

GODLY LIVING IN A GODLESS WORLD

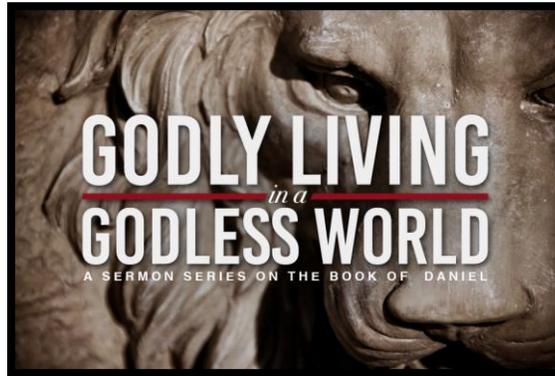
Expositional Study Of Daniel

Daniel 1:1-2

Written By

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The Apostle Paul's prophetic words in his last letter sound like he surfed our net, read our papers, and had his nose in the news of our day:

¹ But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. ⁶ For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these *men* also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith" (2 Timothy 3).

Based on what I see not just in and from my constantly unraveling post-modern, highly relativistic culture here in the States, but in my analysis of ever-changing world events, I think we can safely change the verbiage in verse one to read "... difficult times have come." As in Isaiah's day, before Judah fell as a nation, darkness has replaced light, immorality has become morality and morality is now immorality ... and it has all occurred at breakneck, breath-taking, and shocking speed. We all see it.

For years, I've read about what's occurring nationally and internationally from a wide field of writers. Judge Robert Bork's must read *Slouching Towards Gommorah* is representative of a plethora of well-documented titles illustrating that we, as a nation, are morally, socially,

economically, and spiritually crumbling. Judge Bork spends his entire tome teaching us how this is occurring, coupled with ideas of how to slow the slouch down. Other books like Patrick Buchanan's *Death of A Superpower*, Mark Steyn's *America Alone*, Chuck Colson's *Against The Night*, and a whole host of others describe where our current godless, man-is-the-measure, tolerate anything and everything except for moral, Bible-believing people, truth is relative trajectory will take us nationally and globally and the picture is not too pleasant. In fact, it's downright scary ... if you don't know God.

Paul, who did know the living God, gives us hope because he, like Daniel of old, hands us a road-map telling us it is going to be a bumpy ride prior to the appearance of Jesus, the Christ. In light of this prophetic truth, we need to ask, "How should we then live?" ... to tap into the title of the late Francis Schaeffer's powerful apologetic for dark days. Yes, how should we live? Should we cower in fear? Should we buy a bunker? Should we build a safe room? Should we stock up on food and hope to ride it out? Should we duck and cover? Should we walk around worried all the time? Should we just be quiet as Christianity is systematically expunged from our culture at any and all levels?

The answer to all these questions is an unequivocal and definitive, "No!" Why do I say this? I make this statement because I've read and studied the Bible, God's manual regarding how mankind secures a relationship with Him and how he is then supposed to live. And how is a God-fearing, Christian person supposed to live? Above all things, we are called to be godly people in godless times. What does that kind of person look like? Well, you could study Paul to answer that question, or you could join me as we unroll the brittle, brownish-looking, dog-eared scroll of the book of Daniel. If anyone illustrates how to live for God in a loveless, truthless, intolerant, godless time, it is this young Jewish teenager from the defeated city of Jerusalem. Yes, we can learn from teens who are sold out to the living God, and who go on to live their entire lives in total, uncompromised devotion to the Lord. Daniel was such a young man.

As we embark on this new and exciting study, I ask a few things from you:

- Pray for me that God would give me insight and understanding into this amazing apocalyptic book.
- Pray for yourselves that you would grow in your faith and be challenged to be bold for God as times smell of sunset.
- Read the book. It's only twelve chapters. Go ahead, read it more than one time. And for those type-As among us who want to know how long it will take us to work our way through twelve chapters, well, all I can say is "You know me." You might retire from your third governmental job by the time we finish. ☺
- Realize upfront that you're probably not going to agree with all of my interpretations of this complex, challenging prophecy. That's all right. I'll pray for you, if you'll pray for me. In the end, however, we stand together knowing that God's prophecies *are* complex and He has a way of fulfilling that mankind and Bible scholars never anticipated.
- Be in prayer for who in our godless world you need to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Time will end as we know it and the King of King will appear to establish His prophesied glorious kingdom as detailed in this book. When this occurs it will be like God shutting the door on the ark in Noah's day.

With all these preparatory thoughts in mind, let's get to that divinely inspired scroll of all scroll: **THE BOOK OF DANIEL**. For our purposes in this study, we will engage in a much needed overview. I call it ...

