

F.B. Hole

**Comments on
the book of
the Prophet Daniel**

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Introduction

Isaiah prophesied in Judah both before and also during the reign of the God-fearing Hezekiah, when under his influence things seemed outwardly to be better. Yet the prophet had to reveal the hidden corruption under the surface. In our Bibles his book is followed by that of Jeremiah, who was raised up of God to speak for Him in the last sad days of Judah's history, when things were hopelessly bad and beyond recovery, and the blow fell on them through Nebuchadnezzar.

The seven nations of Canaan had formerly inhabited the land and done horrible things in it: so much so that God sent Israel against them under Joshua with orders to exterminate them. But now the Lord has to say through Jeremiah. 'A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and My people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?' (Jer. 5:30-31). What God did through the Babylonian king 'in the end thereof,' Jeremiah had to see and experience to his deep sorrow. We may get some idea of the depth of his

grief, if we read the book of Lamentations, which follows his main prophecy.

This book is followed by Ezekiel who was carried amongst many others into captivity in the days of Jehoiachin some years before the final crash fell on Zedekiah, which Jeremiah witnessed. In the land of his captivity he saw in vision the glory, which marked the presence of God, departing from temple and city, and if God was gone, all was lost.

Yet each of these three prophets predicted God's future intervention in a way that would be altogether new. Isaiah foretold things that should be absolutely new. even, 'new heavens and a new earth,' brought about by the twofold advent of the Messiah; first as the humbled Servant, to suffer for sins, and then as the mighty Arm of Jehovah redeeming in power what He had first redeemed by His blood.

Jeremiah follows, predicting that these new things will be established, not on the old covenant of law but on a new covenant of grace. Let Jeremiah 31:31-34 be read and note how again and again, 'I will,' appears, rather than the, 'If ye will,' of Exodus 19:8. In this New Covenant God is going to act according

to His own thoughts and purposes in grace, based on the work of Christ, as unfolded by Isaiah.

Ezekiel completes the prophetic outline, that is given to us by these three major prophets. In Ezekiel 36 he foretells the New Birth that will take place with a remnant of Israel before they enter on millennial blessedness, and his next chapter speaks of how they will be spiritually quickened, and brought into a new order of life.

This brings us to Daniel, who raised up by God just as the 'times of the Gentiles' (Luke 21:24) began under Nebuchadnezzar. He was enabled of God to give us a prophetic outline of the course of these times, during which the Messiah would be cut off. Hence tribulation is to be the portion of the people, but with the hope of deliverance at the end.

Daniel's prophecy falls quite simply into two parts after the introductory chapter, which relates the courageous stand of Daniel and his three companions against the taint of idolatry, and the way God honoured it. From the point where the Chaldeans spoke 'to the king in Syriack' (Dan. 2:4), to the end of Daniel 7, this language of the Gentiles is used, and Hebrew

is only reverted to as we start Daniel 8. Thus the historical details and the prophecies that relate to the Gentile powers are written in the Gentile language. Then in the five chapters that complete the book things are revealed to Daniel that mainly concern his people, though details as to the nations are referred to.

Daniel 1

Three times did Nebuchadnezzar and his servants come up against Jerusalem, when the three kings, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, fell before him. On the first of these occasions, Daniel and his three friends were carried captive amongst a number of youths of royal or princely birth, who were considered to be of exceptional intellectual capacity — the pick of the nation in wisdom and understanding. The astute Babylonian king intended to fortify his position with the cleverest men of conquered nations, working them into the army of magicians — the men who trafficked with demon powers, and gave him guidance by their occult practices.

So Daniel and his friends were to go through a kind of college course that would make them to be 'cunning in knowledge, and

understanding science;' the 'science' being doubtless connected with those 'curious arts,' mentioned in Acts 19:19, as practised in Ephesus at a later date. If the great Babylonian monarch could increase the number of men, who could give him supernatural wisdom and guidance, his power would be further increased.

Hence their food and drink was to be of a special and prescribed course from the king's table: the very best of the land, and doubtless of a kind that was connected with idolatrous rites. And further, by the prince of the eunuchs each had his original name discarded. They had come under new ownership, and this was signalized by new names of idolatrous origin and significance. Such was the position in which Daniel and his companions found themselves.

Reaching Daniel 1:8, our thoughts are arrested by the words, 'But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.' A great statement this! Had he not so purposed. no Book of Daniel would have found a place in our Bibles. Notice in the first place that the Spirit of God in the record disowns his heathen name, and uses his original one, which means, 'God is Judge.' The man evidently lived in the light of his name, and so

we notice, in the second place, that he purposed, not in his head, the seat of intelligence, but rather in his heart, the seat of affection Godward, before whom he walked. This is the kind of purpose that stands firm and does not vary.

Then, in the third place, notice that it was defilement that he was determined to avoid. From a material stand-point the food was pure without a doubt. It was the spiritual defilement he had in view, since Babylon was the original hot-bed of idolatry. His three friends are not mentioned in verse 8, but if we turn to Daniel 3:18, we discover they were entirely of the same mind and purpose as he was.

Let us take very seriously to heart the lesson that confronts us here. The secret of Daniel's remarkable power was his purposed separation from the evil world that surrounded him. He knew its defiling power and he refused it. Some five centuries after his day its true character was fully and finally exposed in the cross of Christ as He Himself said, 'Now is the judgment of this world' (John 12:31). We now live in the light of this fact, and we know that it is dominated by Satan, who is 'the god of this world' (2 Cor. 4:4); hence a purposed separation from the world is more necessary for us than it was even for Daniel.

There was with him however not only great firmness of purpose but also a wise and humble spirit in making it known. God had acted on his behalf, bringing him into favour with the prince of the eunuchs and with Melzar his subordinate, yet he did not presume on this and speak haughtily. He rather stated his desire, and presented his prayer that he and his friends might be fed on the plainest of food for ten days as a test, and on the result of this the situation should be stabilized. God was with them and as a result they were delivered from the defilement that otherwise would have been theirs.

From this incident let us learn a lesson. Separation from defilement is ever God's path for His saints, but much depends on the spirit they display as they take it. If taken in a harsh or haughty spirit, rather than a meek and lowly spirit, the testimony to others will be nullified. If our spirit in taking it is marked by, 'Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou' — the spirit that marked the Pharisees of our Lord's day — we shall be helping on the evil from which we profess to be separating ourselves. Daniel and his friends sought their separation, and maintained it, in the right spirit.

Consequently God was with them in a truly remarkable way. Not only were they fairer and fatter in their bodies, but in knowledge, skill, learning, wisdom they excelled all the others who had their portion of the king's meat; and as for Daniel, he was granted a supernatural understanding in visions and dreams, by which in those days God often made His mind known.

When tested before Nebuchadnezzar the verdict was clear. The magicians and astrologers were men who trafficked with the powers of darkness in order to possess knowledge beyond the powers of ordinary men, and compared with these the four men, taught of God, were ten times better. There is nothing surprising in this. Indeed the same thing meets us in more emphatic form in 1 Corinthians 2, where we read that the princes of this world knew nothing of God's wisdom, so much so that they 'crucified the Lord of glory.' Whereas the simplest believer, indwelt and controlled by the Spirit of God, judges, or discerns, 'all things.'

Before passing from chapter 1, we may remark that this question of food contaminated by idolatrous practices was acute among the early Christians at Corinth. They were instructed as

to it in Paul's first epistle to them, 1 Corinthians 8, and 1 Corinthians 10:25-31. Meat sold in the markets or supplied in a friend's house they could eat without raising any question; but if they were definitely informed that it had been offered in sacrifice to idols, they were to have none of it. In this the Christian keeps clear of idolatrous associations just as Daniel and his friends did.

Daniel 2

With the sensational rise of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar the times of the Gentiles began, and chapter 2 opens with the statement that as early as his second year that great monarch had a remarkable dream that troubled him much; and well it might, for in it lay a God-given revelation calculated to humble him. He lost his sleep and, what to him was worse, he lost also any recollection of his dream. He turned naturally to the Chaldeans and their associates, who trafficked with demon powers; demanding that they should recount his dream as well as give its meaning.

This demand, with the threat that, if they failed to answer to it, they should all be destroyed, does at first sight seem savage

and unreasonable. On second thoughts we may remember that just about that time there were false prophets and diviners even in Jerusalem, as we see in Jeremiah 29, whose predictions and explanations failed, and so it doubtless had been with the diviners of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar may have thought he had now a fine opportunity to test these men that surrounded him, and would wish to control him with supernatural understanding as they claimed. If they claimed to give supernatural interpretation of dreams, surely the same supernatural power could reconstruct the forgotten dream! This would verify the claims they made. And if they could not verify their claims, he would wipe them out of his kingdom!

Daniel and his friends being classified by the Babylonians as being amongst these 'wise men,' they were included in the decree issued by the furious king. The action of Daniel and his friends is instructive. They did two things. First, there was Daniel's humble supplication to the king for time, with the assurance that an answer would be forthcoming. This assurance revealed faith in God on the part of Daniel, and that of very remarkable strength. Second, having obtained this brief respite,

Daniel and his fellows gave themselves to prayer that the secret as to the dream might be revealed to them.

So here were these four men, surrounded by the grossest form of idolatry in the world's greatest city, yet so truly separated in heart and ways from it all as to be in touch with the 'God of heaven,' to the point of receiving communications from Him. The secret they prayerfully sought was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. He saw by night just what the king had seen by night some days before. Others had been enabled to interpret dreams — Joseph for instance — but to duplicate a dream, so that what appeared before the mind of one man by night should be exactly repeated before the mind of another man a few nights later; this none can achieve but God. And in no servant of His does God perform this miracle but in one who was thoroughly separated to Him from the defilements of the surrounding world.

The first thing that Daniel did was to bless God and offer praise to Him, as shown in verses 19-23. He was indeed living in an epoch, when God had been changing 'the times and the seasons,' and also removing kings, and setting up kings, showing that wisdom and might are His. The removing of the kings of

David's line and the setting up of Nebuchadnezzar had been acts of God, and Daniel bowed to this and even blessed God in the acknowledgment of it. He blessed God too that He imparted wisdom to those who had been given understanding to receive it, and in particular that the desired secret had been made known to him.

'Times and seasons' as relating to the earth are first mentioned in Genesis 1:14. We have the exact words here, and we meet with them again in Acts 1:7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1. It is clear that this expression refers to God's dispensations and dealings on the earth. In Acts 1, the disciples were not to know the time of God's dealings. Yet the Thessalonians did know the manner of God's predicted dealings, and the order in which they would transpire: indeed they knew this perfectly, though they were ignorant of the coming of the Lord for His saints, as revealed in the previous chapter. But then, that coming has to do with a heavenly calling, while 'times and seasons' relate to the earth.

The dream being revealed, Daniel is quickly brought before the king, and at once disclaims any virtue, as resident in himself. He referred the king to the God of heaven, who reveals secrets, and who intends to make known to him the future course of

Gentile dominion, that had commenced with his overthrow of Jerusalem and its king. Nebuchadnezzar was plainly told that God had thus acted for the sake of Daniel himself and his fellows, and that he might realize that he had to do with a God who knew the most secret thoughts of his heart and mind. In verses 31-35, the dream is related to the king.

