

DANIEL

Week 5, chapter 2

We finished up Daniel chapter 1 last time. It gave us an historical overview of Daniel from the time that he and his 3 fellow exiles were first taken to Babylon. Then it tells us about an overt attempt by the Babylonian authorities to strip Daniel and company of their Hebrew identities, giving them new Babylonian identities (assimilating them), by using the 4 elements that make up the identity of a person, especially in those ancient times. Those elements were location, name, civil and religious education, and diet.

The historical overview continues by explaining that Daniel remained in the employ of the succession of kings of Babylon, even on to the time when the Babylonian Kingdom was conquered and taken over by the Persians and Medes, and he found himself in the employ of the royal court of Cyrus the Great: the King of Persia.

Because diet is a biblically important topic I ask you to recall that of the 4 elements of identity change imposed upon Daniel and the exiles, Daniel firmly pushed back against only 1 of those elements: adopting a Babylonian diet. And we should not think that a Hebrew diet was radically different from the cultural eating habits of the other Middle Eastern nations and cultures. Rather, kosher eating had some restrictions involving sources of meat that other cultures didn't, the use of leavening at certain times but prohibited at others, and prescribed ways that food was to be grown. The actual dietary differences primarily concerned the handling of the food, and mostly of meat.

We discussed that the Torah deals with the issue of food in two different sets of laws; one set deals with what is permissible to eat versus what is not. That is, the definition of what is food for the Hebrews versus what is not food is established. And this definition is not based on which items might or might not be reasonably edible and healthy for a human being. Rather the list of what is permissible as food is pronounced by God with little explanation and no provable human rationale or logic. The list mostly concerns itself with animal protein: meat. Certain birds (like chickens) can be food, but others can't (generally scavenger birds). Certain land animals (like cows and sheep) can be food, but others can't (like pigs and rabbits). Certain sea creatures (like fish) can be food, but others can't (like eels, lobsters, and clams). Why? No explanation. It is simply God's sovereign decision.

On the other hand, there is a completely separate set of laws concerning food (and other things by

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the way) that explains what constitutes ritually clean versus ritually unclean. Thus clean and unclean do not involve the defining of which edible items can be food, but rather they speak about the proper handling of the permissible food. So the concept is that permissible food has to be properly handled or it can become ritually unclean and therefore it should not be eaten or it would ritually defile the person eating it.

Because over the centuries the gentile-dominated Church has adopted a doctrine that says that the Law of Moses is dead and gone and nailed to the Cross, then it is assumed that dietary regulations are only for Jews. I dispute that notion because not only is the Hebrew Apostle Paul frequently misquoted or taken out of context in order to arrive at that conclusion, but Yeshua Himself warned us not to ever think that the Law would be abolished, set aside, or even altered on account of Him.

Matthew 5:17-19 CJB

17 "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.

18 Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.

19 So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Will the Torah (the Law) pass away someday? Yes; Yeshua says that it, most definitely, will. But when will the Torah (the Law) pass away? Most of Christianity responds: "It already happened when Christ died on the Cross and arose from His grave". But when did Christ say that the Law would pass away? Not "until heaven and earth pass away". Heaven and earth certainly did not pass away upon Messiah's death or resurrection, and it still exists until this day, does it not? Therefore, according to Him, so does the Law of Moses still exist. And woe to those who teach otherwise (He says), who will have their status before God reduced to "the least".

In any case Daniel and his friends were given permission by their captors to eat a kosher diet of only vegetables as an experiment to see if they would remain healthy and not surprisingly they did. Their glowing health was not because eating only vegetables is the best thing, but rather it was because of their faithfulness and obedience that the Lord supernaturally gave them outstanding vitality. Thus the all-important 4th element of their identity change to Babylonians (diet) was short-circuited and their Hebrew identities were less threatened.

With that foundation established, Daniel chapter 2 then takes us from the realm of the historical to prophecy. And interestingly, the original language this chapter was written in changes from the Hebrew used in chapter one, to Aramaic. It will remain Aramaic through chapter 7.

