

Sabbath School Lesson #2 – From Jerusalem to Babylon – 4-10 Jan 2020

Christ was with Daniel and his three fellows who were ostensibly taken captive with others to Babylon. We read: “As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17). Of the greatness of ancient Babylon, as the best at the time, we read this: “Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency” (Isaiah 13:19).

We note that at the time when the book of Daniel opens, the Jewish nation was subject to the Babylonians, and many of the Jews were in Babylon. A few years before (about 610 BC), the king of Egypt had deposed Jehoahaz, king of Judah, and placed Eliakim, whom he named Jehoiakim, on the throne (see 2 Chronicles 36:2-4). In the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign (Daniel 1:1) Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The city was taken, Jehoiakim was bound with fetters, and some of the vessels of the house of God (see 2 Chronicles 36:7; Daniel 1:2) were carried to Babylon. Some of the people, also, among whom were Daniel and his fellows, were carried to Babylon at this time (Daniel 1:3-7).

Jehoiakim, king of Judah, however, was allowed to remain in Jerusalem, where he reigned eight years longer (see 2 Chronicles 36:5). He was then succeeded by Jehoiachin, his son, who, after a reign of three months, was taken by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:9-10). With him were also taken all the royal family, the wealthy people, and the artisans, so that only the poorest people of the land were left in Judah (2 Kings 24:8-16). This was about BC 599. Nebuchadnezzar then placed Mattaniah on the throne of Judah, and changed his name to Zedekiah. After a few years’ reign Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who again came to Jerusalem, and in the eleventh year of Zedekiah’s reign (about BC 588) he succeeded in capturing the city. Zedekiah was carried to Babylon, and with him all the people who had before been left in Jerusalem, and the walls and palaces of Jerusalem were burned to the ground (see 2 Chronicles 36:11-21). This fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah (17:27), and completed the overthrow of the Jewish nation.

It will be well to notice at this point the fulfilment of a prophecy concerning Zedekiah. The prophet Ezekiel, who was then in Babylon, was directed to bring his stuff out of his house, in the day-time, in the presence of the people, and to dig through the wall and carry his stuff through at evening, covering his face at the same time, so that he should not see the ground (Ezekiel 12:3-6). Then he was directed to say to the people of Israel: “I am your sign; like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them; they shall remove and go into captivity. And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth; they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby; he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare; and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there” (Ezekiel 12:11-13). Four years afterward, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and besieged it. For nearly two years the siege was carried on, until “the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king’s garden (now the Chaldees were against the city round about); and the king went the way toward the plain. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon” (2 Kings 25:3-7). Thus was Ezekiel’s prophecy literally fulfilled, and Jerusalem was left in ruins.

Among the Jews who were carried to Babylon at the first siege of Jerusalem, was Daniel, who was of the royal line (see Daniel 1:3-6). Daniel and his fellows were chosen to go through a three years’ course of study and training, in order that they might be fitted to fill offices of trust in the Babylonian kingdom. They were chosen because of their superior mental ability (Daniel 1:4); and so rapidly did they improve that at the end of the three years, when they went before Nebuchadnezzar to be examined, in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all.

Our youth as well as all in the Seventh-day Adventist Church may learn lessons from the influence of Daniel and his fellows. When Daniel found that he was expected to drink wine from the king's table in Babylon, and eat food which he could not conscientiously accept, he at once "purposed in his heart" (Daniel 1:8) that he would not do it. How naturally he might have reasoned that the matter was a comparatively small one, and that if he did not do as the rest did in the strange city he would only get into trouble; he would seem odd and eccentric, and perhaps lose his influence. Many since Daniel's day have overcome their scruples about wrong-doing by such processes of reasoning. They knew perfectly well what they ought to do – but they did not want to do it, and it was easy to find a fairly presentable moral argument to excuse their disobedience. To make themselves peculiar and different from others would be to lose their influence, and then they would be unable to do much good that they were now doing. So they stifled the voice of conscience and decided to do evil that good might come. Did Daniel lose his influence? We hear much of him and of his three faithful companions, but they were only four amongst the captives of Judah who were chosen for their grace and ability to stand in the king's palace with his counsellors and wise men. What of the other young men? They doubtless decided to save their influence and when in Babylon to do as the Babylonians did. They followed the world about them and the customs of "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency" (Isaiah 13:19), and they compromised principle. They are nameless, and so far as we know were useless. But God stood by Daniel and his fellows and by their faithfulness witnessed of Himself before Babylon and all the world. Daniel did not lose his influence by doing right.

Daniel was ostensibly captive in Babylon, with the rest of the Jews, yet he was a pious youth. The Jews were sent into captivity because of their sins, yet Daniel is one of the few men without a shadow of wrong-doing charged against them in the Bible. Thus we see that good people may be brought into trouble in this life through the evil-doing of others. But that good men are brought into difficulties through the sins of others is no ground for complaint. A righteous man cannot be made a captive, even though he be bound with chains. Daniel in Babylon was a free man. When God allows His servants to suffer hardships through the evil-doing of others, it is always for a good purpose. God had work for Daniel in Babylon, as He always has for His servants, wherever they are. Compare the case of Joseph in Egypt. Daniel was free from the Babylonian spirit, which was pride and the exaltation of self above God, and therefore he was free in Babylon. Jesus said, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:31-32, 36).

There is never any need for one to compromise his principles. Many think that if they are guests of some great man, courtesy demands that they should drink his wine, and partake of his dainty meats. So they will lay aside their principles for fear of giving offence. Perhaps they will go so far as to state that they do not believe in eating and drinking such things, but that they will do so 'just on this occasion,' thereby making the case worse than if they said nothing. But Daniel was not merely a guest, free to go away if he chose; he was a captive, subject to the orders of an absolute monarch, whose word was law, and who could with an inclination of the head send one who displeased him to execution. If ever a youth had cause for compromising his principles, Daniel had; but he did not. He knew what would please God: and that was what he purposed to do, no matter what the consequences might be. Because of this loyalty to truth and right, God made the way clear for him. When God allows His servants to be in difficult place, it is so He may have a witness for the truth in that place.

Firmness of character, and loyalty to principle are esteemed even by the world. Daniel's course was such that he could not fail to be noted, and his prominence was only for the advancement of truth. The fact that Daniel made the request that he should not drink or eat of the king's food, would call attention to him, and when it was seen that there was sound wisdom in his choice, the truth was exalted. The man who is recreant to the trust that God has placed in him in a critical time, is of no use – he is passed by as one of the common herd. And the man who feebly makes known what he calls his principles, but puts them aside 'on this occasion,' brings contempt on himself, and causes his associates to think that there is no power in truth. May the God of Daniel make us all as faithful as Daniel was!