

**A Defense of Precise Grammatical Analysis in Bible Study**  
**(Specifically related to a debate over the meaning of Daniel 9:24-27)**  
**By Pastor Scott Markle**  
**([www.shepherdingtheflock.com](http://www.shepherdingtheflock.com))**

## **Introduction**

The following defense originated through a debate over the correct understanding of Daniel 9:24-27. Therefore, this defense shall include both the attacks against and the defense for a precise grammatical analysis in Bible study.

### **Attack #1**

I'm not sure where we are going in this discussion. I'm not convinced that your grammatical analysis leads to a proper understanding of the prophecy, or whether it actually obscures the clear meaning of the prophecy . . . .

However we analyse the grammar, the arithmetic stands - 70 weeks, or 490 years to the fulfilment of the prophecy . . . .

We should judge prophecy both by its faithfulness to the Word, & by its fulfilment, not by grammatical analysis. There is a danger of being Pharisaical. Also, we have the mind of Christ - 1 Cor. 2:16 - so we can look at prophecy with a new covenant, spiritual, Spirit-aided understanding . . . .

Reference to Scripture, rather than grammar, shows that the 70 weeks prophecy was fulfilled perfectly in 490 years. Arguments to insert an indefinite "gap" between 69 & 70 are a denial of the prophecy & make 70 weeks meaningless.

### **Defense #1**

Above you appear to reveal premise against which I will have significant contention and opposition. It is the premise that the grammatical analysis of a passage is not really a help, but is actually a hindrance in Bible study, especially in relation to prophetic utterance. In opposition to this premise, I would contend that grammatical analysis is the arithmetic of communication. By definition, grammar deals with the meaning of individual words, the meaning of grouped words by phrases and sentences, and the meaning of contextual statements within paragraphs. Grammar is the very means by which words, phrases, and sentences have precise meaning in communication.

For example, can we discern any real meaning from the following set of words –

“world whosoever Son life him he God the only his everlasting begotten should perish loved have gave believeth that that so not for but in”

On the other hand, can we discern real meaning from the following set and structuring of words –

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

No, in the first presentation for this set of words, we cannot discern any real meaning. On the other hand, in the second presentation for this set of words, we can indeed discern real meaning, and that a very precise meaning. The reason that we can do this in the second presentation is specifically due to the grammatical structuring by which the words are presented. Grammar is the very means by which word structuring provides meaning. To deny grammatical analysis is to deny the precise meaning of any given statement.

Indeed, to deny grammatical analysis for a statement of God’s Holy Word is to deny the precise meaning of that statement as inspired by God the Holy Spirit in God’s Holy Word. The Lord our God chose to communicate His truth and wisdom unto us by means of the words of His Holy Word and by means of the grammatical structuring of those words, as inspired by God the Holy Spirit. Thus God’s Holy Word is not simply inspired by God the Holy Spirit word-by-word, but also grammatical construction-by-grammatical construction. Therefore, to deny the grammatical construction of any statement in God’s Holy Word is to deny the inspired meaning and communication of God the Holy Spirit with that statement.

Furthermore, grammar is not only the very means by which word structuring provides meaning, but is also the very means by which statements are narrowed in their application. For example –

If I simply employ the word “ball,” then the application is quite broad (although the definition of the word, which is also a point of grammar, does narrow the intention from not including such things as birds, cars, pinwheels, etc.). On the hand, if I employ the grammatical phrase, “the ball,” then the application is now more narrow, not referring to any ball in general, but to one specific ball. Now, if I employ the grammatical phrase, “the ball in the car,” then the application is now even more narrow, not referring to the ball in the house, or in the field, or under the car, or beside the car, but to the ball that is to be found *in* the car. Grammatically, each modifying phrase narrows the application for the meaning of any given statement. So then, to deny a modifying phrase that God the Holy Spirit inspired for any given statement is to deny the correct understanding and application that God the Holy Spirit intended for that statement.

Grammatical analysis is not a hindrance to understanding God’s Holy Word correctly, for grammar is the means by which the Lord our God communicated to us in His Holy Word by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. Indeed, grammatical analysis is the means by which we can correctly understand that which the Lord our God has communicated unto us through His Holy Word by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit.