Since from here forward in Daniel it is prophecy that takes center stage, let's discuss the general nature of biblical prophecy, how we're supposed to use it, and what the intent of prophesy is. Biblical prophecy is much too often mischaracterized as "seeing the future". And while it is true

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that prophecy is always about events future to when the words were being written, it is not about telling us at any level of detail what is going to happen. Rather, biblical prophesy is about providing us with a roadmap of what lays ahead in human history; it provides a trajectory. That is, we are getting information about where we are departing from and where we shall arrive, and then a series of milestones are laid out for us that eventually brings us to a goal. However the details of how we get there, what circumstances happens along the way, or what it looks like when we arrive are either not supplied or they are scant.

A good illustration of how biblical prophecy works is to compare it to the trajectory of human development. That is, the stages that a human being goes through during a normal lifespan from birth to death. One doesn't have to be an academic or even literate, to know the trajectory of human development because it is the same for all humans everywhere in any era past or present. While the labels we might use to describe the several milestones along the way of human development can be slightly different, here is a representative set that ought to sound familiar to you. We are born and begin life as infants. Next we develop into toddlers, then young children, then adolescents, then teenagers. The next stage is as young adults, then adults, then middle-aged, seniors, elderly and finally death.

By the time a person arrives at the developmental stage of a young child they have some understanding that they will eventually become elderly. By the time a person arrives at the adult milestone, it is all too apparent that eventually becoming elderly is not only certain but we probably ought to try to make plans to deal with it. Apart from death, there is no such thing as skipping a stage of human development or indefinitely staying at a stage we like. And yet, while we can look ahead with assurance that we will pass through each one of these discernable stages during our lives, we have no details about what will occur in between each of these inalterable milestones of our development. We can reasonably know some of the characteristic signs that tell us that we have graduated from one milestone to the next, but the myriad of details and wide variation of circumstances of how we got there is never knowable in foresight, rather only in hindsight.

Bible prophecy works similarly. In fact bible prophecy gives us the ability to look all the way to the end of human history, and God's Word even establishes milestones so that we can know when we've arrived at that next stage in prophetic trajectory. Yet in looking ahead, we have almost no details at all. If we're not discerning we can pass right by a prophetic milestone and never notice it. Further the Scriptures don't give us any clear idea of what the landscape is going to look like along the road in between those prophetic milestones. But that sure hasn't kept folks from trying to create their own versions of it to fill in the blanks. I suppose it's only human nature to want to know the future, in detail. However, especially as Believers, we ought to have learned by now that to attempt such a thing is fraught with danger. We have all been subjected to the predictions of an exact date for the Rapture, or the beginning of the Tribulation, or the end of the world, and often from highly respected Christian leaders. Of course, those dates all come and go and hopefully the arrogance of those who think that they have been given special knowledge of such things has been tamped down somewhat.

The learned men from Yeshua's day knew from bible prophecy that they were closing in on that prophetic milestone when the Messiah promised by God would finally arrive; but rather than be

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patient, have faith, and wait and watch, they began to concoct doctrines that sought to describe the details of what had not yet happened. These doctrines usually revolved around their personal agendas and aspiration. They trusted their own intellects and overlaid their own desires upon the shadows of unfulfilled prophecies. And we all know the results: 99% of the Jewish population who bought into these fanciful speculations at the insistence of their many religious authorities, refused to accept the reality when Messiah finally did come. They rejected Jesus Christ because He didn't fit the mental image and details that their religious leadership had created regarding Him or even His purpose.

So as we go forward with Daniel, let us proceed with respectful caution. Today we can certainly know many details of what Daniel prophesied because much of it has already come to pass. But there are other parts of his prophecies that are yet to come, or perhaps more correctly are incomplete. Beware of self-styled modern-day prophets who want to give you exciting and colorful details of things yet to come; those who believe that they can tell you things about the landscape on the way to the next milestone of biblical prophecy; things that the bible does not reveal. If you succumb to this you can easily find yourself eagerly waiting for a train that is assuredly going to come, but you may be standing at the wrong station.

