

DANIEL

Week 3, Chapter 1

The word most used in modern times to describe the Book of Daniel is probably “controversial”. But it has not always been so. We’ve spent two weeks preparing to study Daniel because we need to understand what the reasons are for the many interpretations of, and the virulent attacks against, this particular book. And this is important because the Book of Daniel has become a pivot point in Christianity from the aspect of our actual depth of belief in the truth of the bible and thus our faith in Messiah; and also what it is telling us (and NOT telling us) about a sequence of events still future to us in what we call the End Times. Or in Hebrew: the *acharit hayamim*.

Briefly we discussed that institutional Christianity is built upon a structure called Systematic Theology. And while the church had plenty of firm doctrines set forth prior to the Enlightenment period of the early 1700’s, from that time forward the mindset of church leadership became to essentially use a variation of the Scientific Method as a tool to interpret the bible and to teach it to aspiring pastors and the lay congregations. This tool is called Systematic Theology. It had the ironic effect of both providing a means to protect Christianity from the attempts of the Enlightenment philosophers to essentially dismantle it, but also the Holy Scriptures henceforth had to be turned and bent to agree with human reasoning and intellect or the Holy Writ was deemed suspicious, superstitious, and merely Jewish myth and legend. For every law and command from God, for every biblically related event, the bible scholar was compelled to find an answer to “why?” And until the “why” was determined the validity of the command or the event was questioned.

As any careful reader of the bible knows, God rarely explains His rationale for His decisions. Rather He simply pronounces them and then expects obedience from His worshippers. In contrast the bible academic relies on his or her own intellect, education and worldview to discern the why’s and wherefore’s. And not surprisingly, the end game of modern critical bible scholarship has determined that since the supernatural is not observable it defies logic. And since predicting the future is scientifically impossible and unreasonable; and since miracles cannot be proved in nature or reproduced in a laboratory, then none of these as reported in the bible can be real.

I have had a few people say to me: well no Pastor has ever said that to me nor have I read in a Bible commentary that the author says the supernatural doesn't exist. Or, concerning Israel, I've never heard a Preacher say that he believes (and wants us to believe) in something called Replacement Theology. No, and you likely won't. Some of it has to do with your choice of commentaries, but more it has to do with doing some homework on the personal lives of these authors, reading their journal articles and the interviews given during conferences; finding out where they were educated, who their role models and mentors were, and then understanding the implication of their various theological explanations and conclusions that are often obscured in esoteric academic grammar and vocabulary.

Pastors, on the other hand, will by nature do what can be done to avoid controversy or to side-step difficult doctrinal matters that could easily upset or even split a congregation (and wisely so). And it has been my personal experience that many church leaders at the assistant Pastor and sometimes at the Pastor levels aren't even aware of some of their own denominational doctrines until they are called on the carpet by an upper level denominational authority and set straight. Thus, for example, a denomination that in its fundamental internal doctrines declares that the church has gained all the blessings of God because God has rejected His Old Testament people the Jews (which is by far the most widespread belief in Western Christianity), rarely ever says such a thing out loud or presents more than a veiled implication. But recently some church leaders, as with John Piper, have had to publically reveal their theology as he and others of his persuasion have taken a public and unapologetic stand against Israel and for the Palestinian Arabs. And he had to explain that the reason for it is that his theology is that the Jews are permanently out of favor with God and gentiles (like Palestinians) are therefore in favor. Our own Rabbi Baruch has written an eloquent response to John Piper's unbiblical position on this issue.

But because Systematic Theology is logic and reasoning based, then as time has passed and the human intellect has come to play a larger role in Christianity, it became necessary that physical phenomena in the bible must usually be explained naturally, as opposed to supernaturally. For instance: it has been in vogue for many years now to not necessarily deny a parting of the Red Sea. Rather the trick is to get around the problem of appearing ignorant and out-of-step by explaining that what was crossed over was not the deep waters of the Red Sea but rather a shallow mud flat nearby called the Reed Sea. And that a sufficiently strong and dry wind, blowing in the right direction, coincidentally dried out a pathway sufficient for the people of the exodus to pass through without getting their feet wet. Then the event was turned into Jewish legend and written down as a folk story meant to impart a religious message of God rescuing His own.

