

Daniel- by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

This book is about God's sovereign reign. His reign is so profoundly true that it can even answer the question the Babylonian exiles (like Daniel!) ask in Psalm 137.4: *"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"*.... In chapter 1 God's sovereign reign is seen in several respects. It may have appeared, to the observing eye, that our God had just been defeated by Nebuchadnezzar and his gods. After all, v.2 says that even the vessels of the temple were brought into the treasury house of the Babylonian gods. But no. That same verse also says that our God *"gave"* all these things into Babylonian hands? The fall of Jerusalem was actually the fulfillment of both prophecy (Isaiah 39.6-7; Jeremiah 21.3-10; 25.1-11) and covenant curses on the unfaithful (Deuteronomy 28.36-37,47-49,52,58). Remember what the Bible says about our God: *"I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things"* (Isaiah 45.7); *"having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will"* (Ephesians 1.11b). Look for all the other ways God's sovereign reign is seen in chapter 1. And certainly don't miss how it is celebrated in the confident, humble faithfulness of four of his servants!

Chapter 2

Remember, this book is about God's sovereign reign. In chapter 2 we learn to see his reign in his subduing entire kingdoms to himself and his will. The Christian's life of faith—like Daniel's—draws its confidence from the knowledge that God is sovereign over all human affairs (see 2.19-20; 3.17; 4.34-35). In the very midst of all human affairs, God is always building his own kingdom (see 2.44-45; 4.34—*notice that verse is what Nebuchadnezzar himself was eventually brought to recognize*; 6.26; 7.14). We also see here that this believing confidence, drawn from the knowledge of God's sovereign reign, should very naturally lead us to prayer. This is part of what nourishes the life of faith, as seen in the book of Daniel (and also the rest of the Bible). See Daniel's fellowship with God in prayer in 2.17-18; 6.10; 9.3; 10.2-3,12. Really, what characteristic of Daniel's life stands out more to the reader than his prayerfulness? And that prayerfulness is everywhere rooted in a firm confidence in God's sovereign reign. His kingdom shall fill the whole earth (v.35) and it shall stand forever (v.44).

Chapter 3

Remember the theme of this book, which we are tracing through? God's sovereign reign! In chapter 3 we are jarringly reminded that Daniel and his friends are in exile, in a foreign land—which is a consistent theme in the Scriptures, used to help us understand the Christian life in this fallen world (see John 17.16, Philippians 3.20, 1 Peter 1.1,17). Can the knowledge of God's sovereign reign help us live a life that brings praise and

honor to God, even in those circumstances?... See their trust in God's power, v.17. See their commitment to keep his Word, v.18. See their hopeful expectation without presumption, in vs.17 & 18 again (revisiting 1.12-12 & 2.16). Reflect, for a moment on Romans 4.20 and Job 13.15a. By faith in God's sovereign reign they *"quenched the power of fire"* (Hebrews 11.34a)! This chapter is the literal fulfillment of Isaiah 43.1-4, and you—Christian!—are meant to take it all very much to heart as you live in a fallen world that is not your eternal home. Psalm 34.19-20 says, *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken."* This finds fulfillment here. It finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ (see John 19.36). But it also finds beautiful fulfillment in you, believer.

Chapter 4

Can God's sovereign reign even humble a proud, sinful heart?... Back in 2.47 Nebuchadnezzar made a profession which recognized Daniel's God. But by chapter 3 it's obvious that this was a superficial profession, because Nebuchadnezzar then used all the kingdom, power, might, and glory which God gave him (see 2.37) on the exaltation of himself. And then *that* chapter ended with Nebuchadnezzar *again* recognizing Daniel's God. But he's still not a man of faith. He's merely impressed with the supernatural, like the Simon we read about in Acts 8.9-23. Nebuchadnezzar's heart is not humbled and healed until we get to chapter 4. This story is set in the context of a letter (vs.1-18 & 34-37, with vs.19-33 relaying the terrible fall of Nebuchadnezzar). Having exalted himself as something more than a man, he now became something much less than a man. What brought the judgment to an end? Notice the *"until"* in v.32. Consider vs.34-35, for which vs.2-3 prepared us. As Nebuchadnezzar testifies in the last words of the chapter, *"those who walk in pride [see Daniel's references to the king's sins in v.27] he is able to humble."*

