

DANIEL—GOD IS MY JUDGE

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Lesson: Daniel 6

“So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God”(Daniel 6:23).

Daniel, which means God is my judge, is the central figure in a series of dramatic incidents which graphically represent the judgment of God. Since people first ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—when they became as God, knowing good and evil—a duality of ideas has existed. People have continually had two things placed before them and been requested to choose between them. In fact, we may go back beyond the time when people ate of the forbidden fruit and see these two ideas expressed in the very garden of Eden itself, planted as it was with the tree of life in the middle and round about it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So there has always been this choice between the judgment of God on the one hand and the judgment of humanity on the other. When God commanded Abram to set out from Ur of the Chaldees and go into a land which He would show him, Abram had this choice to make. There was the judgment of God on the one hand, and his own judgment and the judgment of all his friends and relations on the other. He must choose. God was his judge. He accepted God’s call and went forth. Again when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, he was faced with a difficult choice between the judgment of humankind and the judgment of God. But God proved to be his judge, and through his obedience Abraham and his son were saved.

Saul had the same decision to make when he was faced with the task of utterly destroying the Amalekites. The judgment of God said to utterly destroy them. The judgment of man said to save alive the king and the best of the flocks and the herds. Saul departed from the judgment of God, and the result was that his kingdom was taken from him and given to another who would obey the judgment of God.

This principle of the “judgment of God,” as opposed to the judgment of humans, must be a very important one—one that we will always need in order to regenerate—or else it would not have been mentioned so frequently throughout the pages of sacred scripture. For, in fact, from Genesis to Revelation almost countless illustrations of it are given; from the fall of Adam to the denial of Peter we see examples of where people have failed, and from the obedience of Noah to the whole-hearted discipleship of John we see the beauty of its fulfillment. So, in the quiet of our inner thoughts let all of us ask ourselves whether “God is our judge, or human prudence is our judge.” It is only when, from the humility of our own hearts, we can see how great our need for light concerning the judgment of God is, that we shall have born within us that great thirst which shall lead us to the Fountain of living water. Indeed, it may be necessary for us to be cast like Hagar into the wilderness, there to almost perish by thirst before we realize that we need the waters of truth, before we are led to fairly face the question of who is the “judge” of our lives.

Daniel, whose name means “God is my judge,” was the Lord’s appointed symbol to convey to us an image—a stirring spiritual picture—of the power, beauty, and salvation which flow forth from this principle when it dominates our lives.

Let us review, for a moment, the period in which Daniel lived, together with the spiritual significance of it. Jerusalem, the Holy City, represents the very center and soul of true religion, of the spiritual and celestial Church. This holy city, this representative of the stronghold of God in a person, had fallen a prey to its enemies. The armies of Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the city and taken its inhabitants away as captives to Babylon. This happened about the year 600 B.C. In the history of the spiritual Church, which is contained in the internal sense of the Word, what a dreadful temptation this event must portray! What bondage at the hand of evil spirits we see here. We have but to enter into the signification of Babylon to understand the meaning of the event, for Babylon stands for the most bitter enemy which the Church has. Babylon represents the love of self. Not the simple external love of self which we often lightly designate by the term “selfishness.” It is not this. It is not the love of self for the mere indulgence of sensual pleasures; it is that love of self which desires dominion over the lives of others. This is the spiritual temptation which may rise up and carry even the Church itself into captivity.

The very physical aspects of Babylon made it a suitable representation of this concept. In ancient times the city was situated astride the river Euphrates, and it was surrounded by a great and high wall. The height of the wall was nearly 300 feet, and it is said to have been 60 feet thick at its base. This wall enclosed 100 square miles of territory, so that in a siege the city could support itself from its own crops. So Babylon stood, surrounded by its man-made wall, as the typical example of the self-confident love of dominion from a trust in the judgment of humans. Opposed to this spirit is one of the captives of Judah—Daniel, whose life and actions stand as an exemplification of the quality which his name indicates, “God is my judge.”

Daniel was in Babylon under four successive kings. Under the first two, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, he became known as an interpreter of dreams. Under the latter two, Darius and Cyrus, he became a ruler in the country. Like Joseph before him, he had first been the interpreter of dreams, and later the ruler, in order to exemplify the fact that the Lord first gives us to *see* what is right, and then to *do* what is right.

