

Ministry on Daniel

Part 9

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Date	12.03.2013
Duration	00:51:35
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/eb038/ministry-on-daniel

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[00:00:00] Chapter 3, the last two verses. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory, both now and forever. Amen.

The subject matter, even in these two verses, is such that Peter was constrained to burst [00:01:19] out in this happy doxology at the end of his writings. I've read these verses because they testify to a universal principle of Scripture, which, having considered as a principle, we will hope to apply to whatever we know about the book of Daniel. There are, as you know, about five instances in the New Testament [00:02:05] where the subject of foreknowledge is gone into. In the other cases, we are instructed, when we examine the text, that God, knowing what he is going to commit himself to doing in the future, because he knows what he will do, that governs the way that he acts at the present time. That's a very truncated version of what the foreknowledge of God [00:03:01] is. Have a look at those examples in Scripture and see if you come to that conclusion. In 2nd Peter, it's the reflection of that. It's an amazing statement here. Peter was privileged to record this. Beloved, seeing ye know these things before, we are finite creatures. God is the infinite God. And Peter says here, you don't know what you will do in the future. You cannot. And in any case, [00:04:01] whatever the desire you have, you haven't the power to put it into effect. But he says, you've been told now what God is going to do in the future. And Peter says, knowing what God is going to do in the future, you act now in the light of what God is going to do then. Our foreknowledge is not the knowledge of what we will do. It's the knowledge of what God is going to do. And this is a grand universal principle, true of prophetic revelation. If God gives us information about the future, and he does, it's with the intention that we should allow the truth of what God is going to do affect the way we live at the present [00:05:02] time. Putting it another way, God instructs us about what he's going to do in the future in order that we might come to the moral judgment now that is in line with God's eventual judgment on all things. Now they are amazing concepts to consider. And in the working out of it in Peter, Peter says it will have two effects. There'll be a negative effect and a positive effect. Knowing what God is going to do in the future will affect you two ways. You at the present time, knowing what God is going to do in the future, there'll be things you don't do now, things you want nothing to do with. And there'll be other things that you [00:06:05] want to be identified with in a positive way. I just read them and leave it at that. He says knowing what God is going to do in the future, given this kind of foreknowledge, beware lest you are led away with the error of the wicked and fall from your own steadfastness. Now that's what I mean by negative. He says don't do that. Ah, but he says occupy yourself in that which is positive. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The potential for

the personal knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ causes his spirit to well up within him and he exults in the presence of God to whom to [00:07:04] him be glory both now and forever. Amen. Now that's the principle I want to carry back into the book of Daniel.

We've had some fairly intense detailed studies during the week. If we are to be brought to an understanding of what God is going to do, it will involve work, hard work. We will need to apply our renewed minds and it's been very difficult to achieve a balance of knowing how much to put in each evening. That's not an [00:08:04] apology, it's a statement of fact. How much to put in to be fair to the lesson, how much to leave out because putting more in would cloud the issue or be wearying to our minds. When we come to the moral application tonight, there will be no need to spend a long time. There will be no need to have intense intellectual application. Have you noticed that? When we come to the moral challenge of the word, our response to what God has instructed us in, it's always easy to understand. Simple, direct, no doubts or shadows. The only doubt is [00:09:10] to whether I will have the grace and the courage to do what I know is right. So there'll be no need to multiply words, but I want to take from two, maybe three of the chapters, things that highlight the moral challenge for those of us who have had the opportunity to study the book of Daniel. So would you turn please to chapter one.

