

A Vision by the River

Daniel 8 and Antiochus Epiphanes

ESV Daniel 8: 1 In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first.

² And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal.

³ I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last.

⁴ I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

⁵ As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground. And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes.

⁶ He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath.

⁷ I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power.

⁸ Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

⁹ Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land.

¹⁰ It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them.

¹¹ It became great, **even as great as the Prince of the host**. And **the regular burnt offering was taken away** from him, and the place of **his sanctuary** was overthrown.

¹² And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering **because of transgression**, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper.

¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, "For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?"

¹⁴ And he said to me, "**For 2,300 evenings and mornings**. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."

¹⁵ When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, **I sought to understand it**. And behold, **there stood before me one having the appearance of a man**.

¹⁶ And **I heard a man's voice** between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision."

¹⁷ So **he came near where I stood**. And when he came, **I was frightened and fell on my face**. But he said to me, "**Understand**, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

¹⁸ And **when he had spoken to me**, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But **he touched me and made me stand up**.

¹⁹ He said, "Behold, I **will make known to you** what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end.

²⁰ As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the **kings of Media and Persia**.

²¹ And the **goat is the king of Greece**. And the great horn between his eyes is **the first king**.

²² As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, **four kingdoms** shall arise from his nation, but not with his power.

²³ And at **the latter end of their kingdom**, when the **transgressors have reached their limit**, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise.

²⁴ His power shall be great-- but **not by his own power**; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men **and the people who are the saints**.

²⁵ By his cunning he shall **make deceit prosper** under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy

many. And he shall **even rise up against the Prince of princes**, and he shall be broken-- but **by no human hand**.

²⁶ The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now."

²⁷ And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.

(Daniel 8:1-27)

Rivers of Time

Rivers are fascinating things. You can sit on the shore anywhere you like along its banks and it will **never stop flowing**. How can this be? Back in the early days of our nation, Thomas Jefferson had just made the greatest real estate investment in world history paying 15 million dollars for the Louisiana Purchase (Louisiana to Montana). To find out what kind of investment he made, he sent Louis and Clark up the Mississippi from St. Louis, into the Missouri river to Montana and down the Columbia River in Washington. Without those rivers, **exploration** would have been exceedingly difficult and dangerous. As the same time, crossing the west, the greatest **obstacles** settlers faced from the land until the

Rocky Mountains were the rivers. No bridges meant many long and often dangerous hours figuring out how to get a caravan of lumbering Conestogas across safely. Rivers also provide the main source of **water** for almost all people on earth. Without them, life on this planet simply isn't possible. Over the millennia, their water has been so precious that wars have been fought over who gets the rights.

But thinking about rivers is also **an existential proposition**. In a word, they depict in living color **the flow of time**. They wax, they wane. They run rapids and run placid. They run shallow and deep. Our poets get at this:

“To the River Charles” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

*River! that in silence windest
Through the meadows, bright and free,
Till at length thy rest thou findest
In the bosom of the sea!
Four long years of mingled feeling,
Half in rest, and half in strife,
I have seen thy waters stealing
Onward, like the stream of life ...*

“The River of Life” by Thomas Campbell

*The more we live, more brief appear
Our life's succeeding stages;
A day to childhood seems a year,
And years like passing ages.*

*The gladsome current of our youth,
Ere passion yet disorders,
Steals lingering like a river smooth
Along its grassy borders.*

“The River” by Dan Fogelberg

*I was born by a river
Rolling past a town
Given no direction
Just told to keep my head down*

*I was raised by a river
Weaned upon the sky
And in the mirror of the waters
I saw myself learn to cry*

*I ran far from the river
Far as I could see
And as the sun hit my shoulders
I felt it burning me
How I longed for the waters
As the fire raged
How I longed for the river
As I aged*

*I will die by a river
As it rolls away
Bury me in the nighttime
Do not waste the day*

Daniel 8: Setting and Structure

Daniel 8 unfolds in two places. The first is in the citadel or palace of the ancient city of Susa in modern southwestern Iran which back then was called Elam (Dan 8:2). This is not a coincidence as the setting in Elam which is far to the east of Babylon, becomes the setting of the first image which describes the Medes and Persians, particularly Cyrus “the king of Anshan” who came from there (Isa 21:2; 44:28).¹

