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Resurrection For All

(Convention Address)

The subject of the resurrection is a basic and fundamental one which most are very familiar with. Nevertheless, it is good to be reminded of such things, as the apostle tells us in 2 Peter 1:12,13. This is not only for our own sakes, but so that we may give a ready answer to others.

Some today who do not understand the wideness of God's mercy insist that there is not to be a resurrection for all - not for those who are really wicked, those destroyed in the flood or in Sodom and Gomorrhah, or for those killed in the great time of trouble which is to come upon the world in Armageddon. They say also that there is no hope for father Adam. How do we answer these things? Any doctrine we hold must first be scriptural, it must also be logical and reasonable. It must bring honour and glory to our great Creator and show Him to be just what the Scriptures say He is, a God of love.

Is there to be a resurrection for all? Those whom God has called now, the members of the true church, have already in this life received a resurrection, not a literal one but a figurative one. Romans 6:3,4 says "know ye not that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death; therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." When we go down into the waters of baptism to symbolise our consecration, what a beautiful picture it is of going down into death and being raised up again into life. We have already passed from death unto life, as our Lord said in John 5:24 "verily, verily I say unto you he that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto life." Our Heavenly Father views us very differently from the rest of mankind, we already have life, we are no longer under the Adamic death sentence which still rests at the present time on the unbelieving world. This life that we have is provisional. Throughout our earthly sojourn we are being tested and tried. As Jesus said "be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." This is the crown of eternal, immortal life. This is our day of judgement, we are not to receive a further opportunity in the next age, that is the world's day of judgement. We have already come under the provisions of the ransom. This lifetime is our opportunity for eternal salvation.

Is there to be a resurrection for all? Yes, in the fullness of time, all will come under the provisions of the ransom, be saved from the Adamic death sentence and be granted a full trial for everlasting life. This is the thought in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 which tells us "God will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth." None can receive eternal salvation without first coming to a knowledge of the truth. So this passage means saved in the same way we are saved at the present time, saved from the Adamic death sentence. The Greek word here translated "knowledge" has the meaning of "accurate knowledge". In God's due time all are to come unto an accurate knowledge of the truth and be fully enlightened.

The scriptures indicate that there could be some who will not receive a literal resurrection, those who have been called and fully enlightened, have come under the provisions of the ransom and later deliberately and wilfully turned their backs on the Saviour and rejected the only way provided by our Heavenly Father. As we read in Hebrews 6:4-6, "for it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they should fall away to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame". It is not that God has rejected these, quite the opposite, they have rejected Him and the gracious provisions He has made for them, and they are quite unrepentant. As the scripture says, "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." We would hope that there would be few of this class.

Life on whatever plane of existence is a priceless gift which our Heavenly Father gives freely, but He does

not force it upon any. Those who accept must do so upon His terms, namely, acceptance of Jesus as their Ransom and obedience to God, We must do our Heavenly Father's will. This has all been made clear to us now, in the next age it will be made clear to all mankind. Many find it hard to understand why the world in general is not on trial now, why they are not being judged for their actions. There is a very simple answer, that is, accountability. How accountable are they? Only those who are fully enlightened are fully accountable.

We think of the case of Jonah who was sent to preach to Nineveh. When the Ninevites repented and God did not destroy them, Jonah was most upset and displeased with God. We find God's reply in Jonah 4:11, "and should not I spare Nineveh that great city wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand and also much cattle." This is true of the world today as far as spiritual things are concerned, they cannot discern between their right hand and their left. The sparing of Nineveh seems to typify the salvation that is coming to the world in the next age. Jonah, in this illustration, would picture a class that is not very pleased with the thought non-Christians of this age will receive an opportunity in the next. But we rejoice that God's plan is one of universal opportunity for salvation, for the church in the present age, those whom God is calling and drawing to Jesus, and for the remainder of mankind in the next age.

