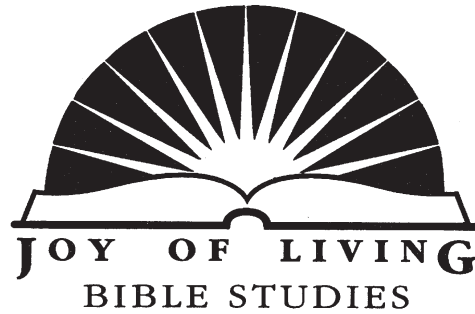


Prophecy in the Book of Daniel Lesson 1



Prophecy in the Book of Daniel

The book of Daniel, together with the book of Revelation, marvelously unfolds future events as God has ordained them in the program of history. This book has not yet been fulfilled; neither has the book of Revelation. These two books, one from the Old and one from the New Testament, complement each other in their symmetry and harmony. The book of Revelation explains the book of Daniel. The book of Daniel lays the basis for the book of Revelation. If you would like to know God's program for the future, it is essential that you understand this book of Daniel.

Knowledge of the future can be a very dangerous thing. Imagine what would happen if any or all of us possessed the ability to know what is going to happen in the days ahead. Think what an advantage that would give us in the stock market, in buying insurance, and in other practical matters of life. By and large, God does not unfold the future to us—certainly not in detail. But what He does show us in the prophetic Scriptures is the general trend of events and where it will all end. Anyone who investigates this area thoughtfully, carefully, and scripturally will discover significant and helpful things about what is happening in our world today. Everything that is happening is working out God's purposes on earth. These will all end exactly as God has foretold. We can begin to understand what is happening today if we know what the prophetic program is.

Symbolic Language

God has taken two precautions in this matter of unveiling the future. First, He has clothed these prophetic passages in symbolic language—in figurative form. That is why in these prophetic books unusual things appear, strange beasts with many different heads and horns sticking out here and there, and images of all kinds, and other indescribable visions. You have the same thing in the book of Revelation—bizarre beasts with strange combinations of characteristics.

These have always puzzled people. You can't just sit down with the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation and read them through and understand them as you would a novel. You have to study them, taking the whole of the Bible to interpret the symbols in the books of Daniel and Revelation. This is one of the locks that God has provided to keep curious minds from getting into these books without an adequate background in Scripture. You cannot understand what is going on in them without first knowing a great deal of the rest of the Bible.

Moral Lessons Illuminate Prophecy

A second precaution God has taken in Daniel is that he doesn't introduce the prophetic section first, but brings us through six chapters into an understanding of the moral character he requires of the reader before the prophetic program can begin to make sense. You can sit down with the prophetic outlines of Daniel and Revelation, draw charts, spend your time explaining to people what all these things mean and how God's program is going to work out, and analyze it—but unless you have incorporated the lessons of the first part of the book into your own life, you will discover nothing there to enrich your life.¹

The Lord Jesus Himself points this out during the Olivet Discourse when His disciples asked Him what the sign of His coming—of His return to earth—would be. Jesus said,

So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." (Matthew 24:15-16)

Notice that He added the words, "let the reader understand." That is—don't read through Daniel superficially. Think it through. You have to understand what he is talking about before you will be able to recognize "the abomination that causes desolation" when it comes.

The Lord went on to say that the world in its superficial approach to truth will not understand when it cries, "Peace and safety," for there will be no peace; sudden destruction will come upon them and they will be swept away, just as the people of Noah's day were swept away when the flood came (see Matthew 24:37-39; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

The History Section of Daniel

Now all of this is a warning to take the book of Daniel seriously and to endeavor to understand the structure of this book as we delve into it. This book divides very simply into two sections, as I have already suggested. The first six chapters are a history of the prophet Daniel himself and his friends in the land of Babylon—men of faith in a hostile world.