We pass on however to consider the dream, as its meaning is unfolded by Daniel, beginning with verse 37. The golden head of this great image of excellent and terrible brightness was Nebuchadnezzar himself. He wielded absolute power, unfettered and unlimited, as no one before had known, nor has anyone since, and which we believe will only be equalled by the predicted 'Beast' of Revelation 13, and exceeded by the Lord Jesus, when He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Lord Jesus will judge and rule in equity, but it was far otherwise with Nebuchadnezzar, for, 'whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive' (Dan. 5:19), as Daniel himself recorded.

The Babylonian empire, magnificent as it was, only dominated the stage in the world's history for a short time. Under Belshazzar and his father it fell from its proud preeminence. It was so

much dependent upon the power and glory of Nebuchadnezzar that no subsequent king is regarded, and in verse 39 we read, 'after thee shall arise another kingdom' which was to be inferior in its character, described in the dream by the breast and arms of silver; and this again superseded by a third kingdom, designated by the belly and thighs of brass.

The lessening value of the metals indicated a deterioration in the quality of the succeeding powers. We may think it a hard saying, but autocracy is the Divine ideal in government, to be realized in righteous yet benevolent perfection in the millennial reign of Christ. It is worthy of note that in this chapter Daniel more than once speaks of 'the God of heaven,' indicating that this first Gentile monarch of supreme power held his authority as delegated from heaven. This is the fact, we believe, that underlies the instruction of the Apostle given in Romans 13:1. The existing power of his day was the fourth, mentioned in our chapter, but the Gentile powers that exist, whoever they may be at any given moment, hold their authority as delegates of 'the God of heaven.'

The second and third empires are passed over with slight mention and our thoughts are concentrated on the fourth, which

was to be characterized by strength, as set forth by the iron. The Roman empire did indeed break in pieces and subdue the civilized earth, and lasted in its unified form for centuries. Though its unity was dissolved, as we know, it is viewed in the dream as existing in some way until its final development in a ten-kingdom form at the end of its story, when clay will be found mixed with the iron; and in result the kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle.

The mixture of clay and iron aptly symbolizes this, for they are substances entirely different in character. Iron is a metal, of less value than gold, though stronger: clay is non-metallic, and its figurative use in Scripture indicates what is human in contrast to what is Divine: see Job 10:9, and Job 33:6; also the references to man being like clay in the hands of God, who is the Potter.

The dream indicated therefore that the fourth empire in its last days would have 'kings,' to the number of ten, and that though still strong there would be an element of brittleness, induced by the introduction of a human element — what in these days we call democracy; which was defined by a noted man as being, 'Government of the people by the people for the people.' Noth-

ing is more uncertain, and therefore brittle, than the will of the people. It seems quite certain therefore that we are living in the days contemplated as being the closing stage in the history of the image.

Upon the feet of the image the stone fell. The stone is described as 'cut out without hands;' that is, apart from man having anything to do with it — not human but Divine in origin. The first prophetic reference to the Lord Jesus as the Stone is in Genesis 49:24, when old Jacob, in blessing his sons made a parenthetic exclamation, 'from thence is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.' Under this figure He again appears in Isaiah 28:16, and so on into the New Testament.

In the dream we are considering, the stone is interpreted as 'A kingdom, which shall never be destroyed,' but we know who the King of that kingdom is going to be. Just as the 'vision' of Habakkuk 2:3, which will surely come and not tarry, is found in Hebrews 10:37 to be centred in a Person, (for the 'it' of Habakkuk is turned into 'He' in Hebrews), so the 'kingdom' which Daniel mentioned as predicted by the 'stone' of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is found to centre round a Person, who is God's 'King of kings.'

We know Him as the 'Living Stone,' and to Him we have already come, as we are reminded in 1 Peter 2:5. We are His already and we partake of His nature as 'living stones,' and so are built up, as under His authority, into that spiritual house and holy priesthood, as indicated. When as the King of that coming kingdom, predicted in Daniel 2, He falls in judgment it will be completely to demolish. While we wait for that, we know His attractive power, the effect of which is to build up. How great the favour and blessing of knowing Him thus!

It is indeed a solemn thought that judgment has at last to fall on the imposing image, that represents Gentile dominion on earth, and crush all to powder. It should have a sobering effect on us all, as we realize that nothing of all man's pomp and power and outward glory is going to remain. Not only are the iron and clay ground to powder, but the gold and silver and brass also. The wind of God will sweep all away as chaff. The God, who will do this, is great, and He was making it known to this king, who was great in the eyes of men. The greatness of God guaranteed the certainty of the things the dream foretold.

This should remind us of what we read in 1 Corinthians 1:19, and 1 Corinthians 2:6, where the Apostle's words inform us that

not only powerful Gentile kingdoms are to be swept away, but that also the intellectual princes of the earth and all the wisdom they represent will come to nothing in the day when God rises up in judgment.

This revelation, that reached the king through Daniel, had an immediate effect upon him, as we see in the closing verses of the chapter. Instead of being angered by this prediction of ultimate disaster, he was made acutely conscious that he was in the presence of the supernatural — a power was in evidence that he had found wholly wanting in the Chaldeans and his magicians. Only, true to his heathen upbringing, he was mainly concerned with the man in whom the power was displayed. He did indeed acknowledge that Daniel's God was 'a God of gods, and a Lord of kings,' but the worship he offered was directed to Daniel, rather than to the God, in whose name he spoke. So we see here an illustration of what is written in Romans 1:25, that the heathen 'worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.'

So Daniel was not only worshipped but also made one of the chief, if not the very chief, of the advisers and rulers under the king, and at his request his three companions were also greatly

elevated. They went at one bound, so to speak, into high positions of prominence. And did this wonderful display of Divine power have a salutary and lasting effect on Nebuchadnezzar? The next chapter shows quite conclusively that it did not.

Daniel 3

How long an interval there was between the events narrated in chapters 2 and 3, we are not told, but we cannot resist the impression that there was a connection in the mind of Nebuchadnezzar between the image of his dream and the gigantic image, that he caused to be made. The image of his dream only began with a golden head, which represented himself. It was followed by a great image, which should be all of gold.

Since the ancient cubit was the length of the human fore-arm — anything from 18 to 22 inches — this image must have been at least 90 feet high, with a breadth of 9 feet. The immense store of gold, which enabled the king to do this, may not have equalled the supply that came to Solomon, yet it shows that the 'times of the Gentiles' began with a great display of power and wealth and glory. And how will the period of Gentile dominion end? The answer to this we find in Revelation 13. Another

mighty king will arise, and another great image will be made. If we compare the two scenes, we note many resemblances, and yet a significant contrast; in the fact that, as we read in the last chapter, it was 'the God of Heaven' who gave to Nebuchadnezzar 'power and strength and glory;' whereas the coming great king, who is named 'the beast,' will obtain 'his power, and his seat, and great authority' (Rev. 13:2), from 'the dragon;' that is, from the devil himself.

The resemblances are equally striking, and bear witness to the fact that the sinful tendencies of poor fallen man in all ages are just the same. By the God of Heaven Nebuchadnezzar was granted much power and glory, so at once he used it to glorify himself in this gigantic golden image. Many different peoples were under his sway, each with their many gods, whom they worshipped. Now let them, while retaining their local deities, have a kind of 'super-religion,' which would have the effect of binding them together under his sway. Hence the cry of the herald, beginning, 'O people, nations, and languages.'

Moreover these ancient monarchs knew how to influence the masses. Music exerts a very subtle influence on the human mind, whether it be of the cultivated and classical type or the

lowest productions of the heathen world. Indeed, the lowest type seems to produce the most intoxicating effects, as do the 'devil-dances' of savages. Under the influence of this kind of music people, and especially the young, behave as if they were intoxicated.

So, to move the mighty concourse of people to worship the golden image, and thus pay homage to the mighty king, 'all kinds of music' were played. The penalty for non-compliance was the dreadful one of being cast alive into a burning fiery furnace.

Very similar things are predicted in Revelation 13 for the end of the age, but with even more striking accompaniments. Instead of all kinds of music, the false prophet will have power to give life and speech to the image of the beast, and those who refuse to worship will be killed. The statement that there will be power to give 'life' to the image is indeed a startling one, but we must remember that at that time there will be 'the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish' (2 Thess. 2:9-10).

As we read on in our chapter, we learn how God changed Nebuchadnezzar's word and thwarted his determination. As we read on in Revelation, we learn in Rev. 19 how far more drastic and eternal judgment, though longer delayed, will fall upon the beast, who is personified by the image that is to come, and on the false prophet, who will promote it.

Of all the lusts and desires that are resident in the nature of poor fallen man, the most deep-seated is the desire to glorify, even to the point of deifying, himself. At the outset he fell to the seductive assertion of Satan, 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil' (Gen. 3:5). The adversary did not of course state that they would know good, without being able to achieve it, and evil, without being able to avoid it. Ever since, self-exaltation has been the ruling idea in our world. Thus it was with Nebuchadnezzar. For the moment he was the apex of the pyramid, and beneath him, acting in his support, were 'the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces;' and this eight-fold description of important personages is given twice in our chapter, as if to impress us with the solidity of the pyramid of which he was the apex. From this apparently un-

challengeable position the great king issued his decree, which was in effect a God-defying one. And God took up the challenge through three devoted servants that He had in reserve.

Remarkably enough Daniel is not mentioned in this chapter: a fact that should be of encouragement to us. Why not mentioned, and where he was, is not revealed; but it is encouraging to know that in the absence of a servant of striking courage and power, God can take up and use with great effect servants of lesser gifts. Daniel's three companions did not possess his gifts of understanding as to dreams and prophecies, but they did share his devotion to the one true God, which entailed a thorough-going separation from the abomination of idolatry. Hence when the multitudes, from the highest to the least fell down to worship the image, they stood erect. They exemplified the principle stated by the apostles in Acts 5:29 — 'We ought to obey God rather than man.'

Their enemies at once reported this to incite the rage and fury of Nebuchadnezzar. The king did at least enquire if the reported lack of action was true, and then issued his ultimatum, coupled with the insolent question, 'Who is that God that shall deliver

you out of my hands?' The reply of the three Jews was a memorable one.

If memory serves us aright, this is the first case on record where a servant of God has been threatened with the direst form of death penalty, if he did not deny his God and forsake his faith, though a prophet like Elijah was threatened by Jezebel. There have been many such cases since. In Daniel 6 we have the case of Daniel. In the history of the early church we read of many who were thrown to the wild beasts because they would not deny their Lord and Master. Many a 'heretic' went to the fires in our land, as well as in Spain under the Inquisition; and we believe not a few have done so in our day under the iron hand of Communism. But, as we have often noticed, the first case is a very memorable one, and the stand taken rings through the centuries.

In the first place they asserted that their God was able to deliver them. They exalted His power. In the second place they did not hide the fact that for reasons of His own He might not deliver them. And then, in the third place, they stated with the utmost decision that were He not pleased to deliver, they would not forsake their God by worshipping the king's golden image,

in the honour of gods that were false. 'We will not serve thy gods,' was their decisive word; and in result they were greatly honoured by their God.

