

## Lesson 12

# Precursors

**Sabbath Afternoon, June 14**

The names of Daniel and his companions were changed to names representing Chaldean deities. Great significance was attached to the names given by Hebrew parents to their children. Often these stood for traits of character that the parent desired to see developed in the child. The prince in whose charge the captive youth were placed, "gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego." . . .

At the very outset of their career there came to them a decisive test of character. It was provided that they should eat of the food and drink of the wine that came from the king's table. In this the king thought to give them an expression of his favor and of his solicitude for their welfare. But a portion having been offered to idols, the food from the king's table was consecrated to idolatry; and one partaking of it would be regarded as offering homage to the gods of Babylon. In such homage, loyalty to Jehovah forbade Daniel and his companions to join. Even a mere pretense of eating the food or drinking the wine would be a denial of their faith. To do this would be to array themselves with heathenism and to dishonor the principles of the law of God. . . .

But Daniel did not hesitate. The approval of God was dearer to him than the favor of the most powerful earthly potentate—dearer than life itself. He determined to stand firm in his integrity, let the result be what it might. He "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." And in this resolve he was supported by his three companions. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 480, 481, 483.

Will the Lord forget his people in this trying hour? Did he forget faithful Noah when judgments were visited upon the antediluvian world? Did he forget Lot when the fire came down from Heaven to consume the cities of the plain? Did he forget Joseph surrounded by idolaters in Egypt? Did he forget Elijah when the oath of Jezebel threatened him with the fate of the prophets of Baal? Did he forget Jeremiah in the dark and dismal pit of his prison-house? Did he forget the three worthies in the fiery furnace? or Daniel in the den of lions? . . .

Though enemies may thrust them into prison, yet dungeon walls cannot cut off the communication between their souls and Christ. One who sees their every weakness, who is acquainted with every trial, is above all earthly powers; and angels will come to them in lonely cells, bringing light and peace from Heaven. The prison will be as a palace; for the rich in faith dwell there, and the gloomy walls will be lighted up with heavenly light, as when Paul and Silas prayed and sung praises at midnight in the Philippian dungeon. —*The Great Controversy*, p. 626.

Sunday, June 15

# Daniel 2 and the Historicist Approach to Prophecy

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 499, 500.

Hundreds of years before certain nations came upon the stage of action, the Omniscient One looked down the ages and predicted the rise and fall of the universal kingdoms. God declared to Nebuchadnezzar that the kingdom of Babylon should fall, and a second kingdom would arise, which also would have its period of trial. Failing to exalt the true God, its glory would fade, and a third kingdom would occupy its place. This also would pass away; and a fourth, strong as iron, would subdue the nations of the world.

Had the rulers of Babylon—that richest of all earthly kingdoms—kept always before them the fear of Jehovah, they would have been given wisdom and power which would have bound them to Him and kept them strong. But they made God their refuge only when harassed and perplexed. At such times, failing to find help in their great men, they sought it from men like Daniel—men who they knew honored the living God and were honored by Him. To these men they appealed to unravel the mysteries of Providence; for though the rulers of proud Babylon were men of the highest intellect, they had separated themselves so far from God by transgression that they could not understand the revelations and the warnings given them concerning the future.

In the history of nations the student of God's word may behold the literal fulfillment of divine prophecy. Babylon, shattered and broken at last, passed away because in prosperity its rulers had regarded themselves as independent of God, and had ascribed the glory of their kingdom to human achievement. The Medo-Persian realm was visited by the wrath of Heaven because in it God's law had been trampled underfoot. The fear of the Lord had found no place in the hearts of the vast majority of the people. Wickedness, blasphemy, and corruption prevailed. The kingdoms that followed were even more base and corrupt; and these sank lower and still lower in the scale of moral worth. . . .

In the word of God only is this clearly set forth. Here it is shown that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God's purpose. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 501, 502.

Monday, June 16

## Worshiping the Image

The Lord did not forget His own. As His witnesses were cast into the furnace, the Saviour revealed Himself to them in person, and together they walked in the midst of the fire. In the presence of the Lord of heat and cold, the flames lost their power to consume.

