

A Conservative thinks again about Daniel.

THE difficulties involved in interpreting the book of Daniel are notorious. To this fact the variety of expositions offered us today are a sufficient witness. The writer of this article has travelled a tortuous way to reach his present conclusions; he feels it may be more helpful to recount his successive reactions to the problems presented by the book than to give a bare statement of opposing views, for he suspects he is not alone in his experience.

When his interests first turned to eschatology, the writer felt he ought to know something about the book of Daniel. Very rashly he announced to his congregation that he would commence a series of studies on the book in his weekly Bible school; feeling he could share the results of his labours as he proceeded. He consulted a tutor of his former theological college, seeking advice as to how to tackle the problems entailed. He was not a little shocked when the respected tutor advised him not to make up his mind too quickly as to the date of Daniel: "Study the book first, then draw your conclusions," he was told. That sounded heretical. Did not every respectable Evangelical know that Daniel was written in the sixth century? He turned to his studies, determined not to be deflected from the path of truth.

He began with Pusey's *Lectures on Daniel the Prophet*. The opening sentences of the treatise confirmed his suspicions as to the orthodoxy of his respected tutor. "The book of Daniel is especially fitted to be a battlefield between faith and unbelief," declared Pusey. "It admits of no half measures. It is either Divine or an imposture. To write any book under the name of another, and to give it out to be his, is, in any case, a forgery, dishonest in itself, and destructive of all trustworthiness. But the case as to the book of Daniel, if it were not his, would go far beyond even this. The writer, were he not Daniel, must have lied on a most frightful scale, ascribing to God prophecies which were never uttered, and miracles which are assumed never to have been wrought. In a word, *the whole book would be one lie in the Name of God.*" The student's mind was made up. He would under no circumstances yield to the devilish subtleties of the critics!

Pusey's work is certainly a masterpiece of erudition. R. D. Wilson, in his article on Daniel in the International Standard Bible Encyclopædia, stated that it still remains the finest work on the book. One can hardly wonder, therefore, that it completely won the assent of a young man who had read no other serious work on the subject. But Boutflower is equally persuasive, being armed with an up-to-date knowledge of Assyriology. Sir Robert Anderson's exposition of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel, contained in *The Coming Prince*, also made a deep impression by its careful marshalling of evidence and the astounding results of its calculations. There followed an ever deepening conviction of the authenticity of Daniel as the student passed on to absorb C. H. H. Wright's works, together with those of Auberlen, Keil, Zöckler and various lesser lights. By this time he was so fortified that the fiery darts of Bevan, Charles, and Montgomery could make no impression on his armour; Daniel was sixth century, a child could tell it, further argument was superfluous. His congregations were instructed in the orthodox fashion. The esteem for the formerly highly respected tutor diminished a shade!

Not long afterwards the writer commenced for the first time a careful study of the Apocrypha. He was made just a trifle uneasy by the curious similarity of atmosphere between some of these books and that of Daniel, particularly in the realm of personal piety, but he suppressed the thought as too subjective. He passed on to the study of the extra-canonical apocalyptic literature. Since it was generally admitted that Daniel was prior to these works, the similarity of the latter to it was sufficiently accounted for by conscious imitation, so nothing was gained in this respect. All the time, of course, he was reading the Old and New Testaments, ever with an eye on eschatology. From the fog an important principle of interpretation increasingly made itself discernible: every writer of the prophetic books in both Testaments stood in an immediate relation to the Kingdom of God; to them all, the Kingdom was "at hand." In the N.T. this needs little demonstration; the Parousia is not only longed for, it is hoped for and expected to happen "soon" (see e.g. Rom. xiii. 11f., 1 Cor. vii. 29f., Heb. x. 37, 1 Pt. iv. 7, Jas. v. 8, 1 Jn. ii. 18, Rev. i. 3). The principle, however, is equally discernible in the O.T.: Isaiah looked for the Kingdom of God to come in connection with the troublous times of the Assyrian oppression (see e.g. Chs. 7-9, 10-11), Habakkuk on the destruction of Babylon (Hab. ii. 2-3); Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel prophesied of its establishment after the return of the Jews under Cyrus (e.g. Jer. 29-31, Is. 49, 51, Ezek. 36). Haggai, writing after that return, foretold the advent of the Kingdom after the completion of the Temple then in course of rebuilding (Hag. 2).