We shall, however, do well to remember that the seductions of the world are more damaging to our testimony than its opposition and its threat of disaster or death. At the end of his life the Apostle Paul had to write, 'Demas has forsaken me,' and he did not follow this by saying, 'being fearful of the world's threatenings,' but rather, 'having loved this present world' (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul had just before written of, 'all them also that love His appearing;' knowing that the appearing of the Lord Jesus will usher in a world very different from the present one, and that is wholly according to God. Demas fell before the seductions of the present 'world,' or 'age,' and that surely is the danger for us — the Christians of English-speaking lands, who are largely exempt from the persecutions experienced elsewhere. May God give us that decision of character that marked the three Hebrews, so that faced by seductions we may say, 'Be it known ... that we will not ... '

Pursuing the narrative, we note the complete change in Nebuchadnezzar, as compared with the picture presented at the

end of Daniel 2. Then he was on his face in the presence of Daniel, and to fall on one's face is to efface oneself in a figurative way. Now he is on his feet and so full of fury that his very face was transformed with savage resolution. Not only are the three men, who have defied his will, to be thrust into the fire, but the furnace is to be seven times hotter than what was the ordinary thing. As a consequence the mightiest men of his army were to fling them in. Thus the judgment fell. The deed was done.

And then the hand of God began to appear. The judgment fell, but it was upon the most mighty of Nebuchadnezzar's famous army, and not upon the three defenceless Jews. The first thing the proud, impious king saw was his mightiest men slain by the furnace he had so excessively heated up. A humiliating sight for him! The next thing he saw was four men walking, free and unhurt in the midst of the fire, the very outskirts of which had slain his finest soldiers. The fire, that was death to them was not only preservation but liberty to God's servants. They were flung in 'bound,' but now they 'walk,' for the only things consumed were their bonds, and they had a heavenly Visitor with them.

In the presence of this astounding miracle the furious king was subdued. The dream of Daniel 2, which Daniel had expounded, had moved him, but though he learned that he was the golden head of the dream image, he had not taken to heart the fact that the supreme earthly position that he had reached was granted to him by 'the God of heaven.' If he had, he would never have boastfully asked, Who was the God that could deliver out of his hands? The God of heaven, who had given him his dominion, had accepted his challenge, reversed his word, quenched the violence of his seven-fold heated fire, and made visible His presence with those who were to have been his victims.

The king recognized that there was something Divine and God-like about 'the form of the fourth.' The way in which he expressed his conviction was doubtless controlled by God. Before this, Balaam had said things that he never would have uttered apart from Divine compulsion. After this, Caiaphas uttered things that had a different meaning to that which he intended, as recorded in John 11:51. So it was here, Nebuchadnezzar recognized that God had intervened and manifested His presence with the men he had sought to slay, and he used just the right expression, though not understanding the true force of it. While

it is the Father who forms the purpose, it is the Son who manifests and acts. This we learn when the New Testament is reached.

The miracle was so complete that their garments were not affected, not an hair of their heads singed, not even the smell of fire was attached to them. The king had fully to recognize the hand of God, and acknowledged His mighty power. Still he did not advance beyond knowing Him as 'the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,' just as, at the end of Daniel 2 he acknowledged Him as the God of Daniel. He did not acknowledge Him as his God, though he pronounced severe penalties against any who spoke against Him. This great man, with whom the times of the Gentiles began, had yet a deeper lesson to learn.

Daniel 4

This we find as we read on into chapter 4, where a remarkable change in the narration takes place. We are permitted to read what, at a later date, Nebuchadnezzar himself caused to be written and published to all the many nations and languages that were beneath his sway. In it he made known the dealings

of God — whom he now called 'the Most High God' (New Trans.) — with himself personally. It was a story of his own complete discomfiture and humiliation at the hands of God; and therefore the very fact, that he should publish the story abroad, indicated a great and fundamental change in his own mind and attitude.

The preface to his story, and especially verse 3, is very striking. He mentions first 'His signs' and 'His wonders.' We live in an age that is characterized by faith. The Apostle Paul could write of a time, 'before faith came,' and again of a time, 'after that faith is come' (Gal. 3:23, 25). Signs that appealed to sight had a special place before the epoch of faith began. But it is also a fact that, when God inaugurated a fresh dispensation, He authenticated what is new by signs of a miraculous nature. It was so when He brought Israel out of Egypt; and the law epoch began at Sinai. It was so in supreme fashion when He manifested Himself in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ; and again when the church age began, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles. So it was, as we see here, when the times of the Gentiles began.

The particular sign and wonder that Nebuchadnezzar is now about to relate is, as we see, very humbling to himself. In one

hour his mighty kingdom departed from him, though presently restored. In contrast to this, he confessed God's kingdom to be everlasting. Though he may not have in any full measure realized it, two or three generations would see his dominion, typified by gold, fall before another dominion, typified by silver. God's kingdom, he acknowledged, abides through all generations. This he confessed before he narrated the experience that made him realize it. God had to act toward him in judgment.

Before acting, God issued a warning. This is ever His way. There was warning through Noah before the flood. There was warning for Pharaoh before the judgments on Egypt. There was warning for Jerusalem through Jeremiah before the city fell to the Babylonians. There is warning today as to the judgments that will fall when the church age is closed. So it was here with this powerful individual. God warned him by means of a dream. His first dream might well have lifted him up, for he was the head of gold. His second dream warned him of a complete casting down.

The warning came just when the king seemed to have reached the very climax of his prosperity. His many warlike expeditions were over; his great conquests completed. He was at last at rest

and flourishing in the palace of his magnificent city. As we all know, dreams are strange and unaccountable things. As sleep fades, and the mind begins to resume its activities, unusual things may flit across its awakening consciousness. It is not surprising therefore that God has been pleased to make known His thoughts and purposes to men by means of a dream, especially in times of urgency and importance. It is remarkable, for instance, that in the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 1 & 2), we get God speaking in a dream no less than five times.

As the result of his second dream Nebuchadnezzar was again troubled and afraid. He was conscious that it proceeded from the unseen world, and had in it a message for him; yet God's previous dealings with him had left no permanent impression, for in his trouble he again thought first of the magicians of various kinds and the Chaldeans, and when they failed, Daniel was brought in as a last resort.

We notice, however, that though Daniel was consulted, the king addressed him under the heathen name that had been given him. In both verses 8 and 9 we find, 'Belteshazzar,' which he states was 'according to the name of my god,' for Bel was one

of the great gods of Babylon. Moreover, in keeping with the heathen name that he used, he only recognized that in Daniel was, 'the spirit of the holy gods.' The true God — 'the God of Heaven,' — who had given to him his great dominion, was as yet unknown to him.

This we have, be it remembered, by his own confession, before he proceeded to relate the dream, which made him afraid, warning him of the blow that was impending from the hand of God.

In verses 10-17, we have Nebuchadnezzar's own account of the dream that made him afraid. We have only to read these verses to see that there was in it a strongly marked element of the supernatural. Not only was there a visitation from 'a Watcher and an Holy One,' but also a decree, endorsed by 'the Most High,' who 'rules in the kingdom of men.' The king could only turn to Daniel, addressing him as Belteshazzar, 'according to the name of my god.' The Babylonian gods are mentioned satirically in Isaiah 46:1, 'Bel bows down, Nebo stoops.' So, though he hoped for enlightenment from a man, 'in whom is the spirit of the holy gods,' we are not surprised that before the Most High he was afraid.

In verse 19 we see that Daniel himself, to whom the meaning of the dream was at once revealed, was also afraid and troubled, for he realized it warned the king of impending chastisement from the hand of God — a stroke of the severest kind.

Let us briefly review what had preceded this dream. The times of the Gentiles began when Nebuchadnezzar reached the zenith of human splendour, wielding autocratic power in unparalleled fashion. By an earlier dream he had been warned that though he was the head of gold in the great image, deterioration would set in, and at the end the dominion, vested temporarily in him, would be crushed to powder under the judgment of God.

How little this affected him we see in the next chapter. The dearest passion in the heart of fallen man is that of self-exaltation. So the great king has made the gigantic image, which all are to worship, and woe betide him who does not! Again God intervened. He gave courage to three of His servants, who braved the king's wrath and his furnace, though seven-times heated. In result, Nebuchadnezzar was defeated. God simply made a fool of him in the presence of vast crowds of his peoples. Had this any permanent effect upon him for good?

The chapter we are considering shows that it had not. He is still the same self-glorifying man. Consequently God will act in an even more drastic way. The first intervention was addressed to his intelligence — his understanding of the future. The second was a display of the Divine power, which publicly humiliated him. Still no permanent alteration, though for the moment he was deeply impressed. So now the kingdom of 'gold' will be left intact, while he alone is dealt with.

This second dream concerned a great tree. Elsewhere in Scripture great men and nations are likened to imposing trees — Ezekiel 31, for instance — so the figure was not an unusual one. Daniel at once saw that the king himself was portrayed, and the judgment that was to fall on him. God will not strike him personally until warning has been given. This indeed is ever His kindly way. He did not send the flood on the world of the ungodly until ample warning had been given; nor captivity upon Israel until they had been fully warned by the prophets. Today we live in an age very near to judgment, as to which warning has long been given. Are we sufficiently aware of this? When the Gospel of grace is preached, is the note of warning

sounded with sufficient clearness? We sadly fear that it is not, but rather avoided as an unpleasant theme.

The warning given today may be disregarded by most, even as it was by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel courageously warned him and even counselled him to alter his ways, as we see in verse 27. But the warning given was not heeded, nor the counsel given followed. Even then, God waited twelve months before His judgment fell.

Walking amidst the splendours of Babylon, the king experienced a moment of supreme pride; Everything around him spoke of his 'power,' his 'honour,' his 'majesty.' The ruins of Babylon are remarkable even today, and men of understanding have reconstructed in picture form the marvels they must have contained. As we looked at the picture, we could only say that if it was at all accurate then none of our present cities could rival it. The king filled with pride, felt himself to be exalted above measure. Then the blow fell.

From a pinnacle of glory Nebuchadnezzar was now degraded to the level of a beast, indeed almost beneath that level; and in that miserable, bestial condition 'seven times' passed over him.

It was no passing affliction but a protracted one, though it is not indicated here whether 'times' means years. Elsewhere apparently, it does.

An element of prophecy enters, we believe, into this story, for it is a remarkable fact that a 'beast' appears at the end of the record concerning Gentile dominion, when we come to Revelation 13. The last man who will hold that supreme place, and who will be crushed by the appearing of the Lord Jesus in His glory, is described as a 'beast.' He will not be a demented one, as was Nebuchadnezzar, but he will be worse because dominated by Satan, never lifting up his eyes to heaven but always down to the earth. And further, if we are right in identifying him with 'the prince that shall come' of Daniel 9:26-27, his career will cover the 'week' of years, mentioned in those verses — the equivalent of 'seven times.'

There is a contrast, however, for the beast of the last days goes to his doom in 'a lake of fire burning with brimstone,' whereas Nebuchadnezzar at the end of his seven times was restored to sanity and to his kingdom. And further, this time something effectual does seem to have been wrought in his soul. Not only did he lift up his eyes to heaven with the understanding of a

man but he blessed God, giving Him His title of 'the Most High.' Now the first time that this great name of God occurs is in Genesis 14, where Melchizedek is called a priest of 'the Most High God' who is therefore, 'Possessor of heaven and earth.'

