

Ministry on Daniel

Part 1

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[00:00:00] In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem and besieged it.

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hands, with part of the vessels of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar, to the house of his God. And he brought the vessels unto the treasure house of his God. [00:01:02] In any worthwhile structure, if the building is to last and stand any test that comes along, the foundation must be well and truly laid.

Taking the example of natural life, the prophet Isaiah reminds us that the right order of things is to take root downward, bear fruit upward.

Another thing that I become aware of increasingly is this.

If there was ever a time when it could be accepted that all or most of an audience like this was fully conversant with the text of the scriptures we were going to consider, [00:02:20] I judge it's no longer a reasonable assumption.

Amongst children, it's no longer realistic to start applying the lesson to be learned until we first of all ensure that the details of the narrative are understood. Another thing that over the years perhaps has made us shy away from merely saying what the story is before we apply it, [00:03:05] is that very often, maybe the way we've been trained over the years, that very often we fly to the moral and spiritual application because that's much more obvious to us than the physical material details. I give you two examples and pass on. It's much easier, to me anyway, to see the lesson that God intends us to learn from things like the tabernacle and the temple than to glean from scripture sufficient detail to lay out a working plan, a blueprint from which one could with any confidence make a model. [00:04:02] I think in the mercy of God, there's always some detail which is left unstated so that we don't get too engrossed with the actual material detail and we are drawn on to the moral and spiritual lesson. Notwithstanding all that, for myself, I judge that I will be well able or better able to learn the moral and spiritual lessons there are for me in the book of the prophet Daniel if I know something about the background. So, in this introductory session, I would ask for your forbearance and I will assume that like myself, mostly in the past, you've gone into the detail, you've gone to the prophetic interpretation and you've gone to the moral application without worrying too much about how the thing was when it happened. [00:05:16] Now, whether that's the case or not, I intend to spend time this evening in ensuring that we know something about the background, something about the situation, and then when it comes to the application later on, we'll be better able to see it. Now, we're going to spend

time tonight then on a bit of geography and a bit of history. Don't be put off by that. Don't switch off either because you say, geography, history, I know it all. I'll wait till Tuesday before I switch on. Or on the other hand, saying, history, geography, not for me. [00:06:10] The geography concerning the book of the prophet Daniel.

Let us remind ourselves of a basic lesson in reading the Bible. In geographical terms, the reference point is the land of Israel.

When things are spoken of, and we shall see something of this, as north, south, east or west, it's about north, south, east or west of Israel in general and Jerusalem in particular. Let us always bear that in mind.

[00:07:01] Now, having said that, I want to take you back to the 8th century BC and I have here some maps as you will observe.

Now, if you cannot see them, ideally move forward.

If you cannot or will not move to a position where you can see the maps, gain what you can, come forward at the end having listened to what is said and compare the detail with the maps. Better still, go home, get those Bible maps and Bible atlases off the shelf. I believe it was Dr. Oliver of Galashiels who many years ago made a very pertinent remark. He said, we should not shelve the truth. There's much truth on our shelves, even maps. [00:08:03] Let us take them off the shelves, dust them off and see what there is to be gained. Now, in the 8th century BC, the Gentile Empire that was in sway was the Assyrian Empire and the capital was at Nineveh.

Now, you may not see the writing, you can see the colour. The blue is the Mediterranean Sea, the red sea, the Persian Gulf. I would guess that even up to about 6 months ago we didn't know very much about the geography, I would think most of us are acquainted with maps like that now. Red Sea, Persian Gulf, South Arabia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, Palestine and the Assyrian Empire in the 8th century BC was the one that counted.

[00:09:12] Now, that was very significant for the people of Israel. At that time, Israel as a nation was split into two.

There was the northern part of Israel here in yellow and there was the southern part of Israel called Judah. Judah and Benjamin were with their capital city at Jerusalem and there we have the northern part of the kingdom, the ten tribes with the capital at Samaria.

