

Allan MacRae, Daniel's Prophecies: Lecture 1

This year we are considering the prophecies of Daniel; and so we will look at a few introductory matters. We notice that the book of Daniel is referred to in the New Testament, or before that is referred to in the Old Testament in one other book, Ezekiel, the fourteenth chapter. We'll just very hastily glance at that. In Ezekiel 14, Ezekiel is rebuking the wickedness of his contemporaries. And in verse 14 he says, "Even if these three men Noah, Daniel and Job were in it [the country], they should deliver only their own souls by their righteousness says the Lord God." And in verse 20 we find the same statement; the end of the verse slightly different but the same ideas there too. Now this: Job and Noah, of course, were great ancient figures, but at the time of Ezekiel, when Ezekiel was living in the land of Israel, Daniel was a prisoner over in Babylonia.

We don't know just exactly when this was written by Ezekiel. Probably Daniel had already been there about twenty years, and so may have been very prominent at the court. And his reputation for wisdom we see was even known way across the desert there in Israel, by this reference to him. This is the only reference to Daniel in the Old Testament outside of the book of Daniel. In the New Testament we find him referred to in Matthew 24:15 and in Mark 13:14. Both of those are references to the "abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet." And I have placed in parentheses there other references in Matthew, Mark and Luke in which the name of Daniel is not used, but in which Jesus says to the high priest, "hereafter you shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven." And everyone agrees that that is a reference to the seventh chapter

of Daniel. We will look at that when we get to that chapter. But everyone agrees Daniel 7 is what is referred to there in the gospels.

The term "son of man" originally just means a man; it means an individual of the class of man. And in the book of Ezekiel the phrase "son of man" is used maybe seventy or eighty times to refer to Ezekiel. In the book of Daniel there is one case where the Lord addresses him as 'son of man,' but in this one case it says that there will come one "like the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven." It was recognized very early that that is a prediction of the coming of the Messiah on the clouds of heaven. And Jesus Christ calls himself "THE Son of Man," very clearly referring back to this statement in Daniel.

Now in the book of Daniel, what is most familiar to most Christians is the great accounts in this book of Daniel's fidelity to God. Many people think that the Bible is composed of just one miracle after another. Those who have this idea have not read the Bible very much, for you can read long sections without ever finding any reference to what we would call a supernatural act; something that is ordinarily called a miracle. Of course the word "miracle" actually simply means "a sign" and it does not have to be a supernatural act. But we do have great supernatural acts in the Bible, but they are found only in a few great crucial periods. And one of those periods was the time at the beginning of the Exile, when we have this accumulation of the miracles described in the book of Daniel. These accounts in five of the first six chapters perhaps you might say in all six of the first chapters of Daniel are probably among the best known parts of the Bible. Sunday school lessons often, as they go through the Old Testament, present these stories. They are all very interesting stories and they are wonderful illustrations of the

way that God has blessed those who are true to Him. There is great value for us in studying these accounts in the book of Daniel. But that is not our purpose in this course.

We are in this course confining our attention almost exclusively to the prophecies. And so the book of Daniel is characterized by these two things, great accounts of fidelity to God and great prophecies. The last six chapters of the book of Daniel are almost entirely made up of prophecies--predictions of the future. One might suggest dividing the book of Daniel into two parts: the first half histories, and the last half prophecies.

Roughly such a division can be made, but it is not altogether true because one of the greatest prophecies in the book of Daniel occurs right in the second chapter. And one of the chapters of the last six is almost entirely composed of a prayer that Daniel gave. But the last six are composed almost entirely of prophecies and those prophecies are very little known to the average Christian. They contain some marvelous illustrations, evidence of God's power, and God's knowledge of the future. There are lessons of tremendous power, but they are not easy to interpret, so I'm glad that in this course we have only about six chapters to cover instead of being like last year our course in Ezekiel when we had nearly fifty chapters to cover. We will be able to go more in detail about the particular points of interest and of difficulties.

But another reason why you cannot strictly divide Daniel into two parts is the fact of the languages of the book. Daniel begins in Hebrew and it ends in Hebrew, but from Daniel 2:4 to the end of chapter 7 it is in a different language, the Aramaic language. We try to give a training in the languages of the Bible here, I am very anxious that every one of you get a thorough training in Greek because the great central teachings of our

Christian faith are brought out in that very complex and precise language in the New Testament. The Old Testament is not nearly so precise and its statements are often more general in nature. And consequently we cannot be quite as precise, often in our conclusions regarding many things in the Old Testament as the New. So I feel that it is of outstanding importance that you get a solid foundation in the Greek language.

