

Introduction to Daniel – God is in Control

Pastor Michael Denna – June 13, 2021

Daniel 1:1-2

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

Today we begin a new series. Our tradition here at Providence since my arrival has been that I preach through a New Testament Book and then an Old Testament Book. We have just finished 1 Corinthians and so now we are going to be going through the Book of Daniel. 1 Corinthians was written to a troubled church. Daniel is written in what I would call a troubled time for the people of God.

Daniel is a book about a young man, at least he is young in the beginning of the Book, that is carried off into captivity into a strange land. The environment that he was raised in, was swiftly and suddenly taken away. Daniel was born into great promise, he had in the eyes of those around him unlimited potential. Suddenly, all of that potential was gone, and he found himself surrounded and controlled by enemies of God. At every turn Daniel was tempted to compromise his faith. Almost all of those around him would succumb to this temptation and yet Daniel remains faithful. Not only does Daniel remain faithful, he excels in the presence of the enemies of God.

Daniel is an interesting book for a few reasons. There is much of book that is written in narrative form, and there is much of the book that is prophetic. Daniel is one of only two books in the Bible written in two different languages, the other book is Ezra. It is written in both Hebrew and in Aramaic. Aramaic is a cognate of Hebrew, and so if you can read Hebrew you can generally read the Aramaic. (I might add there are some who are better than others.)

The prophecies, to many seem obscure and strange, and yet Daniel brings forth the revelation of God in such a way that he prophecies the ruling kingdoms of the world for the next 600 years, and he also prophecies the coming of the Messiah as well as the birth and expansion

of the Kingdom of God, that kingdom that is built without hands that kingdom which will know no end.

Daniel is incredibly relevant to us today in the early parts of the 21st century because we, like Daniel are children of the Most High, and the culture around us has is changing, or better yet, has changed. Daniel was captured and deported as young boy, probably in 606 or 605 B.C., from his home in Jerusalem to live the entirety of his life in the foreign city of Babylon. We, who live in what has often been called a melting pot, have a difficult time understanding exactly how hard this was on the Israelites. Our society for many years has been a mix of what I would call faithful Christianity and a whole mess of other things. The context in which the life of Daniel is set is summed up in the question asked by the exiles in Babylon in Psalm 137:4:

*How shall we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?*

The Book of Daniel is a book that identifies with this challenge. The world system is a foreign land to the people of God. Those of us who are a little bit older have seen how rapidly things have changed in just a very short period of time. We live in a nation, that was established on the principle of religious freedom. However, we have often used this freedom to move further away from God, and now we find ourselves captive to alien world views, and foreign ideas. We live in a day where much of the church speaks the language of Babylon and not the language of God. The Book of Daniel deals with this and answers the question, "How should we then live?"

One of the things that I find very interesting in this Book is that when we understand it in its full context it reveals the way in which the world brings people under its subjection. At a casual glance it may seem that all was well in Jerusalem and then one day out of nowhere, along came King Nebuchadnezzar and laid siege to a city that was thriving and doing well. However, one of the things that is important for us to realize is that even this siege of Jerusalem in 605 B.C. was one event in a long death spiral. Remember the City of Jerusalem would survive for another 19 years before her final destruction in 586 B.C.. A once great people had been weakened, by gradual assaults against their foundations. They had been weakened by immorality and idolatry, alliances with wicked people and nations, and they had been cursed by poor leadership. Rather than repent and turn to God, they continued in their gradual but sure departure from their God. And eventually we see Daniel, a faithful one, in captivity to the world's system. The entire book teaches us that this world system will always be a 'foreign land' to the people of God. In our Lord's High Priestly prayer in John 17:16 Jesus prayed regarding His disciples: *They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

This verse has often been misunderstood to mean we are not to have anything to do with the world. However, this verse is speaking about where we come from. We are from above, we are not from below. We are not from the world, and yet the task of taking dominion over all of creation is not done away with because we are Christians. Daniel, in a strange land, and amidst people of strange lips never forgot the dominion task given to children of God.