From his royal seat the king looked on, expecting to see the men who had defied him utterly destroyed. But his feelings of triumph suddenly changed. The nobles standing near saw his face grow pale as he started from the throne and looked intently into the glowing flames. In alarm the king, turning to his lords, asked, "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? . . . Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

How did that heathen king know what the Son of God was like? The Hebrew captives filling positions of trust in Babylon had in life and character represented before him the truth. When asked for a reason of their faith, they had given it without hesitation. Plainly and simply they had presented the principles of righteousness, thus teaching those around them of the God whom they worshiped. They had told of Christ, the Redeemer to come; and in the form of the fourth in the midst of the fire the king recognized the Son of God. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 508, 509.

These faithful Hebrews possessed great natural ability and intellectual culture, and they occupied a high position of honor; but all these advantages did not lead them to forget God. All their powers were yielded to the sanctifying influence of divine grace. By their godly example, their steadfast integrity, they showed forth the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. In their wonderful deliverance was displayed, before that vast assembly, the power and majesty of God. Jesus placed himself by their side in the fiery furnace, and by the glory of his presence convinced the proud king of Babylon that it could be no other than the Son of God. The light of Heaven had been shining forth from Daniel and his companions, until all their associates understood the faith which ennobled their lives and beautified their characters. By the deliverance of his faithful servants, the Lord declares that he will take his stand with the oppressed, and overthrow, all earthly powers that would exalt their own glory and trample under foot the God of Heaven. —"The Life of Daniel and Illustration of True Sanctification," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 1, 1881, par. 21.

The three Hebrew youth, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (we have no record of Daniel's being present), did not dishonor the God of heaven by paying homage to this idol. Their action was reported to the king. Angered, he called them before him and by threats endeavored to induce them to unite with the multitude in worshiping the image. Courteously, yet firmly, they declared their allegiance to the God of heaven and their faith in His power to deliver them in the hour of trial. —*Manuscript 110*, 1904, par. 52.

Tuesday, June 17

## Worshiping the Image, Again

Trial and persecution will come to all who, in obedience to the Word of God, refuse to worship this false sabbath. Force is the last resort of every false religion. At first it tries attraction, as the king of Babylon tried the power of music and outward show. If these attractions, invented by men inspired by Satan, failed to make men worship the image, the hungry flames of the furnace were ready to consume them. So it will be now. The Papacy has exercised her power to compel men to obey her, and she will continue to do so. We need the same spirit that was manifested by God's servants in the conflict with paganism. Giving an account of the treatment of the Christians by the emperor of Rome, Tertullian says, "We are thrown to the wild beasts to make us recant; we are burned in the flames; we are condemned to prisons and to mines; we are banished to islands,—such as Patmos,—and all have failed." So it was in the case of the three Hebrew worthies; their eye was single to the glory of God; their souls were steadfast; the power of the truth held them firmly to their allegiance to God. It is in the power of God alone that we shall be enabled to be loyal to him. . . .

The commandments of finite, sinful men are to sink into insignificance beside the Word of the eternal God. Truth is to be obeyed at any cost, even tho gaping prisons, chain-gangs, and banishment stare us in the face. If you are loyal and true, that God who walked with the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, who protected Daniel in the lions' den, who manifested himself to John on the lonely island, will go with you wherever you go. His abiding presence will comfort and sustain you; and you will realize the fulfilment of the promise, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." —"God's Care for His Children," *Signs of the Times*, May 6, 1897, par. 16, 18.

The beast with two horns "causeth [commands] all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." Revelation 13:16, 17. The third angel's warning is: "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God." . . .

After the warning against the worship of the beast and his image the prophecy declares: "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Since those who keep God's commandments are thus placed in contrast with those that worship the beast and his image and receive his mark, it follows that the keeping of God's law, on the one hand, and its violation, on the other, will make the distinction between the worshipers of God and the worshipers of the beast. — *The Great Controversy*, p. 445.