Open your bibles to Daniel chapter 2.

READ DANIEL CHAPTER 2 all

Immediately the opening verse causes controversy as far as the modern school of Bible Criticism is concerned, and once again it involves placing this narrative in time. Verse 1 says that what is about to follow, that has Daniel in the center of the action, happened in the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. These particular bible scholars say that we are presented with a contradiction because in the previous chapter Daniel is said to have gone to a 3 year school that began upon his arriving in Babylon. Thus both statements cannot be correct, they say, proving that the Book of Daniel was fictitiously authored by at least 2 writers, or that if the work is of a single writer he was not only a poor historian but wasn't smart enough to make the two chapters agree with one another.

There have been a number of approaches to try and reconcile this issue (that for me is a non-issue). Some scholars say that this is a matter of how a king's Regnal years are counted, which happens in 5 different ways in the Old Testament. Others say that it was not in the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzar but rather the 12th that this occurred. And in fact some ancient bible manuscripts indeed say it was the 12th year of Nebuchadnezzar. Josephus offers that the date is meant to reflect the 2nd year after Nebuchadnezzar sacked Egypt. And there are others. There is a much simpler answer to this that doesn't require reverse engineering.

First of all, the way the bible relates chronology to its readers is not the way it is done today (of that there is no dispute). And the ancient literary Hebrew style is not modern Western literary style and we ought not to expect it to be. Second, it is commonplace in the bible to describe an event or a

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story from start to finish in summary form. And then in later paragraphs or chapters to return to some point in that overall time period and explain some particular event or another in greater detail. For example I could take a few minutes to tell someone of my education background by first giving an overview from kindergarten through graduate school. But then after that summary go back to my high school days and tell a story about some event that happened then. I have little doubt that is all that is happening here at the outset of Daniel 2.

So Daniel chapter 1 was merely an introductory historical overview that brought Daniel to Babylon from his home in Judah, put him into the service of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, and demonstrated Daniel's steadfast faith in Yehoveh all during that time. It is also explained that Daniel was sent to a Chaldean school for 3 years to learn the ways of Babylon, and finally that Daniel served so loyally and so long that he even found himself in the service of the King of Persia when the Medes and Persians took over the Empire from the Babylonians.

Therefore when we come to Daniel chapter 2, we are backtracking to focus on a particular event that happened at a particular moment during Daniel's long captivity; and it happened in Nebuchadnezzar's 2nd year on the throne (counted however one wants to count it). In fact, exactly which year this might have happened in is largely unimportant to the story. Nonetheless assuming the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzar is correct this means that Daniel was probably still in Chaldean school, and his 3 years of education were not yet completed.

Sadly I must keep reminding you that the reason that the modern bible commentators of the Higher Criticism discipline (which is the majority of bible academics) take this unwarranted stab at trying to find these supposed discrepancies in the Book of Daniel is because they begin with the immovable worldview that there are no such things as the supernatural, miracles, or predictive prophecy. Therefore Daniel can only be fiction; and they see their job as exposing this to the ignorant masses of Christians and Jews, and thus also being admired and accepted by the liberal academic elite.

The first 3 verses of this chapter are a preamble to the prophetic story and are written in Hebrew, and then at verse 4 when the story begins in earnest it switches to Aramaic. The gist of the preamble is this: King Nebuchadnezzar was troubled by a series of dreams such that it disturbed his sleep. That is, he didn't have just one dream, he had several and they were all either the same dream or closely related. We have no idea over what period of time these dreams went on; days, weeks, months perhaps. Finally he became so full of anxiety over them that he determined they had important meaning and so he had to know what they meant and how it pertained to him and his kingdom.

