

God's Message to Us in Daniel

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Introduction

Today in our sermon series on God's Message to Us in Every Book of the Bible,

- we have come to the book of Daniel.

The book of Daniel is written by Daniel.

- Daniel was a young man who was carried off to Babylon in 605 BC when he was only about sixteen years old.
- This was the first deportation by King Nebuchadnezzar.
 - There was another in 593 when Ezekiel was taken, and still another in 586 when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar.
- This happened, as we have seen in our study of the Old Testament, not because God could not stop these mighty nations,
 - but because God raised up these nations for the very purpose of chastening His people because of their rebellion against Him.
- Nebuchadnezzar's policy was to take some of the brightest and best young men like Daniel, along with other leading citizens, and incorporate them into his government.
 - He sought to win their allegiance and use their abilities for his kingdom and cause them to forget their people.
- Daniel, being deported in 605 BC, ended up serving Babylonian kings until the Persians conquered them in 539, and then he served a few more years under the rulers of the Medes and Persians... something like 70 years in all.

The book that Daniel wrote is twelve chapters. Part of it is written in Hebrew and part of it is written in the international language of the day which was Aramaic.

- The Hebrew part is the part that especially relates the Jews.
 - It includes the first chapter where we have an introduction telling us of how Daniel and his three friends came to prominence among the exiles in Babylon...
- And then in chapter 2:4 through the end of chapter 7,
 - we have the Aramaic part which relates to the whole world—God's message to the ruling nations at that time.
- And then in chapters 8-12 we have a Hebrew portion...
 - This part shows how the affairs of the world affected the Jews.

Let me add that this book causes great distress to those who categorically reject divine revelation (a very irrational thing to do), because Daniel is full of remarkable predictive prophecy.

- To try to explain some of it away (especially the detailed prophecies that were fulfilled in the Maccabean period (2nd century BC), dogmatic assertions have been made that Daniel was written by someone who lived long after Daniel,
 - but because no rational historian can deny that copies of Daniel were certainly in existence long before 63 BC when Rome came to power, there is no good way for them to explain how whoever wrote Daniel was able to predict the rise of Rome...
 - And even worse for their theories, Daniel clearly predicts that the anointed one, the Christ, will come 483 years after the issue of the decree to restore and rebuild

Jerusalem which comes to the time of the ministry of Jesus Christ, long after the alleged imposter of Daniel could have written his forgery.

- In other words, whoever this deceiver was, he still had to accurately prophesy the time of Christ and His work well over a century before it came about.
- So anyone who irrationally rejects the possibility of predictive prophecy had best open their mind and admit that Daniel has at least some predictive prophecy...
 - And if he has some, we might as well accept that he has quite a lot of it and was an honest man who wrote it when he said he did... something like 530 BC.
 - As Christians, we should accept that this book has come to us from the hand of God.

And now let us look and see what wonderful lessons there are for us in this book.

I. We learn that God will use His faithful servants, even when the church is very weak.

A. It is very tempting for us to fall into despair when the church is weak.

1. When you see compromise in the church; that can tempt you to give up.
 - For example, when you see that many church leaders are so full of unbelief and compromise that they reject things like we were just talking about...
 - that Daniel was written by Daniel in the sixth century BC.
 - And when we hear of reports of unfaithfulness and immorality.
 - And when we see (as I did in a fresh way this week) those who profess to be Christians, but who know nothing about their sin and their need of Christ.
 - They know that they have been hurt and that God can heal them, but they do not know what they need to know to be true Christians... that they are sinners who need to be forgiven through Christ.
 - Daniel and his friends had certainly experienced a full dose of this when they had seen all the idolatry and the rebellion among the covenant people that had led to God bringing Babylon against them.
2. Second, when you see the world gaining power and control and the LORD being ignored in the public square; that can also tempt you to give up.
 - Such is our day, and such was Daniel's day.
 - Increasingly, the scriptures are not even consulted in framing our laws, our scientific theories, or our consideration of what is important.
 - Those who hold to the scriptures are looked down on as being ignorant and out of step with progress—even in ethics.
 - When the tide is turned against us like this, it can be easy to retreat into embarrassed silence, especially when penalties and threats and persecution are added to the mix—when it even becomes not only unfashionable, but illegal to speak the truth.

TRANS> It is so easy to say, “Where is the LORD in all of this? What’s the use of continuing to testify for Him when nobody believes it anyway?”

B. But what a wonderful example we have with Daniel and his friends of faithfulness that is blessed by God in such times!