Now then, if you are going to read the Bible in the original language, it is also important that you know the Hebrew. And I only wish that we had Bibles, commentaries, grammars, dictionaries in which the Hebrew was written in the Latin letters, the type of letters we use for our English language. If somebody wants to donate a million dollars for that purpose I would be glad to direct people in translating the Hebrew Bible into Latin letters. It would require a little bit of a revision of the alphabet, but not much to make it a good representation. But I am sure you would learn as much Hebrew in one year then, as you would in two or three now. Because a tremendous part on our effort to learn Hebrew is simply a matter of getting your eyes used to those letters. And you have had twenty or twenty five years of getting your eyes used to Latin letters and you can't make up for that with entirely different sort of letters in a year or two. That is a great part in the effort of learning Hebrew.

Now that is as far as it has gone in most seminary courses in learning the languages of the Old Testament, but there is a portion of the Old Testament that is written in the Aramaic language. That includes these chapters I mentioned in the book of Daniel. It includes the certain sections about a half of the book of Ezra and one verse in the book of Jeremiah. These are in Aramaic and since it is a comparatively small part, we figure

that in a Seminary course we cannot expect most students to learn any Aramaic. And in this course, I am not requiring work in the languages; we are doing this on the basis of the English, and I am discussing the original languages where they apply because we have many students who are only now beginning Hebrew. But you should know that there is that difference so that in chapters 2-7 we have the identical letters, that is the same kind of letters as Hebrew. In fact Hebrew letters are originally Aramaic letters.

Hebrew before the Exile was written in a different kind of angular script, but they made the change of the type of letters during the Exile and adopted the more square Aramaic letter forms but still wrote Hebrew with it. And so we have this section of Daniel which is in Aramaic, which includes about a third of the prophecies. And the prophecies from chapter eight on are in the Hebrew language, but chapter seven and most of chapter two is in Aramaic.

Now I want to make a mention about a great attack that was made on the book of Daniel by a neo-Platonist philosopher named Porphyry who lived from A.D. 233 to 304. Porphyry said the book of Daniel claims to tell about great future events; he said you look at history of the times after Nebuchadnezzar, when Daniel was said to have lived and you find that the book traces events very, very accurately during a period of more than four centuries.

Now Porphyry said this is extremely unlikely that anyone would have ever been able to do such a thing. But he said if somebody in the time of a great crisis in the history of Israel were to write a book to encourage people to stand valiantly for their faith, he might imagine in that someone four centuries earlier wrote a book which predicted events

up to that time. And then which predicted the great attack made upon the religion of Israel by a king named Antiochus Epiphanies who ruled in Syria from 175-165 B.C. And he said many of the acts of Antiochus Epiphanies are very precisely, though in somewhat general terms, described in the book of Daniel, just as somebody living at that time would have described them. But, he said after that, the book tells simply what the writer hoped would happen and so he said the history goes up to a certain point, claimed to be prophecy given four centuries earlier, and then all of a sudden it begins to make wonderful promises about someone coming from heaven in the clouds and remedying everything and delivering them, and that part is all imaginary; that did not happen.

So Porphyry said we can see when it was written. It describes the history through that period accurately up to that point and then just imagines a lot of things that might have happened afterward. And so he said that was when the book of Daniel was written, and many today, and in the last century, have fallen for this view. Even some earnest Christians, men like F.W. Farrar, whose book on the life of Christ is highly regarded. In writing on Daniel he followed Porphyry's idea.

Now we would think that would make the book a fraud; a book by somebody four centuries later, claiming it was written earlier, giving history claiming it was prophecy in advance. We think that would identify the book as a fraud, but most important we know that it was accepted by the Jews at the time of Christ as being a divinely inspired book, and our Lord Jesus Christ set his seal upon the books that were accepted by the Jews at that time as being God's holy word. And so on the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, we believe that Daniel actually lived in the time of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and that

Daniel was able to predict these historical events four centuries after his time with remarkable accuracy.

And what Daniel describes beyond what happened then, we believe that he is looking further into the future, much beyond the time of Antiochus Epiphanies. We take that attitude because we believe that Jesus Christ gave His authority to the Old Testament as God's word and entirely true and dependable. And now in this course, we are not interested in studying the criticism, we do have to do a good bit of that in our classes; it is vital that you be prepared to meet the higher critical views which are so widely taught as established fact in seminaries and in universities throughout the world today. But that is not the purpose of this particular course.