Chapter 5

(We fast forward quite a bit here; Daniel is now around 80 years old. This is not a detailed account of Babylon's history; it's a selective history of the war between the kingdoms of light and darkness, as it happened then, to give courage to the servants of God who read it now.)... If God's sovereign reign is true, then the Christian humbly confesses—as Psalm 31.15 puts it—*"My times are in your hands."* As theologian J.I. Packer put it, "To know that nothing happens in God's world apart from God's will may frighten the godless, but it stabilizes the saints." That has been the theme of Daniel ever since 1.2: *"the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand."* And now we see the prophet of the Lord telling King Belshazzar, *"God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end"* (5.26). Belshazzar was probably the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. ("Father" and "son" language—vs.2,11,18,22—was understood elastically in this culture.) But Belshazzar's literal father moved the royal

residence to Teiman, leaving Belshazzar in Babylon as second in command, making the offer of someone becoming "*the third ruler in the kingdom*" (vs.7,16,29) quite logical. By the way, the accounts of ancient historians Herodotus and Xenophon agree with this account.

Chapter 6

Daniel 6.10 is one of my favorite verses in the whole Bible: "*When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.*" In its context, this verse helps us understand what a life lived by faith in God looks like. (And, by the way, Hebrews 11.33 says that sometimes those who have lived by faith in God have "*stopped the mouths of lions.*" Yep. That's a reference to Daniel.) He knows God (see 11.32b). And he has fully devoted his life to God (see 1.8; 3.17,18; and here, one of my favorite parts of the Bible, 6.6-10.) That's a big part of what a life lived by faith in God looks like: to know God and to fully devote yourself to God. There are three parts to today's chapter: Darius is deceived (vs.1-9). Daniel is determined (vs.10-17). Daniel is delivered in danger—*note: not from danger, but in danger* (vs.18-28). Why? Because God's sovereign rule extends even to the mouths of wild beasts.

Chapter 7

In the last chapter we saw God's sovereign reign extend even to the mouths of wild beasts. In today's chapter we see his reign include the beast-like kingdoms of *men* as well! The kingdoms of this world may be scary at times, but before getting immersed in that discussion, take heedful note of v.18 and v.22 and then vs.26-27. Note how God's people will one day share in the shining fullness of God's kingdom! This is how it is expressed in 12.2,3: "*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*" This is the knowledge that allows Daniel (and you as well, Christian!) to resist evil pressure from the beast-like kingdoms of sinful man. This vision reminds us of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. But there the focus was on all those powerful succeeding kingdoms that stood against the kingdom of God, only to be conquered by it. Here the focus is on the corruption and degradation (as well as the short-lived character—compared to God's eternal kingdom) of those kingdoms.

Chapter 8

We have seen God's sovereign reign give bold faith and confidence to his servants, under duress. We have seen it conquer the fallen kingdoms of this world, we've seen it

humble a man as proud as Nebuchadnezzar, and we've seen it shut the mouths of wild beasts. But how long will God's sovereign last? Do we have assurance that it will endure? In chapter 8 Daniel receives a vision that gives him a fuller understanding of the conflict that's going on in this world. Daniel himself has been very much a part of this conflict, but the conflict itself is cosmically more enormous than just Daniel himself—it's the battle between all the successive kingdoms of this world and the kingdom that God is building. This vision consists of two central images: one in vs.1-4, the other in vs.5-12. These are followed by two spoken revelations: one in vs.13-14, the other in vs.15-26. The second is spoken by Gabriel himself, whom we most associate with the Christmas story (see Luke 1.19 & 26). Note Daniel's response to the whole vision. This is a serious conflict, and the immensity of it could easily overwhelm us. But Daniel was not paralyzed. Look at v.27: he got up and continued his daily duties. See 2 Peter 3.11.