Belshazzar was the last king of the Chaldeans. He was drinking wine out of the vessels of gold and silver which had been brought from the temple in Jerusalem, representing the most horrible profanation, when the hand appeared writing on the wall, “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.” And Daniel, being called, foretold the Lord’s judgment on this crime of profanation. That same night the Persians, under Darius, entered and took over the city, having temporarily turned the Euphrates from its course and used its dry riverbed for an entrance into the city.

This represents the first judgment on the love of dominion, but the Church is not yet delivered from its bondage. It was not until later, when Cyrus became king, that the Jews were sent back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Yet Darius represents an earnest effort to place the “judgment of God” as the ruling principle in our lives. So at the beginning of chapter six we read, “It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one....”

This, surely, portrays a strong desire to make the “judgment of God” first, over other things. But the task is not an easy one; it is something that can be done only by combat and victory over the temptations from the hells, which are immediately sent against the resolve to make the “judgment of God” the first thing in our lives. The one hundred and twenty rulers who were placed under Daniel represent all the loves of rule in us which must be subordinated to the “judgment of God.” This cannot take place at once; these lesser princes will not permit it. They were jealous of Daniel.

The rulers under Daniel were jealous of him because he refused to become a partner to their corruption. They sought in vain to find some fault in his performance of his duty, but he was found to be faithful everywhere. They could not find any error or fault in him, and so they banded together to attack the one thing which they knew he would not yield—his love for his God. They knew that three times a day Daniel entered his room, opened the window toward Jerusalem, and prayed earnestly to his God. This act of Daniel’s represents the measure of his name, “God is my judge,” and the idea that if God is my judge I must pray to God in order to learn what His judgments are.

So the rulers banded together to establish a decree. Now Darius represents a new beginning, but, as stated before, it is not at all easy to make a beginning in throwing off the influences of the love of self and the love of dominion. As soon as we attempt to do this, all the influences that seek to make us lead a selfish life come upon us and show us the desirable state in which we alone are regarded. Even so, the rulers came to Darius, and they brought to him a decree which stated that anyone who asked any petition of God or any person except Darius the king within thirty days should be cast into a den of lions.

How often the host of affections and emotions within us come to us with similar decrees which they desire us to sign. Our love of pleasure comes and begs that for a time we consider only our own pleasure, our own happiness, and the gratification of our own loves. Our love of ruling over others comes with its plea that we exalt ourselves above others and make them worship and yield to us. Our love of comfort and ease comes and begs us to consider ourselves alone for thirty days. And, in a moment of weakness, we may yield, as Darius yielded and signed the decree.

Then the conflict arises—the age-old struggle between the judgment of God and the judgment of people. At first when we yield to the judgment of people—that is, to the natural human impulses within us—we do not realize where it will lead us. But the evil spirits who inspire us to accept only the judgment of humanity know, and they rejoice at the signing of the decree. Let us pray that the Daniel *in us* may act as Daniel did in this story. For although he knew the decree, and none knew better that the laws of the Medes and Persians do not alter, nevertheless Daniel entered his room as at other times and prayed three times a day to his God.

This was the occasion that the hundred and twenty rulers sought. They felt sure that now their wicked vengeance would be exercised upon Daniel. So they went to Darius with the news that Daniel, of the captivity of Judah, had not obeyed the decree of the king and was therefore worthy of death at the jaws of the lions. When the king heard this he was very sorrowful. He had not thought, when he complied with the demand of his under-rulers, that in so doing he would be forced to put Daniel to death.

There is an important lesson in this particular part of the story. Somehow, Darius had believed that he could institute the worship of self and, at the same time, keep Daniel, who would not worship any but his God. This depicts a state which may gain a place in any of us. We often think that we can act selfishly, and for our own interests, and still have the “judgment of God” as our standard. We think that we can have the wisdom, the judgment, the blessings of religion, and not make any sacrifices for them. But these things cannot exist together in the same mind. As soon as we sign the decree in favor of selfishness and self-centeredness, in that self-same hour the Daniel within us is doomed. And this is what the Lord meant when He said, “No one can serve two masters,” and again, “you cannot serve both God and Mammon.” Darius had given in to the Babylonian rulers, and although he labored all day to save Daniel it was too late. Daniel was cast into the den of lions.