Now, concerning the judgment of prophecies by their faithfulness and fulfillment – Yes, we should indeed judge prophetic utterances by their faithfulness to God’s Word and by the precision of their fulfillment. However, we cannot determine their faithfulness or their precise fulfillment without considering a grammatical analysis; for it is directly by grammatical analysis that we are able to determine the precise meaning of a given prophetic statement. Furthermore, there is no danger “of being Pharisaical.” There is only a danger of being *precisely correct*. Finally, I would

agree that we now possess “*the mind of Christ*” through the indwelling Holy Spirit, whereby the indwelling Holy Spirit is present to guide and aid our understanding of the very Word of God that He Himself inspired. Yet God the Holy Spirit will only ever guide us and aid us to understand the Word that He Himself inspired in perfect union with the very words and grammar that He Himself inspired. On the other hand, if our understanding departs from the very words and grammar that God the Holy Spirit inspired, then we can be certain that we are not actually following the guidance and aid of God the Holy Spirit for that understanding.

## **Attack #2**

I'm posting this here to illustrate a problem I have with Pastor Scott's approach to the debate. In this fragment of a post in the debate, he employs 800 words to respond to 100 of mine, & misquotes me so refuting at length a point I didn't make.

Note that I referred to "your grammatical analysis" & "complicated grammar" with no suggestion that grammatical analysis *per se* "of a passage is not really a help, but is actually a hindrance in Bible study, especially in relation to prophetic utterance." And I did NOT "deny the grammatical construction of any statement in God's Holy Word." I hope it goes without saying that understanding grammar is necessary to understanding both the written word & speech.

## **Defense #2**

First, concerning the complaint against many words – By nature, the more the need for a teacher to engage in explanations and evidences, the more the words that teacher will employ in order to communicate those very explanations and evidences.

Second, concerning the complaint of a misquotation and misunderstanding –

Indeed, in the following quote you did make direct reference to my grammatical analysis – "I'm not convinced that your grammatical analysis leads to a proper understanding of the prophecy, or whether it actually obscures the clear meaning of the prophecy."

Indeed, in the following quote you did make direct reference to complicated grammar – "I think in this case, the 70 weeks is so clearly specific that simple arithmetic overrules complicated grammar."

However, in the following quote you spoke against grammatical analysis in general, and that in specific relation to Biblical prophecy – "We should judge prophecy both by its faithfulness to the Word, & by its fulfilment, not by grammatical analysis. (emboldening and underlining added by Pastor Scott Markle) There is a danger of being Pharisaical. Also, we have the mind of Christ - 1 Cor. 2:16 - so we can look at prophecy with a new covenant, spiritual, Spirit-aided understanding."

Herein you indicated that we should (as a positive assertion) judge prophecy "by its faithfulness to the Word." Herein you also indicated that we should (as a positive assertion) judge prophecy "by its fulfillment." However, herein you also indicated that we should *not* (as a negative assertion) judge prophecy "by grammatical analysis." Furthermore, herein you also imply that

"there is a danger of being Pharisaical" if we examine a prophecy too closely "by grammatical analysis." Finally, herein you even seem to imply that our having "the mind of Christ" should be set in contrast with an examination of "grammatical analysis," such that our having "the mind of Christ" might even allow us to disregard any grammatical analysis and might allow us through our "new covenant, spiritual, Spirit-aided understanding" to bypass any grammatical analysis.

Third, concerning your reference to "complicated grammar" – By nature, correct grammatical analysis will be just as *complicated* as the sentence that is being analyzed. If a simple sentence of only three to six words is being analyzed, then correct grammatical analysis will be somewhat simple also. However, Daniel 9:24 is not such a simple sentence only of a few words. Rather, Daniel 9:24 is a more complex sentence of 49 words (if my count is correct), containing a main clause that is modified by six infinitive clauses.

### **Attack #3**

That is an assumption imposed by your grammatical interpretation, not a straightforward reading of Scripture.

### **Defense #3**

You continue to place my grammatical analysis in contrast to a straightforward reading. The fact is that if a grammatical analysis is accurate to a given text, then it is equivalent to a straightforward reading, simply with a more detailed understanding for the specific ways in which the words and phrases of the text are being used and are modifying other words and phrases in the text. As such, a correct grammatical analysis, by definition, does not assume or impose anything on the given text. It only reveals what is actually, straightforwardly being stated in the given text. Now, with regard to the discussion-debate itself, I am actually the only one of us who has done any significant grammatical analysis of the passage. I have to wonder why that might be? I have to wonder why you yourself do not engage in grammatical analysis?

### **Attack #4**

The problem comes when grammatical considerations are used to impose an interpretation on Scripture.

