

Lesson 1

Daniel and Zechariah?

Daniel and Zechariah have much in common, but there is at least one big difference - Zechariah has never been studied in Vacation Bible School!

Daniel was likely born around 620, which would make him about 15 when he was taken captive in 605. We know he lived at least through the end of Babylon in 539, and then into the reign of the Persian rule under which he was thrown into the den of lions. If that happened in the first year of the Persian rule (538), then Daniel was 82 years old when he was thrown to the lions!

As we said in our study of Zechariah, the prophet was likely in his 20's when he began to preach in 520. If we assume he was 25, then he was born around 545, which would mean that Zechariah was 6 when the Persians defeated Babylon, and was 7 when Daniel was thrown into the lions' den as an octogenarian.

Daniel is an Unusual Book

On one hand, it contains accounts of lions' dens and fiery furnaces that we have known since we were children. On the other hand, it contains visions and prophecies that are some of the most difficult to unravel in all of the Bible.

The book also contains some of the most remarkable examples of predictive prophecy found anywhere in the Bible, which explains why it has been viscously attacked by liberal critics, perhaps more so than any other book in the Bible. One book that I have on that subject is aptly entitled *Daniel in the Critics' Den!*

Many commentators today tell us that the prophecies in Daniel are all about the end of the world - and perhaps we will find that some of them are. But many of those commentators go a step further and tell us that all the signs indicate that the end of the world is very near.

Walvoord writes:

■ The rapidly increasing tempo of change in modern life has given the entire world a sense of

impending crisis. ... How long can world tensions be kept in check? ... As alarming as these events are, they really are not surprising in light of the Bible's end-time prophecies.

Let me read next from the introduction of another end-is-near book:

It is impossible for the most thoughtless to overlook the impressive and almost unprecedented character of the age in which we live. Events, as rapid in their succession as they are startling in their magnitude, ... chase each other like waves on the sea... .

And where did that second quote come from? From another modern end-is-near bestseller? No. It came from *The Great Tribulation, or Things Coming on the Earth* by John Cumming, which was published in 1863 in New York at the height of the U.S. Civil War!

Ronald Reagan said, "I sometimes believe we're heading very fast for Armageddon," and he told *People* magazine in 1983 that:

Theologians have been studying the ancient prophecies-what would portend the coming of Armageddon-and have said that never, in the time between the prophecies up until now, has there ever been a time in which so many of the prophecies are coming together. There have been times in the past when people thought the end of the world was coming, but never anything like this.

President Reagan was right about most things, but he was not right about this. The end of the world will not be preceded by signs.

How do we know that? Many reasons, but, for starters, we are told repeatedly that the end will come like a thief in the night, and thieves don't leave signs ahead of time.

We will need to proceed carefully as we study the prophecies in this book. And for those of you who were here for our study of Zechariah, you know what we will need to do first! Determine the context and the time frame!

Prophecies in the Bible almost always come with a time frame. Why is that important? Because absent a time frame it is not that difficult to predict things. You simply make a vague statement that could apply in many circumstances, and then you slide it up and down the timeline of history until you find a match. And if you can't find a match, you just say it hasn't happened yet! There is a very well known example of such a prophet - Nostradamus, the 16th century French astrologer.

The Bible is not like that. When it tells us what will happen, it almost always tells us when it will happen. One exception, of course, is the end of the world - we know it will happen, but we don't know when. But in almost all other cases, the Bible tells us both what and when. And if we don't first ask when, we will have very little hope in successfully understanding what!

In addition to remarkable prophecies, we will meet and discuss some very interesting historical figures during our study.

We will meet Cleopatra in Chapter 11, along with many other famous people.

Daniel 4 is unique in all scripture. The entire chapter is written from the perspective of a pagan king.

In the very first verse of Daniel, we will meet two historical kings: Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon and the Chaldeans. One of those two men is one of the most despicable men in the Bible, and hint - it is not Nebuchadnezzar (although he would come close)!

Why Study Daniel?

The first reason should perhaps be the only reason - it is part of the word of God. But there are some other reasons to study Daniel.

Daniel has a vital message for the modern Christian. Why? Because Daniel gives us a wonderful example of faithfulness to God while living in a culture that is totally hostile to God, which describes the culture we are living in today.