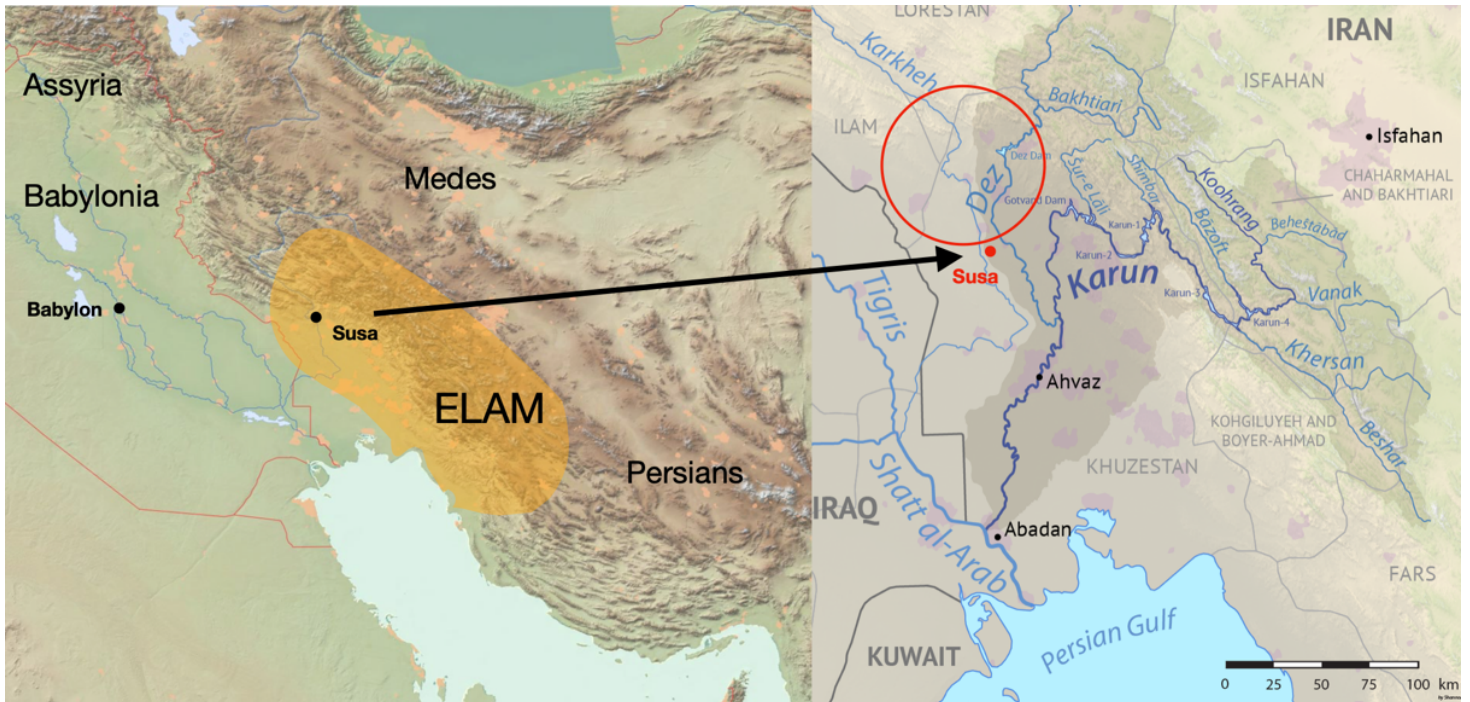
This city, nestled itself just south and west of the Zargros mountains, was settled between three rivers (and/or tributaries), which in flood stages actually merge together. One of these is the second place of Daniel’s vision (the second place). He is transported to “the Ulai canal.”

While we know from archeology that there was a canal that ran just north of Susa on the N. or N.E.,² the idea of seeing a vision by one of the rivers (particularly the mighty Karkheh, which at 590 miles long is the only navigable river in Iran and flows only a few miles east of Susa), makes for a better setting. It also makes for a good parallel in Daniel

¹ Florin Gh Laiu, “An Exegetical Study of Daniel 7-9,” Master of Theology to the University of South Africa (Nov 1999): 104. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/43176309.pdf>.

² S. R. Driver, *The Book of Daniel with Introduction and Notes*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 112.

12:6-7 where we see a man clothed in linen who is “above the waters of the river” (NAS; the ESV has “stream” while the YLT has “flood”). And, it makes for a more exciting unfolding of his vision.



Like chapter 7, the vision has a time stamp. It is “in the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar” (Dan 8:1). This puts it two years after the former vision of the beasts and the heavenly divine council scene where Christ comes like a “son of man.” This is the third and final vision that takes place during Belshazzar’s reign.³ Like the last chapter, this

³ Ch. 5: The fall of Babylon (538 B.C.); Ch. 7: The Vision of the Beasts (550 B.C.); Ch. 8: The Vision of the Ram (547 B.C.). On the timing see Gerhard F. Hasel, “The First and Third Years of Belshazzar (Daniel 7:1; 8:1,” Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS) 15.2 (1977): 153-168. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1411&context=auss>.

Going Deeper: In this paper, he cites an interesting text (the “Verse Account”) about “the third year” of Belshazzar where, “After he had obtained what he desired, a work of utter deceit, Had built

date might not be incidental. For, it was in this year that the Medo-Persian empire **subsumed Lydia**, the great power of the Western World that the Assyrians were never able to fully conquer. Given the topic of the vision, this is certainly an interesting coincidence and would have made for a nice analogy with coming world events.

The structure of our passage is, as always, important to consider. First, chapter 8 returns us for the first time since chapter 1 to the **Hebrew portion** of Daniel. The book finishes in the original tongue of the Jews. It has been suggested that this happens in order to **give deeper credibility to the chapters**, because they are prophetic, and Hebrew is the language of the prophets.⁴ More to the point, I think it shows that the things unfolding in them deal more specifically with Israel than where they are in Babylon. Whatever the case, this creates a new chiasm with the remaining chapters:

(this) **abomination, a work of unholiness**" (p. 158). This most likely refers to the departure of Nabonidus to Tema where he built the temple Ehulhul in Harran to the moon god Sin, a heresy considering Marduk was the main God of Babylon. While most likely not the same "third year" as Daniel 8:2, an "abomination" is certainly an interesting parallel to the events of Daniel 8-9.

⁴ **Jay Rogers**, *In the Days of These Kings: The Book of Daniel in Preterist Perspective* (Clermont, FL: Mesia House International, 2017). 26.



It is **tempting** to outline the chapter similarly to the common outline of chapter seven with a simple **vision** (first half) / **interpretation** (second half) format. But as we saw in chapter 7, that doesn't quite work. It is better to see something like a chiasm, though this one isn't as formal as others have been:

- A. Daniel transported to the Ulai Canal to see a vision (8.1-2)
- B. Daniel's vision described (8.3-14)
- C. An angel appears on the scene (8.15-19)**
- B¹. The angel interprets Daniel's vision (8.20-26)
- A¹. Daniel reacts to his vision and goes back to work (8.27)

But another interesting way of looking at the chapter is, like a river, through a series of risings and fallings:

- 8.3-4 A rise. Daniel lifts his eyes, and sees the ram rise in power.
- 8.7 A fall. The ram falls, with no-one to deliver it.
- 8.8a A rise. The goat becomes great.
- 8.8b A fall. The goat's strength is shattered.
- 8.9 A rise. A little horn becomes great enough to reach the stars.
- 8.14 A fall. The horn's demise is announced.
- 8.15 A rise. Light begins to dawn on Daniel.
- 8.18a A fall. Daniel falls to the floor, overborne.
- 8.18b A rise. Daniel is lifted to his feet.
- 8.27 A fall. Daniel is left confused, with no-one to explain the vision to him.⁵

The chapter itself will takes us on a **vision into the future**, with its ebbs and flows of time and life and difficulty and death and conquest. It does so through **images that are in some ways similar** to those of chapter 7. Here is list of similarities and differences:

Comparing Daniel 7 and 8	
Similarities	Differences
Both depict kingdoms as animals	The time frames are not identical
Both depict rulers as animal horns	The kinds of animals are totally different. Ch. 7's are predators. Ch. 8's are herbivores.

