**DANIEL’S VISION OF ANTICHRIST**

**(Daniel 8:1-27)**

**“The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.” (v. 26)**

It seems that Daniel chapter 8 is a repetition of chapter 7. That’s correct. However, in this repetition, there holds some significance. Most importantly, this chapter provides detailed insight into the Antichrist concerning the distant future, utilizing a historical prefigure who emerges shortly after Daniel’s vision. While the Antichrist is not the main figure under study, through his portrayal and the fulfillment of the vision regarding the Antichrist, God intends to impart specific lessons for our ultimate victory. May God bless us to discern His teachings amidst the grievous, dark, and extreme calamities faced by His holy people.

**I. The prefigure of the Antichrist (vs. 1-14, 20-22)**

Look at verse 1: **“In the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me.”** This vision occurred in 551 B.C., two years after his initial revelation. While his first vision came to him in a dream as mentioned in 7:1, it appears that this second vision occurred while he was awake. Not only did God grant Daniel the ability to interpret dreams and visions (1:17), but He also directly communicated His plans and intentions through visions. Remarkably, amidst one of Israel's most tragic periods, God bestowed His visions upon an exile, Daniel, who maintained spiritual purity during the Gentile world and remained devoted to God with all his heart.

What then was Daniel’s vision? Look at verses 2-3. **“In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal. I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later.”** Susa was situated approximately 230 miles east of Babylon. Following Babylon's destruction, about a century later, the Persian king Xerxes (known as Ahasuerus) established an impressive palace there, transforming Susa into the capital of the Persian Empire. It was within the walls of Susa that the events chronicled in the Book of Esther unfolded (Esther 1:2), and where Nehemiah served as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:1). In Daniel's vision, he found himself in Susa, the future capital of the Medo-Persian Empire, while the Babylonian Empire still reigned.

Daniel witnessed a ram with two horns. These horns did not emerge simultaneously; initially, one was shorter than the other, but eventually, it grew longer, surpassing the other in size. Verse 20 reveals that this two-horned ram symbolizes the Medo-Persian Empire and its humble beginnings. The longer horn represents Persia, which rose to prominence later than Media but ultimately subdued it, leading to the formation of the powerful Medo-Persian Empire.

The combined might of Persia and the Medes is vividly portrayed in verse 4: **“I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great.”** This depiction of the ram's conquests aligns with the Empire's historical expansion into Babylon (to the west), Egypt (to the south), and Asia Minor (to the north), as previously mentioned in chapter 7 with the image of the bear devouring three ribs (7:5b) in its mouth.

Continuing his vision, Daniel witnesses a startling sight: a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes emerges from the west, swiftly traversing the earth without touching the ground. This goat charges at the two-horned ram standing beside the canal in a display of great fury (5-6). Verse 21 identifies the single-horned goat as representative of the Greek Empire, with the horn symbolizing Alexander the Great. Alexander's remarkable military talent is highlighted, as he begins his conquest of the Persian-ruled territories at the young age of 22. Within four years, from 334 to 330 B.C., he successfully subdues the entire Persian Empire, demonstrating the swiftness of his campaigns like the speed of the goat crossing the earth without touching the ground.

What became of Alexander the Great? Verse 8 reveals, **“The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.”**After his conquest of the Persian Empire, Alexander sought to expand his dominion further, venturing into India. However, he eventually relented to the demands of his troops and turned back. At the age of 32, while in Babylon, he held a grand banquet in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, envisioning further military campaigns. Yet, he succumbed to a fever and died suddenly, possibly due to malaria and complications from alcoholism, or some speculate, poison. Remarkably, Alexander's death coincided with the shattering of the goat's single horn at the pinnacle of its power. After Alexander's death, he left no clear successor, resulting in the division of his empire among his four generals.

Turning to verse 9, **“Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land”** we witness the emergence of another horn, although small at first but growing in power towards the south, the east, and towards the Beautiful Land. This prophecy, fulfilled approximately 380 years later, manifested through Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He ascended to the throne as the eighth king in the Seleucid dynasty in 175 B.C., ruling over the Syrian region of Alexander's empire. Despite his unremarkable beginnings and lack of royal qualities, Antiochus proved to be a cunning and formidable ruler.

 After rising to power, Antiochus IV Epiphanes invaded Egypt in 170 B.C. On his return, he targeted Jerusalem, often referred to as the 'Beautiful Land.' Verses 10-11 illustrate his wicked actions: “**It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.** **It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord; it took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down.”**

Antiochus waged war against the holy people of God, ordering the Jews to abandon their ancestral laws. He prohibited the observance of the Sabbath, customary festivals, traditional sacrifices, and circumcision of children. In 167 B.C., he blatantly erected an image of Zeus in the temple, reportedly resembling himself, and demanded worship him in the form of Zeus (11:31). Jews were compelled to offer unclean sacrifices and consume swine's flesh.