With Daniel, we have a teenager living far from home and facing many temptations but who nevertheless determined to remain faithful to God no matter what, and who did so for his entire life. That tells us a great deal about Daniel, and I think it also tells us a great deal about Daniel's parents.

That is a big reason to study the book of Daniel, but there are others.

If you love history, you will love Daniel. Daniel lived through some of the most exciting and turbulent times in human history, and he prophesied about later exciting and turbulent times that occurred after his death.

If you love languages, you will love Daniel. Daniel is one of the few books in the Bible originally written in more than one language, Hebrew and Aramaic.

If you love math and puzzles, you will love Daniel - how do we unravel the 70 weeks in Daniel 9? Many have tried. Will we be successful?

Another reason to study Daniel is that studying Daniel can be a great tool for personal evangelism. The same is true of Zechariah and Revelation. Why?

People have questions about those books of the Bible, and they hear many strange things about those books. If you can answer their questions, they will perhaps trust you on other issues about the Bible. One of the best ways to open doors is to leave a commentary about Daniel or Revelation in your office as a magnet - people will notice it and ask you about it.

If you ever study with an atheist, one of the first things you will need to do is convince them that the Bible is not from man. To do that, I would turn first to Daniel. If we can show them that Daniel contains specific prophecies of certain Roman emperors (and we can), then Daniel is not from man because we have copies of Daniel from the Dead Sea scrolls that predate those Roman emperors.

Finally, studying Daniel will teach us about the church. In Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, we will learn that the church is not just a Jewish kingdom, that the church is not man made, that the church is victorious, that the church is eternal, that the church is immovable, that the church is powerful, that the church is important, that the church was planned, and that the church was established during the first century Roman empire. All of that from a book written half a century before the church was established in Acts 2.

Why Was Daniel Written?

What did the book mean to its original audience? This question is always key to unraveling the meaning of a book. Yes, God's word was written for us, but it was not written *first* for us. To properly understand the Bible, we need to always ask what it meant to those who heard it first, and that is particularly true when it comes to prophecy.

What can we say about those who first heard the prophecies in this book?

Contrary to all of their expectations, God's chosen people had been uprooted from their promised

land and transported to Babylonian captivity.

Of course, this should not have been unexpected. They had been warned by Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and many other prophets (all the way back to Moses) that because of their flagrant apostasy and immorality, the city and the temple would be destroyed and they would be carried away in captivity. (Yet I imagine it came as a big surprise anyway.)

2 Chronicles 36:16 tells us why they were in captivity.

But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

Jeremiah 5:15 tells us about the Babylonians who carried them away.

Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say.

How did the world see these events?

To the pagan world, it seemed as if the God of the Hebrews had been completely discredited. The mighty gods of Assyria and Babylon had burned his temple to the ground and led his people away in chains, and the Hebrew God was apparently powerless to stop them.

Of course, the truth was that those foreign people and their false gods were serving God's purpose by bringing punishment upon his people. God was still totally in control and in charge even though it may have appeared otherwise. In fact, in Jeremiah 25:9, God refers to King Nebuchadnezzar as "my servant."

But that is not how it seemed at the time to the world around them.

The book of Daniel has two responses to that false view.

First, Daniel's goal is to convince the faithful Israelites that God had not forgotten them - and that they should not forget God. One day they would be vindicated, and God would restore them to their former position.

Second, Daniel's goal is to show the pagan nations that God was truly sovereign and preeminent, and that any power they had was given to them by God and could be taken away by God anytime he desired.

In Daniel 9, we will study one of the most beautiful and powerful prayers recorded in the Bible. And the most remarkable thing about that prayer is what it reveals about Daniel.

To Daniel, the worst part of the captivity was that someone might look at it and conclude that God was not able to deliver his people. Daniel did not pray, "Get me out of this!" Instead Daniel's primary concern in that wonderful prayer was for God and for God's reputation.

A central theme that we will see in the book is the power of prayer. Daniel was a man of prayer, and Daniel lived almost his entire life of over 80 years in a hostile culture, and yet remained faithful to God. If we are having trouble remaining faithful in our own sin-sick and perverted culture, perhaps we need to closely study Daniel's prayer life.

When Daniel Was Written?

We usually ask that question when we study a book of the Bible, and we usually spend about 30 seconds or less in discussing the answer. Not so with Daniel.

