

## 04.01.2020 DANIEL: FROM READING TO UNDERSTANDING

*So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'*  
**Acts 8:30**

*God gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him. Daniel 2:21, 22*

*I make mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Ephesians 1:16, 17*

This quarter we study the book of Daniel. There are many good reasons why we should carefully study this book.

### 1. It gives us confidence in God.

Daniel is a book that is crucial to understanding the times we live in. It gives us unshakeable confidence that the God we worship is the sovereign God who is in control of history – our personal history, the history of the church and the history of the world.

### 2. Christ is the central theme of the book of Daniel.

- He is the Great Stone who will crush the kingdoms of this world (2:34, 35-44).
- He is the Son of Man who is given dominion by the Ancient of Days (7:13, 14)
- He is the coming Messiah who will be 'cut off (suffer the death penalty), but not for Himself' (9:25, 26).

### 3. The life and example of Daniel.

Daniel belonged to a group of Jews taken captive to Babylon. They are described in Daniel 1:3 and 4 as *'some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand.'*

He was placed in an intensive 3 year training programme in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. His name was changed (and the court even tried to change his diet to a Babylonian diet) so that he would lose his Jewish identification, but Daniel resolves to remain faithful to the God of his fathers, even unto death, if need be.

This faithfulness was rewarded by God for, like Jesus, he had favour with God and men. Kings of both the Babylonian and the Medo-Persian court respected and honoured him and deferred to his wisdom. The Babylonian queen mother said he had "insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods" (Daniel 5:11).

'In addition to being a prophet, Daniel was an administrator and a wise man. As such, his influence as a witness for God extended from the city of Babylon throughout the Neo-Babylonian Empire. While his administrative title "ruler over the entire province of Babylon" (Dan. 2:48) had to do with politics and government, the other responsibility the emperor gave him, the supervision of "all its wise men," had certain religious connotations.' *Daniel: Zdravko Stefanovic.*

He was a righteous man; his contemporary the prophet Ezekiel, himself a captive in another area of Babylon, refers to him three times as righteous (Ezekiel 14:4, 18, 20). He was a man 'greatly beloved' of God (Daniel 9:23, 10:11, 19).

'The book of Daniel tells us that normally, it was Daniel's custom in Babylon to pray "three times a day" (6:10). However, in crises and times of greater spiritual needs, he studied the prophetic writings and then turned his "face to the Lord God and searched for him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes" (9:3). At times, he would prolong this type of austere life for weeks, during which he would be on a very simple diet (10:2, 3). Various passages from Daniel's book indicate that his diligent and prayerful study of the Pentateuch and the scroll of

the prophet Isaiah exercised a positive influence on him. Yet it was the life and teaching of the prophet Jeremiah, Daniel's contemporary, that affected his life more than any other part of Scriptures.' *Ibid*.

As we study the book of Daniel, we shall see that the life of Daniel by faith, prayer, courage, consistency and lack of compromise. He knew that wisdom and understanding came from God and he was a fervent seeker of wisdom and therefore, of God Himself. What he learnt of God and His character was revealed in his life. Like Jesus, he worshipped and served God with an undivided heart (Daniel 6). Like Jesus, he identified himself with the plight of his people and interceded for them (Daniel 9).

'As God called Daniel to witness for Him in Babylon, so He calls us to be His witnesses in the world today. In the smallest as well as the largest affairs of life, He desires us to reveal to men the principles of His kingdom. Many are waiting for some great work to be brought to them, while daily they lose opportunities for revealing faithfulness to God. Daily they fail of discharging with wholeheartedness the little duties of life. While they wait for some large work in which they may exercise supposedly great talents, and thus satisfy their ambitious longings, their days pass away. In the life of the true Christian there are no nonessentials; in the sight of Omnipotence every duty is important. *Prophets and Kings: p. 487-488*

