

GOD IS ON THE THRONE

Introduction to the Book of Daniel – Daniel 1:1-2

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What a blessing to gather in fellowship as this New Year begins!

I'm so excited to begin our study of the Book of Daniel tonight.

This book is one of the most amazing books in God's Word!

It is filled with fascinating truths about world history that will excite your mind –

But it is also filled with timeless truths about God that will **renew** your mind and transform your life!

I am thrilled to be diving into this book together this year.

About a year ago, I had the privilege of taking seminary class on Daniel with Pastor Todd Dykstra and that was just incredible!

It was a catalyst for my amazement and affection for this book – and it peaked my desire to bring these precious truths to you all!

For many months now, I have been preparing and praying that God would use this book to sanctify us and make us more useful to Him!

Tonight, we're going to be doing an introduction and overview of Daniel – just to help us gain a 30,000-foot view of this book – to help us understand it.

The book of Daniel is one of the most well-known and well-loved books of the Bible.

It contains some of the most fascinating characters and narratives:

- *Daniel, the exiled teenager who could interpret dreams.*

- *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace.*
- *Daniel in the lion's den.*
- *Daniel's visions of eschatology (the 4 beasts, the talking horns, the ram and goat, the 70 weeks).*
- *Nebuchadnezzar, the king who dreamed about how world history would unfold.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar, the king who became a wild beast – a cow in the fields.*
- *Belshazzar, the king who saw the terrifying handwriting on the wall before he died.*

We will walk through all of that as we go through Daniel.

Not only does Daniel contain fascinating stories and characters, but it is also one of the most important books to understand the history of Israel.

Which means that it is **vital** to understand the OT!

Many of you are probably starting a fresh Bible reading plan and likely will be reading through much of the OT in the coming days.

Daniel will enrich your understanding of God's redemptive plan as it unfolds through Israel and the OT.

But not only will it enhance your understanding of Israel's history, it is one of the most important books to understand the history of the world.

In Daniel, we will encounter very specific prophecies about the four Gentile empires that would dominate world power.

But not only does it help us make sense of our world's **history**, but it is also one of the most significant books to understand our world's **future**.

It has often been (rightly) said that you cannot truly understand biblical eschatology without the book of Daniel – *that's exactly right*.

Daniel is indeed the “spinal cord” of biblical eschatology.

This book contains prophecies that are incredible in their precision – many of which have been fulfilled, some which await future fulfillment.

You will be amazed at **the precision** and **accuracy** of Daniel’s prophecies – and this will bolster your trust in God’s Word.

In fact, something interesting that illustrates **the importance** and **precision** of Daniel is how much it is attacked by skeptics and liberal theologians.

Those who want to deny the supernatural and divine authorship of these prophecies understand that Daniel poses a major challenge.

So, there are many attempts and attacks to discredit this book and its author.

Because of this, I will occasionally pause and make you aware of major objections and walk through biblical answers to these attacks.

And just a *spoiler alert*: God’s Word is completely trustworthy! Every so-called objection has a response.

But, we will marvel together at the absolute accuracy that could only come from God through His prophets.

And, again, it will help us shape and strengthen our clarity of biblical eschatology.

I pray you will be challenged and blessed by that as we go through.

Now, with that in mind, some of you may be thinking that Daniel will be a book for the more intellectual theologians among us...*not practical*...

And while it is indeed **profoundly theological**, it is also **intensely practical!**

As we will soon see, Daniel is one of the most powerful books that teaches us how to live in relationship with the living God, no matter the cost.

Daniel himself is an example for living with integrity and convictions before God, regardless of the pressures and pleasures of this world.

You've probably heard the phrase "*dare to be a Daniel*" ...there's good reason for that, as we will soon see!

We will find all these things (and more) in Daniel as we got through...

But all those things (important though they may be) are not the most important thing we will find in the book of Daniel.

The most important thing for us to take away from the book of Daniel is this – this is the central theme of Daniel:

The absolute sovereignty and trustworthiness of the true and living God.

Let me say it again:

The absolute sovereignty and trustworthiness of the true and living God.

Towering above all the amazing things we will discover in Daniel, **that** is the theme that Daniel most emphatically puts on display.

That is the thread that Daniel weaves throughout his book.

In Daniel, we will find God's sovereignty and trustworthiness displayed:

- *Over all nations (not just Israel), kings/rulers, empires, and false gods.*
- *Against the proud!*
- *On behalf of the humble!*
- *In His promise of the Messiah.*
- *In His plan for His people.*
- *Over angels.*
- *Over Satan, Antichrist, and the forces of evil yet to come.*
- *Over the course of history and the future of this world.*
- *Over eternity, without end.*

We need to come to this book with reverent hearts ready to worship this God!