Some understanding of this fact had now entered the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, as we see in verses 34 and 35. This opened the king's eyes to the fact of his own nothingness, for he confessed that, 'all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;' and if all, then himself among them. He recognized also the supreme power of God in enforcing His will in heaven and on earth. In the presence of the greatness and the power of God, he at last recognized his own nothingness and impotence.

At last Nebuchadnezzar had learned his lesson, and made public acknowledgment of the God of heaven, and therefore the discipline of very severe sort, through which he had been passed, was removed and he was restored to his kingdom in a chastened spirit. His public confession and praise of 'the King of heaven.' is recorded in the last verse of our chapter. To Him he ascribed 'honour,' 'truth' and 'judgement,' in all His dealings.

Never had a man been more lifted up in pride than this king, and never had a proud man been more signally abased.

Let us not forget the abasing power of God. We often dwell upon the grace of Christ, as mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but let us not forget that not only is He able to sympathize, 'able to succour,' and 'able to save,' but also, 'able to abase.' He did it effectually with Nebuchadnezzar, and evidently for his spiritual good. He will presently do it far more drastically with the 'beast' of Revelation 13, as we see when Revelation 19 is reached. The pride of man, generated by his scientific advances and consequent wonderful achievements, is increasing. It will reach its climax ere long. Then Nebuchadnezzar's confession will be demonstrated as true in overwhelming fashion — 'those that walk in pride He is able to abase.'

Daniel 5

The period of Babylonian supremacy was comparatively brief, and the 'head of gold' had to give place to the 'breast and arms of silver.' As we begin to read chapter 5, we find ourselves transported to the last hours of that period. The great city was

still marked by scenes of wealth and much voluptuous splendour.

Years ago, learned critics claimed that the Book of Daniel was largely legendary and written several centuries after the events it related. Belshazzar, they regarded as an imaginary figure, since they found no reference to him in extant records. Later, however, his name did appear on a clay tablet that was unearthed, so this assertion, like a great many more of their unbelieving assertions, was shattered as the archaeologists dug in these ancient ruins. It appears that in accordance with an ancient custom he was associated with his father in the kingship, and that his father being elsewhere at that time, he was virtually king in Babylon just as it fell before the rising power of Medo-Persia.

Whatever may have been the permanent effect upon Nebuchadnezzar of God's dealings with him, his successors displayed all the arrogant splendour of his earlier years. Belshazzar's name began with the name of Babylon's god; the gorgeous feast with a thousand of his lords, together with wives and concubines was typically heathenish. Inflamed by wine, he had the golden vessels, that had years before been taken from the temple in

Jerusalem, brought before them. so that gloating over them, they might publicly dishonour Jehovah, and praise their many false gods of metals, of wood and of stone. He deliberately flung down the gauntlet before God, who at once accepted the challenge.

This, we believe, is always God's way. He does not act in judgment until the evil is fully manifested. It was so with the Amorite nations, as shown in Genesis 15:16. It was so with the kings and people in Jerusalem, as testified in 2 Chronicles 36:- 11-20. It will be so again in the sad history of Christendom, as predicted in Revelation 17 and 18.

Thus it was in that great festive hall in Babylon, and in result we have one of the most dramatic scenes on record. No legion of angels appeared, no visible display of Divine power: just the fingers as of a man's hand were visible, writing four words on the 'plaister of the wall,' just, 'over against the candlestick,' where they were most visible. The proud king was reduced to a shivering mortal, and his lords astonished.

As we ponder this scene our thoughts turn in two directions. They travel back to Exodus, where we read of the law being

given, written with 'the finger of God' upon tables of stone. It was fitting material for stone cannot be twisted or bent, though it can be broken. Here the finger of God is connected with demand upon guilty men. Then our thoughts travel on to John 8, where the guilty woman was brought by conceited Scribes and Pharisees to the Lord Jesus for condemnation. He did not condemn her: and why? Well, He gave an indication of the reason by stooping to write on the ground, and this He did twice, as if for emphasis. He stooped to write in the dust of the temple, for He had stooped from the heights of His glory, 'into the dust of death' (Ps. 22:15), so that the righteousness of God might be maintained and His love fully expressed. Here then we have not the finger of demand, but rather, as we may say, the finger of dust.

But now in Daniel we again have 'the finger of God,' and we find it to be the finger of doom, written on plaster, that easily crumbles. God manifested His presence by showing the tip of His fingers, and it scared the life out of Belshazzar. When the final hour of judgment arrives and 'the dead, small and great, stand before God' (Rev. 20:12), what will be their feelings? We

are reminded of that word, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb. 10:31).

Once more the wise men of Babylon were called in, but only to display again incompetence and ignorance. We are told that there was nothing unusual about the four words. They were not words taken from some unknown, barbaric tongue, but, being on that occasion God's words, they were quite outside the understanding of these servants of the world and its false gods. The fact, stated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14, is strikingly illustrated. As 'natural' men they had no power of understanding the things God had written.

The whole scene was now transformed. Belshazzar had moved from profanity to prostration, and the whole company had descended from gaiety to gloom. Into this chaotic scene came 'the queen,' as stated in verse 10, and in the next verse she refers to Nebuchadnezzar as 'father' of Belshazzar. Not infrequently 'father' is used in Scripture for 'forefather,' and thus clearly it was here. She was evidently the queen-mother, and most likely a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and consequently possessing a much clearer remembrance of God's dealings with her father, as well as of Daniel and his God-given understanding.

What is quite evident is that, years having passed, Daniel had dropped completely out of public notice. In court circles his name was so unknown that the queen had to give a full account of him and of his powers, though she still treated them as being 'the wisdom of the gods.' Daniel is lifted from his obscurity, brought before the king and promised great honours if he could interpret the words. The reason why he was promised the third place in the kingdom was evidently because Belshazzar himself was only the second. The first being his father, who was at that moment elsewhere.

Daniel's answer, recorded in verse 17, is very striking. Previously, as recorded at the end of Daniel 2, Daniel had accepted the honours placed upon him, now he treated them with disdain. The meaning of the four fateful words had evidently already penetrated to his heart, and he knew that Belshazzar was rejected of God, and his kingdom about to crash in ruin, so his proffered honours were worthless.

Before the interpretation of the words, God gave through Daniel the clearest indictment of the Babylonian empire, as summed up in Belshazzar. the existing head of it. The king was reminded of God's dealing with Nebuchadnezzar, which

humbled him. Belshazzar had knowledge of this but had ignored it, and had exalted himself even more blatantly against 'the Lord of Heaven,' by bringing the golden vessels that had been in the temple, where once His presence had been manifested, and glorying over Him, in praising the demon powers that were represented by his idols. This brought things to a climax, and the first of the 'overturnings,' predicted in Ezekiel 21:27, was at hand.

By the writing on the wall a warning was given, though only a few hours were to elapse before the blow fell. The word, 'numbered' was twice written, as if it was a point to be emphasized. The God, who can number the stars, as well as the hairs on a human head, had observed and numbered the proud sins of the Babylonian empire. The word, 'weighed' showed that Belshazzar himself had been tested and condemned. By 'divided', the immediate overthrow of the empire was announced.

The warning produced no change in Belshazzar, for he invested Daniel with honours, as though his kingdom was to continue, and that in spite of Daniel having renounced them. He wore those honours for just a few brief hours, for that night the pre-

dicted judgment fell. Darius the Median took the city and the kingdom, and Belshazzar was slain.

Thus came to its end the first of the great empires that are to fill up the times of the Gentiles. It gives us, we judge, a sample of the way in which God has caused the others to be overthrown; though the fourth, the Roman, is to be revived, and its component parts brought together again. that it may decisively and finally be destroyed by the personal appearing of the Lord Jesus, since it was under the Roman that He was mocked and crucified. Then it is that man's great empires will all of them together, be blown into nothingness, 'like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors.' When the writer was young it looked as if there was to be a stable British 'empire,' for about a century ago the late Queen Victoria, of happy memory, had been proclaimed 'Empress of India.' A short century has proved that the term, 'empire,' was a misnomer, and the word has been dropped.

Daniel 6

The Medo-Persian Empire now became the dominant world power, and Darius became king in Babylon. It appears that his-

torians have difficulty in identifying this man. It may be that he was only a vassal king, under the suzerainty of Cyrus king of Persia; but this is a matter that need not detain us. In the Babylonian section of the new empire he arranged things as he saw fit, and again we find Daniel promoted to a place of great power. The hand of God was in it, though on the human side two things may have been in his favour. First, he was not a native of Babylon. Second, Darius almost certainly would have heard of the dramatic scene in the palace, just before he captured the city that seemed so impregnable, and thus of Daniel's superhuman understanding.

The scene brought before us in chapter 6 is very true to human life and nature. Daniel's exalted position filled the hearts of lesser men with envy and hatred. If possible, they would destroy him. This purpose of theirs brings to light a remarkable testimony as to his character — 'he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.' As a result they concluded that no attack on him would succeed unless it were made, concerning the law of God.

Here we must pause, and consider our own ways. What point of attack does each one of us present to those who in an antag-

onistic spirit survey us critically? Very frequently, we fear, we present more points than one. Hence the constant exhortations to a life of godliness, that we find in the Pauline epistles. To the Philippians, for instance, he urged, 'that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life' (Phil. 2:15-16). If we today, as well as the Philippians nineteen centuries ago, can be thus described, crooked and perverse folk who wish to accuse us, will have to base their attack on the word of life, or the way in which we hold it forth, rather than on our personal ways. Let us each be very much exercised as to this matter.

The presidents and princes were shrewd men. They knew the power of flattery and how men love to exalt themselves. Hence they suggested to Darius a decree of self-exaltation; practically deifying himself for the period of a month. Into this trap Darius fell, and we learn in connection with it that in this kingdom of 'silver' the power of the monarch was not so absolute as in the kingdom of 'gold'. Nebuchadnezzar did just what he liked without curb laid upon him. The Medo-Persian kings had to consider their captains' and counsellors' advice, and a law.

when once promulgated, could not be altered. The law was signed, by which under pain of a terrible death, any who feared the God of heaven, should be cut off from Him for thirty days. In principle he was doing again the great sin, attempted in chapter 3. Nebuchadnezzar demanded worship through his golden image. The method of Darius was far less spectacular, but equally against God. For all practical purposes there shall be no God but Darius for thirty days!

In Daniel 3, Daniel is absent, and courage was given to his companions to stand firm in their allegiance to the one true God, and refuse to bow down to the image. In the present chapter the three companions are absent and Daniel alone is seen. Exactly the same spirit is seen in him. They would not for one moment bow down to worship a god of man's devising. He would not for one day cease to pray to the true God, whom he knew. They acted negatively, defying the king's command to worship Satanic powers. He acted positively, maintaining contact with the God of heaven, though it involved defying the command of Darius. In both cases God stepped in, and miraculously sustained and delivered His servants in a way that exposed the folly of the kings.

Darius indeed was quickly made to discover his folly. Daniel made no sensational protest; he only went on doing what had been his custom. Three times each day he knelt before God with thanksgiving and prayer, and he made no secret of it, since he did it with windows open, and thus all could see.

But why did he have his windows open 'toward Jerusalem'? Read 1 Kings 8:46-50, and the reason is plain. He believed God would answer that petition in Solomon's prayer, so he fulfilled the stipulation that the prayer should be made, 'toward their land ... the city which Thou hast chosen.' Such was the record in the Scriptures. In obedience he fulfilled it, and went on fulfilling it in spite of the king's decree.