⁵ James Bejon, "Commentary on Daniel :: Chapter 8 (8.1-27), 24. https://www.academia.edu/19627822/Commentary_On_Daniel_Chapter_8_8_1_27_.

Both culminate in the rise of a sinister little horn	Ch. 8 is narrated more specifically
Both bring out the pride of man	Ch. 7 portrays history as a line; Ch. 8 as part of continuing cycle of rising, splintering, persecuting, falling
Angels interpret both	Different languages (Aramaic vs. Hebrew) ⁶

A couple of these is especially important to think about. Someone has astutely noticed, “In contrast with the wild and political imagery of [chapter 7], this one is built from domestic and Sanctuary animals, and its focus is not political per se, but moral and religious.”⁷ In fact, “Daniel 8 is full of sanctuary language.” This includes the visionary animals that were used for sacrifices, especially on the Day of Atonement, the cleansing of the sanctuary (**Dan 8:14**).⁸ As such, we will see that the focus of our chapter is not on God’s eschatological people (the church) like it was in Daniel 7 when all the saints inherit the kingdom, but on God’s **typological** people (the

⁶ See Bejon and also the slide presentation at <https://sainttims.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Daniel-8.pdf>.

⁷ Florin Gh Laiu, “An Exegetical Study of Daniel 7-9,” Master of Theology to the University of South Africa (Nov 1999): 101. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/43176309.pdf>. He has a small chiasm for ch. 9 on p. 100.

⁸ Ville Suutarinen, “The Little Horn in Daniel 8: In Defense of Historicism,” Asia-Pacific International University (AIU), August 2019, 52 (and earlier in his work, look that up). https://www.academia.edu/40110988/The_Little_Horn_in_Daniel_8_In_Defense_of_Historicism.

Jews). These are the people who foreshadow the church. As such, Daniel 8 is going to teach us that history repeats itself therefore acts as a great **teaching aid** of what to expect throughout history until the culmination of the Second Coming when Jesus finally comes to make all things right. To put that another way, Israel (the type of the church) and her history become types of things to come.

The Vision (Dan 8:1-14)

The Lopsided Horned Ram

Moving into the passage, we see the setting that we have described in **Dan 8:1-2**. Then Daniel begins to explain the strange things he saw. “**I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last**” (**vs. 3**). Here is **our first rising**. As a way to connect this to the river as a memory device, assume that the river is flowing high. The ram is on the opposite bank from Daniel and Daniel can’t get over to it—there is too much water and it is running much too fast off the rugged peaks above.

At first, the beast is simply **standing** there. It has **two horns**, which is perfectly normal. But these horns are **lopsided**. One appears higher than the other. But then the strangeness truly comes. He apparently saw both horns grow out of the head before his eyes. The larger horn grew up last.

Suddenly, **the beast begins charging**. Usually, rams will charge each other in mating rituals to see who will get the female. But this is a singular ram. It seems, however, that there are **other animals** around. “**I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great**” (4). It is unusual to describe a ram as a beast that no other animal could defeat, unless, of course, you are a CSU fan. Unlike those Rams, this ram defeats *all* of his opponents and is now seen as the king of the all beasts.

The Unigoat

This is a strange thing to **ponder**, and that’s exactly what Daniel was doing when suddenly he saw **a new animal**. “**As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the**

ground” (5). The ram has been charging north, south, and west. But when it came too far west, suddenly it was met by a goat that was so fast it seemed to fly—it never touched the ground. Imagine that the river has gotten very low now and the goat has no problem coming across it to the ram’s side. It looks like it is running on top of the water! Though I would normally bet money on a ram beating a goat, in this case it would be money poorly spent.

This goat was even more unusual. He had a singular horn between his eyes. He’s a unigoat. Recall that we saw horns in the beasts in chapter 7. They referred to individual kings. Here, the unigoat sees the ram and begins to charge at him “in his powerful wrath” (6). The goat is angry. The ram has encroached on his territory. As the enraged charged occurred, the goat “struck the ram and broke his two horns” (7). The water is at its lowest point and the ram falls. At that moment, his power was completely destroyed. “The ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power” (7).

Now, the goat becomes the king of beasts. Imagine the water rising higher than before. It overflows its banks, mirroring the power of the bizarre beast. “The goat became

exceeding great” (8). But at the height of its power, “when he was strong,” the great horn was broken. Imagine again, suddenly, the river dries up almost completely. The goat now falls with the water level.

Four Horns and the Little Horn

In its place four lesser horns grew up and out in four different directions “toward the four winds of heaven.” Think of the water level rising yet again. Are you getting riverboat sick yet? The unigoat becomes a truly monstrous looking creature.

But then, one of the horns grew a horn on top of it and this horn grew exceedingly great “toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land” (9). The animal is now standing still, like the ram at first. Gazing—southeast, far past the rapids. He has tunnel vision. He sees far away. His sight, his mind, his will is bent—*on Israel*.

As it stood there, it started to grow. Taller and taller. Higher and higher it rose, “even to the host of heaven.” It began to throw down “some of the host and some of the stars” of heaven (10). It threw them down to the ground and began to trample on them. The stars were like clods of dirt under its hooves.