The first six chapters of Daniel are helpful to someone who is trying to live as a Christian in difficult surroundings. If you work in a company surrounded by a godless crowd who take the name of God in

1. Ray Stedman gives a brief overview of Daniel chapters 1-6 in this lesson. See the Joy of Living study, *Daniel: Chapters 1-6* for an in-depth study.

vain, who agree with the ideas and attitudes of the world, who make fun of the things of God, showing little interest in what God says, then I suggest that you read carefully this portion of Daniel.

The first six chapters are for you if you are a young man or woman going to school, where you are surrounded by those who seem to have no interest in God, or the things of God. Daniel and his friends were themselves teenagers when they were first taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and carried off to the land of Babylon. As they began their career of faith, they did so with all the insecurity of a young person in a hostile environment. These chapters record the pressure they underwent as they stood for their faith in the midst of these difficult surroundings.

Daniel Chapter 1

In Daniel 1 the young men were confronted with the necessity of changing their diet. They had been told, in God's Word, what they were not to eat, and the very things that they were not to eat were the things that were required eating for them as prisoners in the palace of the king of Babylon.

What were they to do? This king was the most powerful tyrant who ever lived on earth. The Bible records that there was no king before or after Nebuchadnezzar equal to him in authority (see Daniel 2:37). There were no restraints upon what he desired to do. His word was absolute law. He could take any man's life at any time. Later in his reign, he took the lives of the sons of the king of Judah as their father watched and then had the father's eyes put out (see 2 Kings 25:1-7). So, these young teenagers knew that they had to comply with the king's demands or forfeit their lives.

They felt all the pressure and they heard all the arguments that any person hears today to try to get them to give up acting on the basis of faith. They surely heard the argument, in whatever form it took in those days, "Everybody else is doing this; what difference does it make what you eat? So what if you have a ham sandwich with these Babylonians? What's the difference?" After all, they were prisoners in a country far away from home. Who would know, or care, what they did?

They felt that pressure. But these young men stood fast and God honored them. God gave them the grace to stand despite that pressure, and as a result they were exalted and given positions of authority and responsibility in that kingdom. This story of repeated pressure goes right on through this book.

Daniel Chapter 2

In chapter 2 you see part of the reason for this kind of testing for these particular young men. It comes out more clearly in the story of the great dream-vision of King Nebuchadnezzar. We will go over this dream-vision and its prophetic interpretation in the next lesson.

Again in this chapter Daniel is pressured and threatened with death if he does not conform. Again God's man comes through, as he always does when he is willing to stand and obey God despite the pressures. God overrules in the affairs of mankind. Life is never determined by superficial pressures. The outcome that seems logically

inevitable as you face a situation is not necessarily the outcome that will happen if you are trusting in the invisible God who rules the affairs of mankind.

If you are in touch with God, you don't need to worry what the crowd is doing. God is able to carry you through and work the situation out no matter how impossible it looks. That is exactly the story of Daniel, repeated five different times through these first six chapters.

God gave Daniel and his friends the privilege of helping the most powerful man on earth to recognize the overall government of God. The world lives with the idea that there is no God, or that if He does exist He has no real power. He doesn't do anything. He doesn't change history. He doesn't affect human lives. He doesn't enter into situations and make any difference. He is a great old man in the sky, out there somewhere, who doesn't really affect anything that happens down here. That is the world's philosophy.

But every believer—if he or she walks faithfully and obeys what God says despite the pressure—is, like Daniel, given the privilege of opening the eyes of people to the fact that God exists, that He is not dead, that He is at work in the affairs of mankind, and that He is a power to be reckoned with.

Daniel Chapter 3

In chapter 3 you have the story of the fiery furnace. The young men were commanded to bow down before the image Nebuchadnezzar had erected. It was a huge image, as tall as a nine or ten story building. The whole crowd was gathered on the plain, with these three young men among them.

And there was a band—and what a band! The instruments are given to us here and we don't even recognize the names of all of them—the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music. Everyone was ordered to fall down and worship the image when the band played. They had some additional inducements. In order to compel their obedience, a great furnace was built at the other end of the plain; if they didn't bow down, that is where they would end up. Now, that was a lot of pressure for young people to bear, but in spite of the pressure, when the band played, everybody fell down and worshipped—everyone except the three young men.

