The Prophetic Book of Daniel: Setting and Introduction

Daniel 1:1-2

 Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the Old Testament book of Daniel. You will find Daniel after the major Prophets of Isaiah and Jeremiah. We have just completed an 8-month study of the Epistle of James. Our next focus is going to be to study the book of Daniel together as a church family. We are beginning our study of this book for two reasons: 1. The book of Daniel serves as the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament book of Revelation. God used the life of Daniel to encourage and guide His people as they were spending time on exile in Babylon. The first reason we are studying this book is so that we may encourage and guide each other as we patiently wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2. The second reason we are studying Daniel is because we will see in the experiences of his life how God can use His people to be His messengers and live in a way that will honor Him in the modern-day culture. Daniel was forced to move to a new country, give up everything he knew from his former life in Jerusalem, and use the gifts God had given him to lead the people during their exile. You and I will greatly benefit from the experiences of Daniel as well as learn how we can patiently endure hardships as we wait for the return of Jesus. With our time together today we will be introducing the book and becoming familiar with the setting and the major theme of the book, which is to prepare the reader for what will happen in the last days. This will help us to better understand the historical context and how the situation Daniel was in played a role in his work as a prophet to the people of Israel as well as a representative of God to both the Babylonian and Medo-Persian Empires.

 Let us read together Daniel 1 verses 1 and 2: **“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord handed Jehoiakim king of Judah over to him, 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.”**

Using the first two verses of the book we have provided some information that gives us the setting for the rest of the book. The first piece of information we have provided is that all of this began in the “third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.” This is important for us to know because this tells us about the situation Israel was in at the time of Daniel. At this time Israel was split into two kingdoms, the north and the south. The northern kingdom was known as Israel and the southern kingdom was known as Judah. The nation of Israel split up during the reign of Solomon’s Son Rehoboam who became king after the death of Solomon. Rehoboam had difficulty with collecting taxes from his subjects and after a disagreement arose over taxation the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms. The reason the southern kingdom was called Judah was because the tribe of Judah was the tribe primarily living in that region. Rehoboam became the King of Judah and then another line of kings took control of Israel. The books of 1 and 2 Kings outline the kings who ruled each of the kingdoms after that time. So, what we find out is that Jehoiakim was the king of the southern kingdom of Judah and that is the part of the nation that was invaded by Babylon.

The next piece of information we are given is that the King of Babylon at that time was Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon was a neighbor to the east of Judah and would today be found where Iraq is located. This invasion took place in 605 B.C. and resulted in the capture of the city as well as the king and his family. Another attack took place in 589 B.C. in which the city of Jerusalem was surrounded and under siege by Babylon. Daniel and his friends had already been taken to Babylon by this time, but now Nebuchadnezzar had returned to take the rest of the people and plunder back with him to Babylon. The King of Judah at that time was Zedekiah. This siege was one of the most brutal situations to ever take place in the history of Israel as a people. In 2 Kings chapter 25 we have an account of what took place during this siege **“Now in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it, and built a siege wall all around it. So, the city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land” (2 Kings 25:1-4).** If we look carefully at the dates provided for the siege, we see that it lasted for over a year. During the siege nothing was allowed in the city nor was anyone allowed to leave. It was basically a blockade, to use a navy term. In the 4th chapter of Lamentations Jeremiah records in a song the horrible conditions the people faced during the siege: **“The tongue of the infant clings To the roof of its mouth because of thirst; The children ask for bread, But no one breaks it for them. Those who used to eat delicacies Are made to tremble in the streets; Those who were raised in crimson clothing Embrace garbage heaps. The hands of compassionate women Boiled their own children; They became food for them Due to the destruction of the daughter of my people” (Lam. 4:4-5, 10).** This account tells us that it was so bad that the people were forced into cannibalism.

Now the next issue we need to address is why did Nebuchadnezzar attack Jerusalem in the first place? To answer this question, we need to take a trip far back in Scripture to the book of Deuteronomy. When Moses was giving his final instructions to the nation of Israel, he warned them what would happen if they neglected to be obedient to the Lord. **“When you father children and have grandchildren, and you grow old in the land, and you act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today, that you will certainly perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to take possession of it. You will not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of human hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear, nor eat nor smell anything. But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things happen to you, in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice. For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; He will not abandon you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them” (Deut. 4:25-31).** What Moses warned the people about was worshipping idols and forgetting about the Lord, which they eventually would do and then they did in the days of Jeremiah the prophet. God judged the nation for forsaking His laws and bowing down to other gods that were made of wood and stone. The Babylonians invaded and sieged Jerusalem because it was God’s judgment against Judah for their disobedience. They continually disobeyed even after God sent them numerous prophets to warn them of the coming judgment. The last prophet to come to warn the people was Jeremiah, who warned the people about the coming judgment. Rather than listen to him the kings and the people listened to self-proclaimed prophets who told the king and people what they wanted to hear, so the people rejected Jeremiah and listened to the false prophets because they liked their messages better.

