

Uncommon God: There is no One like Him

An Introduction to Daniel

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

Exodus 15:11

Introduction: Uncommon & Uncompromising. These words have rattled around in my head as I thought through and began studying Daniel in earnest these last weeks. These words certainly apply to the person of **Daniel**, the one of Sunday School flannel graph Hall of Fame, who is known for braving the lions den and interpreting impossible dreams. A study of his life is needed today, and really any day, as a young man was torn away from family and homeland, placed in the court of the most powerful and ruthless king in the world, given a regiment of brainwashing and retraining, and prepared to be prominent and power players in a world dominant kingdom. In other words, there was a **golden carrot** at the end of a stick if Daniel and his fellow exiles would simply **play by the rules laid out for them**. This is where Daniel, the man, shines. Not only did he risk positional realities in refusing to **compromise** when it came to eating the kings food, but he risked mortal realities as well (you know, like his own head). We will trace **how he operated** in a completely pagan world, government, and system, and did so with **integrity, excellence, and uncommon faith** to the degree that God used his life to influence multiple world powers, a pagan group of magicians, and was God's instrument to help bring Israel back out of exile after 70 years. Much like **Timothy**, of whom Paul said, *"I have no one like him, who will genuinely concerned for your welfare"* (Phil. 2:20), Daniel was a man who lived an uncommon life, unwilling to compromise in the midst of unprecedented circumstances, making him a unique model for us as we navigate a country divided with a growing rejection of God, His Word, and even His people. As the country we live in feels more and more like **Babylon**, and as we deal with the reality that we are strangers and aliens in a foreign land, Daniel's life is one that deserves both study and mirroring.

However, Daniel is NOT the main character in this book, nor is he the main focus. In fact, Daniel himself would admit that. No, the main person we will look at throughout this study is the One who is truly **UNCOMMON & UNCOMPROMISING**, or the One who is wholly other *because* He is wholly other. We live in a day where **SELF** is triumphed, elevated, and is the final authority. If someone *feels it, thinks it, and wants it*, it must be true, and if you say that it is NOT TRUE, you must be canceled, are now the enemy, and are victimizing me. In his book *"The Rise of the Triumph of the Modern Self"* by Carl Trueman, he points out how we have morphed from a culture that believed the world had a given order and a given meaning, and thus humans are required to discover that meaning and conform to it. Now, people see the world as so much raw material out of which meaning and purpose can be created by the individual. He illustrates this by the phrase, 'I am a woman trapped in a man's body', which he states would have been laughed at by his grandfather decades earlier, but now is normative to our neighbors or someone you talk to at Starbucks. 'The statement is, after all, emblematic of the view of personhood that has almost completely dispensed with the idea of any authority beyond that of personal, psychological conviction....'I think I am a woman, therefore I am a woman.'" (p. 36). Mankind has become an authority unto itself, and in so doing, has out right **rejected God, placed themselves under judgment, and continues down a spiral of misery**, when joy, life, and contentment are all available for all who would ask for it. In this, **there is nothing new under the sun**.

What is needed now more than ever for our church, believers everywhere, and all who are living now: **a full, refreshed, complete, yielded, and joyful view of our Uncommon God**. We need to see God as **sovereign**, who is moving all of history to completion, who is never frustrated, who will do all that He

says. We need to see Him as **active, not silent**, in the midst of all that is going on, even in the abject absurdity of what we have seen these last weeks, which is consistent with the violence, rhetoric, and lack of integrity in leadership we've seen the last months. We need to embrace the fact that God is a **promise keeping God**, who does this perfectly, both in the good and sobering realities. There is no God like our God, who:

- Never compromises His holiness or standards - He is never trying to "be like everyone else"
- **Glorious & Holy** ----- yet equally **Patient and Humble** - A God who exercises great restraint and even willing to be spat at and on in order to save His own
- **Brings judgment** ----- but ALWAYS gives ample warning
- **Enacts righteous wrath** ----- yet gives a **perpetual call to repentance, offering forgiveness**
- **Upholds righteousness and satisfaction of wrath** perfectly, without compromise, through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ
- Desires to be **with His people** and have them function as His own, loving Him wholly, fully with their whole heart as He satisfies them completely
- **He has delivered all of this in the past in PART** --- but He is preparing a people and a KINGDOM in the future where Christ will reign in **dominion, authority, in perpetuity, and we will BE WITH HIM**...He will be our God, and we will be His people.

This is the story of Daniel: Our Uncommon, uncompromising God who keeps His promises, offering Himself to be their God, who patiently disciplines and purifies, and who Himself saves, redeems, restores, and ultimately reigns with His people. We will look back in history past to see **promises made**, look at Daniel's present to see **promises kept**, in order to look to our future to see **promises fulfilled**.

