

The Prophets

Lesson #38

Daniel 1:1-3:30

Outline

I. *The Life Of Daniel (1:1-6:28)*

- A. Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's court (1:1-21).
 - 1. The introduction of Daniel and his friends (1:1-7).
 - 2. Daniel's dedication (1:8-16).
 - 3. Daniel's rise to favor (1:17-21).
- B. God reveals Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel (2:1-49).
 - 1. The dream received by Nebuchadnezzar (2:1-6).
 - 2. The dream revealed to Daniel (2:7-23).
 - 3. The dream interpreted to Nebuchadnezzar (2:24-45).
 - 4. The promotion of Daniel (2:46-49).
- C. God saves Daniel's friends from the fiery furnace (3:1-30).
 - 1. The test of faith (3:1-12).
 - 2. The demonstration of faith (3:13-18).
 - 3. The vindication of faith (3:19-30).

Notes

Daniel 1:1-7

- Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, first invaded Palestine in 605 B.C. and took captives back to Babylon. His second invasion was in 597 B.C. The third and final captivity took place in 587 B.C., when all the remaining people of Judah who had not escaped were taken to Babylon.
- The first invasion was in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim; this follows the Babylonian method of designating the years of a king's reign. According to the Jewish method of counting those years, 605 B.C. was his fourth regnal year (Jeremiah 25:1). Jehoiakim began his reign in 608, as an appointee of Neco king of Egypt, who officially changed his name from Eliakim ("El will establish") to Jehoiakim ("Yahweh will establish").
- From the very beginning of the book, Daniel makes it clear that Nebuchadnezzar's success was not due to his own prowess but was the work of the one true God, who had brought about the complete collapse of the Judean monarchy. Thus the theme of God's absolute sovereignty is implied already here and continues as a theme that dominates the book.
- Commissioned by the king to spot future diplomats, Ashpenaz chose men of good looks, intellectual aptitude and prior diplomatic training. These men were then to be assimilated into Babylonian society, learning the language and literature of the culture. The native language of the

culture was Akkadian, a Semetic language written in syllabic cuneiform. Through archaeological discovery we know something of the literature of that culture. Today we have examples of legal texts, historical writings, religious myths, heroic epics, wisdom material and more.

- As in ancient times, the world now does not like to recognize the name of God, yet each of the four boys had God's name within his own. Daniel ("God is my judge") was changed to Belteshazzar ("Bel protect his life"). Bel was the name of a Babylonian god. Hananiah ("Jehovah is gracious") became Shadrach ("the command of the moon god"); Mishael ("Who is like God?") became Meshach ("who is like Aku," one of the heathen gods); and Azariah ("Jehovah is my helper") became Abed-nego ("the servant of Nego," another heathen god).

Daniel 1:8-16

- The Babylonians could change Daniel's home, textbooks, menu and name, but they could not change his heart. He and his friends were determined that they would obey God and refused to conform to the world (Acts 5:29; Romans 12:1-2).
- Daniel and his friends had the courage to object to the food prepared for them and desired to observe the dietary laws of the Old Testament (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). Probably most of the meat items on the regular menu were from animals sacrificed to the gods of Babylon, and no doubt the wine from the king's table had first been part of the libation to these deities. Therefore even those portions not inherently unclean had been tainted by contact with pagan cultic usage.
- Daniel found "favor" (lit., "love or loyalty based on a mutual commitment") with Ashpenaz and felt he could confide in him. The word "God" has the definite article ("the") prefixed to show that this was the work of the true God. Here, as in verse 2 and again in 17, the verb "to give" suggests divine intervention.
- Daniel turned to Ashpenaz and proposed a ten-day fast. Ten days is long enough for the effects to be seen yet short enough not to arouse concern. Ashpenaz agreed and the test worked. In vs. 15, the expression "fatter" is used of the cows in pharaoh's dream in the story of Joseph (Genesis 41:2).

Daniel 1:17-21

- Daniel and his friends were granted special wisdom by the Lord, not because of their diet, but because of His approval of their faith and commitment to His word. God gave Daniel the ability to interpret dreams or oneiromancy. Daniel did not have to resort to the occult practices. God simply revealed the answer to him.

