it. This time he burned the city with fire, broke down its walls, slaughtered many of the people, and probably bore away another batch of captives to the banks of the Euphrates.

Among the earlier captives taken by the king of Babylon in the days of Jehoiakim were four young men. Like Timothy in later times, they may have had godly mothers who taught them the law of the Lord. Or they may perhaps have been touched by the words of Jeremiah the "weeping prophet," whom God had sent to the people of Judah. So, when the nation was rejecting the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Moses, these young men took Him as their God: they received Him into their hearts.

Many may have mocked at Jeremiah's warnings, when he lifted up his voice against the sins of the people. They may have laughed at his tears, and have told him to his face—just as people say nowadays of earnest preachers—that he was causing undue excitement. But

these four young men would seem to have listened to the prophet's voice; and they had the strength to come out for God.

And now they are in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar the king commands that a certain number of the most promising of the young Jewish captives should be picked out, who might be taught the Chaldean tongue and instructed in the learning of Babylon. And the king further ordered that there should be daily set before them portions of meat from his table, and a supply of the same wine as he himself drank, and this was to go on for three years. And at the end of three years these young men were to stand before the great monarch, at that time the ruler over the whole world. Daniel and his three young friends were among those thus selected.

No young man ever goes from a country home to a large city—say to a great metropolis—without grave temptations crossing his path on his entrance. And just at this turning point in his life, as in Daniel's, must lie the secret of his success or his failure. The cause of many of the failures that we see in life is that men do not start right. Now, this young man started right. He took character with him up to Babylon, and he was not ashamed of the religion of his mother and his father. He was not ashamed of the God of the Bible. Up there among those heathen idolaters he was not ashamed to let his

light shine. The young Hebrew captive took his stand for God as he entered the gate of Babylon, and doubtless he cried to God to keep him steadfast. And he needed to cry hard, for he had to face great difficulties, as we shall see.

Soon comes a testing time. The king's edict goes forth, that these young men should eat the meat from the king's table. Some of that food would in all probability consist of meats prohibited by the Levitical law—the flesh of animals, of birds, and of fishes, which had been pronounced “unclean,” and were consequently forbidden. Or in the preparation, some portion might not perhaps have been thoroughly drained of the blood, concerning which it had been declared, “Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh” (Leviticus 17:14). Or some part of the food may have been presented as an offering to Bel or some other Babylonian god. Some one of these circumstances, or possibly all of them united, may have determined Daniel's course of action. I do not think it took young Daniel long to make up his mind. He “purposed in his heart”—in his heart, mark that!—“that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat” (Daniel 1:8).

If some modern Christians could have advised Daniel, they would have said, “Do not act like that; do not set aside the king's meat; that is an act of Pharisaism. The moment you take your stand, and you say you will not eat it,

you say in effect that you are better than other people." Oh, yes, that is the kind of talk too often heard now. Men say, "When you are in Rome you must do as Rome does"; and such people would have pressed upon the poor young captive that, though he might obey the commandments of God while in his own country, he could not possibly do so here in Babylon—that he could not expect to carry his religion with him into the land of his captivity.

I can imagine men saying to Daniel, "Look here, young man, you are too puritanical. Don't be too particular; don't have too many religious scruples. Bear in mind you are not now in Jerusalem. You will have to get over these notions, now you are here in Babylon. You are not now surrounded by friends and relatives. You are not a Jerusalem prince now. You are not surrounded by the royal family of Judah. You have been brought down from your high position. You are now a captive. And if the monarch hears about your refusing to eat the same kind of meat that he eats, and to drink the same kind of wine that he drinks, your head will soon roll from off your shoulders. You had better be a little politic."

But this young man had piety and religion deep down in his heart, and that is the right place for it. That is where it will grow; that is where it will have power; that is where it will regulate the life. Daniel had not joined the

company of the "church," the faithful few in Jerusalem, because he wanted to get into "society" and attain a position; that was not the reason. It was because of the love he had toward the Lord God of Israel.

I can imagine the astonishment of that officer, Melzar, when Daniel told him he could not eat the king's meat or drink his wine. "Why, what do you mean? Is there anything wrong with it? Why, it is the best the land can produce!"

"No," says Daniel, "there is nothing wrong with it in that way, but take it away. I cannot eat it." Then Melzar tried to reason Daniel out of his scruples; but no, there stood the prophet, youth though he was at that time, firm as a rock.

So, thank God, this young Hebrew and his three friends said they would not eat the meat or drink the wine; and requesting that the portions might be taken away, they endeavored to persuade the overseer to bring them pulse (seeds of vegetables) instead.

