

# The Divine Programme of The World's History Chapter VI. The Daniel Programme – Part II.



The prophet Daniel writing down the visions he saw.

Continued from [Chapter VI. The Daniel Programme – Part I.](#)

The character of Daniel is lofty, beautiful, and gracious,— a model character in many respects, and one befitting a prophet of peculiar privilege. It is not deliberately sketched, but comes out incidentally; it does not obtrude itself on the attention as we read his prophecy, the book being mainly autobiographical in its form, and the prophet having no desire to make himself prominent. This style of writing, in which it is peculiarly easy to fall unconsciously into egoism, serves only to exhibit Daniel's singular self-abnegation and noble simplicity. We learn that he was an exile, a captive, and a slave like Joseph, as is indicated by the change of his name.

This change, intended to remind the slave of his servitude, was a custom of the East and of the period, and continued even to Christian times. Chrysostom says: "The master having bought a slave, wishing to show him that he is master, *changes his name*." And again, "that the imposition of names is a symbol of mastership is plain from what we too do" (St. Chrysostom, Serm. 12, Op. iii. 1). And Daniel was not only a slave, but a life-long sufferer at the hands of his captors, one of those in whom was fulfilled the prediction to Hezekiah (Isa. xxix. 7), as appears from the fact stated in chapter i. 3, This makes his noble and faithful character all the more remarkable, as his class were proverbially addicted to intrigue, assassination, and conspiracies. Gibbon dwells on their notoriously pernicious influence on courts and kings.

He was only about fourteen when he came to Babylon, as we judge from the fact that it was at that age lads were committed to royal instructors to be trained for the king's service, on which they entered at sixteen or seventeen. The three years during which he was "taught the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans" early displayed his character, manifesting a beautiful boyish simplicity of faith, and that high-principled self-denial in trifles for conscience sake, which is the sure earnest of future greatness, and gives the best promise of a grand career. His faith grew by exercise, till it prevailed to bring down the interpretation of the king's dream, and

it lasted through life, leading the prophet in his old age to "continue in prayer," even when the den of lions was the penalty.

Bold and uncompromising where allegiance to God was concerned, Daniel was, however, singularly respectful and deferential, sympathetic, polite, and patient. Though never dazzled or deluded by the splendours of Nebuchadnezzar's court, he evidently both admired and respected his vast power. It had, indeed, elements of greatness as the *first* which changed the "robber-tyrant domination of Assyrian and Babylonian might into organized rule."

This respect is consistently shown—in his explanation of the king's dream of the image, and subsequently in that of the tree cut down, which predicted Nebuchadnezzar's insanity. How reluctant is the prophet to explain this latter vision! He sat astonished for an hour, and his thoughts troubled him, not because he feared the results to himself of the unwelcome intelligence he had to deliver, but out of sincere sorrow for and sympathy with the proud monarch before him. Tenderly and respectfully he at last, when urged, reveals the counsel of God to the king, accompanying the announcement with words of gentle yet earnest exhortation, if perchance reformation of life might lead to a lengthening of tranquillity.

The same deferential, respectful tone marks his words to the weak and unjust Darius: "Before thee also, O king, have I done no hurt." And especially it comes out in his interview with Belshazzar on the eve of the capture of Babylon, when he recalls the glory of Nebuchadnezzar as he had seen it in his own early days. "The Most High God gave thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: and for (or on account of) the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down." (Dan. 5:18,19)

Daniel's career of prosperity in a strange land never weaned his affections from his fatherland, or lessened his longing for the restoration of his people and the temple at Jerusalem. Three times a day he prayed "towards Jerusalem," as we learn incidentally in his old age. He led a life of earnest, longing prayerfulness for Jewish interests, while all those seventy years doing faithfully the king's business. So perfect was his fidelity that his enemies could find no fault in him in his official capacity, and the length of his career makes the statement remarkable.

"The stripling of seventeen *sat in the king's gate* ('in the Porte,' as we say, retaining the oriental term), president over all the colleges of the *wise men*, and of the whole province of Babylon. *Daniel continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus*, are the simple words; but what a volume of tried faithfulness is unrolled by them! Amid all the intrigues, indigenous, at all times, in dynasties of oriental despotism, where intrigue too rolls round so surely and so suddenly on its author's head; amid all the envy towards a foreign captive in high office as a king's councilor; amid all the trouble incidental to the insanity of the king, or to the murder of two of his successors,—in that whole critical period for his people Daniel *continued*. . .

"The force of the words is not drawn out; but, *as perseverance is the one final touchstone of man*, so these scattered notices combine in a grand outline of one, an alien, a captive, of that misused class who are proverbially the intriguers, favourites, pests of oriental courts, who revenge on man their ill-treatment at the hand of man; yet, himself, in uniform integrity, outliving envy, jealousy, dynasties; surviving in untarnished uncorrupting greatness the seventy years of the captivity; honoured during the forty-three years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign; doing the king's business under the insolent and sensual boy Belshazzar; owned by the conquering Medo-Persians; the stay doubtless and human protector of his people during those long years of exile; probably commissioned to write the decree of Cyrus which gave leave for that long longed-for restoration of his people, whose re-entrance into their land, like Moses of old, he was not to share. Deeds are more eloquent than words. Such undeviating integrity, beyond the ordinary life of man, in a worshipper of the one God, in the most dissolute and degraded of the merchant-cities of old, first minister in the first of the world-monarchies," gives him a place among the highest and holiest men the world has ever seen. (Pusey: "Lectures on Daniel the Prophet," pp. 20, 22.)

