

Reformation Fellowship Notes • April 19, 2020
Teacher: David Crabtree
Handout #1
Daniel Introduction, Part 1

I. Introduction

- A. I am going spend two weeks giving an introduction.
 - 1. I already gave a brief introduction to Daniel.
 - a) But it is now obsolete.
 - b) I don't want to take too much time with introductions.
 - c) But there are some things that are important to say.

II. Why study Daniel?

- A. It addresses this question: How do we live godly lives in a world dominated by huge hostile forces?
 - 1. We have to understand why we exist.
 - a) What is life all about?
 - (1) We live in an age when our culture can't figure this out.
 - (2) We need to have clarity for our own sake and the sake of those around us.
 - 2. We need to understand the story that human history is telling.
- B. Besides, the book of Daniel is inherently interesting.

III. Is this book written for a Jewish audience?

- A. This was my starting assumption.
 - 1. It was written at a key time in Jewish history; their whole world was turned upside down.
 - a) Exile
 - b) Destruction of Jerusalem
 - c) Destruction of temple
 - 2. Concentrated prophetic activity
 - a) Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were all written at this time.
- B. But half of the book is written in Aramaic.
 - 1. Aramaic was the lingua franca of the ANE.
 - 2. Why would God have done this? How can this be explained?
- C. It is a Jewish book.
 - 1. It assumes a knowledge of things Jewish.

- a) The OT
 - b) History of Israel and Judah
 - c) It is written at a key time in Jewish history.
2. But the first half is focused on the universal phenomenon.
 - a) It exposes the nature of Empire.
 - b) This is highly and directly relevant to the whole world.
 3. The second half is focused on the relevance of Empire for the fate of Israel.
 - a) At this point, the text switches back to Hebrew.

IV. Is Daniel a prophetic work?

- A. According to Jewish tradition, Daniel was not categorized as a prophetic work.
 1. Apparently because Daniel does not say, “Thus says the Lord.”
- B. But by content it is very much like the prophetic works.
 1. To my mind it fits into the corpus of prophetic works.
- C. But it is unlike the other prophetic works.
 1. Several visions full of symbolism
 - a) A few of those visions were not visions that Daniel saw; he just interpreted them.
 - b) Curiously, the visions become less symbolic as we progress through the book.
 - (1) The last is not symbolic at all.
 2. Most prophetic works do not contain much specific, detailed prediction.
 - a) Daniel has the most of any of the prophetic works.

V. Digression: My comments about newspaper exegesis of prophecy

- A. What is meant by newspaper exegesis?
 1. It is interpreting the prophetic works by imposing current events on the prophet’s words.
 - a) This is, of course, wrong.
 2. Proper interpretation seeks the meaning of the human author.
 3. But prophecy is a little different.
 - a) When Daniel has a vision, the vision is authored by God; Daniel is just relating what he saw.
 - b) So, we are interpreting God’s vision as told by Daniel.
 - (1) And we can see in the text itself that Daniel does not fully understand the visions he is relating.
 - (2) Anyone who conscientiously tries to interpret the prophetic works can easily see why there are so many different interpretations.
 - c) I have long held that much of predictive prophecy cannot be clearly understood until the events it describes start taking place.
 - (1) If this is true, newspaper exegesis is inevitable.

- (2) It is not wrong to try to see if current events match the prophetic prediction.
 - (a) But hold on to such interpretations very loosely.
 - (b) I think any matches will be very clear when the time comes.

VI. My observations about the message of the prophetic works

- A. I have been working on the prophetic books for several years now.
 - 1. There is still much that I don't understand.
 - a) My liabilities
 - (1) Not all that bright
 - (2) Bad memory
 - (a) Each prophetic book (and even non-prophetic books) contribute pieces to the picture.
 - b) I still don't have a prophetic timeline.
 - (1) I won't be able to present a clear and detailed vision of what will happen and in what order at the end of time.
- B. But I am getting a feel for what they are about.
 - 1. In the simplest form, the prophetic works are a call to repentance.
 - a) At the core of the prophetic works is a presentation of the gospel.
 - (1) Gospel—the good news that salvation is available to man.
 - 2. The gospel can be presented in an infinite variety of ways.
 - a) The Pentateuch, Psalms, Prophets, Gospels, Epistles of Paul each give their own unique presentation of the gospel.
 - b) All are elaborations on the call to repentance.
 - 3. The prophetic works present the gospel by raising the question, “Where will you turn when it all comes down?”
 - a) They talk about impending disasters.
 - (1) How will you respond when that disaster strikes?
 - b) But the contemporary disaster is a taste of the great disaster that is coming at the end of history.
 - (1) That great disaster poses the same question more pointedly.
 - (a) How would you respond to that great disaster?
 - c) How we respond depends on how we think about what happens in this life.
 - (1) How do we explain to ourselves the nature of this life?
 - 4. There were two competing narratives at the time of the prophets.
 - a) The dominant narrative: Polytheistic worldview
 - (1) Ubiquitous in the ANE
 - (2) There are many gods.
 - (a) Each is at home in its own land with its own people.
 - (b) The fortunes of each land are a reflection of the relative power of the god of that land.
 - (i) When Babylon conquered Judah, that indicated that Marduk was far more powerful than YHWH.

