

Survey of the Bible Daniel 1 - 2:1-11

Today we come to the book of Daniel. Daniel was a Jew and a servant of God in the sixth century B.C. who found himself in Babylon as part of the captivity of Jerusalem.

The opening verses set the scene.

Daniel 1:1-4 ^{NAU} In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, ⁴ youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of* wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

Verse 1 tells us that it was the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.

This would have been 605 B.C.

The final date mentioned in the book of Daniel is found in the 10th chapter.

Daniel 10:1 ^{NAU} In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar; and the message was true and *one of* great conflict, but he understood the message and had an understanding of the vision.

History tells us that the third year of Cyrus' reign was 537 B.C. And so, we're looking at 70 years of Daniel's life in this book, from the time he was captured to the time of Cyrus' third year would put him into his 90's.

And so, Daniel would serve God for the full 70 years of captivity that was promised by God in the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 25:8-12 ⁸ "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, ⁹ behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and *I will*

send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰ 'Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² 'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.

The book of Daniel is a combination of historical and prophetic writings that point to an eschatological picture of the kingdom of God.

And when I say picture that is precisely the point. Daniel is literally given pictures of the future as visions are given him by God. There is a tendency to view Daniel, and its counterpart Revelation, as puzzle books where we're taking details and trying to make them fit into a particular pattern to get the sense of what the puzzle is trying to tell us.

Rather, both Daniel and Revelation along with other prophetic books like Ezekiel are more along the lines of a picture book that paints portrayals of basic concepts that anyone can understand. It doesn't mean that the details are unimportant only that unless you can see the forest will you really understand individual trees.

Even at the end of his life Daniel found it difficult to understand some of the details of the visions he received from God but was given understanding of the big picture of what God was conveying to him.

Daniel 12:8-13 ⁸ As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what *will be* the outcome of these *events*?" ⁹ He said, "Go *your way*, Daniel, for *these* words are concealed and sealed up until the end time. ¹⁰ "Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. ¹¹ "From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there will be* 1,290 days. ¹² "How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days! ¹³ "But as for you, go *your way* to the end; then you will

enter into rest and rise *again* for your allotted portion at the end of the age."

Since this is a combination of a Survey of the Bible that paints broad strokes, and sometimes an exegesis of particular passages when I feel it's time to slow down and smell individual roses, we'll approach Daniel as a survey-ge-sis.

According to Sinclair B. Ferguson *"the book of Daniel breaks down into two halves: Chapters 1-6 are clearly biographical in nature, tracing Daniel's witness in the royal court of Babylon. Chapters 7-12 contain a record of his visions of God's purposes for the future. The actual structure of the book, however, is more complex. For one thing, Daniel 2:4b –7:28 is written in Aramaic."*

"Aramaic was an international language as early as the 9th or 8th century B.C. It has therefore been suggested that this section in Daniel [is] of special significance to those who were not Jews [as it] was written in the international language."

One of the things we'll see in Daniel is that the structure of the book is not strictly chronological. In other words we don't start in chapter 1 in a particular year wherein each chapter progresses through the book to the next year which builds upon the next year in a neat straight line.

Rather, what we see is that Daniel may start at one point and end at another point thus encompassing an entire period of history, but then goes back to same starting point to repeat the same event but adds new details of the same time period, not unlike the book of Revelation, a structure that is described as progressive parallelism.

In fact, the first chapter begins with a very young Daniel in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, where Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it and ends in verse 21 of chapter one, "And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king", about 68 years later.

And so, the first chapter tells us a few things of the beginning of Daniel's ministry and a few things of the end. And then in chapter 2 Daniel goes back to the beginning of his ministry recounting the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

I like the way Ferguson puts it where he likens *"the structure to a spiral staircase, turning around the same central point on more than one occasion, yet rising higher and higher at the same time."*

And so, in a sense, Daniel builds on a central theme while never leaving that theme but only walking around it to get several different vantage points.

And so, we'll start where Daniel started his adventure, the opening verses of this book.

Daniel 1:1-4 ^{NAU} In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, ⁴ youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of* wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

As we look at this passage we notice some interesting things.