Or in keeping with the modern Systematic Theological doctrines of John J. Collins and his highly acclaimed scholarly commentary on Daniel, he just dives in taking as understood that

Daniel was written at the time of Antiochus Epiphanies (some 370 years after when Daniel lived), and explains all the passages of his commentary in those terms. Further he describes the literary form of Daniel in the Introduction to his commentary as “Aramaic tales”. And informs the reader in that same Introduction that the consensus of modern critical scholarship is, and has been for nearly a century, that (and I quote) “the stories about Daniel and his friends are legendary in character, and the hero himself probably never existed”.

And yet he readily admits a few paragraphs later that from the 2nd through the 17th centuries, Daniel’s authenticity went virtually unquestioned in the church.....UNTIL.... we hit the period of the Enlightenment in Europe and Christianity went through its transformational restructuring into modern Systematic Theology. He also leaves out that from the time of Ezra until the time of Christ there is no mention in any known Jewish writing of Daniel being thought of as possibly untruthful, nor do we hear such a suggestion from the mouths of the Essenes at Qumran where the Book of Daniel was discovered right along with the other Dead Sea Scrolls.

Then in our last lesson we discussed that one of the 6 to 10 or so categories that forms a unified Systematic Theology is something called Eschatology; that is, the doctrines concerning the End Times. And that in general those End Times positions are fairly well summed up in 3 different named theological viewpoints: Amillennialism, Pre-Millennialism, and Post Millennialism. I’m not going to go over these again; you can review them on you own from our previous lesson. However practically every commentator on Daniel holds tightly to one of these positions (or some slightly modified version of one) whether they openly express it by name or not, and it is often up to the reader to investigate the author to discern which one. But whatever the theology the author might subscribe to, it substantially determines the author’s interpretation of Daniel before the first words of the commentary are ever penned. Because if he or she comes to theological conclusions outside of their doctrinal boundaries, then his or her particular brand of Systematic Theology is compromised, even wounded.

We ended by discussing that Christianity has changed mightily since the days of the New Testament, when Yeshua lived and later when his half-brother James was the leader of this Jewish sect known as The Way. We saw that the Christ movement was at first Jewish founded and dominated; then it became gentile dominated and Jews were discouraged from membership. By the 4th century the Roman Emperor Constantine strove to make the now Hellenistic brand of Christianity the official religion of his empire, and as a result Christianity exploded in popularity across the known world. It is here when the Roman Catholic Church took form.

And from the 6th through the 18th centuries we saw how the primary goals of the church

hierarchy were political power within state and national governments, and also to fend off any competing religions such as Islam. Thus Christianity tended to look mostly inward and took a defensive posture.

But starting shortly upon the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, a heart-felt interest in bringing new Believers into the fold emerged. By the 1950's and 60's evangelism took hold in the church as it began to direct its efforts outside its own walls, sometimes spurred on by difficult social problems; and this led to the Jesus Movement of the 60's and 70's. The Church was on a high, and once again church growth exploded. And the result has been that for any practical purpose the entire globe has by now had the Gospel message taken to even the most remote reaches; and it was accomplished by the gentile church, as prophesied.

However, we learned that Yeshua and Paul spoke of a day when the era of gentile leadership in teaching the world about the Lord would end, and the Jews would once again find themselves at the forefront. This would happen upon the Hebrews returning from the 4 corners of the earth to re-establish the nation of Israel, and when Jerusalem once again came under Jewish control. The first of those two events happened in 1948, the 2nd in 1967. And not surprisingly, really, as we look around us we find Jewish Messianic Synagogues emerging not just in America but throughout the world. Its partner (on the gentile side) in restoring biblical truth from a whole-bible approach (as opposed to a New Testament only approach) and extolling the rightful place of the Hebrew people as God's precious treasure is the Hebrew Roots movement. Together there can be no more visible, tangible evidence that we are at the end of an age that Yeshua calls the "fullness of the gentiles" but is better known to us as the church age.

