

Day 259

Young Elihu Protests and Praises

Job 32.1 – 37.24

There is one character in the drama who has not yet been heard from; a young man named Elihu (Heb אֱלִיָּהוּ אֵלֵּי, meaning, He is my God) who has been following the impassioned interchanges between the older men.

Job 32.1 Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz cease (Heb יִשְׁבְּתוּ *yishbetu*, from the root *shabat*, to cease or rest – the same root as Sabbath) answering Job, because, they perceive, he is ‘righteous in his own eyes’ – that is, he sees nothing wrong at all in his actions. They have been locked in a conversation of the deaf.

Job 32.2 – 5 Elihu Ben Barakhel now speaks out, having allowed his elders to pursue their arguments with each other. He is angry that Job has set himself up as perfect, rather than God, and that the friends have just condemned Job, offering him no comfort or explanation.

Job 32.6 – 9 Elihu makes a very insightful statement at the outset; wisdom is not just about length of years. After all, years can produce bitterness as well as sweetness. Rather, it is the Spirit of God that brings understanding, which is not given only to the aged.

Job 32.10 – 22 The young man has listened to both sides, and finds both inadequate, but he is not going to employ the same methods of reasoning as they have. As he has listened, Elihu has been bottling his frustration up inside, because he sees that God is being defamed. Now he wants to speak without fear or favour. (32.21 literally, now may I not exalt a man's face, and towards a man not flatter.)

Heb אֶל-נָא אֶשָּׂא פָּנַי-אִישׁ וְאֶל-אָדָם לֹא אֶכְנֶה

(above is read right to left)

Al – na essa’ pheney-ish ve’el ‘adam lo akhanne

Not may I raise face of man and to human not flatter

Job 33.1 – 7 Elihu is not putting himself above Job. Like him, Elihu is human, but is also formed by God, and from Him comes his very life.

Job 33.8 – 13 Elihu takes Job to task for setting himself up alongside God’s perfection. The Lord is so much higher than any man, and not to be trifled with.

Job 33.14-22 In fact, the Lord does speak to man, He is not silent, communicating through dreams and through suffering itself.

Job 33.23 – 28 But if a messenger (Heb מַלְאָךְ *mal’akh* – can also refer to a divine messenger, an angel) can intercede for that person, then despite the person’s failure and sin, they can be redeemed and can be brought back to health. This could refer to a human intercessor, or heavenly being calling out to God on the sufferer’s behalf.

Job 33.29-30 God's aim is not to destroy but to redeem, to turn him around.

Job 33.31- 34.4 Elihu gives Job a chance to respond, and asks for the continued attention of the others. However, no one speaks and he continues uninterrupted.

Job 34.5-9 Job seems to be in danger of giving up on God, accusing Him of denying Job justice. He is hanging around with bad company, because he is losing heart in the fight.

Job 34.10 – 30 But the Lord is essentially just, and not evil. In fact, the Lord sustains all life on the planet by His breath and has all government in His hand. He is perfectly aware of what is going on, and does administrate His kingdom. But He cannot be commanded to speak or to appear.

Job 34.31- 37 Elihu is telling Job that he cannot insist that he is without sin, for there is no such thing as a sinless man. If nothing else, Job is in rebellion against God, which is itself a sin!

Job 35.1 – 8 Job is expecting to be justified by the Lord for being good, and yet also is questioning what good continuing in obedience is. Elihu says that our doing good or sinning is of no real consequence to God, who is far above such issues, but it affects our own lives, it has outcomes which are far-reaching for us as individuals.

Job 35.9-16 When mankind is in pain or struggle he so often complains to God and cries out for deliverance, rather than seeking to walk with God in the midst of the anguish, not recognising the Lord's over-arching care and concern for man. Job is in danger of accusing God of not caring, which will not further his case with the Lord.

Job 36. 1 – 12 Elihu is seeking to walk a middle road between Job's accusing God of injustice, and the friends' painting God as vindictive. The young man is convinced that the Lord is both just and merciful. He is saying that the Lord both sustains the righteous and also gives the wrongdoers a chance for repentance and transformation. He cannot make the evil good, cannot overlook wrongs, but He does want to redeem what is lost.

Job 36.13-15 Sadly, many people just live life in resentment toward the divine, even though God wants to reach into their affliction and speak to them.