Then a wonderful miracle occurred. The lions did not touch Daniel, or, as he expressed in simple words to the king, “God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me.” Here, indeed, is a miracle—the mouths of hungry lions withheld from devouring a man by an angel of the Lord—and yet it is a miracle which we can quite readily understand when we see the spiritual, internal aspect of the story.

Daniel moving about amid varying earthly changes, represents a spiritual principle, also moving amid a corresponding spiritual environment. That spiritual principle is the judgment of God. What do we mean today by the judgment of God? God does not dictate His judgments at the present time. He no longer needs to tell them to us, for He has already given them. They have come down through the ages, and they exist today as the Word of God. In the Word of God are found the judgments of God. Those people, then, who desire to act according to the judgment of God, or to have God for their judge, must obey the truths of the Word. Those who approach the Word in this spirit form for themselves a clean, pure conscience. When they act according to this conscience that has been built upon the Word of God, then they are acting with the judgment of God. We all have people as the judge of our lives, whether we desire it or not. Our fellow humans will judge our actions; they will interpret our lives according to their standards. They may attribute motives to our conduct which are far from the truth, and if we allow ourselves to be governed by these judgments we will be forever in mental chaos. But to have God as the judge of our lives is to rise above the considerations of people, to rise into the realm of higher things where the supreme consideration is whether we are conducting our lives in conformity with God’s will, that is, according to the wisdom made manifest to us in His law or Word.

People are as strong as the support or staff upon which they lean. If they lean upon the reed of human intelligence, then in the hour of trial they will surely fall, in the moment of doubt they will tremble and perish; but if they lean upon the Rock of Ages they will rest upon a sure support—they will be like the man who had built his house upon a rock and the winds and the rain beat upon it, but it stood forever. So the simple statement “God is my judge” denotes all this spiritual strength, all the trust and faith that come from following a pure conscience. Those who are stalwart in this conscience are immune to the attacks of evil spirits and falsities. They will, indeed, undergo temptations, but they will not succumb to them; they will be protected by the fact that God is their judge.

In a bad sense lions represent the power of falsity attacking the truths of the Word. It was because of this meaning of a lion that David slew a lion and a bear when he was a young man. In this action David represented the power of Divine truth to overcome all the false slanders and attacks that jeopardize life. So, likewise, Samson, when he was a young man, met a lion on the way to Philistia and slew it. Now Daniel was thrown into a den of lions, and their signification is the same. Those lions represent the falsities endeavoring to destroy the truths of the Word. If those truths had been perverted by falsities—if Daniel had been fearful and afraid to pray to his God—then the falsities represented by the lions would have had an effect upon him. But against the truth that “God is my judge,” these falsities are powerless. This is the spiritual explanation of the cause for Daniel’s safety in the lions’ den.

At the end of the story Darius commanded that Daniel’s accusers should be brought and cast into the den of lions, and the lions destroyed them. This illustrates a spiritual law that the evil bring upon themselves the punishments which they seek to place upon others. Here the eternal choice is made clear, and the results are unmistakably written. The choice for the “judgment of God” carries with it the ability to withstand the assaults and punishments which evil spirits seek to bring upon us. The choice for the “judgment of self” will in the end bring destruction at the hands of the evils and falsities which we cherish.

In this story, Darius is the central figure. He stands for us in this temptation. First, he gave himself over to Daniel, making him ruler of his land. Then he was swayed the other way by the temptations to selfishness and the love of dominion. But in the judgment that followed his duty became clear. The false accusers must go as they sought to punish others; they must be cast into the lions’ den. And Darius himself then made a proclamation that throughout all his dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God who delivers and rescues.

“God becomes our judge” when we see that He has the power to save us from our sins. There was no hurt found upon Daniel when he was taken from the lions’ den because he believed in his God. And no hurt shall be found on us if we make God the judge of our lives and trust in Him.