

Daniel in Babylon:

The story of a great man's faith

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The Seventy Weeks

The Persian conquest of Babylon made very little difference to the normal life of the city. The comparative ease with which the capital had fallen, with little destruction or loss of life, meant that the citizens merely exchanged a Babylonian ruler for a Persian. Cyrus. The commercial life of the city went on as usual; merchant vessels from Africa and India still came up the river to the quays of Babylon: caravans of goods still traversed the high roads from Syria and Egypt. The government was in the hands of the Persians, but the life of the nation went on much as before. It was not at the capture of Babylon by Cyrus that the vivid prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah relating to the doom of the wicked city had their fulfillment, but twenty years later, when Darius Hystaspes the Persian king laid siege again to the city and demolished its walls. In the meantime Daniel was faced with the situation that the power of Babylon was broken, apparently for ever: Cyrus the Persian was quite evidently the coming man, and Cyrus was the name of the man in Isaiah's prophecy who should let the captives go and restore the worship of God at Jerusalem. Small wonder that Daniel went to the sacred books to discern what he could of the purposes of God.

In the first year of his reign (Darius) I Daniel understood by books the number of the years whereby the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. ' (ch.9 vs.2).

An old man of ninety sat reading, as he had read hundreds of times before, words that were penned when he was a lad of sixteen or so. His whole life had been lived in expectation of an event which, even as a boy, he knew could not come until he himself was ninety years of age; whatever may have been the hopes and beliefs of his fellows as to their deliverance. Daniel himself had known all along that he was destined to spend the rest of his life in Babylon. That Return from Exile which he so ardently desired for his people would not come until he himself would be too old to share in it.

Nearly seventy years previously, in the third year of Jehoiakim King of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar had besieged Jerusalem, made Jehoiakim tributary, taken the sacred vessels from the Temple and carried them, with Daniel and his fellows, into Babylon. In the following year the Babylonian king broke the power of Egypt at Carchemish and thenceforth was the undisputed master of Western Asia. In that year Jeremiah uttered the message against Judah recorded in his twenty-fifth chapter, and it is that message to which Daniel referred. The Divine sentence had gone forth

against the guilty people; from that third year of Jehoiakim when they became tributary to Babylon and their Temple treasures went into an idol sanctuary, they were to serve the king of Babylon seventy years (Jer. 25. II). At the end of the seventy years the power of Babylon was to be broken. Until then all nations were to serve Nebuchadnezzar, and his son, and his grandson, "until the very time of his land come" (Jer. 27. 7) a prophecy which was fulfilled in a most remarkable way, for his son Evil-Merodach (Jer. 52. 31) and his grandson Belshazzar both reigned and then the kingdom came to an end. Daniel, after the death of Belshazzar and the transfer of sovereignty to the Persians, realized that the time had expired.

What were his thoughts as his eyes scanned the familiar words and his mind went back to those days of long ago? Was there a measure of sadness that so few of his own generation remained to share his realization of hopes fulfilled? Daniel must have been getting a rather lonely man. His old friend and mentor, Jeremiah, was of course long since gone to his rest, buried somewhere in Egypt. Of his three companions in exile, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, nothing is known since the incident of the fiery furnace, nearly forty-five years in the past. Quite likely they too were dead. Ezekiel the prophet and Jehoiachin the captive king were almost certainly at rest with their fathers. The up-and-coming young men who were marked out as leaders of the nation when the Return to Jerusalem could be effected were two generations later than his own. But there was no jealousy and no repining. Daniel knew he could have no part in the stirring days of the Return himself, but he knew that prayer was vitally necessary before that Return could become a reality and so he betook himself to earnest and urgent prayer on behalf of his beloved people. And the consequence of that prayer was the revelation of a time prophecy so obviously and accurately fulfilled that it set the seal upon Daniel's book and stamped the study of time prophecy with Divine approval.