Yet we find it necessary, in this course, to deal to some extent with this particular theory because it makes a difference in the interpretation at a good many points. And so I will refer to the critical theory a good many times. And you don't want to simply take anything that the critics--who want to think Daniel was written later--say as being necessarily false, because they are certainly right in saying that the book of Daniel contains a remarkable picture of the history of those four centuries. But the interesting thing is, that in order to hold their theory, they have a number of points that say he was quite mistaken about the history. That is quite interesting and I think that it is a rather weak point in their whole theory, but we will notice certain points of that type as we come to them.

But I want to say a few words specifically about the purpose of this course.

Number one: "The purpose of the present course is definitely not to find proof texts for

views already adopted." There is great value in someone who has a complete idea of what he believes the Bible teaches about the future. One may write on the book of Daniel in order to show how it fits in with those ideas, and in order to give evidence from the book of Daniel of particular points that support his view points. But the unfortunate thing is that most Christian teachers are equally dogmatic about those matters that are absolutely clear and definite in Scripture, and about those matters which are highly speculative as to interpretation of Scripture. One thing that we particularly try to do here at Biblical is to inculcate an attitude of saying "this is clear in the Scripture we stand upon it, but here is something which may be interpreted in two different ways; we think this is the more likely, but we do not stand as positively on that as we do on those things that are absolutely clear and definite in the meaning of Scripture."

Let us move on to number two. "Our purpose in this particular course is not to come to the book of Daniel with an already adopted idea of the future." We are coming to it simply to find what is there and to see just what is taught right in this particular book without importing into it, anymore than we can possibly help, ideas from other sources. Secondly, it is not our purpose to determine the detailed course of events that are still future.

In order to know what the Bible teaches about things that have not yet occurred in our day, and are still future, it is necessary to compare all those parts of the Scripture that deal with this matter. That is a big study. There are certain things that stand out absolutely clearly in it, and there are other matters on which equally intelligent Christians can differ. That is not our purpose in this course. We are anxious to find how much there

is in the book of Daniel that predicts things that haven't yet happened. We are anxious to see what there is to say definitely has not yet occurred. Since Daniel is part of God's word, it definitely will occur, but we will concentrate on what we can say with absolute positivity that comes only from Daniel. So you see we have a rather restricted purpose in this particular course.

That leads very naturally to the next statement in our purpose. Number three: "Our purpose is not so much specific results, though we will get a good many of them, as the learning of sound methods of Bible study." I am anxious that you get the definite ideas that are clearly taught in the prophecies in the book of Daniel, but I am even more interested in you getting an understanding of the correct methodologies of approaching the Bible, in order to see what is definite and clear and to see where differences of opinions can be had. It is so common in studying the Bible to take a passage and say "well now this could be this way, could be that way, it looks to me a little more probable if it's this way." And then a little further on we say we have already proved that this is taught there, and when we find a verse that seems to contradict it and we say, "well it could not contradict it," so we have to interpret it such a way so it fits in.

I believe it is important to find what is clear in any part of the Scripture and then to explain the matters that are less clear in relation to the clear, instead of reaching certain conclusions on perhaps sparse but yet not absolute evidence, and then twisting other things to align with it. And so method is my greatest purpose in this course, but I will assure you we will get a good many results that will be very much worthwhile.

And number four, "In this course I desire to look at the book by itself, bringing in from other scripture only what is absolutely clear." Now that statement is not strong enough. I don't mean that anything you find in Scripture that is absolutely clear we are ready to bring into this particular course. I mean that there are a few great, definite scriptural truths to which any Christian must agree that are taught in the Bible. And aside from those, we are going to look simply at Daniel and see what we find there. There are just a few points at which we will bring in matters that are clearly taught elsewhere in the Scriptures.

So we go on to Capital 'C' I will barely mention at this point the importance of the historical background. You cannot interpret Daniel in any proper way without bringing in the facts of ancient history. Now of course some of those facts are not well known to us, as a matter of fact, in any history, many of the facts are not well known. If you were to write a history of everything that will happen in the world between now at 10:30, in these next five minutes, if you were to write such a history, the books that it would take would more than fill this room, because every individual in the world within this next five minutes will have certain ideas, certain thoughts, certain relations to other individuals. There probably are people being born in some countries in the world today that nobody knows anything about except their own families. And who will forty years from now, if the Lord tarry, be known throughout the world as important historical figures? But most of the people in the world pay no attention to them until the time when they become prominent, and yet for a true understanding of history, their early life is tremendously important.

History properly would include everything that happens, and what we know of history is only what people thought important enough to write down. And of course, in these days we write down an awful lot more than used to be written down, but even so, there are a great many things that are not written down today. And when you come to ancient history, a great deal of what you know rests upon things that happen to be preserved, but a great deal that is of tremendous importance, has not been preserved. And so there are certain facts in history that are pretty well established and there are a great many matters concerning which comparatively little is known.

