

Daniel
The Book of Daniel
Daniel 1-12
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Well, that song that we just sang together, the “Ancient of Days,” has become one of my favorites for a couple of reasons: one, because it really summarizes what we’ve learned from the Book of Daniel; and secondly, because it is from the Book of Daniel that we find that name. It’s the only place in Scripture where it’s used, in Daniel chapter 7, where God is referred to as the Ancient of Days. On His throne ruling over all, that is a great way to introduce our overview, our flyover of the Book of Daniel. I must admit to you that when I decided to do this—I’ve done this with several other books, and I thought, you know, what can be so hard about teaching back through in one message everything we’ve studied? It was harder than I thought for the Book of Daniel, because there is a central theme but that central theme is developed in so many different ways. And I want us to see that together tonight. So buckle up. Here we go. A flyover of the Book of Daniel.

The Old Testament prophet Daniel, you remember, was carried away in the first stage of the deportation of Judah in 605 BC. He would’ve been about 15 years of age at the time. For 70 years then he lived in Babylon, a thoroughly pagan city under the authority of evil men and Gentile empires with seemingly limitless power. It was there that he wrote this book.

Now let me remind you of its structure. There are several different ways to look at Daniel. You can look at it according to emphasis. The first 6 chapters are historical narrative, and the final 6 chapters are prophecy. You can look at it according to how the thought sort of develops. In which case, chapter 1 is an introduction to the book; chapters 2-6, events in the lives of Daniel and his Hebrew friends in relation to what was unfolding in Babylon; and then chapters 7-12, Daniel’s visions of the great world empires.

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But another, more interesting way to look at this book is to look at it according to the languages that are used. The first Hebrew section begins in 1:1 and runs through chapter 2 and the middle of verse 4, and suddenly in that verse Daniel changes from Hebrew to Aramaic. So then you begin the Aramaic section in 2:4, running through the end of chapter 7. This is Yahweh's message and plan for the pagan nations. And then you have the second Hebrew section, Yahweh's message to and plan for Israel, that begins in chapter 8 and runs through chapter 12. Why Aramaic? Well, Babylon was multiracial, and it had a trade language. And that trade language was Aramaic. So Daniel, then, writes his book deliberately targeting two different audiences, the Jews on the one hand and the peoples of Babylon on the other.

Now the primary purpose of Daniel really can be found even in his name. Daniel's name means "God is judge." Or when we think of judge, we think of a court room. In Hebrew, the word "judge" implies one who rules. And so "God is ruler" is Daniel's name. There again is the theme of this great book. If I had to take the theme and incorporate it into a single sentence, it would be this: Yahweh is sovereign over the lives of individuals, the affairs of nations, the span of empires and all of human history. So it is down to the smallest detail of an individual life and across the sweep of the empires of all of human history and time. God is sovereign over all those things. One name that is used often for God in this book (some 9 times) is El Elyon, which means God Most High, or God Most Exalted, or we could say the Sovereign One. And again, you see how each of these is driving home this one central theme.

Chapters 1 through 6 are six historical narratives of the personal experiences of Daniel and his friends in Babylon. And Daniel didn't choose them accidentally. He chose those six incidents, recorded in the first 6 chapters, to drive home his theme but in unique ways, and I want to capture that. So with each chapter, each section we look at tonight (the first 9 chapters and then chapters 10-12), I want to give you a theme that sort of takes this major theme, God's

sovereignty over all things, and spells it out in some unique ways, which, I think, is Daniel's purpose. So let's look at it together.

Daniel chapter 1. The theme of this chapter is God is sovereign in the lives of His children and arranges the details of their lives for their good and for His own strategic, eternal purposes. The chapter begins, the book begins with a sort of sober reminder that God sovereignly fulfills His Word. Notice verse 1:1:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. [why? verse 2] The Lord gave [underscore those words] 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.

God is faithful and sovereign even in the execution of His judgment. That's how this book begins.

Verse 3, "Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, [notice this] including some of the royal family and of the nobles." Down to verse 6, "Among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah." This means Daniel and his three friends were nobility, perhaps even in the royal line. According to Josephus, Daniel and his three friends here were in fact members of King Zedekiah's family. But the focus of this paragraph isn't on Daniel and his friends. The focus is on God. You see, Nebuchadnezzar thought that he was in complete control of the destinies of God people, of these four young men. And that's exactly how it looked. But that was exactly wrong, because that wasn't the reality at all. God had a plan, and Nebuchadnezzar was merely contributing to that plan. And God "gave."

As this chapter continues to unfold, we're reminded that God sovereignly blesses the obedience of His children. Verse 8:

Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. [verse 9] Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials.

Notice again, "God granted." That's exactly the same Hebrew expression as in verse 2, "[God] gave." And here God gave Daniel *hesed*. He gave him steadfast love and compassion in the eyes of Ashpenaz. God sovereignly blesses the obedience of His children.