- (ii) Therefore, Judahites were inclined to shop around for a better god.
- b) Biblical narrative: YHWH is the one true God.
 - (1) The people of Israel are YHWH's chosen people.
 - (a) They are the people through whom God has elected to reveal himself to the world.
 - (2) God has a unique relationship with the people of Israel.
 - (a) God made a covenant with them.
 - (i) That covenant obligates them to obey God.
 - (ii) There is a severe penalty for disobedience.
 - (b) They did not obey God's laws.
 - (c) God came in judgment against the people of Israel.
 - (i) They were warned many times.
 - (ii) The judgment was foretold; it was not a surprise.
 - (3) The conquest by the Babylonians was not due to Marduk's power.
 - (a) It was because YHWH used the Babylonians to punish Judah.
 - (4) God chose to support this narrative with just a "still, small voice."
 - (a) God rarely acts overtly in history.
- 5. The issue is which narrative are the people of Israel going to accept?
 - a) The dominant narrative had overwhelming cultural support.
 - (1) It was the "natural" way to understand things.
 - b) Will God's people embrace the biblical narrative in spite of the huge cost?
- 6. How this is expressed in Isaiah
 - a) Isaiah 46:8-11 — God is in complete control of history.

"Remember this, fix it in mind,
 take it to heart, you rebels.
 Remember the former things, those of long ago;
 I am God, and there is no other;
 I am God, and there is none like me.
 I make known the end from the beginning,
 from ancient times, what is still to come.
 I say: My purpose will stand,
 and I will do all that I please.
 From the east I summon a bird of prey;
 from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose.
 What I have said, that will I bring about;
 what I have planned, that will I do.

- b) Isaiah 44:6-8 — God's people are witnesses to God's character.

"This is what the LORD says—
 Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:
 I am the first and I am the last;
 apart from me there is no God.

Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.
 Let him declare and lay out before me
 what has happened since I established my ancient people,
 and what is yet to come—
 yes, let him foretell what will come.
 Do not tremble, do not be afraid.
 Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?
 You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?
 No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.”

c) Isaiah 43:9-13

All the nations gather together
 and the peoples assemble.
 Which of them foretold this
 and proclaimed to us the former things?
 Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right,
 so that others may hear and say, “It is true.”
 “You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,
 “and my servant whom I have chosen,
 so that you may know and believe me
 and understand that I am he.
 Before me no god was formed,
 nor will there be one after me.
 I, even I, am the LORD,
 and apart from me there is no savior.
 I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
 I, and not some foreign god among you.
 You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God.
 Yes, and from ancient days I am he.
 No one can deliver out of my hand.
 When I act, who can reverse it?”

7. What God wants is to have his character and the Narrative vindicated.
 - a) He is a good, faithful, righteous, sovereign, creator God.
 - b) Everyone who lives his life in accordance with this truth is a witness to God’s character.
 - c) Every act of faithfulness is a victory for God.
8. The prophets are all about supporting the still, small voice.
 - a) History is a stage on which we live our lives.
 - b) The prophets are cheering us on to live lives of faith.
 - c) There will be times when this will be very costly.
 - d) In the end of history, it will be particularly costly
 - (1) And it will look like God is losing on all fronts.
 - (a) Faithfulness will seem very costly and “foolish.”

- (2) It will be increasingly important to understand the story that history is telling.
 - (a) It will be helpful to know in advance how much it will look like God is losing.
- C. All the prophetic works are helping us to understand the story of history and prepare us for the fact that at the end it will look like the cause of God is hopeless.
 - 1. Daniel is most interested in clarifying the nature of Empire.
 - a) In the end, Empire will achieve its most “perfect” form.
 - 2. The book of Daniel spells out some of the most significant implications of this fact.

