

The week before last, on Friday evening, I was sitting next to my wife along with 260 children and staff members at Scioto Hills camp. It was the closing bonfire service, a 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 by staring at the fire burning before us. 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 fascinating sight.

Then I started pondering a thought. How could you, if you so desired, quench those sparks? It dawned on me there were two basic ways. One would be to try to snuff out each spark individually. But this would be nigh impossible, for there were thousands of sparks flying heavenward. The second, 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.

Would you consider a question? Is your heart 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 you want a heart that's on fire for God, open your heart up to God's Word.

The fire of God's Word 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 "A Look Back at the Future."

Daniel 8 is just that. It's a look back--Daniel saw and recorded his vision in the 6th century B.C. while living in Babylon. It's also a look 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 (as we saw last time) in verses 1-14.

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

- I. 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. 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).

***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.

3. He will be self-focused (25).
 4. He will be destroyed (25b).
- III. 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.

I. The Impact of the vision (15-18)

Notice the impact on Daniel as described in v 15, "And it came to pass, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then behold, there stood before me on 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 seen! In his vision, he saw transported ahead to the capital city of the next world empire, Medo-Persia. There in the palace in Shushan (2), while by the river of Ulai, he 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 (16-18), "And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood; and when he came I was afraid, and fell upon my face; but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man; for at the time of the end shall be the vision. Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground, but he touched me, and set me upright."

This "someone" 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 Dan 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 Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1, and in Jude 9 and Rev 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.

Note: There is great angel-hysteria these days. 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! The number-one television program in Russia today features a New Age psychic and channeler who is on every morning in Moscow (Carlson, 185). People are fascinated with the extra-terrestrial, and this intrigue includes angels. You can even buy an angel-pin if you like! But what does the Bible say?

How did Daniel respond to the presence of an angel?

1. *He fell on his face.* V 17 again (NIV), "As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate." 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 (Ex 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 (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)." And so when Daniel saw this messenger from God, he fell on his face.

2. *He slept.* Daniel shares in v 18 that while the angel was speaking, Daniel went into a deep sleep. He was breathless, face-down, as though he were dead (same response in 10:9). In what happened next, we see a picture of the mercy of God.

3. *He was raised.* V 18 concludes, "Then he touched me and raised me to my feet." You see, God doesn't want His people cowering before a created being such as an angel. No, He is the only one in the universe Who deserves reverence and awe. What's amazing, however, is that He invites us to come close to Him! That's grace!

May I ask you a serious 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.

When Daniel experienced the presence of Gabriel--a created, angelic messenger of God, not even God Himself!--what happened to him? He was panic stricken. With all the talk about "panic attacks" in our day, I would remind you there is a natural time to have a panic attack. When's that? When you realize you are in the presence of the holy!

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

II. The Interpretation of the vision (19-25)

Listen to what Gabriel told Daniel in v 19 (NIV), "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.

The truth is, God was angry with His wayward people 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 his vision, Daniel learned that in future days, God would again use pagan nations to accomplish His corrective purposes with Israel. Beginning in v 20, God identifies three future rulers He would use to carry out His plan.

A. Media and Persia would rule the world (20). V 20 states, "The ram which thou sawest, having two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia." In Daniel 2 & 7, God revealed there would be four successive world empires, likely referring to the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman empires. Here in Daniel 8, the angel mentions the middle two 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 (NIV, 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."

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 "not in his power" (22). That is, none of his successors were as great as Alexander. Just like God predicted.

C. An ungodly ruler will enter the scene (23-25). The LB offers a vivid description of this ruler (23-25): "Toward the end of their kingdoms, when they have become morally rotten, an angry king shall rise to power with great shrewdness and intelligence. His power shall be mighty, but it will be satanic strength and not his own. Prospering wherever he turns, he will destroy all who oppose him, though their armies be mighty; and he will devastate God's people (24). He will be a master of deception, defeating many by catching them off guard as they bask in false security. Without warning he will destroy them. So great will he fancy himself to be that he will even take on the Prince of Princes in battle; but in so doing he will seal his own doom, for he shall be broken by the hand of God, though no human means could overpower him."

Who is this ungodly ruler? Most feel it refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, that ruthless despot that caused havoc in the 2nd century B.C. What did Daniel learn about him here?

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

One thing that history verifies about Antiochus Epiphanes was that he was wicked. V 23 predicted he would understand "dark sentences," and that he did. He was a crafty master of intrigue.

