

Route Sixty-Six

Part Twenty-Seven

Daniel

A Glorious Quest

(John 5:39; Daniel 7:14)

With Study Questions

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A Glorious Quest

(John 5:39; Daniel 7:14)

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:14).

Introduction

As a child, as youngsters are wont to do, I got into a bit of trouble. It was enough of an infraction to require our principal to call the fire department. I was ten years old on the playground when someone found one of those emergency road flares. It somehow found its way into my hands and I was dared to light it. I took the bait. Moments later I was sitting in the office waiting for the authorities.

Two Redondo Beach Firemen walked in, had a brief conversation with the principal then made their way in my direction. They asked a few questions about how I obtained the flare, then asked me one more question. It was well over fifty years ago, but their response to my answer changed my life to this very day.

Their final question was, "Why did you light it?" To which I responded, "I was dared to." Then one of them responded, "Son, in this life there are followers and leaders. You need to decide which you will be." I didn't decide at that young age that I wanted to be a leader, either as a husband, dad, coach, elder, etc. Those kinds of things weren't on my mind. But what I did decide (not necessarily always with success), that I would not allow myself to be overly bullied or influenced by my

surroundings, whether those surroundings were moral, academic, social, etc.

It is not likely that those firemen are even still alive. And I'm guessing that my response to them was not one of immediate gratitude. They likely felt their advice had fallen on deaf ears. But it had not. And we all have the opportunity, or responsibility, to bring a bit of wisdom into the ears of those with whom we come into contact, young or old.

I open with this story, as we pursue the book of Daniel, because Daniel is one of the few people in all of Scripture of whom only good is written. Noah, Moses, David, Peter and so many others have their dark story recorded. But not so with Daniel. Daniel is wise, good, faithful and uncompromising, living almost his entire life in captivity. It was not as if the daily news was reporting advances in godliness in Babylon and Persia. And yet this did not deter Daniel.

Since Daniel's story spans so many years, we have the advantage of examining the influences in Daniel's young life and how it poured its virtue out decade after decade. Daniel opens telling us that Daniel was taken into captivity in "third year of the reign of Jehoiakim" (Daniel 1:1). This means that during most of Daniel's youth, his king was the righteous Josiah. Daniel would have been a teen when Josiah died.

It was also during this time that Jeremiah commenced his powerful public witness. If you recall, Jeremiah was woefully referred to as the "Weeping Prophet" due to the lack of response to his (usually) negative prophetic warnings and utterances. How encouraging it would have been for Jeremiah to know that Daniel, as an old man (perhaps sixty years later) was still pondering the words of Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2). Would it not be wonderful to be some Daniel's Jeremiah?

Survey of Daniel

So, what did this influence look like? What comes to the fore when we read the twelve chapters of Daniel? So much of Daniel involves visions of what God will do. Daniel's present faithfulness is buttressed by a certain hope contained in the promise of God (both historically and eternally). Daniel knew that he was a cog in God's plan of redemption, and in this respect, his life was full of meaning, joy, courage and (perhaps

above all) contentment. In his pain and captivity, Daniel knew (as should we) that God had not deserted Him, nor would his mission ultimately fail.

As mentioned, Daniel opens with an account of Babylon besieging Jerusalem and taking Daniel (and other young men) captive. From the beginning these specific young men were selected due to their wisdom and intellect that they might be easily trained in the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

Daniel and his three friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego) excelled and were far superior to the existing magicians and astrologers in whom the king normally relied. One thing we read from the very beginning of Daniel's captivity is his unwillingness to compromise when it came to Israel's dietary restrictions. Not a great deal is made of this, but small compromises lead to large ones. And an early statement of one's convictions helps strengthen us in later temptations. Even my pagan friends know my convictions and will call me on it if they see falter.

Daniel's early ascension to notoriety involves his ability to make known and interpret a dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar may be the most powerful person on earth at the time and the lack of ability of his normal wise men to help him with his dream results in him beginning to kill them. Daniel enters the picture, and both tells the dream and interprets the dream.

The dream was of a great image with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, feet partly of iron and partly of clay. A stone was cut without hands strikes the image on its feet and breaks it in pieces and the rest of the image is crushed as well and becomes like chaff in the wind. Then the stone becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth.

The interpretation of the dream amounts to this: the image represents four kingdoms. The head is Babylon, then Media-Persia, then Greece and finally Rome. This is universally agreed upon. It is also universally agreed upon that the stone is Christ who will set up a kingdom that will **"never be destroyed"** (Daniel 2:44). But this is where the universal agreement ends.