Philippians 3:20 says: *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”* As Christians, our citizenship is in heaven and because of this, according to 1 Peter we are *“strangers in the world.”* I want us to notice that we are strangers **IN** the world. One of the themes I often speak about is the theme that as Christ’s disciples, we are surrounded by enemies. They do not know, nor can they know, apart from Christ, why we live the way we are called to live, and we are often tempted by the ways of the world. Daniel underwent countless temptation to be like those around him and yet Daniel shows us that it is possible to live in a way which brings praise and honor to God.

My prayer as we go through this book is that we will learn the lessons taught by Daniel and that we will be strengthened in our conviction to live in the world and yet live apart from compromise.

Perhaps one of the most difficult things to do is to hold firm in your conviction when all around you are or seem to be compromising. I want to begin by asking a question. *“How can we live with conviction in an age of compromise?”*

If you are serious about living an obedient Christian life, you can count on facing multiple pressures to compromise your stand. Some of you will be pressured by an employer. Others will be pressured by friends or relatives. Some of us may even find pressure within our own household. There is often pressure by society in general. There is even pressure from an increasingly Godless State. But even more than all of that there is that internal pressure that comes from our own natural desires. There are the pressures of trying to get ahead, a promotion, a large contract, an “A” on an exam, and so on. Such pressures confront anyone who seeks to live uncompromisingly for the Lord in any generation.

In the opening chapter of the book of Daniel we are introduced to a very remarkable person. Daniel is one of those rare individuals who learned how to stand strong for the Lord in the face of incredibly difficult circumstance and very real temptations. The facts about Daniel and his being carried off into captivity are spelled out in the beginning of this book and yet many of us are unfamiliar with this period of Israel’s history so they are confusing to us.

I want to begin by introducing the historical background to the Book of Daniel. Daniel was born into a Jewish family of nobility and royalty in Jerusalem. He was a young prince in the making with a

very bright future. But one day his city was attacked by the mighty Babylonian army from the east under King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 1:1 reads: *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.*

I said earlier that one day his city was attacked, but if we want to understand that we must know the history of that time. The last good King in the nation of Judah was Josiah. Josiah became the King when he was only 8 years old in the year 639 B.C. According to 2 Kings 22:1-2 *Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.*

Josiah became king after the reign of Manasseh, and the brief reign of his son Amon. Manasseh, according to 2 Kings 21 was a wicked king. His wickedness was so great that he exceeded the wickedness of the nations around Judah. Remember, the people of God were called to be a light to the nations. Rather than being that light, Manasseh saw the nations around Judah and he said, I can do even worse. Listen to these words describing the reign of Manasseh. We will begin in 2 Kings 21:1

21 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. ² And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. ³ For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. ⁴ He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." ⁵ And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. ⁶ Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. ⁷ He even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; ⁸ and I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers—only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them." ⁹ But they paid no

attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

¹⁰ And the LORD spoke by His servants the prophets, saying, ¹¹ “Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), ¹² therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. ¹³ And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. ¹⁴ So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, ¹⁵ because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.’ ”

¹⁶ Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD.

Because of the great wickedness under Manasseh, God had promised he was going to send judgment. Listen to verses 14 and 15 again:

¹⁴ So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, ¹⁵ because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.’ ”

After Manasseh died his son Amon began to rule.

¹⁹ Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. ²⁰ And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. ²¹ So he walked in all the ways that his father had walked; and he served the idols that his father had served, and worshiped them. ²² He forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD.

²³ Then the servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his own house. ²⁴ But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Amon. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place.

