

Daniel: An Introduction

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[0:00] Well, today we are going to start a series, a new series, and it's a new series on Daniel. So today's a warm-up, and I exercise and I work out at home, and one of the instructors that I always listen to always says this, warm-up is the most important part of exercise. Warm-up prevents injury.

It says that, and I don't want us to be injured in any way as we study the book of Daniel, and so today's sort of a warm-up, a stretch, introductory material, so that we can hit Daniel full stride, reading it the way I think it was meant to be read, and understanding it, and hopefully with the Lord's blessing that we'll learn from it. So let me ask you, what do you think, what do you think of when you think of the book of Daniel? What do you think of when you think of the book of Daniel? Now, children, you probably know about the book of Daniel. There was a young man named Daniel, and he had three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and you know that Daniel and his three friends were very brave, and they had to stand up to King Nebuchadnezzar, and they got in trouble. Sometimes they got into a lot of trouble. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace, and God protected them. And Daniel was thrown into a den of lions, and God protected him. Daniel is one of those books that we teach our children from the very youngest of ages, that we tell the stories that we find there, and it's very good that we should teach them those stories. The stories are simple. They're easy to understand, and they teach us the lesson that we all need to know, that sometimes in this life, we have to dare to be a Daniel. We have to dare to stand alone. That's clearly one of the biggest lessons that we are supposed to learn from that book. But let me ask you adults now, what do you think about Daniel? Perhaps you think that's what Daniel is about. It's stories about for children, and those sorts of things. But you yourself, you've sort of learned those lessons, or you don't think there's much more to Daniel than that. And let me say, if that's where you're at, if that's where you're at, that's okay. That's okay for today. Hopefully, Lord willing, when we get done going through this book, I hope by the end that you'll see that Daniel isn't just a book for children. It's a book for adults to learn. Perhaps some of you maybe know a bit more about Daniel. You know that there's some very good children's stories, but you know a little bit more, and the rest of it is kind of cloudy.

You're not sure what all that means. Daniel isn't written like a lot of other books. It's very different. It has some very strange pictures. It uses very strange language. And so you read it, and you might as well be reading those French instructions on your DVD player. You might be able to sound out the words, but what it all means is really beyond you. Who knows? And if that's you, then that's okay. That's okay for today. Hopefully, with God's help, what is foggy will snap into focus, and you'll be able to sort out Daniel a little bit better. Now, maybe some of you used to know what Daniel meant. You used to have charts and diagrams, and you knew all about those 70 weeks, and some of you don't even know what I'm talking about, but you other people, you know about those 70 weeks, and you know that the King of the North was obviously the Soviet Union, and the King of the South was obviously some sort of new Egyptian empire, and you used to know it all down to the littlest horn, but something happened, and you abandoned that ship, and you never found a new ship to be on. You don't know what it means anymore. You used to have an idea, but now it's very foggy, and you just think no one can have any idea what it means. Well, if that's you, that's okay. That's okay. I don't promise to have all the answers. There are some parts of Daniel that are just frankly very difficult, and so I don't promise to have all the most satisfying answers, but I sincerely want to give you Daniel back. If you've sort of lost it because you've lost an interpretation of it, well, I want to give you that book back.

I would be thrilled if you could read Daniel and profit from it again, because all Scripture is God-breathed, and it is useful, including this book. Now, as I sat down to think about the sermon

and think about how I want to introduce this book of Daniel, I thought and thought, what do my people need to understand the book of Daniel? What do they need to understand Daniel? And I think there's a lot of things that we could say, that I could say. I could talk about the Babylonian culture, the Babylonian gods, the city of Babylon, what it looked like, because that's where Daniel primarily takes place, and I think in a lot of ways that might be helpful. But those things aren't really super important at this point, and they're certainly not super important after a big lunch on Sunday afternoon.

