

DANIEL

Week 1, Introduction

Out of the frying pan and into the fire we go, in ways you can hardly imagine just yet. I welcome you all to an exciting, hopefully eye-opening and inspirational study of the incomparable and controversial Book of Daniel.

Most Believers have at one time or another studied passages taken from Daniel or even the entire book. We'll find reference to those passages peppered into various New Testament books and of course in Revelation. However I pray that after the end of some months of our new study that you will agree that at the least you have heard it from a different perspective. And the perspective that I am endeavoring to present to you is one of spiritual and intellectual honesty and as true to the context, intended meaning, and historicity of Daniel as we can get at this point along the long road towards God's ultimate plan of redemption.

There are several uncomfortable and inconvenient realities that we will face as we work our way through the Book of Daniel. Things that must have been as utterly head-scratching to the earliest hearers of Daniel's pronouncements, as it was to its earthly, human author who received these visions from God and wrote them down. We will discover some answers to difficult questions that we'll be confronted with, and in other cases probably a limited range of possibilities will be the best we can do. I share frankly with you that if you have not studied the Torah with us in the past, this book is going to be all the more challenging for you than for others who have.

The most expedient way to study this book would be to just dive right into it. However I don't believe it would be the most effective or profitable. As I contemplated how best to approach the teaching of Daniel I realized that there was no way around the subject of Systematic Theology and the doctrines proposed by each of the many Systematic Theologies held by the many institutional Christian denominations. One of the reasons that there are so many books and commentaries on the Book of Daniel, and why they can vary so drastically in what they teach, is the author's own personally held theology.

The Book of Daniel is in many ways in a class by itself; and I think by the end of today's lesson you will come to understand that. This relatively short book of only 12 chapters lies at the crossroads of our faith. It is the bridge from the past to an as-yet unrealized future (even though current indications are that that future is just around the corner if not almost upon us). The Book of Revelation is dependent upon Daniel. Nearly everything that we know (or think we know) about the End Times counts on Daniel. How to make sense of world history since the time of the Babylonian Empire is dependent upon Daniel. Even the inherent trustworthiness of the Bible, and especially of the New Testament, stands upon what we discover in, and about, the Book of Daniel. So those are the high stakes we are dealing with when we decide to delve deeply into this particular book, and that is why we're going to take our time and we're going to integrate several disciplines and subjects into our study that at first blush might not seem

needed or even appropriate.

I suspect that shortly you will wonder if I'm trying to approach you as theologians or perhaps trying to make you into theologians. I'll need you to trust me that I'm not. And one of the reasons that you can believe that is because I am not a fan of theology and particularly not of Systematic Theology. So a definition of these two terms is probably the best place for us to begin.

Theology is defined by Webster's as "the study of religious faith, practice, and experience; the study of God and of God's relation to the world". The American Heritage Dictionary defines theology in this way: "The study of the nature of God and religious truth; rational inquiry into religious questions." So without dissecting it too far, the modern definition of theology is a study of God (whomever you hold that to be), but done in a rationalistic manner.

But there is more. Every standard dictionary definition I could find also expounded on the meaning of theology to include words like these, as printed in the American Heritage dictionary: "A system or school of opinions concerning God and religious questions." Thus we are led right to the term Systematic, which modifies the word Theology. And in modern times it would be fair to say that all mainstream Christian theology is Systematic Theology. On the other hand, Christian Hebrew Roots takes a different approach.

Systematic means something that is related to or consisting of a system. And a system, according to the Webster's Dictionary, is: "a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole." As pertains to religion it is: "an organized set of doctrines, ideas, or principles usually intended to explain the arrangement or working of a systematic whole". So, again, without dissecting it too far, a system is a carefully defined set of ideas, or doctrines, or parts that are each fully interdependent on the group as a whole in order to form an end product or function. In the case of religion, and as is at the core of the modern Church institution, a unified theology is achieved using a systematic approach.

