

Main Idea: In order to understand the significance of Daniel's vision, we must consider three issues in light of Daniel 8:15-27.

- I. Let's consider the impact of the vision (15-18).
 - A. Daniel was confused by what he saw (15).
 - B. Daniel was terrified by what he heard (16-18).
 1. He fell on his face.
 2. He slept.
 3. He was raised.
- II. Let's consider the interpretation of the vision (19-25).
 - A. Media and Persia would rule the world (20).
 - B. Greece would rule next (21-22).
 - C. An ungodly ruler will enter the scene (23-25).
 1. He will be wicked (23).
 2. He will be destructive (24).
 3. He will be self-focused (25).
 4. He will be destroyed (25b).
- III. Let's consider the implications of the vision (26-27).
 - A. We can learn about life in the future (26).
 1. Daniel 8 is an ancient account.
 2. Daniel 8 has a future significance.
 - Antiochus is gone.
 - Antichrist will come.
 - B. We can learn about life in the present (27).
 1. We must live in light of what we know.
 2. We must trust God for what we don't know.

Scripture Reading: Daniel 8:1-14

With the summer staff from Scioto Hills Camp with us this morning, my mind goes back to previous experiences of watching the Lord work there. One Friday evening twenty years ago I was sitting next to my wife Sherry along with 260 children and staff members from the camp. It was the closing bonfire service, a highlight time in which people were given opportunity to give testimony to what God had done in their lives in the previous five days.

I found myself mesmerized as I stared at the fire burning before us. You know the experience. I watched the sparks with fascination. I saw these tiny, fiery specks rise up out of the burning logs, and ascend towards the towering limbs in the trees above. It was a humbling sight.

Then I started pondering a thought. How could you, if you so desired, quench those sparks? And it dawned on me there were two basic ways. One would be to try to snuff out each spark individually. But that of course would be well nigh impossible, for there were thousands of sparks flying heavenward. The second, and most efficient way, would be to douse the camp fire. By extinguishing the fire, you would be killing the source of the sparks. The sparks would vanish if you caused the fire to vanish. The sparks are dependent on the fire.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

And that leads us to a question. Would you say your heart is on fire for God? Did you realize that the Word of God is like fire? It is according to what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 20:9, "His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones."

The sparks of a godly life are dependent on the fire of the Word of God. Jeremiah couldn't shake the impact of God's Word. His life was changed by what God said. If we want a heart that's on fire for God, we must open our hearts up to God's Word.

The fire of God's revelation caused the sparks to fly in Daniel's life, as we began to see last week in our investigation of Daniel 8. Daniel was certainly a man whose heart was on fire for God. This morning, we want to ponder the vision that God gave this prophet, in a message entitled "Looking Back to Prepare for the Future."

Daniel 8 does just that. It looks back. But it looks back in a way that helps us prepare to live for God in the future.

Daniel saw and recorded his vision in the sixth century B.C. while living in Babylon. So we're looking at history here. But Daniel 8 also looks ahead at the future, for in the vision (and the others recorded in Daniel 7-12), God allowed Daniel to see the outcome of world events.

The vision itself is recorded in verses 1-14, which we considered last time. Now as we seek to understand the significance of Daniel's vision, we must consider three issues in light of Daniel 8:15-27.

I. Let's consider the impact of the vision (15-18).

Notice the impact on Daniel as described in verse 15 (AV), "And it came to pass, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man."

The impact on Daniel was twofold.

A. Daniel was confused by what he saw (15). That's not surprising considering what he had just seen. In his vision, he saw transported ahead to the capital city of the next world empire, Medo-Persia. There in the palace in Susa (2), while by the canal of Ulai, he saw a ram with two horns (3). That ram pushed westward, northward, and southward, crushing all its foes, until it became great.

Then he saw a goat come from the west with great speed, and ram into the ram. The goat became great, until its great horn was broken, and four successive ones developed.

As the vision continued, Daniel saw a little horn develop out of one of the other four. This aggressive little horn became very great, but more significantly to Daniel, it became very blasphemous. It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host (11), defiled the Lord's sanctuary, dragged God's truth in the mud (12), and oppressed the people of God.

Daniel couldn't make sense of what he saw. Suddenly, he noticed beside him someone standing who looked like a man, and his confusion turned to terror.

