

Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary

Book of Daniel

Theme

The book of Daniel might appropriately be called a handbook on history and prophecy. Predictive prophecy is a preview of history; history is predictive prophecy passing in review. The element of prediction enables God's people to see the things of time in the light of eternity, alerts them for effective action at appropriate times, facilitates personal preparation for the final crisis, and provides a firm basis for faith upon fulfillment of the prediction.

The four major lines of prophecy in the book of Daniel set forth in brief outline, against the background of world history, the experiences of God's people from the days of Daniel down to the close of time. "The curtain is drawn aside, and behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies, the agencies of the All merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels on His own will" (PK 500). Each of the four lines of prophecy reaches a climax when "the God of Heaven" sets "up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (ch. 2:44), when the "Son of Man" receives "everlasting dominion" (ch. 7:13, 14), when opposition to the "Prince of princes" is "broken without hand" (ch. 8:25), and when God's people are delivered forever from their oppressors (ch. 12:1). The prophecies of Daniel thus provide a divinely constructed bridge from the precipice of time to the boundless shores of eternity, a bridge over which those who, like Daniel, purpose in their hearts to love and serve God, may pass by faith from the uncertainty and distress of the present life to the peace and security of life everlasting.

The historical section of the book of Daniel reveals, in most striking manner, the true philosophy of history (see. Ed 173-184). This section stands as a preface to the prophecy section. By providing a detailed account of God's dealings with one nation, Babylon, the book enables us to understand the meaning of the rise and fall of other nations outlined in the prophetic portion of the book. Without a clear understanding of the philosophy of history as revealed in the narrative of the role of Babylon in the divine plan, the role of other nations that succeeded Babylon on the screen of prophetic vision cannot be fully understood or appreciated. For a summary of the divine philosophy of history as set forth by inspiration, see ch. 4:17

In the historical section of the book we find Daniel, God's man of the hour, brought face to face with Nebuchadnezzar, the genius of the gentile world, that the king might have opportunity to know Daniel's God, the arbiter of history, and to cooperate with Him. Nebuchadnezzar not only was the monarch of the greatest nation of the time but was also eminently wise, and had an innate sense of justice and right. He was, in fact, the leading personality of the Gentile world, "the mighty one of the heathen" (Eze. 31:11), Raised to power for a specific role in the divine plan. Of him God said, "Now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, *my servant*" (Jer. 27:6). As the Jews went captive to Babylon it was desirable that they be held under a hand that was firm without being cruel (according to the standards of that day). Daniel's mission at the court of Nebuchadnezzar was to secure the submission of the king's will to the will of God in order that the divine purpose might be realized. In one of the dramatic moments of history God brought together these two great personalities. See p. 569.

The first four chapters of Daniel narrate the means by which God secured the allegiance of Nebuchadnezzar. First of all, God needed a man who would be a fit representative of the principles and policies of heaven at the court of Babylon, so He chose Daniel to be His personal ambassador to Nebuchadnezzar. The means God employed to bring Daniel, a captive, to the favorable attention of Nebuchadnezzar, and the means by which Nebuchadnezzar came to have confidence, first in Daniel and then in Daniel's God, illustrate the manner in which God uses men today to accomplish His will on earth. God could use Daniel because Daniel was a man of principle, a man of sterling character, a man whose chief business in life was to live for God.

Daniel "purpose in his heart" (ch. 1:8) to live in harmony with all the revealed will of God. First, God brought him "into favor and tender love" with the officials of Babylon (v. 9). This prepared the way for the second step, the demonstration of the physical superiority of Daniel and his companions (vs. 12:15). Then followed a demonstration of intellectual superiority. "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom" (v. 17), with the result that they were considered "ten times better" than their closest competitors (v. 20). Thus, in personality, physique, and intellect Daniel proved to be markedly superior to his fellow men, and thereby won the confidence and respect of Nebuchadnezzar.