Wednesday, June 18

## Early Church Persecution

The day of Peter's execution was at last appointed, but still the prayers of the believers ascended to heaven; and while all their energies and sympathies were called out in fervent appeals for help, angels of God were guarding the imprisoned apostle. In the prison Peter was placed between two soldiers, and was bound by two chains, each chain being fastened to the wrist of one of the guards. He was therefore unable to move without their knowledge. The prison doors were securely fastened, and a strong guard was placed before them. All chance of rescue or escape by human means was thus cut off. But man's extremity is God's opportunity.

The apostle was not intimidated by the situation. Since his reinstatement after his denial of Christ, he had unflinchingly braved danger, and had shown a noble courage and boldness in preaching a crucified, risen, and ascended Saviour. As he lay in his cell, he called to mind the words that Christ had spoken to him: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Peter believed that the time had come for him to yield up his life for Christ's sake.

The night before the day set for the execution, Peter, bound with chains, slept as usual between two soldiers. Remembering Peter's former escape from prison, Herod on this occasion took double precautions. In order to secure extra vigilance, the soldiers on guard were made answerable for the safekeeping of the prisoner. Peter was confined in a rock-hewn cell, the doors of which were strongly bolted and barred. But the bolts and bars and the Roman guard, which effectually cut off from the prisoner all possibility of human aid, were but to make more complete the triumph of God in the deliverance of Peter from prison. Herod was lifting his hand against Omnipotence, but he was to be utterly humiliated and defeated in his attempt upon the life of God's servant. —["The Deliverance of Peter," \*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald\*, April 27, 1911, par. 10–12.](#)

It is the work of the angels to come close to the tried, the suffering, the tempted. They labor untiringly in behalf of those for whom Christ died. When sinners are led to give themselves to the Saviour, angels bear the tidings heavenward, and there is great rejoicing among the heavenly host. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Luke 15:7. A report is borne to heaven of every successful effort on our part to dispel the darkness and to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ. As the deed is recounted before the Father, joy thrills through all the heavenly host. —[The Acts of the Apostles, p. 153.](#)

Thursday, June 19

# The Mark of the Beast

It will require moral courage to do God's work unflinchingly. Those who do this can give no place to self love, to selfish considerations, ambition, love of ease, or desire to shun the cross. We are commanded to "cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet." Shall we labor to make the name of God a praise in the earth? Shall we obey his voice, or shall we listen to the soothing voice of the evil one, and be rocked to a fatal slumber just on the eve of eternal realities? The truth is everything to us, or it is nothing. Let those who want to make a name in the world, go with the world; but let those who would serve God, obey God, and not man. In the great conflict between faith and unbelief, the whole Christian world will be involved. All will take sides. Some may not apparently engage in the conflict on either side. They may not appear to take sides against the truth, but they will not come out boldly for Christ, through fear of losing property or suffering reproach. All such are numbered with the enemies of Christ; for Christ says, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." —*"Seek First the Kingdom of God," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, February 7, 1893, par. 12.*

There can be only two classes. Each party is distinctly stamped, either with the seal of the living God, or with the mark of the beast or his image. Each son and daughter of Adam chooses either Christ or Barabbas as his general. And all who place themselves on the side of the disloyal are standing under Satan's black banner, and are charged with rejecting and despitefully using Christ. They are charged with deliberately crucifying the Lord of life and glory.

Each one has an important question to answer for himself: Are you on the side of Satan, a transgressor of God's law, or are you loyal to that God who declared himself to be, "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." God's character is here displayed as his glory. God has delivered all judgment into the hands of his Son; and as a righteous judge, Christ must pass sentence on every work whether it be good or bad. Justice is as much an expression of love as mercy. —*"Christ or Barabbas?" Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, January 30, 1900, par. 4, 5.*

The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. —*The Great Controversy, p. 605.*

**Friday, June 20**

## **For Further Reading**

"Three Hebrew Worthies: Heroes for God," in *My Life Today*, March 5, p. 68.

"In the Master's Service," *Signs of the Times*, November 7, 1900, par. 1–11.