B. Daniel was terrified by what he heard (16-18). Here's what he heard, verses 16-18, "And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, 'Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.'"¹⁷ As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. 'Son of man,' he said to me, 'understand that the vision concerns the time of the end.'¹⁸ While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet."

This “man” that Daniel saw and heard was an angel. A voice (we're not told whose voice; one suggestion is another angel, such as Michael; Calvin suggested it was Christ) told Gabriel to tell Daniel the meaning of the vision.

This is the first mention in the Bible of an angel by name. We see Gabriel again in Daniel 9:21, as well as in the New Testament (he announced the birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias, and the birth of the Christ-child to Mary). The only other angel named in Scripture, aside from Satan, is Michael, mentioned in Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1, and in Jude 9 and Revelation 12:7.

Gabriel told Daniel plainly that the intent of the vision had to do with the time of the end (17). We'll explore the interpretation of the vision itself in a moment, but first I want you to see how Daniel responded to this angelic presence.

There has been great angel-hysteria the last three decades or so. One source suggests that books and articles dealing with the New Age movement accounted for approximately half of all Christian bookstore sales in the early 1990's. Also back in the 90s the number-one television program in Russia featured a New Age psychic and channeler who was on every morning in Moscow.² People continue to be fascinated with the extra-terrestrial, and this intrigue includes angels.

But angels don't exist to call attention to themselves. They are ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:13-14). When we appreciate their ministry rightly, we give our adoration to the One who sent them, Christ Himself, not to the angels.

How did Daniel respond to the presence of an angel?

1. *He fell on his face.* Verse 17 again, “As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate.”

When was the last time you fell prostrate in recognition of the Lord? We've lost the sense of reverence that the holy God deserves from us.

John MacArthur tells about his conversation with a man who claimed that God audibly spoke to him on a consistent basis. MacArthur asked when this happened, and the man replied that while he was shaving in the mornings, he would see Jesus. To which MacArthur responded, "Well, I just have one final question. When he appears to you, do you keep shaving?!"

In the Bible, the consistent response to the divine presence is that people fall on their faces. When Moses had contact with God at the burning bush, he hid his face (Exodus 3:6). When Isaiah saw the seraphim and the Lord lifted up, he called down curses upon himself (Isa 6). When Ezekiel saw an appearance with the likeness of God's glory, he fell on his face (Ezek 1:28). When the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife, he said, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God (Judges 13:22)."

Likewise here, when Daniel saw this messenger from God, he fell on his face. Again, I'm concerned that we've become to *relational* with God that we've lost the appropriate *reverence* He deserves.

Do you fear the Lord? Until we fear Him, as we're gripped by His greatness and power and perfection, we'll never appreciate the wonder of what He did at the cross to reconcile us to Himself.

Notice what Daniel did next.

² Carlson, 185

2. *He slept.* Daniel shares in verse 18 that while the angel was speaking, he went into a deep sleep. He was breathless, face-down, as though he were dead (we see the same response in 10:9). Again, God is awe-inspiring, and if we haven't been awe-inspired recently it's because we don't know Him very well.

In what happened next, we see a picture of the mercy of God.

3. *He was raised.* Verse 18 concludes, "Then he touched me and raised me to my feet." You see, God doesn't want His people cowering before a creature He made such as an angel. No, He is the only one in the universe who deserves undivided reverence and awe.

What's amazing, however, is that the Transcendent One came into this world as the God-man to reconcile us to Himself. And now He actually invites us to come close to Him! That's grace! Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace."

Again, may I ask you a vital question? When was the last time you were gripped by a fear of the holy? When was the last time you fell on your face before God?

You say, "Well, I believe in a God of love." I do, too. God loves us. But what makes that so astounding is that the God who is longsuffering and patient and loving is also holy and righteous and just and awesome. He cannot allow sin in His presence. And He has provided a way for our sin to be removed so we can enter His presence.

When Daniel experienced the presence of Gabriel—a created, angelic messenger of God and not even God Himself—what happened to him? He was panic stricken. With all the talk about panic attacks in our day, I would suggest there is a proper time to have a panic attack. And here it is, when you, a sinner, realize you are in the presence of the holy.