### **Defense #4**

Actually, by its very definition accurate grammatical analysis *cannot impose anything whatsoever* upon a given sentence or text. Rather, by its very definition accurate grammatical analysis *only draws out* of a given sentence or text the grammatical arrangement and meaning that is present by the purpose of the communicator of that given sentence or text (which for God's Holy Word is God the Holy Spirit Himself).

## Attack #5

Your extreme grammatical analysis makes it difficult to appreciate what you are actually trying to say.

You complain about me rearranging the words of Scripture, but we need to understand what the Scripture is saying before we interpret. Interpreting is seeking to understand & explain the Scripture, so needs additional words or in this case, emphasis of the actual words.

## Defense #5

You compel me yet again to defend my focus upon grammatical analysis in Bible study.

First, concerning your accusation that my “extreme grammatical analysis makes it difficult to appreciate” my message – I believe that a more accurate word would have been the word “precise,” rather than the word “extreme.” That in which I have engaged is *precise* grammatical analysis in order that we might rightly understand what God the Holy Spirit has *precisely* inspired. It is our responsibility as Bible students to be “*rightly dividing the word of truth.*” (2 Timothy 2:15) This instruction portrays the picture of *precisely* cutting a line in accord with a *precise* pattern. Through inspiration God the Holy Spirit has established the *precise* pattern of truth in God’s Holy Word. It is now our responsibility to be just as *precise* in our study of that word of truth. Now, when God the Holy Spirit *precisely* inspired God’s Holy Word, He not only *precisely* inspired the words; He also *precisely* inspired the grammatical placement of those words into sentences and the flow-of-thought placement of those sentences into contexts. Therefore, when I engage in the *precise* grammatical and contextual analysis of a passage, I am being *directly obedient* unto my Lord’s instruction to be “*rightly dividing*” (cutting the line of understanding *with precision*) His Holy Word in accord with the *precise* pattern of words, grammar, and context that God the Holy Spirit *precisely* inspired. Even so, let it be known unto you, unto those who have joined with you in this debate against me, and unto all others – **No matter how much you may attack me for engaging in such precise grammatical and contextual analysis, I will NOT disobey my Lord by complying to your wishes and by giving up on that precise grammatical and contextual analysis!**

Now, concerning the matter of appreciation for my precision in the grammatical and contextual analysis of the passage – Any individual who desires to pursue a *precise* understanding of the passage will greatly appreciate my precision in handling the passage. However, it is just as certain that an individual who prefers to handle God’s Holy Word with loose generalities and who finds the precise grammar and context to be against his position will not at all appreciate my precision in handling the passage. Indeed, the very fact that you and those who stand with you in this matter so regularly seek to disregard and disrespect precise grammatical analysis is evidence in itself that the precise grammar of the passage is more in favor of my position and more in contradiction to your position. Certainly, why would you want to find appreciation for that?

Second, concerning your recognition that I have a complaint against you for “rearranging the words of Scripture” – Most certainly I will stand against you for so doing. **God the Holy Spirit Himself *precisely*** inspired the grammatical arrangements for the words of Scripture in order to communicate *precisely* the truth of God as He intended. Do you believe that He has given you

the authority to rearrange the grammatical arrangement of those words as you see fit? I am certain that He has not. Do you believe that you know better than He did and does concerning how the grammatical arrangement of those words ought to be? I am certain that you do not. Now, since you have revealed how little regard and respect you have for the precise grammar of the passage, I am not actually surprised that you feel comfortable rearranging the Holy Spirit inspired, grammatical arrangement of the words in that passage.

Even so, I would repeat give the warning – Whenever an individual changes the grammatical arrangement that God the Holy Spirit inspired in any given statement of God’s Holy Word, that individual changes the meaning from that which God the Holy Spirit communicated into some other meaning. Such changing of the meaning from that which God the Holy Spirit communicated by inspiration *is not* right dividing of God’s Word of truth. Indeed, I would challenge you to develop a greater respect for every single word that God the Holy Spirit inspired and for the grammatical arrangement of those words in each sentence that God the Holy Spirit inspired in each given context.