Job 36.16 – 21 This is a beautiful expression in Elihu's mouth in 36.16; the original Hebrew is

וַאֲף הִסִּיתָךְ מִפִּי-צָר רַחֲב לֹא מוֹצֵק תַּחְתָּהּ

(above is read right to left)

Ve'aph hasit-kha mipi-tzar, rachabh lo mutzaq tachtehah

And yes, he entices you from mouth of trouble, breadth not restricted under it

In other words, His purpose is to woo you out of distress, and into a place of freedom without restriction. Elihu appeals to Job not to give up on the way of righteousness, not to resort to evil in reaction to this trial. Yet it is clear that God cannot force us against our will, he can only entice and draw us.

Job 36.22 – 26 Elihu lets out an exclamation of praise to this awesome Lord; it is impossible to fault Him, because we cannot comprehend Him. He outlasts and outdoes mankind, therefore the most we can do is sing in awe of His greatness.

Job 36.27 – 37.13 The paean of praise to the Creator continues from Elihu as he meditates on the power of God carried in the thunderstorm. The snow, rain and ice are also signs of God's creative force at work – the clouds can bring both retribution in the flood, and relief through watering the earth. (37.13)

Job 37.14 – 24 Elihu concludes with an invitation to Job to be in awe before the God who brings both clouds and clear skies, who puts the sun in the heavens which man cannot even countenance in its glory. God is beyond our judgement, and inscrutably powerful, but in the depth of His being, God is just and not vindictive.

This exaltation of God by the young man, Elihu, seems to invite now the Lord's response, and He Himself will silence all as He speaks now directly to Job.

Day 260

The Lord Speaks to Job

Job 38.1 – 42.17

Job 38.1 – 3 The Lord now responds to Job out of the storm, which has just been spoken of, the place from which the Lord started to speak to the people of Israel on Sinai when they refused to hear Him (Ex.20.18,19) Who is this who is besmirching the Lord's wisdom without real foundation?

Job 38.4 – 35 The Lord goes through the whole galaxy of creation; earth, stars, sea, dawn, oceans, light and darkness, snow, lightning and constellations, and asks whether Job has any influence or power over them. The poetry of this section is intensely beautiful, highlighting the impossibility of man's fully comprehending the skill and intricacy of God behind the universe.

Job 38.36 – 38 Not only is the Lord the source of all creation, he is also the source of wisdom and understanding.

Job 38.39 – 39.30 Not only has the Lord created all things, He has also provided for all things their food. The wonder of nature is not an accidental collision of circumstances, but a divine plan of order which sees lions, hawks and buffalo finding their place in the cosmos according to their species and instincts.

Job 40.1-2 Now the Lord calls Job for his comments; what does he have to say to lay to God's charge?

Job 40.3 -5 Job is speechless before the Lord's omnipotence. He says (in the beautifully poetic yet laconic Hebrew)

הֵן קִלְתִּי מָה אֲשִׁיבְךָ יְדֵי שָׁמְתִי לְמוֹפִי

(above is read right to left)

Heyn qalloti, mah 'ashibhekka yadi samti lemo-phi

Behold I am vile what shall I reply to you my hand I put to mouth

Job 40.6 – 41.34 The Lord invites Job to contend with him, to show the Lord what he has to offer in contention with the mighty God. The Lord draws attention to his own works, *behemoth* and *leviathan*, which are part real and part mythical, perhaps regarded as the most fearsome of the Lord's creatures.

The nearest contender in the natural world for the role of *behemot* (Heb. תּוֹבְהֵם, which is in fact simply the plural of *behemah*, animal or beast) is the hippopotamus. Gesenius suggests that in fact the word hides another term of Egyptian origin, meaning water-ox (*p-ehe-mout*, ehe meaning ox and mout, water.) This seems to suit the context, certainly, and the hippo is known to be a fearsome animal when crossed.

The other creature, Leviathan, (Heb לִוְיָתָן *Liv-yatan*, *wreathed* or *twisted one*) is more complicated. The obvious candidate for this is the crocodile, although combined in with the description is reference to a fire-breathing, dragon-like creature. This could be a mythical version of the river-reptile, compounded with the natural one. The concept of a great serpent which rode the waters of chaos is known from some creation myths, and therefore the writer could have this in mind also.

Job 42.1- 6 Job is left humbled at last before the Almighty. He has been overreaching in his arguments, and finds himself way out on a limb. Job has come face to face with God's wonderful person, and having seen Him, realises his own frailty, and repents. This turning in his heart leaves God in a place to restore and redeem.