1. In the opening chapter, (Daniel 1), we have them refusing to compromise on the dietary laws that God had appointed for His people in the Old Testament.
 - a. We are told in verse 8 that **“Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”**
 - In the Old Testament, God had instructed His people to distinguish themselves as His worshippers by abstaining from certain foods and though wine was allowed, the king of Babylon’s wine would have been poured out to idols.
 - You see how Daniel respectfully requested that he not be required to eat these things that would defile him, even though he had been removed from Jerusalem and its temple (it was still standing at this time).
 - Daniel knew that even if the temple was destroyed, it was still his duty to distinguish himself as a worshipper of the true God in this way.
 - So he asked the chief of the eunuchs to test him and his friends for ten days by giving them only vegetables and see how they got on.
 - b. Many of you, like Daniel, have respectfully asked to be exempted from working on the Lord’s Day, even though other professing Christians do so.
 - Of course there must be things like working honestly and diligently, as unto the LORD, and refusing to lie even if your boss asks you... else your testimony will not have much impact.
 - c. So what was the outcome with Daniel and his friends?
 - 1) Verse 15-16 tells us what happened at the end of the ten day test: **And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies. ¹⁶ Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.**
 - 2) But that is not all that happened—because these men had clearly set themselves up as God’s servants, verse 17 tells us what else God did for them: **As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king.**
 - 3) If you set out to honour God, He will very often enable you to shine for Him before an unbelieving world.
 - It may not always be in the way you expect, but it will always be.
- In chapter 3, we have a second example of faithfulness that God honours:
2. In chapter 3, we see Daniel’s friends refusing to comply with King Nebuchadnezzar’s command to bow to the colossal image that he had set up.

- a. His desire was for everyone to be unified in celebrating the greatness of his kingdom—
 - And as an outward symbol of allegiance, he gathered all of the people of Babylon together for a big feast and set up an image of human likeness that was 90 feet tall.
 - He had a herald declare his decree to the great assembly:
 - Dan 3:4-6: **“To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; ⁶ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”**
- b. What pressure society can put on us to conform!
 - Not only was there the peer pressure of a whole nation conforming to this, but there was also the threat of being cast into a fiery furnace.
 - And on top of that, these men had been promoted in the kingdom and had very comfortable lives there with honour and wealth—a thing hard to give up.
 - What would you do in such circumstances?
- c. Daniel’s three friends refuse to bow to this statue, even after they are reported and the king confronts them.
 - And they tell him why in Dan 3:16-18: **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “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.”**
 - King Nebuchadnezzar has the furnace heated up and had them bound and cast into the furnace... how helpless they are—but God is not helpless!
 - He does not allow them to be burned or even to get the smell of smoke on their clothes—so that Nebuchadnezzar ends up praising the God of heaven as a result.
 - What could be better than to be such an example to unbeliever around us that they cannot but praise the God that we love?
 - Is there anything better than that we should glorify Him, pointing people to His greatness?
 - Let me tell you that He will always be glorified through His peoples’ faithfulness.
 - It may not be as visible as being delivered from a fiery furnace and having the greatest leader in the world praise God because of you,
 - It may not even ever be evident in this present world.
 - But if you are faithful now, on the Day of Judgment God will bring glory to His name when He vindicates you.

- What happened to Daniel’s friends is a testimony to us of what God will always do with those who honour Him.
 - They will cause all people to glorify Him at last.
 - Never suppose that you are wasting your time when you live for the glory of God.
 - Even if the faithfulness you are called to is something that is never seen at all in this world—God will bring all things to light in the great Day when Christ returns in His glory.
3. In chapter 6, we have the famous account of Daniel refusing to give up his worship of God despite the threat of the lions’ den.
- a. Many of you children know the story of Daniel and the lions’ den.
 - This event was in the years of Darius, after the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians had been established, when Daniel was an old man.
 - He had been promoted to a very high rank by Darius because of his faithfulness, so some of his jealous peers hatched a plot against him.
 - Daniel 6:6-9 tells us what they did: **So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: “King Darius, live forever! 7 All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.” 9 Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.**
 - b. And we are told what faithful Daniel did!
 - Even though the temple had been destroyed, Daniel had continued to keep the hours of prayer that God had established when the morning and evening sacrifices would have been offered. He would pray three times a day.
 - So did he stop now that there was this threat of a lions’ den?
 - Look at Daniel 6:10: **Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.**
 - c. And what was the outcome of Daniel’s faithfulness?
 - He was indeed cast into the lions’ den.
 - Even though the king regretted it, there was no way to change the law.
 - But the LORD did not let the hungry lions hurt Daniel.
 - Perhaps he just slept with them that night like a bunch of big pussy cats that he snuggled up with.
 - And the next day when Darius learned of it, he praised the true God and made a decree that no one was to blaspheme Him.
 - He also ordered the men who had set Daniel up to be cast into the lions’ den with their wives, and all of them were devoured before they even hit the ground.

- That is what God does—not only does He bring glory to His name through His faithful servants...He also brings our enemies to judgment.
- If Daniel had caved in, he never would have experienced this wonderful blessing of honouring God and being delivered by Him...
 - Even when our enemies have the upper hand, the LORD will always bring our enemies to judgment even though they may have the upper hand now.
 - Ours is to be faithful, and the LORD will take care of the rest.

