

## **"DANIEL, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Text for Sermon: Daniel 1:1-, 6-7; 1:19-21; 2:20-21, 34-35; 3:17-18**

### **Introduction.**

Change. I know a thing or two about change. Allow me to do a few moments of autobiography.

1018 Front Street is the 32<sup>nd</sup> address I have lived at. That becomes even more impressive when you consider I had 29 addresses in my first 36 years, and only three in my last 33 years. I attended 10 different schools in my 13 years of kindergarten through High School. I spent most of my education being the new kid.

I think it would take an expert psychologist to unpack how all of that has impacted and influenced me and still affects me.

One of the particularly interesting challenging set of changes occurred during seminary while I was an Assistant to the Pastor at the First Parish Congregational Church in Wakefield, MA. It was a historic congregation. Six years ago they celebrated their 375<sup>th</sup>.

I served there for three years under three different senior pastors. The pastor of 17 years retired near the end of my first year. The interim pastor served during my second year. The newly called senior pastor served during my third year. Three years, three very different senior pastors.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus is attributed with saying, "The only constant in life is change."

Change can be hard, big changes even harder. Changing homes or jobs, moving to a different state. Changing countries and cultures and languages is even harder, as some of you have done. The death of a child or a spouse or a divorce are considered the most devastating changes we experience in life.

The changes in our world in the past 100, even the past 50 years are huge. Even just this millennia. And no doubt in the next decade we will see staggering changes. No one really knows how AI is going to change our world. It is a new world and getting newer all the time.

Change is hard. We have limited capacity for change, and we are easily overwhelmed. How do we survive?

God anticipated our need for help and one of His tools to help us is the book of Daniel. It is a survival manual for navigating massive changes that life throws at us.

## **Daniel.**

Daniel is a rare book in the Bible, like Ezekiel, in that it takes place during a judgment of God and is written in a place of exile. Daniel was a teenager when he was taken into captivity in the first wave of exiles twenty years before Ezekiel. Daniel would die in captivity around the age of 80.

Talk about change, Daniel was not in Kansas anymore. Jerusalem was not Babylon. Babylon was a vast secular, pagan, idolatrous culture and nation. Babylon summed up radical secular humanism.

***Babylon*** straddled the Euphrates River and was one of the greatest cities of the ancient Middle East. Babylon was the cultural center of the empire. It was the Rome, Paris, London, NYC of the day.

It was one of the very oldest cities on earth. You can visit the ruins of this city about 60 miles SW of Baghdad in Iraq. The Babylonian Empire covered much of the modern day Middle East, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and much of Turkey and northern Saudi Arabia.

Ezekiel was a priest who became a prophet of God. Daniel on the other hand, had the gift of the prophet in terms of receiving from God prophecies foretelling the future, but he never held the office of a prophet. He was not a classic mediator between God and His people.

This would explain why in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel is not listed the prophetic books but with the wisdom books at the very end of the OT.

Daniel was more of a statesman like Joseph, who served Pharaoh in Egypt. Daniel eventually become one of only three administrators over the 120 provincial governors throughout the kingdom (6:1). Talk about change, while in exile Daniel served under four kings.

King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 1-4

King Belshazzar, Daniel 5-8

King Darius, Daniel 9

King Cyrus, Daniel 10-12

The book of Daniel stands as a unique mix in the Old Testament, it begins with history, then makes a huge transition to visions of future events significant to the Jews. The book divides neatly into two sections.

The first six chapters Daniel writes of himself in the third person. He records a series of six historical sketches, in which Daniel and/or his friends are delivered and/or otherwise vindicated.

These six miracles are meant to remind the exiles Babylon has not conquered the God of Israel with the gods of Babylon. God is still God, and God is God even in Babylon. So great and powerful are these miracles that all the pagan kings are forced to confess Israel's God is the one and only true God.

In the second section of the book, (chapters 7-12), Daniel speaks of himself in the first person and records a series of visions relating to Israel and the surrounding nations. Daniel predicts the rise of the Greeks and even the rise of the Romans hundreds of years in the future.

### **Date.**

I haven't made much of a point of the dates of the various books, mentioning them mostly just in passing. But we have to say just a bit more about the date of Daniel. Why? Because it is a matter of great controversy and a lot of scholars have made a big deal about it.

A simple reading of the book tells us the date of writing must be some time near the end of Daniel's 80 years in Babylon during the time the Persians when King Cyrus overthrew the Babylonian empire. That would put it around 530 BC which we know to be near the end of the Jewish exile.

But among a whole host of liberal scholars, there is almost universal consensus that it was not written in the fifth century B.C. They say the book must have been written around 165 BC. Hundreds of years after the death of Daniel. In other words, Daniel is not a historical person, but a figure of legend, he never existed and these stories and visions are made up.

Why? Because the prophecies in the visions in chapter 2 and 7 speak of events after the Persian empire falls, events so far away as the Greek empire and after the Greek empire

falls to the Roman empire. These visions are so prophetically accurate it is assumed there is no way they could have been delivered beforehand. The liberals' assumptions are built on the rickety foundation of unbelief.

These scholars are working out of their presupposition that there can be no genuine predictive prophecy. They don't believe in God or at least that God would make such long range predictions in these visions.

God did just that, centuries in advance. People are afraid of a God having sovereignty and authority about the future and saying things about the future far in advance of that future.

Yet when God does that, it proves He is God and it says His remaining predictions will come to pass.

The denial of the authorship, because of an unwillingness to accept marvelous miracles and amazing prophecies is pure intellectual pride and disbelief.

### **Purpose, theme**

This leads us to the purpose and theme of Daniel.

When Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "The only constant in life is change" he didn't take into account one other constant in the universe.

The overarching divine purpose of Daniel is seen in the narratives that show God's sovereignty over kings and kingdoms, and in the visions, showing His sovereignty over the future. Exile, deportation, suffering, change are not the end of the story.

God's holds absolute universal sovereignty over all the nations of the earth, even the most pagan. The book of Daniel isn't really about Daniel, but Daniel's God, God is the hero. In this book we meet the Most High God who is sovereignly ruling over the kings and kingdoms of human history until the Messianic Son of Man consummates history and brings His people into the everlasting Kingdom of God.

"God saves a sinful and weak people; he preserves young men from impurity and old men from lions; he answers prayer and interprets dreams; he exalts the humble and humbles the proud; he vindicates the faithful and vanquishes the profane; and he rescues covenant-forsaking people by returning them to the land of the covenant" (ESV Study Bible).

The absolute sovereignty of God literally permeates every chapter of the book in the miracles and the visions. He is sovereign over the past and over the future. The dominion of the God is a universal, everlasting dominion. He does whatever He pleases with the powers of heaven and the powers of the people of earth.

We see this clearly illustrated when the sovereignty of God is put to the test.

***First, the fiery furnace.*** Do you think the fiery furnace heated so hot it killed those who threw the men in, is going to be a problem for the God who created the sun? When the men are delivered untouched by the fire, pagan Nebuchadnezzar declares:

**Daniel 4:3** How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders!  
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

***Second, the lion's den.*** The God who created the lions curbed their hunger and closed their mouths. When Daniel is delivered untouched, pagan King Darius declares:

**Daniel 6:26-27** I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever;  
his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.  
27 He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth,  
he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

## **Jesus**

The message of Daniel is redemptive. There is a God, He is in control, He will deliver His people, evil will be destroyed, Jesus will reign and the righteous will enter His rest and reign with Him.

Daniel's prophecies reveal the fulfillment of God's great redemptive plan that began at the Fall and will culminate in the return and reign of the Son of Man on the earth.

This is ***the gospel according to Daniel***, the good news of the triumph of Christ and the deliverance of His people. It's meant to give us a future and a hope, to give us courage in the face of our enemies and all evil, to give us hope in our troubles and perseverance in our trials.

The part of the vision I read from Daniel 2 is a vision of the successive empires of the world.

**Daniel 2:34-35** As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

“Babylon is the most glorious, the golden head. Then the silver was the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Then came the brass of the Greeks. After that we find the iron of Rome, and then the iron and clay of a weakened Rome. The stone cut without hands is the kingdom of God, which came during the time of Rome, and struck the kingdoms of this earth on the feet. *That stone, the rule and realm of Christ*, is in the process now of becoming a mountain that will fill the entire earth. (Doug Wilson).

God has a specific timetable. Everything is exactly on schedule and going exactly according to plan. The number of days are fixed. This season of grace and mercy and gathering in of the elect is limited.

For a while it seemed as if God was not in control and that pagan nations superseded divine authority. But God revealed His authority and power.

For a while on the cross it seemed as if God was not in control and the will of the Jewish and Roman leaders had prevailed. But God revealed His power and authority over sin, Satan, death and hell.

Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God. To Him belongs the glory and the power for ever and ever.

It all ends with grace. Even though the Jews had failed Him miserably, God revealed that He had not cast off His people Israel.

### **Implications and application.**

Daniel is a survival manual for saints, for God’s people living in an alien land, in a foreign culture, in a godless climate, for a people living in a time when everything is changing so fast. It is a survival guide for when there are no immediate solutions, no approaching rescues.

Is there a more relevant message for our secular and materialistic culture that ignores God? How do you remain faithful to a holy and true God while living in a pagan land with pagan gods? Can it be done in a way that maintains inner peace and joy?

The message of Daniel is that it is possible to resist the values of a hostile pagan culture with wisdom and integrity without compromising or withdrawing from the world. But this is only possible with a burning conviction that God alone is God and to be worshipped and served.

Will you be able to stand firm and resist to the end, whatever the cost? Even if that cost is ridicule in the workplace or mocking on the street.

It is not the fire that determines the result, it is what is put into the fire. If you put gold into the fire you will get a purer gold out of the fire, but if you put dross into the fire you will only get dross out of the fire.

If you put the wise into the fire they will be purified. If you put the wicked into the fire they will only come out more wicked. The trial only reveals the heart.

God will preserve a remnant who will persevere to the end.

**Matthew 24:13** But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Over and over we have seen the emphasis on how hard life will become in the future, but it will be limited, God is in control and in the end, God will triumph over evil.

God's people are encouraged to live with an eye to the future, on the promised joy set before us. Daniel encourages us to take the long view, that God's purposes are long, but you can trust Him with the confidence that He is working, and one of His tools is the prayers and faithfulness of His people.

We don't live in a closed universe as liberals and secular humanists and atheistic evolutionists would have us to believe. God is here and He is not silent.

We have a God who knows and rules the future. God has complete knowledge and comprehension of all of time, of all nations and of all kings. We have a God who is mighty to save and can and does deliver His people out of furnaces and lions dens.

***Calvin's prayer at the end of Daniel:***

Almighty God, since you purpose for us no other end than that of constant warfare during our whole life, and subject us to many cares until we arrive at the goal of this temporary

life: Grant, we may never grow fatigued. May we ever be armed and equipped for battle, and whatever the trials by which you test us, may we never be found deficient. May we always aspire towards heaven with upright souls, and strive with all our endeavors to attain that blessed rest which is laid up for us in heaven, in Jesus Christ our Lord. -- Amen.