For once, I will assume that we are reasonably conversant with the text and draw attention to the issues that come to light. And in chapter one, I want to [00:10:04] consider the possibility that we may or may not yet be established in the truth of God. I will make no assumptions. Maybe it's right to consider that I'm starting tonight for the first time prepared to commit myself in the sense of Romans 12 verses 1 and 2, in the light of all that God in his wonderful compassion has done for me. What must I do in answer to that? If I'm beginning tonight as a relatively naive believer, what sort of start is open to me? And in chapter one, perhaps we [00:11:05] consider someone like that. Verse four. Speaking of Daniel and his friends, we read this. Children in whom was no blemish, well-favored, skillful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge, understanding science, such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

Daniel was one of that young generation, part of that nation, that kingdom of Judah, captured by Nebuchadnezzar, and the best of the nation, the best of the [00:12:11] young people, creme de la creme, the young yuppies of the day, segregated from the common herd, and taken away into Babylon.

The world was their oyster. Nothing new about management training, maybe the jargon changes from generation to generation, but even in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar said, pick the best ones, groom them for stardom. Oh believer, let's take this position, the younger ones in particular. Satan's [00:13:09] after you, the world's after you. We'll groom you for stardom, we'll give you the best training the world, the world can offer you. Rank, position, salary, perks, they're all there. What was Daniel's response? Well, Percy tells us, Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank. Why is it that in our simple [00:14:07] English Bible, God has been very gracious, and so often necessary moral lessons that we need to learn are collected together under the letter P. I don't know the answer to that question. It's a fact of our language, that very often God says, now look, I'm going to make it easy for you to understand, and the first requirement is to be right in your heart. Daniel purposed in his heart. It's said in the reading, quite right. Very difficult in Scripture to understand which comes first often, the heart or the mind. We can see the activities of the [00:15:10] personal spirit in the thinking of the mind. We can see the sensitive response in matters of the heart concerning the soul, but it gets

very difficult when we read such Scriptures as, as a man thinketh in his heart, we would expect that he would think it in his mind, or feel it in his heart, but Scripture says, as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Oh, the heart and the mind are very much involved in being set here for the glory of God and the blessing of his people. [00:16:03] Daniel was a man who was fully committed that at whatever personal cost, that he would devote his life on earth for the blessing of his people. Oh, he made progress. You know, if you are a Christian and living as a Christian, most of the time, you will find that you will make progress in your career, or in the home, or at school, because if you're a committed Christian, you'll be hard working, you'll be honest, you'll do the right thing, and up to a point, that will be recognized and you will make progress. But the time will come where you have to decide for yourself whether or not the commitment to God, or that a commitment [00:17:07] to career, firm, or personal interests, is going to have the priority. All these are not difficult to understand, are they? Daniel purposed in his heart, and he got as far in his secular activities as it was possible to get, and as we shall find, he wouldn't compromise in any way at all. Doesn't mean he was difficult with other people, doesn't mean that he was obnoxious, but he was true to God, and then he served men in the light of that.

A sequence of phrases that often occur to me, make what you will of them, God [00:18:07] usually works this way, the blessed God in his grace, he instructs our minds, that our hearts might be moved, that our consciences might be stirred, that our will might be submitted, that our feet might be turned into right paths, regard that as trite or not, I'm sure it's abidingly true. And the first movement given by Daniel here was that he purposed, he committed himself. I like that phrase in Paul's second letter to Timothy, all that will live godly in [00:19:04] Christ Jesus, all who commit themselves, all who say at all costs, that's the first priority for me, to live in full personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 12, prove thy servants I beseech thee. He purposed and he was prepared to be proved.

We have to be very careful before we commit ourselves before the Lord. The Lord takes us at our word. And if like Daniel, we purpose to be here for God and [00:20:02] the Lord Jesus Christ and fully committed to him, if that's our purpose, oh we'll be given the opportunity to prove the purity of our motives. If we commit ourselves fearlessly before God and man, we will be put to the test. How often we hear, how right it is. We always get tested on our own ministry and that's not by any means restricted to platform ministry. If I pray Lord, give me the grace to be here for thee. The Lord will take us at our word and he will give us the kind of experience in life that gives us the opportunity to demonstrate [00:21:07] the purity of our motives and the completeness of our commitment. Everyone who purposes finds that we are proved. And here in verse 12, he was proved. Verse 15, the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. You vegetarians will say, what did I tell you? All this flesh isn't good for you.

