

Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL

A. THE PERMANENT VALUE

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(The Historic Night) Daniel 2:20-22.

- i. The Fact of the Government.
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 1. "The Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand."
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- i. The Colossus.
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B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

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Guiding Evil to Development and
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THE book of Daniel falls into two parts. The first six chapters are historic, and the last six are prophetic. By that I do not intend to suggest that there is nothing of prophecy in the first six chapters, nor that there is no recognition of history in the last six; but that the main note of the content of the first six is historic, and the principal value of the content of the last six is prophetic. These two parts are intimately related to each other, and in our study of the content of this book we have attempted to suggest the relation by the titles of the two divisions.

- In the first we have the historic night, and
- In the second the prophetic light.

This distinction needs to be maintained when we turn to the consideration of the message of the book.

If of any book among these prophetic writings the description of Peter, “**a light that shineth in a dark place,**” is peculiarly true, it is so of this one.

The historic section of the book gives a picture of the world when the national testimony of the Hebrew people was lost even more completely than in the time of Ezekiel. During many of the years Ezekiel was in captivity, Jeremiah was exercising his ministry in Jerusalem, and it is evident that his ministry influenced that of Ezekiel.

When we come to the book of Daniel we can discover no such general influence.

The kings of the chosen people are only referred to in passing. The testimony of the people as a nation was wholly at an end. We see the great world powers of the time in the light shed on them by the ministry of Daniel, a most remarkable man in every way, a man who, loyal to the God of his fathers, nevertheless rose to positions of prominence in three empires; and who in the midst of circumstances, difficult and dangerous as were those of a Gentile court at that time, remained loyal to the Lord.

The prophetic section of the book gives us a picture of the working out of the Divine purpose through all human history.

In attempting to discover the permanent value and the living message of this book, we are aided by the fact that such value lies deeper than the immediate application of anyone of its parts, and its living message is independent of any particular method of interpretation.

I desire first of all to set this book in relation to those which have preceded it.

We have considered the message of Isaiah, the message of Jeremiah, and that of Ezekiel, and we shall now find that there is intimate relationship between these three and the message of Daniel.

There is an old division of these prophetic books into major and minor with which we are all familiar. We speak of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel as the major prophets, and of the twelve, beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi, as the minor prophets. There has been doubt in the minds of some as to whether Daniel should be reckoned among the major or the minor. There is a sense in which that division is in itself false and misleading. I refer especially to the designation of the twelve as the minor prophets. They are minor in no sense save that of bulk; indeed, that was the meaning of the word in its first application to them. For many reasons it would be an excellent thing if we could abandon the use of the words.

Nevertheless, there is an element of value in the division between the four and the twelve.

They constitute two sections.

The principle of the division is not chronological. I presume we are all agreed now that Hosea's prophecy was earlier than that of any of the four to which I have already made reference.

There is a division, and I believe it is a spiritual one. When we seek for the permanent values and the living messages, we find in these first four a unifying revelation. Speaking broadly, I should be inclined to say that the permanent value of the four is that of the unveiling of the King, while the permanent value of the twelve is that of the unveiling of the Kingdom.

I recognize that to make a division like that, and leave it as though it were final, would be most unsatisfactory. Both the Kingdom and the King are seen in the four; both the King and the Kingdom are discovered in the twelve; and yet undoubtedly there is this distinction, that the supreme and overwhelming revelation of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel is that of the King Himself, while the particular and special revelation of the twelve is that of the conditions within the Kingdom which occupied the attention of the prophetic voices as they declared the word of the King.

Therefore, for the purpose of a general examination, I should always speak of the major prophets as revealing the King, and of the minor prophets as revealing the Kingdom. I have no difficulty, therefore, with Daniel, but deliberately place him with the first three. To use the word already referred to, I number him with the major prophets.

Let us go back, then, in order that we may place Daniel in relation to the messages already considered, for in his prophecy we have the completion of the revelation.

Isaiah began his ministry in the reign of Uzziah, one of the most prosperous as to material things in the whole history of Judah. It was in the year of his death that the prophet saw that new vision which lifted the whole of his subsequent ministry on to a higher plane.

Jeremiah was the prophet of failure, exercising his ministry during the reign of the last of the

kings of Judah.

Ezekiel delivered his messages not to the people as a nation, but to a handful of exiles in captivity.

Daniel personally delivered no messages to the chosen people themselves, but he exercised a ministry of remarkable force in the midst of the great world powers.

In the prophecy of Isaiah we saw the Throne.

His supreme revelation is that of the uplifted, established Throne of the Lord. He declares two facts concerning it, the fact of its exercise of government, and the fact of its method of grace. These constitute the permanent value and living message of Isaiah. As we said in our consideration of the content of the book, the two great passages in which this continuous purpose finds clearest expression are the sixth chapter, which gives an account of his vision, and the fifty-third, which thrills with the message of the grace of God.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah we have a vision of the activity of the Lord. That activity is threefold: that of judgment of sin, suffering for sin, and victory over sin.

Ezekiel strikes a deeper note as he presents the Person of the Lord, and unveils four facts concerning that Person, those, namely, of supremacy and service, of manifestation and mystery.