Without any doubt, the most controversial topic about the book of Daniel is when the book was written. And there are two views - the early date view and the late date view.

The early date view holds that the book of Daniel was written in Babylon in the late sixth century BC by the prophet Daniel who had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. According to this view, the prophecies in the book are genuine and accurate, where by "genuine" I mean that the prophecies predate the events that are prophesied.

Not wanting to keep anyone in suspense, and before we discuss the second view, I will tell you now that we will take this first approach here. And I suspect that does not come as a surprise to anyone here! The book of Daniel is genuine, the prophecies of Daniel are genuine, and the book of Daniel was written by Daniel.

Now, before I describe the late date view, let's see if we can figure out what that position must be. I say "must" because once you adopt the assumptions of the modern liberal critic mindset, you are

pretty much in a straightjacket when it comes to the book of Daniel. Why?

Daniel contains detailed prophecies about certain kingdoms that were to follow after the Babylonians or Chaldeans. That Daniel could know that any kingdom would follow the mighty Chaldeans was shocking enough, but that Daniel provides intricate detailed prophecies about three subsequent kingdoms that look forward about six centuries is impossible for the liberal critic to accept.

So how can modern liberal critics explain the book of Daniel? They would never admit that Daniel was inspired by God. They would never admit that Daniel was a prophet. But if Daniel was written before the Greek and Roman empires and if Daniel contains detailed prophecies about the Greek and Roman empires written six centuries earlier, then the book of Daniel must be from God.

What must the liberal critic do to get around this dilemma? They have two choices. They can move the date of Daniel until after the events that are prophesied, or they can change the prophecies so that they are referring to some earlier event (even if that change causes them to predict events that never actually happened).

And, in fact, modern liberal critics do both of those things.

First, they tell us that the book of Daniel was written around 168 BC rather than in the sixth century BC.

And second, they tell us that the four kingdoms of Daniel 2 are Chaldea, Media, Persia, and Greece rather than Chaldea (aka Babylon), Medo-Persia (aka Persia), Greece, and Rome. That is, they split Medo-Persia into two separate kingdoms to avoid having the fourth kingdom be Rome.

Why do they split up the Medes and the Persians? Why don't they instead try to have Daniel post-date Rome just like they argue Daniel post-dates Greece?

Because we have copies of Daniel that predate the first century Roman empire, which means the liberal critics can't push the date of Daniel far enough ahead in time to have it written during or after that time.

But do I really mean that they take prophecies that read perfectly on events in the Roman empire, and move them to instead refer to events that never occurred in the Greek empire? That is exactly what I mean, and let me give you an example from the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, commenting on Daniel 11:40-45.

Predictions that Ptolemy will provoke another war with disastrous results, so that Antiochus will conquer Libya to the west of Egypt and Ethiopia to the south, but on his way back will perish somewhere along the coastal route. None of these predictions was fulfilled.

When we get to those verses in Daniel 11, we will find that they are discussing Rome, not Greece - and that they fit perfectly with the history of Rome.

Why doesn't the Oxford commentator apply those verses to Rome? Because to do so would cause him to admit that Daniel was a genuine prophet, so instead he applies the prophecies to Greece.

But to make this work, the liberal scholar has to first convince us that the second kingdom is Media and the third kingdom is Persia. One commentator has rightly said that this viewpoint is the weakest part of the late date theory.

There is no evidence that Daniel ever considered the Medes and Persians as separate empires whereas there is evidence that Daniel considered Medo-Persia to be a single empire.

In Daniel 8:20, we find a single ram with two horns representing the kings of Media and Persia. In 8:21, a shaggy male goat (Greece) with a prominent horn (Alexander the Great) tramples the ram.

Also, in chapter 5 when we read about the handwriting on the wall, the last word written is Peres, which is derived from the word meaning "to divide" but also is a reference to Persia. That is, Persia was depicted as conquering the Babylonians - making Persia second and not third.

We will have much more to say on these four kingdoms as we move through the text.

So here is the second of the two views on when Daniel was written, what we will call the late date view.

The late date view holds that the book of Daniel was written in Palestine by an unknown Jew around 168 BC during the Maccabean period. The prophecies in the book concerning events prior to 168 BC were written after the fact and so are not genuine prophecies. The other prophecies in the book were merely guesses of future events, many of which later proved to be inaccurate.