Thirdly, God sovereignly equips and places His children for His own eternal purposes. That's what really happens in the rest of this chapter. That's what's going on in chapter 1. Verse 17, "As for these four youths, God gave [here we are again] God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams." He sovereignly equipped them. And then after the three years of education, they were brought personally before Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 19, "The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service."

You see what's going on here? God is sovereignly at work in the details of these young men's lives. Daniel's captivity looked on the surface like the end of the world, but in fact it was God's plan. God's purpose in sending Daniel and his friends to Babylon was not for judgment, but for mercy to His people. Sinclair Ferguson writes, "We tend to see our trials as isolated nightmares. God, however, sees them from a different perspective. They are important and connected

punctuation marks in the biography of grace He is writing in our lives.” Do you believe that? Do you believe your life is no different than these young men? Listen, God can enable us to live lives of faithfulness to Him even when surrounded by pagan influences and propaganda like Daniel was. But in the end—understand this—God is sovereign in the lives of His children, arranging all of the details for their good and for His own strategic, eternal purposes.

That brings us to chapter 2, Daniel 2. The theme is, again, reflective of Daniel’s overall theme but more specific: God has a sovereign plan for human history. That plan is disclosed, you remember, in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in the first 13 verses.

Now just to remind you, beginning in chapter 2 in the middle of verse 4 and running to the end of chapter 7, Daniel stops writing in Hebrew and starts writing in Aramaic, the trade language of Babylon. Why? Because these chapters underscore the rise, the decline and fall of all the great empires of the ancient world. Because the focus of these chapters is on this cosmic plan of history, it makes perfect sense—doesn’t it?—that they’re written in Aramaic, the international trade language of diplomacy and commerce then (as English is today); so that God could make His purposes known to the people of the world, the people of the ancient Mediterranean world.

God disclosed His plan in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, but He made known what His plan really was only through divine revelation, through His prophet. He disclosed it to Nebuchadnezzar, but no one would have ever understood its significance or its meaning unless God had revealed it to His prophet. And so we see God’s plan explained for our benefit, and that really is the bulk of the second part of this chapter.

To this point in the chapter, to 2:31, Daniel has told us that the king had a dream and demanded that the wise men tell him the dream and its meaning. Now we learn, beginning in verse 31, the content of the dream. Verse 31, “You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you,

and its appearance was awesome.” It was enormous. If the image that Nebuchadnezzar builds in chapter 3 was a replica intended to duplicate this one, which is likely, then it may have been 90 feet tall, the equivalent of a nine-story building.

Verse 36 says, “This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king.” And you’ll remember, this image in the dream describes four successive world empires dominating the Mediterranean world and ultimately replaced by a divine kingdom. You remember there’s the statue, and then there’s this stone cut out of the mountain without hands that comes and crushes the kingdoms of men to powder and grows into a great mountain representing the ultimate Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Christ Himself. Now, you’ll remember that—and I’m not going to go through all of this—but you’ll remember that the image of Nebuchadnezzar consisted of these successive empires. The head of gold was the Neo-Babylonian Empire; the chest of arms were silver, representing the Medo-Persian Empire; the belly and thighs were bronze, representing the Greek Empire; the legs and feet were of iron, the Roman Empire; and then the toes were iron and clay mixed, a revived Roman Empire of some sort that’s still yet in the future.

Now these were the earthly kingdoms represented in that statue, but then comes a fifth kingdom in verses 44 and 45, a divine kingdom. Notice, it’s established by God through His Son at the Second Coming. Verse 44 says, “In the days of those kings [the kings at the end of this revived Roman Empire] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed.” Notice, it will be eternal. “That kingdom will not be left for another people,” Verse 44 goes on to say this kingdom will be totally victorious. “It will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, [and yet it itself will] endure forever.”

This is a great chapter, but I want you to get the large point. There’s so much detail, I think sometimes we can get lost in it. Don’t miss the big points in Daniel chapter 2. The sovereign God of history has a plan that He is working out relentlessly, irresistibly, certainly in human

history. The kingdoms of this world are temporary. Only God's kingdom lasts forever. And all of human history—including, folks, what you are reading on your news source today—all of human history is building toward one great climax: the crushing of the kingdoms of men and the building of the kingdom of God. It will certainly come. That's the message of Daniel chapter 2.

That brings us to Daniel 3. The theme of this chapter is God is sovereign over the state-sponsored persecution of His people. Here we get into the reality that while God is sovereign over all of history, He has not promised to protect His people from all danger or harm—even from death. God is sovereign even when it comes to government-sponsored persecution of His people. I think we all understand that that can come in any culture. It can come in our culture at some point, and we can live, to some extent, in fear of that and dread of that. Daniel says you don't have to, because God is sovereign even over that.

