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Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 12

God made this promise to Moses about the conquest of Canaan:

Exodus 23:20, "Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."

And that is exactly what happened! The Lord went before Moses and the people with the Pillar of Cloud and Fire. In fact, this glorious truth continued with Joshua. Under Joshua's leadership

Israel passed over the Jordan in order to take the Promised Land and who led them?

Joshua 3:14-16a, "So it came about when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant [which was the throne of God] before the people, and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), that the waters which were flowing down from above stood *and* rose up in one heap..."

And accordingly, David prayed this:

Psalms 25:4-5a, "Make me know Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me..."

It is from texts like these that we get the idea of the Lord going before us in our sojourn on this earth and preparing our way. This is such a comforting truth! In fact, we see the Lord doing that with Daniel. As you know, the book of Daniel was written for the people of God as they went into exile. It contains a series of messages given to encourage the genuine child of God as they suffered under the judgment of God on account of the apostasy of their nation.

- Daniel 1 answers the question, "What ought we to do now that we are in exile?" What was the answer given? Purpose within your heart to seek... honor... worship... trust the Lord!
- Daniel 2-12 answer the question, "What is there to encourage the child of God to seek the Lord in the valley of the shadow of death?"

We are now at the ninth word of encouragement that God gave His people in the Valley: God's purpose and plan for all things are realized in Christ! Consider with me the setting, first and foremost, it involves fidelity in ministry.

Daniel 9:20, "now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God..."

The idea behind this is, "While I was offering the prayer I just recorded in vv. 1-20..." This is the setting for this next section. Based upon the time indicators and our knowledge of the Jewish practice of praying three times a day, we conclude that Daniel has been praying for most of the day. This was common practice for Daniel and was what brought him to the Lion's den.

Daniel 6:10, "Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously."

Throughout the Old Testament era faithful Jews prayed three times a day (morning, noon, and evening). It is said here that Daniel continued that practice throughout his time in exile. Now to allow for the “weariness” that Daniel encountered while praying here (v. 21), there is no question that Daniel would have had to begin his prayer at the time of what normally would have been the morning offering! With that, notice:

Daniel 9:21b, “...the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in *my* extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering.”

The “time of the evening offering” was late-afternoon, approximately 4:00 to 5:00 pm when the sun was going down! Taken together these passage indicate that Daniel had been wrestling with God in prayer for 8 to 10 hours! This therefore places this section in the context of extreme faithfulness!

And this is a key to spiritual growth! If you do a study sometime you will discover that just like the physical growth of children at night,¹ the majority of spiritual growth occurs NOT when we read the word of God and study it alone, BUT when this is accompanied by fidelity in one’s walk!

James 2:18b, “...show me your faith without the works [which is an impossibility], and I will show you my faith by my works.”

One’s faith and devotion to God is NOT seen by what we profess, BUT how we live! This is no doubt why Paul exhorted this:

2 Timothy 2:15, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God [the word for “approved” was a smelting term which referenced a piece of metal which after being heated and cooled many times is “proved” and so ready for use] as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”

The exhortation is that we must be men and women who don’t just study the word, but live it out in and through the difficulties of life. This is what produces a weapon in the hand of the Lord!

Daniel set an important example for the people of God in exile! How many years had they labored in exile with little or no fruit? How many unanswered prayers had been offered during this time? Yet, Daniel’s life testified to the importance of faithfulness! It was only after almost seventy years in exile serving, ministering, and praying on behalf of God’s people that Daniel received the answer given here!

¹ The audio sermon contained a verbal blunder at this point. I misread an article that stated children can grow as much as .1 inches per night (in a growing spurt). That is a far cry from 1 inch. Please accept my apology, but don’t miss the point. Just like the subtlety of a child’s growth, so oft-times it is when it comes to the child of God!

Grave Concern over Jerusalem

Notice a second aspect to this setting, Daniel had a grave concern over Jerusalem.

Daniel 9:20, “Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God.”

It should be obvious that a major concern behind Daniel’s prayer was the city of Jerusalem and specifically its restoration! It was his reading of Jeremiah 29:10 which promised the restoration of Jerusalem that prompted this prayer.

Daniel 9:1-2, “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans— in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was *revealed as* the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, *namely*, seventy years.”