TRANS> So you see how God uses us to bring glory to Him when we are faithful to Him before a world that tries to get us to compromise.

- Don't be discouraged in the face of opposition so as to give up!
 - Purpose in your heart as Daniel did that you will honour God, and you will not be disappointed.
- Now let us move on to a second lesson we can learn from the book of Daniel...

II. We learn that the Most High God rules over all the nations and does with them whatever He pleases to bring about His purposes.

A. In chapter 2, the LORD reveals the future to King Nebuchadnezzar in a dream.

1. In this way He reveals to the man that He has raised up to the highest seat of authority a revelation about this future.
 - But there is a problem—Nebuchadnezzar requires his wise men to tell him is dream or be executed—all of them.
 - Either he knows what he dreamed and wants to test them, or he has forgotten it; but God purposed all of this that He might show that the dream and its interpretation is from Him.
 - None of Nebuchadnezzar's men can interpret it, but God reveals it to young Daniel, His faithful servant, who was known to be His servant.
2. And in this dream, the LORD shows Nebuchadnezzar an image that has in it four kingdoms—the Babylonian kingdom that now is—which is the head of gold...
 - And three other kingdoms that are to arise in succession.
 - The second is Medo-Persia represented by the silver chest and arms (which they were known for);
 - The third is the kingdom of Greece represented by the bronze thighs (with which their armies were clad);
 - And the fourth is represented by the iron and clay feet of the image which represents the Roman Empire—they were known for their iron weapons.
3. This is incredible prophecy—God is in charge and He is telling Nebuchadnezzar of the fall of his kingdom followed by the rise and fall of three more kingdoms.
 - This shows us, as Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar (see verse 28) that: **there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.**
 - We need to know that even when ungodly kingdoms rise, that it is God who raised them up and it is He who will bring them down.

- None of them will last forever—it must have been a hard thing for Nebuchadnezzar to accept that his kingdom would soon be gone,
 - but it was just what he needed to hear and what we all need to hear of the kingdoms of this world.
- And why do we need to learn that?
 - We need to see this so that we will not put our hope in the kingdoms of men, but only in the kingdom of Christ.
 - We are so easily impressed by the greatness of the kingdoms of this world, and they may be great compared to the others... but they are nothing before the LORD but kingdoms that will fall.

B. As the Aramaic section continues, God drives the lesson home even further to King Nebuchadnezzar that He is the one who establishes not only kingdoms, but kings.

1. In chapter 4, we have a very unique chapter of holy writ in which Nebuchadnezzar writes to us of how he learned that God is in control even of him.

- He tells us of another dream that he had in which there is a great and magnificent tree—Look in chapter 4:10-16: **These were the visions of my head while on my bed: “I was looking, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. ¹¹ The tree grew and became strong; its height reached to the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. ¹² Its leaves were lovely, its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, the birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. ¹³ I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. ¹⁴ He cried aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it, and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, And let him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of a beast, and let seven times pass over him.”**
- Nebuchadnezzar explains how only Daniel could interpret this dream because he is from true God,
 - And he explains how Daniel warned him that the tree represents him (King Nebuchadnezzar), and that unless he repents of his pride, God will cut him down and make him like a beast of the field... verse 25 says: **“They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”**
- Nebuchadnezzar tells how Daniel urged him to repent, but he did not listen.
 - Twelve months later, he was looking over his kingdom and boasting about his accomplishments instead of giving glory to God...
 - It was then that he was driven out in the field to behave like a wild ox.
 - He repents and declares in verse 34-35, **And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives**

forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. ³⁵ 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?”

2. If ever there was a generation that needed to learn this, surely it is ours!
 - We do not see the hand of God—we think kingdoms rise because men are clever and become powerful—
 - And indeed, they may be clever and powerful, but it is God who raises them up and it is God who brings them down and God who will judge them all.

TRANS> Indeed, in chapter 5, we see the fall of Babylon, that great empire.

- I will not go into that, but just mention that King Belshazzar was feeling quite smug and secure, having forgotten what his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had learned.

C. But the most important teaching about God raising up and putting down the kingdoms of this world for us is found in the Hebrew section of Daniel.