2. *He will be destructive (24)*. V 24 (NIV) tells us about the source of his power, "He will become very strong, but not by his own power." Gabriel revealed that Antiochus would derive his power. From whom? It could refer either to God, Satan, or Alexander the Great. What would he do with his power? One word--destroy.

V 24 again, "He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people."

The second-century Jews felt the destructive hand of Antiochus firsthand. On the penalty of death, he forbade them to possess the Hebrew Scriptures and obey 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 B.C., 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 v 25 reveals (NIV), "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 for God, or you live for yourself. Antiochus is a worst case scenario of the latter, but what about us?

Take stock of your life. Are you living for God or for yourself? What happens to people who live for themselves? 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. 2 Maccabees 9 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, "That's interesting, but so what? What relevance does this vision have for us?" Good question! It's a question we must never fail to ask when we study the Bible.

III. 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 vv 26-27.

A. We can learn about life in the future (26). Listen to the angel's final words to Daniel (26), "And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true; wherefore [implication], shut thou up the vision [seal up, NIV]; for it shall be for many days [for it concerns the distant future, NIV]." Don't miss it. The angel told Daniel this vision had implications for the future.

That's interesting. Liberal scholars attack the idea that Daniel wrote this book, and say it was written in the 2nd century B.C., 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 6th century B.C., what benefit would it bring them since it wasn't fulfilled for almost 400 years?"

The Liberals 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. Two things are true:

1. *Daniel 8 is an ancient account.* Ancient, that is, to us. Some of what was future to Daniel is past-tense for us. The Medes and Persians are gone. Alexander is gone. Antiochus has been dead for over 21 centuries. But on the other hand...

2. *Daniel 8 has a future significance.* J. Dwight Pentecost believes the prophecy of Daniel 8 involves a dual fulfillment (Walvoord, 195): "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."

The truth is, the following are both true.

•Antiochus is gone.

•Antichrist will come.

V 23 states that Antiochus would rule in the "latter time" of the Greek empire, but to be technical, Antiochus did *not* rule in the "latter time" of the Greek empire, for he met his end more than 100 years before the Greek empire did. There is a sense in which Daniel 8 looks beyond Antiochus to an even more ruthless, more blasphemous world ruler.

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."

My friend, a bleak day is coming for the world. A man called the Antichrist will come in great fury. God tells us about him here for this reason. The time to get ready is now.

B. We can learn about life in the present (27). With the vision over, notice how Daniel came back to the "real world" in v 27, "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." You say, "I don't get it. Why did God want Daniel to know this if he couldn't understand it?" For this reason. So that after the predicted events did take place, people could say, "It happened just like God predicted. God is true."

The purpose of prophecy ultimately is to exalt God. Daniel didn't have to figure it all out, and in fact, he couldn't. But God was exalted. How did Daniel respond to this prophecy? He got sick! Then after his sick leave, he went back to work!

I would suggest that Daniel's model leads us to make two choices this morning.

1. *Choice #1: We must live in light of what we know.* Christ is coming again. Are you ready for Him? Are you living for Him now?

2. *Choice #2: We must trust God for what we don't know.* What's going to happen tomorrow? We don't know. But God does. Choose to trust Him today.

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 allow the Word of God to produce a roaring fire in your heart for God.

Introduction: Is it important to study what the Bible has to say about future events? 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. Let's exalt the Messiah, the Lord, the King Jesus. Let's prepare for His coming in this service. To begin, let's sing a song based on those words from Mt 23:39.

Response: 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

Can you sing those words with confidence? Can you say honestly, "Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him! How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!?" Certainly, all of us need to shout those final words, "O for grace to trust Him more!" Let's bow before Him now and allow His Spirit to minister His grace to our lives.

Note: When Daniel was gripped by the reality that he was in the presence of the holy (albeit an angel for him), he was terrified and fell on his face. Please use the posture appropriate for your response in prayer at this time. Perhaps a head bowed, perhaps on your knees, or perhaps on your face before God.

Time of Response in Prayer

Ponder the following in your conversation with God:

1. God's plan for the future is as certain as His record of the past. Are you ready to meet the Living God? 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."

Let's continue to worship God now as we listen to the following.

Ministry in Music: Men's Ensemble

There's only one name that is truly great, and there's only one Person who truly deserves glory and honor. His name is so important that He said Jerusalem will not see Him until she cries, "Baruch ha'ba ba'shem Adonai, that is, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Let's glorify His name with our lips as we prepare to leave and glorify His name with our lives.

Worship through Singing: #29 "Glorify Thy Name"