

The Book of Daniel

by G.H. Lang

G.H. Lang's sermon on the Book of Daniel emphasizes the importance of faithfulness and holiness in a corrupt world while highlighting God's sovereignty and prophetic insights.

Scripture: Genesis 12:3, Leviticus 11:44, Isaiah 52:11, Ezekiel 5:5, Daniel 2:21, Matthew 13:41, John 10:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:3

Topics: "Prophetic Ministry", "Christian Holiness"

Description

F.F. Bruce commends G.H. Lang's work on the Old Testament Apocalypse, emphasizing its relevance in times of crisis and upheaval. Lang focuses on the spiritual and prophetic lessons of Daniel, providing new insights into both the historical and prophetic chapters. The book is praised for its topicality, originality, and thoughtful presentation of fresh ideas in a reasoned and moderate style. Bruce highlights the importance of Daniel's character as a servant of God, emphasizing the need for holiness and obedience in the face of challenges and temptations.

Transcript

FOREWORD - by F.F.Bruce

THIS IS EMPHATICALLY A BOOK FOR THE PRESENT DAY. IT would at any time be a pleasure to commend this work of my highly esteemed friend Mr. G. H. Lang, but under present circumstances it is doubly a pleasure to commend a work so calculated to quicken the readers' interest in the Old Testament Apocalypse and assist their understanding of it. Apocalypses have been called "tracts for the times, especially for bad times." It is indeed very natural that in times of crisis and upheaval many should turn to those inspired writings which paint the human scene in the most sombre colours imaginable, and yet throughout the darkest hours look forward to the certain dawn of the new day when "the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed."

Mr. Lang is concerned with the spiritual and prophetic lessons of Daniel rather than with critical and historical questions, though he makes plain his belief in the authenticity of the book as against the view that it is a pseudepigraphic work of the Maccabean age. His treatment of the historical chapters is unusual and valuable, showing how aptly the moral principles there illustrated apply to the life of the Christian today, particularly in the totalitarian states, and how they may be expected to apply increasingly as time goes on. The exposition of the prophetic chapters is largely new, forming an original and independent contribution to their study. In particular, he leaves the beaten track in Chapters VII and XI, his treatment of

these being in part a development of suggestions made in earlier days by Dr. S. P. Tregelles and Sir Robert Anderson.

The work is highly topical. Mr. Lang's emphasis on the central place occupied by the eastern Mediterranean in prophetic geography loses none of its force in view of the increasing importance of that region in our own day. As he describes the character of Nebucadnezzar and his successors, and paints the portrait of the predicted Antichrist, we cannot fail to be struck by the many features which regularly reproduce themselves in tyrants and dictators, not least in those of the present day. Indeed, in April, 1940, a British Cabinet Minister found no words more suitable to describe a contemporary European potentate than those of Daniel ii : 21 if. For these and other reasons this book ought to make a special appeal at such a time as this. It is the fruit of much thoughtful study, and its presentation of many fresh ideas in a style at once reasoned, moderate, and free from dogmatism forms a gratifying contrast to the superficiality, loose thinking, and unfounded assertion which mar too many popular works on Biblical prophecy. If some of the interpretations here offered fail to carry conviction, we need not conclude that they are therefore to be rejected, but should give heed to the advice of Francis Bacon: "allowing, nevertheless, that latitude which is agreeable and familiar unto Divine prophecies; being of the nature of their Author with whom a thousand years are but as one day, and therefore are not fulfilled punctually at once, but have springing and germinant accomplishment throughout many ages, though the height or ful-ness of them may refer to some one age."

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BY THE GRACE OF GOD, MY INTEREST IN PROPHETIC STUDIES

was kindled in my youth, and by that grace it has been maintained and deepened for sixty years. Some results of this reading and reflection are here offered to my fellow-pilgrims in this waste, howling wilderness for the end of which we long. I say results rather than conclusions. Let no one conceive that he has concluded his study of prophetic scripture. For myself, I know that I know "not yet as I ought to know." The mass of details is so vast that it is more than a life-work to co-ordinate it, and the overlooking or the wrongly estimating of even one statement may lead to a false opinion, just as the omission or misreading of one figure will falsify a calculation. If a book be only a repetition of positive and well-known truth it may still be of use, by introducing that truth to some not acquainted with it. But this book is offered as, it is hoped, a contribution to the study of Daniel.

More space than is usual is given to treating the historical chapters, on the grounds that actually these too are prophetic and also are full of urgent and practical lessons, lessons without which the prophetic chapters will never be rightly used. Upon the more obviously prophetic parts some interpretations are offered not yet common, but which seem to me to follow closely the statements of the book, and to give them a more powerful practical bearing.