Heb 6:4-6 makes it very clear that the unbelieving world is not on trial at present. We are given there a list of things that must occur before they are placed on trial, before there is any possibility of their coming under the ultimate penalty. Firstly, they must have been once enlightened, that is, fully enlightened as to all the details of the divine plan. Then it says, "and, have tasted of the heavenly gift", that is understood the call and purpose of the church, the exceeding great and precious promises that are ours. The passage goes on, "and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit". This narrows it down to those whom God calls and draws to Jesus. Those who accept that call, and only those, are made partakers of the Holy Spirit. The portion ends, "and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come." It is crystal clear that at the present time God is not dealing with or judging those he has not called and enlightened. That is why there is to be a resurrection for these in the next age, that is their day of judgement and testing. As Jesus said in John 12:47-48, "if any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to judge the world but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." This confirms again that those who do not believe, those who are unenlightened, are not being judged now but will be judged in the last day, the 1000 year millennial day. They will be judged by the words of Jesus which, as our Lord said, were not His own words but God's words. These will then taste of the good word of God, come to understand it, and have to conform their lives to the righteous principles contained therein, if they wish to obtain everlasting life on earth.

We have further confirmation of this in Romans 11:31-32, "even so have these also now not believed that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy, for God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all". This passage is speaking of the nation of Israel but the same principle applies to both Jew and Gentile. Even though they might have failed miserably in this life to come up to the divine standard, if they did so in unbelief, God can show mercy to them in the next age. This is just the opposite to the belief of many, who say God will have no mercy on those who do not believe in the present life.

No one of course can receive eternal salvation in unbelief. When these who are now in unbelief come back in the resurrection, they will then believe on Jesus Christ and the value of his ransom sacrifice will be applied for them. During the gospel age, God is selecting those who are rich in faith, accept His word, and are prepared to believe without seeing the actual evidence with their own eyes. In the next age it will not be a matter of faith to the same extent as it is today. Who can fail to believe, when they see the glory and power of God displayed by the resurrection, when they themselves, their friends, their relations, are brought back from the grave?

Some say "if there is to be a resurrection for all regardless of how they behaved at the present time, why bother to consecrate our lives to God and walk in the narrow way of self sacrifice? Why not live now for our own enjoyment, eat, drink and be merry and wait for our opportunity in the next life?" There are several answers to that question. Firstly, today is the only day of salvation for joint heirship with Christ as a member of His Bride. We are called to something that is very special, not just an ordinary calling, but as the scriptures describe it, "a high calling", and a "so great salvation". We are called to be part of God's own family, the divine family on His plane of existence, immortality. Not that we have any desire for honour or preeminence but we know this is what God has called us to, this is what God wants for us. So to be pleasing to our Heavenly Father we strive to be worthy to have part in the first resurrection as a member of his own Heavenly family, His spiritual children. Nevertheless our attitude should be that we will be happy and content with whatever position we are allocated. As the Psalmist says, even if it is only a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord. The motivating factor in running in the race for the prize of the high calling should be one of service, that is what we have been called to, at the present time especially service to the brethren, in the next age to all of God's family on the earthly plane. Also we receive a blessing at the present time, as our Master said in Mark 10:30

“ye shall receive a hundred fold now in this time”. We have the joy of fellowship with our brethren, a fuller and richer life, and the peace of mind that the knowledge of God’s plan brings, especially in the difficult days that we live in.

For another answer to the question, as to why become a disciple of Jesus now, let us look at Revelation 20:6. “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” Look at that one little sentence “on such the second death hath no power.” In John 5:29, our Lord indicates that two classes are coming forth in the resurrection, one to a resurrection of life, the other to a resurrection of judgement. The class mentioned in Revelation 20:6 upon whom the second death has no power, are those who receive the resurrection to life. What a wonderful blessing! This alone is sufficient reason to become a disciple of our Master now. What a joy when we awake on resurrection morning to know that we have life in the full sense of the word, life that will not be taken away from us again; to know that our period of test and trial is over. This is in contrast to those who have part in the later resurrection, the resurrection to judgement. When they awake, their period of testing and trying is just beginning and it seems that it may not be fully complete until the thousand years are over, and Satan’s little season of release is finished.