But, the principal facts of the political history of the Near East in ancient times enter very definitely into the prophecies of Daniel. I'm not going to take two or three days to try to go over these great events and have you gain a good understanding of them. Instead, I'm going to touch upon them as we come to them. And anything I say in relation to that history, if you have questions about, you could look up in any encyclopedia or any good ancient history. I believe that most of what we will deal with in the historical background you will find in almost any book on the subject. Matters that are obscure or uncertain I do not expect you to know.

And yet the strange thing is that practically every commentary I have seen on the book of Daniel makes statements that are contrary to all that is known on the particular points of ancient history. And it looks to me like the writers of these commentaries simply have taken a statement in Daniel and said that it must mean so and so and said that's how the history was, without looking into what is preserved in history to see what

actually did indeed happen. There are two or three cases where I have been surprised to find that as a fact, and we will find those as we go on.

Now capital 'D' I see I already did cover: the attitude toward the critical view. We are not here trying to answer the critical view; we are not going into it in detail. But it is important we know its central feature which I have already mentioned to you. And it will enter into our interpretation at a number of points to see how the critics have interpreted it. And there are some places where their interpretation is absolutely right and we agree with it thoroughly. There are other points at which their interpretation, I am convinced, is absolutely wrong. We will look into those, but that is not our main focus.

Now I mentioned earlier that the predictions in the part of Daniel after the first six chapters are comparatively little known in the Christian world. And that is unfortunate because there are some very wonderful predictions there and some very marvelous evidences of the truth of God's word in those chapters. They are very important, but they are comparatively little known.

But Chapter 2 is probably one of the fifteen or twenty best known chapters of the Old Testament. I believe Sunday school lessons nearly always; in the course of going through the Old Testament, include Daniel 2. And in Daniel 2 the setting of the prophecy is not our present interest, but there are one or two points in it that chapter I would like to have clarified.

And so I remind you, I imagine most of you are familiar with the events in the second chapter of the book of Daniel. It starts just like chapter one starts, with a date. It starts, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar

king of Babylon to Jerusalem and besieged it." Then chapter two starts, "And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams and his sleep was troubled." So we have a start there that is very evident that that is the point at which a chapter division should be made.

You know, of course, that our chapter divisions are not original in the Bible; the chapter divisions were put in about the thirteenth century. And the chapter divisions, according to the general idea, were put in by an English Archbishop in his Latin Bible. It is generally thought that he put many of them in as he rode on horseback making his pastoral calls. And many say that when his horse stumbled, he made a mistake in the place he put in the chapter division.

I heard Campbell Morgan, the famous English expositor, say once that he believed that in nine cases out of ten, the chapter divisions are in the wrong place. Now I believe that is quite extreme; I would say it is quite the other way around. There are a great many cases where if you are going to have a chapter division, it is in the right place. But there are many places where there are no divisions at all. I do not recommend any revision of the chapter divisions, because they are very convenient in order to find a place. And so even though they are erroneous, I would stick with them. Just as in electricity, we still call positive cathode what is really negative and we still call negative (anode) what is really positive. Because when the names were originally given, we did not know what the facts were about the direction in which the electrical currents moved and therefore the names were wrong. It would cause tremendous confusion to change them today, so we just stick to the old names. And the same is true here.

Now these divisions were taken from the Latin Bible and put into the Hebrew Bible. And when they were put in, there are a few cases, maybe one in twenty, where they preferred to make it at a different place. So occasionally the Hebrew Bible has a different chapter division than the English, but not more than about one in twenty. We follow the divisions from the Latin, which were put there in the thirteenth century A.D. The verse divisions are much older than the chapter divisions, but they also were put in quite a time after the Bible was originally written. And in some cases they are very strange; we have cases where two or three long sentences are included in one verse. And we have some cases where one sentence is divided into two or three verses. They are strange, but they are very convenient for finding places.

Now the setting of the prophecy here is Nebuchadnezzar, and I believe you probably all know that Nebuchadnezzar called in all his wise men. We read in verse two that he called the magicians, astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to show the king his dreams. And they came and it says in verse four, "then spoke the Chaldeans to the king in Syriac." The "Syriac," it would be better translated, "Aramaic," which is the name we use today for the language in which they spoke and from there on it simply changes to Aramaic from that point on in the text.