Of writers on prophecy known to me the most helpful are G. H Pember, B. W. Newton, R. Govett, and, on Daniel, S. P. Tregelles. The last-named book is happily still to be obtained, from Mr. G. H. Fromow, 9, Milnthorpe Road, Chiswick, London, W.4. The book by Pember here quoted (except on p. i 80) is The Great Prophecies of the Centuries concerning Israel, the Gentiles, and the Church of God (Ed. 1941). Numbers in brackets after quotations are the pages of the work quoted. Other simple numbers in brackets are the verses of the chapter of Daniel under consideration. This can be easily remembered, because

each chapter of this book deals with the corresponding chapter of Daniel.

The Revised Version is generally followed, not the Authorized. The inexact renderings of the latter put exact study quite out of the question; and in prophecy pre-eminently exactness of rendering is indispensable to exact knowledge, and exact knowledge to learning distinctly the landmarks the pilgrim needs to see on his journey so as not to miss the way, and how he shall walk and act so as to please God. If this book shall help any in so walking its chief end will be served.

These pages were written in the summer of 1938. Matter in square brackets.[]-is mine. G. H. L.

August, 1940.

Note to the Fourth Edition. Sundry minor changes have been made necessary by lapse of time and the cessation of war. Some rearrangement and amplification will be found in Chapter VII. The exposition remains as before.

THE PROPHET HIMSELF

THE TOOL MUST FIT THE HAND OF THE WORKMAN, THE SWORD

the hand of the soldier. God's instrument must be adapted to His use, His co-worker must correspond to Himself. The character of the prophet must represent worthily the God before Whom he stands and for Whom he speaks.

This first chapter delineates Daniel himself. It shows his status in society, the discipline that developed him, the sphere of his service, the temptations that tested him, his associates, his strength of character. It reveals the secret overruling by God of his affairs, the direct divine endowment granted, the superiority over worldly men thus conferred, and the feature, altogether and miraculously exceptional in those lands and times, of his preservation to extreme old age, in spite of the changes and dangers of an eventful public career amid world upheavals.

We are not told who penned the description, but it is so masterly, so comprehensive though brief, as itself to manifest the heart-knowing God as its author, revealing the qualities He valued in the man who was to bear His name before kings and to describe to them, and to all succeeding generations, the course of world history. His messages were to be an exhibition of man and of God: of the one in his greatness and weakness, his skill and folly, his vice and cruelty, his pride and doom; and of the Other in His divine wisdom, unfailing power, inflexible justice, His mercy and faithfulness, His present and final supremacy.

So special a service demanded a special servant. This prophet was to stand before kings in the highest offices of State, so he was chosen from royal, or at least noble, blood (ver. 3). For certain purposes there are advantages in aristocratic birth and inheritance. The training, culture, physical well-being (ver. 4), instinctive and acquired skill in ruling, the wide outlook, the ease in handling large affairs, make a man either more useful, or, of course, more hurtful to mankind. Every society, the kingdom of heaven included, must have leaders, if it is to prosper. Happy is the land that rears them, miserable the country denuded of them, as by decay or revolution. The mismanagement of affairs public by men unversed in great matters has produced vast miseries, of which awful examples exist today, as heretofore. But when God needs a servant He chooses one suitable to the work in view, and trains him thoroughly. Such an one was Daniel.

He must learn to stand as a rock amidst the fury of vast and violent public changes and grave personal perils. Therefore as a youth he was permitted to endure the horrors of invasion; to witness the degradation of his king being bound with fetters. He himself, with others of his rank, was dragged from home and country to servitude in the land of the invader and oppressor, and, as far as we know, he never again saw the land of his birth (II Kings 24). He watched the rifling of the house of God itself, a plain token that Jehovah was abandoning His people to the consequences of their apostasy. This lad, who was already "skilful in all wisdom, and endued with knowledge" (ver. 4), could not but have reflected much upon all these terrible happenings, and have seen in them the dread fulfilment of Jeremiah's contemporary prophetic warnings, the solemn, yet to faith the strengthening, assurance that God keeps His word to the letter.

Arrived in Babylon he is quickly put into a new school, with hard lessons and frightful perils. He is taken into the royal household to be trained for service at court. And what a court! At its head a terrible oriental despot, capable of most fiendish cruelties, as was usual in those days, and as can be matched, alas, in these days. He could slay a captive's sons before their father's eyes, and then put out the latter, so leaving the wretched parent with this as the last memory (Jer. 39: 6,). He could throw his chief officers into a furnace to watch them burn (Dan. 3); yea, could roast his victims in a slow fire (Jer. 29: 22). Yet modern poison gas and liquid fire are not much behind this for barbarousness. Such a man Daniel must study to please! How shall the youth maintain his godliness? How shall a young officer of State preserve his probity in a court permeated with bribery, corruption, and fraud? How shall a young man keep clean his way amidst the filthy immoralities habitual in heathendom, and pre-eminently in its court life? And how shall a captive courtier resist the terrible pressure of the temptation to secure toleration and advancement by worshipping the gods of the tyrant in whose hand is his future, yea, his life? (Comp. II Kings 5: 17, 18).