They refused the flesh. They had this homemade vegetable broth and at the end [00:22:08] of the proving period, they were fitter and better-looking than anybody else. Well, their diet certainly didn't do them any harm. But what brought the true prosperity, and that's the P for verse 15, what made them really prosperous was they'd committed themselves before God and they saw it through. They submitted to the test and they came out of the test with flying colors. If I commit myself before the Lord to be true to him and I'm put to the test as I [00:23:03] will be, when the practical test comes along, do I take the opportunity and prosper spiritually and morally or do I yield to the temptation to grumble? I've noticed that often if things go wrong in life with an unbeliever, he tends to blame God. If things go wrong in the life of a believer, he or she is tempted to blame the devil. It's one of the paradoxes, isn't it? That a man who says, I don't believe there's a God and backs that up by ignoring

God all his [00:24:09] life. When something goes wrong in his life, he says, well, if that's what your God's like, I want nothing to do with him. He blames the God that he doesn't even believe exists. Things go wrong for the believer, can't be made it's wrong, can it? It must be the devil at fault. Daniel and the others, they submitted themselves to the test and they prospered. Let me draw your attention to several verses to show that Daniel's prosperity wasn't a fleeting thing. He prospered [00:25:03] and he prospered and he prospered. Look, chapter 1, verses 19 to 21. Among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In all matters of wisdom and understanding that the king inquired of them, he found them 10 times better than all the magicians and astrologers. Well, he prospered. Chapter 2, verse 48. The king made Daniel a great man, gave him many great gifts, made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, chief of the governors over all the wise men of [00:26:02] Babylon. Chapter 5, chapter 1 and 2. He prospered in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter 5, verse 29. He prospers in the reign of Belshazzar. Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet and put a chain of gold about his neck and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. Chapter 6, verses 1 to 3. He prospered in the reign of Darius. It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom and hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom, over these three presidents of whom Daniel was first. Verse 3. This Daniel was preferred, another P, above the presidents and princes because an excellent spirit [00:27:07] was in him, and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Chapter 6, verse 28. Daniel prospered, there's the word, in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus, the Persian. Nothing difficult about this, is there? He committed himself early in life, in his teens, when he was first abstracted from his countrymen and siphoned off to Babylon. He committed himself and he continued to enjoy true prosperity right through to the age of about 90 years of age. [00:28:03] I heartily agree with the statement made this afternoon. If we don't commit ourselves when we are young, we'll never be fully committed when we are old. Whether it's commitment to a regular prayer life with the Lord, whether it's a regular commitment to study the Scriptures, whether it's a regular commitment to keep a short account with the Lord and confess sin as it occurs, rather than when somebody else finds out about it. If we don't accept and act upon that kind of commitment early in life, we'll never switch it on later in life. He prospered as an old man [00:29:01] because he was true to his commitment when he was a young man, and the same is true of young women. Well, he prospered throughout all those reigns. Let's go back to chapter 1 and verse 19. The king communed with them and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Simple lesson. Commit yourself before the Lord to be fully devoted to him. You'll be tested, you'll be proved, you will prosper. And this little verse tells us times [00:30:11] will be hard. Some of your former friends will desert you, even Christian believing friends won't face up to the same measure of commitment. But even though few, there will always be those with whom you can have fellowship in that life of full commitment. Remember Elijah? He said, Lord, there's only me left. Oh, do you ever feel like that? There's only me left. All the burdens are on my shoulders. Nobody else cares. Satan will tempt us. I'm not blaming the devil. [00:31:10] Satan will tempt us to think it's no longer worth the bother. Sit in the back row, come occasionally, don't exert yourself, go through the motions. It's as much as can be expected of you at this late stage in the dispensation. Like the man at the end of the shipwreck scene, Acts 27, hang on and wish for the day. Well, maybe you're tempted to think like that. Daniel wasn't like that. Elijah had to be told, now listen Elijah, you think you're on your own, there's another 7,000 equally committed as you. You may well conclude it would be very, very difficult for you now to find 7,000 believers [00:32:13] with whom you'd find yourself in full, happy fellowship in every sense of the word. You may be right, but there will be some. I haven't got a fee for this one. I'm open to offers. The best word I've got at the moment, a simple one, he had his parts. It's a solemn thing for me that when I was in my late teens and early 20s, there was a group of about 70 young people on Tyneside [00:33:07] who seemed very keen, certainly very active, certainly we all saw each other a lot and we seemed very enthusiastic. It's