Now, I want just to leave the history just a little bit for the moment and just pinpoint this matter of geography. [00:10:12] Yes, we'll leave that at that. And looking ahead, the Assyrian Empire covered most of what we would now refer to as Iraq, Syria and Jordan and parts of the Middle East.

Of eastern Turkey and bits of what we now call Iran or what used to be Persia. And the two vital spots really are the land of Palestine, God's pleasant land, and the valley of Mesopotamia between the Tigris and the Euphrates, which has always been a point of contention, being so fertile. [00:11:10] And at the time was under control of the kingdom of Assyria.

Now, the kingdom of Assyria was vanquished by the Babylonian Empire and the capital moved south

from Nineveh to the city of Babylon and then in turn was overtaken by the Empire of Persia.

Now, that's as far as I want to take the geography lesson tonight, but when scriptures are referred to, just glance up there and we can move on to what is a little more relevant, the history of the significant nations. [00:12:02] When Israel as a nation demanded a king, they wanted someone they could look up to and they were given one that they could look up to physically, head and shoulders over all the people.

As the scripture says of him, King Saul. And then we had three 40-year reigns, King Saul, King David, and King Solomon, three times 40.

Solomon sinned grossly.

That's sufficient for our purpose to take account of that. He sinned grossly. Now, when David had wanted to build a temple for God, a temple for a house for the Lord, God said, that's a good idea, but it won't be in your time. [00:13:11] You are a man of war and it wouldn't be proper for you to be allowed to build a house unto the Lord. But because you've got the idea, you collect the materials together and then your son Solomon will be allowed to do it. Now, that was blessing that was deferred for a generation. Solomon was allowed to build the temple. Towards the end of his life, he was told by God, because of his sins, judgment would fall upon the nation over which he had been given the stewardship of being king.

[00:14:01] But as the blessing of building a house for the Lord was deferred a generation in David's time, so the judgment upon the kingdom in Solomon's day was deferred a generation unto Rehoboam's time. Solomon's son, Rehoboam. And Jeroboam and others rebelled against Rehoboam when the kingdom first passed into Rehoboam's hands and it was then that the kingdom became divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Now, because they were in the North, the ten tribes were more vulnerable to attack from further North and from further East.

[00:15:03] Now, the Assyrian Empire, we see with its capital at Nineveh that it was readily placed to attack the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And the prophets of the Lord in succession, those prophets whose responsibility it was to speak to the Northern Kingdom again and again, they said if you don't mend your ways, you're going to be conquered by a Gentile power. The ultimate insult to God's earthly people. If you want to see which prophets prophesied under which kings, again there is a chart here both for the Northern and the Southern Kingdom and have a look at the end or consult the data at the back of your Bibles and you'll see which prophets ministered and prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel or the Southern Kingdom of Israel. [00:16:13] Well, Israel, the Northern Kingdom did not repent and the final message came to them that they would be taken away into a foreign land, they would be replaced by foreigners and that others would be able to enjoy the fruit of the present land. And the Kingdom of Assyria was allowed to attack the Northern Kingdom. Now, if you look here, you'll see that that is the Dead Sea, that is the Sea of Galilee, River Jordan flowing North to South. Now, if you remember, there were two and a half tribes which didn't really enter into the land. [00:17:09] Reuben, Gad and a half of the tribe of Manasseh, the brown, yellow and purple, they didn't go over the land, over the Jordan, into the land, they stayed on this side, Jordan. They were, their confidence in God, their faith was incomplete, they didn't go all the way. When they were liberated from Egypt, they went almost into the land but not quite, their faith was incomplete. So, for that reason and because circumstantially they were the nearest to be picked off by the Kingdom of the Empire of the Assyrians, Reuben, Gad and Manasseh in about BC 740 were taken away captive

into the land of Assyria. [00:18:12] Now, the rest of the Northern Kingdom, having lost such a slice, everything that was East of the River Jordan, they should have realised then that it was time to mend their ways. They went on as before, disobedient to their God and about 18 years later, 722 BC or thereabouts, they were invaded again by the Assyrian Empire and all the remaining Israelites of that Northern Kingdom were taken away. And they were dispersed and they were scattered and they became lost. [00:19:07] Often, the lost tribes of Israel are mentioned in conversation or in books.