We have been looking at the logic of why the world is not on trial for life or death at the present time. We saw one reason is that they have not been enlightened by receiving the Holy Spirit. Another very basic reason is that they are already under a death sentence, the Adamic death sentence. This is what our Lord meant when He said, “let the dead bury the dead.” There are two classes of people in the world, those who have life, the true church, only these yet come under the provisions of the ransom. As- it says in Hebrews 9:24, “Jesus has appeared in the presence of God for us,” i.e. the Church. The value of His ransom sacrifice has been applied to these, so they have been released from the Adamic death sentence. The world must also be released from this death sentence, before they can be placed on trial. The church must be completed before this occurs, then the value of the ransom will be applied to the remainder of mankind, and their trial for life begin.

The understanding that the unbelieving world cannot die eternal death at present is very strongly implied in the term “second death”. Right from Adam’s day until now, all have died in Adam, which is the first death, so no one can become subject to second death until released from first death, the Adamic death. Can we not see how reasonable our gracious Heavenly Father’s plan is in giving all these a resurrection and opportunity for everlasting life in the next age. Not only is it reasonable but it is scriptural as we have already seen.

A very clear statement is that of our Lord in John 5:28,29, already referred to. “Marvel not at this for the hour is coming in which all that are in the grave shall hear His voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgement”. Many seem to feel that God cannot be this kind and merciful and that they must find some way of changing this passage. There can be no exceptions to this statement that “all in their graves are to come forth”, apart from those already mentioned, who have had a full opportunity, have been spirit begotten and have later deliberately rejected Jesus as their Saviour. This may seem at variance with the statement before us that all in their graves are to come forth, but we are not always given all the truth in any one place, we find a little here, a little there. We formulate a doctrine on the basis of the scriptures as a whole. We harmonise scripture with scripture, we modify one scripture with another. (e.g. Matt. 21:22 with 1 John 5:14)

So we read John 5:28 in conjunction with the scriptures as a whole. Nowhere in the scriptures are we told of any other class that will not come forth in the resurrection, so to say that those drowned in the flood, those destroyed in Sodom and Gomorrhah, those who die in the time of trouble, are not to receive a resurrection has no scriptural backing. We could term this a man-made doctrine. In fact, the scriptures indicate that the people of Sodom and Gomorrhah will come back in the resurrection, (Mark 6:11, Matthew 10:15, Ezekiel 16:53.) Some have insisted that not all the dead are meant in John 5:28,29, but only those that God has in His memory. This thought is based on the fact that the Greek word translated “grave” literally means “memorial tomb”. The Greek word concerned is translated - grave 8 times, sepulchre 28 times, tomb 5 times. It seems clear that no such thought of God’s memory is intended. This is simply the regular word of that day denoting a grave. For example in Mark 5:1-3, we have the account of the man with the unclean spirit who made his dwelling among the tombs. This is the same word again. It is plain that it applies to all in the graves, regardless of who was buried there. Vines dictionary says of this word that “it primarily denotes a memorial, also a monument, anything done to preserve the memory of things or persons. Among the Hebrews, it was generally a cavern closed by a door or stone, often decorated”. Obviously this was done to preserve the memory of a loved one, just as we erect a tombstone or a plaque today. Clearly, the term “memorial tomb” has nothing to do with God’s memory but human memory of departed loved ones.

The apostle Paul, in Acts 24:15, confirms once again the resurrection of two classes. He says “and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust”, meaning believers who have been justified and unbelievers who have not been justified.

Paul said this is the hope he has; he obviously means hope for both classes, not only for the just. And we could consider other such scriptures as Heb. 2:9 “that He (Jesus) by the grace of God should taste death for every man,” and John 1:9 “this (Jesus) was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

Many say, yes we accept that life is offered to all, to any who become believers and accept Jesus, but they must do so in this life. We can answer with such texts as 1 Timothy 4:10 which tells us that God is “the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.” This text is very plain because it contrasts the two classes. True, in the present age, God’s special interest is in believers, but He is the Saviour of all men not just those who believe at the present time. As we read in 1 John 2:2, “He is the propitiation of our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” He is the propitiation at the present time for the Church’s sins, but in addition to this, for the whole unbelieving world in the next age.