Its power became greater, “even as great as the Prince of the host” (11). Let’s spend a moment here. The host of heaven and the stars are two terms that refer to the heavenly beings. We are about to see two of them in this chapter, which can’t be a coincidence. The “prince of the host” appears earlier in the Bible by this same title in Joshua 5:14. Joshua sees a man (*ish*) and becomes terrified. The man then identifies himself as “the commander of the army of the LORD” (*sar tsaba’ Yahweh*). It is unfortunate that the ESV translates one as “the commander of the army” and the other as “the prince of the host,” because it is the exact same words in Hebrew.

But we can identify this person even better. Because he says that the place Joshua is standing is holy ground, therefore, he must take off his sandals. This is the same thing the Angel of the LORD told Moses at the burning bush, and this person is none other than Christ in the OT. Thus, Daniel sees this goat with the little horn becoming as powerful as Christ himself!⁹ But we will say more about this in a moment.

⁹ Calvin takes my view. However, many have seen this prince of the host as the high priest of Israel. Bejon (p. 57) translates this as “higher” than the prince of the host and argues it is not possible for a man to be higher than the God himself. However, how is it any more possible for a man to be “as high” as God himself? It is possible, for a time or season, if God decrees it, and then only in a limited sense, which is clearly what is in mind here. The goat’s power is not omnipotent over all things, but only as it regards the temple in Israel.

Now comes the truly amazing thing. Incredibly, Daniel sees that “the regular burnt offering was taken away from him,” that is, from the Prince of the host. And even more, “the place of his sanctuary was overthrown” (11). Interesting that it is a goat that takes away the burnt offering! What man has the power to defy God himself and rise higher than the Angel of the LORD?

Vs. 12 is extremely difficult to translate. The ESV says, “And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering...” What does that mean? The LXX says, “And a sin-offering was given for the sacrifice, and righteousness was cast down to the ground; and it practiced, and prospered” (Dan 8:12). The idea seems to be that some kind of evil sacrifice is made in God’s house. The Latin reads, “And strength was given him against the continual sacrifice.” In this interpretation, the idea is that this little horn becomes powerful enough to stop sacrifices in God’s house.

The word “host” is the same as the previous verse. The Greek and Latin assume that it has a different meaning from that verse.¹⁰ Let’s assume it still means “army.” It may or may not be the same army. Some translations read the army as the

¹⁰ Or even that the text was corrupted. See John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 334-35.

people of the house of God, meaning either the priests who took care of it or the Jews, in which case they are given over the power of the little horn. Others read it as the host of heaven in a continuation of the previous verse. That makes the most sense to me. What would it mean that the host of heaven are given over the power of the horn? It could mean that this horn will have a power that overcomes theirs or it could mean that he will put a new heavenly host in charge of God's house in which case he will desecrate it. In fact, all of these interpretations, as we will see, could be correct!

The key part here is that this happens “because of transgression.” The transgression belongs to those who worship in God's house and in fact in Daniel 9 we see that this is how Daniel takes it. The result of this is horrific. “Truth” is thrown to the ground and the little horn will act and prosper in whatever he does (12).

Lamentation: For How Long?

Suddenly, the vision is interrupted. Daniel hears someone lamenting and someone else answering. They are called “holy ones.” This is the same language used of “the saints of the Most High” in the previous chapter. There I

said that this term can be angels or God's people, or in that case, both. Here, it clearly refers to some kind of angelic beings. One cries out like [Jeremiah in Lamentations](#), “[For how long...](#)” For how long “[is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?](#)” (13). This is a great question, because [is it possible that God himself could be thwarted by a man?](#) Here is the answer. [Only if it were temporary and God permitted it](#) in his sovereign decree, and even then, who would really have the power? We raised this kind of question with Nebuchadnezzar.

The answer comes and as it does, imagine that river sinking all the way to a dry wadi, “[He said to me, ‘For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state’](#)” (14). This is the fall of the horn and the simultaneous rise of sanctuary. A word on this number is in order. Because this is the temple that is in mind, and because according to law an offering was made each [evening and morning](#), this could refer to 1150 days or, slightly less than 3 ½ years. However, it could refer to 2,300 days as well. As we will see, it doesn't really matter, because the fulfillment

includes both numbers. This is the end of the vision, properly speaking.

The Angels (Dan 8:15-19)

Now, while the sights of the animals now trail out of sight, Daniel is nevertheless **still there on the banks** of the Ulai. And he “**sought to understand it**” (15). Suddenly, “**There stood before me one having the appearance of a man.**” Some (Rogers) take this as a reference to the son of man in ch. 7 and therefore to Christ in the OT. But this is incorrect. He is not said to be a “son of man” but a *geber*, which is variously translated as man, mighty one, or warrior.

However, Daniel then hears “**a man’s voice.**” This time the word is *‘adam*. **This is the one like a son of man!** His voice comes “**between the banks of the Ulai.**” I imagine that the waters are now very high again and raging. In a parallel, Ezekiel, about to hear from this same son of man, says that he heard the sound of the wings of the host of heaven “**like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army**” (Ezek 1:24). John sees the same person and says, “**his voice was like the**

roar of many waters” (Rev 1:15). Who is this person? He is none other than the Prince of the Host, or, as he will later be called, Michael.¹¹

His voice goes to the other angel, who is called Gabriel. “Make this man understand the vision.” He is Gabriel’s commander. Curiously, Gabriel is the only named angel in the Bible other than Michael. The word is a play on *geber* (man/warrior) and his name means “God is my hero/warrior/man.” In 1 Enoch, he is put in charge of Paradise and is one of other archangels (Sariel and Raphael) who punish the Nephilim. Closer to home, in Daniel he is clearly a warrior and he appears once in the NT to announce the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:19, 26), which in my view means that in both of his appearances in the Bible, he is closely associated with Christ.

Gabriel came and stood by Daniel. I imagine the waters subsiding again. Gabriel’s voice is not like that of Yahweh’s. Nevertheless, he is a frightening creature, “And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face” (Dan 8:17).¹²

¹¹ The question of whether Michael is the proper name for the Angel of the LORD has been debated for ages. I answer in the affirmative. Jerome explains that “the Jews assert that this man who directed Gabriel to make Daniel understand the vision was Michael” (*Tanḥuma Genesis 23; Yalkut 2.1066*). But the Jews also attributed the voice to God (*Genesis Rabbah 27:1*). For Christians, they can be the same thing.