Job 42.7 – 9 The Lord makes it clear that Job's friends have misrepresented Him to Job, and He calls on them to atone for their arrogance. Job will pray for them, and in so doing, they are reconciled with the Lord whom they have insulted.

Job 42.10 – 17 When Job prays for his friends, so that there is not only reconciliation with the Lord but also with Job, his prosperity and wellbeing are restored to him. He receives gifts from those who come, his brothers and sisters included, and the Lord gifts him with flocks and herds, and very beautiful daughters. He even lives an unusually long life to one hundred and forty, and lives to see his great-grandchildren. At his death, he is found to be *zaqen u-seva' yamim* (Heb זָקֵן וְשָׂבַע יָמִים, literally, 'old and satiated with days') – he is satisfied with his life at the end.

Thus comes to an end the account of Job and his suffering, and his restoration and redemption by God, his relationship with the Lord intact and strengthened.

William Blake designed a number of engravings to illustrate the book of Job; the last is of Job standing with his new family, rejoicing in God, a powerful representation of the hope of perseverance. More of them can be found at www.blakearchive.org



Day 261

Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land

Psalms 44, 74, 79, 80, 85,89

The Psalms considered over the next two days reflect the pain and anguish of a people in exile. Just as they did under the oppression of Egypt, the people of God cry out to Him from their captivity in Babylon.

Psalm 44

This Psalm, as others before, is a *maskil* (Heb. מִשְׁכִּיל from root שָׁכַל *sakhal*, meaning to instruct, thus it is a song of instruction.) It is in the style of the sons of Korah.

The singer sings of the past, of the victories achieved under the covenant of God, all given by His favour to Israel. Yet now, the situation has turned around dramatically, and Israel and Judah have become a 'byword' among the nations for defeat and loss. There is an appeal to God to re-engage with His people, to deliver them from their pain, and an appeal made to the Lord to redeem them (Heb here is פָּדַנִי *pedenu* from *padah*, to release or rescue) because of His covenant and His *chesed*, His obligation to His promises. (44.26)

Psalm 74

This is another *maskil*, a teaching Psalm, this time in the style of Asaph.

The singer feels as though God has abandoned His people, the people He purchased for Himself from Egypt. He calls on the Lord to 'turn your footsteps towards these ruins' – words adapted into a song of prayer by a modern song-writer, Godfrey Birtill.

The Temple is destroyed, there is a dearth of God's expression through prophets, and it looks as though this situation will last a long time.

Yet there is a reminder (v.12 onward) that the Lord is the rescuer and deliverer of His people. He is the one who overcame the powers of chaos at creation, to Him belong the night and the day, the boundaries of the seasons. There is an appeal not to hand over the 'life of your dove to the beasts' (v.19) on the basis of the self-sacrificial promise, the covenant of the Lord. For the sake of His own honour and dignity, the Singer appeals to the Lord to rise up and defend His people, to silence His enemies.

Psalm 79

Addressed to the director of music, this is a psalm sung to instrumental accompaniment, a *mizmor*.

The theme of Israel as the wild vine is one which has been noted already in the prophecy of Isaiah 5, Jeremiah 2.21 and Hosea 10. Here it is taken up again by the singers of Israel, this time as an appeal to the Lord to restore the people of Israel, who are languishing in tears and shame.

The Lord has fulfilled His word through Isaiah and Hosea, He has cut back and pruned this rogue plant, but the call is to revive His people again, and to make His face shine upon them.

Perhaps this gives a modern reader more insight into Jesus' words when He speaks of Himself as the 'true vine', (John 15.1) that is, the vine of integrity and reliability. In Him, the wild vine is at last made whole and fruitful.

Psalm 89

This is a further song of instruction, ascribed to Ethan the Ezrahite. As with other psalms, there are places in this psalm where *selahs* are placed, pauses, probably for instruments to complement the depth of sentiment of the lyrics. These are at the end of verses 4, 37, 45 and 48.

The singer develops the theme in this Psalm of the *chesed*, the covenant obligation of the Lord. In the first two verses, the words *chesed* and *emunah* (Heb אֱמוּנָה, meaning dependability, faithfulness) appear twice, highlighting their importance in the song.