Verse 12 reveals the cause of the calamity: **“Because of rebellion, the LORD’s people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.”** Daniel clarifies that God allowed these offenses as a consequence of God’s people’s sins. Antiochus desecrated the temple, devastated the city, and ruthlessly slaughtered its inhabitants, including 80,000 Jews, in a single instance.

Despite Antiochus's apparent triumph over God's people, Daniel received a revelation concerning the duration of his desecration of the temple. In verse 14, a holy one informed Daniel: **“It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.”** Interpreted as 2,300 days, approximately 6 years and 3 months, this prophecy was fulfilled when Judas Maccabaeus liberated the temple in late 164 B.C. The subsequent rededication of the temple marked a restoration of religious autonomy for Judah, and it was celebrated by Jews as Hanukkah, meaning 'dedication' (John 10:22).

Antiochus met a fitting end in 163 B.C., afflicted by an incurable plague in his bowels. It is said that his torment was so severe, and the stench of his disease so unacceptable, that none could bear to approach him.

 Here, God planted his hope for God’s holy people by promising their deliverance from Antiochus, so that they might look forward to a happy result and not give way to despair under events so full of anxiety, confusion, and suffering. God’s power and justice will prevail, so we should never give up our faith or lose hope, no matter how powerful God’s enemies may seem.

 This prophecy focused mainly on the events that would happen to the Jews just before the first Advent of Christ. But we need to understand that it also foreshadowed the events that will happen to the holy people of God through the Antichrist just before the second Advent of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:7-10). Antiochus was the prototype and prefigure of the Antichrist, who will come before Jesus’ second coming.

 So far, we have learned that God had repeatedly revealed visions regarding the rise and fall of worldly empires through Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. Also, he revealed that he even set times over the Antichrist. Through these lessons, what does God really emphasize to us? God wants us to know that he is sovereign over the history of the world and is even in control over Satan and evil forces. Jesus teaches God’s sovereignty in Matthew 10:29-31: **“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care…So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”** Jesus emphasizes the fact that our lives are under God’s sovereignty, and God watches over us and cares for us as his children. Therefore, we can be confident in God’s providential care, and we need not fear any evil or harm in any situation. Even if it does come to us, it can only come by God’s will and ultimately for our good to purify our hearts and worship him wholeheartedly. God will give us ultimate victory in his set time. Praise be to God, our heavenly Father, who rules over the universe and cares for our lives in his sovereignty!

 **II. The time of the end (vs. 15-27)**

While Daniel was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before him stood one who looked like a man. And Daniel heard a man’s voice from the Ulai calling, **“Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision” (15-16).** The man possibly refers to Christ, who had already appeared as **“one like a son of man” in chapter 7.** The angel Gabriel is God’s messenger mentioned four times in the Bible (Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19; 1:26). What was Gabriel’s message? Look at verse 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.’”** The angel, Gabriel, explained that the vision concerns the time of the end. What does it mean the **“time of the end”**?

The **“time of the end”** is also referred to by Jesus as the **“times of the Gentiles”** (Luke 21:24). It refers to the whole period from Jerusalem’s destruction and exile by the Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar to the second advent of Christ. Now we are living in the **“time of the end.”** Many of the events that would happen under Antiochus IV Epiphanes will be repeated during this time. Historically there have been many Antiochus-like figures thus far. Roman emperors Nero and Domitian, Nazi leader Hitler, and communists like Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong,and Kim Jong Un. During these times, God deals with Israel and his holy people with divine discipline that would come through such Antiochus-like figures.

Look at 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.’”** Here Gabriel tells that he is going to tell events happening in **“the time of wrath,”** which is also called **“the appointed time of the end.”** Within the **“times of the Gentiles”** there will be a specific time called, **“the time of wrath.”** We call this time **“the Great Tribulation.”** It will happen just before the Second Advent of Christ. God's disciplinary act was manifested on Israel and will be manifested on his church in the time of wrath. God will also pour his wrath on the unbelieving world through his acts of judgment (The Seven Trumpets in Revelations 8-11 and the Seven Bowls in Revelations 15-16).