- Ashpenaz proudly presented his students before Nebuchadnezzar for the final examination. Out of the entire group of brilliant young men, the king found that the four Hebrews excelled vastly; so he gave them responsible posts in his government. The superiority of the four young men would not endear them to those they surpassed. This jealousy becomes an important factor in chapter 3.
- “Magicians” probably were those who used a chart or design to answer questions and “astrologers” is derived from the Akkadian word for “soothsayer.” They surpassed the professional heathen diviners and conjurers by the power of God.
- Daniel’s career in public service continued “until the first year of king Cyrus,” which would have been 538 B.C. According to 10:1, which attests a revelation given to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, Daniel outlasted his Babylonian conquerors. He ministered under four kings and probably lived to see the Jews return to their land at the end of the captivity (1 John 2:17).
- This first chapter has shown that success without compromise was possible even in the midst of captivity. Daniel’s life testifies to the challenge of cooperating with society without compromising godliness (Jeremiah 29:5-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Daniel and his friends stood against their culture when it threatened to compromise their integrity before God. We are blessed because of this inspired description of Daniel’s faithfulness. He is called “beloved” in 10:11, an honor given in the Bible only to one other -- Jesus Christ.

Daniel 2:1-6

- When Nebuchadnezzar first came to Jerusalem to conquer, he was not yet king; he was acting for his father, Nabopolassar, back in Babylon. This accounts for the seeming contradiction between the three years of training for Daniel in 1:5 and the “second year” of the king’s reign in 2:1.
- Having apparently forgotten the dream, Nebuchadnezzar demands that his “experts” reveal the content of the dream and the dream’s meaning. To them, this was unreasonable and unprecedented (vs. 10). Without the content of the dream, they had no way to “interpret” it.
- With the initial response of the astrologers, we have a language change from Hebrew to Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of the Near East at the time. The Aramaic portion of Daniel continues to 7:28 (Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26 is the other lengthy Aramaic section of the Old Testament).
- The anxiety of the king, which prompted the dream, is compounded by his inability to remember the dream. The Babylonians believed that if a man could not remember his dream, it meant that his personal god was angry with him.

Daniel 2:7-23

- The “experts” freely admitted that they did not receive divine revelation. When they could not interpret the dream, Nebuchadnezzar ordered their execution. However, this order threatened the lives of Daniel and his friends. How would God intervene to resolve this dangerous situation?
- When the “experts” told the king that divine revelation was needed to reconstruct the king’s dream, they were indeed correct. This was the reason why Daniel and his friends prayed to God. The stage was set to show the reality, wisdom and power of the one true God (Isaiah 46:10; Amos 3:7).
- All the knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men could not give the king his dream and deliver them from imminent death. God alone bestows wisdom and discernment. Only by His revelation can we know the deep mysteries.
- Daniel’s prayer of thanksgiving emphasizes the power and wisdom of the one true God (Job 12:13). The power of God is illustrated by His control over the course of history: He sets up kings and deposes them. This is precisely the point of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Although the Babylonians may have triumphed on earth, the God of Israel was absolute Sovereign in heaven and on earth.

Daniel 2:24-45

- Daniel publicly gave God all the glory. Furthermore, in 2:30, when Daniel does mention himself, he claimed that his mediation is only for the benefit of the king. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt he saw an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The statue was in human form with various metals which comprised its different sections. To bring about its destruction, a rock appeared. The rock struck the statue on its feet, felling it. The fall resulted in the destruction of the iron, clay, bronze, silver and the gold of the statue. A wind swept away the pieces of the statue without leaving a trace. The rock, however, became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.
- The different sections represent world empires. While Nebuchadnezzar was represented by the most precious of metals -- gold -- Daniel informs the king that his authority to rule is merely derivative from God.
- The fourth kingdom is described in greater detail than either the second or third. The fourth kingdom has greater strength than the previous kingdoms and it therefore crushes and breaks all the others. Iron connotes toughness and ruthlessness. The greater strength of this fourth kingdom may be seen in a comparison of the longevity of these respective historical kingdoms: Babylonia (605-539 B.C.); Medo-Persia (539-331 B.C.); Greece (331-146 B.C.); Rome (27 B.C.-A.D. 476).

- Not one of these four world empires will endure forever. Each in turn collapses to its successor. By contrast God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Psalm 2:6; 48:1-2; Isaiah 2:2-3; Ezekiel 17:23; Micah 4:1-2).
- Jesus was born during *Pax Romana* and in the genealogical line of the Jews. Clothed in the flesh, Jesus entered human history, proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17). Paul commented upon these great truths in Galatians 4:4-6.

Daniel 2:46-49

- Nebuchadnezzar's worship of Daniel is simply a way of honoring the God Daniel represents. The king is not committing himself to exclusive devotion to the God of Israel. As a polytheist Nebuchadnezzar can always add another deity to his pantheon.
- The king gave honors and gifts to Daniel, who did not want to receive them since he was anxious for God alone receive the glory. Daniel was honored and promoted because he was faithful to God, and not because he compromised his convictions.
- Normally the position of ruler over the wise men would be reserved for a Chaldean nobleman. For a Jew to be so honored was unprecedented. Daniel did not keep the honors for himself, but asked that his three friends share his promotion.