Thankfully, He takes the panic away, if we have placed our total trust in His saving work. For He says over and over in the Bible, "Fear not. Fear not. Fear not."

Which brings us to the second issue related to Daniel's vision. First, the impact.

II. Let's consider the interpretation of the vision (19-25).

Listen to what Gabriel told Daniel in verse 19, "He said: I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end."

What did the angel say this vision is all about? The KJV says "what shall be in the last end of the indignation." The NIV describes it as the "time of wrath."

It's not popular to talk about *wrath* and *indignation* these days. We'd rather hear about prosperity and self-fulfillment. But the vision before us has to do with wrath, probably referring to God's wrath against Israel.

Keep in mind that God was angry with His wayward people Israel and was going to chastise them. In Isaiah's day, God used Assyria to express His indignation towards His disobedient children (Isa 10:5, 25). In this vision, Daniel learned that in future days, God would again use pagan nations to accomplish His corrective purposes with Israel.

Beginning in verse 20, God, through His angelic messenger, identifies three future rulers He says He would use to carry out His plan.

A. Media and Persia would rule the world (20). Verse 20 states, "The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia."

We've already seen that in Daniel 2 & 7, God revealed there would be four successive world empires. We suggested those likely refer to the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the

Greek, and the Roman empires. Here in Daniel 8, however, the angel actually mentions the middle two kingdoms by name.

When Daniel had this vision (551 B.C.), the Babylonians were in control under King Belshazzar (1). In a little over a decade that would change, and the Medes and Persians would take control. They would be the #1 world power for the next two centuries.

B. Greece would rule next (21-22). Here's what the angel revealed in verses 21-22, "The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king [referring to Alexander the Great]. The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have his power."

And as predicted, so it happened, as verified by the history textbooks. With lightning speed, Alexander the Great conquered the world all the way to Afghanistan in 327 B.C. Unfortunately for him, however, Alexander died in his prime, and no one ruler could follow in his steps. In the end, his empire was divided into four parts with four rulers, but they did not have "the same power" (just as told in verse 22), for none of his successors were as great as Alexander.

C. An ungodly ruler will enter the scene (23-25). Notice the vivid description of this ruler in verses 23-25, "In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise.²⁴ He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people.²⁵ He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power."

Who is this ungodly ruler? Most feel it refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, that ruthless despot that caused havoc in the second century BC. What did Daniel learn about him from this interpretation?

1. *He will be wicked (23).* Verse 23 says (AV) "in the latter time of their kingdom," that is, during the latter time of the four kingdoms in the Greek Empire mentioned in verse 22. In that time, "when the transgressors are come to the full", says the AV, better translated "transgressions"; i.e. "when their sin is at its height" NEB, "when rebels have become completely wicked," says the NIV. This indicates that God in His mercy would postpone judgment until the depth of sin made it inevitable. It was then that "a stern faced king" (AV, a "king of fierce countenance") would arise.

One thing that history verifies about Antiochus Epiphanes was that he was wicked. Verse 23 predicted he would understand "dark sentences," as the AV puts it, and that he did. He was a crafty "master of intrigue," as the NIV says.

2. *He will be destructive (24).* Verse 24 tells us about the source of his power, "He will become very strong, but not by his own power."

That's interesting. The angel Gabriel revealed that Antiochus would derive his power. From whom? From Alexander the Great? From Satan? From God? He doesn't say, and all were true.

What would he do with his power? In one word, *destroy*. Verse 24 again, "He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people."

And so in the second-century BC, the Jews felt the destructive hand of Antiochus firsthand. On the penalty of death, he forbid them from possessing the Hebrew Scriptures and obeying the Law of God by circumcising their children. He expelled the godly high priest Onias III and replaced him with a pagan pawn. And worst of all, around the year 168 BC, he stormed Jerusalem, looted and seized the city by treachery, offered a pig on the altar of the Lord, and converted the temple to the worship of Zeus.

3. *He will be self-focused (25)*. Blasphemously so, as verse 25 reveals, “He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will take his stand against the Prince of princes.”

Again, history verifies that Antiochus claimed to be god. In fact, he made coins that actually bore the inscription *theos epiphanes* ("God manifest").

