

The Plot against Daniel

The first five chapters of the book of Daniel relate the history of the kingdom of Babylon. With the close of the fifth chapter, the government is transferred to the Medes, of whom Darius, known in history as Darius the Mede, a man of sixty-two years, is king. With him is associated Cyrus, the Persian, the leader of the army, and heir to the throne. The time represented by the golden head of the image has passed, and a baser metal represents the rising power. The Medes were not, however, a new or unknown power, for they are mentioned in chronology as descendants of Japheth, and as early as the eighth century B. C., when Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians, they were scattered through the cities of the Medes. This had brought the Medes into contact with the Jews two centuries before the fall of Babylon. To their knowledge of the God of the Jews may be attributed the purity of their worship, for while they were heathens, they had never fallen into the gross forms of idolatry which were practiced by most of the nations of Western Asia.

The habits of both the Medes and the Persians, but more particularly of the Persians, brought them in close touch with nature, and in their worship they took the elements, fire, earth, water, and air as the highest manifestations of the Deity. They therefore sought a hill country, and kept a perpetual fire burning. They believed in the struggle between good and evil as represented by light and darkness, and doubtless the words of Isaiah, which are addressed to Cyrus, had this belief in mind, for the Lord says, "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." In these words he places himself above the gods of the Persians, and explains why he called Cyrus to his strange work.

The Persians at the time of the overthrow of Babylon were physically strong and rugged, due in great measure to the simplicity of their habits and their temperance in eating. Such were the conditions which made it possible for the Medes and Persians to be the rod in the Lord's hand for the punishment of Babylon. The organization of the kingdoms as effected by the Babylonian monarchs is given in verse 1 of the sixth chapter, for Darius immediately placed one hundred and twenty princes over the one hundred and twenty provinces. This change in the administration of the government of the provinces is highly important, since the strength of the ruling monarch is in proportion to the sympathy and co-operation of the subject princes. It was impossible to maintain a representative government where there were conquered provinces, and peace depended much upon the strength of the central organization. Over the one hundred and twenty princes were the three presidents, of whom Daniel was the first.

It was not after the order of the world that Daniel, belonging to a race held in bondage, should at once be given one of the highest positions in the newly organized government. It will appear still more unusual when it is remembered that Daniel had been made third ruler of the Babylonian kingdom under Belshazzar. Reference to the first and second verses of the eighth chapter of Daniel shows that Daniel was not a stranger to the new government, for before the death of Belshazzar, he had lived at Shushan, in the province of Elam. To the fact of acquaintanceship it may be added that the excellent spirit and unsurpassed business ability of Daniel brought him into prominence.

Here is recorded the case of a man who was a devout follower of God, one whose honesty, accuracy, and skill in every particular was a wonder to the world. It is a powerful witness to the duties and privileges of every Christian business man. He was a noble statesman, but not a politician, an example for all office-holders. He fulfilled his duties

under the Medes just as faithfully as under the Babylonians. He served the God of heaven, and not a man-made party. A business man does not necessarily have to be a sharp, policy man, but may be instructed by God at every step. When prime minister of Babylon, Daniel, as prophet of God, was receiving the light of heavenly inspiration. The usual type of a statesman, worldly, ambitious, scheming, is compared in the Scriptures to the grass of the field, and to the fading flower. The Lord is pleased to have men of intelligence in his work if they remain true to him. Through the grace of Christ, man may preserve the integrity of his character when surrounded by adverse circumstances. Daniel made God his strength, and was not forsaken in his time of greatest need. The very position which he occupied put Daniel to the severest test. As chairman or chief of the presidents over the princes, Daniel was obliged to deal with all the under-rulers of the empire. One by one they were obliged to render an account to him. This was that the king might receive no damage. The king, then, was in danger; not in danger of losing his life, but these officials were scheming politicians who were robbing the government in every possible way. If they had taxes to gather, they turned a large per cent to their own account. There was bribery, cheating, wire pulling, and buying of positions in the Babylonian government, as there is in the world to-day. Dishonesty was found everywhere.

Inspiration does not describe the iniquity in detail, but it does say, "The godly is perished out of the earth;...they hunt every man his brother with a net. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up." The princes and men in power not only work mischievously, but they work with both hands earnestly. If details are wanted, study the governments of to-day. They are the off-shoots from that same root of Babylon, and by studying the iniquity of to-day, we can know the sins against which Daniel had to stand. Even in the best of earthly governments, hundreds of thousands of dollars are used annually in an unlawful manner. When \$3,500 is paid for a single vote, and the individual returns the money because he has an offer of \$3,700 from the other party; when a mayor of a city can afford to spend three or four times his salary to obtain an office, it must be known that money comes from some unlawful source.