He starts out by reminding us of the relentless reality of government persecution. In the first 15 verses you see it unfold. You remember, Nebuchadnezzar got the idea for building a statue from his dream back in chapter 2. The one in the vision was made of five different metals. I just showed it to you. But Nebuchadnezzar's, he builds his statue, his image, of what? Entirely of gold. Not solid gold. It was likely like many of the things then. It was probably built with a structure of wood and then hammered gold was placed over it. But his was entirely gold. Why? Why not all of those metals? He was making a statement, a very strong statement. He was saying Babylon would endure, and no other kingdoms would follow it; it's not the head of gold that Babylon is, it's the entire thing. Human history, he said, will be dominated by Babylon. This image was in defiance of what Yahweh had told him in his dream: that his kingdom would come to an end and another would follow it.

For the dedication of his image, you remember, Nebuchadnezzar required all of the important officials of the empire to be present and to bow down before it as an act of worship, sort of of the empire and of Babylon's gods. Refusing to do so came with a horrible penalty. Verse 6, "But

whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.”

And then the orchestra strikes up. Some great instruments, I wish we had time to look at them. But when the orchestra began to play, hundreds of the most important people in the Empire of Babylon did exactly what they had been commanded to do. They fell down and worshiped the image of gold as Nebuchadnezzar had commanded. Hundreds of the most powerful people in the nation, in the empire. Except for three, three young Jewish men who continued to stand. And their refusal to bow and worship was quickly pointed out to Nebuchadnezzar by jealous members of his own government. Which, again, is all too common.

That brings us to the believer’s response to government persecution. How do you respond? Look at verses 16-18. I love this. Verse 16 says be completely unintimidated by human authorities. They say, “We do not need to give you an answer [regarding] this matter.” They spoke graciously but directly and boldly, unintimidated. Secondly, be completely confident in God’s power regardless of the danger. Verse 17, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, and [whatever He chooses] He will deliver us [in one way or another] out of your hand, O king.” This is how we face government persecution. We are confident in God’s power to rescue us from whatever they choose to bring. Thirdly, be completely submissive to God’s will regardless of His choice. Verse 18, “But even if He does not.” We believe He’s able. We’re confident that He can, but He may not chose to do so. And you know what? That’s OK with us. We’re submissive to His will in this. And then finally, be completely committed to God regardless of the consequences. Verse 18 goes on to say, “But even if He does not [save us from the fire], let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image [which] you have set up.” Folks, this is a blueprint for responding to government persecution. And I pray that it doesn’t come more strongly in our day, but it may. And this tells us how to respond.

Thirdly, you see God's complete power over government persecution, verses 19 and following. This section begins with a severe example of government's cruel treatment of God's people. Verse 19, "He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated." Now remember, this is a smelting furnace. It was there to melt the gold to hammer onto this image. A smelting furnace like this one could generate temperatures as high as 1,984 degrees Fahrenheit, the temperature at which gold melts. Nebuchadnezzar demanded this one be heated to its maximum capacity. Once the fuel was added, once the young men were tied up, they (notice verse 21)

were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

You need to realize that Satan hates God, and he hates God's people. And he energizes those who are his children, the people of the world. He energizes many of them to attack and hate His people as well. And that's what you see unfolding here.

But the good news is God is greater. His protection is greater. Verse 25, you remember they're thrown in, and Nebuchadnezzar said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" We considered this. Likely what's he's saying from his own pagan mindset here is that this fourth person is a supernatural being of some kind. I believe—and when I taught through this passage I gave you some arguments for why I believe—this is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ with His people in the fire, preserving, protecting.

Verses 26 and 27, they're brought out of the fire, they're inspected, and they learn that God miraculously preserved them in every way. I mean, think about it. You sit around a campfire for

five minutes and your clothes smell like smoke. These guys had been in the furnace, and there wasn't even a smell of smoke, not a singed hair. God miraculously preserved them. This story reminds us that God is sovereign over kings and over governments, even in their persecution of His children.

God has specific purposes in and uses governmental persecution to His ends. Notice verse 28:

Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants... Therefore I make a decree [notice this] that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego...”

And he goes on to pronounce the penalty. What is God doing? How is He using this circumstance? Well, God was doing more here than ensuring the future prosperity of these four people, these three young men who were cast in the fire and Daniel, who wasn't there apparently on this occasion. The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Nation of Israel was still 15 years in the future when this incident unfolds. Hasn't happened yet. They're still in their land. But the day was coming when Nebuchadnezzar would go, and they would be destroyed, and he would bring the people of God back to Babylon. God would use these events that are unfolding here for the protection and prosperity of His people when they arrived in Babylon. God was at work behind the scenes using even government persecution to accomplish His eternal purposes for His people. Do you believe that? Do you believe that if persecution comes from our government in your lifetime that that will not be out of God's control but rather a perfect part of His plan to accomplish His own strategic and eternal purposes?