These events prepared Nebuchadnezzar to meet Daniel's God. A series of dramatic experiences—the dream of chapter 2, the striking deliverance from the fiery furnace (ch. 3), and the dream of chapter 4—demonstrated to the king's satisfaction the knowledge, power, and authority of Daniel's God. The inferiority of human knowledge, exhibited in the experience of chapter 2, led Nebuchadnezzar to admit to Daniel, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a reveler of secrets" (ch. 2:47). He freely acknowledged that the wisdom of God was superior, not only to human wisdom, but even to the supposed wisdom of his own gods. The incident of the golden image and the fiery furnace led Nebuchadnezzar to admit that the God of heaven "delivered his servants" (ch. 3:28). His conclusion was that no one in his realm should "speak anything amiss against the God" of the Hebrews, in view of the fact that "no other God" can "deliver after this sort" (v. 29). Nebuchadnezzar now recognized that the God of heaven was not only wise but powerful, that He was not only omniscient but omnipotent. The third experience—the seven years during which his own vaunted wisdom and power were temporarily remove—taught the king not only that "the most High" is wise and powerful but that He exercises that wisdom and power to rule in human affairs (ch. 4:32). He has wisdom, power, and authority. It is significant that the first act Nebuchadnezzar performed after his reason returned to him was to "praise and extol and honour the King of heaven" and to acknowledge that "those that walk in pride" as he had done for so many years, God is able to abase" (v. 37).

But the lesson Nebuchadnezzar personally learned over a period of many years largely fail to benefit those who succeeded him upon the throne of Babylon. The last ruler of Babylon, Belshazzar, openly defied the God of heaven (ch. 5:23) in spite of the fact that he was acquainted with the experience of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 22). Instead of working in harmony with the divine plan, "Babylon became a proud and cruel oppressor" (Ed 176), and in the rejection of the principles of heaven wrought its own ruin (Ed 177). The nation was weighed and found wanting (ch. 5:25-28), and world dominion passed to the Persians.

In delivering Daniel from the lions' den, God demonstrated His power and authority before the rulers of the Persian Empire (see ch. 6:20-23; PK 557) as He had previously before those of Babylon. An Edict of Darius the Mede acknowledged "the living God" and admitted that He is "steadfast for ever" (v. 26). Even "the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not" (v. 8), was obliged to yield before the decrees of "the most High," who "ruleth in the kingdom of men"

(ch. 4:32). Cyrus was favorably impressed by the miraculous evidence of divine power exhibited in the deliverance of Daniel from the lions' den (PK 557). The prophecies outlining his role in the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple (Isa. 44:26-45:13) also made a deep impression upon him. His heart was profoundly moved, and he determined to fulfill his divinely appointed mission (PK 557).

Thus the book of Daniel gives a demonstration of the principles according to which God's wisdom, power, and authority operate through the history of the nations for the eventual accomplishment of the divine purpose. "God exalted Babylon that it might "fulfill" His purpose" (Ed 175). It had its periods of test; it "failed, its glory faded, its power departed, and its place was occupied by another" (Ed 177, see on ch. 4:17).

All four visions of the book of Daniel are concerned with the struggle between the forces of good and evil on this earth from the time of Daniel to the establishment of the eternal kingdom of Christ. Inasmuch as Satan uses the power of earth in his effort to thwart God's plan and to destroy God's people, these visions introduce those powers through which he has been most active.

The first vision (ch. 2) deals primarily with political changes. Its primary objective was to reveal to Nebuchadnezzar his role as ruler of Babylon, to make known to him "what should come to pass hereafter" (v. 29).

As if to supplement the first vision, the second (ch. 7) emphasizes the experiences of God's people during the sovereignty of the powers mentioned in the first vision, and forecasts the ultimate victory of the saints and God's judgment upon their enemies (see vs. 14, 18, 26, 27).

The third vision (ch. 8, 9), supplementing the second, emphasizes Satan's attempts to do away with religion and people of Christ.

The fourth vision (ch. 10-12) summarizes the preceding visions and covers the ground with more detail than any of the others. It amplifies the subject of the second vision and that of the third vision. The focus of its emphasis is on "what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days" (ch. 10:14), and "the time appointed was long" (v. 1). The narrative outline of history covered in chapter 11:2-39 leads up to "the latter days" (ch. 10:14) and the events of "the time of the end" (ch. 11:40).

The prophecies of Daniel are closely related to those of the book of Revelation. In large measure Revelation covers the same ground but gives particular emphasis to the role of the Christian church as God's chosen people. Thus details that may be obscure in the book of Daniel are often clarified by comparison with the book of Revelation. That part of his "prophecy which related to the last days, Daniel was bidden to close up and seal 'to the time of the end'" (GC 356), when, through a diligent study of the book, "knowledge" of its import would be "increased" (ch. 12:4). Though "that portion of the prophecy of Daniel relating to the last days" was sealed (ch. 12:4; AA 585), John was specifically instructed to "seal not the sayings of the prophecy" of his book, "for the time is at hand" (Rev. 22:10). Thus, for a clearer interpretation of any portions of the book of Daniel that tend to be obscure, we should watch carefully the book of Revelation for light to dispel the darkness.