I fear that many believers assume that by the lost tribes being scattered, that what we are intended to understand by that is that there are Jews in every part of the world and so there are, but they are not the lost tribes of Israel.

The lost tribes of Israel are the members of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which was taken away in two stages, 740 BC, 722 BC by the Assyrian Empire and we don't know where they are. [00:20:06] No point in guessing. When God wants to bring them together again, he will, but if God says they're lost, they're lost and there's no point in my trying to guess where they are. When we speak of Jews as we recognize them, we are speaking about those of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, similar sound, the Jews from Judah, and certainly there are Jews in many nations of the land. Makes it very difficult for man to sort it out with all the intermarriage that goes on. We can have confidence in God that when he so decrees, he will gather together his earthly people and ensure that they are there to have the opportunity given to them of enjoying the good things of God's green and pleasant land. [00:21:09] Well, there we have it. The Northern Nation was taken away in two stages and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, had the opportunity of mending their ways. Now, God was gracious. He took away the Northern Kingdom in two stages and he was even more gentle with the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Those who were taken away were taken away not in two stages but in three. Now, again, we shouldn't fault the historians for a word or a year here and there. [00:22:01] Very, very difficult to track down exactly what date certain things happened. But again, when we think of what the Bible says about geography, that the reference point is the land of Israel, Bible history has its reference point, the people of God, the people of Israel. And so things that are of deep significance in worldly terms, Gentile terms, are often glossed over and something that's relatively unimportant in the world's eyes is seen to be of great significance to God because it affects his earthly people. Now, what happened was that the Southern Kingdom did not mend their ways, they were not repentant. [00:23:04] At the same time, the Assyrian Empire was overtaken by the Babylonian Empire with its capital at the city of Babylon, or Shinar, as it's spoken of in the Bible on five occasions. Now, we come to the point where Nebuchadnezzar was in control. And he took the opportunity of invading the Southern Kingdom Judah and he took away the holy vessels from the house of God and he creamed off, I suppose, what would nowadays be called the yuppies, the up-and-coming bright young things of the day, those with the best upbringing, those with the most cultured background, the privileged class of the day, those who were able to respond to special training, and he took them off. [00:24:19] He creamed off the best of the young generation and he took them back to Babylon. Now, what I want to do at this stage is read some scriptures and just to orientate our minds. Unless we relate what's going on to the scriptures, we are wasting our time. Turn back, please, first of all, to 1 Kings, chapter 8, verses 46 to 50.

This is part of Solomon's word that he gave when he dedicated the temple that God had allowed him to build. [00:25:11] Speaking of the people of God, those who should be using the temple of God in the worship of God, chapter 8, verse 46 says, If the people sin against thee, for there is no man that

sinneth not, and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near. Yet, if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely. [00:26:02] We have committed wickedness, and so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name. Then hear thou their prayer, and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them. Second Chronicles, the last chapter, 36.

[00:27:03] Verses 15 to 21.

The Lord God of their fathers... Now, bear in mind that what is being recorded here is 400 years, approximately, after Solomon dedicated the temple. By now, what Solomon had indicated had occurred.

The people had rebelled, they had been disobedient, and the northern kingdom was away, and the southern kingdom was about to be taken away too. The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. [00:28:05] But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or him that stooped for age. He gave them all into his hand, and all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and break down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. [00:29:09] And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon, where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths. For as long as she lay desolate, she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years. Now move over, please, to Jeremiah 25. Jeremiah 25, and verse 12.