Just as it took a while for the fortress-minded Church to drop its resistance and embrace its divine commission of evangelism, in this new transition it is going to take time for the Church to drop its resistance to embracing its true historical, biblical and spiritual Hebrew Roots and accept that the Jews who have been pushed aside for nearly 2000 years are in process of regaining the pre-imminent place God had for them all along, as the key players in His process of redemption. The only question before us is: will we recognize what the bible clearly states is the sign of our entry into the End Times, accept it and go with the flow? Or shall we fight against it and hang on with all our might to mostly manmade doctrines and comfortable traditions that validate what we would prefer to believe and give us the greatest social acceptance?

And finally, as we get ready to enter the Book of Daniel hang on to this: what you each accept about the authenticity and truthfulness of this book has everything to do with the nature of your

relationship with the Lord. Because if you conclude that Daniel is a well-intentioned fraud, as do most modern Bible commentators and a growing segment of Pastors and Bible Teachers, and that it was created as Jewish fiction around 165 B.C., then it puts you in direct opposition to Christ who in Matthew 24:15 and 16 quoted Daniel by name, and told His disciples to believe it. Further such a stand makes the Book of Revelation, which is said to have come from our Messiah, error filled and rather useless, since the prophecies of Daniel are foundational to it.

Now here's what the Book of Daniel claims and what I believe the evidence clearly proves. It was written around 530 – 540 B.C., by Daniel, while he was in Babylon. Several of the prophecies contained in it have already come to pass, precisely as predicted, but there are more to be fulfilled and we can confidently expect them to happen.

I think a good way to approach our study of Daniel is to see it in 3 parts. Part one is chapter 1 and it is the historical introduction to the book. Part two is chapters 2 – 7 and deals with the gentile nations of the earth, especially as concerns their inherent character, their relation with one another, and their destinies. Part three is chapters 8 – 12 and the subject is Israel. It deals with Israel's relationship with the gentile world and what God's plans are for Israel's future.

It surprises most bible students to learn that Daniel was composed in two different languages. Some of Daniel is written in Hebrew, some in Aramaic. Remembering that chapter and verse divisions were added long after the bible was closed up and don't necessarily follow the bible flow as it was originally written, we can generally say then that chapter 1 is in Hebrew, chapters 2 -7 are in Aramaic, and chapter 8 to the end returns to Hebrew. This fact has allowed bible skeptics and especially the school of bible criticism to say that on its face this is strong evidence that Daniel was written by at least 2 different authors probably at two different times. But that completely overlooks a couple of simple facts. First, the language of Babylon (where Daniel was captive) was Aramaic. And Second and perhaps most important, the passages of Daniel that speak directly to the Hebrews concerning Israel are in Hebrew, while the passages that speak directly to gentiles concerning the gentile kingdoms and nations are written in Aramaic, the gentile language of that era and region.

As the Book of Daniel opens, Judah has already been carried off in exile to Babylonia. And since the Kingdom of Judah basically represented but 1 tribe, Judah, even though Benjamin as well as some unknown part of Simeon had been largely absorbed into Judah, still it is technically correct to call this people group Jews. The same cannot be said for another part of Israel that had been carried away in a totally separate exile. That part of Israel were not Jews; rather they consisted of 10 Israelite tribes that occupied both the northern part of the Kingdom

of Israel (also called the Kingdom of Ephraim), as well as the land on the east side of the Jordan River. That group of 10 tribes had been exiled and scattered all over the vast Assyrian Empire some 120-130 years before Judah's exile to Babylon. We hear little more about those 10 tribes in the remainder of the bible except to learn that they continued to exist (in exile), and that at some time far into the future (of Daniel) that they would return in mass to the Promised Land and join up with Judah to form one unified nation that would never end.

It helps to understand that Israel was NOT in a condition of having been rejected by God as is often portrayed. Rather they were in a state of suffering from God's indignation or fury against them. In Christianity we generally have little trouble with the concept of rejecting the sin but accepting the sinner; that is precisely what is happening with Judah in its relationship with Yehoveh and now in their exile.