And so we're going to skip a lot of those things, and we're just going to go to the bare essentials. What do you need to understand Daniel? You need three things. The first is you need to understand some history, some history. And so let's dig in. Let's turn in our Bibles to Daniel chapter 1, verse 1. Daniel chapter 1, verse 1. It's right after the book of Ezekiel, the book of Daniel. [6:08] It goes Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel chapter 1, verse 1.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. Now Daniel takes place in a definite time, a definite place, with definite historical characters. So it was in the third year that something happened, and it took place in Jerusalem, the city of Jerusalem, and there were two kings, Jehoiakim and Nebuchadnezzar. And that's the way Daniel always is. That's how a lot of it is. Daniel takes place in real time, with real people, with real characters. And the book of Daniel is always really emphasizing when things took place and where they took place, because Daniel is grounded in history. It's a record of history. And so you need to understand that as you go into the book.

If you're going to understand Daniel, you have to understand that this is a book about history. So Daniel is not a fairy tale. It doesn't take place in Never Never Land. It doesn't take place in a faraway galaxy a long, long time ago or something like that. It was in this world, with real people who had real moms and dads, and real towns and real cities, who took part in real historical events. And it was in that history that God acted, that God did something, that God revealed himself to his people. And it's that very same world that we're living in, that God is still acting, that he's going to bring this world to its scheduled end. And so you're going to need to know a little bit of historical background if you're going to appreciate the reality of Daniel. So for the longest time, this isn't going to be long, so just hang with me. For the longest time, Assyria was the biggest, baddest kid on the block. For a thousand years, close to a thousand years, the Assyrians had an empire of one sort or another. They were the dominant superpower. And they had kings with terrible names, like Asher-Uballit I, and Tukalit-Nirtu, and Asher-Banipal, and all sorts of things that we're not going to go into.

They had these kings, and they ruled over places like Syria, and Iran, and Iraq, and Turkey, and Egypt. This was a real Assyrian empire. But then something happened. In 625, 625 years before Jesus was born, there were all these rebellions in the Assyrian empire. And they came to a head in 612 BC, a bunch of different rebel armies, including one from Babylon. They came in, and they destroyed Nineveh.

[9:18] Now the conquering king of Babylon, this king, was named Nebel-Pelazer, and the only thing that he is really famous for is because he had a son named Nebuchadnezzar. And so with Nineveh sacked, it's destroyed.

The Assyrian army, or the Assyrian empire, is just pretty much all done for. It's at its last ends. But some things take a while to die, and the Assyrian empire was one of them.

And so it hung onto life like a desperate man, until in 605 BC, Prince Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonian army against the Assyrian, the remnants of the Assyrians, the remnants of the Egyptians, and their allies.

This is important. Their allies, the Judeans. Babylon came, and he fought these three armies, and Nebuchadnezzar crushed those armies. And so now you have it. Syria is gone, and Babylon is the new superpower.

So a thousand years of Assyrian empire is gone, and Babylon is in control, and Judah had chosen the wrong side. Historically, from a human standpoint, Judah had chosen the wrong side. And we read what happened next.

[10:36] Nebuchadnezzar came, and he besieged Jerusalem. He didn't destroy it at this point. He besieged it, and then he took away a bunch of its people, including a teenager and his three friends.

20 years passed. About 20 years. And then in 587 BC, Judah chose the wrong side again. And this time, Nebuchadnezzar was not so lenient. He came, set siege to the city, and then he leveled

Jerusalem.

And he scattered the Jews far and wide. And so now the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Israel is basically no longer a nation. And year after year passes.

Until after 70 years, God looked at his timetable, and he said, Babylon, time's up. And he raised up a new king and a new empire.

And out of the north, out of the north of where would be present-day Iran, came this wild, raging king, King Cyrus, and his Medes and Persians.

[11:44] And he came, and he sacked Babylon and destroyed it. He put one of his vassal kings, one of his under kings, in Babylon, Darius the Mede, and while he settled matters elsewhere.

That's the history you need to understand. The most important thing is this. The key thing to remember is this. How long was Babylon an empire? It was about 70 years.

How long was Israel an exile? It's about 70 years. When you read about Babylon in the Bible, you need to think, whether it's in the Old Testament or the New Testament, you need to think they were only around for a very little time, and God destroyed them.