#### 4. How do we read Daniel today?

*God gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him. Daniel 2:21, 22*

When we read the Bible, it must not be just to gain knowledge. That only touches our intellect. The scribes and Pharisees were the best Bible students of the time and they crucified the Messiah foretold by Daniel. Jesus understood that they only had an intellectual understanding of the Scriptures. He said to them, "*You do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*" *John 5:38-40*

When we read the Bible, we must ask God for wisdom, understanding and revelation. This does not merely involve our intellect and reasoning. It involves our spirit – that part of man which communicates with God. Wisdom, understanding and revelation are ours when we wait upon the Holy Spirit to reveal to us what God wants us to understand as we read His Word.

The Apostle Paul understood this very well. That is why he prayed, "***I make mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. I am praying that the eyes of your heart (understanding) be enlightened.***" *Ephesians 1:16-18*

Paul is not praying that just our minds be enlightened. He wants our hearts to be enlightened. The purpose of our Bible study must be to get revelation from the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit's revelation will always lead us to Christ Himself – our Friend, our Saviour, our Redeemer, our Justification, our Sanctification, our Lord, Master and King.

**When studying the Bible, we begin by using our eyes (body) to read. Then the Word enters our mind (soul). But then the Word must penetrate beyond our soul to our spirit, where the Holy Spirit will give us revelation. When our spiritual vision is clear, then we become 'obedient to the heavenly vision'. Too many Christians today are disobedient to the Word because they have only understood it emotionally and mentally, not spiritually.**

As we study the book of Daniel, let us fervently ask God to reveal to us the meaning of the book through His Holy Spirit. Only then will we put our confidence in Christ. Only then will we live in the certainty that the God of the Bible is the God who knows the plans He has for us- '*thoughts of peace, to give us a hope and a future*' *Jeremiah 29:11*. The prophet Jeremiah who penned these words was a contemporary of Daniel who lived in Jerusalem in the time of the Babylonian captivity and greatly influenced Daniel's life.

*We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

***But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:8-14***

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#### **Additional Notes:**

Chapters 1-7 of Daniel are primarily historical (though they have lessons for us today, as do the stories of the Old Testament). Chapters 2-7 are written in Aramaic (the language of Babylon) and the remaining chapters are written in Hebrew as they were intended for Jewish readers.

Chiastic Structure of Chapters 2-7):

- 'Chiasm' (from the Greek letter X [pronounced "key"]) a literary form that is based on Hebrew logic.
- The structure of these chapters follows this form.
- In chiasms, writers reason full circle, coming back to the beginning point of an argument.
- The first point parallels the last point. The second point parallels the next-to-last point, and so on, with the climax at the centre rather than the end.

- A. Nebuchadnezzar's vision of four kingdoms (Daniel 2)
- B. God delivers Daniel's companions from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3)
- C. Judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4)
- C'. Judgment upon Belshazzar (Daniel 5)
- B'. God delivers Daniel from the den of lions (Daniel 6)
- A'. Daniel's vision of four kingdoms (Daniel 7)

The central message is that God is sovereign over the kings of the earth. He establishes kings and removes them - temporarily as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar and permanently as in the case of Belshazzar.

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#### **Current Interpretation of End-Time Prophecies in Christendom**

There are four schools of interpretation regarding Daniel and Revelation.

There are four schools of interpretation. They are:

- **Preterism**
- **Futurism**
- **Idealism**
- **Historicism.**

Whichever school you belong to, you will arrive at a different conclusion. So it is important that you are aware of the four schools, but it is also important that you know the background. Let us briefly observe what each school believes.

The **Preterist** believed that the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were all fulfilled within the near proximity of the prophet. In other words, by the second century B.C., all of Daniel's prophecies were already fulfilled. Within a few years after John, all the prophecies of Revelation were fulfilled. In other words, the prophecies do not have a long range view. This is one view.

