

# LECTURES ON DANIEL THE PROPHET

## THE NEEDED MORAL CONDITION TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND GOD'S MIND

### CHAPTER 1

In beginning a series of addresses on this book, I want you first to notice the title of the chart "Outline of the book of Daniel the Prophet." I call especial attention to the name given to Daniel, because it is given to him, not by man, but by our Lord Jesus Himself, in the 24th chapter of Matthew, 15th verse, and in Mark 13:14, There we find Him warning His disciples concerning the setting up of "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the *prophet*." I emphasize this, because it is a common thing with some in our day to deny that there was a prophet, Daniel. If you are even moderately familiar with the theories of the destructive "critics," you must know that the book of Daniel was about the first portion of Scripture to which they objected. They declared that it was utterly impossible to credit the idea that Daniel lived in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, and Cyrus, and yet wrote a book which told of all these world-empires before any of them, except the first two, had come into existence. Daniel, these learned teachers tell us, was simply a romancer, who lived over 200 years later on, and he wrote his so-called prophecies after they had all become history.

As a simple believer, who owes everything for eternity to what the blessed Christ of God accomplished on Calvary's cross, I prefer to accept His testimony, though it were in opposition to all the wise men of the day. He declared that Daniel was a prophet. He spoke not of Daniel the historian, nor Daniel the romancer, nor Daniel the novelist, but Daniel the *prophet* Daniel the man who had enlightenment by the Spirit of God, and therefore could speak of the things that were not, as though they were. That is one thing I shall be insisting on in all these lectures. I stand for the full inspiration of all the reputed word of God, and necessarily, therefore, of the book of Daniel.

The first chapter, as noted on the chart, is introductory. It sets forth the moral condition suited to enlightenment in the ways and counsels of God. In it we read of a little company of faithful men maintaining a state of separation to God from evil, in a day when everything seemed to be against them, and it appeared as though there was none to whom they could turn for help.

This little company, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, four devoted young men, set themselves against all the evil of the kingdom of Babylon. They said, "We will not defile ourselves": and these were the men to whom God could communicate His mind. I believe it is important to dwell upon this, because in our own day, alas, in many cases prophetic study has been taken up by very unspiritual persons. If we are going to get the mind of God in studying this book, we must remember that it consists of revelations, deliverances and visions given to a spiritually-minded man who was separated from the iniquity of his day; and if we are to understand it, we also need to be spiritually-minded, and to walk apart from all that is unholy, all that would hinder progress in divine things. We need ever to have before us the words, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2 John 8).

The truth of God is learned through the conscience; and this is the reason why the most brilliant men can read the Bible through, over and over again, and never hear the voice of God in it at all. It has been said that " what is one man's meat is another man's poison." The very word of God may become poison to an unspiritual man, if he reads it without being in subjection to God, reads it to find difficulties; and arises from its perusal more confirmed in his unbelief than he was when he sat down to consider it. But, on the other hand, the same book put. into the hands of a spiritually-minded person, one who has bowed in God's presence, owning his lost condition, who has trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour, and who is now seeking to live for God, and to let his whole life be subject to His word that man sits down to the same book, and he finds it to be food for his soul, building him up on his most holy faith.

If you want enlightenment in divine things, see to it that you walk in the power of an ungrieved Spirit, for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him."

In verses 1 and 2 Ave find fulfilled the "word which God had previously declared by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others of the prophets, would soon take place. For a number of years Jehovah had been sending prophets to the backsliding kings of Judah, warning them that the day of His patience had almost run out, and that though Israel had been His chosen people, yet because of their sin He was going to give them over to the power of their enemies, and the land of Palestine was to lie desolate. Singularly enough, as we might consider it, God connects this with their failure to keep the sabbatical year. He had told them, when they came into the land, that every seventh year must be His. For 490 years they had not kept one sabbatical year. They doubtless thought they would do better by tilling the land annually, and that they would be richer as a result of taking- their own way. God had told them that if they gave every seventh year to Him, they would have abundance in the sixth year to last them until harvest in the eighth year; but they evidently did not believe Him, and they thought to better themselves by their own efforts. Thus, through covetousness a sin that is eating like a canker among many of God's professed people today the word of the Lord was ignored and His commandment broken. For 490 years He seemed to be indifferent to this breach of obedience on their part; He appeared to wink at their sin. But He had taken account of it all; and when they, perhaps, thought His law had become as a dead letter, He sent Jeremiah to tell them that now they must go down to Babylon, as captives there for seventy years, while the land kept sabbath! They had cheated God out of seventy years, they thought; but He squared the account by giving them into the power of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Chaldeans, who carried them away to the land of Shinar; and there they remained until the seventy years had expired, while the lost sabbaths were being made up.