God raised them up to discipline, correct, and train his people. And then God destroyed the destroyers. You need to understand that historical background if you're going to understand Daniel. Now, what else do you need to understand, Daniel? You need to know what kind of book it is. What kind of book it is. It's both an easy and a hard book. The first six chapters are some of the easiest chapters in the Bible to understand, and the last six chapters are some of the hardest books in the Bible to understand.

[13:03] The first six chapters, those are the places where we get our stories, that we tell our children when they're two- and three-year-olds. And the last six chapters are the chapters that we hardly read in our devotions because they're just so confusing and we just sort of skim over them.

But I'll remind you, it is both easy and it's hard, but all of it is for our good. And so we're not going to stop at the easy parts. We're going to go all the way through.

It is hard in some places. But I'll just remind you that you get diamonds in hard places.

Hard-to-reach places is where you get gold and treasure. And I think that's what you're going to find when we get to Daniel, those harder last chapters.

So what kind of book of Daniel? It's an easy and a hard book. It's an international book, which I mean, it's a big book that covers lots of different countries.

Daniel's unique in one way. It's the only Old Testament book written in two different languages. It's both written in Hebrew and Aramaic.

[14:07] Now Hebrew is what most of the Old Testament is written in. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The New Testament was primarily written in Greek. But Daniel is different. It's written both in Hebrew and Aramaic.

And Aramaic was the international language of that world. It was the language that everyone spoke. It was the language of business and government. It's the place that English has in our present world.

It's the language that if you know this language, you can pretty much go anywhere and you'll find somebody that speaks it that you can get along with. And you don't have to be afraid that you won't be able to understand the menu or whatever if you understand English.

So if you understood Aramaic, you could speak to anyone pretty much anywhere. Now, so Daniel is written in this language. And so it has this international flair.

It's written from a much bigger perspective than most of the Old Testament, which had this more narrow concern about Israel. Daniel is about God's plans for all the nations of the world.

[15:13] And it's spoken to all the peoples of the world, not just Israel. And so when you're reading it, you need to read it as a big book with a big audience. It has a big open room that Daniel is speaking to.

A big audience. And so it speaks to these huge international events. And it presents a God who's not just the God of Israel, but the God of all the nations, all the different peoples of the world.

So Daniel is an international book. It's a wisdom book. It's a wisdom book. Most people generally think of Daniel as a prophetic book. Some people have gone so far as to call it the key to all of prophecy.

If you understand Daniel, then you can understand everything. And I think that is to miss the major emphasis that Daniel puts on wisdom. Daniel is called wise more times than any other person in the

Bible, except for Solomon.

The good guys in the book, they aren't called Israelites. They aren't called Jews. They're called either the saints or the wise. The wise.

[16:28] God in Daniel is worshiped more often for his wisdom than any other attribute. When the people were praising God in the book of Daniel, they're praising God for his wisdom and his sovereign control and how he exercises that so wisely.

And so as you read it, as we go through it, you're going to see this constant emphasis on wisdom. Wisdom to living in this world with enemies all around. Wisdom to understand God's purposes for the present and the future.

And all of it, God is addressing our minds. In those easier chapters, God is still addressing our minds and he's confronting us.

And he's demanding that we think about, what are we about? What are we living for? What is God doing in this present situation? So it's an international book.

It's a wisdom book. It's an apocalyptic book. And that is a terribly hard word for this time of the day. It's apocalyptic. And we're going to go into more detail about what all that means in a different sermon.

[17:37] But apocalyptic means it's a certain kind of writing. Daniel is sort of like the Old Testament version of Revelation. Revelation. And Revelation, you probably know some more about, but it has these very strange, vivid characters.

And it has a lot of angels in it. And the angels fight with other angels, apparently. And the angels, most importantly, talk to Daniel about what God is doing.

They're the messengers that tell Daniel what God is doing. Now, apocalyptic basically means unveiling. An apocalypse is the unveiling of something.

And so, apocalyptic literature is the unveiling of God's purposes for this world. What is God doing in this world? That's what they're going to tell us. And so, when you read Daniel, what you get is a heavenly perspective.