The next view is **Futurism**. This is held by quite a few Christians today. Futurism teaches that some of the prophecies of the prophetic sections of Daniel and Revelation were fulfilled in the prophet's day or in his period. But then there was a big gap in time and the prophecies of the last days are fulfilled at the end of time. In other words, some were fulfilled during Daniel's period and others will be fulfilled at the end of time and between is a gap known as the "gap" theory. For example, of the 70 weeks of Daniel 9, it says that 69 weeks were fulfilled during the Jewish period and Daniel's period and the 70th week will be fulfilled at the end of time. In between is the big gap.

**Idealism** says that prophecies are not predictions but simply symbolic forms of instruction. This is the position of many Lutheran scholars who do not believe that God can see the future.

Then we come to the **Historicist** position, which is the Adventist position. This position believes that prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are a continual record or prophecies of historical events or periods until the consummation. In other words, it gives us a continuous basic event that will take place from Daniel until the time of the end. Or from John in the book of Revelation until the time of the end. So we have an overall panoramic view of the history of the world from these prophets' time till the end of time.

**This position was not invented by Adventists. This was the main school of the reformers. The historicist is often known as the "reformation school of interpretation." So we belong, as a church, to the reformation camp. The reformers using the historicist approach of Daniel and Revelation, mainly Daniel, came to the conclusion that the "little horn" of Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 was the papacy. That was the conclusion the reformer Luther came to. It was not something that we invented. The reformers believed that.**

If you were a Roman Catholic, what would you do? You would not take that sitting down. So the Roman Catholic Church came up with two scholars — both Jesuit priests. The preterist scholar was Luis De Alcazar. He was from Seville, Spain, a Jesuit priest who came up with the idea of the preterist interpretation. If you say that the prophecies of Daniel were fulfilled all within the period of Daniel's time, you have to excuse the papacy because the papacy did not exist in Daniel's period or the second century, B.C. The papacy began in the fifth century A.D.; therefore, by using the preterist approach, you save the Catholic Church from being the "little horn." I don't blame them. They are trying to save themselves from an embarrassment, because the little horn is equated with the antichrist.

The other position, the futurists, also introduced by a Jesuit priest Francisco Ribera, from Salamanca, also from Spain. He came up with the futurist idea that some of the prophecies of Daniel were fulfilled in his time and some at the end of time, and, in the gap theory, which is the papacy period, none of the prophecies apply.

So whichever approach you take — Futurist or Preterist — you deliver the Roman Catholic Church from being the little horn. I don't blame them for that. What bothers me is the fact that today almost every denomination in the Christian world that came out in Protestantism except for the Seventh-day Adventist Church has given up the historicist interpretation and gone to the Roman Catholic position. Is that progress or recession? I'm sure that, if Luther was to rise up from his grave, he would be horrified with what the Protestant churches have done with their school of interpretation, the historicist.

So remember that these two schools which today are accepted by the Christian churches at large were both originated, futurism and preterism, by the Roman Catholic scholars. They had a purpose. They met that purpose. Today the Protestant churches have fallen for it and, therefore, have liberated the Catholic Church from being the "little horn."

When I use the term "Roman Catholic Church," I am not referring to Catholic Christians. I come from a very strong Roman Catholic background. I am pointing my finger at the hierarchy, not at the members of that church. We must

make a distinction that the Roman Catholic Church makes themselves. To them, the church is divided into two camps, the teaching church (the Magisterium) and the taught church. I am not referring to the taught church, which comprise the members. I am referring to the teaching church. I challenged my own uncle, who is a Jesuit priest, when we discussed this, to defend both the preterist and the futurist position with an honest exegesis of Daniel and he came up with poor conclusions, so I said to him, "I am not willing to accept your position even though the Protestant churches have. He told me, "All the other denominations have turned to our position." And I said to him, "If a thousand people tell lies and one person tells the truth, lying doesn't become truth."

*EH 'Jack' Sequeira. Available at: <http://www.jacksequeira.org/sanctuary17.htm>*

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