¹² It is possible that this is the center of the chapter. Taking vv. 15-18 as the center of the chiasm we can then divide it as follows:

Another fall! Gabriel spoke to the prophet as he was prostrate. “Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end” (17). Importantly, Daniel is echoing Hab 2:3, which can help bring some clarity to the meaning. “For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end, it will not lie.”¹³ The “end” is not the end of all things, but the appointed time of God’s choosing. Certain things have to happen, and then it will be fulfilled. Daniel wants to know what those things are.

As Gabriel is speaking to Daniel, he fell into a deep sleep with his face to the ground (18). He was simply overwhelmed by the vision and had no more strength. But Gabriel “touched me and made me stand up” (18). Again, imagine the waters of this mighty river rising again as Daniel’s strength is returned. He who fell is made to rise. And upon him, a light of interpretation will now dawn.

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- A. ¹⁵ When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it.
B. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man.
C. ¹⁶ And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision."
B. ¹⁷ So he came near where I stood.
D. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face.
- A. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."
C. ¹⁸ And when he had spoken to me,
D. I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground.
B. But he touched me and made me stand up.
- A. ¹⁹ He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end.
¹³ Collins, 337.

The Interpretation (Dan 8:20-27)

Vv. 19-26 are the interpretation of Gabriel of the vision of Daniel. This is where we will now begin to see how chapter 8 differs in time frame from that of ch. 7 which ended at the fall of the second temple in 70 AD. It will take us through the rivers of time, down several centuries, but not up to the birth of Christ. However, this is a typological vision of other things, and one that the people of God needed to heed when it was fulfilled, so that they might be better prepared for their Messiah to come. It is still one whose lessons can teach us today.

Gabriel begins, “Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end” (Dan 8:19). The “indignation” refers to the events surrounding this little horn and his blasphemous attempt to set himself above God. The end then refer to the end of this little horn.

“As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia” (20). Recall that in ch. 7, this was the second beast, the lopsided bear. Now, it is a ram with lopsided horns. They are lopsided because Darius the Mede began the rule in Babylon. But he only lasted about

two years. Then **Cyrus** the Great, the Persian, ruled for a very long time. So here we have a continuing parallel with the previous visions (with Nebuchadnezzar, this was the silver torso).

Much more important than the ram is the goat. “**And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king**” (21). This refers to the rise of the Greek Empire and **Alexander** the Great. Alexander was born on July 20, 356 B.C., in the Greek kingdom of Macedonia.

Prior to his rise, Greece was a series of city-states. Over a hundred years earlier, the Persians tried to invade Greece (the ram charged west). They first stopped the Persian king **Darius the Great** in 492 when the Athenians won the famous **Battle of Marathon**, and then again they defeated **King Xerxes I** in 479, a year after Leonidas led the Spartans to the Hell’s Gate where 300 Spartans held off a million Persians for several days in the Battle of Thermopylae (made famous in the movie “300” and the book *Gates of Fire*).

Alexander was Grecian retribution such as the world had never seen. Barely in his 20s, he **united the city states** and created the greatest empire in history. In ten short years he moved from Greece, through Turkey, south into Africa, east past Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and into

western India, almost to Nepal and perhaps as far as western China!



Hell bent on conquest, who knows what the empire would have looked like had he lived another 20 years. But at age 32, the still youthful emperor succumbed, probably to malaria, while in Babylon on June 13, 323 B.C. Upon his death, his four generals fought for the empire. In short order, it was subdivided into four parts. This is precisely what Gabriel now explains, some 300 years before it happened. “As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arise, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power” (Dan 8:22).

In fact, no one in history, save perhaps Genghis Khan, could boast the realm of Alexander. Two of these lesser kings (Cassander and Lysimachus) essentially ruled only over the motherland. Ptolemy and Seleucus received 80% of

the empire, with Ptolemy being south and Seleucus being east. As often happened to the tiny Promised Land, it found itself **right in the middle** of kings fighting to rule it. At first, Ptolemy had it. But after a few years, the descendants of Seleucus took control. Then, in 175 B.C., the great great grandson of Seleucus, a man named **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**, became king.



“Antiochus Epiphanes” is was his throne-name (he was born Mithradates). It means “**God Made Manifest.**” Almost all commentators agree that **this man is the little horn** that came out of one of the four in Daniel’s vision.¹⁴ Gabriel says,

¹⁴ Dispensationalists sometimes will deny it. Hassler way overstates his case when he concludes, “In no way does the little horn point to Antiochus IV Epiphanes or Rome. The incongruities

“And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise” (Dan 8:23).

There had already been many kings since Seleucus, and Gabriel uses the biblical language “their transgressors have reached their limit” to describe them. Way back in Abraham’s day, God said this about the wicked inhabitants of Canaan. “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Gen 15:16). You see, God gives to each group of people a set period of time to inhabit and rule. He is patient, even with the wicked Nephilim Amorites, whose sins only increased over time. But eventually, their time runs out. What that limit is, only God himself knows.

The 1 and 2 books of the Maccabees¹⁵ comment on this very time frame. 1 Maccabees describes the decades after

between the little horn, Antiochus, and Rome bolster this conclusion.”¹⁴ Mark A. Hassler, “The Identity of the Little Horn of Daniel 8: Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Rome, or The Antichrist,” *MS7* 27.1 (Spring 2016): 44, <https://www.tms.edu/m/TMS-Spring2016-Article-02.pdf>. Of course, there are also others. See for example Suutarinen.

¹⁵ **Going Deeper:** What are these books? Many know them only because they are contained in the Roman Catholic Bibles and that they consider them canonical and because we don’t consider them authoritative, they associate these books with Rome and view them as evil books to stay away from. In fact, these are ancient Jewish books that were part of the LXX, though never part of the Hebrew OT canon.