The singer reminds the Lord of the covenant, the *berit* (Heb בְּרִית) made with David for a successor to be on His throne in perpetuity.(v.3) In the heavenly realms, in the unseen

councils of God, it is faithfulness which stands out as a defining attribute of the Lord.(v.8)

Justice and straight-dealing are foundational to God's kingship, and *chesed and emet*, covenant obligation and integrity highlight the presence of the Lord as He comes.(v.14) There is a further reminder of the election of David (v.20) and of the promise of God's *chesed* abiding with him.

There is also a rehearsal of the clear terms of the covenant with David, which entail following the ways of the Lord. (v.30ff) If these are ignored or abused, the Lord will punish and will correct, but His *chesed* – obligation cannot be revoked (v.33) nor will the covenant be annulled, because the Lord has sworn by His own name to be true to His word. (v.34,35)

Yet it seems now as though the Lord has gone back on His promise, and forsaken His *chesed* to Israel. (v.39) King Zedekiah has been blinded and imprisoned in exile, and Jerusalem has been destroyed. The Psalm ends with an appeal for the Lord to relent and to have mercy on His people, a cry for his *chesed* to reappear (v.49), and to remove the shame of God's anointed one (Heb מָשִׁיחַ *Meshiach*, the same word used of the Messiah.)

The Psalm ends with a shout of praise, and a double 'Amen' – let it be, let it be!

Day 262

Four More Psalms in Exile

Psalm 102

This psalm is one of deep emotion, a contemplative complaint (Heb שִׁיחַ *Siyach*) to the Lord from one who is oppressed.

There are echoes here of Job's deep anguish before the Lord; this is a place of sorrow and rejection, but it is wonderful to know that the Scriptures have space for the deepest pain of mankind. There is no demand to keep a stiff upper lip and not express the darkness of life.

However, there is a recognition, a reminding oneself that the Lord is King, even in the midst of such inner turmoil. There is hope of the Lord's compassion coming to Zion, which has been destroyed and needs to be rebuilt.(v.14-16)

There is trust also that a future generation will read of the restoration of Jerusalem (v.18) and of the gathering not only of Israel but of the nations there to worship. (v.22)

The Psalm ends with an appeal to the Lord's enduring mercy and unchanging nature, a looking for the Lord's rescue from suffering.

Psalm 106

There is no ascription in this psalm, which begins with Israel's ancient refrain of praise

הַלְלוּ-יְהוָה הַזֹּדוֹן לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ

(Above is read right to left)

Halelu-Yah Hodu LAdonai (YHWH) ki tov ki le'olam chasdo

Praise the Lord Thank the Lord for good for forever His *chesed*

Hallelujah; give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His self-sacrificial commitment never ends.

The psalm begins with exalting the Lord, and goes on to rehearse the story of Israel, particularly highlighting Israel's failure, sin and hard-heartedness, right from the days of the deliverance from Egypt.

They have grumbled, rebelled, made idols and despised the promised land. The singer reminds of the sin of Ba'al Peor in Numbers 25, when the pagan women misled the Hebrew men into sexual sin, and of the terrible vengeance of Pinchas (Phinehas) which saw many fall by the sword. There is a reminder of Meribah, where Moses struck the rock and lost his entrance to the land, and of the terrible consequences of allowing the Canaanites to remain in the land, resulting in the idolatry which has led at last to the downfall of the monarchy.

'Therefore the Lord was angry with His people' (v.40) and handed them over to the foreign invaders. However, because of His covenant, the Lord has been moved to mercy, and has allowed them to find favour, even in exile. (v.46) – For this, look at the example of Daniel, Esther, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

The Psalm ends with an appeal for restoration to the land, as the Lord has promised through Isaiah and Jeremiah, and through Ezekiel. The Psalm ends with the same note of praise with which it began, '*Halelu-yah*'!

Psalm 123

This psalm is one of the songs of ascents, a *Shir-Ha-Ma'alot* (Heb שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלֹת), normally sung when going to worship at the Temple. However, its content speaks of the desire for God to show mercy. It is a time of national need, a time perhaps of great contention from nations around.

Psalm 137

This Psalm of lament is one of the best known of the songs in exile. It speaks of the pain of a forcibly transported community, looking back on what they have lost. Although their oppressors want to benefit from their cultural heritage, and want to hear some of their psalmody, their 'songs of Zion', these songs are sung in connection with the Temple, which has been destroyed. How can songs be sung without a place to sing them?

There is a yearning for Jerusalem, and a commitment never to forget her, and always to look forward to return. The Psalm ends with an appeal to God to repay their enemies for their cruelty, both their neighbours, Edom and their captors, Babylon, with an equal and terrible cruelty, that they should see their children destroyed as the Jews have seen done to theirs .