Jeremiah 25:5-15 CJB

⁵ *The message was always: 'Every one of you, turn back from his evil way, from the evil of your actions. Then you will live in the land ADONAI gave you and your ancestors forever and ever.*

⁶ *Don't follow other gods by serving and worshipping them. "Don't provoke my anger with things your own hands have made; then I will do you no harm.*

⁷ *But you wouldn't listen to me," says ADONAI, "so that you could provoke me with the products of your hands, to your own harm."*

⁸ *"Therefore, here is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot says: 'Because you haven't paid attention to what I've been saying,*

⁹ *I'm going to send for all the families of the north,' says ADONAI, 'and for my servant N'vukhadretzar the king of Bavel, and bring them against this land, against its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them, making them an object of horror and ridicule, a perpetual ruin.*

¹⁰ *Moreover, I will silence among them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bridegroom and bride, the grinding of millstones and the light of lamps.*

¹¹ *This entire land will become a ruin, a waste; and these nations will serve the king of Bavel for seventy years.*

¹² *But when the seventy years are over, I will punish the king of Bavel and that nation for their sin,' says ADONAI, 'and I will turn the land of the Kasdim into everlasting ruins.*

¹³ *I will inflict on that land all my words that I have decreed against it, everything written in this book, in which*

Yirmeyahu has prophesied against all the nations.

14 *For they too will become slaves to many nations and to powerful kings; I will pay them back according to their deeds and the work of their own hands.'*

15 *"For here is what ADONAI the God of Isra'el says to me: 'Take this cup of the wine of fury from my hand, and make all the nations where I am sending you drink it.*

God says that because Judah infuriated Him due to their sinful wickedness especially as concerns idol worship, He would send Nebuchadnezzar against them to express God's fury and exact a price. But this was only to be for a predetermined period of time. At the end of that time, God's fury would be turned away from Judah and instead directed towards Babylon for having been too harsh on His people.

One other thing. Just as the exile of the 10 tribes was indefinite and the exile of Judah was fixed at 70 years, so is it that the exile of the 10 tribes was a thorough scattering over a vast area while the exile of Judah was to be together as a group sent to a common place. Thus while the sense of community would be broken for the 10 tribes, the sense of community for Judah would remain intact. Daniel (as was Ezekiel) was fully aware of this, and it is reflected in his prophecies.

Before we read Daniel, I want to advise you that as we run across several of the passages where bible critics question their accuracy and their authenticity, I'm going to tell you about them and we'll discuss them sometimes in depth, other times only briefly. The reality is that as modern Believers we have little choice but to know our bibles thoroughly enough to refute the bogus claims that not only the secular world but other segments of the Church and Synagogue sometimes throw at us.

Let's open, now, the incomparable Book of Daniel.

READ DANIEL CHAPTER 1 all

It seems that when King Nebuchadnezzar first sent his troops against Jerusalem he not only returned home with valuable articles and vessels looted from the holy Temple, but he also

commandeered several Jewish youths of unusual aptitude, physical characteristics and aristocratic lineage. He wisely intended on using their intellectual and spiritual gifts for his royal court. They were turned over to some Chaldean tutors to be educated in the ways of the Babylonians, no doubt to learn to read, speak and write their Aramaic language, and to help lead the way in assimilation of the Jewish people. But be aware that these young Jewish men almost certainly already had a working knowledge of Aramaic since it was the most spoken language of the region and would have been needed for business and political transactions with the outside world, as well as the many residents of Judah who were foreigners.

This military expedition spoken of in the 1st verse happened when King Jehoiakim was ruler of Judah, and we first heard of it back in 2nd Kings 24.

2Kings 24:1-4 CJB

CJB 2 Kings 24:1 *It was in Y'hoyakim's time that N'vukhadnetzar king of Bavel invaded. Y'hoyakim became his vassal for three years, but then he turned against him and rebelled.*

2 *ADONAI sent against him raiding parties from the Kasdim, Aram, Mo'av and the people of 'Amon; he sent them against Y'hudah to destroy it, in keeping with the word of ADONAI which he had spoken through his servants the prophets.*

3 *Yes, it was at ADONAI's order that this happened to Y'hudah, in order to remove them from his sight because of the sins of M'nasheh and all he had done,*

4 *and also because of the innocent blood he had shed - for he had flooded Yerushalayim with innocent blood, and ADONAI was unwilling to forgive.*