And I'm here to tell you that the entire concept of a knowledge of God and His Word to mankind that has been arrived at systematically is inherently flawed. This is going to hurt your head a little bit, so I want to try a little further (not too far I hope) to articulate this line of thought.

In a lesson I gave quite some time ago regarding the Book of 1st Samuel, I delved into the inherent qualities and problems with a systematic approach to discovering God and His attributes, and to studying the Bible. I would like to review, and in some cases repeat some of

that now.

Modern Systematic Theology was a response to the threat of the European Enlightenment of the early 1700's that sought to gut the church of its spirituality by means of ushering in secular humanism to replace it. Since this was the era when intellectualism and the Scientific Method were established as the best of all possible protocols for the discovery of truth the Church felt pressured into formulating a systematic method to present itself. The hope was that it would be intellectually acceptable to the leaders of the new Enlightened Society. And the system that was created was called theology, and it sought to divide and separate the essence and practice of Christianity into about 10 categories. Each category was given a fancy academic name and the church endeavored to answer a series of key questions about Christian beliefs that each of these 10 or so categories would naturally ask. At the end of the day, the answers to those questions formed the basis for the interpretation of the Bible. The Church calls those answers "doctrines", and thus the conclusions formed by these doctrinal principles, when used together, formed an intertwined and interdependent unified theological system. The downside was that if one of the doctrines that were part of the system changed or failed, the entire system was affected since it is viewed as a whole.

Example: an automobile is a system. There are many parts needed to form that system; engine, steering, passenger cabin, transmission, brakes, lighting, and so on. And there are many possible approaches to defining each part of that system. An engine can be gas, diesel, electric, or even a hybrid of those. It can have 4 cylinders or 6 or 8 or even none. It can have disc brakes or drum brakes or a combination of both. It can be designed to seat 2 or 4 or 6 people or even more in the passenger cabin. It can locate the engine in the front of the car and use the transmission with a drive shaft to drive the rear wheels. Or it can put the engine in the front and drive the front wheels without a drive shaft. Or it can put the engine in the back of the car, and so on and so forth. But here's the thing: the system is completely interdependent. Each part is designed to work in concert with all the other parts. You can choose to design it with the engine in the front, but once committed and the car is in production, you can't just decide to move the engine to the rear of the car without a complete makeover of system. And as anyone with a car knows, it doesn't take much to bring the entire system to a halt. If you have as little as a flat tire, the entire system becomes inoperable to achieve what it was designed to do: move people around. Systematic Theology operates the same way. If one part breaks down, the entire system fails. If one doctrine of the system is proved wrong, it will have a ripple effect upon the many other doctrines that forms the system.

That we have many differing Systematic Theologies ought to be a clue that as good as was the intent, there is an inherent flaw within the very concept of trying to use a systems approach to understanding and describing God and to deciphering the Holy Scriptures.

Here's the thing: the basis of Systematic Theology (the basis for practically all Christianity) allows for almost no gray areas; no wiggle room. The required answers to the generally 10 categorical elements (the doctrines) of Systematic Theology must be firm and unequivocal. "I don't know" or "Scripture isn't clear on the subject" or "It can be either this, or that, or

something else” is not workable. You can’t have the engine to a car BOTH in the front of the car and at the rear of the car at the same time. And you can’t leave the matter undecided or you can’t build the system in the first place. You must decide and then stick with it. A system only works if each part of it is clearly defined and generally inflexible, because it all has to work together as a whole.

Let me illustrate this from another angle. Christian Systematic Theology looks into the Scriptures (almost exclusively the New Testament Scriptures written by Paul) to find the answers to those questions posed by each of the 10 categories. There are usually a number of bible verses that address each of those questions; sometimes directly and at other times only by implication. Allow me to give you 5 familiar subjects that are typically addressed by Systematic Theology: 4 of them are The Law, eternal security, the Sabbath, and the deity of Christ. It’s the 5th one, End Times doctrine, called Eschatology by Bible academics, that is at the heart of the matter in the Book of Daniel.