Day 263

Two of Daniel's Mystical Visions

Daniel 7.1 – 8.27

The story now moves to the character of Daniel, who having served Nebuchadnezzar and achieved high office, has continued in Babylon through the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-Merodach (c.561 -559BC), assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglissar, who takes the throne for four years (c559 – 555BC). After him, in 555BC, Labashi-Marduk lasts only a few months before he is overthrown by Nabonidus in 555BC.

Nabonidus ends up being a king-in-exile, when he removes himself to Arabia after being resisted by the priests of Marduk for trying to impose the worship of the moon god, Sin. In his absence, his son Belshazzar takes over the throne in 552BC, which is when Daniel receives puzzling dreams from the Lord, full of symbolism, concerning the unfolding of history.

It is worth noting here that, while Daniel is given some of the explanation of the visions he receives, much of it is hidden from his understanding. (8.27). It behoves the modern reader, therefore, while taking on board the power and the drama of what the dreams reveal, not to seek to pin historic events to the figures spoken of, lest we bring human wisdom to divine matters. What is clear is that the outcome is to be the rule of God over all the earth, which aligns with God's planetary purpose covenanted to Abraham.

Dan. 7.1-14 Much of the imagery of Daniel's dream is similar to that of Ezekiel in his apocalyptic prophecy. Winged lions and leopards, the river of fire, a wheeled throne, these are echoes of the exiled prophet's words. There is a progression in the vision, as winged lion gives way to bear, which in turn moves to a leopard, and then the iron-toothed beast with ten horns.

The four beasts are superceded by a vision of the throne of God with multitudes before Him, and books opened, a day of reckoning of some sort. The beast is slain, and then a human being appears in the heavens, who comes into the presence of God and is given eternal rule and government.

Dan. 7.15 – 18 In his dream, Daniel is disturbed in spirit, and asks a bystander what it all means. He is told that the four beasts represent four great kingdoms, or empires, which are coming. But the outcome of the story is the establishment of the reign of God mediated by His yielded, holy people, which will last forever.

Dan.7.19-27 Daniel is particularly impacted by the great iron-toothed beast, and its horns. The explanation is given that the beast represents an empire which will arise, and from

which will spring a number of smaller authorities (horns are a symbol of power in ancient understanding.) In particular, one authority, having overwhelmed others around it, will attack the holy people, and seek to impose new laws and seasons on them. However, his power will be overcome and God's people will be vindicated and emerge triumphant.

Dan.7.28 Daniel, deeply troubled, does not discuss the dream with anyone.

It is worth noting that the book of Daniel became very popular during the time of the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes, during the second century BC. Antiochus, one of the descendants of Alexander the Great, oppressed the Jews fiercely, and certainly the description of the little horn fits the tactics of Antiochus against God's people. It would also therefore be possible that the four beasts of Daniel 7 are the successive empires of Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greece and Rome, although this is not specified in the Scripture.

Thus, these prophecies of Daniel point to a coming persecution of God's people with an ensuing vindication and establishment of a kingdom which will have no end. This undoubtedly refers to the Messiah Himself, Jesus Christ, who is the 'son of man' coming to receive the glory of the Ancient of Days in 7.14.

Dan.8.1 – 14 In the third year of Belshazzar's co-regency, Daniel dreams of the battle between a sheep and a goat. The sheep, a ram, has two horns. In terms of interpretation, this again fits most closely with the empire of Medo-Persia, a co-existence of two powers come together in allied supremacy. However, the goat overcomes the sheep, signifying the rise of Alexander the Great, upon whose death, his empire will be divided into four, with the rise of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties.

The small horn, referring back to the vision of chapter seven, which grows from the head of the goat, will be oppressive and will persecute the holy people in the 'Beautiful Land'. This again would seem to be a presaging of the oppressive regime of Antiochus Epiphanes which would cause the Jewish people such loss and hardship.

Dan.8.15 – 26 Daniel is given the interpretation by a nearby man (Heb גַּבְרִי *Gabher*, a word meaning originally 'mighty man' or 'warrior', but which eventually came to have the meaning of 'gentleman' – the modern Hebrew word to address a woman is גַּבְרֵת *Gebheret*, the feminine of *Gabher*.) However, this is no ordinary 'gentleman'. This is 'God's gentleman' – *Gabhri-El* (Heb. גַּבְרִי־אֵל). Interestingly, there is no mention of this character being an angel (in Hebrew, a *mal'akh*) which Luke later identifies him as. He appears here, rather, as a man who speaks with Daniel, albeit one whose presence is enough to strike terror into Daniel, causing him to fall facedown at his feet. Daniel seems to swoon, but the man raises him up.