Now interestingly, the bible critics who claim that Daniel is fictional say that we immediately encounter a dating issue because Daniel says it was in the 3rd year of the reign of Jehoiakim when Babylon invaded Jerusalem; however Jeremiah 25 says that the 1st year of Nebuchadnezzar was the 4th year of Jehoiakim so we have a 1 year discrepancy. Therefore, the person writing this had to be a fraud because Daniel was supposedly present and wouldn't have made such an obvious historical mistake. Just one problem. I have presented to you in earlier lessons on other books that there were 5 systems of dating events and the reigns of kings working simultaneously throughout most of the Old Testament era. So the issue, of course, is how to accurately express the reigns of kings and to co-ordinate them with historical

events. This is a common challenge for bible scholars throughout the Old Testament. As an example, in one dating system only whole years were counted. So a ruler in his first year could rule for only 1 day shy of an entire calendar year, and yet that was considered as year zero, not the first year of his rule. In another system a king could reign for as little as the final day of the current calendar year, and that was counted as year 1 of his rule. Further, sometimes the calendar used was the civil calendar year (whereby years began in the month of Tishri) but at other times the calendar used was the religious event calendar year (whereby years began in Nisan) giving a half year difference automatically. So to debate over a stated 1 year discrepancy and making Daniel to be historically inaccurate as a result is ludicrous and disingenuous. No one is certain even whether Nebuchadnezzar would have counted his years on the Babylonian throne the same way as Jehoiakim would have counted his on Judah's throne!

It was in the year 605 B.C. that Nebuchadnezzar sent mostly mercenary forces to Jerusalem to attack it in response to Jehoiakim's rebellion and this could be considered the time that the first wave of Jewish captives were hauled off to Babylon; Daniel and Ezekiel are said to be part of the first group to be taken. So they would be in Babylon to personally witness life there for the Jewish people, in exile, but would not be in Jerusalem to be eye witnesses to the later Babylonian military excursions into the Holy Lands and thus the later deportations; rather they would have had to rely on others to give them accounts of what occurred.

Verse 3 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar commanded his chief eunuch to select some of Israel's finest youth, and that they should be seed of the kingdom (meaning the Kingdom of Judah) and nobles for use in the Babylonian palace. Later we'll hear that Daniel was a eunuch. But in the bible eunuch (Hebrew **saris**) can be used either narrowly to mean a male who has been castrated and then used in specialized service to the king (such as being a guardian over his harem) or it can be used broadly and mean a male who is a steward of some sort for the king and castration is not involved. One notable example of the broader use of the word **saris** (a eunuch) who was obviously not a castrated male was Potiphar, Chief Steward of Pharaoh in Joseph's day. Potiphar was married and we even hear of his wife accosting a younger Joseph. While we can't know for certain, it appears that in Babylon, and in this setting, the term eunuch had come to be the name of some official government office rather than a term indicating male castration. So later when we are told rather off-handedly that Daniel had become the **saris** for the king, it is close to unthinkable that Daniel had been castrated; rather he just assumed a high office.

The next question has to do with what the term **zera melucha** means. Depending on your translation it is either seed of the king or seed of the kingdom, or like in the CJB the royal. We can probably cross out the word kingdom since in Hebrew kingdom is **mamlacha**. The reason this is an issue is because it is this passage that causes some commentators to say that Daniel (and possibly the other 3 youths) were of the royal line of Judean Kings (family of King Jehoiakim). But the term **melucha** can just mean royalty in the broadest sense so that it in no

way means a person who could succeed to the throne. What makes it more uncertain is that there was a second category of societal class that was to be acquired and sent for training by the Chaldeans and that was **partam**, meaning nobility (aristocrats).

Likely Daniel and his 3 associates were some mixture of **partam** (nobility) and **melucha** (royalty) but we don't know which might be which. Verse 4 makes it clear that these would be Jewish youth who were already given the finest Hebrew education, considered the brightest and most refined of Judah, and were to be very good looking. And this was because they would be serving, and representing, the King of Babylon so they were to look and act the part. And the first thing that would happen is that they would be given over to the Chaldeans (a special district of elite Babylonians) to be educated in the finer nuances of Babylonian history, customs, and language. Nebuchadnezzar was a smart man, and he was going to take advantage of whatever brain-power he could extract from Judah. Further, this would serve to weaken Judah, tear at their social fabric, and hopefully make them less likely to cause trouble.

We'll continue with Daniel chapter 1 next week.