Those who say that there is no hope for father Adam do not fully understand the workings of the ransom. While Jesus tasted death for all mankind, he did not die for each person individually, but for Adam, thereby redeeming all in Adam. As we are told in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, “for since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead, for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” The all that are made alive in Christ are the same all that die in Adam i.e. all mankind. Romans 5:14 shows that Adam was a type of Jesus, and in 1 Corinthians 15:45, Jesus is described as “the last Adam”. In 1 Timothy 2:6, we are told that Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all. The Greek word here translated “ransom” means corresponding price. Adam was a perfect man before he sinned, the perfect man Jesus was the corresponding price, hence He is described as the last Adam. How could the first Adam not benefit from the provisions of the ransom when it was exactly a corresponding price for him? Had Adam not sinned, he would have been the life giver and father of all mankind, but since he did sin, the second or last Adam took his place and became their life giver and father. This is the thought in Isaiah 9:6, where Jesus is described as the “everlasting father”. Some translations render this passage the “father of the age to come.” What a beautiful thought that is, the father of the age to come! Surely the resurrection and opportunity for all is one of the things that attracted us to the truth. This doctrine above all others displays our gracious Heavenly Father’s true character and His love for all His human family. (JGT: 1993)

“O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! or who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been His counselor? or who has first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom: 11:33-36)

“If God seems far away, guess who has moved.” (Wayside Pulpit).

Daniel, The Beloved

(Convention Address)

DANIEL is certainly one of the great figures of the Old Testament. Like Joseph, he rose to a position of high authority in an alien land and served with great distinction. He is spoken of three times as a man greatly beloved of God and a review of his life, his piety and his utter consistency of character clearly show why he was so highly esteemed and much used by God.

Outside of the book which bears his name, little is known of Daniel. Interestingly, he is mentioned by Ezekiel, an approximate contemporary, as a standard of righteousness, along with Noah and Job, and of wisdom. He is not recorded by name among the illustrious band of faithful ones in Hebrews 11, but would certainly be among “the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions.” Heb. 11:33.

His lifetime spans the whole of the Jewish captivity in Babylon, where Daniel was taken, with other hostages, on the orders of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, after he had taken Jerusalem and subjugated Jehoiakim, king of Judah. Some indication of Daniel’s background is probably to be gained from Dan. 1:3,4, where it states that Nebuchadnezzar directed that the hostages be taken from those of noble birth, skilful, well-educated and able to conduct themselves in a royal court.

Considering the long period of Daniel’s stay and service in Babylon, he must have been quite young at the time of his being taken there, and historians and scholars suggest that he would have been only about 16 or 18 years of age at that time. He was nevertheless evidently already well informed not only in secular subjects but also in the religion of the true God of Israel. This becomes apparent quite early in his determination not to be defiled with the foods provided for the hostages but even in this matter to serve God.

The earliest years of Daniel’s life would have been spent under the reign of Josiah, one of the good and faithful kings of Judah. The record of his reign reads, in brief - “he did that which was right in the sight of the

Lord, and walked in all the way of David, his father, and turned not aside to the right hand nor to the left.” 2 Kings 22:2. He saw how the nobles and people of Judah had so grievously departed from God’s ways and sought earnestly to restore true worship, so that it was said that “like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might - neither after him arose there any like him.” 2 Kings 23:2.

Despite all Josiah’s endeavours during his 31 years reign, however, the nation soon lapsed back under his son, who reigned only 3 months before being deposed by Pharaoh-Nechoh, king of Egypt, who installed Jehoiakim as his vassal king over Judah. Only 3 years later, Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem, as already seen. All this happened within 4 years of Josiah’s death, in fulfilment of earlier prophecies, of Isaiah to King Hezekiah, as recorded in Isa.39:6,7 and of Jeremiah in Jer.25:11.