Gabriel gives Daniel the explanation as above, of Medo-Persia as the ram, and Greece under Alexander as the goat, who will give way to the wicked king who will cause devastation among the people of God. This king will be destroyed, by the power of God. Daniel is to 'seal up' these words, for they concern a time four centuries hence, and are not immediately comprehensible.

Dan.8.27 The physical effect of this ecstatic experience on Daniel is momentous. He is ill for several days, after which he continues with his duties. However, the visionary Daniel

is stunned and devastated by the vision (Heb **נֶאֱשָׁתוּמַם עַל-הַמַּרְאָה** *va'eshtomem al-ha-mare'*, literally 'I was caused to be devastated by the vision.') and cannot fully comprehend it.

Day 264

The End of Babylon, Promise of Restoration

Daniel 5.1 – 31, Daniel 9.1 – 27

Dan. 5.1- 31 Around 542BC, Belshazzar the co-regent of King Nabonidus throws a banquet. The tables are laden with the treasures looted from the Temple in Jerusalem, the holy vessels. As part of the festivities, drink offerings and toasts are made to pagan idols. At this point, the Lord steps in and writes on the wall of the banquet hall in Aramaic, not in a foreign language, but in a language understood by all there. However, this is a riddle, and seems to have little meaning. The words, in Aramaic are

מִנֵּי מִנֵּי תֵּקֵל וּפְרְסִין *Mene', mene', teqel u-pharsin*

The words were all monetary expressions; *mene'* was a mina, equivalent to fifty shekels. *Teqel* is the Aramaic word for 'Shekel' (The sound *t* tends to appear in Aramaic where *sh* comes in Hebrew.) A Shekel is 11.5 grams of silver. And a *peres* or 'fraction' is the sum of 25 shekels, or half a mina. In one sense, the writing in the wall might have appeared to us in later ages in another realm as

Pounds, Pounds, Shillings and Pence!

Belshazzar is terrified, and calls the Babylonian shamans to tell him what it all means. But none of them is able. However, Belshazzar's queen remembers Daniel's facility with meanings of spiritual things from his service to Nebuchadnezzar. She recognises in him the Spirit of the Divine Ones (in Aramaic **רוּחַ אֱלֹהִין** *Ruach Elahin*, which however, corresponds to the Hebrew plural form of God's name, **רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים** *Ruach Elohim*), and she encourages Belshazzar to send for him. It is significant that the Lord's wisdom is sufficiently recognised by these pagan rulers to draw on it when need arises.

Old Daniel appears, and the task is explained to him. Daniel begins his address to the King by upbraiding him for his ignorance of Nebuchadnezzar's witness to the supremacy of the Lord (here called in Aramaic **מָרָא-שְׁמַיָּא** *Mare' Sh'mayah* – Lord of heaven – hence the cry in the New Testament *maran-ata*, Lord come!), following the great King's humiliation by God.

He then announces that, because Belshazzar has desecrated the property of this Lord of heaven, and not followed Him, He has sent this message. Daniel explains the riddle thus;

Mene' or 'mina' which comes from a root meaning 'measured' or 'numbered' means that Belshazzar has been measured up by the Lord.

Tekel comes from a word meaning to weigh. A shekel is a weighed amount. Belshazzar has been weighed and is found to be ‘underweight’.

Parsin or ‘fractions’ is a play on words, since it also sounds like the Aramaic for ‘Persians’ – Babylon is ‘fractured’, divided and given to the (Medes and) Persians.

Although Belshazzar keeps his promise to reward Daniel with high office, it is irrelevant as Belshazzar is killed that night, and Darius the Mede claims the kingship from him. There may be a slight anachronism here, since Darius will not come to the throne of Persia for another twenty years. However, it is probable that Darius is given as the name here as representative of the dynasty which now takes over, (as we might speak of the Georgians to include some Kings and Queens not with that name). The actual perpetrator of the coup is most likely Gubaru of the Gutium people, an ally of Cyrus the new ruler of the empire.

