

CULTURE SHOCK
The Beautiful Land and the Beast
Daniel 8

Last week we entered the second half of the book of Daniel, and I am sure that some of you felt like we had moved right into the twilight zone! The first six chapters of Daniel contain some of the most memorable and inspirational human stories that have ever been told, and it is absolutely fun to study. But the final six chapters of Daniel are a collection of mysterious prophecies filled with bizarre images that are difficult to understand. Some of you want to give up and move on to something else, but if you do you will miss out on some of the most important messages in the entire book. And these final chapters are more relevant to today than this morning's newspaper! I want to encourage you to STAY WITH ME in our study. **The study of prophecy will strengthen your faith as it helps you to develop and broaden your biblical WORLDVIEW.** The truth is, we do not often realize that our current worldview is so cluttered by our culture and so LIMITED to our experiences, but the study of prophecy can help to change that. It will help you to hear the news differently each day. It will cause you to pay attention to things that you would otherwise have dismissed as unimportant. **The study of prophecy will force you to become a STUDENT of HISTORY.** You will begin to see how God is at work in the details of the formation of cultures and of nations. Prophecy will teach you to study things that may not satisfy any of your personal needs or wants. It also requires discipline of MIND that forces you to THINK.

But I also want to give you a warning about the study of prophecy. Do not allow it to CONSUME you. Many people over the centuries have "gone to seed" on the study of prophecy and then done some very foolish things. One group in the late 1800's thought that the 2,300 days of Daniel 8 meant 2,300 years, and that Jesus was going to come 2,300 years after the time of Daniel. So a large group of people sold all of their belongings, put on white robes, and waited on a mountaintop for Jesus to return. He never came. But some of those people "refigured" their calculations, and then went on to form groups that became cults. Instead of that extreme, we should follow the example of Daniel after he received his visions. **Daniel 8:27 NLT**

27 Then I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for several days. Afterward I got up and performed my duties for the king, but I was greatly troubled by the vision and could not understand it.

The study of prophecy can be disturbing, as it was to Daniel. But that did not stop him from getting up and performing his duties. Culture shock happens when we stay faithful in our responsibilities even as we wrestle with heavy spiritual realities.

Daniel is filled with prophecies that point to many events that are still unfolding in our generation. That is AMAZING when you consider that he wrote his words down over 2,500 hundred years ago! **But I want you to understand that the study of**

prophecy requires that you know the KEYS that make sense of the seemingly unconnected details of current situations in nations and cultures, and there is one key that stands out in the book of Daniel.

The key to understanding prophecy in the book of Daniel: The nation of Israel.

The book of Daniel is about the sovereignty of God in the GUIDANCE of history. We are headed to our divine destination on this planet, and God is taking us there according to his own timetable. **The nation of Israel is CENTRAL to the unfolding of that plan.** Daniel resumed writing in Hebrew in chapter 8 to reinsert the nation of Israel onto the national scene. Jesus compared the nation of Israel to a fig tree, and he instructed us to keep our eyes on that fig tree as it buds. **This little nation that is no bigger than the state of Rhode Island is on the center stage of world powers. But God wanted Daniel to know what would be happening in kingdoms that would dominate them until the time of Christ.** In chapter 8, Daniel saw a vision of a two-horned RAM being attacked and stomped to death by a swift-moving GOAT that had one enormous horn on its head that was then broken off and replaced by four other horns. Daniel was then given the meaning of the vision: **Daniel 8:20-22 NLT**

20 The two-horned ram represents the kings of Media and Persia. 21 The shaggy male goat represents the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes represents the first king of the Greek Empire. 22 The four prominent horns that replaced the one large horn show that the Greek Empire will break into four kingdoms, but none as great as the first.

If you are a student of history, you will know that Daniel was writing these words some 200 years BEFORE they occurred. **Daniel was writing history in advance.** The first king of the Greek Empire was none other than Alexander the Great. Daniel even wrote in detail about what would happen to this “mighty horn” of Greece: **Daniel 8:8 NLT**

8 The goat became very powerful. But at the height of his power, his large horn was broken off. In the large horn's place grew four prominent horns pointing in the four directions of the earth.