And so on. The question suggested itself: Is Daniel an exception to this principle? The prophecies were looked at again with this query in mind. There seemed to be one answer possible: Daniel is no exception.

This conviction was established for the writer in a very simple way. All expositors (except the extreme futurists) are agreed that the vision in Dan. 8. 1-27 has Antiochus Epiphanes in view: he is the "little horn" that ravages the people of God and their land and exalts himself against the host of heaven. Now the angel interpreter distinctly declares that *the vision belongs to the End-time*, immediately prior to the setting up of the Kingdom of God: "Understand, O son of man; for at the time of the end shall be the vision" (viii. 17), and again in Verse 19: "Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation; for at the time appointed the end shall be" (or, as R.V., "it belongeth to the appointed time of the end"). From these statements alone one may deduce that, to this writer, the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes stood as the immediate precursor of the End. This is made abundantly clear in the closing vision of the book, Chs. 10-12. An angel tells the prophet, "Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for the vision is yet for many days" (x. 14). A lengthy description is then given of the relations between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic houses, with especial prominence to the doings of Antiochus Epiphanes, who appears in xi. 21 and continues to occupy the scene until the end of the chapter. It is important to realise that Antiochus is the king spoken throughout this passage; there is no indication of a change of reference after Verse 21, it is the same tyrant who works his evil doings till he comes to an untimely end (xi. 45). Immediately after that event Michael stands to deliver his people, the resurrection of the dead occurs and the kingdom is given to the saints (xii. 1-3). It thus seems clear that this prophet knows no history after the age of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Since this is so in these two visions, the presumption naturally occurs to one that the same goal is in view in the other visions of the book. This conclusion seems inescapable when it is realised that each vision culminates in the End-time and is described in similar terms throughout: i.e. the descriptions of Chs. 2, 7 and 9 correspond both to each other and to those of Chs. 8 and 11-12. No attempt is being made at completeness here so there is no need to adduce any but the most significant parallels.

The two divisions of the last empire in Ch. 2, represented by the iron legs, are related in detail in Ch. 11, where the fortunes of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires are set forth, although the

writer knows quite well that these two kingdoms did not exhaust Alexander's territory (see vii. 8, xi. 4); he confines his attention to these two empires because of their importance for the situation he has in mind. The strength of iron possessed by the fourth kingdom (ii. 40) is represented by the fierceness of the fourth beast and its great iron teeth (vii. 7), with which may be compared viii. 10, ix. 26, xi. 40f. The failure of iron and clay to mix together (ii. 43) is illustrated in Ch. 11 by the unsuccessful marriages attempted between the Seleucids and Ptolemies (xi. 6, 17). The little horn of vii. 9, despite all that is said to the contrary, seems identical with that of viii. 9, which confessedly denotes Antiochus Epiphanes; Boutflower compares with the latter passage what is said of Antiochus in xi. 23, "He shall come up, and shall become strong, with a small people," so that the oppressor in these three visions is the same. The description of his activities, in Ch. 9 as well as in Chs. 7, 8 and 11, leaves little room for doubt that the prophet has in view one individual only. This antichrist waxes great against God (vii. 8, 25, viii. 11, xi. 36-37). He persecutes the Jews and spoils their land (vii. 21, viii. 9, ix. 26, xi. 30f). He affects the regular sacrifices (vii. 25, viii. 11, ix. 27, xi. 31, xii. 11). He treads under the sanctuary (viii. 11, 13, ix. 26, xi. 31). He sets up the abomination that desolates (viii. 13, ix. 27, xi. 31, xii. 11). This lasts for three and a half years approximately (vii. 25, viii. 14, ix. 27, xii. 7). A catastrophic judgment overtakes the tyrant (ii. 34-35, vii. 9-12, viii. 25, ix. 27, xi. 45-xii. 1). The Kingdom of God is then established (ii. 35, 44, vii. 13-14, 18, 22, 27, ix. 24, xii. 2-3).