You know, you have an attic, maybe, and you can pull down that ladder and walk up and you get to see what's going on topside. Well, that's what Daniel is. It's a ladder that we can walk up and see what God is doing from his perspective.

[18:52] And so, Daniel has this very high ceiling that goes all the way up to heaven. And Daniel is able to see what is going on in the nations of the world. What is God working out in this world from that perspective?

And you get to see, you get moved off your single little stitch that you're on and you lift up your head and you can see the whole blanket or at least a lot more of it.

So, Daniel is an apocalyptic book. So, you need to know those things. It's written to teach you wisdom. It's an international focus.

It's written in a way that's challenging and that demands wisdom. But it's not impossible to understand by any means. And so, as you read Daniel, you need to read it with a big God in mind. He's a big God. And God is going to be challenging you to think differently about what he is doing in this world and how we're supposed to live in light of that.

[19:54] Now, thirdly and finally, what do you need to understand, Daniel? You need to know that this book is for you. It's for you. This book is to teach you wisdom.

We just got done saying that. Daniel is a wisdom book. And that means it's relevant for you right now. It's really relevant for you right now. So many people come to Daniel thinking, this is talking about things that are going to happen way long time, maybe after I'm dead.

Hopefully I'll be dead when all these weird things happen. But that's not exactly true. Daniel was written to teach you how to live where you are at right now.

Now that you're in exile. That's where Daniel and his three friends were. They're in exile. So are you in exile? If you're a believer, you are.

If you're a believer, you are. Isn't that what Hebrews says? In chapter 11, the author is talking about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

[20:58] And they said, all these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on the earth. It goes on and it says what they were looking forward to.

And what were they looking forward to? They were looking forward to a different country, a better country, a heavenly one. So Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they were exiles.

And if we are their children in the faith, then we are exiles as well. And so Daniel has written to teach us how to live now that we are in exile, that we are in a faraway country and we're not home yet.

This is a book to teach you about God and you know that. But Daniel has written to teach you more about this big God that saved you in Jesus Christ.

[21:59] What kind of God is he? It's written to teach you that no matter what, God can save his people. That no matter what, he can save his people. That no matter what, there's grace in him to stay faithful no matter where you're at.

That you can live without compromise in a world that is against you. That's full of ungodly people like we saw this morning. right? Now, this is a book last of all to teach you about Jesus Christ.

About Jesus Christ. So let me let you in on a little secret. You can't really understand Jesus and his ministry in the gospel and what he was preaching about unless you understand Daniel.

Especially Daniel chapter 7. And if you don't believe me, you can read Daniel chapter 7 this week and think about it closely and think about some of the names that you run across and think about what Jesus called himself and think about what he preached.

I'm not going to tell you. You can look up on your own and I think you'll see that he was preaching in Daniel 7 language. He was preaching with Daniel in mind.

[23:16] And it's not just chapter 7. The whole book is pointing to Jesus. There's a coming king. There's a coming kingdom. There's a certain person that is going to come and he's going to judge.

He's going to rule. And so it's going to point you to Jesus. And that's what you all need. We all need pointed again to Jesus. And so it's written for you to know him and to love him better.

So here's your homework. Take three or four days this week. If you choose. Skim through Daniel. You don't have to read it very close, at least not now.

Skim through it. Look at its headings. Get a feel for it. And if you're curious, read it again. Read it closer. And remember, this is a book about a God who works in time and space.

That he worked in that world and it's the same world and he works in this world. And it's here to teach me wisdom. It has relevant information for me today. And sometimes it doesn't in a very hard way.

[24:19] But it's not an impossible way. And remember that it's a book for you. It is a book for you to know. And it's a book for you to see the Lord, the one who loved you and who you're going to see one day.

God. So let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this book of Daniel and just for the fact that it is in our Bibles to teach us wisdom.

Thank you that it presents to us a very big God. Thank you that you show yourself and that you unveil some of your plans for this world, for our own comfort, for us to live a more godly life.

Pray that you would please help us this week, help us to be wise as we do live in exile here, as we long for that heaven, our home. And I pray that you would send us on our way rejoicing in you, rejoicing in what you have done for us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.