"Take away this wine, and take away this meat. Give us pulse and water." The prince of the eunuchs probably trembled for the consequences. But, yielding to their importunity, he eventually consented to let them have pulse and water for ten days. And, lo, at the end of the ten days his fears were dispelled; for the faces of Daniel and his young friends were fair-

er and fatter than the faces of any of those who had partaken of the king's meat. The four young men had not noses, as those of too many men nowadays seen in our streets, as red as if they were just going to blossom. It is God's truth—and Daniel and his friends tested it—that cold water, with a clear conscience, is better than wine. They had a clear conscience; and the smile of God was upon them. The Lord had blessed their obedience, and the four Hebrew youths were allowed to have their own way; and in God's time they were brought into favor, not only with the officer set over them, but with the court and the king.

Daniel thought more of his principles than he did of earthly honor or esteem of men. Right was right with him. He was going to do right *today*, and let the morrows take care of themselves. That firmness of purpose, in the strength of God, was the secret of his success. Right there, that very moment, he overcame. And from that hour, from that moment, he could go on conquering and to conquer, because he had started right.

Many a man is lost because he makes a bad start. A young man comes from his country home, and enters upon city life: temptation arises, and he becomes false to his principles. He meets with some scoffing, sneering man, who jeers at him because he goes to a church service, or because he is seen reading his Bible,

or because he is known to pray to God—to that God to whom Daniel prayed in Babylon. And the young man proves to be weak-kneed: he cannot stand the scoffs, and the sneers, and the jeers of his companions; and so he becomes untrue to his principles, and gives them up.

I want to say here that when a young man makes a wrong start, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is ruin to him. The first game of chance, the first betting transaction, the first false entry in the books, the first quarter-dollar taken from the cash box or till, the first night spent in evil company—any of these may prove the turning point; any of these may represent a wrong start.

If ever any persons could be said to have had a good excuse for being unfaithful to their principles, these four young men might. They had been torn away from the associations of their childhood and their youth; they had been taken away from the religious influences which centered in Jerusalem, away from the temple services and sacrifices; and had been put down in Babylon among the idols and idolaters, among the wise men and soothsayers, and the whole nation was against them. They went right against the current of the whole world.

But God was with them.

And when a man, for the sake of principle and conscience, goes against the current of the whole world, God is with him; and he need not

stop to consider what the consequences will be. Right is right.

But our testimony for God is not limited to a single act, it has to last all through our lives. So we must not imagine for a moment that Daniel and his three young friends had only one trial to undergo. The word to the Lord's servants is the same in all ages, "Be thou faithful *unto death*" (Revelation 2:10, italics added).

This city of Babylon was a vast place. I suppose it to have been the largest city the world has ever seen. It is said to have been sixty miles round, and is understood to have consisted of an area of two hundred square miles.<sup>1</sup> A line drawn through the city in either direction would measure fifteen miles. The walls are said to have had an elevation of three hundred and fifty feet: they would therefore be nearly on a level with the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. The breadth of the wall is said to have been over eighty feet, and on the top eight chariots could run abreast. Babylon was like Chicago—so flat, that for ornamentation men had to construct artificial mounds and, like Chicago in another particular, the products of vast regions flowed right into and through it.

## II. "Thou Art The Head Of Gold"

*Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.*

—Daniel 2:1

We hear of Daniel again some few years later on, and under new conditions. The king of Babylon had a dream; and his dream greatly disturbed him. He musters before him the magicians, the astrologers, the soothsayers, and the Chaldeans (or learned men), and requires from them the interpretation of this night vision of his. He either cannot or will not narrate to them the incidents of the vision, but demands an explanation without detailing what he had seen in his dream. "The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill."

That was a pretty unreasonable demand. It is true that he offered them rewards and honors if they succeeded. But of course they failed. And they admitted their failure: "There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requireth; and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with [men]."

"Except the gods." They did not mean the God of heaven—Daniel's God. He could have revealed the secret quick enough. They meant the idol gods of Babylon, with whom these so-

called "wise men" thought, and wrongly thought, the power of interpretation lay.

"There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter." They were wrong there; and that they soon found out. "The king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain" (Daniel 2:12-13).

The king's officer came to Daniel, but Daniel was not afraid. The officer said to him, "You are classed among the wise men; and our orders are to take you out and execute you." "Well," says the young Hebrew captive, "the king has been very hasty. But let him only give me a little time, and I will show the interpretation."

He had read the Law of Moses, and he was one of those who believed that what Moses had written concerning secret things was true: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children" (Deuteronomy 29:29). He probably said to himself, "My God knows that secret; and I will trust Him to reveal it to me." And he may have called together his three friends; and have held a prayer meeting—perhaps the first prayer meeting ever held in Babylon. They dealt with the threatening message of the king of Babylon just as Hezekiah had dealt with the threatening letter

of the king of Assyria a hundred years before. They “spread it before the Lord.” And they prayed that this secret might be revealed to them. And after they had prayed, and made their request to God—and the answer did not come right off, then and there—they went off to bed, and fell asleep.

I do not think that you or I would have slept much, if we had thought that our heads were in danger of coming off in the morning. Daniel slept; for we are told the matter was revealed to him in a dream or night vision. Daniel’s faith was strong, so he could sleep calmly in the prospect of death. If his friends did not sleep through the night, it is most likely they were praying.

In the morning Daniel pours out his heart in thanksgiving. He “blessed the God of heaven.” He had got into the spirit of Psalm 103: “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (verse 1). Paul and Silas had the same spirit of thanksgiving when they were in the prison at Philippi. Daniel makes his way to the palace, goes into the guard room, and says to the officer: “Bring me in before the king; and I will shew unto the king the interpretation.” He stands in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar; and, like Joseph before Pharaoh, before proceeding to unfold the dream, he gives glory to God: “There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets” (Daniel 2:24, 28).

Daniel took his place as nobody: he himself was nothing. He did not wish the king to think highly of him. That is the very highest type of piety—when a man hides himself, as it were, out of the way and seeks to exalt his God and lift up his Redeemer, and not himself. And then he proceeds to describe the dream: “Thou, O king, sawest, and behold, a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible” (verse 31).

I can imagine how the king’s eyes flashed out at those opening words; and I can fancy him crying out, “Yes, that is it: The whole thing comes back to me now.”

“This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.”

“Yes, that is it exactly,” says the king; “I recollect all that now. But surely there was something more.”

And Daniel goes on: “Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. . . . This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.”

And then, amid deathlike stillness, Daniel went on to unfold the interpretation; and he told the king that the golden head of the great

image was none other than himself. "Thou art this head of gold" (verse 38). He then goes on to tell of another kingdom that should arise—not so beautiful, but stronger, as silver is stronger than gold—that described the Medo-Persian empire. But the arms of silver were to overthrow the head of gold. And Daniel himself lived to see the day when that part of the prophetic dream came to pass. He lived to see Cyrus overthrow the Chaldean power. He lived to see the scepter of the empire pass into the hands of the Medes and Persians. And after them came a mighty Grecian conqueror, Alexander the Great, who overthrew the Persian dynasty; and for awhile Greece ruled the world. Then came the Caesars, and founded the empire of Rome—symbolized by the legs of iron—the mightiest power the world had ever known: and for centuries Rome sat on those seven hills, and swayed the scepter over the nations of the earth. And then, in its turn, the Roman power was broken; and the mighty empire split up into ten kingdoms corresponding to the ten toes of the prophetic figure.

I believe in the literal fulfillment, so far, of Daniel's God-given words; and in the sure fulfillment of the final prophecy of the "stone . . . cut out of the mountain without hands" (verse 45), that by and by shall grind the kingdoms of this world into dust, and bring in the kingdom of peace.

While the feet were of clay, there was some of the strength of the iron remaining in them. At the present day we have got down to the toes, and even to the extremities of these. Soon, very soon, the collision may occur; and then will come the end. The “stone cut out without hands” is surely coming—and it may be very soon.

What does Ezekiel say, prophesying within some few years of the time of this very vision?—“Remove the diadem and take off the crown. . . . I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is, and I will give it him” (Ezekiel 21:26–27).

What does Saint Paul say?—“The appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; . . . to whom be honour and power everlasting” (1 Timothy 6:14–16).

Yes, the fifth monarchy is coming, and it may be very soon. Hail thou fifth monarch, who art to rule the world in righteousness, and sway the scepter “from the river even to the ends of the earth.” Shortly the cry, “Christ is come!” will be ringing through the earth. It is only a “little while.” Cheer up, ye children of God; our King will be back by and by! And to those who have not as yet given their hearts to Christ, I would say, Lose no time! If you want a part and lot in that coming kingdom of the Lord you had bet-

ter press into it now while the door is open. By and by "Too late! Too late!" will be the cry.

When King Nebuchadnezzar heard the full description of his dream and listened to its interpretation, he was satisfied that at last he had found a really wise man. He gave Daniel many great gifts, and raised him—just as Pharaoh had raised Joseph ages before—to a place near the throne. And when Daniel was raised to position and power he did not forget his friends. He requested of the king that they should be promoted; and they also were put in positions of honor and trust. God blessed them signally; and—what is more—He kept them true to Him in their prosperity as they had been in their adversity.

From that moment Daniel becomes a great man. He is set over the province of Babylon; he is lifted right out of bondage, right out of servitude. He was a young man, probably not more than twenty-two years old: and there he is—set over a mighty empire; is made, you might say, practically ruler over the whole of the then known world. And God will exalt us when the right time comes. We need not try to promote ourselves; we need not struggle for position. Let God put us in our true places. And it is a good deal better for a man to be right with God, even if he hold no position down here. Then he can look up and know that God is pleased with him: that is enough.