

# **NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL**

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**WILLIAM KELLY**

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CHAPTER I.

It must be evident to any attentive reader, that this first chapter is purely a preface to the book. It introduces us into the scene to which the prophecies, of which Daniel was either the interpreter or the vessel, are the great after-piece, the subject-matter which the Spirit of God is about to convey to us. We may therefore take advantage of this, to inquire into the peculiar nature of the book on which we are about to enter.

The properly prophetic part of Daniel begins with the second chapter. Then follow certain historical incidents, which, as I conceive, have a most intimate connexion with the prophecy,—if not directly, in the way of types, —which show out the moral principles or the issues of the powers of the world, with which the book is occupied.

In order to understand Daniel, it is necessary to bear in mind that prophecy in the Old Testament divides itself into two great parts. There were prophecies that concerned the people of God, Israel, when they were still under His government; unfaithful often but still subject to His discipline and owned of Him to a certain extent. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and indeed many of the lesser prophets, such as Hosea,

Amos, and Micah, have this first character. Israel was still recognized as God's people, if not the whole, at least that part of the people with which God still had certain dealings in the land: of course I refer to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which clung to the house of David. After awhile they too fell, and the heir of David became the leader in rebellious idolatry against the Lord. Then a change of the utmost importance ensued. The throne of the Lord, which was established in Jerusalem, ceased altogether upon the earth. God no longer owned Israel, nor even Judah, as His people. And I call your attention particularly to this, because there are often vague thoughts as to what is meant by "the people of God" in Scripture. As Christians we look at God's people as those that really belong to Him—His children by faith of Christ. Now there is a danger of carrying the same thoughts back to the language of the Old Testament. But it will be found, if we examine Scripture with care, that, in the ancient oracles, by people of God is meant only the Jews or Israel. Nor is it merely a certain aggregate of the elect there, but the entire nation, or that part which still clung in a measure, though very unfaithfully, to God's king, and whatever they might be, owned as the people of God. Then came a time when God disowned His people. This was predicted by Hosea. It was accomplished when God gave up the last king of Judah to the Chaldean conqueror. God would have sacrificed His own holiness, truth, and majesty, if He had longer tolerated the Jews or their idolatrous king.

Now it is a remarkable thing in the history of the world, that although there were certain powers of growing importance and ambition in the east, none before had been allowed to step into positive superiority to all rivals. In the west there were only hordes of wanderers, or, if some were settled, they were uncivilized



barbarians. In the east and south powers had rapidly risen; one of them, Egypt, is particularly well known in connexion with Israel. Another too, Asshur, is quite as ancient in its origin: indeed we read of its name, and of certain aspirations and efforts after power, before we read of Egypt at all. These were the great rivals of the early world, and they had a civilization of their own. It might have a rude character, but that it was barbaric grandeur none can deny who believes the scriptures, nay, who sees the relics of Egypt and Assyria. Well, these powers were constantly struggling for the mastery. But however God might use the Egyptians and Assyrians, or others less considerable, as a rod of discipline for the good of Israel, yet to no nation on earth was supremacy allowed until it was perfectly plain that God's people were proved to be unworthy of being His witness and the scene of His government on the earth. First, then, Ephraim (the ten tribes), having sunk into hopeless idolatry, was swept away. For a long time there had been monarch after monarch only following or exceeding each other in evil; and all through it had been a scene of rebellion and idolatry. Thus God had been compelled to root such a people, that only disgraced Him, out of the land where they had been planted. Still the two tribes that clung to the house of David were owned. But clouds hung over them, and snares were laid by the enemy of the most fatal kind. At this crisis prophecy shines out in all its fulness. For prophecy always, I think, supposes failure. It never comes in during a normal state. But when ruin is impending or begun, then the lamp of prophecy shines in the dark place.

This we find true from the first. Take the revelation in Gen. iii.—that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. When was it given? Not when Adam walked sinlessly, but after he and his wife were fallen. Then God appears, and His word not

only judged the serpent, but took the form of promise to be realized in the true seed—certainly a blessed disclosure of the future, on which the hope of those who believed rested. It was the condemnation of their actual state. It did not allow the faithful who followed to sink into despair, but presented an object above the ruin on the part of God, to which their hearts became attached. Again, Enoch is the person in the antediluvian world who, above all others, is said to have “prophesied,” though we do not get the record of it till one of the latest books of the New Testament. “Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” Now that the evil, found in the germ in Adam, had broken out into all but universal corruption and violence, we have a well-defined prophecy of judgment coming on the world. It was the interference of God in testimony before He acted in power. Then Noah is seen, who, still more than Enoch, was publicly connected with this evil state. I believe that Enoch’s prophecy had a remarkable application to the deluge, though it looks onward, of course, to the grand catastrophe in the last days. When a prophecy is given, there is often a partial accomplishment at the time or soon after. But we must never look back at the past pledge as if the whole thing were exhausted. That would be to make scripture of private interpretation. And this is the true sense of 2 Peter i. 20: “No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.” We must take it in the vast scope of the plans of God, and the unfolding of His purposes, which alone find their consummation at the close. It is to that point that all prophecy looks. Then only we have the grand fulfilment.

Again, let us take the patriarchs, who are expressly called prophets. "He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my *prophets* no harm." Their claim to this title may be explained on the same principle. They were the then interpreters of the mind of God; "called out," because there was a new and fearful evil come into the world, which we never read of before the days of Abraham—idolatry. Worship of idols, as far as Scripture reveals it to us, is only mentioned after the flood. This was spreading everywhere, and becoming paramount even in the descendants of Shem; and therefore God called out a witness in word and deed separate from so flagrant iniquity. Prophecy, or a prophet, always supposes the presence of new and increasing evil, because of which God is pleased to unfold His mind with regard to the future, and to make it of present practical value to those then on the earth.

In the case of Moses it was manifest. For though he was the great lawgiver, the golden calf was set up almost immediately after, and thus the ruin of Israel, as a people under law, was complete. And so it remained for him, as the great prophet of Israel (Deut. xxxiv. 10), to reveal the sure and growing corruption of the people, whatever might be the resources of God's grace at the end; as, at an earlier epoch, he had predicted the inevitable judgment of God upon Egypt. Coming lower down in the history of Israel, we have one who begins the line of prophets emphatically so-called; for he is mentioned thus: "Yea, all the prophets from *Samuel*, and those that follow after," &c. His call was at a very critical period in Israel's history; at a time when the children of Israel had fallen into such a frightfully low state, that they were willing to use even the ark of God as a charm to preserve them from the power of their enemies. Then it was that God put His people to shame. His