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[FROM PELCUBET'S NOTES.]

FIRST QUARTER.—Lesson 5.—Jan. 31.**DANIEL AND BABYLON.—Dan. 1: 8-21.****GOLDEN TEXT.—Where withal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.—Ps. CXIX: 9.**

INTRODUCTION.—We now turn back in the history for a few years, to about the time of the lesson on the Rechabites, in order to consider the life and work of one of the captives who lived through the whole captivity. This is the point in the history where the Book of Daniel belongs, and hence we take up its study. We can understand the Book much better because of our knowledge of the times gained from the previous lessons.

DANIEL.—At this time about 14 years old. Plato says that was the age when the Persians placed a boy under the royal instructors. And the three years of study (ver. 5) would make him 17 when brought before the king,—the age, according to Xenophon, at which they entered upon the king's service. Daniel was born in Jerusalem, of noble parentage, carried captive in the first captivity,—the beginning of the 70 years foretold by Jeremiah,—lived at Babylon, a man of great learning, a great and wise prime minister, a prophet of far-seeing vision. He lived through the whole of the 70 years,—during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar (43 years), of three Chaldean successors (two, three and one-half, and three-fourths years), of Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus. His last recorded vision was in the third year of Cyrus, B. C. 534. So that he must have lived to be over 85 years of age.

I. THE CAPTIVES.—King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that from among the captives should be selected a number from the highest families, and such as should give the best promise of talent and ability, to be trained in the language and literature of the Chaldeans. The object of this selection was that they should be held as hostages. This custom of taking young men of the finest parts from a captive or subject race to fill responsible positions about the king has prevailed in many despotic governments, and is essentially the usage of the Turkish empire to this day. Four were selected from the Jewish captives, the chief of whom was Daniel. The others were the Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who afterwards were cast into the fiery furnace and escaped unharmed.

II. THE TEMPTATION.—Ver. 8. *Daniel purposed in his heart.* He determined what he would do, and then took the wisest possible plan for gaining his object. He does not express stubborn determination and make open resistance at first, but makes a courteous request. *He would not defile himself with the king's meat, i. e., food.* It was the food appointed by the king for those who were in training for the court. He would be defiled or polluted by it, because (1) the dietary might comprise articles of food, such as the flesh of swine, hares, etc., which the law interdicted to the Israelites (Lev. 11.); (2) the flesh may not have been perfectly cleansed from blood, so as to be allowed by the Jewish law (Deut. 12: 23-25). Jews, even at this day, have their own butchers, and regard as unclean the meat prepared in the ordinary way. And at that time "devout Jews were very scrupulous in obeying these requirements (Ezek. 4: 14; Acts 10: 14). Probably much of the food prepared for the table of the king of Babylon was such as the Jews regarded as unclean." (3) Probably that which rendered the royal provisions unclean in Daniel's estimation was the universal custom among the heathen of consecrating each meal by offering a portion of it to their idols, and pouring out libations of wine in their honor. Yet more, the heathen, as, indeed, did the Jews, used for food animals that had actually been offered in sacrifice at the altar of their gods; and, in eating meat presented to him by the heathen, a Jew could feel no certainty that he might not be partaking of that which had been offered to idols. The Jews were particularly scrupulous about eating food which had been thus defiled (Hos. 9: 3, 4). Even the Christian church at first insisted upon abstinence from food which had thus been polluted (Acts 15: 20). (4) He feared defilement from the luxurious diet provided by the king, whose dainties and wine he thought would corrupt the body and diminish the vigor of the mind. *Nor with the wine.* He has probably seen its effects on others; the bad company and danger into which it led.

TEMPTATION TO WHAT. The four captives were tempted to do that which was debasing and degrading; to disobey the law of their God; to deny their religion and God, and yield to the popular idolatry of the day; and (4) thus to be recreant to their country, and their nation, and

all the promises and hopes which belonged to them.

