

DANIEL 8



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Daniel 8

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Cover art: Rembrandt, *Daniel in the Lions' Den*

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Daniel 8: Introduction

The Lord continues to enlarge upon His visions to Daniel concerning kingdoms yet to come and the coming Kingdom of God.

It is important to remember that Daniel 7 and 8 come chronologically before Daniel 6. These visions of God's greatness over great kingdoms surely emboldened Daniel to obey the Lord in the face of an unjust law by Darius.

These visions should matter to us as well, because they remind us of the central theme of Daniel, which we have been observing from the beginning: God is sovereign over the nations.

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1 The Medes and the Persians

Introduction

Again, we are pushed back before Daniel 5, two years following the vision of Daniel 7, to a new and enlarged vision of events to come. The more clearly these visions are related, the more terrible they become. And the more our understanding of the greatness and power and majesty of God becomes clear, the more He should be magnified.

Review Daniel 6.

Read Daniel 8.1-4, 20.

Think it Through

1. The kingdom of the Medes and Persians was likened to a bear in Daniel's earlier vision (Dan. 7.5). Now it is a ram with two horns. What do the two horns represent? One horn was higher than the other, like one side of the bear was higher. This probably represents the Persians, who were the dominant power in the Medo-Persian Empire. How is this ram's power depicted in Daniel's vision? What do you suppose it would have been like to live in those times?

2. In his vision, Daniel experienced a change of venue from his days serving the kings of Babylon. He is in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire (modern Shush in Iran). How do you suppose Daniel interpreted this vision as applying to himself? Daniel is very much immersed in the world of Babylonian politics, life, and culture. But he remains a man to whom God opens the mysteries of His divine revelation. What does it take to be such a person? Should we aspire to be like Daniel, fully engaged with our times, but living by the revelation of God? Explain.

Meditate

"He signifies Darius the Persian by saying 'it had two horns,' as Darius ruled the Medes and the Persians. 'Both horns were long, but one was longer than the other': this is referred to the Persians, whose power was superior to that of the Medes and rose to a higher level. 'And the longer one came up second': this is said because the Persians, after the Medes, would have obtained the rule over the world." *Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD)*

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. 1 Corinthians 5.9-11

Heavenly Father, again today I will go out into the world and all its corruption and lies. Speak to me throughout this day, O Lord, that I might...

Pray Psalm 2.1-3.

Pray for the nations of the world, especially for people who despise God, reject His Word, and refuse to submit to them. Pray for any people like this you expect to see today.

Psalm 2.1-3 (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage,
Conspiring together from age to age?
Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand

Against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below,
His Kingdom authority overthrow!
Throw off His Law, reject His Word;
No more be governed by this Lord!”

2 The Greeks

Introduction

Strong, powerful, and extensive as it was, the Persian Empire would not endure. It would be defeated by a small army of Greeks under the leadership of Alexander the Great. In eleven short years, Alexander swiftly subdued every nation and people from Egypt to India, before his death in 333 BC. Alexander was one of the greatest pagans who ever lived. He was used by God despite his wanting to be regarded as the son of god. Like the Pharaoh of old, God raised Alexander to power so that He could show His glory through him.

Read Exodus 7.1-5, 9.13-16

Read Daniel 8.5-7, 21.

Think it Through

1. How did Daniel see the swiftness with which Alexander made his conquests? Alexander is depicted as a “notable horn” in this vision. The word *notable* or *conspicuous* plays on the word *vision* or even *prophecy*, since in other contexts it can mean this. Can you see how this intends to exalt the greatness of Alexander, and the impression he made on the peoples he conquered? Explain. With an army of less than 50,000 men, Alexander destroyed the Persian army, which he estimated to be near one million, at Guagemela. Darius fled with a few of his men, but they murdered and abandoned Darius before Alexander caught up with him (contrary to the report of Aphrahat, see on). How does Daniel summarize these striking events? How great was Alexander to the people who experienced him?

2. Alexander was dead before his 35th birthday, and his kingdom was divided among four of his generals. Alexander’s first victories were won in his native Greece. He was actually a Macedonian, from the north, and undertook first to unite the warring Greek tribes, before crossing the Bosphorus to begin his conquests. But he had to overcome a language problem at home, since the Greeks spoke three different dialects and could not easily understand one another. Alexander created a simplified form of Greek which came to be called *koiné* or *common* Greek. Wherever he went, from Egypt to Afghanistan, Alexander installed *koiné* Greek as the *lingua franca*. He introduced Greek culture and built Greek cities, many of which he named after himself (recall Gen. 4.16, 17). Colonies of Greek-speakers went from Greece eastward to Italy and Spain. The New Testament was written in *koiné* Greek. How can you see the sovereign hand of God, working for His own glory through the conquests of Alexander? Is God doing this through nations and rulers and other “notable” men and women today?