That brings us to chapter 4, the theme of chapter 4. Again, continuing to look at different nuances of the overall theme of Daniel (God's sovereignty over human history), here we learn that God is completely sovereign over every throne and every human ruler. And this is clear

because there's a phrase that's repeated throughout this chapter—in verse 17, verse 25, verse 32. “Until you recognize that [El Elyon] the Most High [God, the Sovereign One] is ruler over the realm of mankind and [He] bestows it on whomever He wishes.” Did you notice those two expressions? He's sovereign over the “realm of mankind.” And He is sovereign over every human ruler: He “bestows” that rule on the one He chooses.

Thirty years have passed since the fiery furnace in chapter 3, and then we have the incidents described in chapter 4. This is a fascinating chapter. It's the only chapter in Scripture written by a man who was once a pagan king, and it is the only Old Testament passage written by a Gentile. The account, as Nebuchadnezzar unfolds it, comes in a series of scenes. It begins with a surprising introduction. Notice Daniel 4:1:

Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of very language that live on all the earth: “May your peace abound! It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me [literally “with me”].

“How great are His signs
And how mighty are His wonders!
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom
And His dominion is from generation to generation.”

It's really a shocking beginning if you think about it. We know this man from history. And God humbled him, brought him to his knees. And he writes a chapter in our Bibles. He goes on to recount a troubling dream in verses 4-18, and then that dream is revealed to him in a shocking prophecy. That dream was actually God telling him of what was going to happen in his own life. Go down to verse 20. Here Daniel explains. He tells us what the dream is, but he also then explains it. Verse 20:

“The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged [think Sequoia, that’s what we’re kind of talking about here]—it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth [that is, to the end of the inhabited Mediterranean world].”

The tree represented Nebuchadnezzar and his vast Babylonian empire. But there was a decree made regarding him, verse 25. The decree is “that you [will] be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place [will] be with the beasts of the field, and [you’ll] be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven.” Nebuchadnezzar would come to believe he was an animal. This is a psychological condition called Lycanthropy, in which a person thinks that he’s a particular kind of animal and begins to behave as though he is. It’s still observable today. You can read accounts of it. This would last, verse 25 says, until “seven periods of time... pass over you.” His insanity was to last for seven years. Now just think for a moment what you were doing seven years ago in 2013. That’s how long Nebuchadnezzar would live in his insanity. But something had to happen (verse 25) that would occur before he was brought back to sanity: “Until you recognize that the Most High [that El Elyon, the Sovereign One] is ruler over the realm of mankind and [He] bestows it on whomever He wishes.”

Well, that was the prophecy, and it didn’t change. It was an unchanging sentence. Verse 29 says,

Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king reflected and said, “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power for the glory of my majesty?”

And Babylon was something. I showed you pictures and re-creations of what Babylon the great was like. It was a magnificent city. One of the greatest cities in human history. But he was caught up in his own pride. Scripture goes on to say, “While the word was in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you.’” And then you know the story as it unfolds. All that had been prophesied comes to pass, and for seven years he lives like an ox among the domesticated cattle. And then he looked up, he looked up and his sanity was returned to him, and he recognized the One who reigns over all.

What are the lasting lessons of this chapter? I love this section. And I’m going to give it to you, because I want you to think about it. I want you to go back and reflect on what Nebuchadnezzar says he learned from this experience. They are lessons we all need to learn. First of all, God’s greatness is worthy of worship. Verse 34, he worships God. Secondly, God’s sovereignty is unending. Notice verse 34: “His dominion is an everlasting dominion... His kingdom endures from generation to generation.” God never stops being in charge. You and I will pass from this earth if the Lord delays His coming, and a new generation will come, generation—whatever follows Z. But God will still be on His throne. God’s power is unstoppable: verse 35 says, “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing.” Listen, if every human being on this planet joined forces to assault the throne of God, it would do nothing more to God than a single drop of water to the great Rock of Gibraltar. Unmoved, His power is unstoppable. God’s plans are unchangeable: verse 35 goes on to say, “He does according to His will in the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth.” His wisdom is unquestionable: verse 35 says, “Or can you say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” God’s mercy and His grace are unfathomable: verse 36 says, “At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out.” God’s salvation is sovereign: verse 37, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of Heaven.” I believe we’ll meet this man in heaven.

God's works are true, God's ways are just, and God's goal is humility. Here is the ultimate moral of this story. When the sovereignty of humanity's greatest king meets the sovereignty of God Most High, when they collide, verse 37 happens. "[God] is able to humble those who walk in pride." Whenever God chooses, He is able to humble rulers and remove them from power. But I love this. Even more amazing, He can redeem the most powerful and the most evil and the most proud and make them testimonies of His grace, trophies of grace. That's what He did with Nebuchadnezzar.

That brings us to Daniel 5. The theme of Daniel 5 is God is completely sovereign over the rise and fall of the empires or kingdoms of men. We've seen so far God's rule over individual lives. We've seen His rule over the overarching plan of history. We've seen His rule over government persecution. We've seen His rule over individual kings and rulers. Here we go to empires. This chapter begins with the defiance of Yahweh, and it teaches us that no government, no matter how defiant, is beyond God's sovereignty. Verse 1, "Belshazzar the king." This is the son of Nabonidus, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.

Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles... he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem.

This was no ordinary day. This was a red-letter date in human history. The date was October 12, 539 BC. And on the night of this feast, Nabonidus the king of Babylon had fled. His son Belshazzar and his forces had withdrawn within the great city of Babylon, and the city was under siege by the Medes and the Persians under the lead of Cyrus.

He has a great feast, and he asks for the one particular set of goblets to be brought to the feast for them to drink from. [It] happens to be the goblets from the temple in Jerusalem. Why? Why, of all the nations Babylon had conquered, did he choose the vessels of Israel that night? Because in the third year of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel had prophesied that Babylon would fall to the Persians. Belshazzar had undoubtedly heard that prophecy, and he ordered the goblets from the temple of Yahweh to be brought as a deliberate act of defiance. It was his way to say, "Listen, the gods of Babylon are stronger. They will protect us. We'll drink wine from this petty deity, whom the nation of Babylon has captured, captured its people."

That brings us to the writing on the wall. And this section teaches us that no empire, no matter how powerful or protected, is beyond God's reach. At the height of Belshazzar's drunkenness, his immorality and his blasphemy, verse 5 says, "Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace." Now, I wish I had time to describe the defenses of the City of Babylon. That's what makes this so shocking, because it was a city that appeared to be completely impregnable, unassailable. And that's why they're feasting: celebrating there's no way we can be taken, there's no way we can be attacked. And in the middle of the throne room, a hand shows up and begins writing. It goes on to say,

The king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. Then the king's face grew pale... his thoughts alarmed him... his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.

He was not untouchable like he thought he was.

That brings us to the words of the prophet. No ruler, no matter how wicked, is beyond God's verdict. Daniel, you remember, is eventually—after they've tried to find somebody that can interpret it among the wise men of Babylon, Daniel's eventually brought before the king. And he

began by recounting Nebuchadnezzar's story from chapter 4. And then he confronts Belshazzar's sin in verses 22-24. Notice the charges against Belshazzar. They were, willful disobedience. Verse 22, "You, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew" everything that happened to your grandfather. Secondly, deliberate defiance of the true God. Verse 23, "You have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and [you] brought the vessels of His house." Thirdly, arrogant disrespect of God. Notice again verse 23: "But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and... your ways, you have not glorified." God says you have disobeyed Me, you have defied Me, you have disrespected Me. And then comes God's verdict. Verse 26:

"This is the interpretation of the message: [Daniel says] 'MENĒ'—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 'TEKĒL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 'PERĒS'—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and [the] Persians."

That brings us to the end of chapter 5 and the revolution of history. No empire, no matter how improbable, rises or falls apart from God's decree. Notice verse 30: "That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain." With that one brief sentence Daniel documents one of history's greatest events: the fall of the Babylonian Empire and the rise of Medo-Persia. Think about this. On a day, a single day, when the world turned upside down, when the world's greatest city was under siege, when the world's most powerful political figure was executed, when one world empire crumbled and another rose from the dust, even on a day like that, our great, sovereign God was on His throne in complete control. That's the message of chapter 5. God is completely sovereign over the rise and fall of the kingdoms of men.

That brings us to Daniel 6. The theme of Daniel 6 is God is sovereign over the persecution of His people, even when it comes through the malicious use of unjust laws. You remember back in chapter 3, how did the persecution come against God's people? It came through the sort of

capricious decision of an evil ruler. Here it comes from the calculating, deceptive use of governmental law. I think if persecution comes in our day, this is more likely the tack that it will take. Daniel begins by documenting two common causes of judicial persecution of God's people. There are a lot of other reasons for persecution, but here are two extremely common ones: jealousy over the success of God's people, and resentment over the integrity of God's people. They simply can't stand what we stand for. As a result of that, there will often be the malicious use of judicial persecution. In this case, in verses 6-9, the two other commissioners who served alongside Daniel and several of the satraps proposed a law that was aimed solely at Daniel.

Now think about that. Here is a law that has one intent and purpose, and that is to bring persecution to God's man, or we could say to God's people. For 30 days, Darius was to be the sole priest and mediator between the people and the gods. Now, if you're wondering what is this about? Understand that politics is politics. It's probably just like today. It's likely this was sold as a test of loyalty to the new regime. You know, Darius is the new king, we want to show our loyalty, so for the next 30 days this is how it's going to work. Those who broke the law would face the gruesome fate of being cast alive into the den of hungry lions. Understand what's going on here, folks. This was the intentionally malicious use of the legal process to attack God's people.

How do you respond to judicial persecution? How should the believer respond? Daniel is a perfect model. Look at verse 10: "Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." Folks, when government laws demand what God forbids or forbid what God demands, we are required to respectfully, graciously disobey the government and its laws in order to obey God, and then patiently suffer the consequences just as Daniel did. The good news is, God has unlimited power over judicial persecution.