The early formative years of Daniel’s life would have therefore been spent during the latter years of the good king Josiah. If as seems probable Daniel was of noble birth, he would no doubt have thus become acquainted with the ideals and endeavours of Josiah. For it was during his reign that the book of the law had been re-discovered in the house of Jehovah, and in this Josiah read the warnings against the waywardness and disobedience of his people. This he sought valiantly to turn round, but alas without any lasting success.

It was accordingly only a few years after Josiah’s death that Daniel and all the other hostages were taken into the Babylonian court and the account given in the book of Daniel begins to unfold. Three other young men among the captives are also brought to our attention; these were also possessed of remarkable faith in the power of their God and their testimony under trial (Dan.3:17,18) stands as their monument and as a challenge to the Lord’s people of every age - “If it be so, our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king, but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image thou hast set up.” Our God is able, but if not!” What faith is there.

In passing, the meanings of the names of the four young men are interesting and suggestive of Godly parentage:

Daniel “God is my judge.”

Hananiah “God is gracious.”

Mishael “This is as God.”

Azariah “God is a helper.”

It is no doubt significant that these names were very soon changed in the Babylonian courts. Whose is the name we bear, as Christians? Do we always honour it as we might, for our Lord is also able?

For us, being invited to partake of the food and drink provided in the royal court would probably not present any very great problem, though most Christians would generally favour a simpler diet. But for a pious Jew, the law made specific provision as to what was clean and permissible and needed to be observed carefully as an act of obedience and as a mark of separateness from other nations. To avoid partaking in Daniel’s circumstances would present a problem in the ordinary course, but we read that “God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.” Dan.1:9. As a result, the young Hebrews were allowed to adhere to their preferred vegetarian diet, which had proved superior.

For the Lord’s people of every age, there is a need of separateness, and for great care over the nourishment we take in. In place of the world’s delicacies and delights, our Heavenly Father has provided in His dear Son, the pure Water of Life and the Bread of Life for our sustenance. For the young in Christ, He has given the pure milk of His word and for the more mature the meat of the word for our growth and development. As the hymn-writer puts it - “My table is furnished with bounty so free, My soul on Thy word is well fed.” This is better fare than in any earthly royal court.

Already the character of Daniel, under the hand of the Lord, was becoming evident and had made an impression on the master set over him. We are warned in the New Testament to beware when all speak well of us; this may well indicate too close identification with the worldly and failure to stand up for our faith. But at the same time our behaviour, our demeanour, should always be such as to command at least the respect of reasonable people and we read of Jesus in His early years that He “increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.” This is of course the right order - God first.

Because of their faithfulness, God gave all four young men knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom, but Daniel was also given understanding in all visions and dreams. Much of the book of Daniel, from Chapter 2 on, is taken up with accounts of these means of prophecy and these reach right down to our own day and even beyond. It has been said that the book of Daniel not only preserves links in the chain of world history but also provides vital keys to interpretation of all prophecy, including the final book of our Bible - the Revelation

of Jesus Christ, given through the beloved apostle John.

We might indeed see a character link between Daniel, the man greatly beloved of Jehovah and the beloved apostle of our Lord, whose visions recorded in Revelations and given some seven centuries after those of Daniel are, as it were, a continuation and fuller development of them. Both men greatly loved God and were greatly loved for their faithfulness, both were used to bring messages to God's people, not only of immediate local significance and encouragement but of universal and dispensational importance. Both lived to a very great age, both were given final messages of personal assurance.

After a training period of three years, Daniel and his companions were brought to stand before the king but very soon a test of faith was to come upon them. The king had had a most disturbing dream but could not recall it. So he asked his local wise men to tell him what it was and what it meant. Not surprisingly none could and the king ordered all his counsellors, including the four Hebrews, to be put to death. But Daniel and his companions prayed and we read that God answered and further that Daniel blessed the God of heaven for that answer. Thankfulness to our Heavenly Father not only for specially answered prayer but for His daily care - how important it is.

The vision itself, we are now all familiar with - a great image of a man, with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of part iron and part clay. But even more significant for us - a stone cut out of a mountain, not by human means, that smote the image on the feet and brought the whole image down and itself, that is the stone, became a great mountain filling the whole earth. What a truly remarkable panorama of world history there is in what God made known to Daniel, bringing us right down to the final setting up of God's kingdom.