Meditate

“But the ram was the king of Media and Persia, that is, Darius; and the he-goat was Alexander, the son of Philip, the Macedonian.... And the he-goat of the goats came up from the region of the Greeks and exalted himself against the ram, and he struck him and broke both his horns, the greater and the lesser. And why did he say that he broke both his horns? Clearly because he humbled both the kingdoms that he ruled; the lesser, that of the Medes, and the greater, that of the Persians. But when Alexander the Greek came, he killed Darius, king of Media and Persia.” *Aphrahat (270-350 AD)*

For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” Romans 9.17

Lord, I cannot see all that You are doing in the world, but I know You are doing all things well. Work in me today, Father, so that...

Pray Psalm 2.4-9.

How does God look on the nations of the world? How should we be praying for them?

Psalm 2.4-10 (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath
At all who embark on this cursèd path.
His angry Word to them is plain:
“Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

Proclaim the message far and wide,
That God has exalted the Crucified!
From heav’n He sent us His only Son,
Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all
Who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes
To break the prideful, sinful ones.

3 Successors to Alexander

Introduction

Following Alexander's death, his empire was divided into four parts, the most important of which for our purposes was that which came under the rule of Ptolemy, and after him, Antiochus Epiphanes (ruled 175-164 BC). His kingdom was that of the Seleucids. Primarily because of where he ruled, but also because of how, his rule is important to Daniel's growing vision of the coming Kingdom of God. His kingdom recalls an earlier one and hints at a spiritual struggle which John will unfold in Revelation 12. In the fragmentation of Alexander's empire and the hubris of Antiochus we are witnessing the death rattle of kingdoms – and not just earthly ones.

Read Revelation 12.7-17.

Read Daniel 8.8-12, 22.

Think it Through

1. Alexander's was the greatest empire the world had ever known. It's shattering into four weaker fragments (v. 22) illustrates what Daniel saw in chapters 2 and 7 concerning the fragility of earthly kingdoms under the sovereign rule of God. The "little horn" (Antiochus Epiphanes) is a boaster, though not as great as Alexander. The rule of the Seleucids (312 BC to 62 AD) extended (as a puppet monarchy) into the period of the Roman Empire. Meditate on verse 10, and compare it with Genesis 11.1-4 and Revelation 12.3, 4. Why would Daniel's vision have paid most attention to this fraction of Alexander's empire? Meditate on John 12.31, 32. The crumbling and fragmentation of these earthly kingdoms symbolizes the dissolution of another kingdom, not mentioned in Daniel's visions, probably because it was not well understood in his day. Explain.

2. Antiochus took as a deliberate part of his political agenda to dethrone the God of Israel, humiliate His people, and subjugate their nation. He desecrated the holy sanctuary by erecting a statue of a pagan deity. He interrupted the normal routine of sacrifices, and he set aside the Law ("truth") of God. And all the while he was doing this he "prospered." This direct attack on the rule of God puts us in mind of Matthew 4.1-11. Explain. When might it be possible to say that a government today has taken aim on the rule of God? What should such a government expect?

Meditate

"After [Alexander's] death his empire will be divided into four kingdoms, but though those reigning over them are four, they will not succeed in achieving what he achieved but will be seen to be much inferior to his strength." *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." John 12.31, 32

You are my King, O Lord! Let Your Law be my delight, and help me to live as Your witness with...

Pray Psalm 2.10-12

Does God intend the nations of the world to submit to the rule of King Jesus? Pray for your nation, that this may indeed be the case.

Psalm 2.9-12 (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

To Christ the Lord be given all
Who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes

To break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace,
And worship before His exalted face!
Beware His anger and judgment grim:
How blessed are all who rest in Him!

4 Time of Desolation

Introduction

In 164 BC Judas Maccabee restored the temple, which had been desecrated by Antiochus six years earlier. Antiochus took the surname Epiphanes, which suggests “God manifest”, and undertook to eliminate the religion of the Jews, erecting a pagan statue in the temple, sacrificing a pig on the altar, destroying copies of Scripture, and sending many Jews into slavery. His actions provoked the Maccabean revolt, and “then the sanctuary was cleansed.”

Read Psalm 74.

Read Daniel 8.13, 14.

Think it through

1. In his dream, Daniel heard two “holy ones” conversing about events which were yet to come (cf. Dan. 4.13). Apparently, at least some angels are privy to God’s eternal plan. Given what we’ve seen about angels, and their role in earthly affairs, why does this make sense? Meditate on Matthew 18.10, 11. How should we think about the role of angels in our walk with the Lord? Do you think we should give thanks for angels more than we do? Or call on the Lord for their assistance? Why or why not?