History tells us that Alexander the great died at the age of 32 in the city of Babylon from malaria and complications from alcoholism at the height of his world power. Daniel was spot on about this Greek warrior who would arise from the west! Furthermore, four Greek kings were appointed after him to rule separately over the four major parts of the Greek Empire. **Israel was going to be under the rule of one of these Greek dominions (or horns), the Seleucid Dynasty.**

I think that now is a good time to remind you of two very important facts that should increase your faith. **First, Daniel wrote his prophecies about God's**

redemptive plan for the world when the nation of Israel NO LONGER EXISTED.

Remember, Daniel was an exile in the land of Babylon because Babylon had conquered and destroyed the nation of Israel and its capital city, Jerusalem. The temple had been torn down and the wall of the city had been decimated. The people had all been removed from the land and replaced by the peoples of other conquered lands. In spite of this, Daniel wrote about God's plan to use Israel in the midst of these massive changes that seemed to leave this little nation in the dust. Daniel trusted God for this when it seemed impossible. If God had allowed the nation of Israel to be destroyed forever, then there would have been no way that the MESSIAH could have been born in Bethlehem from the line of David. There would have been no chance for Christ Jesus to fulfill the scores of prophecies that had been given hundreds of years before he walked this earth. **You see, our redemption required the existence of the little nation of Israel. The existence of the nation of Israel is ALSO CRITICAL to the fulfillment of prophecies concerning the END TIMES. That leads me to our second important fact that should have a huge impact on our faith.**

Just 67 years ago, the nation of Israel did not exist! The first time that the nation of Israel ceased to exist was during the lifetime of Daniel. That "diaspora" lasted 70 years. The second "diaspora" was when the Roman general Titus conquered the city of Jerusalem and completely decimated it in 70 A.D., some forty years after the death and resurrection of Christ. The nation of Israel was officially dismantled and discarded on the heaps of past kingdoms for almost 2,000 years! **But God's plan for the world as revealed through his prophets (and through the words of Christ) still included "the Beautiful Land."** The prophet Isaiah clearly predicted a second rebirth of the nation of Israel. **Isaiah 66:8 ESV**

8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children.

On May 14, 1948, Israel (led by a group called the Zionist Movement) submitted its Declaration of Independence to the newly formed Council of United Nations. It was officially accepted by a majority of U.N. nations, including the United States, on that same day! The world witnessed the miracle of the birth of a nation that had not existed for almost 2,000 years in a SINGLE DAY. On the very next day, a coalition of several Arab nations renewed their attack on the land of Israel in an attempt to "drive them into the sea!" They failed. Just for the fun of it, I have printed the final official statement that is found in Israel's Declaration of Independence:

PLACING OUR TRUST IN THE "ROCK OF ISRAEL", WE AFFIX OUR SIGNATURES TO THIS PROCLAMATION AT THIS SESSION OF THE PROVISIONAL COUNCIL OF STATE, ON THE SOIL OF THE HOMELAND, IN THE CITY OF TEL-AVIV, ON THIS SABBATH EVE, THE 5TH DAY OF IYAR, 5708 (14TH MAY, 1948).

The modern nation of Israel is mostly secular, but it is amazing that the only phrase that they could agree on for their official document (“Rock of Israel”) was one that could either refer to the land or to God himself. I am sure that almost none of them were referring to Christ Jesus, the Rock of our Salvation. God is sovereign. Pay attention! Israel is now on the news nearly every day as the nations grumble and grind up against one another on the world scene. We are living in the Last Days!

In the midst of Daniel’s prophecies, there is also a prominent personality that keeps arising that has a violent hostility toward God’s people and toward the Holy Land. **We know that person as the Anti-Christ.** Perhaps no figure in literature is more intriguing – or more frightening – than this one that is written about in several different books of the Bible. He is only referred to as the Anti-Christ in the book of Revelation. In Daniel, he is called “a master of intrigue,” a “despicable man,” “a fierce king,” “the prince who is to come,” “the one who makes desolation,” “the willful king, and “a little horn.” In the book of Revelation, John calls him “the Beast.” Daniel’s prophecies brought this being to light by his revelation of a first foreshadowing of the ultimate Anti-Christ who was to come. The Apostle John wrote about this truth in this way: **1 John 2:18 NLT**

18 Dear children, the last hour is here. You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and already many such antichrists have appeared. From this we know that the last hour has come.