This was the prophet to whom He who sees the end from the beginning, was pleased to reveal THE SIXTH SECTION OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE world's history.

This section was fuller and more detailed and definite than any which had preceded it, and extending from its own date, five to six centuries before Christ, to the end of the present state of things, the resurrection of the dead and the era of blessedness. It contains, with some *unfulfilled* predictions, a prophecy of *the outline of history for twenty-five centuries*; and a comparison of its statements with the well-known course of events must either attest its supernatural inspiration, or confute it even more clearly than any of the programmes we have as yet considered.

Questions as to the date of the Book of Daniel have been raised by rationalistic critics to whom real prophecy in any sense is as incredible as real miracle. The objections raised are about as baseless as objections well could be; and the counter-theories as to the date of the prophecy are one and all incredible, some even ludicrous. The true date, as we will presently show, has been abundantly confirmed and verified both from external and internal evidence. No further proof of the authenticity of the accepted date ought to be demanded—nor can any be given, until further Babylonian exploration brings to light, as it probably will do, contemporaneous evidence of the existence and career of the prophet. But our present argument requires no consideration of this question. Because, even if we accept the latest date suggested for the publication of Daniel, it fails to abate the claim of the book to contain supernatural predictions which were published hundreds and some of them thousands of years before they were fulfilled, and remains therefore an unanswerable witness to the prescient wisdom of God, to the intense reality of His providential government of the world, and to the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

In treating on this subject, we must presume on an acquaintance with the Book of Daniel on the part of our readers. As a mere work of very ancient

literature it is an intensely interesting one, while as an important part of the Word of God it well repays study. Its life-like sketches of the state of things in which the writer lived, and of the characters of those with whom he came in contact; its graphic accounts of the tragic and wonderful incidents of his career; its pictures of saintly devotion, heroic self-sacrifice, calm faith, holy courage, and prevailing prayer, of fidelity under most ensnaring temptation, and of patriotism that nothing could shake; above all, its glorious witness to the delivering power and grace of God, and its lessons of lofty morality, to say nothing of its wonderful anticipations of the world's history—all conspire to make it a document of surpassing attraction. The greatest and wisest philosopher may ponder its pages, as the incomparable Sir Isaac Newton loved to do; while the simplest child finds no stories more interesting than those of the den of lions, the Hebrew children, and the handwriting on the wall; and evangelists like Moody find no theme more moving than the experiences of the holy prophet. The book is partly historic and partly prophetic, facts and foreviews being blended in about equal proportions. The second and the last six chapters of the book are mainly prophecy, the remainder history, in which however detached predictions of events which were near at hand at the time occur.

The prophecies, with the exception of the one great Messianic prediction, and the few closing ones of the book, are political in character; they relate to kings and kingdoms, victories and defeats, treaties and royal marriages, and the fortunes of different nations; and in this fact we have a fresh proof of the suitability of the instruments divinely selected for the work they are destined to do. Moses, trained in college and at court, and placed in command of armies and expeditions, familiarized subsequently with the mountains and valleys and resources of the Sinaitic peninsula, was appointed to lead the Exodus of Israel, and convey the law of God to the Jewish nation. David, the first great king of Israel, is chosen to receive revelations as to the kingdom, and as to the Messiah who should rule to the uttermost ends of the earth. And now Daniel with his noble Jewish lineage, his high and careful Gentile education and training, his familiarity with the imperial politics of Nebuchadnezzar and with the varied civilization of Chaldea,—Daniel with his statesmanlike experience of government, with his personal faith and his pure aspirations, with his strong national sympathies, yet his wide acquaintance with the world,—Daniel the royal exile, the “ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan. ii. 48), is made the medium of revelations embracing the political outline of long centuries of Gentile history, the first and second advents of Messiah the Prince, the hope of Israel and the salvation of the world. His training and experience, his character and position, all adapted him peculiarly for his work, and to be the channel of the wonderful revelation which was committed to him.

So numerous are the predictions in this short book that it would require a volume to consider them in detail. We must take up the main outline only of its programme of the future, and that outline is so clear and so comprehensive that subsequent history must have either definitely verified or absolutely falsified it. There can in this case be no possible uncertainty or doubtfulness as to the correspondence of prophecy and fulfilment. When a long

series of consecutive events, embracing the political fortunes of all the leading nations of the world for twenty-five centuries, together with the characters and epochs of the greatest heroes of history, are predicted in succession as luminously and clearly as if the prophecy were a narrative, it must be either plainly fulfilled or not so. In this sixth section of the programme there is evidence of greater strength than in any of the previous ones of Divine foreknowledge, and of the control of the course of history by Divine power.

The programme has four main divisions, the last of which is still unfulfilled:

I. The twice-repeated prediction of a succession of FOUR GREAT EMPIRES, followed by the kingdom of God.

II. The full and chronological prophecy of the FIRST ADVENT OF CHRIST, and the DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

III A long and detailed prediction of the events connected with the second and third of the four great monarchies, including especially the wars of the Ptolemies and Seleucid, the Maccabean persecutions and martyrdoms, and the career of Antiochus Epiphanes.

IV. Predictions relating to events still future—the second advent of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the restoration of Israel (