The restoration of Jerusalem was of major concern and import to Daniel because Jerusalem served a central role in the life and thinking of every Old Testament Jew, including Daniel! Listen when David conquered this Jebusite city and established it as the capital of Israel (2 Samuel 5:6–10; 1 Chronicles 11:4–9), Jerusalem became the central focus of God’s people! Accordingly one of David’s earliest royal acts was to bring the Ark of the Covenant, the footstool of God (1 Chronicles 28:2), to reside in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17). By doing this, David established Jerusalem as the center of Jewish religious life! Accordingly, Jerusalem would eventually house the Temple (2 Chronicles 3:1–17; 1 Kings 6:1–38)! As a result, “Jerusalem” became so prominent in the imagination of the Israelites that it came to serve as a title for the nation as a whole (Isaiah 2:2; Amos 2:5; Micah 4:1). That no doubt is why the destruction of Jerusalem symbolized the rejection of Israel (2 Kings 23:27)!

Accordingly, Israel’s hope for restoration from exile was expressed by the image of a restored Jerusalem- which again no doubt is why the focus of the returning Israelites to their land in 536 BC was on the rebuilding of the city and its temple (2 Chronicles 36:23; Nehemiah 2:5, 18; 6:15–16)!

It is little surprise therefore to see a passion on the part of Daniel for the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem along with its temple! For this would be the highest duty of a genuine child of God! In fact, notice the language: Daniel does NOT reference Jerusalem, BUT, “...the holy mountain of my God!” That’s what the city and temple were to him.

To the typical Jew in the Diaspora their greatest burden was NOT the lives lost or even the cessation of Israel as a nation, BUT the destruction of God’s holy mountain! Accordingly, it also would be safe to conclude that the rebuilding of the city and the re-establishing of the temple along with its sacrifices would have been the hope and passion of God’s people, as it clearly was

to Daniel here!

This is an important observation to which we will return in the coming weeks. In fact, it is crucial to a proper understanding of the place of this pericope (Daniel 9:20-27) in the overall scheme of Daniel! So mark it well in your mind; we are going to return to this. With this, notice a third aspect, extreme weariness.

Extreme Weariness

Daniel 9:21, “while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in *my* extreme weariness [most of your translations have, “in swift flight”- we’ll address the difference in a bit] about the time of the evening offering.”

The evening offering doesn’t mean that sacrifices once again were being offered, but only that their regular times were remembered in exile (cf. 6:10; Psalms 141:2). And this is significant! John Calvin commenting on this made this pastoral appeal:

Already seventy years had passed away, during which Daniel had never observed any sacrifice offered; and yet he still mentions sacrifices as if he were in the habit of attending daily in the Temple, which was not really in existence. Whence it appears how God’s servants, though deprived of the outward means of grace for the present moment, are yet able to make them practically useful by meditating upon God, and the sacrifices, and other rites, and ceremonies of his institution. If anyone in these days is cast into prison, and even prohibited from enjoying the Lord’s Supper to the end of his life, yet he ought not on that account to cast away the remembrance of that sacred symbol; but should consider within himself every day, why that Supper was granted us by Christ, and what advantages he desires us to derive from it. (Calvin, 1948, pp. 191-192)

That is what Daniel clearly was doing while he was in exile! With that notice that the work at which Daniel labored here was grueling! No, he wasn’t plowing a field or moving rock. But that in which he engaged was even more demanding, for it taxed his soul!

Let’s take up the expression *in my extreme weariness* which has been variously translated *swift flight* it is the Hebrew, יָעָפְּ (*yě’āp*), which is repeated twice for the sake of emphasis. It was a mistaking of this Hebrew term with עֲנַף (which is the Hebrew word for “wing”) that led to the belief in ancient times that all angels have wings. It also is why the ESV, NIV, and NKJV has “swift flight” in their translations. The correct term is “weariness”- and that of an extreme nature. Truly, this serves as the context out of which Daniel received the revelation given to him from Gabriel: extreme weariness! (Keil, 1996, p. 715)

For the Christian, ministry is not for the faint of heart! Caring for the things of the Lord, one’s own soul, as well as other people is more taxing than any amount of physical labor combined.

The apostle Paul, a man well familiar with physical hardship and labor commented:

2 Corinthians 11:28-29, "Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure upon me *of* concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"

In fact, we read of this same Paul beside himself in on account of the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 3:1, "Therefore when we could endure *it* no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone; and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith."