They are set in a collection called the Apocrypha, which also includes four short books which are part of the LXX of the book of Daniel.¹⁵ Apocryphal books are those books that have been disputed by the church since the beginning as being canonical, but which have often been read in churches and are considered useful and helpful. The Belgic Confession sums it up nicely. “The difference between the canonical and apocryphal books” it says, is that these are books “which the Church may read and take instruction from, so far as they agree with the canonical books; but they are far from having such power and efficacy as that we may from their testimony confirm

Alexander died and the wars that ensued, bringing chaos to the entire world as “**evils were multiplied in the earth**” (1Ma 1:9), leading to the rise of Antiochus. 2 Maccabees is a great ancient commentary on it. “**In the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, in order that he may not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height.... Though he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people**” (2Mac 6:14).¹⁶

Now, Epiphanes wanted to fulfill Alexander’s dream of creating a Greek empire not through war, but through assimilation of Greek culture throughout all the world. Of course, he would use war if he had to. Today we call this process “**Hellenization**” (from the word *Hellazein*, which means “go speak Greek or identify with the Greeks”).

Gabriel said this “**God Made Manifest**” is would be **adept at understanding riddles**. This is a literal translation of a phrase that has nothing to do with a game played in a cave

any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less to detract from the authority of the other sacred books.” (Belgic Confession, Article 6). Our own Confession states their importance negatively but listen to how it ends. They “are of no authority to the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of *than other human writings*” (LBC 1.3). In other words, **you may make use of them as you would other human writings**.

¹⁶ Another take is, “**For he has weighed the age in the balance and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number, and he will not move or arouse them until that measure is fulfilled.**” (4 Ezra 4:36-37).

by Gollum and Bilbo. Ezekiel 28 is a good parallel. Here, the king of Tyre is “wiser than Daniel,” yet because he considers himself to be a god, he will be destroyed like Satan. In other words, this little horn’s wisdom is duplicitous. We see this in the next two verses in Daniel. “His power shall be great— but not by his own power; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken-- but by no human hand” (Dan 8:24-25).¹⁷

We may as well finish off Gabriel’s interpretation. He concludes, “The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now” (26). In much of what we will now say in terms of fulfillment of these things through Antiochus, I will return to the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees to show you the historical fulfillment.

¹⁷ Widder also talks about the Adulterous of Proverbs who has the same language. See Wendy L. Widder, “Dr. Wendy Widder, The Book of Daniel, Session 11, Daniel 8—God’s Leash on Evil,” Youtube (Aug 12, 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WC22xQ09X8M>.

The books of Maccabees are history books. There are four of them, though the first is by far the most accurate historically speaking. They describe important events that took place in the intertestamental period. Specifically, they focus in on the events of the Maccabean revolts during the Grecian rule of the Holy Land. More specifically, they focus on events beginning with Antiochus Epiphanes and later. It is primarily through them that we know about the exact fulfillment of Daniel 8 and as such have been called “a record of priceless worth” (Grimm) and “One of the most valuable sources we possess for the history of the Jewish people”¹⁸ at this time.

We’ve already seen how they add helpful information on Gabriel’s statement of the sins of Greece reaching a tipping point. It is into this tipping point that Antiochus comes to power. He became a powerful tyrant over Israel. 1 Maccabees calls him a “wicked root” (1Ma 1:10). 2 Maccabees curiously calls him a “raging ... wild animal” who set out to conquer Egypt (“to the south,” Dan 8:9) and then invaded the realm of Persia (1Ma 3:28-37; “to the east;”

¹⁸ Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, E. T., 1890, in W. Fairweather and J. Sutherland Black, *The First Book of Maccabees with Introduction and Notes*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897).

Dan 8:9). But never forget, his rise was “not by his own power,” but by God’s.

In a series of devastating attacks, he “sought to take Jerusalem by storm” (2Ma 5:11-14; cf. Dan 8:9 “toward the pleasant land”). He did so and mercilessly massacred “young and old ... women and children ... virgins and infants. In the space of three days, eighty thousand were lost, forty thousand meeting a violent death, and the same number being sold into slavery.” He “entered proudly into the sanctuary, and took away the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof, and the table of the shewbread, and the pouring vessels, and the vials, and the censers of gold, and the veil, and the crowns, and the golden ornaments that were before the temple, all which he pulled off” (1:20ff).

This all explains why certain wicked Jews led by Joshua, the younger brother of the high-priest Onias III who would Hellenize his name to Jason, made a covenant with Epiphanes to defile the city: building a gymnasium, refusing to circumcise their sons, forsaking the covenant, marrying Gentiles and doing mischief (1Ma 1:13ff). They were trying to stave off disaster and Jason made the bargain in order that Antiochus would replace his brother with him as high priest.

Compromising with the devil never works; if you play with fire, you will get burned.

These events had a terrible consequence upon the Jews. Many of them **completely abandoned their religion**. They consented to Greek religion, scarified to idols, profaned the sabbath, set up altars and groves and chapels of idols, sacrificed swine's flesh and unclean beasts, left their children uncircumcised, made their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness, forgot the law, changed the ordinances, committed evils in the land, all under threat of death. Hellenization worked beautifully (1:44-64). It was at this time that Antiochus went into the temple and “**set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar**” (65). He erected a temple of Jupiter-Zeus, renamed the temple after the God of Thunder, and offered a pig on the altar, thus causing the temple to become desolate. Yahweh would no longer dwell in the midst of such unclean abominations.

Can you hear in these histories **the words of Gabriel**? This is a “**bold face**” who deceitfully turned on the Jews after they made covenants with him (**Dan 8:23**). He **brought fearful destruction**, such as not been seen since the days when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first temple. He **succeeded in everything he did and destroyed the people of**

God (24). He defiantly rose up against the Prince of princes (25), for this was his temple where he sat enthroned.