Amon's rule was brief, 2 years compared to 55 for his Father, and he was actually assassinated by people from his own house. And after his reign Josiah is made king in his place. The Bible has quite bit to say about the reign of Josiah, but I am going to give a summary by quoting from 2 Kings 22:2: ² *And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.* Now what I want us to understand here is that under Josiah, the people seemed to be turning back toward God. This was a time of revival, if you will, but the reign of Josiah ended in tragedy when Josiah was killed in battle against the Egyptian King Necho II. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Josiah led Judah against Necho and he was killed. We read about Josiah's tragic end in 2 Chronicles 35:20-24:

²⁰ *After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him.* ²¹ *But he sent messengers to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you."* ²² *Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo.* ²³ *And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am severely wounded."* ²⁴ *His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem. So he died, and was buried in one of the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.*

The passing of Josiah at Megiddo, I would add it is not a coincidence that this is the location of Armageddon in the Book of Revelation, in deliberate disobedience to the Word of God, began Judah's death spiral into apostasy, destruction, and bondage. It was swift and irrevocable according to 2 Chronicles 36. The Jews mourned for Josiah's death, even down through the time of Ezra, and the prophet Zechariah uses this as an image of Israel's mourning. The Kings that followed after Josiah were all puppet kings under Egypt or under the control of Babylon, and their reigns were characterized by obedience to foreign powers or by utter defeat. Judah and Jerusalem ultimately fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.

The King mentioned at the beginning of the Book of Daniel was King Jehoiakim. Immediately after the death of Josiah, Jehoiakim's younger brother Jehoahaz became king. He reigned for three months before he was deposed by Pharaoh Necho. He was then carried away in captivity to Egypt where

he would die. You can read about this in Jeremiah 22:10-12. Jehoahaz was called Shallum, which means “retribution.” After his deposing in 608 B.C. Elakim became king, and according to our text, “*the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.*” Elakim was placed on the throne by Pharaoh Necho and his name was changed by the Egyptian Pharaoh to Jehoiakim. In one of my commentaries on this Book it reads, “*this name change was not very significant.*” Well, I have to disagree on this point. The name Elakim means ‘God raises up.’ The name Jehoiakim means ‘Jehovah raises up.’ All rulers to some degree or another like to point out that their reign or their authority is ordained by God. However this name change recognizes not some generic deity, but rather it acknowledges that Jehovah God raised up Jehoiakim. The person responsible for Jehoiakim’s ascendancy was the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II. What we are seeing here is an attempt by this foreign invader to win over the people of Judah by noting that it was Jehovah who placed Elakim on the throne when in actuality it was Necho who had done it. Necho is claiming divine right by installing Jehoiakim on the throne. He is in a sense saying to the people in Jerusalem and in Judah your God has raised up this man, and he has done so by my benevolent and gracious hand.

Now, we must not forget that God raises up kings and he sets down kings. But if there is one thing we learn from history and from Scripture, that just because God places someone on the throne or in a position of power this does not mean that person carries with him the favor of God. God often uses rulers to chastise people. One of the way God chastises His people and His enemies is with wicked and foolish rulers. Think of the great irony of a man named “*Jehovah Raises Up,*” who according to the Rabbinic literature written about his reign, he boasted openly that his predecessors Manasseh and Amon were mere amateurs at making the Lord angry, and that he would show how to really do it. Jehoiakim was the king in Jeremiah 36 who when the judgments of God toward him and toward Judah and Jerusalem were read in his presence from a scroll. His father Josiah had a very similar incident take place in 2 Kings 22. The Word of the Lord was read to Josiah, and he was immediately cut to the heart and tore his clothes and repented before God. This was the beginning of the revival under Josiah. How would Jehoiakim react? Would he repent of his wickedness, would he hear the Word of God? We read that Jehoiakim instead took a knife and cut out the parts piece by piece as they were read. The parts he did not like he cut out and threw them in the fire.

Are we people who hear the Word of God and repent, or do we pick and choose what we want to hear from the Lord?

