

Immanuel: God Walks with Us

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

5th in an eight-week series

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Daniel 7:9–14 (NRSV)

- ⁹ As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.
- ¹⁰ A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.
- ¹¹ I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. ¹³ As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.
- ¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Matthew 12:1–8 (NRSV)

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.” ³ He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. ⁵ Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”

God walks with us? Who is this man, Jesus?

Jesus and his disciples are just walking through a grainfield on the Sabbath, a Saturday, minding their own business, munching on some heads of grain, when they are accosted by some Pharisees. How dare these men break off a few heads of grain to eat, demand the Pharisees. The Law of Moses, God’s Law, commands that no work be done on the Sabbath and that meant even breaking off a bit of grain!

I picture Jesus calming turning to the Pharisees and pausing as he considers his reply. Then he tells them a story they all know. How David and his rebels, on the run from Saul, had come to the priests at the tabernacle in Nob and eaten the bread that had been set out for God (1 Samuel 21:1-9). The tabernacle was God’s dwelling place and every day the priests set out fresh loaves for God’s consumption. Sure, it was the priests that actually ate the loaves, but it was what they signified that mattered. The tabernacle was God’s place. But David and his men had eaten that bread and David had gone on to the Israel’s greatest king. And now, these Pharisaic busybodies were challenging Jesus over some grain plucked from a field.

After reminding the Pharisees of the story, Jesus proceeded to give it to them straight. Something greater than the tabernacle/temple stood in their midst and he quoted Hosea for them: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (6:6). What a slap in the face.

Quoting Scripture to a Pharisee! And before they can recover, Jesus drops the proverbial hammer: “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and he will declare what is proper and what is not! . . . I can almost imagine the Pharisees never really getting over that one. For who is the maker of Sabbath Law? None other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It seems like such a simple encounter, but it is one of the most profound and revealing in the gospels. Jesus is the Law-giver. But why does Jesus describe himself as the Son of Man? Who or what is the Son of Man?

The Son of Man

When Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, he is calling on the figure in the seventh chapter of Daniel. Glance through the second half of Daniel (chapters 7-12) and you’ll see that it is very different from the endlessly entertaining and “preachable” stories in the first half of Daniel. The writing is apocalyptic, like most of Revelation. In a way, the second half of Daniel merely retells the themes from the first half but in the intensely symbolic language of the apocalyptic genre. It was a style of writing that was very popular among the Jews in the centuries around the time of Jesus. Such writing brought out big cosmic scenes, investing them with striking and often mysterious images and symbols. Many Jews expected God to do something *big* and the apocalyptic style fit those expectations. The word “apocalypse” comes from the Greek word meaning an “unveiling.” Apocalyptic writing was intended to pull back the curtain so the reader could see the cosmic significance of worldly events, such as the abominations committed in Jerusalem by the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanies more than a century and a half before Jesus, whose actions were so profane to the Jews that they triggered the Maccabean revolt. As we learned earlier in the series, the book of Daniel was put into its final form and portions added during the time of the Maccabean revolt.

Thus, Daniel 7 opens with beasts rising out of the chaotic seas that are ready to “devour much flesh.” Whose flesh? Israel’s of course. Who is the beast? Antiochus Epiphanies is the latest such monster. Surely God’s people must be doomed. Right? These mighty empires could overrun and wipe out the Jews any time they wanted to.

But there is more to this world than what can be seen or heard. So, in verse 9, we are taken to the throne room of God, where the Ancient of Days sits on his throne and judges the beasts, powerful horns and all. And, we see that someone like a human being, a Son of Man, is coming with the heavenly clouds toward the throne, where he will be given honor, glory, and dominion over all creation. Who is this Son of Man, whose rule will be “an everlasting one”? Who? . . . *Who?*

Meeting the Son of Man face to face

Jesus answers the question: he is the Son of Man, the one given dominion over all of God’s creation. He is the one raised up by God to usher in God’s kingdom. Jesus is the one “given authority, glory and sovereign power.” This carpenter from the no-account village of Nazareth? The Pharisees had to be stunned every time Jesus referred to himself in this way.

Because we proclaim Jesus to be fully God and fully human, it is understandable that we often take “Son of Man” to be a statement about Jesus’ humanity, making “Son of God” a statement about Jesus’ divinity. But “Son of Man” is not a cryptic way of saying that Jesus is human. Rather, to reiterate, it is a powerful image drawn from Daniel 7:13-14. You might read back over the passage from Daniel again – this is the Crucified One, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Daniel 7 is an ever-present reminder that the monsters and beasts of this world do not win. Sure, they might triumph in a battle or two here or there. But defeat God? No.

Indeed, God's victory over the beasts, over sin, even over death was won nearly 2,000 years ago.