I love the way Daniel 6 is written. I mean, think about this for a moment. God the Holy Spirit didn't allow us to spend the night with Daniel in the lion's den. I mean, let's be honest. Wouldn't you like to read that? It's like, what happened, and what did you think, and what did they do, and did you sleep? And on and on it goes. None of that. Instead, what we learn is about the king's difficult night. The king? How difficult could it be? He's not in the lion's den. I think the reason this is done is to show us that Darius was completely helpless to deliver Daniel. Dale Ralph Davis writes this: "You may have rulers or others in high places who are well-disposed toward you; but don't rest in them as your trump card [pardon the pun], for even they for all their apparent power can prove as helpless as Sampson without hair." You know, I wish Christians could learn this lesson. How often do we put our trust in some political figure who's going to be the deliverer. Jonah had it right when he writes in Jonah 2:9, "Salvation is from the Lord."

And God vindicates His people. He vindicates Daniel. Since the king couldn't sleep, as soon as it was dawn,

at the [very] break of day, [he] went in haste to the lion's den. [verse 20] When he had come near [to] the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?" [verse 22] "My God [by the way, in the Aramaic of this text it's intentionally emphatic: *My God*] sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me."

This likely was the Angel of the Lord, that Old Testament manifestation of the second person of the Trinity, the same one, I believe, who'd walked in the fiery furnace some 50 years before with Daniel's three friends.

God vindicated his servant, and He also vindicates His name. Darius was so awestruck by the miracle that he has just witnessed that he issues a decree. (Well, they're always making decrees.) Verse 26, "I [made] a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel." Why? Because He's real. Verse 26, "He is the living God." Because He's eternal. "He... [endures] forever." Because He's the sovereign Lord. "His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever." And verse 27, because He's the Savior of His people. "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

Now that brings us to the second half of this letter. And don't worry, I'm not going to take as long with the second half. Chapters 7 through 12 introduce us to a new part of this prophecy. Chapters 1 through 6 are historical narratives; chapters 7 through 12 are prophetic visions. Chapters 1 through 6 provide historic evidence that God's people will endure; chapters 7 through 12 provide prophetic promise that they will endure. So let's look, then, at these chapters.

Daniel 7. The theme of Daniel 7 is that God provides here His prospective of human history and its empires. Understand that both chapter 2, the image of Nebuchadnezzar, and chapter 7 both describe the same thing. They both describe four successive empires that will dominate the history of the world. So why two different vantage points? Why is one an image of a man with all these precious metals, and why is this one in chapter 7 a bunch of beasts? Because Daniel 2 shows us man's view of human history and its empires. It's a man, a magnificent image of a man with precious metals glistening in the sunlight. Chapter 7 shows us God's view of the empires of man, and they are destructive beasts. So he begins then with this vision of the four beasts. Again, they represent the four great empires or kingdoms that we saw in the image. The first beast is Babylon; the second beast, Medo-Persia; the third beast is Greece; and the fourth beast is Rome.

After that renewed image showing us God's perspective of the kingdoms of men, we meet, in verses 9-12, the Ancient of Days. With verse 9, you have to think about what's happening. You

see what's happening on the earth, and then in verse 9 the scene switches to heaven. And there, slowly, methodically, unmoved, the Ancient of Days takes His seat with great majesty, surrounded by more than a hundred million angels. They open the books, and they examine the record of the fourth beast and its final, wicked ruler, a man who we'll meet again, Antichrist, the little horn. And they discover that he deserves death, and the sentence is passed. The beast is slain, and the entire empire and its king are destroyed together. Just like that. Gone.

Another person suddenly arrives in the throne room and that is the Son of Man in verses 13-14. Notice:

“I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds with of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom.”

Here is the divine Messiah. Our Lord Jesus claimed this text prophesied about Him. And He will receive [the] eternal kingdom and universal sovereignty. Notice, it's universal. All nations, all peoples, every language group on earth will worship Him. Verse 14, “His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.” Jesus' right to rule will never end, and His kingdom is forever. What you need to see in the middle of the Book of Daniel and at the epicenter of human history is this One like the Son of Man, the divine Messiah, who Jesus said was Himself. This is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, on the heels of that comes the interpretation of the vision of the beasts, and he describes these four empires that we've look at already. After they have exited the stage of history, a fifth

kingdom will be established. Notice verse 18: “But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, [and] for all ages to come.” What is this kingdom? It’s the kingdom of God we saw back in chapter 2. Who is the king of this kingdom? It’s the Son of Man. Verse 14, He “was given... a kingdom.” Who receives this kingdom? “The saints of the Highest One.” That’s us. How long will it last? Verse 18, they will “possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.”