In biblical times dreams and visions were a common way for God to speak to humans, Jew or gentile. Kings took their dreams seriously since the matters they dealt with affected entire nations. So King Nebuchadnezzar called for his kingdoms' magicians, sorcerers, exorcists, and astrologers to come to him, and then more or less working as a team they were challenged to interpret the king's dreams. The Hebrew word that the CJB is translating into astrologers is ***Kasdim***, which literally means Chaldeans. But I think the CJB is right in translating this as astrologers from the aspect that by now, in the 6th century B.C., the term Chaldeans was evolving and more and more it meant professional star gazers who tried to ascertain the future by charting the heavenly bodies.

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So in verse 4, as we have this array of Babylonian seers standing before the king, we are explicitly told that they began to speak to the king in Aramaic. Why would we be told that? What difference does it make? Because Akkadian was the language of the elite but for some reason they chose to speak Aramaic. Did the king perhaps not know Akkadian? And so not surprisingly, it is at this very point that the biblical text ceases to be written in Hebrew and begins to be written in Aramaic, the common everyday language of the Babylonians. But now, and for the next 20 verses, comes a life and death wrestling match between King Nebuchadnezzar and his flock of seers who represent all the known professions of the magical arts of that day. The King of course wants his dream interpreted; but in an unprecedented demand he insists that before they tell him the **meaning** of his dream they are to tell him the **substance** and content of his dream. In fact if they don't first tell him what it is that he dreamed, then he's going to have them torn limb from limb and their homes will be reduced to rubble.

On the other hand, if they are able to tell him his dream and interpret it, they'll receive wonderful rewards. These guys know that they're in trouble. Up to now they could just make up anything they wanted to about what a dream means, agree on it, and tell the king. And in fact one gets the distinct feeling that King Nebuchadnezzar has been down this path before and he's become suspicious. He's had a dream, he tells them the dream, the seers interpreted it.....and it didn't turn out like they said. Or they use it for flattery in hopes of personal gain. His solution? If these guys are so smart and spiritual and connected to the supernatural realm that they can interpret my dreams, then they also ought to be able to tell me the actual dream itself. In fact verses 8 and 9 has Nebuchadnezzar telling the seers:

Daniel 2:8-9 CJB

8 *"I see you're only trying to gain time, because you see that I've decided*

9 *that if you don't tell me the dream, there is only one sentence passed on all of you. So you've conspired to mislead me with lies in the hope that time will change things. Now, just tell me the dream! That will convince me that you will also be able to give me its correct interpretation."*

The seers keep pleading for the king to tell them his dream, and he insists he won't do it.

But then in verse 11, a startling admission by the seers' spokesman: it is not possible for a human being to know another human being's dream. Only the gods can do that, and the gods don't live with humans. In other words, the seers' admit that they have no means to know the king's dream. That did it; the king flew into a rage and condemned all the seers of Babylon to death. He decided that they were, as a group, phonies. This did not mean all the magicians and sorcerers and astrologers and the like throughout the Babylonian Empire were to die, but rather only those in the city of Babylon, the king's capital where his palace was located. But it did indeed mean that ALL the seers who were in the city were to be slain, without distinction for their particular art form and whether they were involved in this debacle or not. Such was the power and prerogative of the

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ancient Oriental Kings, and Nebuchadnezzar's edict of death for an entire class of people to satisfy his outrage was not unusual practice.

It turns out that the decree is to be carried out so thoroughly that even these Jewish boys, including Daniel, are to be slain as well. And this shows us that the idea of higher education in Babylon was primarily religious education. And Babylon's religion involved all of these black arts professionals who were called before Nebuchadnezzar and who now stand as dead men walking. These black arts were at the heart of what Daniel and his companions were to become experts in. Therefore even though it seems to be that not enough time had passed that Daniel had even graduated from his Chaldean schooling, it was enough for him to be included as among the condemned wise men.

