

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

Daniel is an Unusual Book

On one hand, it contains accounts of lions' dens and fiery furnaces that we have known since we were children. On the other hand, it contains visions and prophecies that are some of the most difficult to unravel in all of the Bible.

On one hand, it contains examples of faith, conviction, and the power of prayer, yet the book also contains some of the most remarkable examples of predictive prophecy found anywhere in the Bible, which is why it has been viscously attacked by liberal critics, perhaps more so than any other book in the Bible. One book that I have on that subject is entitled *Daniel in the Critics' Den!*

Many commentators today would tell us that the prophecies in Daniel are all about the end of the world — and maybe some of them are. We will see as we work our way through the book — but many of those commentators go a step further and tell us the end is very near.

Walvoord writes:

The rapidly increasing tempo of change in modern life has given the entire world a sense of impending crisis. ... How long can world ten-

sions be kept in check? ... As alarming as these events are, they really are not surprising in light of the Bible's end-time prophecies.

Let me read next from the introduction of another end-is-near book:

It is impossible for the most thoughtless to overlook the impressive and almost unprecedented character of the age in which we live. Events, as rapid in their succession as they are startling in their magnitude, ... chase each other like waves on the sea... .

And where did that second quote come from? From another modern end-is-near bestseller? No. It came from *The Great Tribulation, or Things Coming on the Earth* by John Cumming, which was published in 1863 in New York at the height of the U.S. Civil War!

Ronald Reagan said, "I sometimes believe we're heading very fast for Armageddon," and he told *People* magazine in 1983 that:

Theologians have been studying the ancient prophecies—what would portend the coming of Armageddon—and have said that never, in the time between the prophecies up until now, has there ever been a time in which so many of the prophecies are coming together. There have been times in the past when people thought the end of the world was coming, but never anything like this.

President Reagan was right about most things, but he was not right about this. The end of the world will not be preceded by signs. How do we know that? For starters, we are told repeatedly that the end will come like a thief in the night — how often have you had a thief leave you a sign the day before he strikes? Also, only the Father knows the day when Jesus will return — do we really think we can figure it out when even Jesus does not know the day? Signs were given for a purpose. The signs in Matthew 24 were for the end of Jerusalem in AD 70, not for the end of the world. Those signs were needed because they allowed the Christians to escape the city — there will be no escape at the end of the world, so there is no need for any signs.

We will meet some very interesting historical figures during our study. We will meet Cleopatra in Chapter 11, along with many others. In the very first verse of Daniel, we will meet two historical kings: Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon and the Chaldeans. One of those two men is one of the most despicable men in the Bible, and hint — it is not Nebuchadnezzar (although he would come close)!

One of the people we will meet is also discussed in the New Testament.

Daniel 7:24-26 — *And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws.*

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — *For that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

Revelation 13:5-7 — *And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them.*

And who is this person? I think we will see that he is Domitian, the eleventh Roman emperor who died in AD 96. The New Testament prophecies about Domitian are remarkable, as they were written *decades* before Domitian came to power — but the prophecies about Domitian in Daniel were written *centuries* before he came to power!

The first eleven Roman emperors were: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero (Julio-Claudian dynasty); Galba, Otho, Vitellius (civil war emperors, AD 69;

the year of four emperors); Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian (the Flavian dynasty). We will meet them all in Daniel — written 600 years before they came to power!

Let's Begin Our Study of Daniel in First Peter

There is a verse in First Peter that is the perfect jumping off point for our study of Daniel.

1 Peter 5:13 (King James Version) — *The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.*

1 Peter 5:13 (American Standard Version) — *She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Mark my son.*

The word “church” is not in the Greek, as shown by the italics in the KJV. Instead, there is just the feminine article, as translated by the ASV.

Who or what is “she”? Some have suggested that she was Peter’s wife (1 Corinthians 9:5; Matthew 8:14). But why wasn’t she named? And how would she have been linked to Babylon? And why include the phrase “elect together with you”?

A much more likely option is that “she” is the church, or, more specifically, a local congregation of the church that is sending its greetings. Elsewhere the church is referred to in feminine terms (John 3:29, Ephesians 5:25-33, 2 John (“elect lady”)). And Peter elsewhere uses the language of this verse in reference to the church (1 Peter 2:9 — a “chosen” generation; 1 Peter 1:1-2 — “elect”).

But where is this church, and why use “Babylon” to describe the location? There are at least three possibilities.

