BIBLE CLASS – THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET DANIEL - CHAPTER ONE 19.01.2023

1— THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET DANIEL

IN the last one hundred and fifty years or so, a remarkable amount of information has been revealed about the early Middle East which helps our understanding of the Bible record. Archaeologist have discovered ancient cities have been excavated, revealing artefacts, engraved inscriptions and scrolls containing information of every kind. These ancient writings have been deciphered and evaluated enabling us to know a great deal more about the early empires of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, and significantly Israel and her neighbours. This is true of the times of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar.



Early historians like Herodotus, Berosus and Josephus give us some details, but they were not contemporary with the events they described and are not always reliable. However, some of their accounts have been confirmed or corrected by the Scriptures and archaeological discoveries. Until comparatively recently the only knowledge of events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar came from the Bible, but in 1956 there was published part of the Babylonian Chronicle, which is now in the British Museum, and which tells of Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns up to the time he appointed Zedekiah as ruler in Judah; this, we are told, took place in the 7th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

Daniel chapter 1 records events which began in 606 B.C. and explains how Daniel and his three companions came to be in the king's palace in Babylon.

In this year the Chaldean Nabopolassar was still king of Babylon, but he was failing in health and his capable son Nebuchadnezzar was both crown prince and chief of the army. Nabopolassar had been ruling the new empire of Babylon for many years. He had gained power through his military exploits, chief of which had been his alliance with the king of the Medes to overthrow Assyria to the north. This was finally achieved when Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. The Medes took over the north and eastern parts of that empire and Babylon took the rest.

Judah under Tribute

It was necessary to assimilate this new and adjacent territory before attempting to subjugate the more distant parts of the former Assyrian empire such as Syria and Palestine. Egypt under Pharaoh Necho took advantage of this power vacuum to occupy the whole of Syria and to put the little kingdom of Judah under tribute. By 606 B.C. the Babylonians felt secure enough to drive the Egyptians from the occupied territories. Nebuchadnezzar, then a young prince, defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish on the Euphrates and chased the defeated army, all the way back to Egypt. On the way he determined to teach the troublesome kingdom of Judah a grim lesson. He took as tribute from them some of the sacred vessels from the temple and a number of nobles and young princes, among them Daniel and his three friends. Josephus says that these four youths were members of the royal house of Judah and if that is so they were related to each other.

Due to his father's death Nebuchadnezzar raced back to Babylon across 600 miles of desert, leaving his army, to take the longer route through Israel's former territory and Syria. Altogether about a thousand miles. We can imagine the misery of all the captives torn from their homes, exiled from their country and the temple and marched relentlessly and harshly for nearly 1000 miles to a heathen and alien country.

One of the dire penalties foretold to King Hezekiah by the prophet Isaiah: was, "Thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (39:7).

The humiliating and cruel practice of making young men into eunuchs was a heathen practice ensuring that there would be no descendants to raise a later rebellion or to reclaim their rightful inheritance. It seems probable that Daniel and

his friends were so treated, especially as there is no record of wives or children. This would have been a really bitter blow to the young princes of Judah with the value they would place on inheritance and their hopes for the Messiah.

Perhaps Isaiah almost anticipating what would come, writes 56:3-5 “Neither let the eunuch say, Behold I am a dry tree, for thus says the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an *everlasting* name, that shall not be cut off” (56:3–5).

Doubtless, Daniel and his friends will indeed receive this at Christ’s coming.

Many heathen kings enjoyed having captive royalty in their service—it gave them a sense of power. However, Nebuchadnezzar improved on this. He had the most gifted and physically perfect youths educated for positions at court. When they were about 15 years old they were given three years of intensive training in all the arts and sciences of the Chaldeans, the ruling class.

Babylonian Gods

The names of these gods were often incorporated into the names and titles of the rulers and officers. Nebuchadnezzar, his father, and the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus, had the name Nebo; while Daniel was given the name of Belteshazzar, and the son of Nabonidus, the name Belshazzar. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah decry these false gods when speaking of the fate of Babylon—“Bel bows down, Nebo stoops” (Isa. 46:1). And “Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces” (Jer. 50:2).

