

From The Preface To The Prophet Daniel (Excerpt)

(1530)

From this we see what a splendid, great man Daniel was, before both God and the world. First before God, for he, above all other prophets, had this special prophecy to give, that is, his work was not only to prophesy of Christ, like the others, but also to count the times and years, determine them, and fix them with certainty. Moreover, he arranges the kingdoms with their doings, down to the fixed time of Christ, in the right succession, and does it so finely that one cannot make a mistake about the coming of Christ, unless one does it willfully, as do the Jews; and from that point on till the Last Day, he depicts the condition and state of the Roman Empire and the affairs of the world in such a way that no one can make a mistake about the Last Day or have it come upon him unawares, unless he does it willfully, like our Epicureans.”

Therefore it seems to me that St. Peter has Daniel especially in mind when he says, in 1 Peter 1:11, “The prophets searched what time and what manner of time the Spirit of Christ signifies, etc.” The “what” means that he definitely reckons and determines the time, how long and how many years it is to be until then; the “what manner” means that he finely depicts the way that things are to be in the world at that time, who is to have supreme rule, or where the empire is to be. Thus he proclaims, not only the time, but also the life, the form, and the nature of the time; and this strengthens our Christian faith immeasurably and makes us sure and firm in our consciences, since we see before our very eyes the course of events that he described and depicted so plainly and truly for us in his book so long ago.

For Daniel prophesies boldly and determines plainly that the coming of Christ and the beginning of His kingdom (that is, His baptism and preaching) is to happen five hundred and ten years after King Cyrus (Daniel 9), and the empire of the Persians and Greeks is to be at an end, and the Roman Empire in force (Daniel 7,9), that Christ, therefore, must certainly come at the time of the Roman Empire, when it was in its best state, and that it was to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, since after it no other empire was to come, but the end of the world was to follow, as Daniel clearly announces in Daniel 2 and 7.

Before the world, too, he is a splendid and great man, for we see here that he rules the first two kingdoms as their head. It is as though God were to say, “I must have people for these kingdoms, even though I allow my Jerusalem and my people to be destroyed in order to get them.” To be sure, he was never a king and never had great wealth or honor from his work; nevertheless, he had the work, the business, and the duties of a king and attended to them all; for it is the way of the world that the people who do the most work at court get the least out of it, and those who do nothing get the most, according to the saying of the Gospel, “One soweth and another reapeth.” Nay, what is worse, he had to take hatred, envy, danger, and persecution as his reward, for that is the reward with which the world is accustomed to repay all services and benefits.

But that did not hurt Daniel; he was the dearer to God because of it and God rewarded him all the

more richly, and held Daniel as a king in Babylon and Persia. For He counts and judges according to deeds and their fruits, not according to persons and names. Therefore Daniel was, in actual fact, the true king of Babylon and Persia, though he bore no royal title and had not much wealth from it, but rather misfortune and all kinds of danger. Lo, thus God can encourage His captive Jews, by taking the son of a burgher from destroyed Jerusalem and making him a two-fold emperor, in Babylon and Persia. Among all the children of Abraham, none was so highly exalted in the world as Daniel. Joseph was great in Egypt with King Pharaoh, David and Solomon were great in Israel, but they were all little kings and lords compared with the kings of Babylon and Persia, with whom Daniel was the foremost prince and whom he miraculously converted to God. And beyond doubt, he produced great fruit among the people in the two empires, bringing them to a knowledge of God and saving them, as is well indicated by the letters of these emperors and their command that the God of Daniel should be honored in all lands (Daniel 2,6).

This Daniel we commend to the reading of all good Christians, to whom he is comforting and profitable in these wretched, last times; but to the godless he is of no profit, as he himself says, at the end, "The godless remain godless, and do not heed." For the prophecies of Daniel, and others like them, are written, not only in order that men may know the events and the tribulations that are to come, and satisfy their curiosity, but in order that the righteous shall be encouraged and made happy, and strengthened in faith and hope and patience, since they here see and hear that their misery has an end, that they are to be freed from sins, death, the devil, and all evil, and be brought into heaven, to Christ, into His blessed, everlasting kingdom. So Christ, too, in Luke 21:28, encourages His own with terrible news, and says, "When ye shall see these things, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is near, etc." So here, too, we see that Daniel always ends all his visions and dreams, however terrible, with joy; namely, with Christ's kingdom and advent, and it is on account of this advent, as the most important and final thing in them, that these visions and dreams were given, interpreted, and written.

One who would read them with profit must not depend entirely on the histories or events, or cling to them and go no farther, but must pasture and comfort his heart with the promised and certain advent of our Savior Jesus Christ, which is the blessed and joyful redemption from this vale of misery and wretchedness. To this may this same Lord and Savior help us, praised with the Father and the Holy Ghost, forever. Amen.