Apparently some time passed from the death sentence pronouncement to when it would start to be carried out. In the interim Daniel of course was informed of his fate and as **Aryoyh** broke the news to him, Daniel carefully and respectfully said that he thought it reasonable to at least be told what it is that had so upset the king as to bring on such a harsh response. **Aryokh**, the king's chief bodyguard who had been tasked to carry out the executions, told Daniel what the issue was and Daniel apparently thought he could find out the answers the king sought if he could speak with the king. He convinced **Aryokh** to present him to the king, which no doubt involved some measure of trust in Daniel on **Aryokh's** part; you don't march people in before the king just because they want an audience. I should note here that neither the king nor **Aryokh** were so in love with killing and death so as to forget that the goal was not mass executions but rather to find someone that the king could trust to interpret this series of dreams that he instinctively knew were important. The executions weren't so much punishment as it was simply getting rid of a bunch of false seers who had obviously been lying and deceiving the king when they used to interpret his dreams and visions. We saw the God of Israel order essentially the same thing concerning false prophets of Israel: death to them all.

Daniel told the king that if he would just grant him some time, he would be able to tell him his dream and its interpretation. Apparently the king granted it and Daniel went back to his 3 Jewish friends who were going to suffer the same fate as all the other Chaldeans and told them they should consult Yehoveh to see if He would give them the answer to the dream and thus save their lives and the lives of the Babylonian seers. Verse 19 says that God answered their petition and gave to Daniel the revelation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The secret came in a night vision. A vision of the night isn't necessarily a dream. Since the word dream in Aramaic is **chelem**, but the word vision is **chezev**, we can know that these were two different kinds of experiences. The king had a dream as he slept; but Daniel was informed of the substance of the dream and what it meant by means of a vision while he was fully awake. It's only that this vision occurred at nighttime.

Daniel's response was most appropriate: a prayer of thanksgiving to God. And I find the nature of the prayer quite interesting in that it essentially praises Yehoveh's attributes and His inherent nature. Or another way to think of it is that it defines God's identity. And because Daniel and others from Judah are now in exile in Babylon, identity becomes a core issue for them. We have already seen that Nebuchadnezzar sought to change the identities of those Jewish captives that he

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brought to Babylon, and especially of those who he intended on being in service to him. Now, in Babylon, Daniel reiterates in prayer who God is, and that his own identity is in Yehoveh.

I have taught you on numerous occasions that it is quite a challenge today to sort out just who God is. For going on 2 decades we have seen a growing influence of the Muslims throughout the world, and it has even affected Christian thinking about God, whose name is called YHWH. And yet the Muslims call their god Allah. So it has become vogue, especially among Christian missionaries, to say that regardless of what name Islam calls God, Jews, Christians and Muslims all worship the same God. I reject that on the strongest possible terms. Because as we're shown throughout the Scriptures, and now here with Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving, God can be known to humans in only 2 ways: His name and His attributes. And the attributes of the god of the Koran that the Muslims worship are different on a number of levels than the attributes of the God of the bible that Jews and Christians worship. They are by no means the same god.

In verse 20, Daniel says that Yehoveh's chief attribute is that He is eternal. And that true wisdom and power come from God alone.

In verse 21, God causes the seasons to change and is master of time itself. It is only by the Lord's permission that kings, gentile or Hebrew, ascend thrones and are removed from them.

In verse 22 it is the one and only Lord who reveals things that are otherwise unknowable by humans. Through revelation He gives otherwise secret and hidden things to the wise men of the world.

And in verse 23, the issue of identity once again arises as Daniel says that God, Yehoveh, is the God of Daniel's ancestors.....Daniel's Hebrew ancestors. And that in His sovereignty the Lord has revealed to Daniel the king's dream and what it means.

So as we close this week, let it be with the knowledge that it was the God of Israel who put those dreams in Nebuchadnezzar's mind. Thus it is only the God of Israel who can reveal their true meaning. And next week, we will begin a close examination of the frightening statue made of gold, silver, bronze, and iron, whose image has been the haunting subject of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams.