

::R3630 : page 279::

GOOD PURPOSES OF HEAR

—DANIEL 1:8-20.—SEPTEMBER 17.—

Golden Text:—“Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.”

THE BOOK of Daniel, as we have it in our common version of the Bible, corresponds to that which was accepted by the Jews, but attached to it were three stories (“Bel and the Dragon,” “The Song of the Three Hebrew Children,” “The Story of Susannah”), which have nothing whatever to do with Daniel, and which bear no marks of being his production nor give any evidence of inspiration. These are excluded by the Hebrews as apocryphal, but they are incorporated in the Roman Catholic version of the Scriptures.

This book is one against which the higher critics have thrown and are still throwing the weight of their influence. As with the criticisms of nearly all the other

::R3630 : page 280::

books of the Bible so with this—they claim it was not written until long after the time of Daniel and was merely given his name. The particular ground for this criticism is a misinterpretation of the prophecy, which applies it to the times of Antiochus Epiphanes. Strangely enough these grounds of objection become to us, who have a different view of the meaning of those prophecies, one of the strongest evidences possible of the inspiration of the writer. Certainly no prophet ever described more particularly the great events of universal history, certainly none ever marked more clearly and distinctly than did Daniel the precise time of the first advent of Messiah. The prophecy of the seventy weeks (490 years) was most remarkably fulfilled. The last, the seventieth of those weeks of years, began with Messiah the Prince, began at the time of our Lord’s baptism and anointing with the holy Spirit. His cross marked the middle of that week, as the prophet predicted—“In the midst of the week Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself.” The close of that prophetic week marked the end of special favor to the Jew and the opening of the door to the Gentiles, Cornelius being the first Gentile convert ushered into the favors and blessings of Spiritual Israel.

Our Lord undoubtedly referred to the beginning of the seventieth week of this prophecy when he

sent forth his disciples to preach, saying, "The time is fulfilled." What time was fulfilled? We answer the sixty and nine weeks of Daniel's prophecy had expired, and the seventieth week, which was to usher in the advent of Messiah, had come. No time could be fulfilled unless it had been foretold, and we know of no other prophecy which distinctly foretold the time of the Lord's advent. And again, it should be noticed that our Lord distinctly referred to Daniel, calling him by name and quoted a part of his prophecy, giving us the assurance that it would be fulfilled in the future. That future fulfilment has not yet come, but we believe is near, even at the door—"A time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation." Our Lord adds to the prophecy the words, "No, nor ever shall be." (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:15-21.) The prophet Ezekiel, Daniel's contemporary associated in the exile, twice referred to him in his prophecy, classing him with Noah and Job. He mentions expressly Daniel's great wisdom. (Ezek. 14:14-20; 28:3.) However, as stated at first, those whose eyes of understanding are now opened to see the meaning of Daniel's prophecy and to read the fulfilment of many parts of it in the events of history have no need of any outside evidence or testimony or proof that it was written under divine instruction, and will have no question that the remaining portions of it will be fulfilled with equal accuracy.

FOUR NOBLE YOUNG MEN

As already noted, the first captivity by Nebuchadnezzar included the very cream of the Jewish nation. Amongst them were four young men of about sixteen years of age whose names implied a parentage that was reverential, loyal to God. Thus Daniel signified, "God is my judge," Hananiah, "Jehovah is gracious," Mishael, "God-like," Azariah, "Jehovah has helped." The fruit of godly training is manifest in the course pursued by these young men, as related in the present lesson. Their captivity doubtless seemed to them and all concerned a great hardship, a sore trial, and yet in God's providence it was overruled to be to them a great blessing, and that blessing has come down through the ages to fortify, strengthen and encourage even the spiritual Israelites.

The four boys mentioned were chosen by King Nebuchadnezzar, because of their brightness and general intelligence, to be specially educated with others in a class from which he drew his assistants and councillors of state. One of the first things done was the changing of their names: Henceforth Daniel was known amongst the Chaldeans as Belteshazzar, Hananiah was named Shadrach, Mishael was named Meshach and Azariah was named Abednego, these names implying relationship or servitude to the deities of Babylonia.

But changing their names by no means changed their hearts, just as their transporting from the land of promise to Babylon did not turn them from loyalty to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God in whose existence they believed and whose promises they revered, and whom consequently they desired to please and to serve. Daniel would appear to have been the foremost

or leader amongst them, but the courage and fidelity of all were fully attested, Daniel's by his experience in the lion's den and the other three in their experiences in the fiery furnace.

GOOD BLOOD FROM CHEAP FOOD

The school or college into which these four young Hebrews were introduced was maintained by the king and supplied with wines and various dainties usual to the table of the king and his nobility; but Daniel purposed in his heart that if possible he would choose plain food and not defile himself with the king's dainties and wine. Therefore he early made a request for the simple food here called pulse, a general name no doubt for vegetables, but particularly for the varieties we now know as peas, beans, etc.

