

Introducing Daniel

Daniel 1:1–2; Kings 23:31–24:4

Studies in Daniel #1

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OLD Testament scholars discuss the problems of the book of Daniel that you'd think it should never be preached! It's been used too often to predict the end of the world so steer clear; it's written in two languages; it has two genres of narrative and vision; Daniel did not hold the office of prophet and was placed in the Writings section of the Jewish Bible, but Jesus spoke of him as a prophet because he had the gift of prophecy. Daniel has many difficulties. Daniel should not be preached.

Rabbi Saul said this about the Old Testament: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). And one sentence later: "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). What did Jesus think? He called him "the prophet Daniel" whose words his disciples needed to remember (Matt. 24:15).

We're diving into Daniel this morning, brothers and sisters! Amen?

Admittedly, Daniel is difficult; Daniel is strange to us. Raise your hand if you've ever heard a sermon series through Daniel? Maybe you once heard it taught or preached but all you can remember is that he had three friends

and that he once spent the night with a bunch of lions. Perhaps your preached camped out in Daniel 9 too long with all his end-times scenarios. So this morning I want to do something a little different and introduce Daniel.

The Basics

Let's first start with *the basics*. Most people read Daniel as two halves: chapters 1–6 are biographical as Daniel speaks in the third person while chapters 7–12 are his visions told in the first person. But our Jewish forefathers had more writing style than that!

Chapter 1:1–2:4 is written in Hebrew. Then chapter 2:5–7:28 is written in Aramaic. Then chapters 8–12 return to Hebrew. Why? Hebrew was the language of the Jews, but Daniel's ministry and writing take place while in Babylon so there's also Aramaic, which was the international language of the Middle East in those days. Daniel is writing to his own people to encourage them that Lord is sovereign over all and to exhort them to be faithful to him and patient for his kingdom to come. Then he writes in Aramaic to confront Israel's captors with the truth of the Lord's sovereign rule over all earthly rulers. Their kingdoms come and go; his endures forever!

Let me illustrate this one way. Look at 1:1: **in the *third* year of the**

reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem. This is roughly the year 605BC. Over in Jeremiah we're told this happened "in the *fourth* year" (Jer. 25:1, 9; 46:2). Here in Daniel he's using the Babylonian method of calculating a king's accession to the throne while in Jeremiah he's using the Jewish method. So Daniel's ministry began in 605BC in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Then 10:1 Daniel dates his final vision "in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia." This was 536BC. So his ministry extended 70 years under the great kingdoms of Babylon and Persia and kings Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. And here we are 2,500+ years later. Whose kingdom still stands? Earthly kingdoms rise and fall. God's kingdom has no end! Amen?

History from Man's Vantage Point (vv. 1, 2; 2 Kgs. 23:31–24:4)

Now let's get into the text, focusing this morning on just the introductory words of verses 1–2. And with the big idea of the book being the Lord God of Israel being the sovereign God over the universe and over all earthly kings and kingdoms, the message of verses 1–2 is how the people of God are to view human history. First of all, verse 1 describes *history from man's vantage point*: **In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and**

besieged it. Names, dates, and events. This is why most of us didn't like history in school! Turn over with me to 2 Kings 23:31–24:5.

We need to correlate Daniel to the time in which he wrote. And the context of Jehoiakim's reign was the reign of his godly father King Josiah. Despite Josiah's reforms to bring worship back to how God commanded, they were like a sand castle built too closely to the shore. No matter how much you build up walls and moats, it inevitably is going to be destroyed. It was the same with Josiah's kingdom (2 Kgs. 23:25–27).

Then one of Josiah's younger sons, Jehoahaz, was chosen by the people as their king but he only reigned three months (2 Kgs. 23:31–33). Pharaoh Neco chose Josiah's eldest son, Eliakim ("my God establishes") and renamed him Jehoiakim ("Yah [LORD] establishes"), I think as an irony because Pharaoh Neco really established him (2 Kgs. 23:34)! And as they say in politics, "Follow the money," we read in 2 Kings 23:35 that Jehoakim was beholden to Pharaoh for the "privilege" of being king and had to repay him in silver and gold. How would he raise the money? Like all rulers down through history: taxes! And look at verse 35 where it says **Jehoiakim... exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land.** That word translated **exacted** (*nagash*) is only used elsewhere in the Old Testament in

Exodus 3:7 when the Lord said he knew all about Egypt's "taskmasters."