a solemn thing to me now that out of those 70, of course some have moved away. Good reasons why others aren't involved in the things that I do, nevertheless solemn that out of those 70, there are maybe 12 to 15 that I can identify as seeming to be as committed now as they were then, but there are some. Thank God for those like Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, that [00:34:16] Daniel could go along with and say, now look, these are like-minded. I can throw in my lot with them and I can have fellowship on earth with them while I am true to God in heaven. Oh yes, in the primary sense, communion with the Lord, personal devotion to him, but I'm assured that if we are fully committed in that way, the Lord is gracious and he will provide at least some that we can go on with while he leaves us here to live our responsible lives. There were those with whom [00:35:03] he could go on. Now verse 21, last thing we want to think about chapter 1, Daniel continued. He persevered. He wasn't put off. I seem to remember about the time I'm speaking of, there was a comic character in the Newcastle Evening Chronicle who rejoiced in the name of persevere. He got all the knocks, everything went wrong, but you couldn't keep him down. He kept living up to his name. He persevered. Well, any knocks that come along give us the opportunity to demonstrate what stuff we [00:36:07] are made of. Dare to be a Daniel, or we like to sing to him, dare to be alone, but if we have the courage to be alone and act like Daniel in devotion to the Lord, having proved that we are willing to be alone if the Lord considers it to be necessary, if we have the faith for it, there will always be a handful with whom we can have all things in common and enjoy fellowship together. Fellowship in the remembrance of the Lord, fellowship in prayer, fellowship in the Apostles Doctrine, fellowship in the home and in the assembly. We can be assured of that. The Lord, [00:37:07] as long as we persevere, the Lord will make fellowship available to us. Now, just a word or two on chapter 3. Not so much Daniel now, but his three friends. Daniel allows himself to be persuaded to make this image of himself 90 feet high, 9 feet wide. He allows himself to be persuaded that he's an object of worship and everyone must bow to the image in deference to worship of him. Daniel's three friends, they say, oh, we can't do that. We live in a world of [00:38:16] compromise, don't we? Where, little by little, there is an encroachment on the things that we used to consider to be vital. We are tempted to think and we act upon it. We are tempted to think it's not really vital. I don't want to be considered to be awkward. Better to resist when it's something really important. I won't go along with it, but I'll just keep quiet and I [00:39:05] won't give offense. After that settle down, a bit more encroachment, a bit bigger this time, but a little more compromise. Read 2nd Timothy, chapter 1, 2 and 3, and you see the downward cycle of those who start off by not accepting the truth and then they accept something that is not the truth and they finish up resisting the truth. Little by little the encroachment goes on. Daniel's three friends said, no, we can't do it. We have to give God his portion. And they're told, if not, [00:40:13] into the furnace you go. Notice the audacity of Nebuchadnezzar. Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? God accepted the challenge. Notice verses 17 and 18 as the response of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. First of all, where was Daniel in all this? Daniel the leader, [00:41:08] Daniel the forceful character, Daniel who would tell them what to do and how to do it and they would follow his lead. It's a worthwhile study in Scripture to see those who made progress when their props were removed. Oh, it's all right, as long as there's a strong leader telling us what to do and encouraging us to go along with him and by his charismatic personality carrying us along in his train. Without this record, we might think that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had no personal exercise of their own. They were carried along in the train of Daniel. It's pure conjecture, [00:42:08] we aren't told. But Daniel, as the Prime Minister, may well have been away on official business in another part of the Empire. We aren't told. He wasn't on the spot at the time the test came along. What we are told, and it's wonderful, without the prop that they normally leaned on, these three, and notice it's not the Gentile name that was given to them. When they are standing for God, we read about them, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, that they are not prepared to give way. Verse 17, if Nebuchadnezzar says, who is that God that shall deliver you? Verse 17, they say, [00:43:05] our God is able to deliver