They said, "tell the servants the dream and we will show the interpretation," and the King said to the Chaldeans, "the thing is gone from me; if you'll not make known to me the dream with the interpretation of it, you will be cut in pieces." And they said, "nobody could do such a thing; you tell us the dream, and we'll tell you what it means." And the impression that that makes is that this man was a very arbitrary tyrant who asked

people to do a ridiculous thing, to tell him what he had dreamed. How could you expect wise men to tell you what you dreamed?

But I believe that is a misinterpretation. I believe it because where it says, "the thing is gone from me," the word that is translated as "thing" there can mean a thing, a word, an idea. But it can also mean a decree; it does not have to mean the dream, it can mean the decree. And when it says "it is gone," it can mean the command went out from him. "I have given this command," that's definite, but this is positive. We find it again in verse eight, "The king answered and said, 'I know with certainty that you would gain time because you see the thing is gone from me.'" Now in verse eight, the phrase "is gone," is a word that occurs nowhere else in the Bible. And in recent years scholars have come to the conclusion that this is a Persian word which means "it is firm" or it is positive. That is the way that it is taken in most of our recent translations. The decree is firm, it is fixed, "This is the regulation I have given out to you to produce." It does not mean he has forgotten his dream. After all, if he had forgotten his dream, they could make up anything they want and tell him that was his dream. There would not be much sense in that.

I believe that what often happened was, Nebuchadnezzar was in the habit of calling in these so-called wise men and saying to them, "I dreamt last night that a big horse came in riding through the main square, and there was a man on it who called out certain words and certain things happened. Now tell me what it means." And anybody could make up some kind of an idea as to what he would think that meant, and sometimes what they said would work out so it would happen that way. But other times it didn't, and

the King decided that they were just pulling the wool over his eyes; and so he decided if they really could tell him what the dream meant, they could tell him what the dream was. I think he certainly still knew what his dream was. But he was wanting real proof that these men could tell what it meant, that they were not just making something up.

And so he gave this command “You tell me,” and he had decided from past experience, from their imaginings and pretending, to know more than they did, that he wanted to be through with the whole bunch of them. And so he gave command they were all to be killed. And Daniel was considered a wise man, and the command went out to get Daniel and his associates and kill them with the others. And Daniel asked them to give him time to pray. And Daniel prayed and God gave him the answer. And then we read how Daniel came and spoke to the King and told the King what his dream was. And the king of course knew that what he was told was correct, and therefore he was ready to believe what Daniel said the dream meant. And so we have Nebuchadnezzar’s vision given in verses 31-35; the dream that God had given to Nebuchadnezzar.

Now we all have dreams. The person who does not dream will not live; dreaming is a natural part of life. But for most of us, it is a very good thing to forget what we dream. It is usually just a combination of experiences we have had before, combined in some unusual way. The particular dream that we have may even be the result of what we had for supper last night. Most of the dreams certainly have no meaning. But God can reveal something by a dream if he should choose. And in this particular case, God gave the king a specific dream in order to show his people something of what was going to happen in the future. And so in this case, the dream represented true events of the future.

And the dream is divided into two parts: we have here a static picture first; the King saw a statue. He saw a statue that was made up of five parts. There was the head which was gold, and there was a breast and arms of silver. How many arms did the statue have? I think we are safe in saying it had two arms. There are two arms, there is the breast, and by the breast he means, of course, the upper half of the body torso. But then says its belly and its thighs are of bronze. The thigh is usually interpreted as meaning from the hips to the knees. I have seen many pictures which have shown the whole leg as being the fourth part, but that is not what this says; the third part includes the abdomen down to the knees. The belly and the thighs, they were made of bronze, and then the legs, which would be from the knees down were of iron. The feet were partly iron and partly clay. So the dream begins with a static picture, and then it continues with a dynamic series of events.

There is then a dynamic series of events in the dream, and this series of events has three parts. There is a stone cut without hands. This stone hurls through the air and hits the statue. The statue is entirely demolished and then the stone rolls until it fills the whole world. Those are the parts of the vision. The interpretation is in verses 37-45 and there we have first the meaning of the statue.

Second we consider the parts of the statue. And this I would like you to consider for next time. I would like you to consider this next time and to think of the possible interpretations of the dynamic series of events. What do they mean? What does it mean the stone was cut without hands? What suggestion would you make about that? What does it mean that the statue was entirely demolished? What do you think that means? And

what do you think it means that the stone grew to fill the whole earth? I would like you to write out first what you think those mean. Then, if you have time and inclination, you could consult any book you care to and see what it says. But if you do, please indicate what source you have gone to for ideas. First, I would like to have what occurs to you; I don't want you to necessarily give me the final answer on this, I want you to give me the different possibilities if you can find more than one, and mention which of them seems to be most likely to you.

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