It could be a literal city named “Babylon,” one of which was a Roman garrison town in Egypt. But this option can be quickly dismissed — there is no evidence Peter was ever there.

The second literal option is that this Babylon is the ancient city of Babylon on the Euphrates in Mesopotamia — the same city that we will soon be studying about in Daniel. There had been a Jewish settlement there up until at least a short time before 1 Peter was written. Josephus tells us they had left for Seleucia during the reign of Claudius. Babylon the city was largely in ruins at the time 1 Peter was written. It became a ghost town by AD 115. There is no record that Peter was ever there, much less that Peter was there with Silvanus and Mark.

We are left with one option — Babylon is a figurative reference to Rome, the city where Peter would soon be martyred and where Eusebius tells us Peter wrote his first letter. Babylon was a common figure for Rome, in both Christian and Jewish sources. Early Jewish writings use Babylon to refer to Rome under Nero (Sibylline Oracles) and Rome under Vespasian (2 Baruch).

Revelation 14:8 — *And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*

Revelation 17:5 — *And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

Revelation 18:2 — *Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.*

But how do we know that Babylon means Rome in Revelation? Let's start with the clues in the text itself.

Revelation 17:9 — *And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*

Revelation 17:18 — *And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

A coin minted during the reign of Vespasian (the time when Revelation was written) depicts the goddess Roma sitting upon the seven hills that surround the city of Rome. Chapter 17 depicts “Babylon” as a bloodthirsty harlot sitting upon seven hills. If you lived in the first century, if you had that Roman coin in your pocket, and if you read Revelation 17, who would you think John was writing about? How could there be any answer other than Rome? If anyone ever tells you that “Babylon” means something else (Jerusalem, for example), they need to explain to you how a first century reader with that coin in his pocket would have understood this image to mean anything other than Rome.

Perhaps no point is more obvious in Revelation than this one:

Rome is the one city in history that has been distinguished for and universally recognizable by its seven hills. ... Suetonius and Plutarch record for us that in the time of Domitian the festival of Septimontium (“the feast of the seven hilled city”) was held annually in December to celebrate the seven hills enclosing Rome. ... This point is well nigh indisputably certain. Indeed, “there is scarce a poet that speaks of Rome but observes it.”

There is little doubt that a first-century reader would understand this reference in any way other than as a reference to Rome, the city built upon seven hills.

But we are still left with a question — why is Rome referred to as “Babylon.”

As with most everything else in Revelation, the answer is that Babylon is used as a figurative symbol for Rome — but why that figure?

To answer that question, we need to look at the Old Testament (which should always be the first thing you do to understand what a figure means in Revelation).

Babylon was a place of exile.

Psalm 137:1 — *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*

Babylon was a wicked and haughty city.

Isaiah 13:11 — *And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; And I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.*

Jeremiah 50:29 — *Call together the archers against Babylon: All ye that bend the bow, camp against it round about; Let none thereof escape: Recompense her according to her work; According to all that she hath done, do unto her: For she hath been proud against the Lord, against the Holy One of Israel.*

Jeremiah 51:13 — *O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, Thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness.*

Babylon was a place of persecution. We will study this point as we study Daniel. Babylon carried away God's people into exile, Babylon destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple, and Babylon persecuted the people of God while in exile. In some ways the persecution under Babylon was very different from the persecution under Rome — but both were persecutors of God's people.

There are other comparisons between Babylon and Rome: Both were centers of pagan idolatry, both were hostile to God, both were hostile to God's people, both were hostile to God's plan.

What is the history of Babylon?

As we study Daniel, we will often pause to consider the history of a city, a nation, or a king. Let's briefly do that with Babylon, which will be central to our study of Daniel.

Babylon flourished for thousands of years, starting at least as early as 3200 BC and continuing through 323 BC when Alexander the Great died there, having captured the city in 331 BC.

Babylon makes an appearance in the Bible in Genesis 10 and 11.

Genesis 10:9-10 — *And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. 10 And the beginning of his kingdom was **Babel**, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.*

Genesis 11:8-9 — *So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. 9 Therefore is the name of it called **Babel**; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*

Babel is the Hebrew term for Babylon, and it means “gate of god,” although Genesis engages in some word play to also have it mean “confusion.” God saw Babylon very differently than Babylon saw itself — and that has been true of every other “Babylon” that has since arisen.

Babylon did not have a good beginning. Genesis 11:4 has been called the first public declaration of humanism: “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

Who has ruled over Babylon?