Daniel 3:1-12

- We do not know how much time elapsed since the events of chapter 2. The Septuagint dates the episode to Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year. This seems improbable. A brief period of time seems more probable. However, we do know that Nebuchadnezzar's heart had not changed one bit. He admitted in 2:46-47 that Jehovah God was a great God, but the truth really never penetrated his heart. He praised Daniel and Daniel's God, but he did not repent of his arrogance.
- Inspired by the identification with the "head of gold," Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold. The image probably was overlaid with gold leaf (Isaiah 40:19; 41:7; Jeremiah 10:3-4). The height of the statue, sixty cubits or about ninety feet, is surpassed in the ancient world only by the colossus of Rhodes (seventy cubits).
- It is doubtful that the statue represented the king himself as there is no evidence that statues of Mesopotamian rulers were ever worshiped during the ruler's lifetime. It is more likely that the statue represented Nebuchadnezzar's patron god, Nebo (or Nabu). Prostration before this god would amount to a pledge of allegiance to his viceroy, Nebuchadnezzar.

- The titles of the various ranks of government officials indicate a well-organized bureaucracy. "Princes" were in charge of fairly large realms. "Governors" were military commanders or more likely lieutenant governors. "Captains" were leaders of smaller territories. "Rulers of the provinces" is a general term for a governmental executive.
- According to Jeremiah 29:22, the king of Babylon roasted two false prophets, Ahab and Zedekiah, in the fire. Therefore, the three Hebrew men knew that the king would make good on his threat.
- The text makes no mention of the whereabouts of Daniel during this episode. Perhaps Daniel was absent due to government business. He may have been in Babylon but was not required to be present or bow to the image. Perhaps Daniel took the same stand as his friends, but the Chaldeans were afraid to accuse him, knowing of the king's respect for him.

Daniel 3:13-18

- Nebuchadnezzar confronted the three men with the hearsay evidence, giving them a chance to recant if their actions had been treasonous. The three men were guilty; they did defy the king's edict. They would not defy, however, their God's condemnation of idolatry (Exodus 20:4-6).
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego loved the Lord more than life itself. Ready to lay down their lives for God's glory, the three refused to plead with Nebuchadnezzar to make an exception with them. It is significant that they would have no doubt of the power of their God to deliver them from the king's furnace, but they have no right to presume that He will do so.
- The young men recognized that God's will might be different from what they would desire, and they were willing to have it so without complaining. They made no excuses to Nebuchadnezzar; they cast themselves utterly upon God.

Daniel 3:19-30

- No mortal could have survived an instant in the huge furnace, but the king insisted that it be heated to maximum intensity. The one who in his pride had created an image with the purpose of assuring uniform loyalty found his own image provoked beyond his control.
- Other than the ropes that had melted in the intense heat, the fire did not affect the men. The author of Hebrews spoke of those who "quenched the violence of fire" (11:34; cf. Isaiah 43:1-2; Deuteronomy 4:20).
- The king described the fourth one as resembling deity. The KJV says "Son of God" while other versions say "son of the gods." In vs. 28, he identifies the being as an "angel." Many early expositors adopted the

view that this being was a preincarnate appearance of Christ. God brought about their deliverance by a special emissary who tangibly demonstrated God's presence with them in the trying hour. God had permitted the men to be cast into the horrifying furnace, but in so doing He had not permitted them to go through it alone.

- Throughout the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord appeared to God's people. The angel appeared to Abraham at Mamre (Genesis 18:1-2), to Jacob at the Jabbok (Genesis 32:30; Hosea 12:4), to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:2), to Joshua near Jericho (Joshua 5:13-6:5), to Gideon in Ophrah (Judges 6:11) and to others at various times and places.
- Before such an awesome display of God's power, Nebuchadnezzar could only acknowledge his defeat. He referred to God as the "most high God" or the chief of the gods. This admission can be likened to the phrase he used in 2:47, "God of gods." In this chapter, God deals "gently" with the king's defiance. God's response in the next chapter will be more humbling for the king.
- The young men were promoted and were actually better off for having gone through the fiery furnace. The three Hebrew youths cast themselves upon the mercy of God. The mercy of God is an expression of His kindness in times when man's perspective is bleak or desperate at best (2 Samuel 24:14). In times of greatest need, men and women have longed for the great mercy of God (Psalm 25:6; 123:2-3; Nehemiah 9:31; Isaiah 33:2; 1 Peter 1:3).