Starting a book study is a little like learning to play an instrument. One wants to jump right in playing "Stairway to heaven" on guitar or a Beethoven classic on piano, but much understanding of the instrument itself has to be acquired before proper practice can take place. We drop into a place of history as we read Daniel 1, which was a culmination of a myriad of events and choices that lead a world power to take young men from their home, which was a broken down dynasty, to live in totally new place. **How did they get there? Why did this happen? Why is Daniel important to our life today?** In order to answer these questions, we must understand the historical as well as broader context of God's plan. So this morning, we're going to look back to look forward, seeing God's plan for Israel which has direct impact on our present and future.

History Past: Promises Made

The story of Daniel starts thousands of years before he even existed. In Genesis 12, God called the man Abraham to follow Him, promising to make him a **great nation**, with a **great name, blessing, and land**, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Him. This covenant was solidified through Isaac his son, and Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28). Jacob's family went to Egypt during famine, preparing their entry through the life of Joseph who was sold by his brothers into slavery but whom God placed for such a time as that (Gen. 50:20). From there, Israel grew in number and strength, but was also enslaved by a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:8). God

delivered His people out of slavery through **Moses**, leading the people to the Sinai wilderness, giving them the Law and preparing them for entry into the Promised Land. At the end of Exodus 40, the **glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle**, the place where He would be with His people, leading them in a cloud by day and fire at night (Ex. 40:34-40). God had kept His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and was on the cusp of giving the land to a people ready to fill it, with Him being their God and them being His people. It is here that **Leviticus 26 is so instructive.**

Leviticus presents God as holy, set apart, and He requires His people to be set apart from all others as well. An uncommon God gives uncommon commands which allows His people to shine in the midst of darkness.

A positive Promise: Leviticus 26:1-3; 11-13

*"You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for **I am the Lord your God.** You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: **I am the LORD.** If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, **then** I will give you rains in their seasons....*

*I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And **I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.** I am the Lord your God."*

God wanted to bring the people into the land we know as Israel today, and they would dwell there as a light to the other nations as to the greatness of God, since their harvests would be fruitful despite resting one day a week, they would have peace from enemies and any opposition would be chased out, NOT because Israel was great, but because **God IS UNCOMMON.** But the requirements were clear: do not make idols like all the other nations, keep my commands, and do it with all your heart.

A Dire Warning: Leviticus 26:14, 16, 18, 33

*"**BUT, if you will not listen to me** and will not do all my commandments...I will visit you with panic...I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins....I will scatter you among the nations."*

Even as Israel was just out of slavery, it was clear that **there is no middle ground with God.** Obedience to Him would bring blessing, the kind of blessing beyond imagination, but disobedience would bring consequence, pain, and scattering, meaning they would not stay in the land nor would God walk WITH them anymore.

A Hopeful Promise: Leviticus 26:40-45

*"**But if they confess their iniquity** and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me...**if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled...then** I will remember my covenant with Jacob...and I will remember the land. But the land shall be abandoned by them and enjoy it Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them...**But** I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers whom I brought out of the land of Egypt **in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD.**"*

Even BEFORE they rejected Him, God have a promise of return for His people. If they would humble themselves, confess their sin, and turn to Him, He would bring healing and restoration BECAUSE of His promise that He made to Abraham based on His character. This was sobering but good news to the ears of Israel at that moment, and still good news for us today.

A second instance where we see the same pattern was in the end of Deuteronomy, as Israel had ended its Wilderness wanderings, Moses was prepared to die, and Joshua was going to lead the people into the land across the Jordan, Moses gathered the people on two mountains facing each other, **Ebal and Gerizin** (Deut. 27:12) for a vivid illustration of God's promises and requirements. The tribes gathered on Gerizin would shout out the **blessings**, while the tribes on Ebal would shout out the **curses**. Again, the same pattern was given to the people: following God with their whole heart, denying idols and obeying whole heartedly would bring great blessing. However, disobedience would bring abject **curses**. If you read through Deut 27-28, you'll see God's character on full display. He is a loving, covenant keeping God who seeks to do good to His people, but He will exact wrath on those who oppose Him. Those who think God some **weak, impotent, sniveling ruler** will see that He means business and will share His glory with no other. But here is what was given clearly to the people:

*"All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, **because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandment and His statutes that He commanded you.** They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. Because you did not serve the LORD your God **with joyfulness and gladness of heart because of the abundance of all things**, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom he LORD will send...The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy on the young." (Deut. 28:45-50)*

God goes on to say there would be a siege on the city (Deut. 28:52-53), which absolutely took place in the future in Jerusalem. The people knew very well what they were committing to, and though they would fail spectacularly, Deut. 30:1-10 again record that God would forgive if they returned to them with their whole heart, humbling themselves, and following Him (30:6, 10). What we need to see here is that the **situation Daniel found himself, and all of Israel for that matter, was based on the choice of the people in spite of the clear command and promise of God.**