It is a very common thing for men thus to forget the claims of God, and to suppose that He will never assert Himself. Even saints have been, known to fail in this respect, lint none ever prospered who ignored the authority of Jehovah in the past; and none can prosper now who forget the obedience due as children to a Father, and as redeemed ones to Him who is not only Saviour, but Lord. In the world, and even in the Church nowadays, we hear a great deal about the rights of the people; but there is One whose rights we do not hear emphasized as often as we should the rights of our Lord Jesus Christ. Men of the world are utterly indifferent to His rights, and saints are only too apt to fall in with the spirit of the times; but a day is fast approaching when God is going to square the account. Men may not be concerned just now about what is due to Him; but the day is coming when He is going to awake from His seeming slumber, as He tells

us in the 50th psalm; and then their proud, haughty knees will have to bow, and their tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, to the glory of God the Father, when the once-rejected Saviour manifests His authority and power. Judah ignored God's rights, and the result was they were sent down to Babylon, as we find in these opening verses.

But there was a second and greater reason still why God chose to give His heritage over to the power of the Chaldeans. For centuries idolatry had been gaining ground among them. They had turned away from Him, the living and true God, to serve the false gods of the heathen. Now Babylon was the home of idolatry; so thither the Jews were sent, that they might learn to loathe the idols they had loved. And we find the lesson was well impressed. Ever since the captivity the Jewish nation, whatever its other sins, has been free from this great evil. Unhappily they are like the house empty, swept and garnished, from which the evil spirit of idolatry has been driven; but they refused Messiah when He came in lowly grace; and so, in the not very distant future, a host of wicked spirits will enter the empty house; and the Jews, save a preserved and delivered remnant, will own and worship the "Man of sin." But of this more anon. (soon or in the near future)

The four youths already mentioned were specially distinguished among the rest of their captive brethren. They were taken in charge by the king's orders, that they might be trained to administer in state affairs, and titled for positions of trust and confidence. The name of each of them contains some form of the name of God in Hebrew, and indicates their pious ancestry: for, in Scripture, names have meanings that often help greatly in elucidating the Holy Spirit's mind on a given subject.

All these young men were devoted to Jehovah, as their names imply. But that did not suit the prince of the eunuchs, into whose charge they were given; so, he gave them new names that indicated their subjection to the Chaldeans, calling Daniel, Belteshazzar; and the others, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego names that contain the titles of heathen deities; as though he would thus force them to own themselves the subjects of senseless idols. But these labeled men (labeled as servants to heathen gods) stood firmly for the God of Israel, and refused to dishonor Him by compliance with a demand that would have rendered them unclean before Him.

The test came. They were to eat of the king's meat; and all that meat was dedicated to idols: making it abhorrent and defiling to a godly Jew. But as the king had given his orders, it might have seemed as though these Hebrews had no choice in the matter. Many, at least, would have argued in this way, and said there was no individual responsibility in such a case.

Nebuchadnezzar's authority was derived from God. They had only to obey, they might reason, as the Lord Himself had put them in his power. But not thus did Daniel or his young companions view it. They looked upon the king's command as a trial of their faith. Would they keep themselves from the unclean in the land of the idolater? Would they be just as particular about being true to God as if they were in their own land; giving due honor to His Word, and seeking to glorify Him by subjection thereto, though captives in the country of the oppressor?

They stood the test in a most marked way, as did the apostles in a later day, who said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Daniel besought the master of the eunuchs that he would give them pulse, vegetable food to eat. Fearing the result upon their physical constitutions, he

objected, dreading to incur the king's wrath. But the devoted young men pleaded that, at least, an opportunity be given to prove whether they would not thrive as well upon pulse as the rest of the company did upon the king's meat. To this Melzar consented, and the test showed that at the end of ten days Daniel and his three friends were fatter and fairer than any who were fed with the regulation diet. Permission was accordingly given to continue the same fare; and thus, they were able to maintain a position of separation from the unclean, even in the very home of idolatry.

Now all this might, have seemed to many of the Jews a very trivial matter; and some who read the account in our day may also consider it all a mere quibble on the part of Daniel, Hanamah, Mishael, and Azariah. But it brings out a principle of great force and beauty that should appeal to every Christian heart and conscience. Mark you. the only way to go on with God is by being faithful in little things. He who honors the Lord by conscientious adherence to His Word in what some would call minor details is likely to be exercised about greater things. I have heard Christians refer to certain precepts in the Scriptures as non-essentials. But we may rest assured there are no non-essentials in our Bibles. "The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in the fire, purified seven times." When people talk of non-essentials in regard to anything concerning which God has revealed His mind, it is well to ask, "Essential or nonessential to what?" If it be a question of the soul's salvation, undoubtedly the one great essential is faith in His blessed Son, whose finished work alone avails to put away sin and procure peace with God. But if it be a question of what is essential to the enjoyment of communion with God, essential to obtaining the Lord's approval at the judgment-seat of Christ, then it is well to remember that in everything the believer is sanctified to the obedience of Christ. And it is here that we should seek to imitate Daniel, who had "purposed in his heart" that he would not defile himself. Paul and Barnabas besought the early Christians to "cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart." It is only thus we will be kept from defilement. Anything that defiles the conscience at once breaks the link of communion with God, and hinders our advance in spiritual things. There can be no true progress if there be not care to preserve inviolate this inward monitor. "Holding the faith and a good conscience; which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck is a solemn word worthy of being carefully pondered.