When they were brought before Nebuchadnezzar, he ordered them to fall down and worship the image. Then they said these wonderful words, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter" (Daniel 3:16). They were not being impertinent. They meant that they didn't need to take any time to think over their answer. They knew what to say.

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not..." (Daniel 3:17-18a)

Those are words of faith: "But if not..." The young men were saying, "Our God is able to, but we don't know the mind of God. His thoughts are greater than our thoughts. His ways are different than ours. It may be that He won't do it. But even if He doesn't..."

“...we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Daniel 3:18b)

Now these were young men who had learned that there are things more important than life. It is better to be dead and obedient to God than alive and disobedient to Him. By God’s hand, they came out of the furnace without even the smell of fire upon them (see Daniel 3:27). What an amazing story!

Daniel Chapter 4

Then in chapter 4 you have the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar. Did you know that this whole chapter is the testimony of the greatest king, humanly speaking, that ever lived, the greatest tyrant that ever ruled? It is the story of how God broke the pride of his heart, humiliated him, humbled him, allowed him to exercise his pride until it resulted in what always results when men live in pride—madness. He went out and ate grass in the field for seven years. His throne was preserved, but he acted like an animal. When man chooses to walk out of fellowship with the living God, he becomes animal-like, beastly, brutish. King Nebuchadnezzar became like an animal.

Then Nebuchadnezzar tells how his reason was restored to him by the grace of God. His closing words in this chapter are a great testimony of his faith, and of how God humbled him and brought him back to the throne:

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Daniel 4:37)

Who brought him to this? Humanly speaking, it was Daniel and his friends; four young men were used of God to win the heart of the greatest king of the greatest empire in the world.

Daniel Chapter 5

Now look at chapter 5. Here is the story of King Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall. Note the luxury, licentiousness and lust of that kingdom—a degenerating, deteriorating kingdom. Daniel, having lived through three empires, was remembered by the queen and called upon to interpret what was written on the wall by a strange disembodied hand. Daniel boldly said that the hand wrote the judgment God had pronounced upon that licentious king. This bears out the thesis of this book—that God is at work in the affairs of mankind.

Daniel Chapter 6

Chapter 6 tells of the lions’ den, and it is the same story told in still another way. Darius threw Daniel into the lions’ den, but God sent His angel to shut the lions’ mouths. Daniel was brought out again, delivered by the hand of God.

The Prophetic Section of Daniel

Chapter 7 begins the prophetic section of Daniel, and we will study this section in detail in the following lessons.

You and I often hear people discussing what is happening in the world, with newspaper commentators and others constantly pouring into our ears reports of terrible things. People often say, “What is happening?”

In the tenth verse of chapter 12 Daniel is told:

Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. (Daniel 12:10)

Good and evil are at work in human society, but neither shall overpower the other. Good is not going to become so triumphant that evil finally disappears, as once was thought. Nor is evil going to be so powerful that good finally disappears. Both are going to come into a headlong conflict, and the Bible everywhere records that at that precise moment in history God shall again intervene in human affairs.

Prayer

Our Father, thank You for this reminder from the book of Daniel that You are a living God at work in the affairs of men; that we need not fear even though terrors reign on earth and men hide themselves for fear of them. You are in control of all, and he who walks with You will overcome. He who obeys You—not only in the great and glorious moments of victory, but also in the quiet hour when no one sees—is faithful to You, and shall at last triumphantly overcome as Daniel did. We thank You for this promise. Help us to walk in the strength of it. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Why Study Prophecy?

Too often, as people turn to prophetic sections of Scripture, such as the books of Daniel and Revelation, they are looking for a detailed blueprint of what will happen in the future, a chronological outline that will tell them exactly who, what, when, where, how and why things will happen. Then as they open these books they are confronted with strange images and symbols that often make no sense. Many people are left confused, bewildered and possibly even frightened.

