

# REASSURING WORDS FOR TROUBLING TIMES

(An Overview of the Book of Daniel)

**Text.** Please turn to Daniel chapter 4.

**Intro.** A word here about the troubling circumstances we find ourselves in due to the coronavirus, economic upheaval and job loss, and the societal chaos in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder by police.

**Sermon series?** What would strengthen and encourage us in this chaos?

As I was praying and thinking about all this---Daniel!

The theme of the book of Daniel is the sovereignty of God. God is in total control even though it often looks like He is not in control at all.

**Daniel 4:17** ----- 'This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That **the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.**'

## **Sovereignty defined:**

Sovereignty has to do with the absolute control of God—His unlimited power and control over humanity and history (past, present, and future). Sovereignty means that even though humans and human institutions may totally rebel against God and His desires, God will ultimately accomplish His plans and purposes for mankind.

A scholar named Archer put it this way:

"The theme running through the whole book is that the fortunes of kings and the affairs of men are subject to God's decrees, and that he is able to accomplish his will despite the most determined opposition of the mightiest potentates on earth."

Now let's turn to Daniel 1.

600 years before Christ, God's chosen people the Jews are in rebellion against Him. God punishes rebellious Israel by sending the nation of Babylon to attack Israel, ravage and loot the city, and to take its citizens to Babylon as slaves.

**Daniel 1:1-2** ----- In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, [606 BC] Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. **And the Lord gave** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar [modern-day Iraq] to the house of his god; [Marduk] and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

Think if this happened to all of us. Think of what it would be like if, out of the blue, a foreign country (say, in South America) attacked the state of Texas and took all of us to South America to be their slaves, to follow their religion, for all of us to be given new names, and be forced to learn their language and customs and to eat the food they want us to eat.

What kind of thoughts would be rolling around in our minds if that suddenly happened to us?

A lot of Christians might be wondering: “Where is God in all of this? Why did He allow this to happen? What are we going to do? What is going to happen to us?”

This kind of situation is exactly where Daniel (prob. 15 yrs. old) and his friends find themselves.

In his commentary on Daniel, Baldwin says:

“The predominant message is that God’s people will experience suffering and be threatened with extinction, but that will not be the end of the story because their God is the living and all-powerful God who will get glory by vindicating His name and who will save them.”

In *The OT Explorer*, Charles Dyer says:

“[In addition to his prophecy about the future, Daniel] wrote to show what the believers’ present response should be as they await the coming kingdom of God. Daniel encouraged his readers to remain faithful to God in a hostile society while they waited for God’s promised kingdom.”

Over and over again in the first 6 chapters of Daniel, God does miraculous things to show, not only His people alive at that time (but you and I as well) that He is sovereign and at work on our behalf.

Do you remember what God did to help His people in the midst of their horrible enslavement to Babylon?

- God gives Daniel ability to interpret dreams;
- God protects Daniel’s three friends who were thrown into a fiery furnace;
- Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the tree that is cut down;
- Daniel interprets the writing on the wall;
- Daniel and the lion’s den.

If God had not intervened, Daniel and his three friends would have died at the hands of the ancient kings that ruled over them.

So in Daniel, God's sovereignty is revealed through **God's providence** and **miracles**, but it is also revealed another way—through **the rulers** He puts in office:

In chaps 1-6, there are three rulers from two different countries: Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar from Babylon, and Darius from Persia.

- **In chap 1, God** gives Jehoiakim (king of Judah) into Nebuchadnezzar's hand (Jehoiakim---burned book of Jeremiah)
- **In chap 2, we** have the vision human government being crushed by the stone (a prophetic picture of Christ's kingdom one day completely obliterating human rule).
- **In chap 4,** we see how God deals with those who don't submit to his authority (He judges them!)—Nebuchadnezzar is reduced to an animal for 7 years.
- As we saw earlier, **in chap 5, Belshazzar** has a massive banquet and sees a hand writing something on the wall. He cannot understand what it says, but Daniel can—and Daniel tells him that his days as a king are over. Again, God's sovereignty over man.
- And again, **in chap 6, we have** Daniel in a lion's den because he refused to obey a law that said he couldn't pray to anyone but King Darius. The morning after Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, King Darius asks Daniel (who is still alive) a question:

**Daniel 6:20** ----- “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

**Answer:**

**Daniel 6:22** ----- **My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths,** so that they have not hurt me...

Again, the sovereignty of God displayed through a simple Jewish man who amazes the king and all of his aides.

All of these miracles **in chaps 1-6 were very** encouraging to those trying to follow God in Old Testament times as they are to us as well. (Now, later this summer, we will look at **God's sovereignty concerning the future**—chaps 7-12—what will happen to planet earth and its inhabitants in the future? What are God's plans for Israel as well as the nations across the globe?)

**Application:** What effect did God intend that this book should have on the readers, the original Jewish readers of Daniel's day and us in our day? Let me suggest two simple applications.

**First, acknowledge God's sovereignty.**

We need to **understand** that God is in control and knows how to handle all that is happening in our world.

**Second, submit to God's sovereignty.**

**As we look around** we see chaos. The world around us is horribly evil and getting worse by the day. As humans, we can choose to live by faith in God and obedience to His word, or, we can choose to rebel.

We should follow in **Daniel's** footsteps—obeying God in a godless world.

Is Christ the King of your life? Do you obey Him in all He asks of you?

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Author Richard Exley shared the following true story. He wrote:

I know one [pastor] who returned to his pulpit ten days after his son committed suicide. Under duress he read his text: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Visibly struggling, he said, "I cannot make my son's suicide fit into this passage. It's impossible for me to see how anything good can come out of it. Yet I realize that I only see in part. I only know in part.

"It's like the miracle of the shipyard. Almost every part of our great oceangoing vessels are made of steel. If you take any single part—be it a steel plate out of the hull or the huge rudder—and throw it into the ocean, it will sink. Steel doesn't float! But when the shipbuilders are finished, when the last plate has been riveted in place, then that massive steel ship is virtually unsinkable.

"Taken by itself, my son's suicide is senseless. Throw it into the sea of Romans 8:28, and it sinks. Still, I believe that when the Eternal Shipbuilder has finally finished, when God has worked out his perfect design, even this senseless tragedy will somehow work to our eternal good."

**Closing words**