Chapter 8 of Daniel is the account of the first TYPE of “anti-christ” who would arise as a persecutor of the people of God. **Daniel 8:9-12 NLT**

9 Then from one of the prominent horns came a small horn whose power grew very great. It extended toward the south and the east and toward the glorious land of Israel. 10 Its power reached to the heavens, where it attacked the heavenly army, throwing some of the heavenly beings and some of the stars to the ground and trampling them. 11 It even challenged the Commander of heaven's army by canceling the daily sacrifices offered to him and by destroying his Temple. 12 The army of heaven was restrained from responding to this rebellion. So the daily sacrifice was halted, and truth was overthrown. The horn succeeded in everything it did.

This demonic man became known in history as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Greek ruler of the Seleucid dynasty in 175 B.C. He had a particular hatred for the Jewish people, and he was known for his ruthless treatment of Jews in his day. He attacked and burned Jerusalem in 170 B.C., he killed many religious and political Jewish leaders, and he desecrated the temple in Jerusalem. He is the one that set up a statue of Zeus by the altar in the temple, and then had pig’s blood smeared on the altar to desecrate it! Then he forced the Jews to worship Zeus or be killed.

At this point, I want to make it clear just WHY God allowed Daniel to see these visions. You see, once the people of God were restored to the land (after the decree of Cyrus and the rebuilding of the temple and the walls in Jerusalem), they needed to be warned that intense persecution was going to come against them in their own land in an effort to undermine and overthrow their faith through DECEPTION and FORCE. This is how the Anti-Christ (and his types) were going to operate. Daniel's prophecy was a warning to God's people that would serve to encourage them to STAND UP AGAINST this agent of Satan. Many of the Jewish people who lived during the time of Antiochus FAILED to stand up against his trickery. They began to incorporate the worship of other gods in with the worship of Yahweh (just as their forefathers had done in their idolatry), and they lost their faith. However, the Maccabees (a group of faithful Jews who lived during Antiochus IV's brutal reign) revolted against this godless king and fought against his deceit and his abuse of power. Listen to this commentary on that age: Antiochus had an extraordinarily love of art, which expressed itself in grand temples. He wished to substitute Zeus Olympius for Jehovah at Jerusalem. Identifying himself with Jupiter, his aim was to make his own worship universal (compare Dan 8:25);The coins of Antiochus Epiphanes were inscribed with this title: *theos epiphanies* meaning, "God manifest." None of the previous world rulers, Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:31-34), Darius (Dan 6:27, 28), Cyrus (Ezz 1:2-4), Artaxerxes Longimanus (Ezz 7:12), had systematically opposed the Jews' religious worship. Hence the need of prophecy to prepare them for Antiochus. The struggle of the Maccabees was a fruit of Daniel's prophecy (1 Maccabees 2:59). The sins in Israel which gave rise to the Greek Antichrist were that some Jews adopted Hellenic customs (compare Dan 11:30, 32), erecting theaters, and regarding all religions alike, sacrificing to Jehovah, but at the same time sending money for sacrifices to Hercules. Such shall be the state of the world when ripe for Antichrist. [Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown]

Satan loves for us to WATER DOWN our faith by degrees. We must not allow that to happen. We cannot put the worship of God on level with the worship of anything else, whether that is another god or some pursuit that takes our affection and focus off of God. That is the AIM of the Anti-Christ. From that point, he can easily deceive us into falling into his evil schemes. Like the Maccabees of old, we must be willing to **stand for our faith** and **SHOCK OUR CULTURE**, whether that means fighting temptations to lessen our devotion to God, or refusing to worship other gods beside the Lord. **Remember, we know that Satan's kingdom will FALL.** God foreshadowed this in the destruction of Antiochus IV. Amazingly, Daniel predicted just exactly how long the brutal reign of Antiochus IV would actually last.

Daniel 8:13-14 NLT

13 Then I heard two holy ones talking to each other. One of them asked, "How long will the events of this vision last? How long will the rebellion that causes desecration stop the daily sacrifices? How long will the Temple and heaven's army be trampled on?" 14 The other replied, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the Temple will be made right again."