Since the reference of these visions is identical, then the fourth kingdom of Chs. 2 and 7 is the Greek. From this conclusion these seems no escape. Nor need there be any effort to evade it. We stand in good company in so interpreting the visions. This view was held by a long line of honoured and devout scholars, among whom are to be numbered Ephraem Syrus, Grotius, Zöckler, Westcott, Lightfoot, Zahn, and—for the benefit of our Calvinist enthusiasts—the Annotators of the Westminster Assembly!¹ But it must be clearly understood that most of the objections adduced against the late appearance of the book of Daniel in reality have nothing to do with its date but flow from this relation of the visions, a relation, which, nevertheless, seems to be undoubtedly correct and by which we must stand whatever the consequences.

It may be asked, "Why cannot we freely admit the Maccaean reference of the prophecies of Daniel and still adhere to

¹ For a complete account of the history of interpretation of the four kingdoms, see H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires of the Book of Daniel*, pp. 70f.

their Danielic authorship?" For the writer, the question was settled by the one fact that such a recourse makes the book an exception, and that a most remarkable one, to the rule that the prophets as a body stand in an immediate relation to the Kingdom of God whose coming forms the burden of their prophecies. This rule has been conjoined to another by A. B. Davidson to form the supreme canon for dating any prophecy. "A prophetic writer," he declared, "always makes the basis of his prophecies the historical position in which he himself is placed. . . . And . . . the purpose of prophecy as exercised in Israel was mainly ethical, bearing on the life and manners of the people among whom the prophet lived" (O. T. Prophecy, p. 245). This view, he stated, is "founded on two facts, both obtained from observation, namely, first, we find prophecy to be of this moral character; and, second, we find that particular prophets always do move among the circumstances of their own times" (Ibid., p. 254). Applied to the book of Daniel, it yields the presumption that the author lived in the times that formed the theme of his visions. We still have prophecy, but it is the kind uttered by the rest of the prophets, viz. that concerning the impending revelation of the sovereignty of God.

Other considerations may be adduced to support this main contention. Granting that the Jews might have been warned centuries ahead of the persecution of Antiochus, why did not the prophecies make it explicit that the close of that tribulation would not be succeeded by the Kingdom of God? Alternatively we may ask, Why is the end of the Seleucid empire reckoned as the end of civilisation, the *last* world-empire? The same objection makes the frequently accepted Roman interpretation of the fourth empire equally invalid. For civilisation has continued. The viewpoint is comprehensible on the assumption that the prophet stands in the circumstances of which he speaks, but it is not understandable if he is supernaturally illumined to the degree demanded by the acceptance of Ch. 11 as written in the exile.

It is also necessary to account for the remarkable correspondence between the narratives of Chs. 1-6, both historically and theologically, and the circumstances of the Maccabean age.

Daniel 1 tells of the resistance of Daniel and his friends to the temptation of eating unclean foods. That the food question was a matter more prominent in the post-exilic than the pre-exilic age can hardly be disputed, while we have the knowledge that Antiochus attempted to force the Jews to discard their distinctions between clean and unclean meats (1 Macc. i. 48). The story of the example of Daniel and his friends in Babylonia would be an inspiring incentive to the Jews of the Maccabean period to do likewise.

Daniel 3 relates the refusal of three heroes to worship an idol set up by a heathen tyrant. Antiochus not only encouraged idolatry, but set up the "abomination of desolation" on the Temple altar (an effigy of himself, rather than the small heathen altar which accompanied it, 1 Macc. i. 13, 54).

Daniel 4 relates the madness that fell upon Nebuchadnezzar and his subsequent humiliation and recognition of the supremacy of the God of heaven. The general encouragement such a message would convey to the suffering Jews under Antiochus is itself significant, but if they knew, as is probable, that some people called the tyrant not "Epiphanes" (God manifest) but "Epimanes" (the madman), the parallel would be complete.

Daniel 5 speaks of the judgment of Belshazzar for his blasphemous use of the sacred Temple vessels. 1 Macc. i. tells how Antiochus "entered presumptuously into the sanctuary" and took the Temple vessels, the gold on the wall and the "hidden treasures." The whole passage reflects the horror felt by the Jews on this act of desecration (1 Macc. i. 25-28). The Belshazzar story, particularly with its message of the writing on the wall, would inspire confidence into the dispirited patriots; it would also convey the hint that the kingdom of another tyrant was numbered and was shortly to be given, not to yet a further oppressor, but to the "people of the saints of the Most High."

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(to be concluded)