But there came a time when, after the sanctuary had been abandoned for several years, Judas Maccabees rose up and, after a series of military victories against the Greeks in the face of astounding odds against him, he came to the precipice of the temple. “And when they saw the sanctuary desolate, and the altar profaned, and the gates burned up, and shrubs growing in the courts as in a forest ... and the priests’ chambers pulled down; they rent their clothes, and made great lamentation, and cause ashes upon their heads, and fell down flat to the ground upon their faces, and blew an alarm with trumpets, and cried toward heaven” (1Ma 4:30-40). Judas fought against those few still left in the fortress, chose priests of blameless conversation who had pleasure in the law, and cleansed the sanctuary. They created a new altar, made new holy vessels, brought back the candlestick, the altar of burnt offering and incense, and the table, held a great feast, and reinstated the worship of the One True God.

As for Antiochus, “When the king heard these words, he was astonished and sore moved: whereupon he laid him down upon his bed and fell sick for grief ... and there he

continued many days: for his grief was ever more and more, and he made account that he should die” (6:8-18). This is what he told his friends on his death-bed. “The sleep is gone from mine eyes, and my heart fails for very care. And I thought to myself, into what tribulation have I come, and how great a flood of *misery* is it, where I am now! for I was bountiful and beloved in my power. But now I remember the evils that I did at Jerusalem, and that I took all the vessels of gold and silver that were therein, and sent to destroy the inhabitants of Judea without a cause. I perceive therefore that for this cause these troubles are come upon me, and, behold, I perish through great grief in a strange land.” And Antiochus Epiphanes, “God Made Manifest,” died. As he rose by God’s power, so also he died “by no human hand,” but in grief for the God of Israel tormenting him for what he had done to God’s people.

Rough Timeline of Prophecies of Daniel 8 <i>All dates are BC</i>	
539	Darius the Mede conquers Belshazzar and rules Babylon.
537	Darius dies and the Persian Cyrus the Great rules Babylon.
331	Alexander the Great defeats the Persian Darius III in the Battle of Gaugamela.

323	Death of Alexander the Great. The empire is divided; Antigonos takes Greece, Ptolemy takes Egypt, and Seleucus takes Syria.
176	Antiochus IV Epiphanes ascends to the throne.
174	Jason, brother of Onias, attempts to become High Priest by bribing Antiochus (2 Macc. 4:1-7).
171	Menelaus offers a bigger bribe to Antiochus in order to become High Priest (2 Macc. 4:23-26); Jason flees.
170	Onias murdered through the machinations of Menelaus (2 Macc. 4:30-38).
168	Antiochus IV is turned back in his invasion of Egypt by the ultimatum of Rome. A rumor spreads that he has died, and Jason attempts to overthrow Menelaus. Antiochus discovers this when returning and interprets it as a revolt (2 Macc. 5:11-14). He begins a crackdown on non-Hellenizing Jews (2 Macc. 6:1-12).
167	Abomination of Desolation (Daniel 11:31): Antiochus Epiphanes sets up an idol in the Temple. Jews begin to rally behind the family of Mattathias (1 Macc. 2:27ff.). The Maccabean revolt begins. Mithridates of Parthia takes advantage of the Seleucid confusion to seize the strategic city of Herat; Antiochus leaves the handling of the Maccabees to Lysias and goes to war against the Parthians himself.
164	Antiochus dies of illness while on (successful) campaign against Parthia. Rededication of the Temple under Judah Maccabee.

Curiously, scholars have noticed how these events **all** happened either during a 2,300 or 1,150 day span, depending upon how you recon it. If we look at the **longer** time frame, we can count from 170 B.C., when the priest Onias was murdered by the Benjamite Menelaus who then assumed the high priesthood as a non-Aaronite, thereby desecrating the temple through the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabee in 164 B.C. If we use the **shorter** date, we can see that it was approx. 1,150 days from the moment that Antiochus slaughtered the pig on the altar (167 B.C.), thus bringing the abomination of desolation, until that same moment when Judas rededicated the temple.¹⁹

¹⁹ “If the reference is to days, then its fulfillment would cover the whole period of Antiochus’s blasphemous activities; if the reference is to the evening and morning sacrifices, then the period envisaged is a shorter time of three and a half years—the period between the desecration of the temple by the statue of Zeus and its ultimate cleansing.” Sinclair B. Ferguson and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Daniel*, vol. 21, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1988), 162.

Going deeper. Maccabees gives months and years and sometimes even exact days. Some, reading the numbers very woodenly, have tried to give exact dates to match the 2,300 and/or 1,150. For example, see Fred P. Miller, “The 2300 Day Prophecy of Daniel 8,” <http://www.moellerhaus.com/2300.htm>; Rick Lanser, “Understanding the 2,300 ‘Evenings and Mornings’ of Daniel 8:14,” *Associates for Biblical Research* (May 15, 2019), <https://biblearchaeology.org/abr-projects-main/the-daniel-9-24-27-project-2/4362-understanding-the-2-300-evenings-and-mornings-of-daniel-8-14>; Rogers, *In the Days of the Kings*.

Others have been more reserved, giving approximate time frames that come close. See Rick Lanser, “A Closer Look: Daniel 8:14 Re-examined,” *Associates for Biblical Research* (July 12, 2020), <https://biblearchaeology.org/abr-projects-main/the-daniel-9-24-27-project-2/4688-a-closer-look-daniel-8-14-re-examined>; Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996, orig. 1866-91), 692-695. Delitzsch, understanding that we have here apocalyptic literature, makes a very good point on this when he says, “While by the period ‘evening-morning’ every ambiguity of the expression, and every uncertainty thence arising regarding the actual length of the time of affliction, is excluded, yet

Modern Relevance

This understanding of the prophecies of Daniel 8 being about the Medes and Persians being overtaken by Alexander who dies, gives his empire into the hands of his officers, and over time a very evil descendant of one of them rises to such power in the Holy Land that he seeks to set himself above God himself only to find himself ruined has been **the near universal interpretation** from Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.7.6), to the early church (Hippolytus and Theodoret) to the Reformers (Calvin) to today. So what are we to make of these things?