First we need to keep in mind that Babylon is a city, and that city has been ruled by many different nations:

- **Sumerians** (3200 BC)
- **Akkadians** (2300 BC)
- **Amorites** (1890 BC) — Hammurabi
- **Assyrians** (900 BC) — Isaiah; Nahum describes the fall of the Assyrians
- **Chaldeans** (625 BC) — Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Daniel; Habakkuk (who called the Chaldeans a “bitter and hasty” people in 1:6)
- **Medes** and **Persians** (539 BC) — Cyrus (Daniel 5 describes the transition from the Chaldeans to the Medes and Persians)
- **Greeks** (333 BC) — Alexander the Great
- **Parthians** (141 BC) — Enemies of Rome
- **Muslims** (AD 650) — Up until present day (Iraq)

We will have much to say about the Medes and the Persians, but we should stress now that they were a combined nation at the time they defeated the Chaldeans. They had combined in 553 BC when Cyrus rebelled against his grandfather, the Mede king. But the Medes retained a prominent place in the combined empire.

We will also have much to say about the interaction of these kingdoms with the Jews. The Chaldeans captured Jerusalem in 597 BC (2 Kings 24 and 2 Chronicles 36). Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC.

That was how Babylon began — how did it end? Zosimus tells us that by AD 363 the city had become a wild animal park for the Persian king Shapur I. Who would have thought that when Babylon was at the height of its power? Jeremiah knew all about it 1000 years earlier.

Jeremiah 51:37 — *And Babylon shall become heaps, A dwelling place for dragons, An astonishment, and an hissing, Without an inhabitant.*

Why Study Daniel?

The first reason should perhaps be the only reason — it is the word of God. But there are some other reasons to study Daniel.

If you love history, you will love Daniel.

If you love languages, you will love Daniel — it is one of the few books in the Bible originally written in more than one language.

If you love math and puzzles, you will love Daniel — how do we unravel the 70 weeks in Daniel 9?

Studying Daniel can be a great tool for personal evangelism. People have questions about Daniel and Revelation, and if you can answer those questions, they will perhaps trust you on other issues about the Bible. One of the best ways to open doors is to leave a commentary on Daniel in your office — people will notice it and ask you about it.

If you ever study with an atheist, one of the first things you will need to do is convince them that the Bible is not from man. To do that, I would turn first to Daniel. If we can show that Daniel contains specific prophecies of certain Roman emperors (and we can), then Daniel is not from man because we have copies of Daniel from the Dead Sea scrolls that predate those Roman emperors. Daniel 11 is perhaps the most impressive predictive prophecy in the Bible.

Studying Daniel will help us understand the book of Revelation. Those two books are bookends, and we can't understand one apart from the other.

Studying Daniel will teach us about the church. In Daniel 2:44 and 7:14, 18, and 27 we will learn that the church is not just a Jewish kingdom, that it is not man made, that it is victorious, that it is eternal, that it is immovable, that it is powerful, that it is important, that it was planned, and that it was established during the Roman empire.

Studying Daniel is endlessly fascinating, and perhaps there is no more fascinating book in the Bible. We will be pausing to take numerous side trips — we will spend several lessons on the kingdom, we will dive into the meaning of Daniel's 70 weeks, we will take some time to see how Revelation deals with some of the issues discussed in Daniel, we will take some time to study Roman history and the Roman emperors, and we will take some time to carefully consider the foreknowledge of God when we get to Chapter 11.

Why Was Daniel Written?

What did the book mean to its original audience? This question is the key to unraveling its meaning.

Contrary to all of their expectations, God's chosen people had been uprooted from their promised land and transported to Babylonian captivity. Of course, this should not have been unexpected. They had been warned by Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and many other prophets (all the way back to Moses) that because of their flagrant apostasy and immorality, the city and the temple would be destroyed and they would be carried away in captivity. (Yet I imagine it came as a big surprise anyway.)

2 Chronicles 36:16 tells us why they were in captivity.

But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

Jeremiah 5:15-19 tells us who led them away.

Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. 16 Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. 17 And they shall eat up thine

harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword. 18 Nevertheless in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make a full end with you. 19 And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.

Here is how the world saw these events: The God of the Hebrews had been completely discredited. The mighty gods of Assyria and Babylon had burned his temple to the ground and led his people away in chains, and God was apparently powerless to stop them.