Chapter 9

God's sovereign reign also provides the only working foundation for prophecy and prayer. **In vs.1-2** Daniel has been studying the prophecies of Jeremiah, and sees that "*the desolations of Jerusalem*" (v.2) will last 70 years (see Jeremiah 25.11-12; 29.10). **In vs.3-19**, Daniel takes the covenant promises of God found in Jeremiah 25 and transforms them into prayer, believing that God is pleased to use our prayers as a means by which he fulfills his Word. Reflect on this prayer, taking note of its revelation of the righteous character of God, of its connection to the covenant promises and curses of Deuteronomy 27 & 28, and also of how Daniel's Biblical vocabulary enables him to confess sin for what it is. Also see Daniel's willingness to take the guilt of the past people of God upon himself and confess it as his own. It's a remarkable foreshadowing of what Jesus would later do on the cross (see Isaiah 53.4-6, 10-12, and 2 Corinthians 5.21). **In vs.20-27** Gabriel is sent to stretch Daniel's horizon well beyond the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies. There are other, greater mountain ranges of God's justice and mercy yet to come!

Chapter 10

God determined to make himself and his purposes known to his prophet Daniel in some very special ways, and he did so for this purpose: that his people may know him and rely upon his Word (see 1.17b, 2.19, 28-30, 47). How's it working for you? Is this study of Daniel helping you to know God and rely upon his Word? Today we begin Daniel's final vision, which will take us to the end of the book. This final vision teaches us that God's sovereign reign extends over all of history. As we sing at Christmas, "*He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love.*" **In vs.1-3** Daniel is grieving. Two years earlier the exiled people of God began their return to the land of Israel, but—as the book of Ezra shows us—it did not go well at the beginning. Hence his discouragement. **In vs.4-**

9 God gives Daniel a gloriously overpowering vision. Notice how many "*likes*" he uses to describe it to us. **In v.10-21**, try to list all the ways in which Daniel is given encouragement. Also note that behind the scenes of the conflicts of history there lies a greater conflict "*in the heavenly places,*" as Paul tells us in Ephesians 6.12.

Chapter 11

Remember the main theme of these final three chapters of the book? God's sovereign reign over all history! And this chapter is full of absolutely fascinating ways in which that theme is taught, but that our limited space here and my limitations as a communicator don't allow us to fully explore. But to give you a taste of how fascinating it is... the fourth Persian king in v.2 is Xerxes. And, true to this word, he gathered ginormous riches through taxation. And then he did, in fact, deplete all of that wealth by funding various hostilities against Greece. And then we meet vs.3&4: "*Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. And as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, nor according to the authority with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these.*" That would be Alexander the Great. And his kingdom was indeed fragmented, rather than passed on to heirs. What was previously foretold in Daniel through pictures and visions is here foretold in plain, linear, historical terms.

Chapter 12

Back in 10.13 & 21 we learned that the archangel Michael (see Jude 1.9 for his title) is the leading angelic defender of the people of God (see "*your prince*" in 10.21) against the powers of darkness (see Revelation 12.7-9). Here, in 12.1, Michael—"*the great prince who has charge of your people*"— makes another appearance, again protecting the beloved people of God against the ravages of evil. But note that we are not so much shielded from this "*time of trouble*" as we are delivered out of it. God's holy purposes for those whose names are "*found written in the book*" will never fail. Note the beautiful doctrine of the resurrection in v.2. Yes, may we be among "*those who are wise*" (v.3), always faithful to God's Word, despite any suffering that may come. For they will be glorified, as vs.2 & 3 bear witness. In v.4 Daniel was ordered to preserve these words of hope and comfort, so you might benefit from then now. The final words of the book contain promise and charge to the aged Daniel. He, like us, will need to persevere to the end, going his way, fulfilling his duties. And then he will enter his rest. His works will follow him (Revelation 14.13).

Reflecting on Daniel-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in **Daniel**. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful

passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish **Daniel** before we move forward?