The KJV says he "shall magnify himself in his heart." That's a good summary of what made Antiochus tick. He lived for himself. That's also a good summary of many in our day.

There really are only two ways to live. You either live to magnify God, or you live to magnify yourself. Antiochus is a worst case scenario of the latter, but what about us?

Take stock of your life. Are you living for the glory of God or for your own agenda?

What happens to people who live for themselves? It might not seem like *anything* happens to them, not today perhaps, not that you can see. But something *is* happening.

What did Gabriel say would happen to Antiochus?

4. *He will be destroyed (25b)*. “Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.” There are different accounts as to how Antiochus died. The book of 2 Maccabees (ch 9), written in the second century BC, says he was seized with severe abdominal pains, fell out of his chariot, and died with vain petitions on his lips, imploring the God of Israel to spare his life. The historian Josephus supports that Antiochus died by a nonhuman agency. In the end, Antiochus was destroyed, not by men, but by the providential act of God.

Be sure your sins will find you out.

You say, “This is interesting, but what’s the point? What relevance does this vision have for us?” That’s a good question. It’s a question we must never fail to ask when we study the Bible, for we’re not after a mere history lesson.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

So there’s present benefit in this for us, and to that we now turn.

III. Let’s consider the implications of the vision (26-27).

We’ve considered the impact of the vision on Daniel, the interpretation of the vision by Gabriel, and now we face the most crucial issue, the implications. We see two in the final two verses of the chapter.

A. We can learn about life in the future (26). Listen to the angel's final words to Daniel in verse 26, “The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision [AV, “shut thou up the vision”], for it concerns the distant future [AV, “for it shall be for many days”].”

That time indicator is significant. The angel told Daniel this vision had implications for the future.

That's interesting. Liberal scholars attack the notion that Daniel wrote this book, and say it was written in the second century BC, not to predict history but to reinterpret history. Liberal theologians say that if a prophecy is to have any value, it must be close in time to its fulfillment. They say, "If Daniel 8 was written for people in the sixth century BC, what benefit would it bring them since it wasn't fulfilled for almost 400 years?"

But they miss an important point. The angel specifically told Daniel that this prophecy was to be sealed up for it pertained to the distant future. The reason Daniel was to record this prophecy was not merely for his own benefit, but for the benefit of future generations. The vision in Daniel 8 teaches about life in the future.

So two things are true.

1. *Daniel 8 is an ancient account.* Ancient, that is, to us. Some of what was future to Daniel is now past tense for us. The Medes and Persians have come and gone. Alexander has come and is gone. Antiochus has been dead for over 21 centuries.

So Daniel 8 is an ancient account to us. But on the other hand...

2. *Daniel 8 has a future significance.*

Here's where Bible scholars differ. Some see only historical fulfillment in Daniel 8. But I see two perspectives in this text.

J. Dwight Pentecost believes the prophecy of Daniel 8 involves a dual fulfillment, and I tend to agree. He writes: "The key to understanding chapters 7 through 12 of Daniel's prophecy is to understand that Daniel is focusing his attention on this one great ruler and his kingdom which will arise in the end time. And while Daniel may use historical reference and refer to events which to us may be fulfilled, Daniel is thinking of them only to give us more details about this final form of Gentile world power and its ruler who will reign on the earth."³

So based on Daniel 8, two things are true, one in the past, the other in the future. One, *Antiochus is gone*. Just like Daniel observed in the vision God gave him. The stern-faced king made his presence known, caused devastation for the Jews for a season, and then was put in his place. That's past tense.

But two, *Antichrist will come*. That's future tense, and not just for Daniel, but for us as well.

Why do I think that? Verse 23 states that Antiochus would rule in the "latter part" of the Greek empire, but to be technical, Antiochus did *not* rule in the "latter part" of the Greek empire. In actuality he met his end more than one hundred years before the Greek empire did.

Is Daniel 8 looking beyond Antiochus to an even more ruthless, more blasphemous world ruler and master of intrigue? That may well be the case.

In the New Testament, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 states that the Day of the Lord will not come "until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God."

Sounds a lot like Antiochus, doesn't it? Only worse.

We met "the little horn" who spoke blasphemous words back in Daniel 7:11. Daniel heard this description of him in 7:24-27, "The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he

³ Taken from Walvoord, 195.

will subdue three kings.²⁵ He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.²⁶ But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.²⁷ Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.”