But then he kicks back, back into human history, and talks again about this fourth beast, ancient Rome, which also has a future restored version, or future restored Roman Empire. And there is a king that will rule over that restored Roman Empire in the future. He’s called the little horn in verses 24-26. He’s connected to the old Roman Empire. We’re told he will start small but grow to subdue three of ten nations and lead the other nations, the other seven. He will gain control over the entire empire and eventually the entire earth. This man is in the future, because the empire he controls, we’re told, will be destroyed when Christ returns at the Second Coming. This little horn is the most famous person in history next to our Lord. He is the Antichrist, a powerful, political world ruler who will come during the coming Great Tribulation. Verse 25 says, “And they [that is, God’s people] will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.” God will give His people into Antichrist’s hand to be persecuted for three-and-a-half years. But at the end of that, verse 26, “The court will sit for judgment... his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.” Then comes our Lord’s kingdom. Verse 27, “Then the sovereignty, the dominion... the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One.” The kingdom of God ruled by our Lord Jesus Christ forever.

That brings us to Daniel chapter 8. The theme of Daniel 8 is that God warns His people here about a particular coming period of intense persecution and promises their ultimate survival. Now there is a change with chapter 8. Again, this is when the Aramaic section ends and Daniel begins to write again in Hebrew. Why? Because it’s to God’s people, comforting them,

promising their ultimate survival. Chapter 8 begins with the vision of the ram, the goat and the little horn. And then comes the interpretation of that. What are these figures? Well, let me just give you, briefly, the interpretation. We're told in verse 20 that the ram is Cyrus and the empire of Medo-Persia. The shaggy goat is Alexander the Great and the empire of Greece. And then the little horn is one ruler of the Seleucid Empire, who ruled about 400 years after Daniel, a man called Antiochus Epiphanes. He had one primary agenda: to force the Jews to become Greek in their thinking, behavior and religion. And the reason so much space is given to this man, as we learn, is because he's like the type of Antichrist. You want to know what Antichrist will be like? Just study Antiochus Epiphanes. It's almost like Antichrist copies him. You know, Satan does nothing original, and so he just brings back the same thing in a worse form at the end.

So why would God tell us this? Why all that history? We didn't go through it all, but why the history? Well, it's to remind us that God allows evil and evil men to prosper for His own purposes. God sometimes allows His people to suffer at the hand of evil rulers for His own purposes. God is sovereign over the most powerful and evil rulers. He has determined their days. He will destroy them in history and punish them forever. And don't forget this: God's character is on display even during those worst of times, the worst of rulers. God is still omniscient. He knew all these things before they occurred. He's still sovereign. He appointed these things for His own purposes. And He is loving and gracious. He limited the time of this evil man's persecution of His people and warned them beforehand to prepare them. Don't forget who God is. Yes, God has allowed evil on this world, and we're told it's only going to get worse. Don't be surprised, and don't live in fear. God is on His throne.

That brings us to Daniel chapter 9. The theme of Daniel 9 is that God reveals a sweeping, prophetic timeline of Israel's history, from Daniel to the end of the age. It starts in the first 19 verses of chapter 9 with a prayer, a prayer by Daniel for the end of Israel's captivity. And in response to that, God gives him a vision of the rest of Israel's history. It's the Vision of the Seventy Weeks, and it encapsulates God's future plans for Israel. These 70 weeks are literal,

seven-year periods of time totaling (70 times 7) 490 years. The prophecy describes four periods of time. The first is 69 weeks, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah comes. Notice verse 25: “Until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.” That’s 69 weeks. And I’m not going to get into why he breaks that period into two. We did that when we studied it. But don’t miss the big picture. The 69 weeks began with a decree to rebuild Jerusalem and ends with the ministry of the Messiah. Here’s what’s amazing. When you do the math—we did it together, go back and listen—Jesus of Nazareth was born at exactly the right time to perfectly fulfill this biblical prophecy about when Messiah would come. The 483 years ends during the ministry of Jesus Christ. What else do you need? I mean, how many ways can God prove to us that Jesus was the promised Messiah?

The second period of time is after the 69 weeks. We’re told two things will happen after that. Messiah will be killed, verse 26, and Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed. The third period of time is from the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD (as we now know) until the end. And verse 26 says, “Even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.” And then finally, this last period is Daniel’s Seventieth Week. It will be seven literal years in the future. After the 483 years, at some point during the ministry of Jesus, Israel’s prophetic clock stopped ticking. Shortly after their rejection of the Messiah, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, the Jews scattered. But there is a seventieth week yet in Israel’s future, a seven-year period in the future when the events of verse 27, the seventieth week, will unfold.

Now again, I wish I had time to take this text apart. I don’t. But let me just remind you of the major lessons we learned. This passage clearly teaches that Messiah would come 483 years after the decree to rebuild the city. That falls during the time of our Lord’s ministry. This prophecy says Messiah would be cut off or killed. This prophecy says since He will eventually return, as is recorded here, that means Messiah had to be raised to life again. He was cut off, and yet He lives. The City of Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed yet another time. And at the end of the age an evil ruler will arise who will persecute God’s people. The Messiah will return and

destroy that ruler, establish His own kingdom. And during the time these 70 weeks unfold, God will accomplish all those six magnificent goals outlined in verse 24. Folks, God has a plan for His people. You know what we saw in Romans 11, God isn't done with Israel yet.

