

Lessons from Daniel 8

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So far we have encountered two long-term prophecies in the book of Daniel, covering world history from the time of Daniel until the coming of the future kingdom of God (Dan 2, 7). In Daniel 8 an overview of world history is provided again with additional details.

I. Structure of Daniel 8

- *Prologue* (v. 1)
- *Vision* (vs. 2–14)
 - Ram, goat, and little horn (earthly dimension—vs. 3–9)
 - Little horn (heavenly dimension—vs. 10–12)
- *Audition* (vs. 13–14), including a time element
- *Interpretation* (vs. 15–26)
 - Call to interpret the vision (vs. 15–16)
 - Daniel's reaction (vs. 17–18), including a short interpretation (v. 17b)
 - Second and more extensive interpretation (vs. 19–26)
- *Epilogue* (v. 27)

II. Survey of Daniel 8

1. Time Frame

While Daniel receives his vision during the time of the Babylonian Empire, the vision itself begins with the Medo-Persian Empire, unlike Daniel 2 and 7.

The vision extends to the time of the end (Dan 8:17, 19, 26). Therefore, it parallels Daniel 2 and 7. This is important for its interpretation.

2. Distinctive Features

- Instead of five powers, only three are mentioned.
- However, two are stated by name and at a time when they had not yet played their role as world empires. The Bible is the Word of God. Its predictions are fulfilled.
- In Daniel 8 the sanctuary is stressed, while in Daniel 7 the saints are emphasized.
- The animals of Daniel 8 are sacrificial animals, while those of Daniel 7 are predators. With this feature the sanctuary is emphasized again.

III. The Discussion of Daniel 8

1. Prologue

vs. 1–2 Toward the end of Babylonian rule, Daniel receives another vision. In this vision Babylon is no longer mentioned—obviously because it is about to be defeated.

2. Ram and He-Goat

vs. 3–4, 20 The ram with the two different horns represents the empire Medo-Persia (see the bear that is raised up on one side in Daniel 7). This empire expands toward the west, north, and south, conquering other powers. Reaching the Aegean Sea it attempts to enter Europe.

vs. 5–8, 21–22 The he-goat represents Greece, and the first horn is Alexander the Great. With tremendous speed (“without touching the ground”) he comes from the west and defeats the Medes and Persians (compare with the leopard with four wings in Daniel 7). However, in 323 BC, at the age of thirty-three and at the peak of his power and success, Alexander died. His generals divided the empire among themselves (see the four heads of the leopard). The four kings were Ptolemy, Cassander, Lysimachus, and Seleucus.

3. The Little Horn

a. Information about the Little Horn

- vs. 9–12, 23–25
- (1) It comes out of one of the winds.
 - (2) In spite of small beginnings, it grows exceedingly great.
 - (3) It grows toward the south, the east, and the beautiful land.
 - (4) It grows to the host of heaven.
 - (5) It throws some of the host of heaven and the stars to the earth and tramples on them.
 - (6) It grows up to the Prince of the host.
 - (7) It takes the daily from Him.
 - (8) It overthrows His sanctuary.
 - (9) It casts the truth to the ground.
 - (10) It is broken without human hand.

b. Parallels with the Little Horn of Daniel 7

- The enormous growth (v. 2)
- War against the saints (vs. 4–5)
- Blasphemy (vs. 6–8)
- Suppression of truth (v. 9)
- Its destruction (v. 10)

c. Differences between the Two Little Horns

The little horn of Daniel 8 appears after Greece, not after Rome as does the little horn of Daniel 7. Additionally, the little horn of Daniel 8 comes out of one of the winds, not out of a beast.

d. Interpretation

- (1) The Hebrew grammar in Daniel 8:8b–9 supports the coming of the little horn out of one of the points of the compass.
- (2) This little horn power becomes a new world empire. The wording of the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8 is not identical (see also Aramaic versus Hebrew). The “horn from littleness” in Daniel 8 represents both the pagan and the papal Rome. Verse 9 dealing with its earthly dimension points more to the pagan Rome, while the heavenly dimension of verses 10–14 refers to the papal Rome.
- (3) The beautiful land is most likely Palestine. Rome conquered it as well as Egypt in the south and Syria in the east, becoming the new world empire.
- (4) According to the interpretation provided in verse 24, the host of heaven is the true people of God. Stars may point to their leaders and teachers (Dan 12:3).
- (5) The people of God are being persecuted (see the persecutions of Christians through the Roman Empire and later the Inquisition of the Roman Church).

- (6) The Prince of the host of God is Jesus Christ. The little horn rebels against Him. Rome crucified Jesus. In the Roman Church the preeminence and supremacy of Jesus is limited (due to the worship of Mary and the supposed intercession of the saints).
- (7) In the Old Testament sanctuary system there existed a daily ministry and a yearly ministry. This dual ministry is a type and foreshadowing of the daily and “yearly” ministry of Jesus as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The daily ministry of Jesus is being undermined through additional mediators that the Bible does not know, such as the saints, Mary, priests, and the pope. It is undermined through unbiblical doctrines, such as the confession of sins to a priest and absolution granted by him, the mass as a non-bloody sacrifice, etc.
- (8) The heavenly sanctuary, Christ’s ministry there, and God’s authority are negatively affected through papal Rome.
- (9) False teachings are introduced. Scripture is supplemented and sometimes, if not oftentimes, eclipsed by the authority of tradition.
- (10) In Daniel 2 the stone comes without involvement of human hands and destroys all powers. So also the little horn will be destroyed.

4. The Time Element

vs. 13–14, The entire vision, which begins in Medo-Persian time (vs. 2–3) and lasts till the end, includes
 26 2,300 evenings and mornings. These 2,300 evenings and mornings are 2,300 years. Daniel does not receive further information and therefore does not understand the time element. After the 2,300 years the heavenly sanctuary will be cleansed. From verse 10 onward the chapter deals with the heavenly dimension. Also, after AD 70 the earthly sanctuary no longer existed. The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary corresponds with the Day of Atonement of the earthly sanctuary (verbal and thematic parallels between Daniel 8 and Leviticus 16). The sanctuary and God’s people are finally freed from sin; at the same time the Day of Atonement is a period of judgment (see Lev 16 and Dan 7). After the end of the 2,300 years begins the second phase of Jesus’ ministry as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. After its completion He will come again and erect His kingdom of glory. However, based on Daniel 8 we are not able to date the 2300 years. Daniel 9 will furnish more information. In any case: We live in the last time of earth’s history, and Jesus is involved in a special ministry on our behalf. Soon he will come again. We want to be ready.

5. Daniel’s Reaction

V. 27 Although Daniel did not completely understand what was revealed to him, nevertheless he transmitted it faithfully. God again has allows humans to look behind the scenes. His Word is being fulfilled exactly.

IV. Application

- Among other things, Daniel 8 is dealing with truth. What is truth? In the New Testament it is Scripture and the teaching contained in it (John 17:17). It is also Jesus (John 14:6). To be in the truth means to be in Jesus and agree with His Word and His teachings. This truth is being attacked today. Many people are not interested in God. They fabricate their own theories and religions, but are without orientation because they have become their own yardsticks. But true Christians have a sure foundation and grow in Christ.

- The sanctuary has to do with God's presence among His people. It is also the place from which judgment and salvation come. God does not allow for His plan of salvation to be destroyed, nor does He permit that His way of obtaining salvation be replaced by another system. It is still best to follow Him instead of a man-made system.
- While we live in the last period of earth history when error increases and various kinds of problems become insurmountable, we look forward to Christ's second coming and prepare for it.

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