It was because of their carefulness in maintaining a good conscience that these Hebrew young men were given spiritual enlightenment above all the men of their times. They had an understanding in divine mysteries that others failed to enter into, because it remains true in all dispensations that "spiritual things are spiritually discerned." God does not commonly impart His secrets to careless men, but to those who are devoted to His interests. He may, in His sovereignty, use even a Balaam or a Caiaphas to utter divine truth; but cases like these are extraordinary. The rule is that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him."

It is of grave importance that we bear this principle in mind in these Laodicean times. We live in days when everything that once was deemed important is looked upon as a matter of indifference; when truth for which myriads of martyrs shed their blood is considered hardly worthy of being contended for days when the claims of God as set forth in His faithful Word are openly set aside even by those who "call themselves by the name of the Lord," and who profess to owe everything to the cross on which the Lord Jesus died. Latitudinarianism is the prevailing order, and few ask, with intention to obey, "What saith the Scripture?" Is it any

wonder that a host of false teachings is coming in like a flood, and thousands on every hand are being swept away from their moorings? A good conscience that is, a conscience in all things controlled by the word of God once put away, shipwreck of the faith is almost certain to follow. It is not a question of shipwreck of faith in Christ; but by putting away a good conscience people make shipwreck of *the* faith; and the term "the faith " means" the faith of God's elect, "the truth lie has revealed, and concerning which Paul wrote, "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." It is the same as that spoken of by Jude, who writes exhorting believers to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

And so, we may lay it down as and proven by experience, and supported by Scripture, that the only way we can advance in the truth is by maintaining a good conscience. Allow one thing in your life unjudged that you know to be contrary to the word of God, or that you fear is not in line with God's will for you, and you will soon find your spiritual eyes become darkened, your spiritual susceptibilities deadened, and no real progress made in your soul, but rather a steady decline. But where there is faithfulness in separation from that which is opposed to the mind of God; where His word is allowed to sit in judgment on all your ways, you will learn that " the path of the just is as a shining light, which shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day." The Word will illumine each step before you as you take the one already pointed out.

It is written of these four young men that "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." In this he reminds us very much of Joseph, who also entered into the secrets of the Lord, and who was first characterized by fidelity to God; so that God's smile, God's approbation, meant more, was more to him than the smile or the friendship and approval of any human being. And just as it was with Daniel, who came "into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs," so Joseph, exhibiting the godliness of his life and the transparency of his nature, came into favor with the keeper of the prison; and, to crown it all, we find God opening his understanding, giving him wisdom in the interpretation of dreams and visions, as here with Daniel.

What a lesson for us that purity of heart and faithfulness to God come before enlightenment in divine mysteries! If you attempt to reverse these things, you need not be surprised if you fall into all kinds of error. If you try to put knowledge before heart-purity; if you try to put a grasp of scripture truth before conscientious living in the presence of God, you are almost certain to have a fearful fall awaiting you. It is right here that large numbers have failed, who may well be a warning to us.

Thus, this first chapter of Daniel comes to us as a serious reminder of the necessity of holiness on the threshold of this book of types and prophecies, It reminds us that if we want to go on, and learn all that God has revealed in the various chapters following, we need first to stop and ask ourselves, "Am I, personally, right with God? Am I seeking to live so as to honor Him in all my ways?" It is the solemnity of this that I want to press upon my own soul, and upon each one here, as I close this lecture. Oh, that both saved and unsaved may consider it well!

If out of Christ, I would affectionately remind you of the danger in which you stand. Later we shall be speaking of woes and sorrows, in the throes of which this poor world will soon be. And is it here that you have your *all*? You are building your hopes for happiness in a wasting scene!

Many things which in this book of Daniel are given as prophecy have now become history; many other portions will soon be fulfilled. Dear unsaved one, if you continue in your sins till "the time of the end," without God and without hope your sorrows, your anguish, your bitter, bitter woes will be more than tongue can tell. Think of what it will mean for gospel-rejecters to be going up and down in this scene after the Holy Ghost has been withdrawn when Christendom has become completely apostate, when the word of God is no longer preached, when the saints of God have been called home to heaven when Antichrist's power shall be supreme, and there shall be a famine, not for bread or for water, but for the hearing of the words of the Lord! All this is just before you, in the near future. You may soon enter upon it, if you do not get right with God. Can you afford to longer trifle with events so momentous and fast hastening on?

And if the Lord should not come in your day, and His judgments upon this guilty world be, in grace, deferred for a little, yet consider that you have soon to pass out of this life, and stand before His righteous throne and your own evil record, when it will be forever too late to find a Saviour. Flee now, I pray you, to Him who bids the sinful, the weary, the thirsty, and the lost, find cleansing, rest, refreshment and salvation in Himself, who appeared once "to pat away sin by the sacrifice of Himself " who shall soon "appear the second time," apart from the sin-question, unto the final salvation of all His own!

In view of all this, may we who are redeemed by His precious blood ever remember the word, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable (or, intelligent) service" (Rom. 12:1). Thus, shall we stand, like Daniel and his friends, apart from the world's defiling ways.