Therefore, Babylon led by King Nebuchadnezzar sieged Jerusalem and then after the siege ended took a portion of the nobles and people back with him to Babylon. The second verse of Daniel chapter 1 records that not only did the king take people with him, but he also took the holy vessels from the temple and added them to the holy vessels which would be used to worship the false god of Babylon. As we will see later in the account of Daniel this will turn out to be a very costly error on the part of the king of Babylon. This will lead to the downfall of the Babylonian kingdom and will bring in the Medo-Persian Empire later in Daniel’s life.

Now that we have set the stage for what is happening at the beginning of the book of Daniel, let us share some ways that this book will prepare us for the days ahead of us in this age. Like I said at the beginning of this message, we are studying Daniel because it provides us information regarding the end of the world that all Christians need to know so that they will be prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ. We are taught in the pages of Scripture that followers of Christ should always be looking forward to the return of Jesus Christ. This was what Jesus Himself taught as well as the Apostles Peter and Paul. Let us take a few moments to learn what they believed and taught regarding the second coming of Christ. In chapter 24 of the gospel of Matthew Jesus is answering a question posed by His disciples asking what signs will show His second coming. Jesus said that there will many false prophets who will come claiming to be Him in an effort to mislead many, there will be wars and rumors of wars all over the globe, there will be natural disasters such as earthquakes everywhere, many people will fall away from the faith and betray each other. However, He also encouraged them saying that the one who endures through all of this will be saved. (Matt. 24:4-13). What we discussed last week is very true. Even though it seems like the world around us is falling apart and that the hearts of people are getting so cold we do not need to fear. The Lord God is still in control and He will reward those who stay faithful through the trials that show of His return.

Not only are the Children of God encouraged to endure, but Jesus also shared these words regarding the attitude followers of Christ should have regarding His return. **“Therefore, be on alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming” (Matt. 24:42).** Jesus told the disciples that His people need to always be prepared for His return because that could happen at any day or time.

Not only did Jesus instruct the disciples to be prepared for His return, but the Apostle Paul wrote regarding this event as well. This passage we are about to read might sound familiar to you because it is heard at most funerals. Here are the words of Paul regarding the second coming of Christ found in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as indeed the rest of mankind do, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For we say this to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”** Jesus is surely coming back, so Paul wanted his readers to have confidence in their faith knowing that even though they may suffer for their faith, there is a great hope in the future.

The Apostle Peter also wrote regarding the second coming of Christ. In 2 Peter chapter 3 he provides for his readers details regarding the Lord returning. **“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue just as they were from the beginning of creation.” For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed by being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly people. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!” (vv. 3-12).** We see this attitude in the culture today that the mockers are saying that Jesus will not return and that God does not even exist. This world continues in its godlessness, yet the good news of Jesus Christ endures. Gid is patient with His creation and every day we have is a gift to share the good news with more people. We have the return of Christ to look forward to and His promise of eternal reward to those who remain faithful. This needs to be our focus and why the book of Daniel, with its prophesies regarding the future, are so important for us as a church to study and understand. I believe that we are living in the last days and that the return of Christ will happen soon. No one knows exactly when that will be, but we need to prepare ourselves for this to happen at any time.

Not only are the prophesies contained in Daniel important, but we will also find that Daniel was a strong man of faith who endured harsh treatment for his faith. He remained faithful in his service to the Lord despite the hardships, which included his removal from his home and country as a young man, his refusal to eat the kings food when he was being trained to be a servant for the king, his three friends being thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow to the king’s image, and being thrown in the lion’s den for continuing to pray to God even after an order prohibiting his right to do so. We will find his life to be an encouragement to us who will also see our lives become harder because of our commitment to Jesus. May we find the courage through his example to remain faithful until the Lord returns.

I am looking forward to going on this journey with you through Daniel and I hope you are excited as well. At this time, I would like to allow anyone who would like to ask questions to please share them. Is there anything about the second coming of Christ you would like to know more about that we can discuss as we go through Daniel? Are there things regarding the second coming that are troubling you? Is there anything we can do in our studies together to help you in your walk with Christ? Please think about these questions and feel free at any time during the messages to raise your hand and share them. If you do not have any questions or comments today that is absolutely fine. We can bring them up at any time they may pop into your mind. I have to warn you that there will be several questions that I will not be able to answer immediately, but if you allow me time to research and pray to God for His wisdom, we can answer them together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit as well as the word of God. Let me end today by reminded all of us that the end of the world is not a topic we have to fear. No matter what may happen or what others might do to us we always have the blessed assurance that our God is with us and He will bless those who remain faithful to Him through all of the trials. Let this always be on our hearts as we study the book of Daniel together.