1. In chapter 8, 10, and 11, Daniel is shown something that would be hard for the people of the church to accept.
 - They knew, by now, that God had raised up Babylon to destroy their city and the temple because of their sin, but they also knew that God had promised to restore His kingdom.
 - Surely, that meant that the glory days like those of David and Solomon would return where they, Israel, would be the leading kingdom of the world.
2. But Daniel shows them a very different picture... again, a hard picture...
 - He speaks of the wars that will go on between the world powers and of the rulers of the Persians and the Greeks and the Romans...
 - He shows that Israel will not be a key player.
 - Their land will be simply a place for great armies to rob and trample as they go by.
 - And if that weren't enough, Daniel also shows that a great leader of the Greeks (clearly the prophecy is of Antiochus Epiphanes) will come and desecrate the temple with an abomination of desolation.
3. The lesson here is that even though God is in full control of all the nations, that does not mean that God's people will be ruling the world.
 - Very often they (we) will have very little authority and very little say about what goes on in this world.
 - Nevertheless faithfulness is called for in our service to God.
 - Chapter 12 shows us that our reward will come, not in this world, but in the resurrection at the last day.
 - 12:2-3 says: **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.**
 - The resurrection is what we have to look forward to in God's kingdom.

- Daniel has shown that this is so for him personally as well—in the last verse which says (12:13): **But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.**
- Yes, God is in absolute control, and that means that very often we will be put in the lowly place among the kingdoms of this world...
 - The LORD knows what is best for us and we must trust all to Him, never doubting what even pagan kings were taught in Daniel: **that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses (Dan 4:17, 25, and 32).**

TRANS> But there is yet one more very important lesson in Daniel...

III. We learn that the kingdom of Christ is the only one that endures forever.

- A. In chapter 2 where Nebuchadnezzar had the dream about the great image with the gold head that represented Babylon, the silver chest and arms that represented Persia, the bronze thighs that represented Greece and the feet of iron and clay that represented Rome, I did not tell you what happens to the image.
1. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, a little stone is cut out of a mountain and it smashes the fourth great world empire, that of Rome.
 - In verse 34, Daniel reminds Nebuchadnezzar that in his dream: **“You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.”**
 - Note that this little stone is one that does not come until the Roman empire is established
 2. God describes the kingdom that comes from this little stone in Dan 2:44: **And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”**
 - This, of course, is the kingdom of Jesus Christ.
 - It is represented by a humble stone (not gold or silver or even bronze) that is made without human hands—it is brought about by divine power alone—not with swords and spears...
 - And its greatness is that it is the kingdom that consumes all others and that unlike any other will stand forever!
 - And so it has been.
 - The other great empires fell long ago, but we are at 2000 years with the kingdom of Christ, it is still going strong.
 - The kingdom of Christ has continued now from the time of the Roman Empire, which crumbled before it until the present day.
 - Where is the kingdom of Babylon? of Persia? of Greece? of Rome?
 - They are gone within the space of six or seven centuries, one arose and another fell, but the kingdom of Christ is now at 2000 years and it will never perish!

TRANS> God does indeed give His kingdom to whomsoever He chooses, and He has chosen to give it to His Son eternally.

B. In chapter 7, Daniel sees a vision of Jesus Christ ascending into heaven to receive His kingdom.

- Daniel sees this six centuries before He came!

1. Take a look at Daniel 7:13-14.

- On earth, Jesus' disciples watched as He ascended into heaven, but in this prophetic vision, Daniel saw what happened on the other side of the cloud.

- Dan 7:13-14: **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. ¹⁴ 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.**

- You can see again the emphasis of a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and it is given to the Son of Man.

2. The kingdoms of this world will be consumed and this kingdom will be given to the saints of the Lord, that is, to all those who have come to Him for salvation.

- Dan 7:26-27 says: **'But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy *it* forever. ²⁷ Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.**

C. Seeing all of this, we should do what Daniel did when he saw it.

1. He saw the condition of the saints now and he saw the promise of God to them.

- He saw that their sin had driven them into exile and to many years of hardship, but he saw the promise of mercy so he set himself to prayer.

- In Daniel 9, he humbly confesses the sin of his people, all the while asking God to show mercy to them for the sake of His glorious name.

- Look at the conclusion of His prayer in 9:17-19: **"Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. ¹⁸ O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."**

- Now that is the way to pray if you want to be answered!

2. And you see what the result is... at the end of chapter 9, Daniel's prayer is answered.

- In verse 20-23, Gabriel comes to him as he is praying and fasting and reveals to him that the Messiah, the Prince, is going to come...

- That within 490 years (seventy weeks—or sevens of years—490 years—from the time of the command to rebuild Jerusalem),

- all of Christ's redemptive work will be complete and He will be established on the throne as we saw in chapter 7.

- Look at ver 24: **Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.**
 - Within 490 years, He would make an end to our sins by His cross and bring in everlasting righteousness, fulfilling all vision and prophecy.
 - You see the Messiah is twice spoken of—in verse 25 and then in verse 26—and we are told that He will be cut off...
- There is much more that could be said...
3. But the point is, here is the establishment of the kingdom that God promised would endure forever!
- It is the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who was brought to sit at God's right hand until all the nations are made His footstool!
 - What hope is yours if you have entered this kingdom!
 - It will last forever and ever.
 - God who has all authority over all kingdoms will bring this to pass.