Really, we should take note of verses 1 to 14. Let us make a point of reading that before we come together again. But for the moment, I'll only read verse 12.

[00:30:17] It shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. Chapter 29, and verse 10. For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 1. [00:31:08] Verse 11.

Verse 11.

And so, verse 17.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. We've read scriptures before the event, where the Lord's message was, if you continue in sin, you'll be conquered, you'll be taken away in captivity to a Gentile nation.

[00:32:24] We've read the historical record of what took place when it happened, with the added comment that as God's disciplinary tools, God was going to use Gentile nations, and was using Gentile nations to discipline his earthly people. But that he would hold such Gentile nations responsible to him for what they did to the apple of his eye, in particular when they overstepped the mark. [00:33:03] And finally, we have read after the event, from the Gospel by Matthew, looking back, and seeing the Holy Spirit's record, that things that happened in the nation of God's earthly people happened in an orderly way, at orderly intervals. I'll say no more than that, but there are references here to a series of fourteen generations at a time, thrice over. But perhaps the most significant thing that we've read about was that what took place when Nebuchadnezzar took the holy vessels and the cream of the younger generation back to Babylon, [00:34:01] the most significant thing that we've read is that this was done because, in a particular way, the southern kingdom of Judah, as well as the northern kingdom of Israel, had defaulted in a very special way. They were in debt to God. They had not given to God seventy Sabbath years. They owed God seventy years.

Now, I'm going to read some scriptures now to refresh your memory as to what God had ordained should be the principle on which they worked. That not only should there be one Sabbath day per week, but that there should be one Sabbath year in seven, in order that the land might rest. [00:35:04] Now, we are going to look at a few scriptures, the first one in the book of Exodus and chapter 23. We'll only read the odd verse. Exodus 23, verses 10 and 11.

Six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof. But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest, and lie still, that the poor of thy people may eat. And what they leave, the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. Leviticus, chapter 25. [00:36:03] Verses 1 to 7.

The Lord spake unto Moses in Mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a Sabbath unto the Lord. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof. But in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of rest unto the land, a Sabbath for the Lord. Thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap. Neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed, for it is a year of rest unto the land. [00:37:13] And the Sabbath of the land shall be meet for you, for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, and for thy cattle, and for the beasts that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meet. Chapter 26, verse 14.

[00:38:08] I also will do this unto you. I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning egg, and that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart. And ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies. They that hate you shall reign over you, and ye shall flee when none pursueeth you. Verses 27 and 28.

If ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me, then I will walk contrary unto you

also in fury. And I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.

[00:39:08] Verse 32. I will bring the land into desolation, and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you. And your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate. And ye be in your enemies' land, even then shall the land rest and enjoy her sabbaths. Again, 400 years before the setting up of the kingdom in response to the pleading of the people, there was the message from the Lord to Moses to speak unto the people.

[00:40:13] That even at that early stage, the warning was given, if ye refuse and rebel, you'll be driven out of the land, and your enemies will possess it for themselves. Now, again, God was gracious. As when he withdrew from the temple and its precincts in the prophet Ezekiel, so we find here that the discipline of God on the southern kingdom took place in easy stages and gave them the opportunity to repent, but they did not. First of all, in about 6 or 6 BC, the holy vessels and the cream of the youngsters, they took no notice of this as a nation, and then, well, again, somewhere between 10, 12, 14, 15 years later, when they rebelled again against the king, [00:41:23] the king Nebuchadnezzar said, well, only leave behind the lowest of the peasants to tend the land. Bring everybody out, and bring them all back, and they will all serve me in my land, the land of Babylon. And so they did. And they still were disobedient to their God, and then a few years later on, we find that the few that were left were taken away, and the city itself was destroyed. [00:42:07] What a pitiful comment upon the disobedience of the people. Just a reflection there. This happened because the people had been disobedient and had not given to God the Sabbath years of rest.