One other instance of promise and failure is found in **1 Samuel 8**. The conquest of the land had taken place, Israel was enjoying land they did not cultivate, cities they did not build and military might they did not earn. However, they also had a cycle of disobedience and forgetfulness, where sin was judged by God who would raise up an outside enemy, Israel would cry out, and God would provide a leader or deliverer. This is the summation of the book of **Judges**. At the conclusion of the leadership of **Samuel**, who's sons were wicked, the people did something audacious and predictable: **they rejected God, His leadership, and cried out for a 'real' king.** Here is how its recorded in Samuel:

*"Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us **like all the other nations.**" (1 Sam. 8:5)*

This rightly summarizes mankind for all time. We want to be like everyone else. We want to be autonomous in choices, and are willing to reject God for what we perceive to be best. Here is God's response:

*"Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, **but they have rejected me from being KING OVER THEM.**" (8:7)*

This was the ultimate rejection. God WAS their king. He wanted to rule them with love, justice, and blessing. But THEY rejected. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, believing that there was

happiness and joy outside of Him, thinking that the OTHER nations had it together, were thriving, and could deliver. Even when God warned the people through Samuel that a king would be worse for them, that he would take from them, and that they would regret their decision, they refused to **listen and heed his warning**, so God did what He does in judgment: *He gave them what they wanted*, which simply brought them down a path of judgment. Following Israel's history only confirmed this.

History Present: Promises Kept

Following the choice of Saul as king, Israel experienced a level of global prominence under the united monarchy and leadership of David and Solomon. The kingdom was fractured into two, North and South, under the leadership of Rehoboam and Jeroboam. The 10 tribes to the North followed Jeroboam, and over the span of over 200 years and 19 kings, not one turned to the Lord but sinfully led the nation, culminating in God raising up Assyria in 722 B.C to destroy it (2 Kings 17), mixing their own people and religion with that of Israel and creating what is known as the Samaritans, spiritual and ethnic half-breeds that were the bane of the Jewish people by the time of Jesus.

The Southern Kingdom, known as Judah, was made up of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. They had a mixture of evil kings and reformers, those who brought the nation back to the Lord. Because of this, they lasted longer than the North. God brought prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah to call both kings and people to repentance, but after the righteous leadership of **Josiah**, Judah herself was conquered by **Babylon and its up and coming leadership of Nebuchadnezzar (605 B.C)**, becoming a vassal for several years until Nebuchadnezzar had enough of the leadership there and made final ruin of Jerusalem in **586 B.C** (2 Chron. 36:17-21) It was under the initial deportation that Daniel was taken. But we see in most vivid fashion how God delivered on His promise to both bless His people, seen at the immense power and wealth of the United Monarchy, and the curses of disobedience by Him raising up opposition who destroyed the work that had been done.

History Future: Promises Fulfilled

Now, I'm not sure this is the most comforting or normal introduction to a book study, but it was immensely important. Daniel is actually a book of **hope**, both for people in exile and for those waiting to regain the land that once was theirs. Daniel reminds us of the fact that even when there are evil kings or kingdoms, or governments that wreck havoc and cannot be trusted, or when you find yourself in a place that you have no control or may never see things change for the better in your lifetime, God is and always has been at work to bring all of history to an end, His end. The last verse of Daniel 1 says simply, "*And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus'* (Dan. 1:21), which reminds us that it was Cyrus that decreed the people of Judah could return to their land after 70 years of captivity. God fulfilled what He had clearly promised (2 Chron. 36:20-23). But there is even more hope outside of this fulfillment.

Daniel displays the man and the prophet, the life he lived and the life he prophesied to come. It reminds us of the darkest of nights but the brightest of days in the future. It reminds Israel that a future kingdom is coming, and all believers of Jesus Christ that one day we will rule with Him, when He returns to establish a perfect, undeniable, uncommon, and eternal kingdom. At the end of **Daniel 7:27**, Daniel sees a future and revealed kingdom coming forth:

"And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

That, folks, is the definition of hope. What God desires He will ultimately bring to pass. He is **uncommon** in the fact that He has the power to bring this about, and though it seems like it will never come (or feels like it'll come in our lifetime), we trust that He will keep His promises because there is no God like Him.

Today, then, is a day to heed God's Word. There is nothing new. The issue has always been this: are you going to listen today to the Word of the Lord, turn from your sin, seek forgiveness in Jesus Christ, repenting of your sin in humility, and serving the Lord with your whole heart. God always gives clear expectations and continual warnings about His judgment and wrath, and we see that vividly in our day. If you have never humbled yourself from your rebellion and known the rest that comes from trusting Him, today is the day of believing and repentance. For all of us, we gain perspective that though our days may remain dark, the dawn is coming, and the Ancient of Days will come, will rule, and will make all things right. Until that day, may we be faithful to pursue God with our whole heart because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and in His resurrection.