We might think it strange that such a far-reaching vision or dream should be given to a heathen king and in keeping with his times no doubt a rather despotic one. But it did have an influence on Nebuchadnezzar even at that time for he had to acknowledge that Daniel's God was a God of gods and a Lord of kings. So he set Daniel and his companions over the affairs of his kingdom, with Daniel himself in the presence of the king, who was himself pictured in the image's head of gold. But of what far greater blessing and enlightenment has the dream and its interpretation been to God's people particularly in these last days, when we see the signs of the nearness of the setting up of that great stone kingdom of God.

For we, who live in these last days, have as it were an unbroken link with Daniel the prophet greatly beloved of God, who lived and prophesied so long ago in that first world empire period pictured in the head of gold. We clearly are living in the days of the ten toes kingdoms, when the marvellous stone of no human devising will shortly cast down and replace all the kingdoms that have gone before. John writes in Rev. 11-15 - "the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." How sorely that everlasting kingdom of peace and righteousness is needed today.

For the revealing of the dream and interpretation to the king, Daniel took no credit to himself - "this secret is not revealed to me of any wisdom that I have more than anyone else"; rather he gave thanks: "blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are His. "Any service that we can render for our Lord or for His people is a gracious privilege and no cause for pride for "what have we, that we did not receive?" "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." 1 Cor.4:7, 2 Cor.4:5. This is the true perspective of all God's servants and was the spirit of Daniel.

After Nebuchadnezzar's death, the kingdom under Belshazzar soon fell to Darius the Mede, who set over the kingdom three presidents answerable to himself. Of these, Daniel was first in rank, indicating that Darius also recognised the skills and qualities of Daniel, the testimony to him being that "an excellent spirit was in him." This soon provoked envy among the other presidents and the 120 princes set under them and they sought to find fault or error with Daniel but could not do so.

Their final conclusion was - "we shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Dan.6:5. Though not meant that way, what a wonderful testimony to Daniel's conduct and consistency of life this was. It sets the standard for the people of God in every age. Daniel's life was open for all to see, yet his detractors could find nothing to accuse him of. While evidently continuing to maintain his own religious duties, his attendance upon the king's business was complete and loyal. Yet all the time his heart was with God's chosen people, as we see later in the account.

The Lord's people are always to be peaceable, law-abiding, diligent and conscientious, seeking to comply not only with the letter but also the spirit of the laws under which they live and which in turn protect them to at least some extent. The only limitation is that which led Peter and John to proclaim - "we ought to obey God rather than men" - when they were ordered to cease preaching the gospel. So it was with Daniel, who was confronted by the statute which the king had been deceived into signing - "that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee (the king himself), shall be cast into the den of lions." No doubt

the king's vanity had been appealed to.

The conspirators had well read Daniel's character, and we are not surprised to read - "now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees, three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Dan.6:10. In those days, observance of religious duties was more open and the structure of dwellings would have added to this, making Daniel's actions very obvious.

It has been suggested that Daniel may have been able to comply with some lesser requirement, such as praying less openly but there could be no compromise for Daniel nor can there be for any of the Lord's people in the matter of the One they are to worship. Unlike other nations, Israel's law was very clear - "the Lord our God is one Lord" and "thou shalt have no other gods before me (Jehovah) thou shalt not bow down thyself to them or serve them." So Daniel continued his habit and pattern of prayer "as he did aforetime". While he did nothing extra to provoke trouble, his loyalty to the one true God of his people did not falter.

It is unfortunately possible for Christian people to bring trouble upon themselves needlessly and there is no credit with God in suffering for folly or wrongdoing. The Christian standard, as it no doubt was for Daniel too, is - "as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all".... "be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good".... "render to all their dues." To suffer for righteousness' sake is praiseworthy in God's sight and Daniel's faithfulness and steadfastness were wonderfully rewarded by God, as we read in Dan.6:19-23.

