

Daniel 8,9 and 10 Further Revelation

Some people stop reading the book of Daniel after ch6 and the lions' den. The visions which make up the second half of the book seem strange and difficult to understand. Great scholars have debated for centuries the exact interpretation of certain details. So many folk don't bother trying.

This is a pity because the Lord Jesus quotes from these chapters in the Gospels and the new Testament apostles speak on these same themes. John's book of Revelation uses some of the same imagery. Challenging as it is, this section of Daniel is key in understanding the rest of the Bible and the rest of history!

It helps to remember that Biblical prophecy like this works in more than one way. Passages like these often find specific fulfilment in history but this isn't all. They give patterns that are often repeated in various times and places. And they point forward to God fulfilling His ultimate purposes of judgement, salvation and restoration through Jesus Christ, much of which is still to take place in the future.

So let me summarise chs 8,9 and 10 under these three headings of Specific Prediction, Realistic Perspective and Future Hope.

Firstly Specific Prediction, and with the benefit of historical hindsight we are amazed to see how Daniel, writing in the 6th century BC is inspired to accurately foresee not just the overthrow of Babylon by Medo-Persia but the overthrow of that empire by the rapid expansion of Greece from the west under Alexander the Great 200 years later. More amazing still, he is given to see Alexander's power suddenly ended and his territory divided in four and from one of these smaller kingdoms a particular ruler violently persecute the Jews in Jerusalem.

Historians confirm how Alexander died suddenly aged just 32 and his vast empire was divided between his four generals. One of these founded the Seleucid kingdom one of whose kings, Antiochus IV defiled the temple and brutally slaughtered God's people.

We shouldn't be surprised. Hadn't God spoken previously through prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, predicting Jerusalem would be overthrown and its idolatrous people deported to Babylon for a seventy year exile? Daniel was one of these deportees, leaving his home city Jerusalem as a teenager and living now as a man in his late eighties in Babylon.

These specific predictions are clearly accurate and they show that the Bible should be trusted. God is true to His Word. We are wise to pay heed!

These passages are also applicable more widely. They give us a Realistic Perspective on human government and society in every place and age. The human pride and cruel abuse shown by Antiochus IV have been seen again and again over the centuries often bringing strife and bloodshed. We human beings build great cities and celebrate great achievements but frequently idolise ourselves and our things instead of acknowledging God. Spiritual darkness is usually accompanied by moral corruption, descending quickly into unsafe, abusive culture and society. What an irony - we boast of our identity by practising perversity and cruelty!

Those who fondly imagine we are progressing or evolving into something nice and wonderful are fooling themselves. Better to believe the Word of God that has always taught that while human beings are wonderfully made in God's image we are also 'fallen' and spoiled by the sinful bias of our hearts. This is why we need to be saved and made new by God's grace.

It might be good at this point to pause and note Daniel's response to these dramatic revelations. Far from being smug and full of himself he is quite overwhelmed. This knowledge is heavy to bear!

And more. When he understands from the writings of earlier prophets like Jeremiah that with the coming to power of the Persian ruler Cyrus their exile may actually be coming to an end, he doesn't throw a party. Nor does he shrug his shoulders in apathy as if to say, God will do whatever He wants anyway. He humbles himself to pray more earnestly than ever, confessing his sin and the sin of his people and pleading for God to glorify Himself in showing mercy and forgiveness.

How different from the casual attitudes we often hear expressed today, mocking religion and saying as long as we don't rob a bank or murder someone we'll be fine. If there's a God, He is all love so let's be nice and tolerant and everything will be alright. On what planet???

Things are clearly not alright with human society and while God is more loving than we could imagine He is also holy and there will be a Day of Judgement and we do well to learn from the wisdom of people like Daniel who *humble* themselves before the Lord.

Daniel's faithful devotion to God is rewarded in ch10 with another vision in which he is touched and comforted by the Lord Jesus. And here we are given the third aspect of Biblical prophecy, Future Hope. Chapters 11 and 12 will soberly predict increasing wickedness and global crisis and that things as we've known them will come to an end. However, despite human moral failure and at

times outright blasphemous rebellion, Almighty God will carry through His plan of judgement and salvation, centred on the Lord Jesus.

Ch 9 gives an amazingly accurate prediction of His crucifixion, assuring us that sin will be atoned for and everlasting righteousness brought in. However our Saviour is so much more than a hero who died long ago. He appears to Daniel very much alive, in heavenly majesty, commanding angels and restraining evil powers.

Angels like Gabriel and Michael feature in these visions but this figure in ch10 is not one of them. We might compare John's description of the risen Lord Jesus in Revelation 1. This is God the eternal Son Who lives and reigns with the Father and the Spirit, One God forever! Yet wonderfully He touches and encourages His frightened servant, giving Daniel peace and new strength.

Our Lord and Master holds the whole world in His all-powerful and love-scarred hands. The Son of Man will build His Church and the gates of hell will not prevail. His kingdom will be universal and everlasting. The future belongs to Him and those who obediently trust and follow Him!