One of the most significant signs of **“the appointed time of the end”** is the Antichrist. In verses 23-25, Gabriel explains about the Antichrist. **“In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. 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 those who are mighty, the holy people. 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.”**

What can we learn about him? First, he is a master of intrigue. He will be a cunning and intelligent ruler. He will cause deceit to prosper. Because he will begin as an insignificant political figure, he will deceive many to believe he is a peacemaker. By promising false security, he will rise to power. In the beginning, people will feel secure, but eventually he will brutally destroy many. Second, he will be Satan’s willing instrument. He will be controlled by Satan. He will become very strong, not by his own but by Satan’s power. So no human power could defeat him who plays an agent of Satan. Also, his characteristics will be totally satanic including pride, lies, immorality, and violence. Third, he will persecute the holy people of God. He is a fierce-looking king. He is cruel and brutal. Many holy people will be beheaded for witnessing to Jesus and the word of God, those who have not worshiped the Antichrist and his image (Revelation 20:4). Fourth, he will stand against the Prince of princes. Here the Prince of princes refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Antichrist will blaspheme the Lord and will try to sit in God’s place. Fifth, he will be destroyed by divine judgment. The Lord will judge the Antichrist and his followers directly after his second coming. They will be thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 19:20b). But the holy people of God will be delivered. The Lord will wipe every tear from our eyes, and we will reign with Christ forever.

What can we learn from Daniel’s vision? What kind of attitude should we have? First, the word of God is absolute truth. Gabriel says in verse 26. **“The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.”** He confirmed that the vision is true. Through the historical facts, we already learned how the vision was fulfilled in the past. From this prophecy alone, the authority of Scripture is established by proofs perfectly sure and undoubted. These points must be diligently noticed that the Scriptures may inspire us with the confidence they deserve.

In the same way, the rest of the vision will also be fulfilled. It teaches us that God’s promise and plan are true. The Bible is God’s promise and his words. The word of God is absolute as he is absolute. We have to trust the word of God and live by it in any situation. The angel Gabriel said to Daniel, **“…seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.”** It means that Daniel must preserve the word of God and teach them. Jesus also says in Matthew 24:35, **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”** Therefore, we have to preserve the word of God in our hearts. Revelation 22:7 says, **“Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”** Even under severe persecution and trials, we should not lose heart but be confident of God’s power and justice. We have to hope for Jesus’ second coming, our final victory and eternal kingdom based on God’s absolute promise and preach the Gospel message confidently.

Second, God wants us to be awake and to keep pure. God gave this vision to his holy people to be awakened. We want to avoid suffering as much as possible. But there is God’s good will through the suffering from persecution and trials. It makes us pure like gold. In our sinful human nature, we may be easily contented and enjoy the world. In the process, we may become impure and lose our true hope. But during the tribulation, God’s purpose is to purify his people. We often hear about the beautiful faith of Christians who are severely persecuted around the world.

I remember a short story about North Korean Christians. One Christian community living in a cave under a road was found due to the collapse of the road during construction. They had lived there for 13 years to worship freely and keep their faith. They were all arrested and put to death. Before the execution, a mother told her young son, "Be joyful because we are going to the place where Jesus is." The young boy hung while smiling. Through persecution and trials, their faith became so pure and beautiful. Jesus says, **“Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed”** (Revelation 16:15). God wants to make his holy people spotlessly refined in this sinful world and wait for Jesus like a bride awaits her bridegroom.

 Thirdly, we must commit ourselves to serving God and His work. Despite the persecution and hardships we may face, it's essential to recognize that this isn't God's ultimate plan for His people. Instead, He calls us to serve Him and His mission with unwavering dedication, regardless of the circumstances. When Daniel encountered the vision of the Antichrist, his response was intense. In verse 27, he recounts, “**I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.”** Despite his weariness and the overwhelming nature of the vision, Daniel persisted in his service to the Gentile world, fulfilling God's mission for him.

 In 1 Corinthians 15:58, we're reminded of the importance of maintaining the right attitude amidst trials: **“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”** In times of difficulty, may God grant us the strength to continue serving His redemptive work with courage and the assurance of His kingdom.

 From Daniel's vision of the Antichrist, we glean the truth that God reigns supreme over history and all evil forces. His promises are unwavering and absolute. Anchored in the certainty of our final victory, our duty is to embrace hope for the eternal kingdom, maintain purity, and wholeheartedly devote ourselves to God's work. Yesterday, after the funeral worship service for the late Everrette Dellinger, during the fellowship, Pastor Chris told me a story about Mr. Dellinger in the hospital. When Mr. Dellinger heard that his life would not last long, he said to the Pastor, 'I’m ready.' I was moved by his faith, not fearing his death, but believing in the kingdom of God and eternal life. I thought to myself, 'Am I ready?' I should always be ready by trusting in God’s promise of victory and giving myself fully to the work of God. May God strengthen and bless each of us as we strive to live according to His promise and will in the time of the end!