Turning to the book of Daniel, we find none of these things dealt with, though all are recognized.

The supreme revelation of the book is that of the persistent government of God Almighty over the whole earth towards the fulfillment of the purpose of His grace. In that sentence I express what I hold to be the permanent value of this book. Let me state it more carefully and in slightly altered phrasing. In Daniel we have the revelation of the power and wisdom of the Lord God in the government of the world to the end of the days.

Throughout the whole of this book, with one notable exception, God is described as Adonahy : Adonahy, supreme or sovereign Lord; Elohim, Mighty God. The name of the Lord is only to be found in one chapter - the ninth. Therein we have Daniel presented to us burdened with the failure of his people, and crying out in intercession for them.

In that great intercessory prayer the name the Lord occurs seven times.

The nation to which God revealed Himself as the Becoming One was scattered and peeled, its testimony broken, its influence departed. One man in whom all the principles of God's intention for the nation were preserved, and who was mastered by those principles, spoke for God, lived for God, and worked for God in three empires, but never spoke of God to those Gentile kings by the great name Jehovah. He always referred to Him by the titles Adonahy Elohim.

When, as a result of his study of the writings of Jeremiah, and his consciousness of the passing of time, Daniel came to the conclusion that the seventy years were running out, his heart became

burdened for his own people, and as he interceded for them, the old gracious name was used, the Lord my God, the Lord our God.

That in itself is an interesting fact in the study of this book. Its main value, however, is that it affords a revelation of the power and wisdom of the Lord God in the government of the world unto the end of the days. These words, “**the end of the days,**” are the last made use of in the book, Daniel being told to wait, and being promised that he should stand in his lot at the end of the days.

Thus we discover the unifying principle of the major prophets.

- In the first of them we find the principles of government;
- In the second, the practice of government;
- In the third, the Person of the Governor; and
- In the last, the persistence of His government.
- In the light of this unity of the four, the permanent values of Daniel are the more clearly apprehended.
- In the first part of the book we see the government of the Lord God in the immediate circumstances in the midst of which Daniel lived.
- In the second we see the government of the Lord God in its processes to the end.

In the second chapter, verses twenty to twenty-two, this declaration is found: “**Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: and He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: He knoweth what is in darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him.**”

That passage affords the key to the revelation of the book.

Indeed, its permanent value is contained therein.

Take the first of these divisions, the government of the Lord God in the immediate. It gives the account of the victory of Nebuchadnezzar over Jehoiakim in these words: “**The Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand.**” It is not only recognition, but definite declaration of the fact that Jehoiakim passed into captivity by the act of God. If this were human history, rather than inspired story, we should read that Nebuchadnezzar defeated Jehoiakim, and took him prisoner. That would be perfectly true, but it would not be the profoundest truth, nor the truth that this book was written to reveal. The writer was looking beyond secondary matters to primary ones, and he therefore declared, “**The Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand.**”

The next story is that of the strange, weird vision of the colossus with its head of gold, its breasts of silver, its belly and sides of brass, its legs of iron, and its feet a mixture of iron and brittle clay. The interpretation of the vision could not be discovered by the magicians, and Daniel was enabled both to recall the dream and give its interpretation.

However we may interpret the vision as to detail, however far we may wander from the simple

interpretation of Daniel himself, or however closely we may adhere thereto, the master thought of it is that of God reigning over the affairs of men; and through all the processes of deterioration or destruction, moving towards the final victory of the establishment of the true order amongst men. It is supremely a vision of the reigning, governing God.

When Daniel interpreted the vision of the colossus, he said to Nebuchadnezzar, "**Thou art the head of gold,**" and indicated the fact that his appointment was made by the God of heaven.

When the effect of the vision had passed away, and the king made an image of gold, and commanded that men should worship it, a handful of men refused to bend the knee, and consequently were cast into the fiery furnace, but passed through it unscathed and unharmed. The words of Nebuchadnezzar following this deliverance prove that by its means he had discovered the fact of the government of God.

We pass from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar to that of Belshazzar; and imagination can fill in the details of his court—its luxury, its licentiousness, its lust. In the midst of a drunken carousal the mystic handwriting was seen upon the wall: "**Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.**" This was the handwriting of God, and revealed most clearly the great truth for which this book stands, that God weighs kingdoms in balances, rejects kings from kingship by His own will, and sets up or flings down according to the purpose of His own government.

The last of the series of stories is that of how Darius flung Daniel into the den of lions at the bidding of his courtiers, and then in the early morning enquired: "**O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, Whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee?**" Daniel answered the enquiry in a word which affirms both the power and activity of God: "**O king, live forever. My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths.**"

These stories reveal the instruments through whom God made the fact of His government known, to Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius, and through them to others.

As we turn to look at these instruments we discover three things concerning them.

- First of all, their separation from all the things in the midst of which they lived which were contrary to the will of God.
- Secondly, their inspiration; they lived in fellowship with God, and thus came to an understanding of the mind of God, and were enabled to interpret it to kings without fear or faltering.
- Thirdly, their personal adoration of God as they worshipped Him, and Him alone, and that persistently.