If you’ve ever spent much time in your Bible you know that there are several verses spread throughout the New Testament that address each of these subjects and they’re not precisely the same answer merely repeated in each verse, but rather slightly different perspectives of each subject are brought to light and so the answers vary somewhat. But due to the implementation of a systematic approach to theology, a rigid and well-defined answer is required (an answer that will become the accepted “doctrine” for that subject). And the correct answer is established when a consensus of a particular denomination’s leaders feel they have defined that which best reflects what is intended by the various passages of Scripture (concerning that particular subject) when weighed as a whole. Or, depending on what some underlying foundational theological viewpoint might demand, the answer contained in one particular verse might be chosen while the others that don’t closely validate that viewpoint are discarded.

Perhaps the most highly revered New Testament scholar of modern times is E.P. Sanders. He is a Believer, but to try to characterize him as conservative or liberal would be almost impossible; which is why I like him so much. A few years ago, at a conference of Graduate Students of Philosophy at Villanova University, he was asked to discuss Paul, the New Testament, and the Church. Here is a short excerpt that I hope you listen to very carefully.

Journal of Philosophy and Scripture Moderator: In your work, you emphasize the non-systematicity of Paul’s thought. It’s undeniable that he’s not trying to construct a philosophy or a theology that would be doctrinal. He’s addressing specific concerns, and sometimes his answers seem to contradict each other. I wonder if that non-systematicity will always end up being a tough spot for those who do want to appropriate a Pauline message or a Pauline program into a philosophical or even a theological system.

EP Sanders: It doesn’t slow them up at all, because they just take parts! The great thing about saying that you accept a figure or that you accept a text—for example, the modern fundamentalists who say that they accept the entire Bible—is that you can choose which bits and pieces you will make use of and ignore the bits and pieces that you don’t want

to make use of. So, that's the way it is with appropriating Paul: I can say that I accept the entire Paul, while only taking bits of Paul. I'm sure that the Lutheran theologians of the post-Reformation period thought that they were doing justice to the whole Paul, but they were leaving out such important things as sacramentalism and mysticism and so on, which are part of the whole Paul. So, you can pretend to do it and yet not actually do it.

Bottom line: The Bible does not recognize itself as a system. Paul did not create a Christian system and therefore a Systematic Theology. Rather it is men within the institutional gentile Church who came far later that picked and chose certain Scriptural passages (usually sayings of Paul) in order to create a system that seemed to validate some agenda they had in mind.

A visual illustration of this development of a Systematic Theology might be thought of as the construction of a wall; a high straight wall. On one side of the wall lay the denominational orthodoxy; that is the doctrines that form their belief system. On the other side of the wall lurks heresy, which means disagreement with their doctrines. Therefore for any particular Systematic Theology, on the one side of the wall is truth and on the other side is error.

Now no analogy I can give you is perfect, nor is my intent to demean the brilliant bible scholars and good men who have brought us so many good solid Bible commentaries, but I think this analogy of a wall is reasonably representative of how a Systematic Theology is implemented in principle. However here is the crux of the matter: this sort of systematic approach to knowing God or to learning the Scriptures is NOT how the ancient Hebrews, nor how Judaism up to the time of Christ, ever envisioned establishing the revelation of divine truth. Rather they recognized that for practically any subject we can envision that the Scriptures give us several aspects and some number of applicable principles concerning that subject as boundaries for dealing with it. But Systematic Theology demands by its nature (a nature that demands obedient orthodoxy) that we must choose only the BEST one of those several aspects of each subject as pre-eminent and the other aspects are therefore given less weight or deemed irrelevant because they don't agree with our underlying theology. But of course sometimes after you've chosen the answers to the first 4, 5, or 6 categorical questions, and established them as doctrines, it narrows the possible range of choices you can make to answer the remaining categorical questions because an answer that doesn't take the previous categorical answers into account could easily lead to a set of doctrines that conflict with one another. If I choose to create a car and I put the engine in the rear of the car, I can't also put the luggage compartment, the trunk, there as well even though that's where I think it needs to go. Once I've made the decision where the engine goes, it dictates the nature of many other parts of the system. Then when I decide upon the size and shape of the passenger cabin, the choices for the remaining parts of the system become even narrower.