2. The period of “two thousand three hundred days” roughly represents the time that the sanctuary of God lay desolate and the “host” of Israel was “trampled underfoot”. Why do you suppose God allowed this to happen? What was He saying to His people? Meditate on John 2.13-19. Do you think Jesus may have been recalling the work of the Maccabees in this action? If so, what message would He have been sending to His contemporaries? How does the restoring work of the Maccabees point forward to our Lord Jesus?

Meditate

“Clearly he is witnessing angels conversing and wanting to learn how long is the period of the offenses of impiety and lawlessness, the devastation of the temple, the illicit and loathsome sacrifice and the oppression of the people.” *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” John 2.15, 16

Lord, You have made my body Your holy temple, that I may be holy as You are holy. Drive out of me today, Lord, the things that are loathsome to You, so that...

Pray Psalm 2.1-3

As you pray, listen for the Spirit to convict you, if in any way you have set aside God’s Law and are desecrating His temple, which temple you are. Keeping in mind Psalm 74, pray also that God would cleanse His churches of everything that is worldly, fleshly, and not according to His Word.

Psalm 2.1-3 (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage,
Conspiring together from age to age?
Earth’s kings and all of their counselors stand
Against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below,

His Kingdom authority overthrow!
Throw off His Law, reject His Word;
No more be governed by this Lord!"

5 Judgment on the Holy People

Introduction

Daniel receives the official word on the meaning of his vision, culminating in the vision of Antiochus and his desolations.

Review Daniel 8.1-14.

Read Daniel 8.15-24.

Think it Through

1. What role did the angel Gabriel play in Daniel's vision? Do you find it curious that God employed an angel to interpret the vision He sent to His prophet? How did Daniel respond to seeing this angel? Why? What should we make of Gabriel's calling Daniel "son of man" (v. 17)? Meditate on Revelation 1.20, Revelation 14.6, 7, and Galatians 4.13, 14. Are angels involved in communicating God's truth today? Explain. What is the responsibility of those who are charged with receiving, interpreting, and communicating God's truth to His people?

2. The "time of the end" (v. 17) here does not refer to the "end times". It refers to the end of this particular vision, that is, the period of Antiochus' rule in Jerusalem (cf. v. 23). Who are the "transgressors" of v. 23 (cf. Dan. 9.5-8)? Meditate on verse 24. If Antiochus' great and evil power is not of himself, of whom is it? Is that power still active among rulers and nations today? Antiochus would destroy but prosper; he would destroy but thrive (v. 24). Why does it please God at times to allow the wicked to prosper at the expense of those who are at least nominally His people? Does He still do this? Why might He? Explain.

Meditate

"He beheld the vision by way of a picture or likeness, and he failed to understand it. Consequently, not everyone who sees comprehends what he has seen; it is just as if we read the holy Scripture with our eyes and do not understand it with our heart." *Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD)*

And of the angels He says:

"Who makes His angels spirits
And His ministers a flame of fire." Hebrews 1.7

Lord, You have appointed me to live and proclaim Your truth, and you have assigned angels to assist me in this. Help me, therefore, to...

Pray Psalm 2.10-12.

Pray that God's witnesses will proclaim His truth to all the nations, and that kings and judges and rulers will hear the Word and believe.

Psalm 2.9-12 (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

To Christ the Lord be given all
Who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes
To break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace,
And worship before His exalted face!
Beware His anger and judgment grim:

How blessed are all who rest in Him!

6 Rule of Lies

Introduction

Where men will not submit to the truth of God, they will be ruled by the lies of men. Gabriel explained to Daniel that this would be the case under Antiochus, who would rule over an administration of lies and deceit. His lying to himself and all those “under his rule” would lead him to challenge the authority of God, which he did by presuming to “redecorate” the temple with his own preferred deity and sacrifices, and by seeking to erase the Word of God from Israel. His fate would be the fate of all who choose the lie over the truth.

Meditate on Psalm 12.

Read Daniel 8.25-27.

Think it Through

1. What makes something true or false? How would David (Ps. 12) answer that question? Why are rulers, like Antiochus Epiphanes, inclined to lie to and deceive the people they rule? How can you see that such lying and deceiving often leads rulers to assume the place of God, as the ultimate definers of right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood? What happens to people who disagree with or oppose such rulers? What is the Christian’s duty with respect to truth in matters of governance, public policy, and elected officials?

