

The Rise and Fall of the Second Persecuting Little Horn

Daniel 8:15-27

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The British historian, Lord Acton, wrote in a letter (1887) what has been quoted many times, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." That was certainly true of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Those who rise to power in a nation seldom consider their own end because their lust for power overwhelms them, and they are more concerned with satisfying their own greed than realizing there is coming a day of accountability in which they will be judged by the King of all kings for their corruption and abuse of authority. It would be good if rulers were walked through a cemetery of past rulers to reflect on their own mortality that they might rule in the fear of the Lord as God's ministers for the good of the people.

Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC) ranks among the most cruel and beastly rulers of the ancient world in his monstrous attacks upon the Jewish people of the second century before Christ. His rise was great and his fall was even greater. He saw God's judgment in his fall. His fall is a lesson to all leaders and a lesson to us all.

Our main points are: (1) The Rise of the Second Persecuting Little Horn (Daniel 8:15-25); and (2) The Fall of the Second Persecuting Little Horn (Daniel 8:25-27).

I. The Rise of the Second Persecuting Little Horn (Daniel 8:15-25).

A. We have gained a sneak preview of the second persecuting Little Horn (Antiochus Epiphanes) thus far in our study of Daniel's vision in Daniel 8. We now gain a more complete picture of the rise and fall of this beastly ruler in amazing fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

B. The vision is interpreted for Daniel (Daniel 8:15-19).

1. Daniel has at this point only seen the vision, but now seeks to know its meaning; and there appears before him in human form, the angel Gabriel, who is commanded by "a human voice" to interpret the vision for Daniel (likely the Lord Jesus, the WORD, John 1:1).

2. Daniel falls prostrate to the ground—not in worship, but in fear as Gabriel approaches him (Daniel 8:17). Daniel's reaction of fear before Gabriel is the result of Daniel grasping God's holiness reflected in Gabriel. This was the reaction of even sinners saved by God's grace who come face-to-face with a holy God (Isaiah 6:5; Luke 2:9; Revelation 1:17).

a. To approach God with a light and casual attitude only reveals that we don't truly know the holy God we claim to worship. Even our joy is a holy joy, not an irreverent laughing contest.

b. Without a holy Jesus, there would be no gracious Jesus, for a sacrifice acceptable to God for sin required a holy sacrifice—a perfect life of obedience (which is imputed to us by faith alone). There is no grace and no joy without holiness.

3. Gabriel caused Daniel to stand up and then began to interpret the vision for Daniel.

C. Gabriel identified the kingdoms in the vision (Daniel 8:20-22).

1. The ram with two horns is the Medo-Persian Empire.

2. The he goat (rough/hairy goat) is the Grecian Empire.

3. The great horn is the first king (Alexander the Great).

4. The breaking of the great horn is the death of Alexander.

5. The four horns that then appear are the four kingdoms that arise after Alexander's

death—not in the power of Alexander: (1) Greece/Macedonia; (2) Asia Minor/Thrace; (3) Egypt, and (4) Syria.

D. Gabriel then identified the rise and the beastly reign of the Little Horn that became great (Daniel 8:23-25).

1. The CHARACTER of the Little Horn (Daniel 8:23).

a. Antiochus arose “in the latter time” of the Grecian Empire (the Syrian branch) as Rome was ascending to worldwide power (1 Maccabees 1:10).

b. His rise to power is timed by God to bring judgment “when transgressors are come to the full” (reached their fullness). This refers to Jewish transgressors that fell away from the true religion God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This would be a time of great apostasy with many Jews who would embrace the immoral culture and false religion of the Greeks. Antiochus became the scourge in God’s hand to judge apostate Jews and at the same time to test and build up the faith of true believers in the Lord God (1 Maccabees 1:11-15).

c. Antiochus was indeed “a king of fierce countenance” (i.e. stern/severe outlook against the Jews). He was cruel, violent, and monstrous in his treatment of the Jews (1 Maccabees 1:60-61). Their faithfulness to the Lord and His truth was a personal insult to him.

d. Antiochus was one “understanding dark sentences” (which likely refers to his dark and hidden acts of deceit). He was absent of all integrity or honesty in coming to the throne and in waging war against the Jews. By deceit he ascended to the throne and became “mighty” by intrigue. By sedition he secured the death of his father (Antiochus III) and his elder brother (Seleucus IV); and by fraud he stole the kingdom from his nephew (Demetrius), right heir to the throne. He held the kingdom (especially at the outset) by the help of King Eumenes II of Pergamum. He then proclaimed himself as co-regent with another of the sons of his brother, 5-year old Antiochus, whom he later murdered in order to gain sole power. He was a snake.

2. The SUCCESS of the Little Horn (Daniel 8:24).

a. He started off as a little horn, actually as an hostage in Rome (due to the condition of a treaty which his father made when he was defeated by the Romans), but by deceit and intrigue gained the throne (not “by his own power”—not by his own military strength, but by intrigue, sedition, fraud, and murder—by the help of King Eumenes II).

b. Antiochus prospered and destroyed the mighty as he expanded his kingdom south (to Egypt), east (to Babylon, Armenia, and to the Persian Gulf), and to “the pleasant land” (the holy land—particularly Judea). Especially, he destroyed the “holy people” of God in the holy land (until the very end when God gave victory to His people through the Maccabees). He mercilessly slaughtered the Jews in Jerusalem and throughout the Holy Land (2 Maccabees 5:12-14).

3. The POLICY of the Little Horn (Daniel 8:25a).

a. Antiochus was successful in his military conquests, but he was notorious for his deceitful policies (traitor—Judas; deceiver—Antiochus). We have already noted how he came to power by way of deceit, and his deceit only carried him further, especially in his treatment of God’s people (1 Maccabees 1:30; 2 Maccabees 5:24-26).

b. