

DANIEL IN BABYLON.

JULY 9. – DANIEL 1:8-21.

"Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself."

DANIEL is set before us in the Scriptures as one whom the Lord loved. His standing with the Almighty is strikingly presented through the Prophet Ezekiel, where the Lord, speaking of the sureness of his judgments about to come upon the land of Judah, said, "Tho these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness." (Ezek. 14:14.) These words were spoken by Ezekiel shortly before the desolation of Jerusalem, while Daniel was in Babylon, where he had risen to a position of great prominence; and his fame no doubt had reached his home.

Daniel was carried captive with Jehoiachim, king of Judah, and many of the nobility of the land of Israel, eighteen years before the final captivity in the days of Zedekiah, when the land was left desolate without an inhabitant, and the seventy years of desolation began. Daniel was fourteen years old when carried captive to Babylon, and consequently lived to the extreme age of over one hundred years. – Dan. 1:21.

The Book of Daniel is one of those against which the "higher critics" expend special energy, some being inclined to call it a fiction, while others declare it to be a history of the period of Antiochus Epiphanes (over three hundred years after Daniel's death) and that it was written by some unknown writer who attached Daniel's name as a disguise. Modern science and the higher critics are very much opposed to anything in the nature of positive prophecy – anything claiming to be of direct divine inspiration, and in any sense of the word attempting to foretell the future. The Book of Daniel is preeminently marked with these characteristics, and hence it, more than any other book of the Old Testament, has the reprobation of these gentlemen. But the Lord

forewarned us, through the Apostle and the Prophet, of these wise men, whose wisdom would become a trap and a snare unto them, so that "the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid [obscured]." – Isa. 29:14; 1 Cor. 1:26-29.

Our Lord also pointed out that *these things* are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes – made clear to those who make no boast of wisdom according to the course of this world. (Matt. 11:25.) How true to facts we find this to be! While many of the great and learned are stumbling themselves into higher criticism and other forms of infidelity, the Lord's "little ones," meek, humble, teachable from the Father's Word, are being instructed, and are growing in **[R2493 : page 165]** grace and in the knowledge of the truth.

To those who have clearly in mind the presentations and interpretations of Daniel's prophecies as presented in MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOLS. I., II. and III., there is no need for elaborate arguments to prove that this wonderful Book of Daniel is not a fiction, but more wonderful by far than any fiction that could have been written. And to them it will be useless to declare it a history of events which transpired 167 B.C. and falsely set forth as a prophecy by Daniel; for they see fulfilments, past, present and to come, far larger and grander and more wonderful than anything which occurred at the date named – they see in these fulfilments unmistakable evidence of superhuman intelligence, and that, as Daniel declared, the most high God therein revealed the secrets of his plan still future.

Our lesson proper finds Daniel with others of the Jewish captives in Babylon, where, according to custom, the king had made choice of a number of the most promising of the captive youths to pass a three-years' course of education in the sciences, Babylon being at this time the center of learning. The object in this was no doubt two-fold: the Babylonian monarch thus attempted to associate with his empire the learning and skill of the world, and to promote a friendly feeling as

between Babylon and the various countries over which it held sway, that foreign nations might feel the greater interest in Babylon as the center of the world-empire, and be the more contented with the laws and regulations which proceeded therefrom, knowing that some of their own nation stood before the king as his counsellors or secretaries – magicians, astrologers and wise men, as they were then called.

The choice of the four young Israelites was no doubt a subject of divine providence, and from their names we may infer that they were all children of religious parents, the compounds of their names so signifying, as follows: Daniel, "*God is my Judge;*" Hananiah, "*God is gracious;*" Mishael, "*This is as God;*" Azariah, "*God is a helper.*" Thus did the Lord, overthrowing a nation for its wickedness, make special provision, even in its captivity, for those of that nation who were faithful to him. In choosing these four Jews for the Babylonian college course the prince of the eunuchs, according to custom, gave them new names, to break their identity with their native homes and to establish an identity with the kingdom of Babylon; hence he named them Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.

From the first Daniel seems to have been the specially favored of these favored four – he was favored of the Lord in that, while all four were specially blessed, his portion included visions and revelations; he was specially favored by the prince of the eunuchs who had these youths in charge, as we read, "Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs" (vs. 9). We are not to understand **[R2493 : page 166]** that this favor both with God and man was something wholly outside of Daniel himself; on the contrary, it is proper for us to infer that by birth (heredity) and by natural training of godly parents Daniel had a noble, amiable, winsome character, which not only prepared him the better to be the Lord's mouthpiece, but which also made him moderate, discreet and amiable toward all with whom he had to do.

What a lesson is here, not only for young people, but also for parents! How necessary it is that those who seek divine service shall endeavor to attain to characteristics pleasing to God! And if any find themselves wholly without friends, how proper it is that they should suspect that some measure of the fault lies in themselves; and how proper it would be that all such should seek to cultivate amiability and suavity at the expense of everything except principle! Only Ishmael was to have the experience of every man's hand against him, and his hand against every man, and those who have Ishmael's experience have need to fear that they have Ishmael's disposition, and should forthwith diligently seek grace at the throne of mercy whereby to overcome ungainly qualities and idiosyncrasies.

It is only when we are hated because of our loyalty to the truth (directly or indirectly) that we are to take satisfaction therein, or to think that we are suffering for righteousness' sake. As the Apostle points out, some suffer as evil-doers and as busy-bodies in other men's matters, or because of ungentleness, uncouthness, or lack of the wisdom of moderation, which the Lord's Word counsels. (1 Pet. 4:15; Phil. 4:5; Jas. 1:5.) We are not to forget, however, that rudeness, which is an element of selfishness, may be more quickly dispelled from the heart than from the life, and all should take encouragement from the thought that God, and his people who view matters from his standpoint, judge the sons of God not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit or intention of their minds, their hearts, and have patience with the weaknesses of the flesh, where there are evidences that the new mind is endeavoring to bring the flesh under its control.

Of these four Jewish companions, Daniel seems from the first to have been leader, and his leading seems to have been in the right direction. In a new land, under new conditions, a shallow character would be likely to be thoroughly spoiled. First, the fact of being chosen, even in the probationary sense, to be of the king's council was certainly a great honor; and the tendency to a shallow mind would have been toward vanity, bombast, pride, haughtiness, etc., qualities

which would have hindered real progress in the school, and thus would have made him less likely to be the king's ultimate choice as counsellor: but still more important, it would have separated between him and God, for God resisteth the proud and showeth his favor to the humble. – 1 Pet. 5:5.

Daniel might have said to himself, as some would have said, – I am now far from the land of Israel; I am identified with the Babylonish court, and I therefore may profitably forget and neglect the laws of God, and consider them as having been applicable to me only in my own country, and that here, far from the land of promise, I may do in all particulars as the better Babylonians do. But, on the contrary, Daniel very wisely resolved in his heart that, since his nation had been cut off from the Land of Promise because of disobedience to God, he would be ever careful to do those things which would be pleasing to the Almighty: and, as we shall see, he soon found a place for his new resolutions.

The portion of food provided for these college students by the king's command was good – far better, probably, than they had been used to previously; – nor was Daniel's mental objection to it instigated by self-denial, but wholly by religious duty. The Israelites, under their Law Covenant, were forbidden to eat certain articles of food in common use amongst other nations, for instance, swine's flesh, rabbit flesh, eels, oysters, etc., and indeed all flesh that was not killed by being allowed to bleed to death: for the Law specially forbade the use of blood under any circumstances or conditions. The food of the king's household was not prepared along these lines, and the young Hebrew perceived that he could not hope for any change in these respects, and he was too wise to even find fault with them. He saw rightly enough that the divine Law that was upon him as a Jew did not apply to Gentiles, and he made no efforts to interfere with the general arrangements.

Daniel's request, therefore, was a very simple one, *viz.*, that he be permitted to have a very plain and inexpensive diet, called "pulse," which no doubt was prepared as a part of the general household meal. If the request could be granted, no one would be specially inconvenienced, and yet Daniel would thus preserve himself from "defilement" under the terms of the Jewish Law. It would appear that Daniel's companions, influenced by his decision, joined with him in this request. The prince of the eunuchs, while desirous of favoring Daniel, feared his own position if, as he surmised, this simple diet would prove insufficient for the boys, and lead to a breakdown of their health during the period of study. But finally it was arranged with the *melzar* (or butler) that the matter of diet should be tested for ten days.

Here Daniel's faith in God showed itself. He was confident that, even tho such a diet might not be the most desirable in every respect, yet, inasmuch as it was **[R2493 : page 167]** the only course open to them whereby they could preserve themselves from violation of the divine Law, therefore God would specially supervene to the extent necessary, and in this, it seems, he was not disappointed. There is a lesson for all of the Lord's people here. It is our duty not only to study the Lord's will, but also to consider well the circumstances and the conditions which surround us, and to seek to adopt such a moderate course in life as would first of all have divine approval, and secondly, cause as little trouble, inconvenience and displeasure to others as possible, and then to confidently rely upon the Lord's supervising wisdom and providence.

When we read, "As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams," we are not to understand that this skill and learning was wholly miraculous, like the understanding in visions and dreams, which was to Daniel only. Rather, we are to judge that under what we might term natural laws four boys who had enough character to undertake such a course of self-denial for righteousness' sake would have also courage and strength of character

in respect to all their affairs and studies. We are to surmise that their determination in this matter of their food, that they would rather deny themselves than violate God's Law, would mean to them a mental and moral discipline which would be helpful in all the [R2494 : page 167] affairs of life.

And there is a lesson in this for every Christian. Many are inclined to think of the little things of life as being unimportant, but everyone who attains to any proficiency in any department of life surely learns that his attainments were in considerable degree the result of determined will-power, and that it is well-nigh impossible to be strong in will-power in respect to important things if lax and pliable in respect to things in general, even the less important. Habit is a wonderful power, either for good or evil, and the boy or girl, the man or woman, who has not learned self-control in respect to little things, indeed all things, cannot expect to be able to exercise self-control upon the greatest and most important affairs merely.

In other words, applying this matter to Christians, we might say that he who wants to be an "overcomer" at all, must make the attempt all along the line on every point, great or small, where conscience and principle call for it. It is he who is faithful in things that are least who may be expected to be found faithful also in things that are greater: and this evidently is the Lord's view of this matter. From the Lord's standpoint, all of the affairs of this present life are little in comparison with the future things. Hence he is calling for "overcomers" whose general faithfulness to principle, even in small things, will give evidence of the *disposition*, the *character*, to which may be entrusted the great responsibilities of the Kingdom glory, honor and immortality. – Luke 16:10; Matt. 25:23.

At the end of the three years' college course, when Daniel was seventeen, came the examination before the king, and as should have been expected, Daniel and his companions, faithful to the Lord, seeking first his will, were found to be far in advance of their

companions, and were accepted to the king's council. We might draw a lesson here, without in any sense of the word intimating that it was typified, for we do not so think. We might say that there is a certain correspondence as between the position of Daniel and his associates and the position occupied by all those who have been called of the Father to joint-heirship in the Kingdom, with Jesus Christ our Lord. Not all who are called, nor all who undertake the course of training, have the promise of acceptance: on the contrary, many are called, few will be chosen. But the character of those who will be chosen in many respects corresponds to that of Daniel and his companions. All are not leading spirits, as was Daniel, nor are all given to visions and revelations and interpretations, as was he; but all will have the same spirit of devotion to principles of righteousness, which devotion will be tested under divine providence, step by step, through the narrow way, as they seek to walk in the footsteps of him who set us an example – our Daniel, our Leader, our Lord Jesus. Let all, then, who have named the name of Christ, depart from iniquity, let all such be faithful: "Dare to be a Daniel."

Another thought is that clean spiritual provender is important to the Lord's flock, and that those who have come to a knowledge of the truth should abstain from all food that is defiled. If this shall seem to restrict the bill of spiritual fare, and the opportunities for mingling with the Babylonians at their table, it will have its compensating advantages nevertheless, for the Lord will bless to the spiritual good of his faithful ones even the plainest of spiritual blessings and opportunities. Let a test be made, after the manner of Daniel and his companions, and see whether or not those who feed upon the clean provender of the Lord's Word, and who reject the more sumptuous arrangement and defiled food of Babylon will not be fairer of countenance spiritually, even after a short test. But let us not suppose that anything would be gained by simply abstaining from the Babylonian portion and starving themselves spiritually. Whoever abstains from the popular and defiled supply must seek and use the simple and undefiled food which the

Lord in his providence supplies, otherwise their last state of spiritual starvation will be worse than the first.