VII. Historical background

- A. Assyrian period (745-605)
 - 1. The Assyrians were an aggressive and cruel people.
 - 2. They dominated the ANE for more than a century.
 - 3. They were the instrument of God’s judgment on Israel and Judah.
 - a) Both nations had been unfaithful to God.
 - b) Assyria conquered Israel.
 - (1) Assyria took the people into exile.
 - c) Assyria did not conquer Judah.
 - (1) God miraculously protected them.
 - (a) This story is told in Isaiah 36-37, II Kings 18-19, II Chronicles 32.
 - 4. Assyria treated the kingdoms it conquered brutally.
 - a) They completely destroyed Babylon in 689.
 - (1) This made Babylon determined to overthrow Assyrian power.
- B. Nabopolassar (626-605)
 - 1. He became a leader of the Babylonians and in 626 BC attacked Nineveh—
 - a) In alliance with Medes and Scythians.
 - 2. Nabopolassar and his alliance fought against Assyria for about 21 years, gradually destroying their power.
- C. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562)
 - 1. He became a leading commander under his father.
 - 2. He defeated Assyrians and Egyptians at battle of Carchemish in 605.

It is probable that during these months Damascus, Tyre, Sidon, Jerusalem, and other cities were visited by Nebuchadnezzar or by his lieutenants, and peacefully, but not happily, they swore allegiance to this fresh master from beside the Euphrates and emptied their chests into his own. (Newsome p. 20)

- D. The exile of Daniel (605)
 - 1. It would appear that Nebuchadnezzar took some hostages along with tribute (including some vessels from the temple) from Judah back to Babylon.
 - 2. He took a few thousand young people from prominent families.
 - 3. This was an earthshaking event.
 - a) God and his people are losing to pagan forces.
 - b) The temple was destroyed.
 - (1) Worship of YHWH centered around the temple in Jerusalem.
- E. The emergence of Empire
 - 1. The emergence of empires was a relatively new phenomenon.
 - a) This quote from the historian John Bright:

The campaigns of Tiglath-pileser differed from those of his predecessors in that they were not tribute-gathering expeditions, but permanent conquests. In order to consolidate his gains, Tiglath-pileser adopted a policy which, although not wholly novel, had never been applied with such consistency before. Instead of contenting himself with receiving tribute from native princes and punishing rebellion with brutal reprisals, Tiglath-pileser, when rebellion occurred, habitually deported the offenders and incorporated their lands as provinces of the empire, hoping in this way to quench all patriotic sentiment capable of nurturing resistance. This policy, consistently followed by Tiglath-pileser and copied by all his successors, was one which Israel would in turn learn the meaning. (Bright, p. 271)

- b) Empire building began with the Assyrians, but it was furthered by their successors, the Babylonians.
 - c) It was the most powerful human enterprise the world had ever seen.
- 2. Short-term historical context of the book of Daniel
 - a) The Babylonians overthrew the Assyrian empire and quickly took over the territory the Assyrians had controlled.
 - (1) This includes taking control of Judah
 - (a) Babylonians deported some of Judah's most promising youth (Daniel was among them) in 605 BC.
 - (b) They were taken from the land God had given to the Jews.
 - (c) They were taken from the temple where Jews were able to connect with God.
 - b) Baldwin argues that this is the context in which apocalyptic literature was born (here quoting Cross):

The origins of apocalyptic must be searched for as early as the sixth century BC. In the catastrophe of the exile, the older forms of faith and tradition came into crisis, and Israel's institutions, including her religious institutions, collapsed or were transformed." (Baldwin, p. 57)

If it be true that there is a connection between adversity and apocalyptic there could be no more likely time for it to come to fruition than the sixth century, when every visible

expression of Israel's very existence collapsed, and the shape of the future was completely unknown. (Baldwin, p. 58)

VIII. My presentation of Daniel

- A. Daniel is not an easy book.
 - 1. There are many different takes on the book.
 - 2. This is my best shot at this time,
 - a) I have made many assumptions,
 - (1) I have considerable confidence in some of those assumptions,
 - (2) I have far less confidence in others,
 - b) A new piece of information, or a new insight could cause me to change my interpretation significantly,
 - (a) I offer this not as the “gospel truth” on the book of Daniel but rather something for your consideration