Let us seriously ask ourselves if we are as observant of Scripture as Daniel, and moved by it to obedience, as he was.

His courage has become almost proverbial. 'Dare to be a Daniel!' has become a well-known phrase. Good advice it is. But what gave him the courage to dare? The answer surely is — his reliance on God and His word. We may safely affirm that, down to our own time, all the saints who have acquired courage to stand for the truth, and suffer for it, have been forti-

fied in the same way. In the tolerant, easygoing lands where English is spoken, compromise is the fashionable thing. But this was not Daniels' way, and should not be ours.

Hence, though 'an excellent spirit' was in Daniel, the jealous 'princes', who were under him, had no difficulty in denouncing him to the king, who foolishly and blasphemously had signed the decree, which could not be altered or revoked. Realizing his folly, the king made desperate attempts until nightfall to release Daniel, and incidentally himself, from the entanglement, which he himself had created. But all in vain.

So, just as in Daniel 3, we saw the three faithful Hebrews going to their doom, now we see Daniel going to his. And with the same result. God intervened; altering the order of nature, and delivering His servant. Here we have a miracle equally remarkable with that recorded in chapter 3. God has established a certain order in creation, whether in the action of fire or that of living animals. Fire will uniformly burn clothes and even human bodies that wear them. Hungry wild beasts, such as lions, will uniformly spring upon and devour their prey. God, who has established this order can reverse it, should it please Him so to do. It did please Him to do so in both cases. And His con-

trol of the lions in this case is equally remarkable with His suspension of the action of fire.

Some may wish to enquire why God has not acted in this way on behalf of His servants far more frequently? The answer surely is, that God acts in this miraculous way at the beginning of some change in His dealings with men, though He may often act on behalf of His saints in a providential way. It was so, for instance, at the beginning of the Christian dispensation. Peter was miraculously delivered from prison and death, as recorded in Acts 12. Since then, many a saint has died in prison for the sake of the Gospel, though some have been providentially delivered.

As we ponder over this, one reason for it at least becomes clear. In the two cases before us the times of the Gentiles had just begun by the complete overthrow of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. The natural conclusion to be deduced was that the gods of the Babylonian world were more powerful than Jehovah, whose temple was at Jerusalem. They were not, and God demonstrated it by these miraculous deliverances of His servants in the teeth of the powers of darkness. At the end of

the age He will demonstrate it by the damnation of His foes, and theirs.

The same thing may be said of this present Gospel age. Acts 12, which begins with the deliverance of Peter, ends with the judgment of Herod. In both cases an angel 'smote.' He smote Peter up for deliverance, and then smote Herod down to a miserable and disgusting death. God has not repeated these actions, just because we live in this Gospel age, which is characterized by grace. When this age of grace ends, we shall see God's saints completely delivered, and their oppressors completely judged.

In Daniel 6 we see not only Daniel delivered but also the evil men, who conspired against him, judged. They and their families suffered the exact fate that they had designed for Daniel, and that by the order of the king they had deceived into the evil law.

The end of the chapter reveals the salutary effect of the whole episode on the mind of Darius. His confession and decree, which was sent so widely abroad, was similar to the edict sent forth previously by Nebuchadnezzar. Thus in the second of the

four great world-empires this tribute to the One, confessed not only as 'the God of Daniel', but also as 'the living God, and steadfast forever', was sent out to all men. The time had not come for the love of God to be manifested, but His power was declared in striking fashion, and everywhere men, under the sway of Darius, were commanded to 'tremble and fears before Him.

Let us notice the 'decree' of verse 8, and by way of contrast, the 'decree' of verse 26. Both were issued in an empire that permitted no alteration or cancellation of its decrees, yet they do stand in contrast. The first was nullified as to its penalty; the second was soon nullified as to its performance. The subsequent history of that empire shows that men did not tremble and fear before the living God, as they were commanded to do. No empire can legislate in the things of God; and so this 'law of the Medes and Persians' was soon flatly and universally broken! We see this, for instance, in the book of Esther.

Daniel 7

In Daniel 5, we had the record of the last year, indeed of the last hours, of the kingship of Belshazzar. As we open chapter 7,

we are carried back to the first year of his reign. At this time Daniel had sunk into complete obscurity, as chapter 5 bears witness. He had lost touch with worldly fame, but by a dream he was still in touch with heaven. Previously his fame had largely rested upon his God-given interpretations of dreams, though in Daniel 2 the interpretation was revealed to him in 'a night vision'. Now, in his retirement from worldly affairs, by a dream a prophetic revelation is given to him, and 'he wrote the dream', for our benefit, since it has been included in the inspired Scriptures.

Verse 2 is very instructive. What he saw was produced by the striving of 'the four winds of the heaven ... upon the great sea'. Now the sea is used figuratively as indicating the masses of mankind, as are the 'many waters' of Revelation 17:1 and 15, which represent 'peoples, and multitudes, and nations'. So also, 'wind' often represents the power of Satan, for he is 'the prince of the power of the air' (Eph. 2:2). What Daniel saw was, in figure, the forces of darkness working on the masses of mankind, and as a result producing, as we shall see, the four world-empires that fill up the times of the Gentiles. Israel is the only nation that has been raised up by God to a place of supremacy;

but, while it is set aside, four world powers arise as a result of the striving of Satanic forces, and not of the working of God's power.

The powers that emerge are represented by 'beasts'. It is worthy of note that this figure re-appears in the book of Revelation, where the revival of the Roman Empire in the last days is presented as 'a beast' rising up 'out of the sea' (Rev. 13:1). That the four empires should be portrayed as beasts is no compliment to them. But God does not pay compliments, but pre-figures things exactly as they are, according to their inward nature. History, as far as it has been enacted up to the present, quite supports the accuracy of the figure used.

The four beasts appear in rotation, and are described in verses 4-7. The first was the Babylonian, with the strength of a lion and the swiftness of an eagle, and the latter part of verse 4 seems to refer to God's disciplinary dealings with Nebuchadnezzar. This had been nearly fulfilled when Daniel had the dream.

The second, described in verse 5, was the Medo-Persian, that overthrew the Babylonian soon after Daniel had the dream. It is

represented as a bear, which is worthy of note. The Babylonian was like a lion and an eagle, as we see also in Jeremiah 4:7, and Jeremiah 49:19-22. Now the bear in nature has not the strength of the lion, but it is marked by rapacity, as indicated in our verse. History records that 'one side' of it, namely the Median, came up first, for Darius was a Mede; but soon Cyrus the Persian became dominant. He became favourable to the Jews, as the opening verses of Ezra show, but apart from this its power was not tolerant, and the words, 'Arise, devour much flesh', were fulfilled in its history.

In verse 6, the third empire is prefigured, which we know as the Grecian, founded by Alexander the Great. Now a leopard is a cruel beast, marked by great agility. The idea of swift agility is increased by this beast having 'four wings of a fowl' on its back. This aptly sets forth the swiftness of Alexander's conquests, and his overthrow of the Persian empire. It also had 'four heads', and in this we see an allusion to what followed the early death of Alexander — the division of the empire into four separate states, under four of his leading generals.

But a fourth empire was to arise, as stated in verse 7; namely the Roman, which would be so remarkable that no well-known

beast, such as lion, bear or leopard, could represent it. It would be, 'diverse from all the beasts that were before it', — 'dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly'. Its teeth would be 'iron', and it would not only subdue, but also devour and break in pieces all that it subdued. How exactly this described the Roman empire, history bears witness.

Here then we have the four world-empires, that were indicated in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, recorded in Daniel 2. But they are presented in a very different aspect. There the deterioration in the quality of their governments, descending from gold to an unreliable combination of iron and clay, was indicated. Here we have their true inner character and spirit set before us; and all four are beasts, endowed with great strength, which is used with destructive force. What a terrible unveiling is here before us as to the true character, as God sees it, of the mighty empires of men, which are to fill up the times of the Gentiles. Let us ponder these things deeply, and learn to view world affairs in the light of what is here made known to us.

The fourth beast had ten horns, answering to the ten toes at the base of the image, in Daniel 2. Verses 8 and 9 of our chapter show that these 'horns' prefigure powerful men and kings, that

will arise in the last days of the fourth beast. Of these, three will be overthrown before 'another little horn', to be marked by penetrating intelligence and great powers of boastful speech. Here, for the first time, we meet with that evil man in whom Satan's power will be personified, as we shall see lower down in our chapter.

As Daniel gazed at this remarkable sight, 'thrones were set, and the Ancient of days did sit' (New. Trans.); that is, he saw the hour of God's judgment arrived. How majestic is the language of these verses! One cannot read them without being reminded of the way the Lord Jesus appeared to John, as he records in Revelation 1. We remember also that 'the Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son' (John 5:22). To Pharisees and others John the Baptist declared, 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire ... He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire' (Matt. 3:11-12); and 'fire', you notice, marks the scene we have before us here.

The 'Ancient of days' then presents God to us in the eternity of His Being, for we must remember that the Persons of the God-head were not clearly distinguished, as they have been since the coming of Christ. In the presence of Almighty God the Ro-

man empire in its last and worst phase, under the domination of the 'little horn', whom we identify with the first beast of Revelation 13 will be destroyed in judgment; while up to that time the three earlier beasts will have been permitted to exist, though dominion had been taken from them, as stated in verse 12.

This dream clearly divides into three parts. The first, the vision of the four beasts. The second, the vision of judgment established and the fourth beast with its little horn destroyed in the presence of Almighty God. The third, the vision of the advent and glory and eternal dominion of 'the Son of Man'. The allusion to the Lord Jesus here is not as distinct as it is in Psalm 8:4, where the first 'man' represents the Hebrew word meaning 'mortal man', and the second is the word 'Adam'. He was not mortal man, but He was indeed 'Son of Adam', as Luke's Gospel shows. In verse 13, however, it is really, 'a son of man' (New Trans.), and the word in the Chaldee is the one used for mortal man. Daniel saw the One in the vision as being like a son of man, and this He was, for He was 'made in the likeness of men' (Phil. 2:7). In the light of the New Testament we are privileged to know who He really is.

From verse 15 to the end of the chapter we have the explanation that was given to Daniel, of the vision he had seen. Much of it we have already mentioned, but there are in it details not represented in the dream. In verses 18 and 25, for instance, we find mentioned 'the saints of the most High', or 'of the high places'. When the fourth beast is destroyed, together with the 'horn', which is its imperial head, these saints will take the kingdom and possess it forever. Yet some of them will be worn out, or destroyed. As verse 21 says, the 'horn' made war with the saints, 'and prevailed against them'.

We have here a brief allusion to things more clearly revealed in Revelation 13:7 and Rev. 14:9-13. We ask our readers to read these verses, noting particularly the 13th verse, and then turning to Rev. 20:4. It seems plain then that the 'horn' who is the first 'beast' of Revelation 13, will persecute and slay many of the godly, who refuse him and his 'mark'. But such will be blessed in a particular degree, as resting from their labours, and they will be raised before the start of Christ's reign, to share in a heavenly portion and have dominion given to them, in common with all others, who are 'of the high places'; that is, enjoy-

ing a heavenly portion, as distinct from a place in millennial blessedness on earth.