2. Antiochus was removed from rule “without *human* means.” He died of “natural causes” before the Maccabees could dethrone him. What does that phrase, “natural causes”, suggest? Meditate on Ephesians 1.11 and Acts 12.20-24. Are there such things as “natural causes”? Explain. God sets kings up and brings them down, and *any* cause He uses to that end is certainly more than merely “natural”. Antiochus offers a variety of lessons. First, he shows us we should guard our hearts (v. 25). How can we do this? Second, his life is a warning about thinking we know better than God how *anything* in our lives should go. Explain. Why do you suppose this vision affected Daniel so viscerally (v. 27)? Does your reading of God’s Word ever affect you like this? Should it?

Meditate

“If there was no one who could interpret it, how was it that the angel interpreted it in the previous passage? What he means is that he had heard mention of kings and did not know what their names were; he learned of things to come, but he was tossed about with uncertainty as to what time they would come to pass. And so he did the only thing he could do: he marveled at the vision and resigned everything to God’s omniscience.”

Jerome (347-420 AD)

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Romans 1.24, 25

Lord, I am sometimes tempted to exchange the truth of your Word for the lies of the world and my own lusts. Whenever I sense this happening, help me to...

Pray Psalm 2.1-3

Let the Spirit search your heart, mind, and conscience. Are you harboring any lies that might lead you to rebel against God’s truth?

Psalm 2.1-3 (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage,

Conspiring together from age to age?

Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand
Against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below,
His Kingdom authority overthrow!
Throw off His Law, reject His Word;
No more be governed by this Lord!”

7 Layers of Revelation

Introduction

Daniel is an important book for many reasons. Among these is what we can learn from it about the giving of divine revelation, and of our responsibility to whom that revelation is given. As we see from Daniel, God does not reveal His mysteries all at once; rather, He layers His revelation for His people, subsequent insights, visions, and teachings building on what has gone before. And, while it pleases Him for His people to gain a measure of understanding into what He reveals, He does not intend that we should understand it completely. Just enough so that we respond as we should.

Review Daniel 2.31-45 and Daniel 7.1-28.

Read and Meditate on Daniel 8.

Think it Through

1. How did Daniel's understanding of history grow through these three visions of coming kingdoms? Still, at the end of chapter 8, he did not understand all that he had seen, nor did anyone else. Why not? These revelations left Daniel "troubled" (Dan. 7.28), so that he "fainted and was sick for days" (Dan. 8.27). Should he not have been rejoicing, especially at what he saw in chapter 7? Why was he so upset? Meditate on Revelation 10.8-11. How does Daniel's experience foreshadow John's? Which aspects of the Lord's revelation should trouble and sicken us? Which should be sweet, and cause us to rejoice? What if our reading of Scripture is producing neither of these results in us?

2. Notice that while Daniel was "astonished" by the revelation of God, and even sickened for days, his *primary* response was to return to his calling and carry on in his work. We know from chapter 6 – which chronologically comes after chapters 7 and 8, remember – that Daniel was emboldened by these visions to resist Darius' unjust order and continue serving the Lord. How should the revelation God opens to us each day affect our daily lives and work? Meditate on 1 Corinthians 2.12, 13. How does the Spirit do this comparing role in your time with the Lord and His Word?

Meditate

"Some spiritual truths are unclear and need to be interpreted, but this can be done only by comparing them with other spiritual things. For example, when I say that Christ rose again, I compare this to the deliverance of Jonah from the belly of the whale. And when I say that he was born of a virgin, I compare this to the miraculous childbearing of barren women like Sarah, Rebekah and so on." *John Chrysostom (344-407AD)*

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 1 Corinthians 2.12, 13

O Lord, layer Your Word into my soul! Help me to be faithful each day to read and search Your Word, and then to...

Pray Psalm 2

Give thanks and praise to God for the sovereign rule of King Jesus, for the Gospel of the Kingdom, and for the privilege of being sent by Him to live and proclaim the Good News of repentance and faith. To whom will God send you today?

Psalm 2.1-12 (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage,
Conspiring together from age to age?

Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand
Against the Lord and His Right Hand:

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Throw off His Law, reject His Word;
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The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath
At all who embark on this cursèd path.
His angry Word to them is plain:
“Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

Proclaim the message far and wide,
That God has exalted the Crucified!
From heav'n He sent us His only Son,
Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all
Who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes
To break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace,
And worship before His exalted face!
Beware His anger and judgment grim:
How blessed are all who rest in Him!

Daniel 8

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How does Daniel 8 enhance your understanding of the sovereign rule of God over the nations?
2. Does God still judge His people today? When might He do so? What forms can that judgment take?
3. Summarize any principles of reading and understanding Scripture you have gained thus far from the book of Daniel.
4. How should God's people respond to the revelation He gives them? What does that mean for you?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

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