Browsing The Basics Of The Book

From my perspective, we need to limit our focus to a few key concepts. We will cover the first one in this study. We begin, then, with a logical interpretive question:

What's The History?

History. Don't you love it? I do, especially when it is biblical history, for we get up close and personal with the God who created and controls time by His omnipotent, sovereign power. More about that in a few moments. For now, let's limit our focus and time to considering just the two opening verses from Daniel chapter one:

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

In case you missed all those ancient history classes in seminary, or forgot what you studied in Bible school or at the university, we have to begin our study of this amazing book by digging into the history of Judah.

Israel fractured into two parts in 931 B.C. during the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon (1 Kings 12). Because he would not release the northern ten tribes from heavy, bank emptying taxes, those tribes, under the wicked leadership of Jeroboam I formed their own empire. With their own false priesthood, places of idol worship, and regal line, as we read from prophets like Hosea and Amos, they disregarded God and His law, opting to worship anything and anyone other than Him and to follow laws of their own making. Eventually, Assyria defeated them in 722 B.C., as a tool of God's disciplinary hand. They were carried off into captivity never to be heard from again. Note well: *God does keep tabs on what nations do with Him and His truth. Those who wrap moral/spiritual digression in the cloth of moral/spiritual progression will be ultimately held accountable to the living God.*

Hezekiah (716-687 B.C.), a godly man, ruled in Judah when Israel fell to the Assyrians. He was one of Judah's last eight kings before the nation fell to the highly mechanized and better-armed forces of the Babylonians. Trust me on this one. As Judah's political and spiritual leaders rejected God, embraced a relativistic approach to worship which resulted in abject idolatry, and ignored God's law, opting to survive on their own intellect coupled with their military capabilities and weak alliances, they descended into darkness and disarray. Don't tell me nations can't self-destruct. Don't tell me nation are forever.

Of the seven leaders after Hezekiah, only one, Josiah (641-609 B.C.), chose to live radically for God in a godless day (2 Kings 22:3-23:25). During his time an amazing Jewish boy

was born. His name? Daniel. Interesting, this great saint whom God used to stand strong and true for Him in a godless country years later, enjoyed an upbringing at a time of national spiritual awakening. I'm sure the revival built many sound spiritual truths into his life, ones which would sustain him in countless adverse spiritual situations. Don't tell me a godly politician cannot have a positive spiritual impact on his people. Josiah did.

Unfortunately, the kings who followed Josiah did not share his love for God. Blinded and deceived by prideful sin, they willfully made countless moral and political missteps. King Jehoiakim II was no exception (609-598 B.C.) During his carnal, compromised reign (2 Kings 24:1-9), sin reigned unchecked with the people. Instead of turning to God at a time of national crises, as the prophets challenged him to do, he turned to Egypt. Vast amounts of money gleaned from national coffers and from heavy taxation on the people secured their military allegiance (2 Kings 23:35-36). Egypt, Judah's temporary "protector" lost their hold in the region when Babylonian forces defeated them at the battle of Carchemish in 605.

In 605 B.C., King Jehoiakim, devoid of godly wisdom and sporting a seared conscience, became a rebellious vassal against the powerful Babylonians. Wrong move. The Babylonians moved in and basically took what they wanted in this first of three deportations. Daniel, a teenager at the time, was carried away as a slave, along with his three friends, and the holy vessels of the Temple of God. His parents were probably executed, as well, so that he would not have anyone to long to see while a captive. Such was the Babylonian way. Brutal, cruel, and calculating.

Additionally, the arrogant, polytheistic loving king even went so far as to place God's scared temple items in his pagan temples in order to mock the "powerless" God of the Jews. He and his empire would eventually learn that God keeps His eyes on the activities of the Gentile nations too, and will hold them accountable for their godless, immoral incursions. It's a timeless truth too often willfully forgotten in today's geopolitical realm.

In 597, King Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.), the son of Jehoiakim, continued his father's obstinate ways and paid dearly as the Babylonians returned to strip just about everything from the glorious temple of God to the treasures in the king's very house (2 Kings 24:7-16). Strange (and shocking) how some people don't learn about the dangers of sinful behavior by watching how God deals with people in their lives. Since God judged your blood relatives to the north with captivity for spurning His wisdom and ways, and since God moved in and through another powerful eastern enemy to discipline your misguided regal father, you would think you would sit down and re-consider your course of political and spiritual action. Foolish people, really sin-loving people, always think they know better than God, are smarter than God, are wiser than godly counselors, and can live and let live like they want without disastrous repercussions. Such living is completely illogical and dangerous, especially when God stands ready to judge unchecked godless activity.