Not all the saints, mentioned in verse 21 of our chapter, are slain, though war is made against them. These of course will pass into the earthly blessedness of the Kingdom. So, in our chapter we have 'the saints', who will escape and be blessed on earth: 'the saints of the high places,' whose portion is in heaven: and further, in verse 27, 'the people of the saints of the high places', to whom the greatness of the kingdom 'under the whole heaven', is to be given. That people will be the true Israel, cleansed and born again, as predicted in Ezekiel 36, and thus made spiritually to live, according to Ezekiel 37.

This vision was given to Daniel shortly before the first of the four great empires fell, and since he was without the further light shed in the New Testament, we can understand what a disturbing effect it had on his mind. What disturbed him may well encourage us. The beast-like empires of men will vanish in judgment, and all dominion will be vested in the Son of Man, while delegated authority will be exercised by saints both heavenly and earthly.

Daniel 8

We now leave that portion of the prophecy that deals specially with the Gentile powers; and so, as we begin chapter 8, the language of the original reverts to Hebrew from the Chaldee. The vision recorded in this chapter, is dated about two years after the one we have just considered. Though Gentile powers are still in view, the main point seems to be their action in regard to Jerusalem with its sanctuary and sacrifices. It came to Daniel not when he was in Babylon but rather in Shushan; that is, in a palace of the Medo-Persian empire, which overthrew the Babylonian, and it must have been just before that overthrow took place.

Thus before the Medo-Persian empire triumphed, its own overthrow was pictured in the mind of Daniel, since the ram with two horns clearly represented that power. The Persian horn became the dominant one, but it came up last. For a time the ram was irresistible, doing its own will and pushing in all directions.

The he goat of verse 5 is clearly the Grecian power, and the 'notable horn' was a prediction of Alexander the Great, who, moving with great swiftness, crushed the Persian power. Then

verse 8 predicted the sudden end of Alexander and the division of his newly acquired dominion into four lesser ones.

Thus far, we have been given an enlarged view of what was compressed into verse 6 of the previous chapter; but in Daniel 8:9 we pass into predictions that are new, and that deal with happenings that would spring out of the dissolution of the Grecian empire rather than the affairs of the last days, until we come to the interpretation of the vision, which is given to us in verses 19-26. As is frequently the case, the interpretation travels beyond the details given in the vision.

The predictions, as to 'the little horn' and his doings, are distinct from those of the 'little horn', of Daniel 7. That was to spring out of the fourth empire in its last days: this, out of one of the four parts of the divided third empire. This striking individual was to glorify himself and reach towards the south and east and 'the pleasant land', which doubtless is Palestine. The 'stars' he would cast down, we understand to be shining servants of God. He would take away the daily sacrifice and tread the sanctuary down, dishonouring the 'prince of the host'. This was all fulfilled in the career of that evil man, known to history as Antiochus Epiphanes. He defiled the temple and tried to

force heathen worship on the Jews, which led to the revolt under the Maccabees, and a time of much tribulation, until at last after the 2,300 evenings and mornings the sanctuary was cleansed. We believe that many details given in Hebrews 11:35-38, may refer to saints of those days.

When Daniel was made to understand the vision, his thoughts were soon carried on to 'what shall be in the last end of the indignation', as verse 19 says. Verses 20-22, summarize the history we have considered, and then verse 23 carries us on to the latter days, when two things will happen. First, transgressors will have 'come to the full'. Second, a king, marked by bold power and clever understanding, will rise up from the same quarter. This is indicated by the fact that he arises in the latter time of 'their kingdom'; that is, from the north region of Syria, whence came Antiochus of evil memory, who sprang from Seleucus, one of Alexander's generals, who became king of the north, while Ptolemy and his successors became kings of the south, or Egypt.

This coming king of the north, like Antiochus, will attempt to 'destroy the mighty and the holy people'; that is, the Israel of the last days. His doings are described in verses 24 and 25, but

at the last he will 'stand up against the Prince of princes', and as a result be broken 'without hand'; that is, we understand, without human instrumentality. Here then, we have that 'king of the north', or 'the Assyrian', that figures so largely in other Old Testament prophecies, who will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus Himself when He appears in His glory, and His feet stand on the Mount of Olives, as Zechariah has predicted in the opening of Zech. 14.

It is important, we believe, to keep clear in our minds the distinction between this 'little horn', proceeding from the third beast, and the one on the fourth beast in Daniel 7, who is supported by the false Messiah in Jerusalem, according to Revelation 13; and that means of course that he is in league with the Jew and Jerusalem, whereas this northern king is violently against them. Both, though probably not at the same moment, will be destroyed by the glorious appearing of Christ.

Daniel was assured that this vision was true and certain, though what it portrayed was distant from his days. Though the terror of it caused him to faint, he understood it not. It was to be as a sealed book in his day. It is an open vision to us, since we have the light of the New Testament and are indwelt by the Spirit of

God. We may well exclaim, 'Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift'!

Daniel 9

What is recorded in chapter 9 took place shortly after Darius had overthrown Babylon and taken the kingdom - that is, soon after the experience Daniel had, as narrated in Daniel 5. By this time he was of course an old man, and near the end of his life of service, for he had been amongst the first batch of captives, deported by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah, an older man, had been left in Jerusalem, prophesying there until its destruction years later.

The fall of Babylon was a tremendous upheaval. What effect had it upon Daniel? It moved him to study that portion of the Word of God that was available under his hand. A first-rate example for us today, since the upheavals among the nations during the past fifty years have been more far-reaching than the fall of Babylon. The prophecies of Jeremiah had been committed to writing and were available to him as, 'books'. We have the completed Bible, which really means 'The Book'.

To Daniel these 'books' came as 'the word of the Lord'; that is, he received Jeremiah's writings as being inspired of God, and hence authoritative, and to be accepted without question. Happy are we if, following his example, we treat our Bible in the same way. The particular passage that affected Daniel so deeply was Jeremiah 25:8-14, where 'desolations' lasting 70 years were predicted. Daniel must at once have realized that the 70 years had nearly run their course, and that deliverance of some kind was near at hand. The effect that this discovery had upon him is most instructive and also searching for us.

Had we been in his place we might have felt greatly exhilarated by the discovery, and inclined to have a time of jubilation. But it was not thus with Daniel; but rather the exact opposite. He was moved to fasting, humiliation, confession and prayer, realizing the great sin of his people which had brought all this judgment upon them. This we see, if verses 4-19 of our chapter be read. He utterly condemned himself as identified with his people, and he vindicated God in His judgments, proclaiming His righteousness in all He had done.

These words of Daniel should be deeply pondered by each of us. Nowhere in the Bible do we find a finer example of thor-

ough-going confession and prayer, though Ezra's prayer recorded in Ezra 9 closely resembles it. He made no allusion to the covenant of promise made with Abraham, but placed himself before God on the basis of the covenant of the law of Moses, and the subsequent ministry through the prophets. As to this he confessed complete breakdown and disaster, though personally he was less implicated in it than any in his day.

But thus it always is. Those deeply implicated in failure and sin are by that very fact rendered insensible to the depths into which they have sunk, while those less involved are painfully alive to the state of things. What is the state of things in the professing church today? A prophetic sketch of church history is given us in Revelation 2 and 3. The last stage is that of Laodicea. Are those deeply involved in its grievous evils likely to bow down in confession and prayer? No. Only those who are lightly involved will do so. May we all take heed to this.

The things that mark true confession come clearly to light here. The evil is acknowledged without any attempt at excuse or extenuation. The rightness of God's judgments and discipline are fully acknowledged, and the plea that God would grant deliverance, according to His word, is urged, 'not ... for our righteous-

nesses, but for Thy great mercies'. Let us cultivate these excellent features in our day. We too can ask for nothing on the ground of merit, but only on the ground of mercy. As we contemplate the state of Christendom today, and of our own state too, let us cultivate the spirit of humble confession that marked Daniel.

Such confession and prayer meets with an immediate answer, as we see in verses 20 and 21. Gabriel, the angelic messenger of God, was sent, 'to fly swiftly', with an answer that would give Daniel 'skill and understanding' as to events that lay ahead, with the assurance that he was in God's estimation a man 'greatly beloved'. What other saint was permitted to hear himself so described? Our Lord's words were, 'he that shall humble himself shall be exalted' (Matt. 23:12). Here we have an illustration of this. Daniel had humbled himself in exceptional measure, and so he is permitted to know that he is greatly beloved in Heaven. What an exaltation! Had he not been truly humbled such an assurance might have puffed him up to his undoing.

Gabriel was commissioned to reveal to Daniel the prophecy of the 'seventy weeks'; the word week here indicating a period of

seven, it may be of days, or as here it clearly is, of years. We have just seen Daniel stirred to confession and prayer by the discovery of the fact that the seventy years of the desolations had nearly run their course; he is now to learn that seventy years, multiplied by seven, were to pass when according to the Divine reckoning, full release and blessing would be reached, as indicated in verse 24.

The contents of this verse must be carefully noted. In the first place, the time indicated is determined upon 'thy people and upon thy holy city', and not upon the world in general; though doubtless what transpires upon Israel and Jerusalem will have great effect upon the world in general. Then, in the second place, the end that is to be reached is the establishment of full millennial blessedness. Then it is that the sad story of transgression and sin will be dosed; then 'the righteousness of the ages' (New Trans.), will be brought in; then the vision and the prophecy will be sealed up, since all is accomplished: then 'the most holy' or, 'the holy of holies' will be anointed, and set apart for God, as is also predicted in such a passage as Ezekiel 43:12. The end of the seventy years of desolations would only be a very faint and imperfect forecast of this.

The seventy weeks, or 490 years, were, however, to be divided into three parts, and they were to start when the commandment was issued to restore and to build Jerusalem as a city. The opening verses of Ezra give us the edict of Cyrus to rebuild the temple: the edict to rebuild the city was that of Artaxerxes, as recorded in Nehemiah 2. This latter was the start of the seventy weeks, predicted here. The first part — seven weeks, or 49 years, — were to be occupied with the rebuilding, and the re-establishment of Israel in the city and land: that is, about up to the time of Malachi. Then were to come the 62 weeks, or 434 years, completing the period 'to the Messiah the Prince'.

Here then we have a very clear and definite prophecy, which has been fulfilled. In checking its fulfilment the main difficulty lies in the fact that the Jews calculated their years in a way different from ourselves, which gives rise to complications. We are content to accept the result of an investigation made years ago by the late Sir Robert Anderson, a competent and reliable person. He showed that not only were the 483 years to Christ correct, but that they expired exactly to the day on which He made His formal presentation of Himself to His people, riding on the foal of an ass, as Zechariah had foretold.

And what was the result of this presentation? Just what we have in verse 26. Messiah was 'cut off, but not for Himself', or better, as the margin has it, 'and shall have nothing'. Thus His rejection was foretold, and though He had the title to everything on the earth, He had nothing: a borrowed stable for His birth; nowhere to lay His head, while He served; a borrowed tomb at the finish. Here then we find the Jews committing themselves to a sin far worse than their breaking of the law and their persistent idolatry. The consequences flowing from this greatest of all sins, are stated at the end of verse 26.

