

The Book of Daniel Introduction Selected Scriptures

Introduction

It has been argued by several notable theologians that if one theme were to capture the message of the Bible it would be the kingdom of God. While some regard this as an oversimplification, others are convinced otherwise. For example, author John Bright has written, “The concept of the Kingdom of God involves in a real sense, the total message of the Bible; and the Old Testament and New Testament thus stand together as the two acts of a single drama. Act I points to its conclusion in Act II, and without it the play is an incomplete, unsatisfying thing. But Act II must be read in the light of Act I, else its meaning will be missed. For the play is organically one. The Bible is one book. Had we given that book a title, we might with justice call it, ‘The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God.’”

Another highly regarded author, Michael Vlach, also believes that the kingdom of God is the central theme of Scripture. In his comprehensive book, *He Shall Reign Forever*, he traces the theme from Genesis to Revelation and provides compelling evidence for his argument. John MacArthur writes the forward to this book and states, “As Dr. Michael Vlach so clearly shows in his book, a very powerful argument can be made that the kingdom of God is the central and unifying theme of Scripture, and it is the climactic fulfillment of the story of redemption. In his words the kingdom of God is both the ‘grand theme of Scripture and the solution for all that’s wrong.’” Obviously, MacArthur’s high regard for Scripture and knowledge of the Word give tremendous weight to his endorsement. Yet other biblically astute authors do disagree with him. Despite all of this, what is largely agreed upon is that the kingdom of God is a significant theme from Genesis to Revelation.

Yet what is meant by the phrase, “the kingdom of God?” Simply stated, the kingdom of God can be defined as the rule of God over all His creation. More specifically, as Thomas Schreiner explains in his book *The King in His Beauty*, the kingdom of God has a three fold dimension- it focuses on God as king, on human beings as His subjects, and the universe as the place where His kingship is worked out.

As created beings, men and women are called to submit to God's authority, and if they will not submit judgment is warranted (Gen. 2:16-17). Additionally, and arguable most significantly, God's kingship is supremely demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ (Ps. 2, Dan. 7:13:14). Through His atoning work, all people have been given the opportunity to be released from the judgment that is owed them, and enabled to lovingly submit to the God who made them (Rom. 6:23). Going further, the Scriptures teach that through Christ's atoning work, redeemed humanity is given a significant role to play in God's kingdom (Heb. 2:5-9) To be more specific, God's original design for humanity from the start was that men and women would be his ruling representatives on the earth exercising dominion over all that God had made (Gen. 1:26-28). Ultimately, sin marred God's original design, but through Christ these kingdom realities will one day be fully realized when the Lord returns (Acts 3:20-21, Rom. 8:18-25, Rev. 20-22) to set up His kingdom on earth. Summarizing these ideas Roy B. Zuck writes, "History is going somewhere; it is moving according to God's divine plan, which will culminate in the return of Christ, followed by his 1,000- year reign on the earth, which in turn will be followed by the eternal state in the new heaven and the new earth."

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the kingdom of God is an immensely rich and nuanced theme. There is a grandeur and glory to it that should always be kept central in our study and discussions. Yet this should not discourage us from learning, or seeking to understand what God has revealed. Rather it should keep us humble, and eager to mine the riches of the Word so that we will grow in our knowledge of God and His magnificent truth.

With these thoughts in mind, the book of Daniel makes significant contributions to establishing the theme of the kingdom of God in the Scriptures. As with any other book of the Bible, Daniel is set in a specific historical and cultural context, and yet within this framework the predominant truth being highlighted is God's sovereign rule over the events of history. As Dr. Todd Bolen says, "The culmination of all kingdoms is revealed in nearly every chapter of the book, as some kings recognize the supremacy of God's eternal kingdom, and other visions depict it being established at the time it destroys the last human kingdom. The message of the book highlights that the Lord **'sets up kings and deposes them'** and that **'in the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set**

up a kingdom that will never be destroyed' but 'will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (Dan. 2:21,44).

Additionally, the book of Daniel is unique in that it addresses the actual timing of God's coming kingdom through its remarkably specific prophecies. In Daniel 2,7, and 9 readers are given chronological markers that provide insight into the timing and circumstances surrounding the ushering in of God's kingdom. While Jesus made clear in Matt. 24:35-44 that no one can know the exact time or hour of His return, the visions of Daniel highlight that God has not left humanity in the dark about the timetable of His kingdom either. While some students of Scripture will dismiss the prophecies of Daniel as being too difficult to interpret, the fact is that God has given them to man for his encouragement (Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). By studying the texts, and applying sound interpretive principles, readers can be encouraged by the truth God *has* revealed. They can understand where history is headed, and even grasp where they fit into the narrative. And ultimately, by grasping more and more truth their faith can be fortified and their hope can grow.

Key Verse of Daniel:

"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." Daniel 7:13-14

Author and Date:

The book of Daniel was written by the prophet Daniel toward the end of his life, likely in the time frame of 536-530 B.C. The book opens in 605 B.C., when Babylon conquered Jerusalem, and then continues to record historical events that occurred over the next 70 years. While there has been considerable attack on the authorship and date of Daniel, significant time will not be devoted to these claims. That being said, a few key points should be noted:

1. The authorship, date, and canonicity of Daniel were largely unchallenged until the rise of “higher criticism” in the seventeenth century. This meant for more than 2000 years Jews and Christians alike embraced the traditional view that Daniel himself wrote the book towards the end of his life.
2. Within the book the author plainly discloses who he is and the time frame of the events he documents. For those who reject this testimony, the conclusion that must be drawn is that the author was trying to intentionally deceive his audience.
3. A primary argument against the reliability of Daniel, is that the miracles it records are an impossibility, and the prophecies it documents are far too detailed and specific (ie. from chapter 11 alone 135 prophecies have been fulfilled). These arguments are largely given by biased critics who deny the supernatural, sovereign power of God.
4. Important confirmation for the traditional view is found in the writings of Ezekiel, a contemporary prophet of Daniel (Ezekiel 14:14, 20, 28:3).
5. Jesus, Himself, affirmed the reliability of Daniel in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:15, Mark 13:14). This alone should validate the traditional view.