Similar to what we will see in the seventy weeks of chapter nine, the more popular and more modern view is that there is a gap (or parenthesis) between Greece and Rome which is the entire church age (from the time of Christ until the Second Coming). And that the stone actually falls upon a

reconstituted Rome rather than the Rome that existed during the time of Christ.

I haven't time to fully address this right now, but this appears to be a solid example of allowing your preconceived theological convictions to drive the way you read your Bible. I do realize that there are times when a passage must be understood in a sort of counter-intuitive way when it appears to clash with the clear testimony of the majority of clear Scripture. But I will ask you, at least here, what is the most natural, literal reading of the text?

I will put this as simply as I can: Babylon will fall, the Media-Persians will fall, Greece (the reign of Alexander the Great) will fall, Rome will come to power and Christ will be born. His kingdom will begin and the Roman Empire (along with the preceding kingdoms) will be no more. We will touch on this a little more toward the end. We will also pursue why this is important.

Nebuchadnezzar is quite excited about Daniel and his friends. They get promoted and Nebuchadnezzar makes the astonishing statement that their **"God is the God of god, the Lord of kings"** (Daniel 2:46). Yet Nebuchadnezzar is an example of the corruption of power. He reveals himself to be moody, capricious and driven by pride.

He has a gigantic image of gold made (ninety feet high and nine feet wide) and demands that everyone worship his god even though he had just called Daniel's God the God of gods! Similar to Daniel, his friends aren't willing to compromise. Not only will they lose their promotions (which would probably be enough to sway most) but they are threatened with their lives-thrown into a fiery furnace.

Here we read one of the great responses in answer to misguided, usurped authority.

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that *is the case*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

God grant us the wisdom and boldness to have such resolve.

Nebuchadnezzar is not impressed. He has the furnace heated up to seven times its normal heat (so hot that even the guards bringing them are killed). As you no doubt know, the three are not even touched by the heat (even in their smell). Nebuchadnezzar also notices a fourth man in the furnace. There is speculation as to whether that fourth man is the preincarnate Christ or an angel. Suffice it to say, God, in some sense was present in this miracle.

All of this is followed by a second dream by Nebuchadnezzar and a significant impact/lesson in his life. God would reduce him to the level of a beast in order for him to learn that...

...the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses (Daniel 4:25b).

This is followed by one of the most powerful passages in all of Scripture when it comes to the sovereignty of God.

All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done" (Daniel 4:35)?

Oh, that we and today's leaders would seek such deference to the sovereignty of God.

It is also poignant to note here that that Daniel advises the king on a proper course of action. I mention this because many will seek to note that even though Daniel had such a high station in Babylon, he never tried to better to politics or the culture. Such is clearly not that case.

Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity (Daniel 4:27).

What a blessing Daniel's influence on the king would be to the Babylonians. But soon we read of a new leader of Babylon (Belshazzar, the

son of Nebuchadnezzar) who did not benefit from the lesson learned by his father. Nor did he even know Daniel. So unlike Daniel himself and how he benefited from Josiah and Jeremiah.

Belshazzar was throwing a massive party and using the sacred vessels which had been taken from the temple in a mundane and irreverent manner. They also were (no doubt in a drunken fashion) praising false gods. It is during this feast that a very famous term is coined-*The Writing is on the Wall*. For the 'finger of God' as it were makes an entrance and writes something in the plaster. But no one is able to read it. He offers riches and status to anyone who can. Finally, the queen mentions Daniel.

What a scene this is! "Are you that Daniel?" the king utters. "I've heard of you." As if Daniel is one to be flattered. Then the king offers Daniel that riches and status. Daniel answers:

Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation (Daniel 5:17).

Daniel has not come to this event with his hat in his hand-and by that I mean sheepishly. Daniel is respectful in his address of the king. He then tells the king the story of the king's father (which he had known but conveniently ignored-Daniel 4:22) and informs Belshazzar that he had not "**humbled his heart**" before the Lord of heaven (Daniel 5:23). The writing on the wall was "You've been weighed in the balances, and found wanting" (Daniel 5:27). That very night Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede received the kingdom.

It was Darius who was basically tricked into making a decree that no one could bow before any god but him. They did this because they did not like how high Darius had placed Daniel and could find no fault in him to accuse him. They also knew Daniel prayed regularly and publicly. Darius did not want to execute Daniel, but he had to hold to the law he made. The form of execution was to be thrown in the lion's den. God supernaturally shut the mouths of the lion which pleased Darius who ordered that Daniel's accusers receive that which they were seeking to inflict upon Daniel-to be eaten by lions.