Years ago we heard of a Christian talking to a Jewish Rabbi, and asking him what in their history justified God in condemning them to the disasters and miseries they suffered in Babylon. He admitted at once that it was their law-breaking and idolatry. Then, said the Christian, tell me, what have you done that justifies God in condemning you to far worse disasters and miseries, lasting from A. D. 70, to the present time, with even worse things still in prospect? It was a devastating question, and what could he say? We know what we should at once say; pointing to the Messiah crucified between two thieves.

In this prophecy the result of the cutting off of the Messiah is briefly summed up at the end of verse 26. The more immediate result was to be the destruction of the city and the sanctuary by 'the people of the prince that shall come.' Now this prince is the 'little horn', of whom we read in Daniel 7, the head of the Roman Empire in its revived and last stage, whom we identified with the first 'beast' of Revelation 13. This Roman despot is still to come, but the Roman people were the dominant power in the time of our Lord, and they did destroy Jerusalem in very thorough fashion.

That destruction was but the beginning of God's disciplinary judgments upon them. So the prophecy moves on to 'the end thereof', which is to be 'with a flood', or 'an overflow', indicating, we judge, that the sorrows and persecutions that have followed the Jews through all these centuries will rise to flood-tide height just before the end. The closing words of this verse may be read, 'to the end, war, — the desolations determined'. Here is a state" meet, conveying volumes in a few words.

In the past nineteen centuries war has been the prominent feature. If all reference to it were cut out of our history books, there would be not much history left, and there are wars pre-

dicted, that yet have to come. But the Jew and his city are particularly in view in this prophecy, and hence we again meet with the word, 'desolations'. Our chapter began with a reference to the 70 years' desolations predicted by Jeremiah; now as we reach its end we find another prediction of desolations, which in length and final severity will surpass the former. So Messiah's death was to be followed almost immediately by the destruction of Jerusalem, and ultimately, for a long period, but its length not revealed, by war and desolations.

Having mentioned the end in verse 26, we are carried on to the events of the end in verse 27. Who is the 'he', with whom the verse begins? Clearly the 'prince that shall come,' dominating the revived Roman Empire of the last days. He is going to confirm, not 'the covenant' but, 'a covenant with the many for one week' (New Trans.). And this is evidently the one week which completes the 70 weeks of this prophecy. This covenant, we judge, will permit the Jews of that day to resume 'the sacrifice and the oblation' in Jerusalem, for in the midst of the week he will break the covenant, and the desolations will reach their climax.

In the New Translation the close of the verse reads, 'because of the protection of abominations (there shall be) a desolator, even until that the consumption and what is determined shall be poured out upon the desolate'. This will be the time of the great tribulation, and the 'desolator' we should identify as being the 'king of fierce countenance', spoken of in the closing verses of Daniel 8. At the end of this seventieth week Messiah will appear in power and great glory, as other scriptures show, and the 'everlasting righteousness', or 'the righteousness of the ages', will be established. His appearing will completely overthrow the desolator and completely deliver the desolate.

Thus, the day of grace, in which we are living, comes in between weeks 69 and 70. The latter part of verse 26 shows that there is to be an undefined period at that point, marked by war and desolations as to world affairs and the Jews, but marked also by the going forth of the Gospel, as the New Testament shows. The rejection and the death of the Messiah was thus plainly predicted, with the sorrows of the world in general and of the Jew in particular, as the result of it.

Daniel 10

As we commence reading chapter 10, we again find mention of 'weeks'. They are, however, to be distinguished from the 'weeks' we have just been considering, since a note in the margin of our Bibles indicates that in the Hebrew they are 'weeks of days'. For those weeks Daniel was mourning and fasting, though the reason for this is not stated.

At the end of chapter 1, we were told that Daniel continued to the first year of Cyrus: what we are about to consider occurred in the third year of Cyrus, so Daniel was now an old man and very near the end of his remarkable career. Our chapter furnishes us with details preparatory to the prophetic revelations made in Daniel 11 and Daniel 12. They are very instructive, as showing us the way in which angelic beings may act as 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation' (Heb. 1:14).

Verses 5-9, describe the angelic visitation and the effect it had upon Daniel. We may remark that uniformly when angelic beings assume a form visible to human eyes, they appear as men. Nevertheless that which is supernatural marks them, reminding the one who sees them of the presence of God. It was so on this

occasion, and the description given in verse 6 reminds us of John's description of his Lord, as recorded in Revelation 1:14-15. Yet the angel here was not the Lord, as verse 13, we think, makes plain. Still it put Daniel on his face and prostrate.

There is also a resemblance between this scene and what took place at the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Then his companions saw the light but did not hear the words that were spoken though they heard the sound. Here the men with him saw nothing but they were filled with trembling, and fled to hide themselves. Fallen man cannot stand in the presence of God, and even a saint — whether Daniel in the Old Testament or John in the New — falls down 'in a deep sleep', or 'as one dead'. We know God as our Father, but we must never forget His supreme majesty as God.

In the first year of Darius, Daniel was addressed as a man 'greatly beloved', as we saw in the last chapter. We have now come to the third year of Cyrus, and again he is thus addressed twice, showing he had not forfeited the earlier description. And why was this, seeing that so often saints backslide, and do not maintain the life of godliness? The answer, we think, is found

in verse 12. In his devoted life Daniel had maintained two things.

In the first place he had set his heart to understand. How often is this lacking amongst us today! Is it our fervent desire to understand what God has revealed, not with the head only, but with the heart? Daniel loved his God, and loved his people, so that what God made known deeply affected him. If love were more fervent with us, we should be setting our hearts to understand the truth made known to us.

In the second place he 'chastened', or 'humbled' himself before God, while he sought the understanding. Here again we have to challenge ourselves. It is fatally easy to desire a large understanding of Divine truth because it confers a certain prominence and importance upon the person who possesses it. In reality all truth, if apprehended in the heart, humbles us. This is exemplified in the Apostle Paul. Writing of God's great thoughts as to the church in Ephesians 3, he is 'less than the least of all saints'. In 2 Corinthians 12, after telling how he had been caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable things, he says, 'though I be nothing'. Did we chasten ourselves more truly be-

fore God, we should soon have a larger understanding of His truth.

Verses 12 and 13 show that answers to our prayerful desires may be delayed by adverse powers in the unseen world. Satan has his angels, and it appears that some may be deputed by him to hinder God's work in certain kingdoms. The prince of the kingdom of Persia, who withstood the holy angel speaking to Daniel, was doubtless a fallen angelic being. Michael, elsewhere called the archangel, came to help him. The first verse of Daniel 12 shows us that Michael is specially commissioned to act on behalf of the children of Israel, and hence he intervened on this occasion. In the last verse of our chapter he is called, 'your prince'.

In the angelic world there was also 'the prince of Grecia', as verse 20 shows; but in spite of these adverse powers the messenger of God had come to Daniel, and lifting him up had strengthened him to receive the communication that God was now sending him. Conflict in the angelic realm had still to take place with the princes of Persia and Grecia — the empire that was presently to overthrow the Persian empire — but the in-

struction of this humble and devoted servant of God took precedence, as to time, over even that.

He had come to show Daniel, 'that which is noted in the Scripture of Truth'. He spoke as if it had already been so noted, but we may indeed thank God that it has been noted in the Bible — the Scripture of Truth — which we hold in our hand and can read today. What was thus conveyed to Daniel is noted in the chapters that follow, and as we read them we shall see that some things revealed have already taken place, and some remain to be fulfilled, as we have just seen in the prophecy of the seventy weeks. What has been so accurately fulfilled assures us that the important things, that remain to be fulfilled, will all take place with equal accuracy in their season.

Daniel 11

We now come to the last of the prophetic revelations, received and recorded by Daniel. The opening verses of chapter 11, indeed the larger part of the chapter, give us predictions that very evidently have long since been fulfilled. If our readers will glance at the close of verse 35, they will see the words, 'to the time of the end, because it is yet for a time appointed'. Then

turning back to Daniel 9:26, they will see the words, 'to the end'; and at that point came the undisclosed gap in the prophecy of the seventy weeks — as we now know, lasting over nineteen centuries — before the seventieth week arrives. So it is, we believe, here, and only when we reach verse 36 of our chapter does the prophecy suddenly move on to the time of the end, and to the last days.

The three Persian kings who were to 'stand up', according to verse 2, are evidently the three mentioned in Ezra 4:5.7, known in history as Cambyses, Smerdis, and Darius Hystaspes. The fourth, 'richer than they all', would be Xerxes, who was so intoxicated by his own greatness that he attacked Greece, and stirred up the 'mighty king' of verse 3 — Alexander the Great — to humble his pride and shatter his kingdom; gaining for himself 'great dominion', according to his own will.

History records how brief was Alexander's dominion, for he died when still young, and his kingdom was divided between four of his generals, as is clearly foretold in verse 4. Their powers, however, were far more limited and 'not according to his dominion'. From verse 5 onward, our attention is directed to the doings of two out of these four; the king of the south and

the king of the north respectively. If we enquire why the prophecy concentrates on these two only, the answer surely is that only these two meddled with and oppressed the Jews back in the land. Their kingdoms were north and south of Palestine; what we should now call Syria and Egypt, and the first kings were Seleucus and Ptolemy.

The New Translation renders verse 5 as, 'The king of the south, who is one of his princes, shall be strong; but [another] shall be stronger than he'. Both of these princes of Alexander would be strong, but the northern one the stronger of the two. This exactly came to pass.

Verse 6 begins, 'And in the end of years', and we at once travel on some distance into history, for the prophecy does not concern itself here with individual kings. It is just 'the king of the north', or 'of the south', though different individuals may be indicated. What is plainly foretold is the state of friction and warfare that continued for many years between these two opposing powers, to the trouble and discomfort of the Palestinian Jews, who were located between them. We may say therefore that verses 6-20 forecast their evil schemings and fightings up to a point when the power of Rome became manifest, before which

the then king of the north should 'stumble and fall, and not be found'. His successor had to be a mere 'raiser of taxes', to meet the demands of Rome. Infidels have insisted this chapter must have been written after the events, so accurately does it foretell what actually took place.

Reaching verse 21, we read that after this 'raiser of taxes' there would 'stand up a vile person', marked equally by cunning flattery and by warlike violence, and his doings and the things that sprang out of his doings occupy us until we come to the end of verse 36. We have here again, we believe, the man presented to us in Daniel 8:9, as the 'little horn' rising out of one of the four kingdoms into which the Grecian dominion was divided — the man known to history as Antiochus Epiphanes. His evil doings are dwelt upon at some length, we believe, because he acted with such violence against the Jews as to make him a type or forecast of the king of the north, who in the last days will be their great adversary.

This is seen especially in verses 28-32. In the first of these verses, 'his heart shall be against the holy covenant'. Then for a time his plans are spoiled by 'the ships of Chittim'; that is, an expedition from Rome. This was the occasion that some of us

may remember hearing about in our school days, when tired with his falsity the Roman leader drew a circle about him where he stood, and demanded an answer before he stepped out of it. This it was that angered him, and as he dared not attack the Romans, he vented his spleen on the Jews, and had 'indignation against the holy covenant'.

Amongst the Jews of his days were found some 'that forsake the holy covenant', as verse 30 indicates, and establishing contact with these, he proceeded to pollute the sanctuary in a violent way, as verse 31 predicts. He overturned the whole order of things in the temple at Jerusalem, stopping the sacrifices to Jehovah in the endeavour to make all venerate a false image, which is described here as 'the abomination that makes desolate'. Then he corrupted and gained to his side by flatteries 'such as do wickedly against the covenant'.

