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Daniel

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Defeated and far from their homes, the people of God languished in their exile while in awe at the power of their enemies. Into their despair God sent the prophet Daniel and his companions. The stories and visions in the book of Daniel reminded the exiles that it was not Babylon, but God, who raises up and puts down kings and kingdoms. God had not abandoned or forgotten them, but rather He was still full of mercy and power. Daniel's encouraging message was that the future of the Israelites was in the hands of God and not the Babylonians'. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul explains the meaning and purpose of the book of Daniel.

SCRIPTURE READING

Daniel

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the themes and original message of the book of Daniel.
2. To describe the historical background of the book of Daniel.
3. To discuss the role of Daniel at the court in ancient Babylon.

QUOTATIONS

The Bible . . . is not interested in presenting its readers with an abstract understanding of the nature of God. We have little in the Bible that resembles modern systematic theology; certainly there is no listing and description of his attributes. God reveals himself in relationship with his people. We can see this in the dominant metaphors of

God in the Bible. He is king, warrior, shepherd, husband, father, and mother, assuming that his people are his subjects, his soldiers, his sheep, his wife, his children. As we will see, the book of Daniel utilizes some of these metaphors of relationship in support of the overall theme of divine sovereignty; but here I wish to draw attention to the fact that his sovereignty is not described abstractly in this book, but in the midst of the historical process, in the nitty-gritty of life.

—Tremper Longman III

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The lives of the Israelites that were deported to Babylon are reminiscent of the life of Joseph.
 - 1. Joseph lived faithful to God as an exile in Egypt.
 - 2. Joseph's gift to interpret dreams advanced his position in a foreign land, as Daniel's gift does the same for him in Babylon.
- B. King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream in chapter two that troubles him greatly.
 - 1. None of Babylon's wise men are able to interpret the dream.
 - 2. Daniel receives the content and meaning of the dream from God and proclaims it to the king.
 - 3. The king saw an image of a man made of metals in his dream.
 - 4. The image of the man is eventually smashed to pieces by a rock which grows into a great mountain and fills the earth.
 - 5. Each of the metals represent an earthly kingdom.
 - 6. The gold represents Babylon, the silver the Medo-Persian empire, the bronze the Greek empire, and the iron the Roman empire.
 - 7. The stone is the kingdom of God which will eventually destroy all earthly kingdoms and spread across the whole earth.
- C. Nebuchadnezzar erects a giant image in chapter 3 and demands everyone bow down before it in worship.
 - 1. Daniel's companions refuse to bow down and worship the image, and remain faithful to their God.
 - 2. Nebuchadnezzar threatens to throw them into a fiery furnace asking, "Who is the God who will deliver you from my hands?"

3. Nebuchadnezzar will find himself in the hands of their God in chapter 4.
- D. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to worship the image and are willing to die for their faith.
1. The king orders the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual. The men who are commanded to throw the Israelites into the furnace, are consumed themselves.
 2. The king is shocked to see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace with another person that looks like a “son of the gods.”
 3. This is most likely a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ who comes to the furnace before he goes to the cross.
 4. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not burned, and neither do they even smell like smoke.
 5. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges their God as the true God.
- E. Nebuchadnezzar has another dream in chapter 4 which Daniel again interprets for him.
1. Because of his pride, the king is driven from his kingdom and lives as an animal in the wilderness for a time.
 2. Again Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the God of heaven.
- F. Nebuchadnezzar is followed by Belshazzar as king of Babylon.
1. Belshazzar is filled with pride and arrogance and holds a wild, orgiastic, and drunken feast.
 2. He uses the golden vessels from the temple in Jerusalem during his party.
- G. A hand appears against the wall of the palace and writes a coded message.
1. The message is: “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN.”
 2. The Babylonian magicians cannot interpret the message.
- H. Daniel is summoned to interpret the message for the king.
1. Daniel interprets the message that God has weighed Belshazzar’s kingdom and has found it falling short.
 2. Belshazzar’s kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

- I. “That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old” (Dan. 5:30–31).
- J. Historians state that the Persian army rerouted Babylon’s underground aqueduct and marched under the walls and conquered the city on the night of this drunken feast.
- K. The stories of Daniel declare that God raises and puts down kings and kingdoms.
- L. A message of the book of Daniel is that the future of the people of God is in the hands of God and not the Babylonians.

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read chapter 1 of Daniel. In what ways did Daniel and his companions avoid compromise with the pagan Babylonian culture? How did they avoid compromise while respecting the civil authority?
2. Compare Nebuchadnezzar’s dream vision (2:26–45) and Daniel’s night vision (7:1–14). What are the similarities between the two visions? What is Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream? What does this dream communicate to Daniel and to God’s people?
3. How do the events of Daniel 2 reveal important differences between the living God of Israel and the false religion of the Babylonian magicians and astrologers (see especially verses 27–28)?
4. Many see a prophecy of the second coming of Christ in Daniel 7:13–14. John Calvin, on the other hand, argued that this prophecy looked forward to the ascension of Christ. In Daniel’s vision, is the one like a son of man coming toward heaven or earth? What evidence in the text itself supports your answer?
5. In Daniel 8:16 and 9:21, the angel Gabriel appears to Daniel to explain his visions. The only other place in Scripture where the angel Gabriel appears is in Luke 1:19 and 1:26 where he announces the births of John and Jesus. What does Gabriel’s appearance in Luke’s gospel suggest about the relationship of the birth of Jesus to the visions of Daniel?

DISCUSSION

1. Read Romans 13 and Daniel 3. Is the disobedience of Daniel and his companions to the king of Babylon in conflict with the principle of Romans 13? If not, why not?

2. There are a number of places in the New Testament where Jesus speaks of “the coming of the Son of Man.” If Jesus is alluding to Daniel 7:13–14, how might this affect our interpretation of Matthew 10:23 and 16:27–28, for example? Do the parallels to Matthew 16:27–28 in Mark 8:38–9:1 and Luke 9:26–27 shed any light on the discussion?

3. Daniel 11:2–12:3 contains some of the most minutely detailed prophecies in the entire Old Testament, and 11:2–35, at least, have already been fulfilled to the last detail. Many critical scholars consider this to be evidence that 11:2–35 was written *after* the events it claims to foresee. What presuppositions cause critical scholars to come to this conclusion? What is it in their presuppositions that is flawed?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

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