I offer you five thoughts. **First**, consider Daniel's own reaction. **“And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days ... I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it” (Dan 8:27)**. The prophet of God had been given a vision and an interpretation, yet he did not understand it even then. Sometimes, prophecy is such that **until the events occur, it cannot be understood** for what it is. That's the way it was with Jesus himself. All of the prophecies that we take for granted as obvious were not quite that obvious until they were fulfilled. That doesn't

the number 2300 shows that the period must be defined in round numbers, measuring only nearly the actual time, in conformity with all genuine prophecy, which never passes over into the mantic prediction of historico-chronological data” (p. 696). This is in keeping with the idea of numbers being used symbolically throughout apocalyptic literature.

mean there was nothing in them that could be understood ahead of time. Simeon and Anna had good ideas of what to expect when Jesus was born. But God concealed a good portion of their meaning until later, because if he did not, “they never would have crucified the Lord of Glory” (1Co 2:8). And if they would not have done that, we would not have forgiveness of our sins. To me, Daniel’s reaction teaches us in the face of prophecy yet to be fulfilled, to be humble about what we think we know.

Second, note what else it says in this verse. Though he was appalled by the vision, “I rose and went about the king’s business.” Too many Christians have abandoned all sense when then get sucked into future prophetic speculation. Some, setting exact dates, have sold all they have and lived on the tops of their roofs awaiting the rapture, only to be disappointed. Daniel did not stop living his life but continued on with the king’s business. Though he surely means king Belshazzar, who had placed him in a very high position, we can also think of this as King Jesus. And what does he say to us? He has not taken us out of the world (John 17:15), though he protects us from the evil one while in it. Rather, he leaves us here to be salt and light so that men might see the salvation and change of life that occurs when Christ is worshiped. Our

job is to go about our jobs as ambassadors of Jesus, doing our work for our bosses well, bearing Christ's name in our bodies, obeying him, being good and faithful workers until he decides when it is time for us to leave.

Third, along with ch. 7, the interpretation of these prophecies demonstrates very clearly that, “**The horror of human evil is especially concentrated in the state.**”²⁰ This is an incredibly important lesson for anyone to learn, but especially people whose innate desire seems to be to willingly **give more and more power to the state** as they give away more and more of the power that belongs to the individual. Human nature is such that one person is sinful, but a whole collection of them with unlimited and unaccountable power become **nearly as bad as they can be**. The history of every civilization in history demonstrates this, and our own USA is no different, and we are perhaps the only nation in history that actually put safeguards in place to protect against this, and it will isn't working all that well. As one of our great Presidents said at his inaugural address, “**In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem, government IS the problem.**”²¹

²⁰ **Tremper Longman III**, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 208.

²¹ **Ronald Reagan**, Inaugural Address (January 20, 1981).

Beware of the state telling you that they will fix all of your problems. As it accumulates more and more power to itself, those who suffer are the poor, the downcast, and God's people, the exact opposite of what these same people tell you through their serpentine tongues.

Fourth, the fact that these are **sanctuary animals** rather than crazy beasts shows us that God intended something different from the previous chapter. God's **typological** people, the Jews, were going to be disciplined for their sins. Scripture is full of the thought that we will be persecuted as Christ our brother was. While we are not to seek it, neither are we to flee it. We are to embrace whatever God deems fit to put in our way, even as we (as we will see in Daniel 9) may pray and work to the end that such things would not occur in our own day. Too much Christianity today is easy-believism. This is not what Daniel 8 allows you to conclude. Daniel was deeply distressed, and it led him to repent of his and his people's sins and to work hard and seek God's mercy. Have you repented of yours? Is yours a faith rooted in ease and comfort? Then you have not listened to God's word.

This thought is made **clearer in the next chapter**. At the same time, God restored their temple and their sacrifices, meaning that he had mercy on them. Even as the two animals

belonged to [the Day of Atonement](#) ([Lev 16:3, 9](#)), through them God graciously gave to his people a means of atonement whereby they could be forgiven. For us, he has done this through the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Make sure you do not leave this place without trusting in him for forgiveness and worshiping him in your heart as king.

[Finally](#), in chapter 7, we were made to think about [the end of an age](#), the old covenant with its rules and regulations centered upon the [temple](#). At that time, God delivered the kingdom to the holy ones—his church, as we have not looked back since. But in chapter 8, in going to a fulfillment earlier in history, we are to understand something different. History is both linear *and cyclical*. It is [like a river](#). It eventually ends in the ocean, but upon its banks before that time, it ebbs and flows, rises and lowers according to seasons and change. The setting and the vision of Daniel 8 must teach you the lessons of history.

While it will end one day in Christ's glorious Second Coming, until then, there are [patterns and cycles](#) that repeat themselves. The prophecy of Persia and Greece climaxing in a great persecution of God's people, a disruption of his worship, but a vindication of his glory, has been the pattern of history. Thus, many Christians have seen not only an

initial fulfillment in Antiochus, but **subsequent fulfillments** in Rome, Islam, the Papacy, and the Antichrist.²² I wouldn't say there is more than one fulfillment, but that this one prophecy **is a type** of history. Whether they be Jews before Christ or Christians after, whether it be under Nero or the Holy Roman (Papal) Empire, or Anglican Britain or atheist Russia or China or "Christian" America, this is what we should always prepare for. This prophecy can help us understand and prepare to respond as God's people should.

Take, then, the lesson from the river and the vision. Then say in a deeper way than Longfellow:

*River! that in silence windest
Through the meadows, bright and free,
Till at length thy rest thou findest
In the bosom of the sea!
Four long years of mingled feeling,
Half in rest, and half in strife,
I have seen thy waters stealing
Onward, like the stream of life ...*

²² Samuel Núñez, "The Vision of Daniel 8: Interpretations from 1700 to 1900," Dissertation 113 to Andrews University (1987), <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1112&context=dissertations>.

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