What we have with the way that modern Systematic Theology operates is that there are perhaps 3000 or so sturdy and impenetrable denominational walls in existence today and in each case a Believer must select which of these walls seems to be the right wall and then stand on the side of the wall that that denomination says is the right side. Since there is generally but one pre-eminent and best answer to each categorical systematic question, it is the answers to those questions that form the substance of the wall. But was the Bible actually

created in such a way that this is how we're supposed to use it? Is that how it is intended that we find truth? Is this the best means to arrive at the set of answers that (when taken together) lays out the divine attributes of God and how to live within our Christian faith? Modern Theologians say "yes"; I say "no".

Neither God nor His Word function as systems, and to try to organize either into a system brings dysfunction. God is a God of patterns, not systems. A pattern can be overlaid atop many different situations, and it gives us a set of boundaries to operate within, and provides models for moral decision making. A system, as I've shown you, inherently operates rigidly and must have a definite pre-determined answer (doctrine) to every situation that arises. Further a pattern simply indicates the general nature of how God operates. It does NOT purport to tell us WHY He operates that way, nor does it have to agree with our human logic to be valid, nor does any God-ordained pattern put the Lord into a box such that He has no choice but to do something a certain way. Systematic Theology, however, often does exactly that.

The next major flaw inherent to Systematic Theology is that it is an attempt to explain the non-rational and the supernatural in rational and natural terms. Why is that? Because a system is inherently manmade. It is derived from human ingenuity, but also riddled with human limitations. Recall that Systematic Theology was first created in order to comply with the Scientific Method, and thus able to better stand up to scrutiny by scientists.

So how, exactly, can a scientist or a theologian scrutinize or scientifically test the spiritual? Here's what I mean by that. God is spirit. The Word of God gives us spiritual principles. But Webster's defines the term rational (which is at the heart of any systems approach) this way: "Consistent with or based on reason; logical." Thus Systematic Theology wants to find God and His instructions to His worshippers as based on reason and logic. Reason and logic are human traits, but Systematic Theology wishes to assign those same traits to God. Thus Systematic Theology judges and explains God's actions and His teachings based on human logic and reason. If we can't explain what God does, and what occurrences and events we see in the Bible logically and rationally, then they either didn't happen or they are fairy tales. The same issue arises with Systematic Theology's tendency to want to find natural solutions to miraculous biblical events.

Webster's says that natural means: "Present in or produced by nature. Conforming to the usual or ordinary course of nature." In other words, as it pertains to God or Holy Scripture, whatever it is that the Bible is illustrating or telling us about, it has to conform to the observable physical nature of the world around us and operate as it usually operates in ways that seem reasonable to the human mind.

Thus this had led to the skeptical mindset of the most prevalent Bible academics for the past century. A mindset that completely dominates our Seminaries and our Theological universities, and has for decades. But it is a mindset that most church laypeople have absolutely no idea

exists deep within the bowels of their denominational institution and in the hearts and teaching of their denominational leadership. It is a mindset that proclaims that there is no such thing as miracles, and no such thing as predictive prophecy. So-called miracles in the Bible must be, and can be, explained in purely natural and rational terms. And predictive prophecy is seen as simply a unique style of literature that operates such that long after a cataclysmic or societal altering event has happened, it puts the prediction of that event into the mouth of a bible character that lived centuries earlier. It is a contrived story that turns hindsight into foresight in order to achieve some pious purpose.

