

One of the most important principles I personally hold when interpreting Scripture is this: when the Bible clearly explains what something means, we should accept that meaning as it is given. There are many passages in Scripture where the Bible does not offer a definitive explanation, and in those cases careful interpretation, symbolism, and theological inference are necessary. However, when Scripture provides clarity, our role is not to speculate beyond it. So for this week we don't want to focus on what other meanings there might be but only the ones that are clearly there.

Daniel 8 presents an interesting combination of clarity and mystery. At the beginning of the chapter, Daniel receives a vision involving rams and horns that appears strange and difficult to understand. This confusion is not unique to the reader; Daniel himself does not understand the vision and asks for an explanation. This should reassure us—we are in good company when we struggle to comprehend God's revelation.

Daniel is then given an interpretation of the vision, and it is surprisingly direct and clear. The angel explains precisely what the imagery represents and what will take place in history. Yet even after receiving this clear explanation, Daniel is deeply shaken. The chapter ends with Daniel physically ill and emotionally overwhelmed, still feeling as though he does not fully grasp everything he has witnessed.

This tension—between clarity and overwhelming weight—highlights several important truths.

-The Weight of God's Work in Our Lives

First, God's word and work in our lives can sometimes be overpowering. There have likely been moments in each of our lives, and certainly will be moments in the future, when what God is doing feels overwhelming in the moment. Scripture shows us that such reactions are not signs of failure or weak faith.

In these moments, there is grace. When God works in our lives in ways that emotionally or spiritually overwhelm us—and when we do not respond as we might wish—we can rest in the assurance that God's grace remains. Daniel himself became sick and still felt that he lacked full understanding, yet God did not rebuke him for this response.

-God's Use of Partial Understanding

Second, God sometimes gives us veiled or partial understanding of things He later intends to make clear. God could have spoken plainly to Daniel from the start, but He chose instead to reveal the vision in symbolic form and invite Daniel into a process of seeking understanding.

While we may not fully understand God's reasoning in matters like this, it seems clear that one purpose is relational. God wants His people to come to Him for answers. Even the way God communicates with us is designed to draw us closer to Him.

For that reason, it is worth challenging ourselves to reflect on whether there are areas in our lives where God may be speaking, prompting, or challenging us—perhaps not with full clarity yet, but enough to invite us into deeper dependence on Him. While it is unlikely that an angel like Gabriel will appear to explain things directly, going to God in prayer and obedience often leads to a deepening of faith, even before clarity fully arrives.

-God's Personal Call in Our Lives

Finally, there is a point not directly stated in Daniel 8 but clearly consistent with the broader narrative of Scripture: God desires to speak into the lives of His people. God is unlikely to reveal future world empires to us, but He is continually guiding and directing us regarding the paths our lives will take, shaping who we will become and preparing us for both victories and defeats ahead.

Because of this, we are called to go to Him—even when His prompting seems small or insignificant. What seems minor to us may have a far-reaching impact well beyond what we can see.

An powerful example of this is found in the life of David Brainerd.

David Brainerd lived in colonial America from 1718 to 1747. He was orphaned as a teenager and later expelled from college. Despite these setbacks, he was a deeply devoted believer. At a time when it appeared that nothing was going particularly well in his life, Brainerd sensed a call from God to serve as a missionary to Native American tribes in New England.

He served as a missionary for only four years. During that time, his ministry seemed to have limited visible success and was marked by intense suffering, illness, and isolation. His service was cut short when his health deteriorated so severely that he was forced to stop ministering. He moved into the home of the preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards in an attempt to recover, but he died there at the age of twenty-nine.

By every outward measure, Brainerd appeared to have made little impact for the gospel during his lifetime. He died believing that his obedience had produced only modest results.

Yet after his death, Jonathan Edwards published a memoir of Brainerd's life, suffering, and ministry. That book went on to influence some of the most significant figures in the past 250 years of church and missions history, including:

- Jonathan Edwards
- John Wesley
- George Whitefield

- Thomas Coke
- William Carey
- Henry Martyn
- Adoniram Judson
- David Livingstone
- John G. Paton
- Hudson Taylor
- Charles Spurgeon
- Andrew Bonar
- Jim Elliot
- Nate Saint
- John Piper

Each of these figures cited David Brainerd's life as a significant source of encouragement and influence.

Conclusion

When David Brainerd listened to what God revealed to him, his obedience did not look world-changing. His calling appeared small, uncomfortable, and largely unseen. Yet as time unfolded, his faithfulness became one of the most influential forces in the missions movement and the global church over the past 250 years.

For that reason, when God calls us to do something that seems small, simple, or even uncomfortable, we should not dismiss it, even if the future that God show us is overwhelming. I pray we can all desire to set our hearts as his was and likewise pray to "let me forget the world and be swallowed up in the desire to glorify God." (David Brainerd)