I think the theme of Daniel is captured in a declaration that comes **not** from the mouth or pen of Daniel, but from Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:35-37.

This is when Nebuchadnezzar was humiliated by God, he literally lost his mind and became like a wild cow living in the fields for 7 years.

We will cover this fascinating story in depth soon but listen to what Nebuchadnezzar declared after his humiliation.

This, I think can be taken as the theme verse for the book of Daniel!

Daniel 4:34-37, where Nebuchadnezzar declares this:

34 *“But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason 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 endures from generation to generation.***

35 *“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’*

37 *“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, **for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.**”*

That is the message of the Book of Daniel!

Tonight, I want to walk us through some of the historical background and context that will magnify this great theme of the **sovereignty of God**.

But before we get into that, I want to give you a purpose statement for the book of Daniel.

Here is my working purpose statement for the book of Daniel:

To glorify the true and living God and cause His people to worship Him by living lives of humility, faith, and obedience, no matter the cost.

The great implication for us as we study the book of Daniel, then, is this:
Humble yourself before the living, sovereign God!

God is on His throne – you must bow the knee to the King of Kings!

That is the great need for us tonight. That is the great need for us every day.
Humility before the living God.

My prayer is that the book of Daniel will humble us and cause us to live with true humility with our God.

Now, let's dive into some important background and history – I think this is fascinating!

To begin this – go ahead and turn your Bibles and your attention to Daniel chapter 1.

Let's look at the opening 2 verses.

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** *The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.*

Now, to really get a sense of what's going on, we're going to do a jet tour of God's redemptive plan leading up to the events of the book of Daniel.

Most of this will be familiar to you, but I want you to feel the weight of it in a fresh way tonight.

Immediately after Adam and Eve's fall into sin, in Genesis 3:15, God promised that a Deliverer would come to reverse the curse of sin and death.

*And we cannot exaggerate this point – **mankind's eternal hope hangs squarely on that promise!***

But as the pages of the OT begin to unfold, that hope often seems to be fading and almost lost.

Not long after the Fall, things go from bad to worse, and in Genesis 6-8, humanity was so wicked that God destroys the world with a flood.

But in His sovereign grace, He saved Noah and his family – so hope is preserved!

In Genesis 9, we find a reassurance that God's promise is still trustworthy.

He makes a covenant with Noah, marked by the Rainbow – so humanity's hope is rekindled!

Then, God's redemptive plan focuses in on one person – **Abraham**.

In Genesis 12, God makes an unconditional covenant with Abraham that through him, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

God chooses Abraham's seed – his descendants – to be His people through which His redemptive plan would continue to unfold.

This was the nation of **Israel**. So, let's zoom out here for a moment – **the hope of mankind hangs upon God's relationship with this people, Israel**.

Centuries after God's promise to Abraham, Israel multiplied into a significant population – a people – a nation.

But there was a major problem, they were enslaved to Egypt. The question "*where are you God?*" must have been on everyone's mouth.

And you know the story – God answered that question by raising up Moses and He victoriously delivered His people from Pharaoh’s power.

That story was a deafening declaration that **God, not Pharaoh** is on the throne!

And that the Lord Yahweh is the only true and living God, not the gods of Egypt!

Over and over this is the question that God will answer throughout the story of the Bible! God is on the throne! God is the only true and living God.

By the way, this is one of the most important truths that we can impress upon the hearts of our children (*and Daniel is saturated with this*):

There is only one true God, He is on the throne – the gods of this world are dead – you must bow the knee to the true King!

After God delivered His people, He established a covenant with them at Mount Sinai, through Moses, and gave them an incredible means of grace – **the Law!**

As long as Israel would trust and obey God, He would establish them as a nation and use them to bring His blessing to the ends of the earth!

Here, we can zoom out and fast-forward through centuries of Israel cycling over and over again through failure to trust and obey God.

God raised up **judges** to lead them, but yet, the motif that characterizes Israel is this phrase, “*and everyone did what was right in his own eyes...*”

Then after the era of the judges, Israel demanded a king – coveting the other nations and wanting to be like them. And God gave them what they wanted.

Their first king, Saul, failed miserably to obey God and so God gave his crown to David – a man after God’s own heart and God’s choice king.

This was a significant moment in the redemptive story because God made a covenant with David that guaranteed the hope of humanity!

Through David's descendants, God promised to establish an ultimate and eternal kingdom without sin and death.

With David on the throne and later his son Solomon, Israel experienced a brief foretaste of this glorious kingdom.

The temple was built and Israel prospered like never before – and at this time it seemed like all God's promises were coming into full bloom.