It will probably not make you feel too good to know that many of the best known and most influential Bible scholars of our day aren't Believers. They simply see the Bible as a specialized kind of ancient literature and have made it their career field and life's work to analyze it. If some claim to be Believers, then I think that you will very soon question their sincerity, or what they even mean by identifying themselves as "Christians". These scholars belong to what is loosely called the school of Bible Criticism. However there has arisen a branch of Bible Criticism called the school of Higher Criticism, and these we might classify as the most liberal of theologians. I'm not going to get into the nuances here, or start naming names; I just want you to hear and be familiar with these terms so that when you hear of a scholar being a Bible Critic or part of the Higher Criticism academia, you'll factor that in when you read their works.

Let me summarize: the vast bulk of Bible commentaries and Bible scholars for at least a century do NOT accept the supernatural; they only accept the natural and the humanly rational. Therefore they do **not** accept the possibility of miracles nor do they accept that there is such as thing as prophecy that can predict the future. So what do you imagine their position might be on the Book of Daniel? Sadly, even our most fundamental and conservative Christian colleges and Seminaries have fallen to the enormous pressure to question the supernatural and miraculous character of the Bible, and especially that of Daniel. Daniel is probably the most critically scrutinized and dismissed book of the Bible. Thus, among other accusations, the Book of Daniel is said to have **not** been created by Daniel, the exile from Judah who became a member of the Babylonian king's court. Rather the Book of Daniel (they say) is an interesting and clever fraud that was written during the terrible times that Israel suffered under the hand of the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanies, at about the time of the Maccabee Rebellion, around 165 B.C. It was written to give the Jewish people of that time hope.

Why do they arrive at that conclusion? Now please pay very close attention or this is going to slip right by you. Even though there is no good evidence, no proof of any kind of their assertion that Daniel was written long AFTER the predictions that it supposedly contained had been fulfilled, it is the only logical rational natural conclusion they can reach since the #1 premise that they approach the study of Holy Scripture from is: there is **no** such thing as the

supernatural. Therefore there is **no** such thing as divine miracles. Therefore there is **no** such thing as predictive prophecy. Imagine if you or I approached the Bible and our Christian faith this way. How does one call themselves a Believer if one doesn't believe in the spiritual sphere? What happens if you don't believe the Bible is the truth? How can you believe in Jesus Christ if you destroy the very foundation for believing who He is: the divine Messiah, Son of God? And that foundation is that He fulfilled all the predictive prophecies of a coming Messiah.

But then, it gets even dicier. Turn your Bibles to Matthew 24. I want you all to read along with me.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 24:1 – 31

Here we have a chapter in the Gospel of Matthew where Yeshua Himself is doing the prophesying (predicting) of all kinds of future events. Even more look closely at verses 15 and 16. There it says:

Matthew 24:15-16 CJB

15 "So when you see the abomination that causes devastation spoken about through the prophet Dani'el standing in the Holy Place" (let the reader understand the allusion),

16 "that will be the time for those in Y'hudah to escape to the hills.

As we will in time cover in detail during our study of Daniel, Christ is explicitly quoting the Book of Daniel chapter 9 verse 27. Here is that passage in Daniel for comparison.

Daniel 9:26-27 CJB

26 Then, after the sixty-two weeks, Mashiach will be cut off and have nothing. The people of a prince yet to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary, but his end will come with a flood, and desolations are decreed until the war is over.

27 He will make a strong covenant with leaders for one week [of years]. For half of the week he will put a stop to the sacrifice and the grain offering. On the wing of detestable things the desolator will come and

continue until the already decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator."

Or using a Bible version that employs words that are more familiar to our ears (but means exactly the same thing):

LXA Daniel 9:27 *And one week shall establish the covenant with many: and in the midst of the week my sacrifice and drink-offering shall be taken away: and on the temple shall be the abomination of desolations; and at the end of time an end shall be put to the desolation.*

Now, fellow Believers, what do these Bible scholars do with this verse in Matthew where we have Messiah Himself quoting Daniel by name, validating Daniel by name and, holding Daniel high? They generally say one of two things is obvious: either Christ was deceived into believing the Book of Daniel was true, or He didn't know and was so simply wrong.