So is there a connection between the little horn of Daniel 7 and the master of intrigue in Daniel 8? There seems to be. Antiochus seems to foreshadow the world’s final master of intrigue who will blaspheme the Lord and attack the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Dear friends, whether Daniel 8 points to him or not, we know a bleak day is coming for the world. The rest of the Bible makes it clear that the Antichrist will come in great fury and rule during the time called *the tribulation*.

Daniel will have more to say about this time period in 9:27 and 11:31 and 12:11. The Lord Jesus talked about it in Matthew 24:15-21: “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.¹⁷ Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house.¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.²¹ For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.”

So what do we learn from Daniel 8? We learn about life in the future, Daniel’s future, for sure, and I believe our own too.

But why? What’s the point about learning what’s coming in the future? It’s this. The time to get ready for the future is obviously *now*. And that brings us to the second implication of Daniel 8.

B. We can learn about life in the present (27). With the vision over, notice how Daniel came back to the "real world" in verse 27, “I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.”⁴

You say, “I don’t get it. Why did God want Daniel to know all this if he couldn’t understand it?”

That’s a good question. And there may be several reasons, but here’s a primary reason. So that after the predicted events did take place, after kings of Media and Persia came and went, and the king of Greece, and the master of intrigue performed his boastful plot and then was destroyed but not by human power, the world would know that *it happened just like God said it would*.

God is true, and you can, indeed, you *must* trust what He says.

The purpose of prophecy ultimately is to exalt God. Daniel didn’t have to figure it all out, and of course, he couldn’t. But God was exalted.

How did Daniel respond to this prophecy? First, he got sick. Then after his sick leave, he went back to work. I find that very instructive for us.

⁴ AV, "And I, Daniel, fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it."

By example, Daniel teaches us to make two choices this morning.

1. *Choice #1: We must live in light of what we know.* We know that Christ is coming again. But we also know that Christ has already come too. We know the key to being ready for His second coming is to come to grips with why He came the first time.

He came because we are rebels under the wrath of a holy God. He came to make a ransom payment, and on the cross He paid the penalty of sin for those who would put their total trust in Him.

Have you put your total trust in the Lord Jesus? Do you believe He died in your place and that He defeated death on the third day by rising again? And do you believe that He is coming again to earth as the conquering King of kings?

We must live in light of what we know.

2. *Choice #2: We must trust God for what we don't know.* What's going to happen tomorrow? There are some things we do know, yes, but so much we don't know.

What should we do? Put our total trust in the One who does know.

Back to the question with which we began. Is your heart on fire for God? If it's not, you can focus on peripheral issues, the sparks, or you can deal with heart issues this morning. You can affirm what you have just heard from the Word of God today, and let that Word produce a roaring fire in your heart for God.

And tonight you can get in the Book again, and tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. Faith comes by hearing the Word.

In the week of His crucifixion, Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem and said these words in Matthew 23:37-39, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to the desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Baruch ha'ba ba'shem Adonai (Ps 118:26), that is, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

The world rejected the Messiah at His first coming. Namely here, Jesus said the Jewish nation rejected Him and would not see Him again until they confessed the validity of God's chosen servant. Let's exalt the One Who has come in the name of the Lord this morning.

We have seen this morning that God has a plan for this world. My friend, God has a plan for our lives individually, too. The response He desires from us can be summed up in the following word: *trust*. 'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His word, just to rest upon His promise, just to know "Thus saith the Lord."

Hymn of Response: #350 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus

Do you know that you are His child, that you belong to Him? John 1:12 tells us how we can become His child, by receiving His Son, Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. Allow me to give you a prayer you could pray right now:

"Lord, You are God. You are mighty. You are holy. I am none of these. Rather, I am a sinner by nature and by choice, and Your Word says I am in serious trouble. Yet Your Word also says that You sent Your Son into this world to restore people like me, to save us from living for ourselves so we can live for You. I admit I am a sinner. I believe, Lord Jesus, that You died on the cross for my sins, and that You rose again three days later. Right now, by Your grace, I want to repent of my sins and trust You to be my Savior and Lord. Please forgive me. Please take the controls of my life. Amen."