Indeed, apart from formal prostration before the gods in the temples, there was the daily dedication to the palace deity of all the food to be eaten. One who ate of it did thus publicly acknowledge the false god and partake at his altar, for all the viands on the table were consecrated by the firstfruits portion being placed on the household shrine (I Cor. 8 : 10; 10: 27, 28).

This vitiated atmosphere Daniel must breathe all day long: how shall his soul not be poisoned? Through these snares he must pick his way: will his feet not be caught? This pressure, powerful and constant, he must meet: will he succumb? We may believe that the story of his ancestor Joseph, in the court of Egypt, guided and nerved him. The psalms of his royal father David must have directed and inspired him. God's word written has saving power, when believed and obeyed. Perhaps it was Daniel who afterwards wrote: "'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word," and "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119: 9, 10). At any rate, no other life down to his time yields so many situations that correspond to statements in this eulogy of the Word of God.

The first crisis came immediately with the first entrance upon palace life, and it at once revealed the stamina already developed in the soul of the youth. "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself" (i : 8). The actual occasion was secondary, the essential matter was the purpose to remain undefiled. Daniel will be holy because his God is holy. So the law commanded; so shall it be with him, at whatever cost (Lev. 11: 44, 45; 19; etc.).

This is the dominant lesson of the chapter. Oh, to learn it well! For this is the primary, the vital, the indispensable qualification for high service to the Holy One. "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out thence, touch no unclean thing . . . cleanse yourselves ye that bear the vessels of Jehovah," was the call Daniel had

heard through the words of God by Isaiah (52: 11). It is repeated to us (II Cor. 6: 14; 7i): "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me Sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, [persistently] perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Daniel kept clean from defilement of the flesh by resolving not to eat of the king's dainties, seeing these were dedicated to his false god; for we assume that this was at least the principal reason, though doubtless there was the further ground that the food included articles prohibited by the law of Moses, as swine's flesh, etc.

And by keeping clean the flesh he at the same time, and thereby, kept clean the spirit also; for thus he preserved himself from a bad conscience toward God, from the corrupting principle of disobedience to His law, from a compromise which must have lowered moral stamina, enfeebled the will, dissipated courage, and blurred his spiritual vision for both the will of God and the depravity of the world. How pressing is the duty of bodily purity, and with what fabulous usury it recompenses! Hence Paul, that he might be approved of the Judge and win the incorruptible crown, enslaved his body (I Cor. 9: 27). No wonder that our Lord included fasting in His early instruction on practical righteousness (Matt. 6: i 6, x 8). Cleanness of body will be the measure of cleanness of heart, and defilement of the body involves defilement of heart. John Wesley truly said that God commonly retrenches the superfluities of the soul in the same measure that we do those of the body.

It was not that Daniel became an ascetic or was morbidly scrupulous, for we learn later (io: 2, 3) that ordinarily he ate pleasant food; but he would not touch defiling food. Wisely did he face this issue at once, and win the battle at the first brush with the foe. Thus he asserted immediately the supremacy of duty over apparent self-interest, of obedience over danger, of faith over fear, of the fear of God against general custom, of the spirit over the body, of the will over appetite, and above all, of the supremacy of God over man, whether himself or the king. To have shirked this fight would have lost the campaign, and after ages would never have heard of him; the winning it was the start of life-long victory, of final triumph; and Daniel stands in Scripture as one of the very few, whose lives are told at length, against whom no fault is recorded. He is an instance of what is meant by being "without blemish."

Nor was it that he had to depart from the world as to bodily presence. He could not, for he was a captive. Where a believer can leave a yoke with an unbeliever he is peremptorily commanded to do so, by words before quoted. "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate," is imperative. But it may not always be rightly possible. Slaves could not escape that yoke, and were directed how to adorn the Christian teaching while under it. A believing husband or wife may not break the already accepted yoke with an unbeliever (I Cor. 7). We are not called to go out of the world physically to secure our sanctification (I Cor. 5 : 9, io), as monks and hermits would fain do. Indeed, it is precisely what the Lord did not ask for His followers, but rather that they, being sent by Him into the world as His representatives and to be the salt of the earth, should be kept from its evil and its evil prince (John 17 is). So Daniel shall live seventy long years at Babylon, the centre of the world, yet not be of it, nor be tarnished by it. And the grace that sufficed for him is more abundantly available for us, since Jesus went to the throne and the Spirit of holiness came down to dwell in us. Only we, like Daniel, must be, and must abide, in the place and calling clearly appointed of God for each; and in this dispensation, unlike that, political office is not ~ a sphere of God for us, as it was not for our Lord when here. Not till He rules should we.