Although this view has been adopted by virtually all modern scholars, it is not a modern view. The late date view was first put forth in the third century AD by Porphyrius of Tyre. But it was quickly

abandoned after Jerome published a refutation.

Before we move on, perhaps I should explain what I mean by the phrase "modern liberal scholar." A modern liberal scholar is someone who operates according to the dual tenets of liberal theology.

The first tenet is that supernatural explanations of historical events are not acceptable. Any event that requires a supernatural explanation is not historical.

The second tenet is that nothing in a general sense ever happens uniquely in history. All true historical occurrences must be repetitive in nature so that scientists may properly observe them.

But wait, you say, the Bible is full of unique events, including, as examples, the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ! Do you mean to say that there are so-called Bible scholars who reject those events as historical? Yes, that is what I am saying. And they also reject the book of Daniel for the same reasons.

Liberal theologians approach the Bible with the *a priori* assumption that the supernatural is impossible. From this assumption it must (and does, logically) follow that Daniel is a fraud. Let me allow you to hear it in their own words by quoting from a commentary by W. Sibley Towner published in 1984:

We need to assume that the vision as a whole is a prophecy after the fact. Why? Because human beings are unable accurately to predict future events centuries in advance and to say that Daniel could do so, even on the basis of a symbolic revelation vouchsafed to him by God and interpreted by an angel, is to fly in the face of the certainties of human nature. So what we have here is in fact not a road map of the future laid down in the sixth century BC but an interpretation of the events of the author's own time, 167-164 BC.

Towner is correct when he says that "*human beings* are unable accurately to predict future events centuries in advance." But God can do that, and God does do that.

It is very important to realize that the liberal critics are forced to hold the late-date view. These critics say that they are simply seeking the best theories and when a better theory comes along they will accept it instead. DO NOT BELIEVE THEM! They are seeking the best *naturalistic* theory - and they will ignore all evidence to the contrary that points away from a naturalistic explanation. The true explanation is a supernatural explanation, but they aren't looking for that. They are not seeking the truth, which likely explains why they haven't found it.

As we work through this book, we will pause several times to discuss the internal evidence regarding the date of the book, and we will see how the internal evidence is all pointing to an early date.

But in our introduction, let's look now at some evidence outside of the book of Daniel that also points to an early date.

The Testimony of Jesus supports the Early Date View

Did Daniel exist? Was Daniel an actual historical figure? Is the book of Daniel authentic? Was Daniel a prophet? Did Daniel speak from God? Does Daniel have anything to say about Rome?

The liberal critic answers no to each of those questions. But how does Jesus answer those questions?

Jesus refers to Daniel by name in Matthew 24:15 and in Mark 13:14, and Jesus calls Daniel a prophet.

So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand).

Did Daniel predict specific events that occurred many years after the time in which Daniel lived?

Jesus mentions just such an event in Matthew 24:15 that had not yet occurred but that would occur in the first century (see Matthew 24:34). And we will see Daniel's prophecy of that event later in our study of the book.

The modern critic tells us that Daniel is silent when it comes to Rome. The modern critic tells us that the fourth kingdom in Daniel 2 is Greece. Jesus tells us just the opposite.

Isaac Newton (the greatest scientist who ever lived) said that "to reject Daniel is to reject the Christian religion." And I agree with that statement, because if we reject Daniel then we must conclude that either Jesus was mistaken about Daniel or that the gospel accounts are hopelessly flawed about what Jesus taught. Either way, Christianity tumbles from a rejection of Daniel as a prophet.

And how do the liberal critics respond?

The liberal critics simply discredit Christ as an authority on such matters. One critic wrote that "Christ neither would nor could be a critical authority." Another liberal critic says that the "emptying" that Paul spoke of in Philippians 2 may have kept the incarnate Jesus from having complete knowledge about certain non-essential things. Truly incredible!

Jesus said that Daniel was a prophet, and Jesus said that part of what Daniel prophesied was fulfilled after the Greek empire and during the Roman empire. Those clear statements of Christ are in direct opposition to the modern liberals scholars.

Who are we to believe? Who is the real authority here? I believe the one who has all authority in heaven and in earth!

#daniel