

MARCH OF EMPIRE - LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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CHAPTER 8

Daniel in the Lion's Den

LESSON TEXT -- Daniel 6:1-28

The First Six Chapters of Daniel Are Historical in Character -- The Last Six Chapters Are Still Prophetic -- The March of Empire Was Revealed by Using the Metallic Image of a Man -- The Metals in the Image Represented Moral Decay in Gentile Governments -- Daniel Placed in High Authority in a Gentile Kingdom -- Why Daniel Was Chosen -- He Deserved Such High Honor and Could Be Trusted with Great Responsibility -- The Self-seeking Princes Plotted Against Daniel -- Because Daniel Was of Noble Character They Had Difficulty Accusing Him -- They Lied About Daniel and Flattered the King -- They Asked for Daniel to Be Slain by Their Traditional Form or Manner of Capital Punishment -- Daniel Was Not Afraid -- Daniel's Faith and Perseverance in Prayer Was Based Upon the Word of GOD -- Daniel in the Lion's Den -- How He Was Delivered -- The King's Decree

The first six chapters of Daniel, as we have discovered, are historical in character, and the last six chapters are prophetic.

We have progressed in our present study to Daniel the sixth chapter which means that we are nearing the end of the historical portion of the Book. The first six chapters are mostly narration and furnish us with a necessary background for a proper interpretation of the chapters which follow. Let us not forget that Daniel was, in a distinctive sense, the prophet of "**the times of the Gentiles.**"

A study of this book, therefore, is of timely interest and importance to all Bible-loving Christians everywhere, especially in these closing days of the present dispensation when world events are coming to pass according to the outline of prophecy given in this book.

In the fifth chapter, which we studied in our last lesson, we considered the personal history of Daniel at the time of Belshazzar, the King of Babylon. The chapter dealt especially with an account of the handwriting on the wall, which served as a warning to Belshazzar and declared that he had been weighed in the balances and was found wanting and that his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians, which was accomplished, the very night that

the handwriting appearing upon the wall.

LESSON TEXT

We are now ready to advance in our study by considering what is written in the sixth chapter of the Book of Daniel, which gives to us a detailed account of Daniel in the lion's den. This portion of the Book of Daniel is perhaps more familiar to young and old alike than any other portion of the book, because it is often chosen as a foundation for the international Sunday School lesson. Though often studied, it never fails to have an interest for those who read and study what is written in this remarkable chapter. Pray with us therefore, that GOD will bless and use His Word as we read and study it together. In this chapter we have the history of Daniel under Darius to the ascension of Cyrus. In Daniel 6:1-3 it says, "**It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.**"

THE MARCH OF EMPIRE

Let us ever keep in mind that, in Daniel the second chapter under the symbolism of the great metallic image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, and which was interpreted by Daniel, GOD gave a prophetic outline or foreview of the march of empire during the times of the Gentiles. Let us remember that there was a general decline from the head of gold, to the feet and the toes of the image which were made of iron, mixed with clay, which indicated that there would be a process of change and decay in the order of Gentile governments to the time of the end, of all Gentile dominion.

HISTORICAL PROGRESS, BUT MORAL DECAY

Since the Babylonian kingdom had been overthrown and Darius the Median had taken the kingdom as indicated in the last verse of the fifth chapter, we must recognize that our present lesson begins with that period of history represented by the chest and the arms of the image which were made of silver. Silver is not worth as much as gold, thus we see the downward tendency in Gentile government as represented by the image.

AN HISTORICAL EXAMPLE

The change in government is well indicated in the first three verses of the chapter, which we have just read. The kingdom of Darius was ruled over by 120 princes. Over these 120 princes three presidents were named who sat in positions of high honour and authority. Strange as it may seem, Daniel, who was a Jew, and who was of the captivity of the Children of Israel when they were taken into Babylonian captivity, was named by King Darius as the chief one of the three presidents. This gave to him virtually the position of prime minister in the government of Darius in the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. How strange, you may say, that a Jew had risen to such a position of power in a Gentile kingdom, but not so strange

when you consider what is stated in the third verse, where it says, "Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellant spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm."

WHY DANIEL WAS CHOSEN

Daniel had a good record back of him, for he had served under King Nebuchadnezzar and also under Belshazzar for whom he interpreted the handwriting on the wall. In chapter five and verse eleven the queen spoke of Daniel as one in whom was the spirit of the holy gods, and she acknowledged that he was a man of understanding and of wisdom, and that an excellent spirit was in him.

It was natural, therefore, that King Darius would be quick to discern these qualities in Daniel and that he would seek the advice and the counsel of such a man, who had proved himself and who was among the wisest men to be found anywhere in his kingdom.

HONOR TO WHOM HONOR IS DUE

Whether you know it or not, some of the highest officials in our own government here in the United States are members of the Hebrew race and you may rest assured that they hold these high offices because of the virtue and wisdom which they possess. We should be willing therefore, to give honor to whom honor is due regardless of race or color.

THE PLOT OF THE PRINCES AGAINST DANIEL

We now come to a very interesting part of our story which is contained in verses four to nine of our lesson text where it says, "**Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.** Then said these men, **We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.** Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore king Darius signed a writing and the decree."

This portion of our story has in it many things of human interest as well as divine instruction.

DANIEL WAS A NOBLE CHARACTER

The first thing that we notice, is the spotless character of Daniel who was a man of faith and prayer and who walked with GOD continually and who administered the affairs of his high

office with all prudence and fairness and impartiality in the fear of GOD.

It was these very things which brought upon Daniel the trial of his faith, related to us in this chapter. The very fact that he was so good and pure and noble aroused the jealousy of the other princes who were heathen in character and who were unprincipled in their conduct and who were ambitious to obtain greater power at any price. We do not wonder, therefore, that they formed such a subtle plot against Daniel who was the object of their jealousy and who stood in the way of their personal ambitions. Since they could find no occasion in Daniel as to his character or conduct, in the high office which he held, they sought against him on the grounds of his religion, "concerning the law of his God."

This very fact reveals that they knew of the faith and the devotion which Daniel had for the GOD of Israel, and their words reveal also what a living testimony Daniel was in the midst of the spiritual darkness and the political corruption of that Gentile kingdom.

THE PRINCES TOLD A LIE

In forming their plot against Daniel I want you to notice that the first thing they did was to tell a lie to the king. In the seventh verse of our lesson text they said, "**All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.**"

When they reported, that all the presidents, the governors, the princes, and the captains had consulted together to make such a decree their statement included Daniel also, for he was chief of the three presidents whom Darius had placed over the kingdom. But mind you, Daniel was no party to such a plot. On the contrary, he was the object of the plot. It is evident, therefore, that they told the king a falsehood for the purpose of ensnaring Daniel and of finding occasion against him.

THE PRINCES USED FLATTERY

I want you to notice also the subtle tactics which they used to persuade the king to assist them in their diabolical purposes. Not only did they lie to him as to Daniel's part in the plot but they flattered the king by exalting him into the place of a god. Their request was that the king would make a firm decree that whosoever should ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days except of the king, should be cast into the den of lions. Needless to say, these words flattered the king and they were more than he could stand. Being overpersuaded by the princes, and joyful over the fact that he would be looked upon and deified above the gods of the heathen, he signed the writing and the decree. Thus we see again the fact which has been evident throughout the times of the Gentiles! Ever since men rebelled against GOD at the tower of Babel the tendency has been to humanize GOD and to deify man. These princes, in order to find occasion against Daniel, played upon the subtle pride of the king and won his consent to be deified as a god, for at least thirty days, in order that they might execute their diabolical and murderous purposes against Daniel.

THE PERSIAN CUSTOM OF PUNISHMENT

It is interesting to know, why they made request, that anyone who should be found guilty of transgressing this new law should be cast into the lion's den. This was in keeping with the custom of the Persians for executing capital punishment upon criminals. The Chaldeans under King Nebuchadnezzar were in the habit of burning their criminals to death. Hence they threw Daniel's three companions into the burning fiery furnace, which was the natural thing for them to do. But we are told that the Persians were worshippers of fire and regard such manner of execution against criminals as an abomination. Thus we discover why it was they advised that any transgressor be cast into the lion's den, for such a principle and manner of execution was common among them.

DANIEL WAS FAITHFUL AND FEARLESS

We now come to that portion of the chapter which reveals the steadfastness of Daniel. In verses ten to fifteen of our lesson text it says, "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. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king established may be changed."

DANIEL'S ACTIONS WERE BASED UPON THE WORD OF GOD

This portion of our chapter is very interesting and very touching when we understand the historical and spiritual background of those events that are stated here. Daniel was not a religious fanatic, no, not in any sense of the term, but he was acting in faith and obedience to the Word of GOD contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. He knew what was stated in the prayer of Solomon, which he offered at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. He knew that in II Chronicles 6:36-39 Solomon had prayed saying, "**If they sin against thee, (for there is no man which sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land, far off or near; Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly; if they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in**

the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name: Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee."

WE MUST ADMIRE DANIEL'S FAITH AND COURAGE

Thus, my friends, we see that Daniel was consistent in all that he did, and we cannot help but admire his spiritual integrity and his devotion and the fearlessness of his faith. Few men would have had faith and courage to do what he did in spite of the decree which had been issued against him. According to the story as given in our lesson text, we are made to feel sorry for the king than for Daniel, for the king realized what a foolish thing he had done, but because the law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed, the king, as well as Daniel, was caught by the subtlety and the craftiness of the wicked, ambitious princes. Such a thing could never have happened in the Babylonian kingdom for in Babylon the word of King Nebuchadnezzar was absolute, for, "**whom he would he slew and whom he would he kept alive.**" Thus we see the decline in Gentile government from that of the absolute monarchy, toward parliamentary rule which tendency has continued until today in Gentile government, until kings have become mere figureheads. The voice of the people has become more and more the power which governs the throne. This is true of Gentile governments everywhere throughout the world.

THE LAW WAS CARRIED OUT TO THE VERY LETTER

In verses 16 and 17 of our lesson text it says, "**Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.**"

These words need little comment but they reveal the anxiety and the hopeful faith of the king who had done all within his power to save Daniel from such a fate. Daniel's faith and self-composure were of great benefit and encouragement to the king, who said, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee."

THE ACTIONS OF A FEARFUL KING

We now come to a very interesting part of our story in verses 18 to 24 where it says, "**Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.**

My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den."

A WONDROUS FAITH AND THE POWER OF GOD

In these words, my friends, we see not only the faith of Daniel but the power of the living God, who was able to deliver Daniel from the lions' den.

We see also the fate of those, who in wickedness, hate, malice and jealousy had plotted against Daniel who was innocent in the sight of God and man. The judgment which was executed seems very severe but was entirely in keeping with Oriental ideas of justice.

THE RESULT OF THESE STRANGE THINGS

We now come to the closing portion of our chapter which gives to us the result of this experience through which Daniel passed because of his faith and devotion to GOD. In verses 25 to 28 it says, "**Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast forever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in Heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.**"

Thus, my friends, we see the far-reaching influence which grew out of the faith and devotion to GOD which Daniel had in the midst of these experiences through which he passed. May GOD grant that our faith and devotion to Him and to His cause may bear fruit also to His glory and to our good and the salvation of those who are lost.

~ end of chapter 8 ~