Genre:

The book of Daniel is first of all historical narrative. It documents real events in history that took place in a specific geographical and historical context. Yet within the narrative, apocalyptic writing abounds. What this means is that in various sections of the book God reveals truth about future events through visions and symbols, which are given to encourage readers about the ultimate victory of God. As Miller says, “The major theme or message of apocalyptic writing is the eschatological triumph of the kingdom of God over the kingdoms of the earth.”

Historical Context:

The book of Daniel opens in 605 B.C. when Babylon conquered Jerusalem and exiled Daniel, along with many other prominent Jews. Daniel, likely about 15 years old at the time, was born during the final days of the southern kingdom of Judah, when the

godly king, Josiah, was reigning (2 Kings 23:28-36, Dan. 1:1). Sadly, the godly reign of Josiah was followed by the ungodly reign of his sons Jehoahaz (3 months) and Jehoiakim (11 years). Jehoiakim, the king ruling when Daniel was exiled, was a man who completely disregarded the Word of the Lord, even burning the scrolls of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 36). While there were some who remained faithful to the Lord in Judah, the nation as a whole continued in their long-standing pattern of rebellion (Jer. 37:2). Because of their refusal to repent on a national level, the Lord was faithful to His Word, and the judgment that had been prophesied against them eventually came to pass (Dan. 1, 2 Kings 24, Jer. 39). Additionally, it should be noted that the Northern kingdom of Israel had already fallen to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:5-6) so when the Babylonians conquered Judah, the judgment God had warned them about was finally complete.

As we consider the historical context, it is important to also understand that when Daniel was exiled to Babylon in 605 BC, it was actually the first of three conquests by Nebuchadnezzar. In 597 BC the Babylonians returned to Jerusalem and took another ten thousand Jews captive, Ezekiel, the prophet being one of them (2 Kings 24:10-17). Eight years later, they returned again, this time laying full siege to Jerusalem, burning Solomon's temple, tearing down the walls of the beautiful city, and leaving little but destruction behind (2 Kings 25, Jer. 39). Interestingly, the prophet Jeremiah survived all of these conquests, and continued to courageously speak the word of the Lord in Jerusalem until he was carried away to Egypt, where he later died.

Daniel, of course, was well aware of all that was going on in his beloved homeland and grieved over the circumstances (Dan. 9). While the success he garnered in Babylonian society could have corrupted his faith, he never allowed this to happen. His loyalty to the Lord and continued willingness to be identified with his fellow Jews characterized his life in Babylon, and allowed him to fulfill the remarkable role God had planned for him.

Theological Themes:

“Without a doubt the principal theological focus of the book is the sovereignty of God. Every page reflects the author’s criticism that his God was the Lord of individuals, nations, and all of history.” This quote from Miller summarizes the main thrust of Daniel’s theology, and is seen throughout the book. Regardless of how it may appear, Daniel teaches that God’s ultimate kingship is always intact- even when circumstances indicate otherwise.

Of course, the tension that exists is that so often it appears that evil is winning in this fallen world. For the Jews to whom the book was written, this was especially true for they found themselves living in the midst of God’s judgment. Yet in the midst of this, God gave Daniel a remarkably encouraging message- God had not forsaken His people, and would still fulfill all the promises He had made to them- and more!

Throughout the book, the reality of God’s sovereign rule is further demonstrated through the display of miraculous signs and wonders. Through these, God was continuing to reveal that He was the one and only Lord, and nothing could ever thwart His authority or plan. Of course, undergirding all other theological emphases in the book is the reality that one day all earthly kings and kingdoms will pass away, and Jesus Christ will reign as King in a literal, unilateral, everlasting sense (Dan. 3:31-35, 44-45, 7:13-14).

Hermeneutical Guidelines:

As we study the book of Daniel, it will be important for us to keep in mind some basic interpretive principles. As was mentioned earlier, Daniel is full of prophetic, apocalyptic content, which does make interpreting it a challenge. Yet many challenges can be avoided if the reader remains faithful to the following principles. These principles, while applicable to Daniel, should always be considered when studying any Biblical text.

1. The Literal Principle.

Scripture must always be read in its literal, normal, and natural sense. While the Bible does contain many figures of speech and symbols, they were still intended

to convey literal truth. This is especially important to remember when studying prophecy, for there is a tendency, even among conservative interpreters, to over-spiritualize or allegorize certain texts. By looking for deeper, more mystical meanings, they end up drawing conclusions from the text that are simply unfounded.

2. The Historical Principle

Scripture should always be interpreted in light of its historical context. A question that should always be asked is, "What did the text mean to the original audience?" By working through the answer to this question, readers can better understand the author's reason for writing, and grasp the context in which he was communicating.

3. The Grammatical Principle

When studying Scripture, the grammatical structure of each sentence in the original language should be considered. What is the tense of the main verb? Who are the pronouns referring to? By answering simple questions such as these, readers will find the meaning of the text oftentimes becomes immediately clear.

4. The Synthesis Principle

Finally, Scripture must always be synthesized with the rest of Scripture. Paramount in this process is the understanding that because of divine authorship, the Bible will never contradict itself. Therefore, if readers draw a conclusion that contradicts what other passages of the Bible teach, the interpretation that is being drawn cannot be correct.

(Summarized content from MacArthur Study Bible and Basics of Bible Interpretation)

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