That brings us to the last section of Daniel's prophecy we've been looking at over the last few weeks. Daniel 10:1 and running through 12:13. The theme of this section is that God has a detailed plan for Israel through the rest of human history. It overlaps, if you will, with chapter 9, but it goes a different direction. This prophecy, this final vision runs through this whole section, and it extends from the time of Daniel to the future kingdom of God. The introduction to the final vision comes in chapter 10, but then the content of Daniel's final vision unfolds beginning in 11:2 through the end of the book. There're prophecies regarding Persia; regarding Greece and how Greece interacts with the people of Israel during that fight, that tug of war (we studied) over the land of Israel; prophecies in the future regarding Antichrist.

Verse 36 catapults us into the future, that little horn. And we meet history's last world ruler. The most evil, godless tyrant who's ever lived will become the last and greatest world ruler. It's possible he will rise to power before the Rapture. But at the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation, we're told in this passage he will enter into a treaty with Israel. Three-and-a-half years later, at the midpoint of the Tribulation, he will break that treaty; he will desecrate the temple in Jerusalem by setting up an image of himself as the object of worship. Daniel and our Lord call this the "abomination of desolation," an event prefigured by what Antiochus Epiphanes did when desecrated the temple in his time setting up a statue of Zeus to be worshiped. Then Antichrist will break that treaty with Israel. He will implement a policy of massive persecution against the Jewish people and those who become Christians after the Rapture. And that will lead to history's last world war. Verses 40-45 of chapter 11, when he's at the very top of his power, when he's defeated the great armies of the east and of the north, when he's destroyed Israel, when it seems like he has defeated all of his enemies, he will come to a sudden end. How does that happen? Second Thessalonians 2:8, "The Lord will slay [him] with the breath of His mouth

and bring [him] to an end by the appearance of His coming.” The Book of Revelation, in chapter 19, tells us the Lord will defeat Antichrist and his armies at the Battle of Armageddon in the Valley of Megiddo in Israel. And the Lord will defeat him with a sword which comes out of His mouth. In other words, with His Word. Our Lord will simply speak, and the greatest and most evil world ruler who’s ever existed will disappear from human history.

The prophecies regarding the Great Tribulation are in chapter 12. I’m not going to belabor this, because we’ve just looked at it. But this refers not to the entire seven years of the future Tribulation, but to the final three-and-a-half years. It will be a time of unprecedented distress. Verse 1 says, “There will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time.” There’ll be spiritual deliverance of the living. There’ll be physical resurrection of the dead. But how long does that period last, that period of intense distress? Verse 6:

“How long will it be [the angel asked the Lord] until the end of these wonders?”
[verse 7] I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river [this is, again, a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ], as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would [only last three-and-a-half years].

And then He goes on to give a couple more dates. I looked at these last time, but just to remind you. He gives the figure of (here at the bottom) of 1,290 days from the midpoint of the Tribulation. That includes the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation, the Great Tribulation. It also adds 30 days. Likely, during that 30 days is the judgment of the nations mentioned in Matthew 25. And then finally, in verse 12 he says, “How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days!” Those extra 45 days may be the time frame in which Christ establishes His millennial government. That’s, if you will, His transition time to power. And at

the end of that (as one author suggests) will be the inauguration of Jesus Christ as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who will reign on this planet unopposed for a thousand years.

Now, when you think about Daniel, can I urge you to think about it this way? You aren't driving the bus. Do you see that? You are not the driver of the bus. And you know what? God is. And let me tell you that when you're seated back there somewhere on the bus, and God makes a turn, it's not uncommon for us to go, "Why did He make that turn? Where's He going?" Listen folks, God has a destination in mind. We just studied it in Daniel. And God has a route that He's decided to get to that destination. He knows what He's doing. He has a place He's going, and He has a plan to get there. So you're on the bus; you're not the driver. So you have one of two choices. You can sit on the bus gripping the seat in front of you with white knuckles worried at every turn about what's going to happen to you and to your life and to our nation and to the world, or you can sit back and enjoy the ride. It's your choice. But you're going to get to the same destination on the same route regardless of which choice you make. God is sovereign. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this opportunity just to fly over at 30,000 feet the truth that we've discovered together over the last couple of years. Lord, we thank You for this magnificent book. We thank You for who You are, that You have a plan, a plan that will culminate in the return of our Lord, in the establishment of His glorious kingdom. Lord, thank You that You win. Help us to trust You. O God, forgive us for acting like You don't know where You're going, that You don't have a plan. Lord, help us to loosen our grip on the seat in front of us and to enjoy the ride, because we will end in Your presence forever. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.