Eleven years later, in 586, Zedekiah, probably an uncle of Jehoiachin, became the wrong king for such a grave and complicated national hour. Though well-intentioned (Jeremiah 37:17-21; 38:7-28), he caved to the pressure of his nobles who did not like the non-patriotic words of Jeremiah, the prophet (Jeremiah 38), and permitted them to cast the godly man into a dark, dank prison. Mark this well: When a nation is slouching toward Gomorrah, they will tolerate anything and everything except for voices of truth, especially when that truth is tied to the Word of God. From what we learn in Jeremiah chapters 27, 28, and 29, false prophetic voices captured the minds of the people both in captivity and in the nation and incited them to believe

they would be victorious. Sedition against Babylon followed, despite warnings from Jeremiah to the contrary.

By 589 B.C., the erroneous belief God would deliver them, contrary to God's prophetic word to Jeremiah, reached its zenith, causing widespread rebellion. In January of 588 B.C. Babylon reacted in a blitzkrieg fashion (2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 52:4). They blockaded Jerusalem (Jeremiah 21:3-7) and captured outlying fortress cities as they tightened the noose on Jerusalem. In the summer of 588 B.C., the Egyptians marched from the south to assist the Jews;¹ and despite Jeremiah's words that the nation would fall because of their sins as God had warned them, they still chose to hold onto the false teaching of their false prophets.

Again, we must underscore this is the template of what happens as nations self-destruct. God speaks to them through godly men and women and through His Word, yet they chose to reject those words because it is not what they want to hear. Far wiser to follow and submit to God and find true life and peace. Because Judah obstinately opposed God, God permitted the Babylonians to be His hand of discipline. After two horrific years the once glorious capital city of the Davidic empire fell (2 Kings 25:1), and within short order Nebuchadnezzar's troops leveled and burned the temple and the house of the Davidic dynasty, and carried the rest of the nation into captivity in Babylon (2 Kings 25:8-21).

Waiting for the beaten and battered people was Daniel, the young Jewish teen who had been seized in the first Babylonian invasion/deportation of 605 B.C. Now probably in his mid-thirties some nineteen years later, he understood he had been strategically and divinely placed for a moment such as this. Such are the ways of God. Even in the most complex, degenerative, sinful, heart-breaking times, He sovereignly works to guide all events to suit His lofty and superior spiritual purposes. Let's drill down on this concept for a moment.

First, let me ask you a personal question: Had you been torn from your parents and people in your teens and carted off to a foreign country whose language you did not even know, had you watched friends die at the hands of the Babylonian invader and places you frequented destroyed, had you spent probably weeks traversing the desert between Jerusalem and Babylon in a caravan of captives, do you think you would write, in a positive fashion, that God was behind all this? What a young man of faith.

Where did he get this kind of faith, a faith which will move him to live courageously in the land of his godless captors? We can only speculate, but I'm sure his parents played a role in making sure Daniel was exposed to the Word of God, the worship of God, godly people, and the instruction of the priests of God. Makes you ask yourself: What am I doing to make sure those in my life know God and His ways so implicitly that if they were torn away from me and cast into the most godless, Christ-rejecting environment they would stand strong and true for Him?

Second, as sad as Israel's demise was as a nation, God had His holy hand in the individual and national chaos. We know this because of how Daniel opens his book:

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

¹ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 330.

Underscore the opening clause of verse two: “The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.” Daniel wrote those words. Amazing, isn’t it? As John Lennox points out, “Daniel is not content to inform us of what happened; he is much more interested in why it happened.”² From the outset of his apocalyptic/prophetic book about the rise and fall of nations prior to the coming of the Messiah’s kingdom, he informs us that there is a living God who has His sovereign hands on all the affairs of man, even a national calamity. The words of the inspired prophets sustained and supported this godly young man. How could he have not known the words of Isaiah who prophesied right before his birth (739-681 B.C.)³:

¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust (Isaiah 40:15).

¹⁰ At the beginning I foretell the outcome; in advance, things not yet done. I say that my plan shall stand, I accomplish my every purpose (Isaiah 46).

God, who is above/outside of time and space, sees the past, present, and the future completely from His vantage point. This reality assures us that His revelatory plan for Israel, the Church, and mankind cannot be and will not be thwarted by the free actions of His creatures. They are free to act, to either serve or deny and oppose Him, but either way He knows their ultimate free choices and works behind the scenes of world history to make sure that His kingdom/salvific program will be ultimately realized. Daniel knew this. Do you know this?