Many of the prophecies of God's Word have already come to pass. We look back on their fulfillment and they make complete sense, but it is often *because* we are looking back. As they say, "Hindsight is 20-20." As we look at those prophecies yet unfulfilled they are not always quite so clear. Many of the symbols in Daniel and Revelation are interpreted for us elsewhere in Scripture. However, many of the prophesied events, although detailed in other parts of God's Word, are seen from the perspective of eternity and not laid out in neat chronological order. We can make educated suppositions on what things mean and how they play out in time, but remember they are only educated suppositions and only time will reveal the exact fulfillment. We are finite, limited beings looking at the infinite. We who live in time are given a glimpse into eternity.

So, then, what is the purpose of these yet unfulfilled prophecies? Revelation 19:10 tells us, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Prophecies in Scripture are to testify to us—to reveal to us—Jesus Christ.

As you work through the Study Questions, remember that your study of each section of Daniel will be followed in the next lesson by Pastor Stedman's Commentary. It is important to read the Commentary as well as complete the Study Questions! Many ideas are addressed in the Commentary that could not be brought out in the Questions. The Commentary gives us the benefit of Pastor Stedman's years of study and his outstanding teaching.

A special blessing awaits you as you study the book of Daniel. We pray that as you study these Scriptures, God will make them real to you, help you apply them to your life, and truly take them to heart.

Study Questions

Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the commentary on prophecy in the book of Daniel.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the commentary on prophecy in the book of Daniel, or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, tack it to your bulletin board, on the dashboard of your car, etc. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read Daniel 2:1-35.

1. a. We will begin with a review of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and then focus on its prophetic interpretation. How did the king test the wise men—the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers—of his court? (Daniel 2:1-6, summarize briefly)

b. How did the counselors answer him? (Daniel 2:10-11)

2. What did the king order, and how would this affect Daniel and his friends? (Daniel 2:12-13)

3. a. After Daniel asked the king for time to interpret the dream, how did he prepare for this task? (Daniel 2:16-18)

b. How did God answer Daniel? (Daniel 2:19a)

4. When Daniel returned to the king, to whom did he give the credit for his information? (Daniel 2:27-28a)

5. What was in the king's dream? (Daniel 2:31-35)

6. Personal: Do you believe, with Daniel, that “there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries” (Daniel 2:28)? Daniel told the king that the mystery was revealed, “so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand...” (Daniel 2:30). Daniel wrote this book so that God’s people also might know and understand these things. Write a prayer here asking God to help you understand His message in this book, and to help you live according to what you have learned.

Third Day: Read Daniel 2:28-45, concentrating on verse 28.

1. In Daniel 2:28, what time period did Daniel say the king’s dream reveals?

2. a. The Aramaic phrase *acharyth yowm*, translated “days to come” in Daniel 2:28, is also found in Hosea 3:5, where it is rendered “the last days.” From Hosea 3:4, what would be the religious situation of the Israelites before the final period of “the last days” began?

b. Read Luke 2:21-24. Were the Israelites still offering sacrifices in the temple at the time of Jesus’ birth? Therefore, had the final period of “the last days” begun yet?

3. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. From that time until this present hour, the Jews have never had a blood sacrifice. What did Jesus say in Luke 21:24b regarding this period?

4. a. After Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected from death, He spent time on earth with His apostles before ascending to the Father in heaven. Read Acts 1:6. What did the apostles ask Him?

b. What was Jesus’ answer in Acts 1:7?

5. Personal: The “times of the Gentiles” began with Nebuchadnezzar, and it appears that on June 6, 1967, when the Jews recaptured Jerusalem, this period began to draw to an end, as we head toward “the last days.”¹ However, we cannot set dates. There are no limitations on how long these periods take to run their course. God included prophecy in His Word for a reason. He wants us to read and study it, to have something by which to measure our lives and to help us distinguish between the temporary and the eternal, between the passing and the permanent. How does the knowledge of these prophecies change your perspective of your daily life?

Fourth Day: Review Daniel 2:36-45, concentrating on verses 36-39.