It was a golden age of glory for Israel! At this time, the question of "*where is God*" would've been far from people's mind.

But it was short-lived.

In fact, both David and Solomon gave into such grievous sins that it was clear that this could not be the fulfillment of God's everlasting kingdom.

Solomon himself became the first major domino in Israel's collapse.

His unbridled lust for women and wealth turned his heart away from the God who had once granted him great wisdom.

King Solomon's heart was turned toward false gods. He plunged Israel into false worship which culminated in Israel's collapse.

God was faithful to chastise His people for their faithlessness and false worship.

In the aftermath of Solomon's compromise, the once unified kingdom **split** into a divided kingdom.

Israel was the northern kingdom (10 of the tribes, except Judah and Benjamin) and Judah was the kingdom in the south.

The northern kingdom of Israel collapsed first.

But leading up to their collapse, we see God's patience on display.

For several hundred years, God sent prophets who warned the kings and the people to repent.

But the wicked kings and people of the northern tribes ignored the prophets and disregarded God's warnings.

As a result, the northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BC, just as God had warned. (see 2 Kings 17).

With Israel's collapse in the north, the southern kingdom Judah seemed to be the last beacon of hope. But they only lasted a bit longer.

Although they had a few good kings, Judah's wicked kings greatly outnumbered them.

These kings and the people of Judah ultimately turned their hearts toward false gods.

And so, Judah ultimately suffered the same providence as Israel because of their spiritual defection.

In the year 586 BC, the kingdom of Judah collapsed and **fell** to someone we will get to know very well very soon: King Nebuchadnezzar of **Babylon**.

And from a human perspective, with Judah's fall, the last beacon of hope seemed to be extinguished.

And that brings us to Daniel.

The load-bearing question that Daniel will answer is this: *where is God? And what hope does Israel have? What hope does humanity have?*

When all has collapsed and the promise of deliverance for Israel and even all humanity seems to have been lost – what is God's answer? **It is this book!**

That brings us to Daniel 1:1. Let's read that again:

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.”

Let’s briefly talk about the events and characters in this verse.

The opening words give us the date for these events – “*the third year of King Jehoiakim*” – which would be 605 BC (for you history enthusiasts).

So, here are some key data points for you:

- The events of the book of Daniel span the period from 605 BC (Dan 1:1) to 536 BC (Dan 10:1) (Dykstra notes).
- Likely, Daniel wrote the book shortly after between 536 BC and 530 BC.
- Contrary to critics who want to date the book much later (around first century BC), all the data (and God’s own testimony) affirm a **6th Century** writing. (“an early date” – not a late date).

But here in these opening words we are confronted at once with the sovereign control of God.

Because this event had been prophesied *exactly* by both Isaiah and Jeremiah.

I want to you to hear this. Listen to Isaiah 39:5-7:

- 5** *Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD of hosts,*
6 *‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day **will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,**’ says the LORD.*
7 ***‘And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.’ ”***

You know enough about the story of Daniel and his friends to know that this is an EXACT prophecy of what happened to Daniel and his friends in exile.

Now, turn over to Jeremiah 25. I want you to see this prophecy and account of Judah's fall to Babylon.

Jeremiah 25:1-11

- 1 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in **the fourth year of Jehoiakim** the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon),

[Notice that here (and also 46:2) Jeremiah dates this to Jehoiakim's *fourth* year while Daniel states that these events took place in Jehoiakim's *third* year.

Critics jump on this and say – *aha a contradiction! A historical inaccuracy!* – yet this is easily explained by the fact that two different calendar systems were in use at this time.

Jeremiah represents a Jewish account of these dates. Daniel represents a Babylonian account of these dates.

Just to explain even further (*again for you history enthusiasts*) the specific difference is this:

- The Babylonians would count a King's year starting after their first year which was called the "King's accession year".
 - Daniel wrote using this reckoning, which accounts for his saying it was Jehoiakim's *third* year.
 - Meanwhile the Jewish system was simply to count all years beginning from coronation – which is why Jeremiah here and again in Jer. 46:2 says it was his *fourth* year.
- 2 which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying,
 - 3 "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.
 - 4 "And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear,

- 5 saying, “Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever;
- 6 and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.’
- 7 “Yet you have not listened to Me,” declares the LORD, “in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.
- 8 “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Because you have not obeyed My words,
- 9 behold, **I will send** and take all the families of the north,’ declares the LORD, ‘**and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant**, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.
- 10 ‘Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.
- 11 ‘This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve **the king of Babylon seventy years.**

You’ll want to remember that prophecy as we go through the book of Daniel.