As we know, Daniel and his friends were chosen for the special three year training at the palace. Not only were they handsome, healthy and highly intelligent, but they were courteous and faithful: altogether a remarkable group of young men who were destined to be God’s witnesses in high office, as Joseph and Moses had once been. God was with them and to this end brought Daniel into “tender love” with the prince of the eunuchs. From Nebuchadnezzar’s point of view, they were especially chosen because of their qualities and abilities (v. 4). No doubt they had enjoyed a comfortable and secure life in Israel, perhaps in the palace of the king (v. 3), but now plucked from their familiar home background they were plunged into the midst of a strange and alien land. There is no doubt about the intentions of the Chaldeans in this matter: it was to teach them the

learning and tongue of the Chaldeans (v. 4), to turn them from Israelites into Chaldeans, to instruct them in their learning and culture so that they might take their place in Babylon's society, and eventually adopting the habits and customs of their captors, be conformed to that world in which they found themselves. The world is God's enemy. Its aims never change. Thus it is, that in the pressures the world brings to bear upon us, its purpose remains unchanged. It seeks to mould us into its pattern that we might lose our identity as children of God; in effect to become so engrossed in the habits and customs of the people who surround us that we cannot be told apart. The nearest true believers have come into conflict with the National Authorities is a refusal to fight the enemies of the country they were borne in. This is known in the U.K as Conscientious Objection. When the government of Great Britain passed a law which demanded that all men over the age of 18 should make themselves available to fight the enemy of this country, using military force to destroy the enemy even if so doing would result in their own death. Eventually the Government accepted that if a person could prove his conscientious objection, it would be accepted provided, he was prepared to do work of national importance. This included manual labour such as farm work, refuse collection, sewage disposal, coal and mineral mining for all of which payment was minimal. In my younger years I met many brothers and sisters who had experience of bringing up families under such conditions, not one of them complained even though they suffered. Moreover we found that many of the brothers and sisters were admired for their tenacity under such difficult circumstances.

It was this affection which enabled Daniel to request that he and his friends should be allowed to eat pulse and drink water rather than the exotic foods and heady wines served at the king's tables. This was the food of slaves, but it enabled the boys to keep the Jewish food laws and avoid meat offered to idols, blood and other 'unclean' items (Acts 15:29).

God blessed them for their faithfulness, and at the end of their training the king himself examined them "and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; therefore they *stood* before the king." This was a position of honour and privilege and the four seem to have been given a house or apartment within the palace precincts. This made it possible for them to practise their faith unhindered. At this stage they were probably aged between 18 and 20

but Daniel had already been given by God “understanding in all visions and dreams” (1:17).

This is the kind of faith we need, that spirit that is ready to accept the fact that sometimes in our extremity, although we pray to God for deliverance, because He knows our every need, He might, for our ultimate good, leave us to bear our cross, to live through the adversity in which we find ourselves, so that through tribulation, our character might be moulded and we be fashioned into everything that God desires us to be. It is a question of seeing things in the right perspective, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the Kingdom and in the last analysis that is all that really matters, for “Tis not for present power or wealth, Or worldly fame we look to thee; We seek thy gift of heavenly health, The gift of immortality.”

Very soon their faith was to be put to an extreme test. Nebuchadnezzar was young too. He is thought to have been born in 630 B.C. and to have been about 25 on his full accession to the throne. In this, his second year, he could have been about 27. He also was very intelligent, capable, and very religious in a heathen sense and therefore superstitious. Ezekiel describes him as standing at the parting of the ways consulting images and looking in the liver of an animal to decide which route to take (21:21). *We* know, however, that it was the Lord who overruled the course of events.

He had inherited a large empire and had already added to it Syria and Palestine and at this early stage in his reign he was evidently concerned as to its future. It was while pondering these things one night that God sent him the extraordinary dream which we know so well and which was to provide the long-term answer to his problems

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