The expression, "defile," was doubtless of double application: first, the meats and dainties of the heathen were usually dedicated to their deities in some manner, and this to a certain degree would defile in the estimation of those who would recognize that there was one living and true God whose blessing alone they might ask upon their food and drink and every interest. But the separate descriptions, meats and wines, rather implies that there was more than sentimental defilement connected with the matter. It seems to imply that Daniel recognized that his own health of mind and body would be clearer and better if he abstained from many of those delicacies and wines commonly in use. Both were good arguments—good reasons for avoiding, if possible, that class of food and taking the simple diet. We might here remark that it is a recognized fact in the light of the closest scrutiny that peas and beans and wheat contain all the necessary elements for the development and support of the human body—bones, muscle and brain. Those competent to speak with authority on the subject assure us that beans will yield to the human system a larger amount of muscular strength than the best of beefsteak. We are not teaching vegetarianism, but it is well for all to know that they have in a vegetable diet all the necessaries of life. This is important in view of the increasing price of meat, and it may be of still greater importance to remember in the future.

Daniel was evidently of a kind to make friends with good people under all circumstances, and it does not surprise us to find the statement of verse 9 that he soon was in favor and "tender love with the prince of the eunuchs," who was the steward having charge of the

::R3631 : page 281::

students of this college. Daniel's appeal was made to him, but was met with the objection that if by reason of such a change of diet those under his charge should be dwarfed or stunted or physically impoverished it might not only cost him his position but his very life—"endanger his head."

REWARDED WITH GOOD HEALTH

Daniel, however, was fully convinced that the plainer diet would be none to his injury, and urged a ten days' test, on the results of which he was willing to rest his request. The plan was followed, and at the end of the ten days Daniel, and his companions who joined him in the request, were found to be in better flesh and every way brighter and more intelligent than their associates who were eating of the richer fruits and wines. As a result they were permitted to continue their abstemious diet, no doubt much to the amusement of their associates in the school, who without doubt would consider them foolish for thus choosing simple fare when they might have the king's food. It undoubtedly did cost some self-denial to all of these young captives to forego the pleasures of the palate, to endure the sneers of their companions, to be thought strange, peculiar, to be cut off in a measure, ostracised, from those who would be inclined to consider them common people without the cultivated tastes of the aristocratic. The effects, however, were good every way, and it will be well for all of the Lord's people to draw a lesson here in respect to their diet as well as in regard to other affairs of life which have so much to do in the formation of character, the character which is so all-important for those who would be heirs of the Kingdom.

It is undoubtedly true that those who are given to gluttony and the use of alcoholic liquors stupefy their brains and are, therefore, to a certain degree disqualified for whatever business or other matter which may come before them. Some of this class may get along well in the world, but doubtless they would get along better so far as clearness of intellect is concerned if they were abstemious. However, it must be conceded that to mingle with the world, to conform to its habits and customs, to be the "hail-fellow-well-met" with the children of this world is the surest way to worldly success, honor of men and worldly prosperity under present conditions, while Satan is still the prince of this world. On the other hand, the abstemious course, self-denial, the practice of self-restraint, though disesteemed and sneered at by the world, is all-important in the upbuilding of the character likeness of Christ, and all who are seeking to walk in the footsteps of Jesus should remember this, and should endeavor to fight a good fight against their own appetites, their natural desires and for the upbuilding of themselves as New Creatures possessed of the new mind, the spirit of a sound mind, which associates with and relates to all the affairs of life, food, raiment, etc.

THE POWER OF FAITH

Daniel and his associates, under the influence of the promise made to Abraham and his seed, were looking forward to the glorious Kingdom of the future when Immanuel would be King over all the earth. They were seeking to develop characters in accord with the will of God, that thus they might have a share in the better resurrection. We are glad for them, and are sure that when the new dispensation shall open up, the high positions which those ancient worthies will be granted in the

earthly phase of the Kingdom will more than compensate them for the little self-denials which at the moment were no doubt severe tests of character and heart loyalty. And if this is true of those who are the heirs of the earthly phase of that Abrahamic Covenant how much more important to us who by the grace of God are living during this Gospel age and have been called of the Lord to joint-heirship with the Lord in the Spiritual Kingdom. As ours will be the still higher reward and the still higher station, it follows that the trial of our faith will be still more crucial than that of the ancient worthies. The Lord places us frequently where we have opportunities of choosing between this and that, and where, therefore, it becomes a matter of character or principle with us which we should choose. There is no virtue in choosing that which alone is possible to us. As the Scriptures declare, "The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deut. 13:3.) In proportion to our love for the Lord will be our obedience to him, and obedience to him means obedience to the principles of righteousness for which he stands and which are inculcated by his Word; and principles obediently followed develop character, which in turn, by patience, perseverance, must be crystallized, become firm and fixed and unwavering.

THE BLESSING OF THE LORD

God's blessing was upon those boys and their fixity of principle. He blessed them with superior wisdom, knowledge and grace, so that not only the eunuch perceived his favor in them but their companions also, and ultimately the king. The course of training in that college required three years (v. 5). At the end of that time the king called all the students before him and conversed with them, asking questions, etc. The superiority of the four young Hebrews was very manifest, and they were at once selected for officers of the king's court and subsequently reached very high positions of influence and power in the kingdom as governors, etc., especially Daniel. Nevertheless, as might be expected, this favor with God and with the king meant to a considerable degree the jealousy and enmity of their associates. We see this, for instance, in the reporting of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to the king; we see it also in the casting of Daniel into the lions' den, the result of a conspiracy amongst the various officers and wise men of the kingdom against Daniel.

DARE TO BE A DANIEL

Here we have illustrated our Lord's words to us his followers, "Whosoever will live godly in this present time shall suffer persecution"—opposition from the world, the flesh and the adversary. This opposition is so great that many would not think for a moment of encountering it; they therefore are not of the special class whom the Lord is now seeking. Others more courageous, more loyal to the Lord, essay to fight the good fight, but when they come to realize something of

the opposition and its weight and force and how it touches all the affairs of life, their hearts fail them, because they have not the sufficiency of faith in the Lord nor the sufficiency of love for him. The faithful, like Daniel, will set themselves for the attainment of their object at any cost. Their faith tells them that their object is worthy of their

::R3631 : page 282::

effort; their love inspires them, or, as the Apostle would say, constrains them to obedience even to the extent of laying down their lives in the Lord's service; neither count they their lives dear unto them that they may win Christ and be found in him.

But there is another side to this question. There are compensations to be had on the Lord's side and the side of righteousness. Sobriety, self-denial, do not mean merely disappointments, trials, deprivations, oppositions, but they mean also the King's favor. They mean the satisfaction of the heart, the mind; they mean peace with God and peace with our own consciences, and they mean additionally clearness of mind and restfulness of heart.

DEFILING THE TEMPLES

Daniel's determination not to be defiled with certain food reminds us of the words of the Apostle, "If any man defile the Temple of God, him will God destroy." In one sense of the word the Temple of God is the Church, which is now in process of construction as our Lord shapes, fashions and polishes the living stones for places therein. Whoever introduces into the Church that which is defiling, whoever does injury to any of its living stones, is an evil doer in the highest sense of that term, in that he is defiling, injuring the body of Christ, which is the Church. If all could realize this how careful all would be in respect to the bringing in of different errors and false doctrines, misinterpretations of Scripture, etc. How careful each then would be to see that he speaks the things which he does know, that he would confine himself to the things written in the Word of the Lord. In proportion as those who are right at heart see this they will be careful that they do nothing to defile or stumble or injure any of the Lord's little ones.

In another phase of the subject the Apostle speaks of each body, each member of the New Creation, as a Temple, a Tabernacle, in which for the time being the holy Spirit dwells. From this standpoint we should be careful to have our bodies as clean, as pure, as holy as possible. We cannot transform our flesh to make perfect that which was born in sin and shapen in iniquity, but in proportion as the holy Spirit is received by us and in proportion as it has the control of us, in that same proportion there will be a gradual transforming power of the holy Spirit to work in us to will and to do God's good pleasure. Such should remember the instruction of the Apostle to all of this class, that they should purge out the old leaven of malice, hatred, envy, etc., and again his

admonition that we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit—perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.—2 Cor. 7:1.

We firmly believe that all who receive that grace of God into good and honest hearts will surely experience a cleansing work—that the Truth will tend to make them cleaner physically as well as mentally. We are not advocating outward cleanliness as godliness, but an inward cleanliness which will do all it can to accomplish an outward cleansing. And very generally it succeeds—the filthiness of the flesh in various senses of the word begin to disappear. In proportion as the spirit of righteousness and truth and love enter into the heart, filthy words, filthy conduct, filthy habits, filthy appearance, all begin to come under the control of the transformed mind.

The Apostle distinguishes between the filthiness of the flesh and that of the spirit, the outward and manifest filthiness and the inward and secret filthiness; and, while

::R3632 : page 282::

both are important works, the latter undoubtedly is the more important of the two—to be cleansed from the filthiness of the spirit, filthiness of the mind. This refers not only to licentious thoughts, but to evil thoughts and inclinations of every kind; hatred, malice, strife, revenge, backbiting, evil speaking, all these come under this head of filthiness of the spirit. The poor tongue that utters the bitter words and voices the animosities is merely the servant of the heart, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. If there were no bitterness in the heart how could the tongue shoot out arrows, even bitter words—especially against the righteous, against those who are seeking to walk in the Lord’s ways, however imperfectly—against those whom the Lord has covered with the robe of his righteousness? The Lord grant us more and more of this cleansing of the spirit, that we may be more and more filled with his spirit of love and sympathy and compassion, which does not readily impute evil but is full of mercy and good fruits.

=====

— September 15, 1905 —



Jeżeli zauważyłeś błąd w pisowni, powiadom nas poprzez zaznaczenie tego fragmentu tekstu i przyciśnięcie *Ctrl+Enter*.