God prophesied through Jeremiah that Israel would be captive to Babylon for seventy years – *put up a mental sticky note with that.*

Again, I don’t want to lose you here – *why do I want you to see these prophecies?*

Because I want you to see the sovereignty of God *immediately* in the opening words of Daniel.

While the first verse seems to be a **headline of doom**, it was no surprise to God. In fact – this was exactly what He purposed.

Yes, the king of Judah had fallen to the king of Babylon – but the truth behind these events is that the King of Heaven is Lord over all of this!

And that is exactly what we see on FULL DISPLAY in verse 2. Let's read these 2 verses again and notice verse 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 **The Lord gave** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

The Lord gave Jehoiakim over to Nebuchadnezzar! It was HIS doing!

"The Lord" – this is the Hebrew name *Adonai* – Lord, Master, Sovereign.

Daniel is bringing out the truth that God is the **supreme Master** over these things.

I love what commentator Leon Wood writes,

"...Though the outward signs did not seem to show it, God was the Master of this situation, as Jehoiakim was given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. It was not Nebuchadnezzar's strength nor Jehoiakim's weakness that really decided that matter, but God's good pleasure." (Whitcomb, 25)

What we find in these opening two verses is that while nations and governments **rise and fall**, it is always ultimately ***theological***.

We must train our hearts to respond to all headlines this way!

Indeed -- in these events, the battle was intensely theological.

Notice it wasn't just about the conquest of land and governmental authority.

Nebuchadnezzar took the vessels from the house of God to the house of his god.

This statement was clear: *my god is bigger than your God*.
Nebuchadnezzar's chief god was a false god called "Marduk" also known as "Bel".

And to drive home that this is a theological attack, Daniel intentionally identifies Babylon here as the land of *Shinar*.

Now Shinar was a name for the region of Babylon, but more pointedly, it was an OT designation to represent **direct rebellion against God**.

Beginning in Genesis 10-11, Shinar is the site of the tower of Babel, and throughout the OT it is used to symbolize opposition to God.

One commentator puts this way: "*[Shinar] was the place where wickedness was at home and uprightness could expect opposition.*"¹

So here in these opening two verses, Daniel makes it clear that the question that must be answered is ***who is on the throne?***

Is it Nebuchadnezzar? Is it Marduk and the gods of Babylon?

The rest of book will be **thundering answer: GOD IS ON THE THRONE!**

Just think about how this would've brought comfort to faithful Jewish people in the midst of exile and captivity.

That's why God used Daniel to write this book that we will get to study together.

And although we are not Jews in captivity, these truths about our God will bolster our faith in profoundly practical ways.

Here in the pages of Daniel you will encounter the true and living God who alone can bear the weight of your anxieties and burdens and fears.

¹ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 59.

In this fallen world, we walk through all sorts of **custom-made trials**:

...the challenge of **difficult deadlines and jobs**...

...or the **fog** of not knowing what to do with your life, or who to marry, etc...

...the burden of **family conflict and drama**...

...the paralyzing fear of **secret insecurities**...

...the grief of **sicknesses and death**...

...the doubts of **doctrinal uncertainty and unanswered questions...and seemingly unanswered prayers**...

... the fear of **evil governments and the loss of peace and safety**...the fear of financial instability...

...the **pain of lost loved ones without Christ**...

...the sting of **broken relationships with deep wounds**...

...and **most painful and dangerous of all, OUR OWN SIN**...

And at times, it all piles up like a stack of cinder blocks on your chest, and it makes you the question: ***Is God really trustworthy?***

Now, you may not ask that question in those exact words.

But your attitudes and reactions and anxieties reveal a heart that is in fact attacking God with that question – *are You really trustworthy, God?*

Your lack of joy and growth reveal a heart that is doubting God's sovereignty and goodness and asking questions like:

Why should I obey you, God? Why should I worship you?

Why shouldn't I compromise? I mean this isn't really a sin...why can't do this or that...?

The Book of Daniel is going to meet us there and confront us with two primary things:

1. The trustworthiness of the sovereign God who is on the throne
2. The example of a man (Daniel) who entrusted himself to God, no matter the cost.

Also, here in the pages of Daniel, we will be gloriously pointed ahead to the promised Deliverer – Jesus Christ – *the SON OF MAN* – *remember that title.*

We will find detailed and specific prophecies about the Messiah, who is God's ultimate answer to the question of His trustworthiness!

In our next time together, we will get to know this godly man Daniel on a personal level and begin to learn from his character and convictions.

I pray the Lord will use this to transform our hearts into His purposes.

Beloved young adults, the true and living God is on the throne and He will reign for eternity – *will you bow the knee to Him now?*