

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Assurance that Exile shall soon End

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. (Daniel 9:1-19)

For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive. (Jeremiah 29:10-14)

Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah were contemporary prophets. They lived and prophesied during the Babylonian exile. Daniel and Ezekiel prophesied in Babylon. Daniel

served his exile in the palace, beginning with the royal experiment recorded in the first chapter. Ezekiel served his exile as a captive in the slave camp. At the same time Jeremiah prophesied

from Judah. Daniel does not indicate how he obtained a copy of Jeremiah's prophecy, especially so soon after Jeremiah wrote it, but he read it carefully and believed it without reservation. Jeremiah also mentions the seventy year measure of the Babylonian captivity earlier (Jeremiah 25:11-12). In the passage quoted above Jeremiah specifically indicates that, as part of the healing process, His exiled people would "...call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me...seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

Apparently at the time Daniel read Jeremiah's prophecy he and his people had suffered almost the full seventy year period of exile. Daniel believes God's revelation to Jeremiah and believes that the exile shall soon end. He immediately takes Jeremiah's words to heart by doing what God indicated His repenting and banished people were to do. Their restoration was not a passive matter to Judah's citizens. God required their prayerful confessions and return to Him as part of their restoration.

Daniel consistently exemplifies the godly example to his readers. He could easily have pointed the accusing finger at all those rebellious "other people" and claimed personal innocence. His life as reported in Scripture surely affirms just how differently he lived compared with the "rank and file" of his fellows. Daniel describes his immediate response to the knowledge of Jeremiah's words.

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes... We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

Notice Daniel's personal confession of sins committed. Rather than pointing the accusing, self-righteous finger at all "those sinners," Daniel includes himself in the number. During over fifty years of ministry I have occasionally witnessed a variety of attitudes among ministers that come to mind as I ponder Daniel's godly example. The self-righteous and arrogant preacher, upon deciding that things aren't the way they should be, will point the accusing finger at others who have created the deplorable problems of the day, reserving for himself the role of noble savior. He claims to be Mr. Innocent, Mr. I-have-all-the-answers-for-**their/your**-problem.

Shortly after I moved to California in my ministerial youth, a small group of local preachers fell into the habit of "bad-mouthing" Primitive Baptists every time they got together. For an extended period, every time these men met at a special meeting, you could count on the topic of conversation between preaching services being "What is wrong with Primitive Baptists is...." As the people who listened to this depressing clap-trap increasingly became bewildered and discouraged, I became increasingly impatient. Eventually at one of these meetings, when asked to preach, I observed in my introductory comments the practice of constantly talking about "...what is wrong with" our people. Some of these men zealously voiced their "Amen." I then stated with some emphasis, "What is really wrong with Primitive Baptists today is all these people who constantly talk only about what is wrong with Primitive Baptists instead of talking about God and His Word." These men became noticeably quiet at that comment, but their complaining did stop. I observed several quietly voiced "Amens" across the congregation from some of those discouraged sheep.

The godly preacher who truly seeks to change legitimate problems will follow Daniel's example. Instead of pointing the accusing finger at others, he will include himself in the confession, making himself part of the problem, the only way he can ever truly improve the situation that is wrong. There is a cliché that I occasionally read that frames this sensible point, "I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care."

By example Daniel leads his fellow-exiles to do precisely what Jeremiah indicated was necessary and preparatory for God's intervening providence to bring the Babylonian exile to an end. Interestingly 2 Chronicles 36:21 suggests that Judah had neglected seventy cycles of allowing their land to rest every seven years, so God imposed a mandatory seventy year rest on the land to allow it to recover from their greedy over-use of it. We always serve our true best interest by following God's way, not our own.

We live in an age of significant decline among our people. Inevitably we have heard the "What's wrong with us is..." from the self-appointed folk who claim to have all the answers. Their favorite topic of discussion is "revival," typically described by them as getting everyone to go along with their new way of thinking. I observe that Biblical revival always occurred after an intense period of self-examination, confession to God, and prayer, not by extended dialogue about "their failures" or an orchestrated self-driven revival.

Godly Daniel continues to teach us much that we need to heed. Let us sit at his godly feet and learn his lessons—God's lessons—well.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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