More even than the Son of Man

And so, again we come to the identity and nature of Jesus. Who was he? What was and is his significance? The crowds and even his disciples didn't really understand. Do we? Really? Our claims of Jesus go far beyond even those of the Son of Man in Daniel 7. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," begins the opening chapter in John's gospel. The chapter closes with Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man.

Even for us, speaking of Jesus' identity and nature gets lost in a morass of little understood ten-dollar words and general confusion. Really, how could this man from Galilee be the Lord and Creator of the cosmos? Jesus and God: One? Really? It seems absurd on its face. How could anyone be expected to believe such a thing? Why are we surprised that so many, even today, reject the notion out of hand?

The apostle Paul understood this. Invariably, when he arrived in a city and began to speak to them of Jesus, he was scoffed at and ignored. How silly! How crazy! Yet he pressed on. Like Jesus, he didn't water down the claims or pretend away their

Is the Son of Man in Daniel 7 the Messiah?

In her commentary on Daniel in the Smyth & Helwys series, Sharon Pace looks at whether we should understand the "one like a son of man" in Daniel to be a messianic figure.

"In antiquity, many Jews and Christians equated the One like a Son of Man with the messiah. In its root meaning, "messiah," or anointed one, was the king of Israel, selected with God's approval and anointed with oil by a prophet to rule his people with righteousness. In the prophets, the hope is expressed for a future descendant of King David who would be extraordinarily capable of bringing people to God and who would establish justice and peace. Thus, for Jews, the messiah is a descendant of the line of David, fully human, who rescues Israel from its enemies and who redeems the exiles from among the nations, bringing them back to the land of Israel, as promised to Abraham. The messiah is king over all of Israel and leads the people in fulfilling the commandments so that the entire world is filled with the knowledge of God. The messiah's coming also brings about a new age wherein the righteous are resurrected and the world is filled with peace, prosperity, and the absence of suffering.

For the rabbis who lived during the Roman persecutions, it is not difficult to understand why they would interpret the predictions concerning the end of the fourth beast to refer to the end of Roman persecution. In discussing the future reign of the messiah, the rabbis note that his reign will encompass all the earth, including sea and land. They find two relevant texts from Daniel, from the image of the One like a Son of Man coming with the clouds and from the stone not cut from human hands (Dan 2:35):

How do we know that he [the messiah] will hold sway on land? Because it is written, . . . Behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man . . . and there was given unto him dominion . . . that all the peoples . . . should serve him; . . . And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. (Num. Rab. 13:14)

For Christians, the messianic age, as in Judaism, also shares the expectations of peace, justice, and the resurrection the dead. Christian theology is distinct, however, in its understanding of the messiah as the preexistent son of God, equal to the Father, fully human and fully divine, who redeems humankind from sin. The phrase "Son of Man" is used as a title for Jesus throughout the New Testament. In the book of Mark, for example, the vision of Daniel becomes the paradigm for understanding Jesus as Messiah: "Jesus said, 'I am'; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven'" (Mark 14:62). Here the author of Mark uses quotations from Exod 3:14, Ps 110:1, and Dan 7:13-14 to show that the authority, power, and divinity of Jesus will not be defeated. Although the Son of Man must suffer, he will come on earth again in triumph."

consequences. When we offer Christ to others, there is only Jesus to present – the Jesus who is. The Jesus who is God incarnate, fully God and fully human. The Son of Man and the Word. All other “Jesuses” are no more real than the Easter bunny, and who would place their faith in a rabbit?

What began with these words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” soon became this: “The Father and I are one.” We don’t have to immerse ourselves in the profound Trinitarian implications of these words to grasp that in Jesus we meet someone completely and utterly unique. He is a man; yet he is God. Deny either and you’ve lost the truth about Jesus. He is the Lord of the Sabbath. He is Immanuel -- God with Us.

Even more staggering is the knowledge that Jesus’ vocation, his mission, was one of personal sacrifice, a willingness to lay down his life for his sheep. For he was not sent to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17).

And save it he did . . . from all the beasts and the monsters. Could there be better news?

Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

A study of Matthew’s Gospel

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott’s Facebook page. Search for “Scott Engle.”

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

A study of Genesis

Meeting on-line at 12:00 noon Tuesday on Scott’s Facebook page. Search for “Scott Engle”.

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like, wear your pj’s.-- we’re on-line now so who’d even know. Have a Bible handy.

Both classes are now recorded and are available each week in my new podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts. Search by my name, “Scott Engle”.

Scott’s Sunday Class

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 on Scott’s Facebook page. Search for “Scott Engle.”

Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott’s YouTube channel. Search for “Scott Engle.” These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.