us. First of all, from the burning fiery service, and secondly, he will deliver us out of thine hand. Nebuchadnezzar had no personal knowledge of their God. He said, who is he anyway? They say, our God. Our God! Paul, what did he say?

From his knowledge of God, personally, my God, my God, shall supply all your needs. Paul's knowledge of God was such that he said, I know him well enough to know that he won't let [00:44:05] you down. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego said, you don't know our God. We know him. He's our God, and we know that he'll support us. Lovely words. He's able to deliver us. He will deliver us. Perhaps the best bit is, but if not. But if not. This was no escape clause. This was no let up or let out. They said, we know he's able to deliver us. We are assured that he will deliver us. But if it is his will that this is the end of our responsible life on earth, we leave it to him. What a happy situation in which to be. Are we assured that the Lord has left us here for a [00:45:13] purpose? That as long as he has something for us to do, he will leave us here. And when our responsible life and service is over, he will take us away. What a difference it makes in bereavement, doesn't it? To know that the one who has gone to be with the Lord, which for them is far, far better, is something which has been determined by the Lord as being for the best. Not easy. Very real sorrow. But, like these three friends, to be able to say, but if not, we are still going to be true to our God. Now, it is to such, and with this, [00:46:05] we must come to a close. Verse 25. Verse 24. These three men, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar, the king, was astonished and rose up in haste and spake and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto him, unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the four is like the Son of God. [00:47:01] We learn here one vital reason why the people of God are allowed to suffer. In the suffering, and in being determined to be true to the Lord, we get a personal knowledge of the Lord that would come in no other way. Show me a believer that suffered, and you will show me a believer who is mellow and has a personal acquaintance with their Lord and Saviour. It's not automatic. It has to be gained through deep sorrow, suffering, and exercise. Here, in the context of the book of [00:48:06] Daniel, it's another picture of God's earthly people in the day of Jacob's trouble, the last half-week, undergoing terrible suffering, being worn out by their enemies, and yet being sustained in it by the personal presence of their Master. There's a knowledge of the Lord gained in enduring sorrow and suffering that is gained in no other way. You Bible students, you get back here to the problem, it's not a problem really, of Ben and Bar. Here, look at the word, it's not only the [00:49:07] knowledge of the person, that's vital, but it's the knowledge of his official glory and the officers that he will fill when he comes in power and great glory. All these things that have been allowed to happen will be put into proper perspective when he takes up the reins of government, when he acts as the judge. Daniel, in his way, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, here were given an insight, a preview of the time that will come, like Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, given a preview of when the Lord says, enough, and he takes over personal [00:50:01] control and acts officially on behalf of God because he is God. Many more lessons in the book of Daniel, no time for more. Much said about the future in the book of Daniel. Let us go back, 2nd Peter, chapter 3, last two verses. Knowing these things before, God has privileged us to be born in a day, to hear ministry from the book of Daniel that point us to this again and again, that God tells us about the future, that we might behave properly at the present time. Oh yes, there'll be things people say, you don't do this, you don't do that, you don't go there, [00:51:05] you don't go here, but there will be those who see the positive features that arise when we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. With Peter, Daniel in sympathy with it, I'm sure, perhaps we can all come to this and say to him, be glory now and forever. Amen.