Even Darius, who quickly realised that he had been deceived, sought by every means to save Daniel from the lions, and when he could not, he spent a sleepless night, concerned for this man whose noble qualities of character, so different from those of his other counsellors, he had come to appreciate. But God still had further work for Daniel and we read - "so this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." Dan.6:28. Daniel indeed lived on to a great age, his final vision being received when he would have been nearly 90 years of age.

But before this, further visions were given to him concerning the four great world empires that would ultimately be overcome by the all-consuming kingdom of God, and of events that would occur during those periods. Through it all, we cannot fail to note his deep love and concern for his own people. Though a faithful servant of the powers that be in Babylon, his heart was at all times with his people in their captivity and we read in Dan.9:2 - "in the first year of his (Darius') 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 70 years in the destruction of Jerusalem."

As a true patriot and as a worshipper of Jehovah, Daniel felt great sorrow over the nation's punishment at His hands and so he besought God that, now the 70 years foretold had come to an end, the nation's return might be no longer deferred. What a wonderful response Daniel received through the angel Gabriel - "at the beginning of thy supplications, the commandment came forth and I am come to show thee, for thou art greatly beloved." Dan.9:23. Still today, our Heavenly Father knows before we ask the desires and intents of our hearts and waits ready to answer and bless the prayer of faith that first and foremost seeks to know His will.

As well as the assurance of his prayer being answered, Daniel was also given a remarkable prophecy of events that would affect his people right down to the time of Messiah the Prince. Students of the Bible are agreed on the accuracy of this prediction of Messiah's advent at the end of the 69th week or 483 years taking a week to represent 7 years, and the further prophecy of the nation and temple being left desolate. But this grim picture, as far as Israel was concerned, was not left as God's last word to the greatly beloved Daniel - he was assured that at the time of the end and after great trouble, Michael (Who is as God), the great Prince who "standeth for the children of thy people" would come and that "at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." Dan.12:1.

God's closing words to Daniel furthermore speak of the resurrection to everlasting life being given to those found worthy, of the "wise" shining as the stars and leading many to turn to righteousness. How these assurances to Daniel remind us of our Lord's words in Matt.13:43 - "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" - and of the grand times of restoration or restitution spoken of by Peter. Though no doubt much comforted by the assurances given to him, Daniel was not granted full understanding of them; rather he was told to "shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end; many shall run to and fro knowledge shall be increased."

The personal promise to this man beloved of God concludes the record - "go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Dan.12:13. Daniel heard the words of the Lord but was not given to fully understand, as was the case with all the prophets of old, who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit prophesying of the grace that should come upon the gospel age heirs of salvation and testifying of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. Meantime, Daniel was to rest in the sleep of death, awaiting that "better resurrection" which the faithful ones of old all looked forward to.

In many ways, the prophecies of Daniel provide the key to the understanding of Bible prophecy in general. How all-embracing they are! They cover an outline of world history, the first and second advents of Jesus, his rejection and the casting off of Israel, later their restoration under Michael their Prince, and the resurrection and restoration of the “many” of mankind. How wonderfully was this saint of God used! Over 2500 years later, we rejoice to see what he heard in secret becoming plain and the signs of the soon fulfilment of the glorious things foretold.

One commentator has said that “Daniel’s undeviating integrity as a worshipper of the one God in an alien, dissolute society, as first minister in the first of the world empires, gives him a place among the highest and holiest the world has seen.

To be used by God, even in smaller ways, requires that the child of God be separate from the world, single-minded in faith and devotion to His service, of humble mind, diligent in searching the scriptures, instant in prayer. In all these ways, Daniel stands out as a shining example. When he stands in his lot at the end of the days, what a wonderful guide and standard he will be to the world of mankind, along with all the faithful of old times! These were not offered a heavenly reward, but we are told that they looked for a city which has foundations whose maker and builder is God. How well Daniel will be equipped for service in that everlasting kingdom!

The same faithfulness, as that of Daniel, is required of us who have been blessed with a heavenly calling. May each of us, in our day, stand as Daniel did for truth and righteousness. (DS: 1992)

Dare to be a Daniel,

Dare to stand alone,

Dare to have a purpose true -

Dare to make it known.