It should seem obvious that cutting and burning the Word of God does not erase those judgments. Jeremiah simply wrote them again, but remember Jehoiakim, in his very name bore the name of Jehovah God, and yet his hostility toward God and God’s word showed not a life of faith, but a life of

contradiction and double mindedness. Yes, it is ironic, but it is also far too familiar. We do not have to try hard to imagine leaders who professes faith in Christ and yet they support idolatry, sexual immorality, and the murder and sacrifice of children. And we sadly do not have to look far to see people who bear the name of Christ, and yet ignore His words.

The King and all rulers, according to the Word of God was to read and to study and to know the law of God that they might judge righteously. Just like Jehoiakim we have rulers today that have perverted justice as they have forgotten the very one who has placed them in their positions of authority. We are called to be nation of Kings and Priests before God. This of course will be very difficult to do if we ignore God's Word.

Yes, Jehoiakim was a king, and as such he had been given his authority by God. But he was a puppet king, and in spite of this he was full of pride, and he chose to double down on wickedness. Both Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim were unfaithful to God, and they began reinstating, with all haste the wicked practices, and the idolatry that their faithful father Josiah had purged from the land. As they and we should know, God will not be mocked.

The Book of Daniel begins three years into the *'reign'* of Jehoiakim when Nebuchadnezzar begin to lay siege to Jerusalem. This happened in 605 B.C. and when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem he began carrying away the wealth of that land. In verse 2, Nebuchadnezzar hit Jerusalem where she hurt the most—the temple of God, *“And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God.”*

Now something that I think it is critically important for us to see in this text. Jehoiakim was king, because, at least in human understanding he was placed there by Necho II. Necho II, the Egyptian Pharaoh, was apparently bothered by the Babylonian sympathies of Jehoahaz. So he carried him away to Egypt where Jehoahaz died. Judah, and Jerusalem had essentially become a vassal of Egypt, King Jehoiakim had placed his trust in salvation in Egypt, and yet we see that trust was misplaced. There is an important lesson here. Anytime we trust in anything besides the Lord, our trust is misplaced. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Notice it was not Necho who gave over control, it was the Lord.

When Nebuchadnezzar came he took some of the articles from the temple of God and he carried them off to the temple of his god in Babylon. The text is detailed, he put them in the treasure house of his god. The precious temple vessels that were such an important part of their worship, which were being used for idolatrous purposes in Judah were now taken to be used for idolatry in Babylon. This was a wake up call of the highest order.

Our reaction on hearing this is generally one of depression. I cannot tell you how many times I hear people today say things, like look around, things are getting worse than we could have imagined. But what we must learn is that in spite of the great difficulties that such crisis brings to the people of God, every bit of it was and is part of God's providential plan. God, in His sovereignty, allowed all of this to happen. Some might think a better way to put it is that in the Book of Daniel we see the working out of God's plan. God is active. God was not sitting in heaven wringing his hands in despair, wondering what was happening to his beloved Jerusalem. No, this is clearly not the case. At the very moment when the people likely thought that God had forgotten them, He was active in their chastisement. He was also active in their deliverance. Verse 2 clearly affirms that it was the Lord who delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. This brings us to one of Daniel's purposes in writing this book.

Daniel writes to assure God's people that God is sovereign and in control of all human events, even those events that appear to be in opposition to God and His people. As with any war there is a certain amount of, at least from our perspective, chaos. But in the middle of this chaos we see the story of a man who was faithful to God. We see a man whose very life seemed to be turned upside down by the events of his day. Daniel's future once looked very bright. He was a member of royalty in Jerusalem and he is now a prisoner of war in the country of his enemy. His captivity and deportation to Babylon had now dimmed any hope of him ever having a position of power or honor. He was no longer a prince in the making. He was now a lowly prisoner in captivity in of all places, Babylon.

And yet Daniel reveals that God is behind all of it. Through Daniel, God manifests His power and reveals to him the coming Kingdom of God which will know no end. May we learn, as we begin this Book to place our trust in the only name under heaven where man may be saved. May we really learn that He is working all thing according to the council of His will in heaven, and on earth, and may we be faithful in the times that God has placed us.