Let us notice that no less than four times the 'covenant' is mentioned in these verses, and on three of these occasions the word 'holy' is connected with it. What God has covenanted and decreed is always the object of the devil's attack, and this man was without a doubt an agent of Satan in his efforts to subvert what remained of the worship of the one true God at Jerusalem.

But in those days there were to be found not only those who were wicked and whom he could corrupt but also 'people that do know their God', and, 'that understand among the people'. This is ever God's way; He does not leave Himself without a witness of some kind, and here we have a prediction of what actually happened in those dark days. The Maccabees were raised up, zealous and God-fearing men, and under their leadership there was ultimately a deliverance, though not without much loss and suffering, as is indicated in verse 33.

In the closing verses of Hebrews 11, particularly in Hebrews 11:36-38, we find allusions to the sufferings of saints of a by-gone age which we can hardly identify from Old Testament history, and it may be that the reference is to saints who suffered in this period of trial, after the days of Malachi. Their testings were intensified by the failure and apostasy of some who were men of understanding, as verse 35 of our chapter predicted; but this would have a purging effect upon those who did really stand firmly for God.

This mixed state of things is to persist, 'to the time of the end'. Thus it is stated, and thus it has been — particularly as regards the Jew, who is before us in the prophecy here. There is to be in

this master 'e time appointed', but no indication is given of how long the time is to be. We turn to such New Testament passages as Ephesians 3:4-5, and Colossians 1:25-26, to find that in our epoch of Gospel grace going out to the Gentiles, God is working out designs that He had from eternity, but which were not revealed in Old Testament times. In the wisdom of God, however, the prophecies were so worded as to leave room for the things subsequently to be made known without any collision of fact. An illustration of this, often referred to, is in Isaiah 61:2, where both Advents are alluded to in one verse. The same thing may be said of Daniel 9:26, and of the verse before us here.

In verse 36, 'the king' is suddenly introduced to us, and glancing at verse 40 we discover that his dominion will be 'at the time of the end', and also that his kingdom will be found in a land lying between the kings of the south and the north. We conclude therefore that he is a king who will dominate Palestine in the last days, and of whom we read further in the New Testament. He is to be identified, we believe, with the second beast of Revelation 13, and with that false Messiah, coming 'in his own name', whom the Lord Jesus predicted in John 5:43.

The doings of this 'king' are predicted in verses 36-39, and the leading feature is this: — he 'shall do according to his will'. Now sin is lawlessness — the creature breaking loose from the control of the Creator, in order to assert and accomplish its own will. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, we read of 'that man of sin', who is to be revealed when He who restrains is removed, and if that passage be compared with this, we at once see some striking resemblances, for in both the leading features of this coming great one are selfwill and self-exaltation.

Let us each remember for our own soul's good that there is nothing more destructive of true Christian life than self will. We are called to do, not our own wills but the will of God. We are called to a life of obedience, for we are to have in us the mind that was in Christ, which led Him even to death. His was the life of self-humiliation, the exact opposite to the self-exalting mind which was in Adam, and which characterizes the flesh in each one of us.

Two expressions in verse 37 indicate that this king will be a Jew, for he disregards 'the God of his fathers', and also 'the desire of women', for every typical Jewish woman desired to be the mother of the Messiah. He will speak 'marvellous things'

against the true God, assuming a God-like position for himself. Yet he will honour 'the god of forces', or 'of fortresses'; an allusion we think, to what is plainly seen in Revelation 13, where the second beast is the leader in religious apostasy but is dependent upon the first beast for worldly power and military might.

Support he will need, for the kings of both south and north will be antagonistic, more particularly the king of the north, as we see in the closing verses of the chapter. In Isaiah he is spoken of as the Assyrian, and 'the overflowing scourge' (Isa. 28:15), and Zechariah 14:1-3 appears to refer to the end of this northern adversary, as predicted in the two verses that close our chapter. At the outset he will have great success, overflowing many lands, save Edom, Moab and Ammon, who are reserved to be dealt with more directly by a restored Israel. He will even overpower Egypt, and then tidings from the north-east will lead him to Palestine, and he will 'plant the tents of his palace between the sea and the mountain of holy beauty', (New Trans.). And then, when his achievements seem to reach their climax, 'he shall come to his end, and none shall help him'. In this terse yet graphic way was revealed to Daniel what is stated

in Zechariah 14:3. Jehovah goes forth to the conflict, in the person of the Lord Jesus. The adverse northern king is crushed, and comes to his end.

Daniel 12

There will be, however, other antagonistic powers beside the kings of north and south and the false Messiah-king in Jerusalem. All will be dealt with for 'at that time' as the opening verse of chapter 12 declares God is going to resume His dealings with Israel in His grace. Michael the archangel is specially commissioned to act on their behalf, and he stands up to deal with things, and two great events come to pass. First, there will be a complete deliverance to Daniel's people.

This time of great trouble is evidently the time our Lord referred to in His prophetic discourse as the 'great tribulation', (Matt. 24:21), after He had spoken of 'the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet'. In this He referred to verse 11 of Daniel 12, and not to verse 31 of Daniel 11, which though something of the same kind clearly refers to what took place under Antiochus Epiphanes. This verse in Daniel 12 is

the first definite prophecy of this fearful time of tribulation which lies ahead.

And it is worthy of note that this first prediction clearly relates it to the Jew, as also does the Lord's prophecy, recorded in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. It will be the climax of God's governmental dealings with that people, who rejected and crucified their Messiah, though as Revelation 3:10 indicates, all the world will be affected by it, since the Gentiles as a secondary power had a hand in the death of Christ. In that tribulation there will be not only terrible evils, proceeding from both man and Satan, but the outpouring of the wrath of God, as revealed in Revelation 16. As Christians we have the assurance that, 'God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess. 5:9).

Our scripture tells us that an elect Israel will be delivered out of the tribulation — 'every one that shall be found written in the book'; the book of life, as the New Testament speaks of it. The awakening that is predicted in verse 2, is evidently similar to that of which Ezekiel 37 speaks. Many a Jew will be asleep as regards their God, and buried in the dust of the nations. They will awake, some marked by faith to enter into the life everlast-

ing of the millennial age; others still unbelieving to enter into judgment. It will be with them as it will be with Gentile peoples, as the Lord made known in Matthew 25:31-46.

It will also be, as verse 3 shows, a time of reward for the wise and diligent in the service of their God. Let us all take good note of this, for the principles on which God deals with His servants do not vary. There is reward for the 'wise', those who have a God-given understanding of His truth and ways, so as to instruct others also; and a reward also for those who are active in the winning of souls, so as to turn them into the way of righteousness. Thus what we may call the contemplative side of Christian life and the active side of service are to be equally balanced.

Verse 4 closes the prophetic communication that began with Daniel 11, and it corroborates the statement that from verse 36 onwards we have revealed things that will come to pass at 'the time of the end'. Though made known to Daniel and recorded by him, it was to be as a shut book till the end time was reached. During the last century or so these things have been much studied and the light of them has shone forth. This should confirm us in the thought that the end of the age is near.

And the closing words of this verse should confirm us even further: 'many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased'. Our age is strikingly marked by both these things. Our powers of locomotion have increased beyond the dreams of our forbears — on land and sea, and in the air. But it is all to and from. We fly thither, and then back we come to our starting point, and end where we began. The increase of knowledge also is prodigious, even alarming in the field of nuclear energy, as everybody knows. Knowledge — yes: but, wisdom — no. Man is just the same sinful creature as of old — deceived by the adversary.

When we consider the dealings of God, particularly in judgment, the question that always arises in our minds is — How long? That was the enquiry between these angelic beings — appearing as men — that had conveyed the prophecy to Daniel. The answer is given in verse 7, and it plainly shows that the question was how long to the end of the time of trouble once it had begun? The answer was, 'a time, times, and an half', which we understand to signify, 3: years; doubtless the second half of the seventieth week, indicated in Daniel 9. When that last week is finished all power will have departed from 'the holy people';

that is, the God-fearing remnant in Israel. They will be marked by an extremity of weakness, and the adversaries will have reached apparently the peak of their power and splendour. Then the sudden appearing of the Lord in glory and might: His poor saints delivered; the adversaries irretrievably crushed.

Thus it has ever been, and thus it will yet be: Israel in Egypt, for instance. When Jacob went into Egypt in the days of Joseph he and his children were an honoured people. The years passed and they fell lower and lower, until they were a crowd of slaves under the task-master's lash. Then God acted in judgment: His powerless people delivered: the powerful enemy completely overthrown. Thus it will be for Israel at the opening of the millennial age; and we do not anticipate it will be otherwise when the saints are raptured to glory, as predicted in 1 Thessalonians 4. They will not have reached such a state of spiritual opulence that the angels might be tempted to think that they deserved it, but the very reverse. It will be the crowning act, not of merit, but of mercy, as we see in Jude 21.

Daniel's question, in verse 8, finds an echo in all our hearts. It now concerns not the time of the end, but what is to be the final outcome of all this human wickedness and of the dealings of

God? Daniel was a godly Jew of a representative sort, and to such at that time the real significance was 'closed up and sealed'. We are told in 1 Peter 1:12 how Old Testament prophets spoke of things, which they themselves did not understand, as in their day redemption had not been accomplished, nor had the Holy Spirit been given. What Daniel was to know was that God would still maintain a people for Himself, who would be purified and made white and 'tried', or, 'refined', by all His dealings, while the wicked would still pursue their evil way in darkness. Only the wise would have the capacity to understand. This solemn fact is stated very clearly in 1 Corinthians 2:14.

So Daniel had to go his way without any clear answer to his question. He was given, however, supplementary information as to the closing periods, for in verses 11 and 12 we have mentioned the two periods of 1290 and 1335 days. According to Jewish reckoning a year consisted of 360 days, and therefore the 'time, times, and a half', of verse 7, would consist of 1260 days, and the 1290 days would mean one month beyond that, just as the 1335 days would be a month and a half further beyond. What Daniel could know was that he who waited in pa-

tience to the expiration of the longest period, was to enter into blessing.

So here in one word there is an answer to the question of verse 8. Daniel might not know any details but he could be assured that blessing lay at the end for the people of God. We have the same assurance only we have it in larger measure and fuller detail. However searching are God's judgments upon man's evil, for the humble and patient there is always blessing at the end. Another fact lies embedded in these words. God acts, whether in judgment or in blessing in stages. He did so with Israel in Egypt. He did so again when the church was inaugurated. There was the forty days of His repeated manifestations in resurrection, followed by the ten days of waiting; and then the formation of the church by the shedding forth of the Holy Spirit.

So it will be in the last days, when the Kingdom of God arrives in manifested power, and the last word to Daniel is one of full assurance. Until it comes, rest is to be his portion, after a life of exceptional unrest and strain; and when it does come he has an appointed 'lot', in which he will stand — and we venture to think that his 'lot' will not be a small one.

And we too, each have our 'lot' at the end. As sharing in the place and portion of the church, we know how wonderful that will be. But, what about our 'lot' in the coming kingdom of our Lord? That will depend upon our faithfulness in service here. If in any measure our 'lot' in the kingdom is to be comparable with Daniel's, we must like him go through the present world in holy separation and devotedness to God.