Most assuredly, Daniel was quite familiar with the words of Jeremiah, who prophesied from his birth until the first deportation swept him away (627-586 B.C.).

⁷ Who would not fear you, King of the nations, for it is your due! Among all the wisest of the nations, and in all their domain, there is none like you (Jeremiah 10).

World rulers only rule because God allows them to rule, but He, ultimately, is THE King, and His kingdom shall prevail, no matter how the winds blow. Once more, Daniel knew this profound eternal truth as his world literally fell apart. When that occurred he didn’t fall apart. No, he trusted in the sovereign power of God Almighty at the worst possible time of his young life. Will you believe and do the same?

Think of the hard, rational evidence Daniel had, evidence that the living God *had* spoken and was executing His perfect will in the captivity of his people. For years prior to Babylon’s rise to power, the prophets of God cautioned the people that God would use this people to discipline them for failing to follow God’s law:

⁶ Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the LORD (Isaiah 39).

Isaiah made this prediction some eighty years before the rise of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom when their leader, Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the world power of Egypt at Carchemish in 605

² John Lennox, *Against The Flow* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2015), 9.

³ Hobart Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 193.

B.C. Daniel lived to watch it literally fulfilled with complete exactness. I wonder what the mathematical probability is Isaiah could have just posited a good prophetic guess in this instance. I am thinking the stats are in high favor it is impossible for a man to know this particular geo-political outcome with this exactness without divine insight.

Think about this one prophecy pragmatically. We cannot foretell who will win the Democratic and Republican nominations for President, and we most assuredly don't know who will win the Presidency. At best, all we can do is offer educated guesses. We do not even know what the North Korean's are going to do with their nuclear capabilities in the next week, nor do we know what China is going to do with their ever-increasing Navy in the next month. And we certainly cannot figure out what is going to happen to Europe, and especially Germany, because of the influx of over a million Muslim supposedly refugees. What will these refugees do in the next eight years? Will they honor their host country or topple it? Currently, it doesn't look like the future is too bright for Germany, but our finiteness limits our view of time. God does not have this problem because He is infinite.

Add to this that years later when he was probably in his late eighties or early nineties, and after Cyrus, King of Persia, defeated the Babylonians and then freed the Jews, that Daniel connected the dots from Jeremiah's prophecy in 601 B.C., during the fourth year of the reign of King Jehoiakim, stating that Israel's coming captivity would last exactly seventy years:

¹ In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans-- ² in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years (Daniel 9).

What had Jeremiah prophesied? A captivity of seventy years ... no more, no less.

¹⁰ Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ And this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation (Jeremiah 25).

Why seventy years? In Leviticus 25:1-4, God commanded the Israelites to let the land rest every seventh year, to trust Him to provide for them while the land replenished itself. For seventy of these cycles, or for 490 years, the Israelites had shaken their materialistic, man-is-first fists in God's holy face and ploughed away looking for worldly profits. This is another spiritual principle worthy of additional study and contemplation on your part: It matters greatly how we individually and nationally think about and respond to the Word of God for He will ultimately hold us accountable to those parts of the Word which are applicable to us. More precisely, He will hold us accountable to our moral and spiritual behavior by His inexorable, unchanging standards, not by our ever-moving, ever-changing relativistic, I-don't-want-to-offend-anyone standards.

Now, back to the ramifications of the hard evidence from Jeremiah.

Once more, you who think the Christian faith, by definition, is illogical and irrational, based solely on emotion and unfounded thinking, I think you need to reconsider your position. Do the math. Jeremiah could give this kind of prophetic precision because he heard from the God who sees our past, present, and future as if it is our present. That, my friend, is omniscience.

Ostensibly, let's be honest with ourselves. Our best, most brilliant advisors in the Pentagon do not even know how long our battle with ISIS will last. If someone were to know and articulate that time figure years before the fact and it occurred with precision, that would be evidence worth considering, especially if the person said they received it by divine revelation. Such is what Jeremiah did. Such is what Daniel, the thinking man of faith, built his life on in tough, trying times. The point is well-taken: *God plays a vital, crucial, personal role in the lives of people and nations, and His perfect plan will prevail in the end where evil is concerned. You may not think He is working, but be not deceived. He is at work because He loves us and He loves His plan for us.*

I do not know what is going on in your life right now, you might be enjoying a calm sea or a crucible, or you might be enjoying a time of great blessing, or you might feel like the Babylonians are about to breach the gates. Whatever is your lot, let Daniel's example challenge and encourage you to stand strong and true for the God who is there and who is guiding all the events of life, be they good or bad, toward His lofty and exciting purposes.