We see a foreign king from Babylon determining to overthrow a sovereign nation called Judah. From an historical and political perspective this was a move that this Babylonian king found favorable for him and his people.

It allowed him to further his boundaries but also to put a buffer between Babylon and Egypt and so it was a smart move strategically. But we would miss the point of this conflict if we only saw it in an historical or political framework.

There is also a theological perspective to this siege and subsequent captivity.

Does anyone see it in the second verse?

God Himself is the One who not only made it possible for Nebuchadnezzar to lay siege to Jerusalem He initiated it and gave the victory to Nebuchadnezzar.

Why would God do this to His people?

Well, for the reason Jeremiah gave which is also recorded for us in the book of Kings.

2 Kings 21:11-15 ¹¹ "Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites did who *were* before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols; ¹² therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am bringing *such* calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. ¹³ I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. ¹⁴ I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they will become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies; ¹⁵ because they have done evil in My sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day.'"

God's covenant with Israel and Judah was clear. If they rejected the King of kings who brought them up out of the bondage of Egypt and did not keep His covenant He would judge them and deliver them up to her enemies.

And notice that not only those rebels who rejected their God receive the punishment from God but also God's remnant is swept up in this captivity. This is precisely what we see in the lives of Daniel and his colleagues who were faithful to God.

The punishment that befell Israel and Judah was felt by all, but this does not mean that God has rejected His people as we will see throughout the book of Daniel. But this speaks to the fact that even God's people during times of tribulation are to remain faithful, and will by God's grace and strength, persevere to the end.

But, if it is true that God orchestrated the captivity of the people of Judah, does this nullify the culpability on the part of the Babylonians as far as their ungodly behavior toward the people of God?

Not at all. In fact, the same Jeremiah who warned rebellious Judah of her impending judgment from God said this of the instrument, Babylon, through which God enacted His judgment.

Jeremiah 51:20-24 ²⁰ *He says,* "You are My war-club, My weapon of war; And with you I shatter nations, And with you I destroy kingdoms. ²¹ "With you I shatter the horse and his rider, And with you I shatter the chariot and its rider, ²² And with you I shatter man and woman, And with you I shatter old man and youth, And with you I shatter young man and virgin, ²³ And with you I

shatter the shepherd and his flock, And with you I shatter the farmer and his team, And with you I shatter governors and prefects. ²⁴ ***"But I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all their evil that they have done in Zion before your eyes," declares the LORD.***

In the first few verses of our text in Daniel it is clear that Nebuchadnezzar was still a hater of the one true God who empowered him to subdue Judah as he dishonored the God of the Jews by taking the holy place and defiling it.

Daniel 1:2 ² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

These same vessels that Nebuchadnezzar took are some of the same vessels that Belshazzar used to defile the God of Israel.

^{NAU} **Daniel 5:2** When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which *was* in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

We know how that worked out for Belshazzar as the finger of God wrote of his impending doom which we'll see when we get to that section.

The point is that our holy God has a decree to redeem a people for Himself and He uses the means He has ordained to accomplish His will even to choose men like Nebuchadnezzar or even Judas to ensure that His will is carried out.

But in the midst of the calamity of Judah being taken captive God uses Nebuchadnezzar to lift up the name of the Creator God of Judah as He places these four young men of Judah at the forefront.

Daniel 1:3-4 ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, ⁴ youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of* wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

Daniel, along with his comrades, seem to come from royalty, or at least from the higher echelons of Judean leadership. These young men would have been groomed in Judah for leadership in their own nation. And God apparently had gifted them and was now going to use them in their captivity to serve in the court of a pagan king.

They would be retaught many things regarding allegiance but as we will see their allegiance will not be divided when it comes to the things of God, but they will have an allegiance to their new master Nebuchadnezzar that is actually biblical.

And this is where we see the difference between rendering those things to Caesar that belong to Caesar and rendering those things to God that belong to God while not confusing the two.

Nebuchadnezzar had one thought when it came to teaching them the literature and language of the Chaldeans and that was to gradually transform them from the culture of Judah to their new culture of Babylon, which is to say that they will now become conformed into the image of their new master.

