



Daniel 8:15-27

It Is Always Darkest Before Dawn

15 Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly 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, who called, and said, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision."

17 So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end."

18 Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright.

19 And he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be.

20 "The ram which you saw, having the two horns -- they are the kings of Media and Persia.

21 "And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king.

22 "As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power.

23 " And in the latter time of their kingdom, When the transgressors have reached their fullness, A king shall arise, Having fierce features, Who understands sinister schemes.

24 His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; He shall destroy fearfully, And shall prosper and thrive; He shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people.

25 "Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; And he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; But he shall be broken without human means.

26 "And the vision of the evenings and mornings Which was told is true; Therefore seal up the vision, For it refers to many days in the future."

27 And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.

Last week we took a look at the big picture behind this prophecy given to Daniel in verses 1-14, we read of how in the last year of the Babylonian empire God had taken Daniel in a vision far to the East to the city of Susa, and showed him using pictures and symbols, what God was going to do in the future - how He was raising up this Ram, the Persian empire which would be his hand of judgment on Babylon, and then after that he would raise up a Goat, that was the Greek Empire of Alexander the great and that would destroy the Ram, and then after Alexander began to compare himself to God, God would snap his power like a dry twig and in his place would come 4 horns which were 4 kingdoms, and after that a little horn the terrible and wicked king Antiochus Epiphanes who would afflict the people of God and desecrate the Temple for many years until his power was broken as well.

But now as we read this section, I want us to focus on the application of these things to us as believers on a personal level. Because this vision wasn't given just to prepare the visible church for Antiochus, it was given to teach all believers about the nature of these little horns, these anti-Christ, to help them to endure their time, and the kind of culture they engender, and to prepare the final generation of believers for the coming of the man of lawlessness, the beast, the BIG A – Antichrist.

As these verses open, Daniel wants an explanation for what is going on, and the God who knows the desires of his heart doesn't want to leave him in the dark, so a voice commands the archangel Gabriel to explain the vision to him. Calvin is sure that the voice that Daniel hears is the Pre-incarnate Christ, because who else can command even the mightiest of the Angels, and I tend to agree with him.

Daniel is terrified at his approach and he essentially passes out, now if this is how a strong Christian reacted in the presence of an angel, it should tell us something about how impossible it would be for a sinful man to stand in the presence of a Holy God! Gabriel essentially picks him up dusts him off, and explains what is going to happen at the "latter time of the indignation" this is a reference not to the end of the world, but of the end of the time of God's indignation with the Jews and the afflictions such as the exile that accompanied it. The things that were to come before the first coming of the Messiah and the end of the OT period. Now if you have a Schofield reference bible, you know that Schofield thought this was all about the end of the world. But we know that isn't true, because the time periods are spelled out for us – Persia, Greece, the Four Kingdoms, and then Antiochus arising out of Syria, tormenting Israel, and then being destroyed by God Himself. ***A lot of commentators are kind of amazed in that while they expect Schofield to try to correct all the reformed exposition that went before his time, they are amazed that he would also try to correct Gabriel.***

Anyway as these verses make clear, Antiochus Epiphanes was a sinister schemer, a deceitful man, and he was crafty in the way he attempted to overthrow the worship of the living God. First he did it through cultural influence. He wanted his empire to have one culture and one religion that he would be at the center of.

Almost every Antichrist has attempted to do that, Stalin with his program of Russianization and the spread of Communism, Napoleon who attempted to bring the philosophy of the French Revolution to every state in Europe, Hitler with his Pagan vision of an Aryan Nordic peoples empire. Muhammad with his vision of one world-wide Dar-El-Islam. Now what are these anti-christ's doing? They are creating a counterfeit kingdom of God, where instead of Christ at the center, these men who style themselves as Gods are at the center. That's one thing about the Devil, the best he can do is pervert the true and the good. He can create nothing.

But the Israel and the Jewish people stood in the way of that. So his aim was to corrupt the culture of the people of God, to Hellenize them (*Hellenic* means Greek incidentally), to replace a Jewish culture based on the teaching of the Bible with a Greek culture, based on humanism and Greek religion.

So he initially spread Hellenism by using Hellenized Jews, men who had forgotten the God of their fathers and were eager to advance in the brave new world that Antiochus was peddling. Through those men, he introduced Greek culture, Greek thinking, he even mandated Greek sports, and he aimed at the youth, he knew that if he could train up a few generations of Hellenized Jews he could break the chain whereby the faith is transmitted from parent to child and bring Israel to that terrible point where she forgot her God and his Law once again. But this campaign was not entirely successful, he found he could only go so far, you can corrupt those who are externally in the church, but he found out that the