The interest centers in Daniel, who lived in the midst of things contrary to the will of God, but in separation from them; and in such close fellowship with God that it was possible for him to receive the interpretation of visions, and in such reverent and adoring worship as refused to be hindered by any form of opposition.

That man became the instrument in the darkness through whom God was able to flash His light

upon kings, and make courts feel the spell of His power.

Through Daniel and those associated with him, certain facts of the Divine government were forced upon the recognition of these kings.

- They saw His wisdom revealed through His own, in their ability to interpret.
- They saw His might manifest in His care of His own.

Thus, standing back from this great book in order to observe it in general outline, while leaving the details, interesting and valuable as they are, we see God enthroned high above the thrones of men, governing in infinite wisdom and irresistible might.

Halting for one brief glance at the second part of the book, we see the government of the Lord God in its processes to the end.

It is at this point that we find ourselves in the midst of widely differing interpretations. Notwithstanding these, there are broad truths, suggested by the vision of the image, upon which we are all agreed. The words of the prophecy itself declare that the head of gold referred to Babylon, that the bust of silver referred to the Medo-Persian empire which followed Babylon, and interpreting the symbolism of the vision by the facts of history, the belly of brass must have referred to the Grecian power which succeeded the Medo-Persian, and the legs of iron to the Roman Empire. Beyond that we see division and deterioration, until a new movement from without changes the whole course of history; a stone cut from the mountain smites the deteriorated feet of the image, and the whole falls to the ground. It is evident that much of this vision was prophetic. Daniel lived in the midst of some of the circumstances referred to.

The image itself was a revelation of God's knowledge of the processes of the world powers, and preeminently a revelation of the fact that He remains enthroned above every empire as it comes and goes; and, moreover, that its rise and fall is under His government. Beyond the vision of the image we have those of the beasts, the difference between them being that whereas in the colossus we have the symbolism of external manifestation, in the beasts we have that of inward character.

Dr. Scofield draws attention to the significance of the fact that the national symbols of the world powers to-day are all birds or beasts of prey.

I take this book, then, with its mystic passages and its strange figures; with its days, and dates, and dating, its times, half times, times missing, and times found; caring very little about these things for the moment, I see that its living message to this age is that of the wisdom and might of God; of the fact of His actual government, setting up and casting down, guiding evil on the one side to its full development and its ultimate destruction and on the other, preserving good to its full development and final victory. The vision is that of the overruling God, in wisdom knowing, and in might working; of kings reigning and passing, of dynasties and empires rising and falling, while God, enthroned above them, overrules their movements.

Looking through the visions of this book at the government of God, there are two things

impressed upon the mind.

- The first is that God is guiding evil to full development, in order to final destruction.
- The second is that He is overruling good to full development in order to ultimate victory.

There is untold value in the fact that both these movements are revealed. Sometimes we are told that the days in which we live are the most wonderful that the world has ever seen, that the world is getting better every day; on the other hand, there are those who affirm that we are in the midst of dreadful days, that the world is getting worse every day.

What shall we do with these opposing views?

The message of this book is that we shall only discover the truth as we believe both of them. Evil is to-day worse than it ever was - more subtle, more devilish, and more refined, and therefore more dangerous and more damnable. On the other hand, good is more abounding than ever before. Men to-day have fuller revelation than they had, and are growing towards fuller realization.

If these two things be true, it follows that sooner or later there must be a crisis, a final conflict between the two forces.

That is exactly what this book and the whole Bible teach. The Scriptures never suggest that these two processes will end by the reconciliation of good and evil, or by the weakening of good until there is nothing but evil, or the weakening of evil until there is nothing but good. The crisis will come when the stone cut without hands smites the image, and it breaks and crumbles, and the new kingdom of goodness fills the world.

If that be the main part of the living message of the book, there is another which must not be neglected.

Daniel said, "I heard, but I understood not: then said I, a my lord, what shall be the issue of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand: but they that be wise shall understand."

It would be a great blessing if all students of the book would be as honest as the author: "**I heard, but I understood not.**"

Two things are certain as to the process.

- First, "**Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried**";
- Secondly, "**the wicked shall do wickedly.**"

It is impossible to construct an almanac on the basis of that revelation. If we would have the New Testament message which exactly coincides with this, we turn to the last words of our Lord. The

disciples had asked Him: “**Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?**” And He replied: “**It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power.**”

It is not our business to make a calendar. If we attempt to set these things in chronological order, we shall find a great gap, a space for which we cannot account, an unmeasured period. This at least is evident that we are living to-day in that unmeasured period.

What, then, is the last word of this message?

If we believe that God still reigns and rules in might and wisdom, if we believe that we cannot fix the date for the realization of His purpose by human calendars, wherein lies our responsibility?

It is that of this handful of exiles of long ago.

Separation from all the things that are unlike God in the world in the midst of which we live; fellowship with God, which will enable us to declare Him to the age in which we live, so that it shall be compelled to recognition of Him; and finally, such adoration of Him as must express itself in worship always, in spite of all difficulties; such worship as refuses to bow the knee to any god save our one Lord God Almighty, as He has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

~ end of chapter 26 ~

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