Daniel is showing us the reversal of the exodus.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five when he began to reign and did so for eleven years. But the apple fell really far from the tree and he was not his father (2 Kgs. 23:37). The prophet Jeremiah chronicles this time period as well and speaks of Jehoiakim's wickedness in graphic detail: he built his kingdom on unrighteousness and injustice (Jer. 22:13-14, 17; 18:18-20). He opposed true prophets, hunting down Uriah into Egypt and murdering him (Jer. 26:20-23); he dismissed Jeremiah's prophetic words (Jer. 19:3-5; 22:13-19; 26:20-23); he burned a scroll of the Lord (Jer. 36); and led the people into apostasy and idolatry (e.g., Jer. 8:4-12; 10:1-9; 11:1-17; 13:1-11).

After reigning three years, to the north at the Syrian city of Carchemesh in 605, the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians and around 604BC Nebuchadnezzar came down and made Jehoiakim his puppet king for three years (2 Kgs. 24:1). This is when Nebuchadnezzar also took captives, including Daniel, and carried away holy vessels from the Temple as verse 2 tells us (cf. 2 Chron. 36:7). One thing our text *doesn't* tell us is that in 601BC Pharaoh Neco repelled Nebuchadnezzar's army and 2 Kings 24:1 picks up *after* that with Jehoiakim rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. But in 598BC the

second phase of Jerusalem's fall began as Nebuchadnezzar returned; then the third and final phase took place in 587BC resulting in the complete exile.

Names, dates, and places. If we stopped there with *history from man's vantage point*, it wouldn't profit our souls. But there's another vantage point.

History from God's Vantage Point (v. 2; 2 Kgs.24:2-4)

In verse 2 in particular Daniel proclaims *history from God's vantage point*. There are two ways of seeing the same event. When we were on vacation we went to a theme park that had an old roller coaster that re-opened. It was the same roller coaster but now you could ride it in one of two ways: with your own eyes or with a virtual reality headset on. If you don't trust in Jesus Christ and have not been born again by the Holy Spirit, you and I see the same world history in two completely opposite ways. The Bible says there is a natural mind and a spiritual mind; the natural cannot understand the spiritual unless the Lord gives you new life and new eyes.

In verse 1 Daniel recounts the history everyone could see. But in verse 2 he shows us God's vantage point on these events: **and the Lord (Adonai) gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God.** And the Lord even allowed Nebuchadnezzar to br[ing] the holy furniture from his own house in the temple **to the land of Shinar,**

to the house of his god (Marduk), and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. Why doesn't it say Nebuchadnezzar took these things to Babylon, which was the name of his kingdom? Why does it say **the land of Shinar**? This is the older term of that kingdom that takes us back to the Genesis story and a certain Tower of Babel or Babylon, built in the plains of Shinar (Gen. 11). A kingdom rose east of where Eden once was and as a sign of its independence from God they build a massive tower or ziggurat to symbolically reach to heaven on their own in opposition to God. Why does Daniel bring back all these memories? To show us that from God's vantage point this historical struggle between Babylon and Jerusalem was really a struggle between man's Satanically inspired kingdoms and God's.

But why would God ever allow such evil to fall upon his own people? Over in 2 Kings 24 we read that **the Lord sent against Jehoiakim and Judah bands of the Chaldeans and bands of the Syrians and bands of the Moabites and bands of the Ammonites...to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by his servants the prophets**, which you can read throughout the prophetic books (e.g., Isa. 39:6-7; Jer. 15:1-9; Hab. 1:2-6; Zeph. 1:4-13; 3:1-7). But why? **Surely this came upon Judah...to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of [King] Manasseh** (2 Kgs.

24:3). God had spoken back in his law of certain sins and curses on those sins (Lev. 26: 33, 39; Deut. 28:47, 49, 52, 58) and in particular, Mannaseh's sin was the last straw (Isa. 39:6-7). The Old Testament makes clear that God brings judgment on nations, whether Israel or Gentile nations, for their sins.

Daniel proclaims that history is *His*, that is, God's, *story*. Will we view it his way or be stubborn and view it our way?