Dan.9.1 – 19. We know Daniel to be a man of prayer. It was the Blessed John Henry Newman who said ‘*prayer is a vital act of faith*’ and for Daniel, this is so much the case, that he will risk his life to continue his daily conversation with the Lord. Here in Daniel 9, as a result of reading the prophecy of Jeremiah, (which is a fascinating insight into the fact that writings such as Jeremiah’s were accepted as the word of the Lord in Daniel’s day), Daniel is moved to prayer when he realises that the word of the Lord is for restoration of His people to the land and the rebuilding of the Temple.

Daniel’s prayer opens with a calling to God as the keeper of the covenant and of His self-sacrificial obligation (Heb שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֶסֶד *Shomer ha-Berit ve-ha-Chesed*). He acknowledges his people’s sins and rebellion, and the shame of being scattered to the nations, just as God said would happen through Moses and the Torah.

Yet now, Daniel calls out to God for a new rescue, a new redemption, and a restoration of the Temple. He seeks the Lord’s forgiveness, and the re-establishment of Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord’s great glory.

Dan.9.20- 27 At the conclusion of his prayer, Daniel is visited again by ‘God’s gentleman’, Gabriel. He is coming in response to this prayer for the restoration of Jerusalem, which has been heard by the Lord.

Gabriel speaks of periods of ‘weeks’ (or ‘sevens’, since the word week can also be translated ‘sevens’ (Heb שָׁבִיעַ *shavua*’)); these must elapse before God’s purpose is fulfilled. The number seven in Hebrew thought is of importance, as the number of completion, the number of days in which the Lord made and rested from creation.

The message is that, in the fullness of time, the Lord will restore Jerusalem, and the Anointed One, the *Meshiach*, Messiah will be established. (here referring to the King.) However, there is bad news as well. The Anointed One will be removed, and his place taken by ‘the ruler to come.’ This one will set up ‘a desolating abomination’ (Heb מְשֻׁמְמֵם מְשֻׁמְמֵם *Shiqqutzim Meshomem* – it is hard to translate the depth of degradation entailed in these two words. *Shiqqutz* means made filthy, disgusting, and

meshomem means devastation.) The horror referred to undoubtedly refers to Antiochus Epiphanes' later attacks on the Temple, and the placing of pagan symbols and sacrifices in the most holy place. However, an end will also come to this sadness.

Day 265

Daniel in the Den of Lions

Dan. 6. 1 – 28; Daniel 1.21

Dan. 6.1-27 When King Darius comes to power, Daniel is so well thought of, that Darius wants to raise him to the office of prime minister. Daniel is one of the three administrators over the whole empire, and the one hundred and twenty *satraps* (Aram. אַחַרְדָּשְׁפָן *achardashpan*, from a Persian word meaning a lieutenant, a governor) are accountable to him as one of those three. However, this rouses the jealousy of the other officials, and they seek to defame him to the King. However, Daniel is so 'squeaky clean' that there is no dirt to dish up on him.

The only way they are going to trap Daniel is by creating a scenario where he is bound by conscience to disobey the King's law. They know that he is so devout that he would rather commit civil disobedience than sin against the Lord. Thus, they play to the King's vanity, and inveigle him into passing a law which forbids any petition or prayer to anyone, god or man, other than himself for a period of thirty days. The King falls for the ruse, and makes the law.

No sooner has Daniel heard about the law, than he goes home to his house, opens his window toward Jerusalem and prays to the Lord as normal. We are instructed here about Daniel's rhythm of prayer, three times a day, on his knees. He does not intend to do any different, even if it breaks the law of the land.

When they learn Daniel is doing what they expected, the officials report him to the King, and insist on his punishment by being put in the lions' den. Suddenly, the king realises what a fool he has been; he has walked right into the trap. He spends the rest of the day trying to find a loophole which will get Daniel off the hook, but he fails.

As Daniel is thrown into the lions' den at sundown, the King prays to the Lord, calling on Him to save Daniel. He spends the night in fasting and wakefulness.

In the morning, he goes to the den and calls out 'with an anguished voice' to Daniel, who reveals that he is perfectly well; God has closed the mouths of the wild cats. He is brought out completely unharmed.

Then, in his anger, the king has the plotters against Daniel thrown into the lions' den, with their families, where they are immediately attacked and killed. The King issues a decree commanding 'fear and reverence' for the God of Daniel, the Rescuer.

Dan.1.21, Dan 6.28 Daniel continues in the service of the Kings of Medo-Persia, into the reign of Cyrus, the restorer of Jerusalem.