Most of you know that the term behind "endure"— *when we could endure it no longer* — refers to a water tight ship or ceiling. In other words, in the course of Paul's ministry, he was brought to the end of himself over concern for the Thessalonians. On account of fear and concern for their welfare, Paul's ship was sinking; his roof was leaking! If you thought that by being saved your life was going to get easier, you were/are horribly mistaken. As an ex-athlete I know what it means to train to the point of exhaustion. Yet hear me: there is no more difficult thing in the world than ministry in Christ's Kingdom. It begins with self-doubt- Have I done enough and am I doing enough? Then personal sin and inability are factored in which can produce a sense of "floating guilt" and so a profound knowledge of one's unworthiness. Add to this one's own weak disposition, the other demands of life, the eternal nature of the work, and difficult people. These things in Kingdom ministry may leave you emotionally and spiritually exhausted!

Now, the Gospel lifts much of the burden, freeing the man or woman to minister as a broken vessel, but only a part of the burden! Ministry is exhausting!

How Daniel's countrymen needed to hear this! How we need to hear this! If you know such exhaustion, it is NOT because you are not cut out for the work. RATHER, if you know such exhaustion, welcome to ministry in a state of sin and misery!

Inability

This brings us to a fourth aspect of the setting of our passage, inability.

Daniel 9:22, "and he gave *me* instruction and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding."

If you think about who is being spoken to here, this statement really is quite amazing. First, Daniel was a prophet (cf. Matthew 24:15); he was given the glorious calling of receiving revelation from God and passing it along to his countrymen! Second, Daniel was an older man and so one who had walked with God for 80 plus years! Third, Daniel had been given spiritual gifts which enabled him to exceed well-beyond others in the realm of godliness, understanding,

and insight (cf. Daniel 1:4).

And yet this notwithstanding, when it came to the revelation given to Daniel in our passage, he needed the aid of Gabriel to understand it! That is the idea behind, “insight and understanding.” It truly wasn’t innate and so something Daniel had by virtue of just being him. He lacked it and so, without Divine aid, would have been clueless to understand God’s word! What an important point for you and I to see. We understand that the non-Christian is blind to the things of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 2:14: “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

Because of verses like this, we draw the false-conclusion that if you are saved, then you have spiritual insight and understanding- and that is not necessarily true! Recall the disciples on the Road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:25-27, “And [Jesus] said to them, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”

Understanding the Bible is not a given when it comes to being a Christian. It ever and always requires the grace of Illumination by which the Spirit of God opens our eyes. This no doubt is why the Psalmist prayed:

Psalms 119:18, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law.”-

Understanding God’s word is NOT innate to the child of God! It requires the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit- something for which we indeed must pray. That is why Paul prayed thus

Ephesians 1:18-19a, “*I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe...”

Christian, it doesn’t matter who you are or how much you have studied, if God doesn’t open your eyes, you will remain “spiritually appraised.” In himself that was Daniel! And that too was his countrymen! And how important it is that we understand this as well...

Most of us walk around with the assumption that we are informed, at least when it comes to the things of the Lord. That is why at times we are so arrogant toward God and actually charge Him with ill when things don’t go our way or make sense!

Christian, how it behooves us to add to our “theological systems” the conviction that truth is

NOT something we innately know in Christ, but something God must continue to enable us to see. This will allow us to approach God in the valley and humbly say, *“Lord, I know I don’t have the big picture which is why I am struggling with understanding what You are doing. Yet I know You are good and that in glory I will look back upon life here and know You were righteous and just in all that You did! Open my eyes today that I might understand. But if not, grant me the grace to trust You in and through all things!”*

Now in light of the upcoming revelation given to Daniel in vv. 23-27, God’s people were going to need this humble disposition, which no doubt is why Daniel chose to include this as part of the setting of this passage. With that, notice the time indicator in this passage pertaining to Gabriel’s ministry to Daniel.

Daniel 9:23, *“At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed...”*

The implication is that Daniel’s “weariness” and “inability” were God-ordained! It is as if the Lord wanted Daniel weak with limited ability! Why would that be? Paul answered that one this way:

2 Corinthians 12:8-10, *“Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it [the thorn in his flesh] might depart from me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

Family of God, when there is very little of us, there is great dependence upon God (ask Gideon)! As such, we are no better off than when we are weak! For then we are forced to rely upon Christ which is the best place for any of us to be! And by way of encouragement, did you notice the little phrase, *“for you are highly esteemed”*? The ESV translates it more accurately, *“for you are highly loved!”* Yes, God wanted Daniel weak, but that was only because he was beloved of God! Such is the status of each of us in Christ! Weak, but loved!

Such was the state of the people of God in exile! How important therefore was the example of Daniel as the Lord issued forth the very shocking revelation contained in vv. 24-27!

Bibliography

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