In fact, this is precisely why Nebuchadnezzar has their names changed from those of Israel to those of the Chaldeans.

Daniel 1:7 ⁷ Then the commander of the officials assigned *new* names to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Beltshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abednego.

And though there are aspects of these changes which God actually allows there are other lines that cannot be crossed when it comes to the worship practices of the Babylonians that play out in the first few chapters of Daniel.

In other words, no matter what political culture we find ourselves in that culture inevitably demands of us at times to compromise our allegiance to our God. The question is how will we remain faithful to our God?

With Daniel and his friends this will become apparent. But as we will also see they are not alone in being those witnesses for God, because remember God has placed them there in His providence and therefore He will also enable and sustain them there.

Daniel 1:17-20 ¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every *branch of* literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all *kinds of* visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service. ²⁰ As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* conjurers who *were* in all his realm.

This is precisely what God does for His people today, you and I, in Christ. And as we will see later in the book of Daniel, Daniel's wisdom and understanding comes first, not through visions, but through the written word of God. And this is what Paul points out to us today.

Colossians 3:16-17 ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

And so, our ability to work and function as well as honor God in the culture in which we find ourselves, which is often hostile to God, comes not from the culture but from God and His word and His Spirit who enables us to be those faithful witnesses in that culture while still maintaining an allegiance to that culture to the degree that we are peace makers in that culture.

Nowhere in the book of Daniel is Daniel told by God to rise up against Babylon and destroy the pagan culture in which he finds himself. Rather he is told by God to be a light in that culture without compromising the things of God with the understanding that that culture will not take kindly to that attitude.

But God remains faithful to His people as He will demonstrate throughout this book.

But as we come to the second chapter of Daniel we see Daniel's place in the court of the king being challenged in such a way where his life is literally put at risk because of the paranoia of the king.

And by paranoia it should be pointed out that Nebuchadnezzar's entire life was literally one of paranoia of losing his power and his kingdom and he would go to great lengths to shore up that power through a variety of means, from marketing to legislation to intimidation.

Here in the second chapter a dream is the focal point for this time in the history of Babylon as the king is greatly disturbed by a dream that he had.

Daniel 2:1-4 ^{NAU} Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. ² Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. ³ The king said to them, "I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream." ⁴ Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation."

We are told that Nebuchadnezzar had dreams and because of these dreams his spirit was troubled and he was unable to sleep. The point being made is that these were no ordinary dreams. He knew there must be a message in these dreams but he simply didn't know what that message was.

So, what do you do if you are the supreme power in all of Babylon? You call on your paid wise men to tell the dream and its meaning to the king so he can sleep again and not be stressed out by these dreams.

Well, it turns out that these dreams may have actually been one dream replayed each night for the king. But because Nebuchadnezzar is no dummy when it comes to placing confidence in his paid wise men he asks them not for the interpretation of the dream alone, but for them to tell him the actual dream that he saw and then interpret what it means.

Why do you think he does this?

Only he knows the dreams and if they don't know what he saw then their chances of guessing what he saw are pretty slim. Therefore, he essentially is testing their ability to see things that only magicians, conjurers and sorcerers should be able to see if they are the real deal.

And so, Nebuchadnezzar will not entertain their request to first give them the dream so that they in turn can give him the interpretation or meaning of the dream. Instead he tells them this.

Daniel 2:5 ⁵ The king replied to the Chaldeans, "The command from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap.

Here's the problem. Even these men knew that no mortal could accomplish such a thing and that the very request was unreasonable.

Daniel 2:10-11 ¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king, inasmuch as no great king or ruler has *ever* asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean. ¹¹ "Moreover, the thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with *mortal* flesh."

And there is the crux of the matter. Unless you are a god, who by inference knows all things, you cannot possibly read someone's mind. But that's what Nebuchadnezzar wants. He wants to know the mind of God on this matter that has to do with his future kingdom.

Again, where is Nebuchadnezzar getting these dreams?

From God. And so, it is God's intention to give Nebuchadnezzar a vivid picture of his future kingdom and how that will play out regarding the Kingdom of God. And we'll see this next time.