It is impossible to read Daniel's ninth chapter without realizing just how the saintly old man poured out his heart's longings to God. Here are the hopes and dreams of a lifetime, the faith that knows God is faithful, the insight that perceives the only obstacle to be unbelief, the conviction that God will surely hear. He is God, and God cannot lie. What He has promised, that He will surely perform. Every acknowledgement of God's constancy and faithfulness is made, and with that a full and frank admission of Israel's guilt. There is no evasion of the issue; Israel reaped what she had sown: deserved what she had got. But because God is good, and because, with all their faults, Jerusalem and her people are called by God's name, Daniel besought his liege Lord to return, and relent, and execute his great purpose in delivering Jerusalem. "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. Could any of us in these favored days of spiritual understanding come more closely to the nature of Divine forgiveness? Could any one of us come any nearer to the heart of the Father? It was to that last heartfelt appeal the Father responded. Once more a heavenly being of high rank and greatly honored in the courts of heaven was charged with a mission to earth. We know very little about conditions beyond the Veil, the every day life of the celestial world, but that it is a place and condition of ceaseless activity is evident. Gabriel was no stranger to the world of man and he had visited Daniel before. If one asks the question whether there truly does exist an angelic personality bearing the name Gabriel, entrusted at times with Divine commissions to men, the answer can only be that the Bible gives us no ground for disputing the fact. This "seventy weeks" prophecy could only have been revealed from heaven; Daniel asserts that it was told him by a visitor he knew from former experience to be Gabriel, the messenger of God. Five hundred years later the same personality appeared to Mary the mother of Jesus, again with a message of great

import, this time to announce the fulfillment of that which he had predicted to Daniel. Although Gabriel is not mentioned by name anywhere else in Bible history, it is very possible that he is the one concerned in other appearances of an angelic being to men to the Apostle Peter in prison, perhaps, or to Paul when he was told he would be brought before Caesar.

While I was speaking in prayer", Gabriel came. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth, and I am come to show thee" is the assurance of the heavenly visitor. So quickly may prayer be answered; so near to us is that celestial world where God's will is done as one day twill be done on earth. "Before they call, I will answer: while they are yet speaking, I will hear" says the Lord through Isaiah. Sin is a separating influence which puts God far away from us; prayer is a magnetism which brings us at once very near to God.

So the story of the seventy weeks was unfolded. "Weeks" is, as is usually well known, a mistranslation. The proper rendering is "seventy sevens" where "seven" is "hepdomad", a unit, especially a unit of time. There is not much doubt that Daniel was to have his understanding of Jeremiah's seven years linked up with a greater seventy.— seventy sevens, in fact --- leading up to the greater development of God's Plan, which would, eventually, bring to fruition all Daniel's hopes.

The seventy years of Jeremiah were literally fulfilled, several times over. The primary decree was that not only Judah, but the nations round about, were to serve the king of Babylon seventy years and then the power of Babylon would be broken. (Jer. 25. 11-12). During that period the penalty for resistance to the Divine decree of subjection was conquest, destruction, desolation. True to the promise from the third year of Jehoiakim, when Judah passed under Babylonian domination, to the Decree of Cyrus was seventy years. Likewise the period from the destruction of the Temple in the eleventh year of Zedekiah to the completion of Zerubbabel's Temple in the sixth year of Darius Hystapes was seventy years. Small wonder that Daniel, having lived through the First-named period, looked now for the restoration of Judah, and hence for Divine enlightenment as to the next development in the outworking of the Divine Plan.

"Seventy sevens are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (ch. 9 vs 24) to accomplish seven different aspects of our Lord's work at his First Advent. Gabriel recited them in order: While he recited. Daniel must have listened in growing awe as he realized that greater and still unplumbed depths of the Divine purposes were being revealed.

"To finish the transgression." Our Lord's Advent was timed to come when Israel had filled up the measure of their fathers. (Matt. 23. 32). The period between Daniel and Jesus brought Israel's guilt up to the brim and abundantly demonstrated their unworthiness of the promise.

"To make an end of sins." Jesus did that by yielding his own life as an offering for sin, a

"Ransom

for All", to be testified in due time. (Isa. 53. 10; I Tim. 2. 5-6).

"To make reconciliation for iniquity." This is the atonement which Christ made, pictured in the Tabernacle ceremonies by the offering of the blood of the sin-offering on the "mercy seat" or propitiatory in the inner sanctuary, a "covering" for human sin.

"To bring in everlasting righteousness." The Apostle Paul explained this when he spoke of justification by faith, the gift of God to all who accept Jesus as Savior and trust in him alone for

salvation and reconciliation with God.