

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Daniel

Lesson 2: From Jerusalem to Babylon

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim” sets the date for the beginning of the Book of Daniel. Jehoiakim’s reign lasted seven years and in every respect was a disaster for himself and the people of Judah, and was the beginning of the end for the nation. The reformatory work done by Josiah was soon overthrown and the people returned to their pagan idolatry. The voices of the prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk rose louder in response to the declining spirituality of the people, but their warnings went unheeded and were scorned. Rejecting the word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit through His prophets precipitated the crisis. The fast that Jehoiakim proclaimed in 607 B.C., perhaps superstitiously, did not effect any significant change in the people’s hearts and minds.

When Nebuchadnezzar first marched against Jerusalem he ended up taking captives as well as certain sacred vessels from the Temple. King Jehoiakim had been bound in fetters with the intention of his removal from Judah to Babylon, but this was not done. Nebuchadnezzar decided to leave him in Jerusalem as a vassal to Babylon. However, all persons who were physically strong enough or in a political position in which they could foment an uprising, were carted off to Babylonian garrisons. Over three different deportations there were a total of 4600 of the highest ranking, best educated, and strongest people carried away by Nebuchadnezzar’s army (Jer. 52:28-30).

We do not know how many of these people were considered “princes” of Judah who were placed in Nebuchadnezzar’s special holding area in his palace, but we are told that they were “without blemish, well favored, and skillful in wisdom, knowledge and science.” While living in Judah, even under the terrible conditions of war, some of these young men sought to be well prepared intellectually and spiritually for whatever was coming upon them.

When they were taken captive, all the young men were living in a completely immoral society where great confusion about who God is was rampant. But the four men that are brought into focus in the narrative—Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—had especially dedicated their lives to the one true God of heaven and earth. Even though sin abounded in their country, God did not leave in the dark those who sought to know the truth. God is never without a witness and His word is never so abused or obscured that truth cannot be found and diligently studied.

How had their culture become so corrupt? They like us, live in a sinful world, and because our basic human nature “is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7), we accept various sins as normal for the society in which we live. Hazy, indistinct ideas about what

constitutes sin produces only a hazy, indistinct response to it when we're confronted by it. This is a major reason why there is so much apostasy and backsliding in the church, then and now.

Another example is Lot's children, raised in a completely immoral society they succumbed to sin's seduction and could not discern the danger when their father warned them to flee in the night to avoid destruction. They had been so influenced by the society in which they lived, through mind working upon mind during their daily associations, that the "natural" enmity they had for God was stimulated into action. We may shake our heads in disbelief over their wrong decision, but we are of the same mind. We await only convenient circumstances to demonstrate our willingness to also commit the same sin that we frown on in others.

Through our neglect to call sin by its right name, we are constantly compromising our moral convictions, convincing ourselves little by little that "sin must not be so bad" since the whole of our society is committing it without apparent condemnation. By our silence and lack of moral outrage when confronted by evil, we are in essence condoning those sins committed by our society.

When Daniel and his companions were confronted with the king's command to "eat from his table" food and drink that were not wholesome and included the flesh of animals sacrificed to pagan idols, an opportunity for a major compromise was presented to them. Those young men who had not shunned compromise while living in Judah were not likely to stand firm to principle in Babylon. However, Daniel's group, when they came face to face with this difficult problem, knew they could rely on God's teaching and His protection.

The lesson from Daniel chapter 1 is especially for us, showing us how we should be living. Daniel learned the message of righteousness while living among corruption and sin in Judah. That message was the only thing that could prepare him for the trials he faced. Just so, the message of Christ and His righteousness brought to us in 1888, and largely neglected ever since, is the only message that will prepare us to stand in the time of trouble.

In the near future when we are called upon to pass through challenging experiences, we will not be able to endure if we have not prepared ourselves before that time. We must have already obtained that spiritual "eyesalve" that Jesus wants us to receive from Him (Rev. 3:18). We must have already given up everything that impedes the power of the Holy Spirit to work upon our minds in guiding us during that "time of trouble such as never was" on the earth (Dan. 12:1). Voluntary self-control ("temperance in all things") must be the standard of our life. Control of appetite is the foundation of all self-control.

We are on the borders of the heavenly Canaan, and living in the antitypical fulfillment of the challenge that the children of Israel faced at Baal-Peor (Num. 25:1-3). If we open our eyes we will recognize the parallels between that day and ours.

“The last great day is right upon us. Let all consider that Satan is now striving for the mastery over souls. He is playing the game of life for your souls. Will there be sins committed by you on the very borders of the heavenly Canaan? ... Men that God has entrusted with noble talents will be, unless closely connected with God, guilty of great weakness, and not having the grace of Christ in the soul will become connected with greater crimes. This is because they do not make the truth of God a part of them. Their discipline has been defective, the soul culture has not been carried forward from one advance to another, inborn tendencies have not been restrained, but have degraded the soul. For all the natural weaknesses Jesus has made ample provision, that they may be overcome through His grace. If not overcome, the weakness will become a tyrant, a conqueror, to overcome them, and the heavenly light will become beclouded and extinguished” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 24, 1887).

God desires to shape our character through the things He allows to happen to us, whether accidents or disease or loss of wealth or death of loved ones, or as in the case of Daniel and his three companions, unjust captivity. Faith sees through and reaches through all these trials and tragedies, trivial or major. Through all that comes upon us to afflict us and make us miserable, we are to steadfastly look to Jesus and know that nothing in this earth can truly hurt us. “What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No! In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us” (Rom. 8:35, 36 ff.).

—Ann Walper

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTkjC-hFkuM&list=PLsjY9Yfwx9Nx1uiXLI_c49fae41rrkgPO

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