Third, concerning your declaration that “we need to understand what the Scripture is saying before we interpret” – How can you come to a right understanding of what God the Holy Spirit *precisely* intended to communicate in the Scriptures, if you first rearrange the *precise* grammatical arrangement for the words by which He communicated? *Precise* grammatical analysis handles each statement of God’s Holy Word *word-for-word according to the precise grammatical arrangement in which God the Holy Spirit inspired and communicated that statement of God’s Holy Word*. Such a practice is not “extreme” grammatical analysis. Rather, such a practice is a *precise, word-for-word* (“*jot and tittle*”) grammatical analysis *that regards and respects every single word* that God the Holy Spirit inspired, *in the precise grammatical arrangement* in which God the Holy Spirit inspired it. Indeed, such a practice is “rightly dividing” God’s Holy Word of truth. Indeed, such a practice is the only way to understand *precisely* what God the Holy Spirit has inspired and communicated, before we engage in the matters of “interpretation” and “application.”

## **Attack #6**

“I perceived how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.” (William Tyndale)

No complicated grammar needed. The scriptures are plain to those who read them, the ploughboy as well as the king of England

## **Defense #6**

The above quotation by Brother William Tyndale does not actually counteract my use of and focus upon precise grammatical and contextual analysis in Bible study, as follows:

1. In his quote above, Brother William Tyndale was not speaking at all concerning the matter of grammatical analysis. Rather, as per the prepositional phrase, “in their mother tongue,” Brother Tyndale was speaking against the use of the foreign language of Latin in Bible study, and was speaking for the use of the “mother tongue” (language) of English in Bible study.

2. As per the prepositional phrase, “in their mother tongue,” Brother William Tyndale’s quote above actually implies the need for English grammar, since English grammar is a foundational part of the “mother tongue” of English.

3. Concerning the “ploughboy” -- English grammar is taught to 8-13 year olds in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, which is approximately the age that Brother Tyndale’s literate “ploughboy” would have been (if he were not actually older). Indeed, the English grammar understanding that I have been employing throughout my Bible studies at the present time is that very English grammar understanding that I learned as an 8-13 year old in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades of school. As such, English grammar is not “rocket science” (else it could not be taught to such young students). The problem of English grammar ignorance today (and its resulting reading comprehension ignorance) is not that the subject is so very complicated, but that our educational systems have failed even to teach well the basics of “reading, writing, and ‘rithmetic.”

4. Concerning your statement, “No complicated grammar needed” -- Without English grammar there is no comprehensible sentence in English, and without a comprehensible sentence there is no comprehensible communication in English. Actually, English grammar is absolutely necessary for clear English communication and comprehension. Furthermore, how complicated the grammar may be is precisely determined by the simplicity or complexity of the grammatical sentence that is being communicated. A five word sentence is somewhat simple and will have a more simple grammatical analysis. On the other hand, a twenty-five word sentence is somewhat complex and will have a more complex grammatical analysis. The individual who engages in the grammatical analysis of any given sentence does not create the complexity of the grammar and analysis. Rather, that individual simply reveals the simplicity or complexity of the grammar in the sentence as it was originally communicated by the communicator (which for God’s Holy Word is God the Holy Spirit Himself).

### **Attack #7**

Here is my 'plain and simple' opinion:

Good ol' common sense country 'doctor of the scriptures' versus the complicated 'microsurgeon city educated college youngster'.

Little easier than most opinions. One uses the ability of the understandable common sense. One uses the 'pick apart the letters of the words' style of teaching . . . .

### **Defense #7**

Well now, if I need heart surgery, I myself would certainly prefer whichever doctor or surgeon will be the most precise about the matter.

By the way, you certainly have it right when you accuse me of using "the 'pick apart the letters of the words' style" in Bible study to understand and teach it rightly; and I shall continue using this method of Bible study on the grounds of such passages as Deuteronomy 8:3; 12:32; Psalm 12:6; Proverbs 30:5-6; Matthew 5:18; 1 Corinthians 2:7-13; 2 Timothy 2:15; Revelation 22:18-19. Indeed, I would be happy to be known as a "jot and tittle" student of God's Holy Word.

Furthermore, I would dare to say that any believer who takes a "literalistic" approach unto God's Holy Word will likely applaud my efforts in this matter. For the conflict of disagreement is not primarily with our differences of viewpoint concerning prophecy overall or with our differences concerning individual passages in particular (although those differences certainly exist), but is primarily with our differences concerning the method of Bible study itself. Even so, you yourself reveal this in your above comments by placing in contrast what you call your "understandable common sense" method of Bible study against what you call my "pick apart the letters of words" method of Bible study. It is indeed and primarily a "method of Bible study" conflict.