Now let me ask you a question: if prophecy is not possible and if the supernatural is not possible, and if Christ can be deceived or merely wrong in His pronouncements, and perhaps at times be ignorant of the truth, what are we to do not only with His words and teachings, but with the fulfilled prophecies that are the supposed proof of Him as the Messiah and as the divine Son of God?

And now I think you can see why that at the beginning of this Introduction to the Book of Daniel I told you that the stakes couldn't be higher as regards this particular book of Scripture. The reality is that the veracity of not just the Old Testament but the New Testament especially **hinges** on the Book of Daniel.

If the Book of Daniel is only a well-intentioned but fraudulent attempt by some unknown Jewish writer to try to lift the spirits of his oppressed people; a work that was created about 165 years before Christ was born and well after most of the events it pretended to predict had already happened, then it not only doesn't belong in our Bibles, but it would seem that Yeshua Himself was taken in by it, and so any of His predictions for the future aren't to be taken seriously. But even more devastating is that if that is indeed the case then all of Jesus's claims to be God also have to be discounted and ultimately labeled as false. And that, my friends, is precisely the position of some of the most revered and respected Bible academics of our day; and it is one of several reasons why you'll regularly hear or read Daniel presented the way it often is; as more legend and fable than Bible history and prophecy. But even more, this Bible academic mindset has led to why so much of the modern Church has completely fallen off of it's tracks and no longer has any real belief that the Bible is what it purports itself to be: the infallible Word of God. Rather, even though Jesus Christ was a real person, He represents neither God nor Godliness, but rather He was just a very good teacher who tried to change the world by espousing a philosophy of life that revolves around universal love, peace, and pacifism.

Have you, or do you, sometimes attend a more liberal oriented church? Do you listen to Christian teachers on the radio or Internet, or have commentaries that you enjoy, that claim that Daniel is in fact a “late” book as opposed to having been written when it claims it was? Then you are getting your Bible knowledge from Church leaders who don’t truly believe in divine prophecy, and don’t take Jesus’s own words literally or accept that what He believed and taught is accurately portrayed in the New Testament. Do you understand that such a position about the Book of Daniel also destroys the Book of Revelation, because so much of it is built upon Daniel’s visions and prophecies?

So I ask you to hear this and understand that those folks are wrong and they love and trust their own intellect above all else. We will go forward in our study understanding that the Book of Daniel **is** true. It **was** written by Daniel exactly when he says it was. It has proved itself over and over again without error. Biblical prophecy **is** real, has never failed, with proof after proof of it, and is even playing out before our very eyes especially as regards Israel. Yeshua is God and every word He uttered as predictive prophecy has happened or will happen.

There is no middle ground in this matter; it is anything but a mere academic mind game. You and I must be prepared to do something that most Christians are loathe to do because typically we’ve been taught that it is not “loving” to do so: and that is to make a strong judgment and take a firm stand. There is right doctrine and there is wrong doctrine or there is no such thing as divine biblical truth. There is not just my perspective and your perspective on any given subject within the Word of God. Sometimes the issues are relatively small and don’t carry great weight; or they are unclear and all we can reasonably have is opinion and speculation. But other biblical issues are eloquently articulated, contain no ambiguity, and amount to the foundational essence of our faith in Yeshua. I encourage you to weigh the evidence and stand on the side of truth, even if it’s inconvenient and might prove costly in terms of friendships and perhaps even family relationships. Because it will also change your life for the better. With brutal honesty Our Savior tells us this:

Matthew 10:34-37 CJB

34 "Don't suppose that I have come to bring peace to the Land. It is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword!

35 For I have come to set

36 a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, so that a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

37 Whoever loves his father or mother more than he loves me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than he loves me is not worthy of me.

We will continue this introduction to Daniel next week, and I'll take you even deeper into the little understood world of Systematic Theology and we will begin to focus on a critical

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theological doctrine called Millennialism; for it has everything to do with how any particular denomination views the Book of Daniel as regards the events and sequence of the End Times. DANIEL