

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Daniel

Lesson 3: From Mystery to Revelation

King Nebuchadnezzar was proud of his empire, and his beautiful capital city, Babylon. He hoped it would remain forever. He knew very well, however, as all men know, that some day he must die. Then what would happen to his kingdom?

He was a pagan king, and knew nothing about the one true God of heaven. His only contact had been through God's unfaithful people, the Jews, whom Nebuchadnezzar had been able to conquer and take captive. Since he conquered the Jews, who could blame him for thinking that he was greater than their God? The people of Israel had loved themselves more than others, and thought that they alone could be saved. Poor Nebuchadnezzar! In his paganism, he knew no better than to do many wrong things. But God could see that his heart was honest.

There is a fascinating story in Daniel 2, telling how the intelligentsia of ancient Babylon were ahead of their time in their counterfeit idea of God. The rock-bottom basis of their false idea is held today by millions.

The King Nebuchadnezzar had understood enough to know that there is somewhere in the universe a true God. He had blindly trusted the religious leaders of his empire, assuming they were in touch with whoever this "God" is. The true God of heaven had given him what we now know was a prophetic dream of tremendous importance. But God also gave the king temporary amnesia so that events could disillusion him. He correctly decided that if the religious leaders of his empire were indeed in touch with "God," whoever He was, they could learn from Him the details of his prophetic vision and explain it. Good thinking!

But they were stumped. The king was in distress; it seemed that the fate of the world depended on his understanding this strange divine revelation (in a way, it did!). He demanded that they earn their wages by demonstrating their "superior" wisdom. Impossible, they said; no one on earth could do what you want "except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh" (Dan. 2:11).

And there lies the root of all religious falsehood, even some so-called "Christian." The Bible says there are "many false prophets" today (as there were in Babylon). Their fundamental idea? The same as the Chaldeans—it "does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, ... and this is the spirit of the Antichrist" (1 John 4:1-3).

Two aspects that highlight the 1888 message are: (1) the humanity which Christ took, and (2) Christ is the "Saviour of the world." The story of Daniel embraces both as his story unfolds.

The Babylonians believed there is a “God,” but not one who has taken upon Himself our “flesh,” “the likeness of sinful flesh,” who “took part” of the same fallen “flesh and blood” that all we “children” of the fallen Adam by nature possess. In that same “flesh” that we have, Christ “condemned sin” so that “the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled” in all who will simply have “the faith of Jesus” (see Rom. 8:3, 4; Heb. 2:14-17; Rev. 14:12).

We cannot approve of the anger and cruelty which Nebuchadnezzar shows toward his professed “wise men.” But we must remember that this is the anger of an autocrat who has been deceived by those whom he trusted. And all the while, he is basically an honest man.

Note that these were *pagan* “wise men” who believed that God’s “dwelling is not with flesh.” In the end of time there will be only two basic religions in the world: (1) The “faith of Jesus” which declares (as Scripture says) that in His incarnation the Son of God “was made in the likeness of men,” that “God [sent] His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,” that He was “in all points tempted *like* as we are, yet without sin,” that He “condemned sin in the flesh,” our flesh, by denying self all His life up to Gethsemane and even to His cross (Phil. 2:5-8; Rom. 8:3, 4; Heb. 4:14; John 5:30, 6:38; Matt. 26:39; all “dynamics” of the 1888 message).

(2) This belief of the pagan “wise men” of Babylon in a “god” who does not “dwell with flesh,” that the Son of God did not “take” our fallen, sinful flesh upon Himself but was cut off from DNA identity with the human race through a dogma of an “Immaculate Conception,” thus removing from humanity our Savior *from* sin and substituting for us a savior *in* sin. One who did not take our nature could not save us from sin, for he could not be “tempted *like* as we are.”

Thank God Daniel is magnanimous enough to ask to have the lives of the foolish “wise men” saved, although they do not deserve mercy. Daniel hopes that among them there might be found *some* willing to listen to truth and find salvation through the story of the king’s dream. Their lives are saved because of Daniel, a servant of God, but also a figure of Christ, the “Saviour of the world,” in the same way today God spares the lives of many wicked people because of the few righteous ones among them (see Gen. 18:26-32 for an example of how God works even now).

The dream given to Nebuchadnezzar reveals “what shall be in the latter days.” It extends to *our* days. Daniel is not ancient history. It’s more modern than tomorrow’s TIME magazine.

As a servant of God, Daniel takes no credit to himself for his understanding. He gives it all to God. His motive: that the king also might learn to believe the God of truth. He makes certain at the very beginning of his lecture before what was probably a packed house that the thoughts of all who are listening might be directed not to himself but to the God of heaven. At last God has a youth whom He can trust!

The establishment of an eternal kingdom will bring an end to sin. The signal for its establishment is Christ’s success in leading a people to “overcome even as [He] also overcame” (Rev. 3:20). All human history for all past ages has been moving to this day. All who dwell upon the earth will see the establishment of this kingdom. Not only will the

remnants of the empire of Rome be broken to pieces by this “stone cut out without hands.” *All nations upon the face of the earth will be included.* In the end, there is nothing that will be left except that great stone which was cut out of the mountain “without hands.” This will be the eternal kingdom of God.

When and how will this kingdom be established? This kingdom of glory was not established when Christ was here upon the earth, for He said it would come later (Matt. 26:29; Acts 1:6). Flesh and blood cannot inherit it (1 Cor. 15:50). It will be established in the time when Jesus judges both the living and the dead “at His appearing,” *when He comes the second time* (2 Tim. 4:1). *Then* He will come in His own glory with the glory of His angels (Matt. 25:31-34).

Thus we see clearly that this stone “cut out without hands,” which strikes the image upon the feet represents the second coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory. “Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:24).

It is now that God is preparing the subjects of His coming kingdom. It is *now* that He sends the Holy Spirit to men and women everywhere, calling them to consecrate all to Him, that He may rule over them as king of Love. Jesus is the only King in all world history who has conquered, not by force of arms, but by the power of love. Millions would die for Him today.

We are happy to know that Daniel did not become proud after such honor. His early home training when a child, the teachings of self-control and humility which his mother taught him, and his education in the knowledge of the King of Heaven, all these preserved him from falling into vanity when he was elevated to a position of honor and responsibility so high above his fellows. What great Good News this is, that today as the Holy Spirit works in all the world He is training youth who will, like Daniel, endure such honor in humility.

Ellen G. White wrote: “Among those who profess to be servants of Christ an earnest purpose should be cultivated, such as Daniel manifested in the courts of Babylon. He knew that God was his strength and his shield, his front guard and his rear guard. Amid the corruptions that surrounded him in the courts of Babylon he kept himself free from those sights and sounds which would allure him and draw him into temptation. When his duties required that he be present at scenes of revelry, intemperance, and basest idolatry, he cultivated the habit of silent prayer, and thus he was kept by the power of God. ... Let the soul cultivate the habit of contemplating the world’s Redeemer” (*The Youth’s Instructor*, June 7, 1894; *That I May Know Him*, p. 247).

Daniel’s book lives on! And it continues to bear rich fruitage in hearts and lives changed by the much more abounding grace of Christ. Daniel gave the king Good News. Let’s believe it!

—From the Writings of Robert J. Wieland

Notes:

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvI1mBgaASY>

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