In chapter seven we are first introduced with a term which would become the most common term by which Jesus would refer to Himself-the

Son of Man. We will finish with that in a moment, since there is little doubt Jesus had this in mind in terms of how the Scriptures testify of Him. But first, we'll finish our brief survey by noting that in chapters eight, ten and eleven address events that will happen between when this is written and the birth of Christ.

Warring of the kings, the treachery of Antiochus Epiphanes and Daniel's wonderful prayer for the people where, as churches in their imitation confess their sins and appeal to God not...

...because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies (Daniel 9:18b).

Christ in Daniel

So much of Daniel teaches us of Christ. But no portions more than chapters seven, nine and twelve. It is a matter of some controversy, but again I would ask you to read the text most naturally. I say this because in one seminary class, I asked both instructors and students how they could possibly come to the conclusion they had reached. And again, their answer was based more on their theological environment than the plain reading of the passage.

In saying this, I am not bringing you something novel. Though he is not canon, the position I present would be consistent with John Calvin who was the foremost theologian among the Reformers. I say this because I view novel theology with great suspicion and should you. But let us be thoughtful readers. Some say the following passage is the Second Coming, some say it is the Ascension. All agree that the Ancient of Days is God the Father and that the Son of Man is Jesus. Again, what is the most natural reading tell you?

I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him (Daniel 7:13).

In all candor, it appears so obvious that this speaks of the Ascension that it hardly seems that an argument must be made. Jesus is not coming

to earth here; He is coming to the Father. Why is this important? Because the very next verse speaks of the kingdom that Jesus repeatedly taught was established with His first advent (Matthew 16:27, 28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27; 11:20). It is a kingdom of which we are part.

**Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not
pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be
destroyed (Daniel 7:14).**

It is this kingdom and this authority that Jesus appeals to in the Great Commission when He says “all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). This produces that confidence that the gospel, the love of God, will prevail and His bride will be preserved. Two brief comments by Calvin will help grasp the value. First that it is the Ascension:

This passage, then, without the slightest doubt, ought to be received of Christ’s ascension, after he had ceased being a mortal man. He says, *He was represented before God, namely, because he sits at his right hand.*¹

Second, it’s value in the face of attack and persecution.

the Prophet pointed out the perpetual existence of the Church in this world, because Christ will defend it, although daily subject to numberless causes of destruction.²

What immense value and encouragement to Daniel and our brothers and sisters in history and throughout the world today who feel the weight of resistance and the bugle of taps rather than the trumpet of Reveille. Let us not miss as well that we are called to “**serve Him**” in His work of

¹ Calvin, J., & Myers, T. (2010). [*Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 44). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

² Calvin, J., & Myers, T. (2010). [*Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 46). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

redemption, rather than pining away for a secret rapture, waiting for Jesus to complete some incomplete task. His work is finished. He will come again in judgment. We, on the other hand have work to do.

Chapter nine also contains agreement and controversy. There is too much to address for now. Suffice it to say that the “Seventy Weeks” in Daniel points us to the timing of the work of redemption in its completion. Christ will conquer sin and “make reconciliation for iniquity...bring in everlasting righteousness” (Daniel 9:24). After the sixty-nine weeks, it is asserted by many, there will be thousands of years of which the Old Testament doesn’t speak before the seventieth week. But the seventieth week will contain the destruction of “the sanctuary” (Daniel 9:26) which Jesus taught would happen within a generation of His ascension (Matthew 24:2; 34).

Finally, in chapter twelve, we read of the final resurrection. Similar to the words of Christ in John 5:28, 29:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:2, 3).

The wise, good, faithful and uncompromising, life of Daniel was generated by early powerful influences and a keen grasp of the promise and power of God to redeem His people in history and deliver them safely into eternity. May such a spirit be in us as well.

Questions for Study

1. Can you think of moments or conversations in your young life that had a significant impact? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is an early example of Daniel's uncompromising spirit? In what ways can we imitate that? Why is it significant (pages 3, 4)?
3. What are the various views of the stone without hands crushing the image? How do you read this (pages 4, 5)?
4. Discuss the resolve of Daniel's friends with it comes to the gigantic image made of gold (page 5).
5. What did Nebuchadnezzar need to learn (pages 5, 6)?
6. Did Daniel seek to better the culture of Babylon? Explain (page 6).
7. What was Belshazzar's problem (pages 6, 7)?
8. Son of Man was Jesus' most common designation for Himself. How is it used in Daniel (pages 8, 9)?
9. When did/will Jesus start His kingdom? Why does this matter (pages 9, 10)?