Seventy years they owed to God, and because one year in seven was to be Sabbath, this meant that they had been disobedient for 490 years.

Now, put that number in the back of your memory, we'll come back to one or more sets of 490. But think of it that the nation had been disobedient for 490 years. [00:43:14] What's even worse, when you work it out, you find that 490 years from the time that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the southern kingdom and took away the holy vessels out of the temple, if you work 490 years back, you come to the year that Saul was made king. In other words, as long as there had been a kingdom, they had never once allowed the land to enjoy its Sabbath rest. You may well conclude that even before that, they hadn't allowed the land to recover in the way that God had decreed. [00:44:04] But the responsibility of the kings was for this nation, which was constituted a kingdom, and their responsibility was that for the whole of that historical period of 490 years, they hadn't given to God once the Sabbath of rest for the land. How gracious, how long-suffering God is. And now the time had come where the discipline must be applied. Judgment must be carried out. And we find that from this date, which Matthew 1 we've read, began the carrying away of the southern kingdom of Judah into the land of Babylon, not to be lost without trace like the northern kingdom, but preserved as an entity. [00:45:13] And as we've read from the prophet Jeremiah, that after 70 years of discipline, to correspond with the 70 years that they owed God after that commensurate period, that in the ways of God, they would be allowed liberty to come back to their land of promise. Now that's as far as we can take that part tonight. One other little matter that we need to consider for the moment. Not so much the layout of the book, but the language which is used. If you just take your Bible into your hand and look at the book of Daniel, chapter 1, and make a mental note of the fact that from chapter 1, verse 1, through to and including chapter 2, verse 3, [00:46:25] the language that Daniel was written in was Hebrew. Then again, from chapter 8, verse 1, to the end of the book, again is written in Hebrew. Hebrew that the southern kingdom of Judah would be able to understand. The intervening bit, and

we'll find other reasons for this as we go on, but chapter 2, verse 4, right through to chapter 7, verse 28, is written in a language which is variously Arabic, Chaldean, Syriac, or Aramaic. [00:47:07] Now, we aren't surprised that in gospel times that the people were still conversant with Aramaic because, again, the people who were brought from Assyria and Babylon to repopulate the land of Israel had that as their natural dialect. Now, I want to make one fundamental suggestion for tonight and leave it at that. The part written in Hebrew, the first one and a bit chapters, and then the later chapters, are written in Hebrew because they contain God's message to the people of Judah. The intervening chapters, from chapter 2, verse 4, to the end of chapter 7, are written in the Gentile tongue because they contain the message for the Gentile nations. [00:48:15] And the message to the Hebrew people was this, what's happening to you now is no misfortune. It's not primarily due to the aggressive nature of Nebuchadnezzar. It's necessary because you owe to God 70 years and you will go into captivity for 70 years to repay that 70 years. But we will bear in mind that that 70 years that they owed God represented 490 years of disobedience and we must come back to that. Judah had robbed Jehovah, they were in debt, they must pay it back. [00:49:10] Why write half the book in a Gentile tongue? Or we learn in Romans that the whole world is left without excuse. And in the book of Daniel, particularly in chapters 2 to 7, written in a Gentile language, the Gentile minds can understand God outlines what is going to happen, how the Gentile nations are going to act, how God views them in the way that they act, and the judgment that God would carry out upon them when the time was right. And so that they might be without excuse, the outline of history written in advance, or prophecy as we call it, was making plain both to the Hebrews, the kingdom of Judah, [00:50:16] and the Gentiles, the kingdom of Babylon, that their responsibility was directly to God and they were answerable to God for everything that they did. Now, I trust we've laid the basis for further studies, and if the Lord will, on Tuesday night we shall look at the major prophetic statements in chapters 2 and 7 as to the times of the Gentiles. And if the Lord will, we'll do that. But let us project ourselves in our last hymn to beyond that, to the time when God's purpose for Israel has indeed been worked out, when there will be joy on earth, 256.