TEMPTED BY WHAT. (1) By appetite. The love of the king's luxuries and wines. (2) By their ambitions and hopes of success. How could they expect to succeed with a heathen king, when they were so set in a religion which condemned him and his conduct. (3) By the king's command. Why should they not yield as to an inevitable necessity,—their very life might depend upon it. (4) By the love of popularity. Their course would make them appear odd, and subject them to ridicule, and bring them into many troubles. (5) They were tempted by their change of names (see ver. 5). Their own names were all compounded with the name of God. Daniel = *God is my judge*; Hananiah = *God is gracious*; Mishael = *This is as God*; Azariah = *God is a helper*. The new names were compounded with those of royalty or of idols. Daniel was named Belteshazzar = *favoured by Bel or Beltis*, the great Babylonian god or goddess. Hananiah was named Shadrach = *Royal scribe or Circuit of the sun*, an object of worship. Mishael was named Meshach = *Royal guest or the Ram*, a name of the sun-god among the Chaldeans. Azariah was named Abednego = *Servant of Nego*, i. e., Nebo, a Chaldean god. These changes were doubtless made as one means of transforming them into real Chaldean heathens, and to lead them to forget their country and their God. Put now all these things together,—youth, social usage, official rank, professional interests, absence from home and native land, and the mortifications of captivity,—and where in modern life can you find a case of stronger temptation to a self-indulgent and pleasure-seeking career?

III. THE TEMPTATION RESISTED.

—Vers. 8-14.

(I.) BY AN EARNEST PURPOSE.*"He purposed in his heart."***(II.) BY USING WISE MEANS.***He requested of the prince of the eunuchs.* The prince of the eunuchs was simply the lord chamberlain, or the chief officer in charge of the king's household. *That he might not defile himself.* He must have thus confessed his religious scruples, and his adherence to the God of his fathers. Daniel did not believe in the maxim "when at Rome do as the Romans do," in its application to moral questions. But in morals he would do, not as the Romans do, but as they ought to do. And this is the only way to make the world better. What he would have done if he had been refused we do not know; but from his conduct on another occasion (Dan. 6: 10) it is fair to presume that he would have done what he thought to be his duty, without regard to consequences, leaving the result to God.**(III.) BY THE HELP OF GOD.***9. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love.* The favor of others toward the godly is the doing of God. So in Joseph's case (Gen. 39: 21). Since Daniel might reckon upon treatment hard for the young to bear, not only from the officers of the palace, but from his own less scrupulous and less pious companions,—the sneers, the shams, the taunts, which fall so keenly upon the raw sensitiveness of the youthful spirit,—the thing most essential to smooth his path was the favor and kindness of the chief of the eunuchs. And this he gained immediately.**(IV.) BY THE TEST OF FACTS.***10. The king who hath appointed your meat.* It appears that the king's sincere object was to secure in them the very best mental and physical development that could be attained. Ashpenaz certainly expected that the more luxurious diet would affect their bodies favorably. *Why should he see your faces worse looking.* Less beautiful, fresh, healthy. The prince was afraid that the faces of those committed to his care would become thin and wasted. His idea was, that high living is essential to health and good looks,—a very common mistake. *Endanger my head.* Be exposed to having his head cut off for his disobedience. In the arbitrary and despotic courts of the East, a slight disobedience is often punished with death by a capricious monarch.**12. Prove thy servants... ten days.** A period which would indicate the probable result of the entire experiment. *Give us pulse to eat.* Leguminous plants, or their seed; as beans, peas, etc. "Grain, vegetables, herbs, opposed to flesh and more delicate food." What Daniel wanted was a vegetable diet, with water instead of wine. *And water to drink.* This, also, was a most interesting and important experiment, to show that wine was not necessary to produce healthfulness of appearance, or manly strength and beauty.**13. Let our countenances.** Not limited to the face, as the word countenance is with us. It refers to the whole appearance, the form, the "looks." *Of the children that eat.* A number of other boys, besides these four, were undergoing

the same training. *As thou seest.* According to the result of thy observations.

