

SESSION #46

DANIEL (part 1)

1. Context

In order to get a contextual overview, let's review first of all the four Major Prophets in terms of their perspective on Jehovah God as King.

Isaiah, as the Billy Graham of the OT, showed us the salvation of the King. Jeremiah revealed something of the judgment of the King who deals with sin. Ezekiel focussed on the glory of the Lord as it lifted up off the temple and moved away because of the sin of God's people. And then he described the glory of the King returning to the temple in the restoration of the people. Daniel, whom we will look at shortly, focussed especially on the Kingdom of the King. When taken together, we get a fairly full view of God and His work.

There is a particular comparison between Ezekiel and Daniel. Ezekiel, as a man from a priestly family, was concerned about the religious restoration of the people which included the temple and the worship of the people there. In his book we saw this priestly perspective many times, a concern for the glory of God in the temple of God.

In contrast, Daniel has a more prophetic perspective with a focus on the political restoration. He himself was involved in the political arena; it was his career during his entire long lifetime. So, Daniel is the one who shows us the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of the King of kings.

If you recall the main difference between the books of Chronicles and the books of Kings, you will see something of a parallel between Ezekiel and Daniel. The two books of Chronicles took a godly, priestly perspective on the history of the times of the kings. By contrast, the books of the kings – the two books of Samuel and the two books of kings – reviewed the same history but from a political, earthly kingdom point of view.

2. Setting

Daniel had a ministry spanning the entire 70 years of the captivity as he served under 8 middle eastern rulers. During that long political career, Daniel was three times the prime minister of the ruling kingdom of that time, especially under Nebuchadnezzar in the Neo-Babylonian period. He also served under Darius in the Median kingdom, and then under Cyrus in the Persian empire. He therefore had a unique viewpoint and connection with the political power structures of his day. But he himself was a very godly man, as you no doubt know, and his life highlights some godly principles for living in addition to prophecies for which he is famous.

He was taken captive from Jerusalem 19 years before it finally fell in 586 BC. You may recall that there were three sets of captives during these 19 years; Daniel was in the first group which was made up of the highest elite in Judah's society and included what we might call "scholarship winners". These were young men of high intellect who were given special training in all the academic fields known to the Babylonians. Daniel was one of them. The second set of captives were also taken from the upper classes of Jewish society. You might remember that Ezekiel was taken in that round.

Daniel was probably greatly influenced by the prophet Jeremiah in his walk with God, his priorities, his faith, his sense of perspective, his desire to know and love God while growing up as a youngster in Jerusalem. Good King Josiah may also have been a godly influence on Daniel.

3. Prophetic Key

The record which God gives through Daniel turns out to be the key to the entire OT prophetic revelation. It parallels the NT book of Revelation and both books are needed in order to understand what God's plan is for the end of world history.

The book of Daniel is especially useful in understanding the timing of prophetic events, both for the Jews and for the Gentile kingdoms. His book is the greatest book in the Bible dealing with godless kingdoms on one hand, informed by Daniel's own political

experience, and on the other hand, the kingdom of God. He not only describes these kingdoms but helps us understand that these kingdoms are in conflict with one another.

And in the midst of this conflict, Daniel provides assurance that God's people will be preserved through it all. It's an assurance you and I also need as we strive to live godly lives in the context of ungodly political and cultural pressures.¹

4. Message

Daniel's book, then, is a message to two groups of people: the Gentile world and the Jewish world.

At partway through verse 4 in chapter 2, Daniel switches languages from Hebrew to Aramaic which he uses through to 7:28. We don't see this, of course, in any of our English translations but we need to know that this middle section of the book was written in the commercial, political language of the day because those chapters are directed to the non-Jewish people whose language was Aramaic. This Aramaic section of Daniel will then focus on the Gentile world.

The other sections of Daniel were written in Hebrew and focus especially on things which the Jewish people would need to know.

He is especially well known for his use of a particular phrase: *"the times of the Gentiles"*. It's a phrase which Jesus Himself also uses in Luke 21:24 – *"Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."* Daniel gives us the key to understand what this phrase means. It refers to a time bounded at one end by the Babylonian Captivity, when Judah went into captivity to Babylon in 605 BC, and the other end which is marked by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is a very lengthy period of world history from 605 BC right through our own time and on to an unknown time yet in the future.

¹ I highly recommend a book which addresses these issues: "The Church in Babylon" by Erwin Lutzer. (Moody Publishers).

During this time, Gentile empires will be dominant on the scene of world history and the Hebrew nation is left off to one side. When Jesus returns, the cosmic clock will start again for the Jewish nation and they will be the central focus of world history.

5. Structure

Chapters 1 – 6 are historical chapters based primarily around the dreams which God gave to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

Chapters 7 – 12 are prophetic chapters which center on the visions which God gave to Daniel.

So you have the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar which deal with Gentile historical empires, and prophetic visions of Daniel which focus on Israel. Two major parts of the book with differing emphases.

6. Theme

The key thought in the book of Daniel can be found three times over in chapter 4. It particularly relates to Nebuchadnezzar, but it is also an overall theme. God says to Nebuchadnezzar that He, God, had done certain things which would bring the King to acknowledge that *“the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”* This is repeated three times for strong emphasis. Even Gentile political rulers, like Nebuchadnezzar, who ordinarily would not acknowledge the existence of Jehovah God, would have to come to the place of recognizing that there is a great Creator God who rules invisibly over all the world’s kingdoms and gives these as a stewardship gift to whomever He wishes.

I invite you to return for the next session when we will complete our study of Daniel.