Of course, the truth was that those foreign people and their false gods were serving God's purpose by bringing punishment upon his people. God was still totally in control and in charge even though it may have appeared otherwise. In Jeremiah 25:9, God refers to King Nebuchadnezzar as "my servant."

The events in Daniel had a dual purpose:

- To convince the faithful Israelites that God had not forgotten them — and that they should not forget him. One day they would be vindicated.
- To show the pagan nations that God was truly sovereign and preeminent, and that any power they had was given to them by God and could be taken away anytime he desired.

The faithful Jews of Daniel's day either knew that God had not forgotten them, or they *should* have known that. Why? Because of Psalm 89.

Psalm 89 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible when it comes to the church. Why? Because Psalm 89 contains an unconditional promise by God to David about the church.

We are familiar with conditional promises in which God promises to do something if his people remain faithful. We are studying about one of those in Daniel — the people were being taken from their promised land because of their sin and their idolatry.

But there is a promise in Psalm 89 that is not conditional.

Psalm 89:3-4 — *I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, And build up thy throne to all generations.*

Psalm 89:29-34 — *His seed also will I make to endure for ever, And his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, And walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, And keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, And their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, Nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, Nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.*

In short, God promised King David that his throne would be eternal and that his line could not ever come to an end. Daniel knew that, and the other faithful Jews either knew that or should have known that. The Jewish royal line would continue forever.

Psalm 89 sheds some light on a puzzling passage in the New Testament. Acts 1:3 tells us that Jesus taught the apostles about the kingdom of God for 40 days. How then do we explain their question in verse 6?

Acts 1:6-8 — *When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

Were the apostles mistaken? We often say that they still expected an earthly kingdom, but where is the word “earthly” anywhere in verse 6? And does Jesus’ answer give any indication that their question was a bad one? Does he call them hard of heart and slow to understand? No, Jesus just tells them that it was not for them to know the time or the seasons.

I think we may have been much too hard on the Apostles in verse 6. Before we accuse them of getting it all wrong, we need to remember that they had just had a graduate level course on the kingdom from the King himself! Perhaps we are the ones who have it wrong!

But what did they mean in verse 6? “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”

Look at the next chapter:

Acts 2:30 — *Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.*

What is that if not a restoration of the kingdom to Israel?

Psalm 89 promised that David's throne would be eternal. A throne requires a kingdom. When the kingdom was established in Acts 2, David's throne was once again occupied by one of his descendants — the kingdom had been restored to Israel.

Jesus must have told them all about this — they just wanted to know in Acts 1 when it would happen. And it happened in Acts 2.

Luke 1:32 — *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.*

How is that not a restoration of the kingdom to Israel, just as the Apostles asked? The throne of David was restored just as God had promised.

Daniel is going to tell us much more about that eternal kingdom.

Three Great Theological Principles

There are at least three great theological principles that run through the book of Daniel.

The Absolute Sovereignty of God: The affairs of men and kings are subject to God's decrees, and he is able to accomplish his purposes despite the determined opposition of the mightiest men. This is a message we need to hear today. The clear message of scripture is that the kingdoms of earth are raised up and taken down to serve God's purpose.

The Power of Prayer: Throughout the book we see that God acts in response to prayer. Again, this is a message we need to hear today. If we feel powerless it may be because we have become prayerless.

Charles Hummel: The worst sin is prayerlessness. We usually think of murder, adultery, or theft among the worst, but the root of all sin is self-sufficiency — independence from God. When we fail to wait prayerfully for God's guidance and strength, we are saying — with our action if not our lips — that we don't need him. We can go it

alone. The opposite of such independence is when we acknowledge our need of God's instruction and supply.

Samuel Chadwick: The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.

Corrie ten Boom: When a Christian shuns fellowship with other Christians, the devil smiles. When he stops reading the Bible, the devil laughs. When he stops praying, the devil shouts for joy.

If we get nothing else from the book of Daniel and all of the many things that we are going to look at in this book, I hope we all gain an appreciation of the incredible power and importance of prayer.

A. J. Gordon: You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you can never do more than pray until you have prayed.

The Long Range Nature of the Plan of Redemption: God has been working to bring about our redemption since the fall, and, in fact, he had a plan in place before the foundation of the world. We see in this book just how great a plan it is, and we see the extraordinary lengths to which God went to bring Jesus into the world at the perfect time and in the perfect setting. We also see the supreme importance of his kingdom, the church. (It was not just a haphazard decision on God's part!)