IV. THE RESULTS OF THE TRIAL.—Vers. 15-21. They were complete and satisfactory. **FIRST.—****PHYSICAL RESULTS.***15. Their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh.* (1) God may have specially blessed the obedience and faith of these young men. (2) At the same time, it is to be observed that such temperance as they practiced has a natural tendency to produce the result mentioned.**SECOND.—MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL RESULTS.**

By the diet they took they had their minds in some measure more pure and less burdened, and so fit for learning, and had their bodies in better condition for hard labor. So they readily amassed all the learning of the Hebrews and the Chaldeans. Then, too, such self-denial, and courageous adherence to principle, would strengthen their character.

17. God gave them knowledge. Some of it was direct from him, as the visions; some was by blessing their daily studies, by opening doors to wider knowledge, by aiding their thoughts and judgments; also by keeping them from those vices and prejudices which weaken the mind. *Skill in all learning.* In science, in astronomy, in literature, in philosophy the Chaldeans at this time stood at the head of the world. *And wisdom.* Power to apply and use and increase this learning. All four had the learning; the special revelations were to Daniel alone. *Understanding in all visions and dreams.* Through which God revealed the future to Daniel, and also showed him the meaning of the visions which others saw. Before we had so much revelation in the Bible, and especially in Jesus Christ, it was necessary for God to reveal himself to men in these ways.**THIRD.—EFFECT UPON HIS FUTURE LIFE AND CAREER.***18. Now at the end of the days.* The three years of ver. 5, fixed by the king for their training. **19. The king communed with them.** He himself talked with them, and tested their progress, and learning, and talents. *Therefore they stood before the king.* Were the personal advisers, and among the leading officers of the kingdom. **20. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding.** In everything which required peculiar wisdom to understand and explain it. *He found them ten times better.* Better counsellors, better informed. *Than all the magicians and astrologers.* The magicians, the learned class, the scribes, the priestly class, who claimed acquaintance with the will of the gods, and who professed to have the power, therefore, of making known future events, by explaining dreams, visions, preternatural appearances, etc. The astrologers were the Magi, the wise, scientific men, the philosophers. **21. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus, who conquered Babylon.** At this time the proclamation was issued by him to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1: 1), B. C. 534. Thus Daniel continued in influence and authority, at different times, during the whole of the seventy years' captivity. It is commonly believed that when the captives returned, he remained in Chaldea, probably detained by his high employments in the Persian empire, and that he died either at Babylon or at Shushan.**LESSONS: I. VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION.****1. If Daniel could overcome the temptations to which he was exposed, we have no excuse for faltering before ours.****2. Thank God for early Christian training toward God, and duty, and religion.****3. Previous right conduct, and good character formed, is a great means toward the victory over any temptation.****4. God will always open a way of escape to those who put their trust in him.****5. When away from home among strangers, join yourself to some good Christian companions.** Daniel was stronger for his companionship with the three other religious boys.**6. The source of strength is in God.** Looking unto Jesus, who was tempted like as we are, yet without sin.**II. TEMPERANCE.****1. One fundamental principle of temperance is not to defile ourselves.****2. Temperance is not merely total abstinence from all that can intoxicate, but from all excess, all wrong use of the appetites, all indulgence in that which defiles or injures the body.****3. It is our duty to care for the health of the body because it is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and an instrument for doing God's work.****4. It is a great help to pledge ourselves openly, and to join with others in opposition to all intemperance.****5. The advantage of temperance has been tested by a multitude of facts.****6. Religion is the true basis of**

temperance principles and temperance reform.

III. THE WAY TO SUCCESS.**1. God's favor to those who love and obey him.****2. Good character, strong, true to principle, upright, overcoming temptation.****3. Amiability, courtesy, wisdom in dealing with others.****4. True religion that trusts in God, and does right under all circumstances.****5. Diligence and faithfulness in study, and preparation for life's work.****6. Temperance, and care for the health of the body.****7. Faithfulness to those whom we serve.****8. God will honor and bless those who honor him.****Jno. Richards & Son,**

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