Now the real, the God-intended separation from the world involves practical difficulties. For Daniel these were literally insurmountable, a mountain he could in no wise himself remove. The great king had

prescribed a certain arrangement of life: who would dare to vary it? To do so would "endanger the head" of the presumptuous officer that sanctioned it (i: io). But God is supreme, and will open a way for him who is determined to be holy. The very will of God is our sanctification (I Thess. 4:3), and He will make it possible. In Daniel's case He

(i) disposed the heart of the heathen official concerned to be kind and compassionate towards the captive youth, a very rare circumstance that must have comforted and emboldened Daniel. Then

(2) He gave Daniel tact and courage as to the test to be applied in the practical handling of the matter.

(3) He made Daniel and his three friends to flourish physically on the spare diet. Thousands of Christians might well note this to their advantage.

(4) He wrought in them humble submission to the official under whom they found themselves by His permission (i: 13), coupled with secret and firm faith that God would endorse their course. With this sure confidence in God the believer can with quietness let his forbearance and yieldingness be known unto all men. Apparently he leaves the situation to them, while actually he commits it into the hand of God, knowing that He is at hand and is working. (Phil. 4: 4-7). "Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls [better, their lives] in well-doing unto a faithful Creator" (I Pet. 4: 19).

That Daniel's three friends were with him in this faithfulness which God endorsed, shows that this course of life was not for a specially great servant of God alone, but is for all. Indeed, as yet Daniel was not great, but lowly in station. What is before us was the first step to true greatness. Their adherence to the will of God brought accession of knowledge, skill, and understanding; so that these men of God proved vastly superior counsellors, even in practical and weighty human affairs, to the cleverest men of the world (zo).

Thus purposing at all cost to please God, to be pure, thus endowed, and educated in the divine school of discipline, the young man set forward on the journey of life, thick beset with perils and trials; and it was given to him to show to after-generations, to us, that God is El Shaddai, the All-sufficing; for seventy years later, in extreme old age (9: 1, 2) he was still, by his understanding and his prayers, a pivotal co-worker with his God and for the people of God. Such as will be holy must

". . . climb the steep ascent of heaven

Through peril, toil, and pain.

O God, to us may grace be given

To follow in their train!"

And the qualification for being a prophet is the qualification for understanding prophecy. The reader must be one with the prophet in this at least, the resolute purpose to be holy. For the immediate end of all prophecy is practical, moral: "every one that hath this hope set on Christ purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (i John 3: 3). Merely mental study of Scripture is idle, and being idle is mischievous; but "if any man intendeth to do God's will, he shall know of the teaching whether it is of God" (John 7 17). Therefore, as we proceed to consider the visions and messages of Daniel let each ask himself, Am I a man of Daniel's moral purpose and resolve? If so, the Spirit of truth will open the meaning of what He showed and said to Daniel; if not, Daniel's book will remain a sealed book, even when the time of the end may have come (Isa: 9).

CHAPTER II

THE EMPEROR'S DREAM

Section I. The World Crisis that occasioned it

SUPREMACY OVER THE HUMAN RACE WAS SECURED BY SATAN

when Adam and Eve accepted his counsel in defiance of the will of God. He thus became the Prince of the world, and history exhibits two main purposes: that of Satan to maintain his rule, and that of God to regain His sovereignty. Satan rules in disregard of the true welfare of man: "The thief cometh not but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy" : God aims at the well-being of His creatures: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10: 10). He who is a murderer from the beginning loves to destroy (John 8 : 44); but to God destruction is a strange work (Isa. 28: 21): "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord Jehovah " (Ezek. 18 : 23, 32); and His judgements are executed as part, though an unavoidable part, of the process of restoring good government and peace among men (Matt. 13: 41--43); for the true Ruler rules for the good of the ruled.

B.C. 1921. A chief step towards this divine end was the selecting of a portion of mankind to act as a nucleus of the recovery of the whole race and earth. For this purpose God chose Abraham, of Ur in Chaldea, and announced to him, "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12 :3). B.C. 1451. In pursuance of this purpose and promise Abraham's descendants were multiplied into a nation, and became the pivotal people on earth, in reference to whom as a people national and international relationships are regarded and regulated by God . The divine installing of Israel in this position is the first key to the puzzle of international history, and the placing them at the geographical centre of the ancient world, Palestine (Ezek. 5 : 5), was an epoch-marking event. Their return there as the allotted period of Gentile domination ends, at which time international affairs will, as at the beginning, be found centred in those regions, will mark a corresponding epoch. B.C. 1015. A further chief step in the divine plan was the elevating of that people to national supremacy under David.

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