The reckoning of these 2,300 “evenings and mornings” is based on Antiochus IV’s first incursion into Jerusalem in 170 B.C. The Maccabees rose up against this vile ruler in revolt in 167 B.C. when he desecrated the temple, and they successfully restored the temple by 164 B.C., exactly 2,300 days after Antiochus had invaded Jerusalem. Antiochus IV died insane of a gruesome disease in Persia in 163 B.C. Jews celebrate their success over this violent persecutor in the Feast of Hanukkah every December all over the world. Jesus proclaimed that he was the Light of the World during this Feast of Lights in his time.

Of course, Antiochus IV Epiphanes was not the only anti-christ that has ever lived. [You see, we must remember that Satan does not know the exact time when Jesus Christ will return to this earth any more than we do! So, he must in a sense have his “man” ready in every generation.](#) We have seen this over the centuries since the time of Christ. The Roman Emperors Nero and Domitian were known for their persecution of Jews and Christians. Nero impaled them on stakes and set them on fire to light up Roman roads at night. Early on in the dark ages, the Muslim faith began to take a firm grip on Europe and the Middle East. There has been one constant reality throughout the reign of power of the Muslims: the persecution of Jews and Christians. This continues on even in our day. What groups are being slaughtered by ISIS in our day? Christians and Jews! This is the spirit of the Anti-Christ that is still yet to come.

We have also seen Hitler’s attacks on Jews and Christians. He showed no mercy to either of these classes of people. At one time, many thought that Hitler was actually the Anti-Christ because of his brutal treatment of the Jews, and because of his insistence that he was a god. In one of his famous speeches at Nuremburg, a giant banner was unfurled that contained a huge portrait of Hitler with a caption beneath it that read: “In the beginning was the Word.” Hitler was certainly a type of anti-Christ. [Anti can mean “against” or “instead of.” Hitler was seeking to EXTERMINATE the Jewish people, and exalt himself; but God actually used that very thing to give rise to the ultimate creation of the Jewish nation in our day because of the sympathy that it invoked among other nations!](#) God is sovereign. Even so, right now the ruler of Syria (which is the ancient domain of the Seleucids!) and of Iran (which is ancient Persia) is killing Christians and plotting to wipe out Israel.

We have much more to study about the Anti-Christ in other messages to come in Daniel, but I want us to finish today with the proper perspective. **You see, Satan is anxious to put his own plan into motion.** [I love the fact that he is restrained by the power and plan of God in what he can do!](#) But now - like Daniel - we must continue to believe and preach that God’s plan is on track, and that our Lord and Savior will soon return to bring all things to their glorious conclusion even as evil increases. This is why I want us to keep the perspective of Daniel about WHERE to look when everything looks hopeless. [Daniel looked toward the broken land of Israel with absolute trust in the Rock of Israel.](#) We must do the same thing, even as we know MORE than Daniel did in his day. We know that the Messiah has already come, and that he will soon come again. This is the key to our eternal perspective:

Satan is waiting for the opportunity to reveal his Anti-Christ, but we must be watching for the return of the One, True Christ!

We have seen the rebirth of the nation of Israel in our time, and we who are paying attention are fully aware that we are living in the LAST DAYS. We are not called to look for the coming of the Anti-Christ, but we are instructed to keep our eyes on Jesus! Do not allow yourself to be drawn in and deceived by the immoral and perverse spirit of the Anti-Christ in our current culture. Instead, listen to the words of our brother in Christ, the Apostle Paul: **Titus 2:12-13 NLT**

12 And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, 13 while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed.

We are to set our sights on the return of Christ Jesus. We are to live in the light of his presence within us even as we look for his glorious and victorious return to this earth. We should also PRAY for God to hasten his mighty work in the land of Israel. Pray that our leaders will stand with this little nation rather than against it! And pray that Jesus will come again soon. [We are told that we can pray this in Revelation!] Whenever he comes, we know that we are on the side of VICTORY! My heart is fixed, and my mind is clear about the sovereignty of God and the soon return of Jesus Christ to this earth. How about you?

Let's pray.