Lord preserves His elect, those who are genuinely converted. So Antiochus gradually got more repressive, there was a death penalty for circumcising your children which applied to both the mother and the child. The Scriptures were banned, the Sabbath was eliminated, Hebrew was replaced with Koine Greek, and the only religion that was acceptable was a Hellenized corrupt version of Jewish religion. They even erected a Statue of Zeus in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Troops went from village to village enforcing these edicts, and many tens of thousands of Jews who resisted Hellenization died during this period, others gave in. Finally in 167 Antiochus's soldiers came to a town called Modein North of Jerusalem in which an old Priest by the name of Matthias dwelt with his sons, Matthias was well respected and they tried to get him to sacrifice the pig to Zeus himself. He refused to do so, reportedly saying – ***“Even if every nation obeys [the King], each forsaking its ancestral religion to conform to his decrees, I, my sons and my brothers will still follow the covenant of our ancestors. May Heaven preserve us from forsaking the Law and its observances. As for the king's orders, we will not follow them: we shall not swerve from our own religion either to right or to left.”*** (1 Maccabees 2:19-22)

As a Levite stepped forward to take his place, Matthias enraged, killed the apostate Jew and then the king's representative, and then he and his sons took to the hills to begin an amazingly successful Guerilla war against the forces of Antiochus's generals. Matthias died and was succeeded by one of his son Judah Maccabee – Judah the Hammer. He and His rebels were always outnumbered and out equipped, but they won battle after battle, and eventually in 164 BC Judah was able to enter the Holy City and cleanse and rededicate the Temple, exactly as Daniel had prophesied down to the day.

When they rededicated the temple, they had only enough oil for the Candelabrum for one day, they sent for more, but that one day's supply lasted for eight days until fresh oil could be brought. That event is what the Jews still celebrate as “Hanukkah” the festival of lights or festival of rededication to this day, lighting a candle on the Menorah for each of the eight days the oil lasted.

One year later, in keeping with the prophecy of verse 25 - ***He shall be broken without human means*** - Antiochus died through a mysterious disease returning from Persia in 163 BC. Just as was the case with Alexander before him, God reached out and snapped him like a dry twig.

What can you personally learn from this –

First that the spirit of antichrist is not stupid it is quite shrewd – it begins not with open warfare on the people of God, but with the corruption of the society and the church, and the degree to which men embrace that corruption is the degree to which they are applauded by the culture. The same spirit of antichrist at work in our own culture is working in exactly the same way. Think about it,

Antiochus banned the scriptures from society, we live in a time when the Bible and the teaching of it is virtually banned in the public square, We will defend any obscenity under the first amendment, but a high school valedictorian better not mention Jesus or what he taught.

Antiochus eliminated the Sabbath, today we are watching the Lord's Day disappear from public recognition, and the CHURCH AND HER MINISTERS ARE HELPING IN THAT PROCESS!

Antiochus used sports in particular to aid in that process. By his edict, the Sabbath became a day for wrestling and hurling the discus. Antichrists have always used sports that way.

In 1633 Charles I, in order to fight against the growing Puritan Revival and Reformation in England, issued his Declaration of Sports stating that various sports and dances and feasts were all acceptable Sunday recreations. He commanded that it be read by the ministers in every church, and threatened that if they did not they would be removed from their positions, one Puritan minister at the end of the service held up the declaration and said "The King commands that I must read this pronouncement, but he does not command that you must hear it" so he dismissed the people and read the kings declaration to an empty church.

Today we not only have the big obvious Lord's Day Sport of Football, we are seeing the profusion of youth leagues that play on Sunday and so.

Antiochus Corrupted the Religion of the Jews, and replaced it with a Hellenized abomination. Today Christianity is being overwhelmed by modernity. The Liberal church simply parrots whatever the liberal wing of the culture says. But as evangelicals we are being eaten up ourselves by the politicization of the church, and the cultural corruption of our worship, the loss of our theology. In our religion, God is getting smaller and smaller, and man is getting bigger and bigger. It's all about us.

Now Brothers and Sisters, the second use of that was that those things were only the beginning of his campaign. But I'm sure the Jews looking at these things must have said, this is as bad as it gets, it can't get worse than this!

It has always been the case that Christians have looked around at the state of their society and concluded that the end must come soon. Things are just too bad, society is too lawless, persecution too severe, things cannot possibly get worse, Christ must come back now. For instance, reflecting on the state of affairs in his own time, Martin Luther wrote in 1538 "The world cannot stand long, perhaps a hundred years at the outside." But it got worse for those Jews, and it will get worse for us, before it will get better.

So what do we do?

1) Resist this first series of steps – this is the time when the chaff begins to get swept away. The people who love the world more than Christ, the men whose true heart Idol is sports and not God are lost now,

It is the time when "they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have **itching ears**, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

4 and they will turn *their ears* away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

But you will only do that if you love Christ more than the world – **1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

16 For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world.

2) Know that it will get worse, and prepare for that, the spirit of antichrist that is already abroad in the world will get worse, if he can't break you by assimilation he will attack you directly, even to the point as was the case under Antiochus and then Rome and then Islam and then Communism that your worship will be driven underground. Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. Follow the example of the underground church in China. Be willing to go on meeting, baptizing your children,

evangelizing even to the point of death. If you think you cannot, remember the words of Paul from prison, ***Phil. 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."***

3) Remember always, that it is darkest before dawn, the power of Antiochus seemed unstoppable, but the same God who raises up kings, swept him out of the way with the back of his hand. So remain true to your first love, and know that when it seems darkest, the Son is about to rise upon you with healing in his wings, He shall triumph, and you will be more than conquerors in that day through Him who loved us.