1. In the interpretation of the dream, what or whom did the image’s head of gold represent? (Daniel 2:38b)

2. a. What type of authority did Nebuchadnezzar have over his kingdom, according to Daniel 2:37-38a?

b. Who gave Nebuchadnezzar this power? (Daniel 2:37-38)

1. See Lesson 2 commentary.

3. a. In the king's dream, the image's chest and arms were made of silver. What did this represent? (Daniel 2:39a)
 - b. History identifies that kingdom clearly for us, and, in fact, it comes into the picture even before the book of Daniel closes. How does Daniel 5:28 identify the second kingdom?
 - c. Challenge: Read and briefly summarize Daniel 5, which tells how this kingdom rose to worldwide power.

4. a. In the king's dream, the next section of the statue was its belly and thighs. What was it made of? (Daniel 2:39b)
 - b. In his commentary on Daniel 2:39 in Lesson 2, Ray Stedman says this bronze kingdom "is identified for us in Daniel 8:21." Whom does this verse identify? We will go over this in more detail in Lessons 4 and 5.

5. The king's dream portrayed one human kingdom after another, down through the years. As each ruler ascended to power and conquered another, he surely felt that his kingdom must prevail. Yet, each one eventually gave way to the next. Review Daniel's prayer in Daniel 2:20-22. Who is in control of this process?

6. Personal: History has confirmed the identity of the second and third kingdoms of the king's dream, exactly as the book of Daniel predicted. This, as Stedman says in Lesson 2, shows us without a doubt that the prophetic word is "the word of reassurance that God is in control of human affairs." Do you sometimes feel hopeless as you are bombarded by all the bad news that is reported every day? Do you feel powerless to do anything about it all? How does today's confirmation of God's knowledge and power help you see things differently?

Fifth Day: Review Daniel 2:36-45, concentrating on verses 40-43.

1. In Daniel 2:33, Daniel described the next segment of the statue in the king's dream as "its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay." What would this kingdom do, from Daniel 2:40?

2. Challenge: In Lesson 2 Stedman writes, "It is clear now to us, as it must have been even to those in our Lord's day who read the prophecy of Daniel, that the fourth kingdom began with the Roman Empire." How do the following verses illustrate the widespread power of Rome during New Testament times?

Luke 2:1

Acts 16:12

3. From Daniel 2:41-43, what was the significance of the fact that in the king's dream the statue's feet were "partly of iron and partly of baked clay" (Daniel 2:33)?

4. Although the Roman Empire ended as a military power, its characteristics continue throughout the history of the Western world, up to and including our day. It has been and is still subject to divisions, just as Daniel prophesied. In Lesson 2, Stedman summarizes, "What is happening in the nations of the West in our day? Well, clearly they are torn by domestic strife. They are being weakened by internal conflict. There is enough iron yet to threaten with the power and strength of ancient Rome, but there is enough clay to weaken and paralyze so that nations are unable to accomplish their objectives." Do you see this paralysis happening in world events? Read Romans 8:19-25. What do believers wait and hope for, in spite of the frustration that constantly occurs in human affairs?

5. Personal: Have you accepted Jesus' sacrifice for your sin (read John 3:16)? If so, He has given you the gift of the Holy Spirit (see John 14:26). From Romans 8:26, how does the Holy Spirit help us as we deal with the frustrations and problems of daily human life? Write a prayer to God, thanking Him for these things.

Sixth Day: Read Daniel 2:36-45, concentrating on verses 44-45.

1. Review the final section of the king's dream in Daniel 2:34-35.

2. From Daniel 2:44-45a, what was the meaning of this part of the dream?

3. Challenge: Read 1 Peter 2:4-8. How did the apostle Peter describe Jesus Christ, using quotations from the Old Testament (Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; Psalm 118:22)?

4. In the king's dream, all human kingdoms "were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing-floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace;" in contrast, "The rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35). How is this portrayed in Revelation 11:15 and 19:11-16?

5. From Daniel 2:45b, when will this take place?

6. Personal: What is your relationship to that rock? Is He the foundation for your life, or is He coming to destroy all that you have built? Why not pray about this now?