Roman history, with its stories of trusts, monopolies, and corporations, its bribery in the senate and outside the senate, is the history of Babylon, for Rome was one of the governments which were built upon Babylonian principles. French history of the period of the Revolution repeats the story. The history of England, the continental countries, and the United States today repeat the same story. So in the current history may be read in detail what had to be met by the prime minister in the city of Babylon. The sixth chapter of Daniel is left on record to show how a man of God, when elevated to such a position, can remain uncontaminated. It shows that attitude which any man of God must assume toward popular vice and corruption, and more than that, it shows what treatment a man who is true to principle must expect to receive from the hands of those who are corrupt.

Because Daniel did guard the king's interests, Darius was about to set him over the whole realm. But the honesty of one man is like a thorn in the flesh of the unjust, and in their political meetings the princes and presidents sought to destroy the man who made accurate reports, and who was faultless in his dealings. "Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's," is a principle of divine government, and from this principle Daniel could not be swerved.

One can imagine the language of the princes as they discussed the matter. Every scheme they had tried had been checked, and yet it was generally acknowledged that it would be useless to bring a complaint concerning the work of Daniel. There was but one possible way to condemn him, and that must be concerning his religion. Even on that point they dared not make open accusation, but must accomplish their end without revealing their object. Their contemptible, under-handed method of procedure brought them in conflict with the God of Daniel, not with Daniel as an individual.

With manifest respect for the king, and with words which flattered him, a committee of the princes waited upon Darius. The first words they spoke afterward revealed that there was a plot on foot, for they said, "All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors," and other officers had consulted together, when in truth they had held secret meetings, and the chief of the presidents was kept in ignorance of the matter.

The king placed great confidence in his prime minister, and anything purporting to have his approval was accepted without further investigation. The form of a decree was presented to the king. It exalted Darius above all earthly monarchs, and attempted to place him above God. King Darius placed his seal upon the document, making it a law of the land. For thirty days no man should bow down or worship or ask any petitions, save of the king.

The heart of God was drawn toward Babylon. Heaven was bound very close to earth, notwithstanding the iniquity, for God's chosen people were there, and the time of their deliverance drew near. While the Medes and Persians knew about God, they did not know him. An actual experience was needed, and God would manifest his power through that same faithful servant who had witnessed for him sixty-eight years.

Daniel was true, noble, and generous. He was anxious to be at peace with all men, but would not permit any power to turn him aside from the path of duty. He was willing to obey those who had rule over him; but kings and decrees could not make him swerve from his allegiance to the King of kings. He realized that compliance with Bible requirements was a blessing to both soul and body.

Daniel was aware of the purpose of his enemies to destroy his influence and his life; he knew of the decree, but it made no difference in his daily life. He did nothing unusual to provoke wrath, but in a straight-forward manner he performed his accustomed duties, and three times a day at his usual times for prayer, he went into his room, and with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he earnestly pleaded with the God of heaven to give him strength to be faithful.

Daniel had a special meeting-place, and an appointed hour when he met the Lord, and these appointments were kept. There is a beauty in the thought of the soul connection between Daniel and heaven. His spiritual life was an actual thing, a life which he lived as real and as true as the physical life. The only life which his enemies knew or could comprehend was the physical life. To sever the intercourse with God would be as painful to Daniel as to deprive him of natural life; and as Christ withdrew to the mountains after days of soul-harrowing labor in order to be refilled with that life which he constantly imparted to the hungry multitudes, so Daniel sought God in prayer. It was only by these frequent times of spirit filling, as it were, that he had strength to meet the nervous strain of his official duties. When the outward pressure was greatest, then he had the greatest need of being filled, that the equilibrium might be maintained. He who balances the clouds will so balance outward pressure with inward power if we but let him, that we never need be

disturbed. Fifteen pounds to every square inch of surface on the body is the pressure under which we live physically. Why does it not crush us? Because the pressure is equal on all sides, and thus we are unconscious of it. It is but a type of the spiritual life. If trials are great, open the soul to heaven, and equalize the pressure by being filled from above.

Daniel did not and could not deny his Saviour by concealing himself in some corner of his room to pray. He knelt by the open window, toward Jerusalem. He did not pray in his heart, silently. He prayed aloud, as had been his custom before the decree was issued. Noble and true is the one who has God ruling in his heart. Underhanded and mean are the actions of those who yield to the influence of Satan. All that is noble in man is lost forever when such a leader is chosen. Satan was in the councils of those officials as they plotted against Daniel, and after the decree was signed, they set spies to catch him. They saw him kneel in his usual place of prayer; three times each day they heard his voice raised in earnest supplication. It was enough; the accusation was made against "that Daniel which is of the children of the captivity of Judah."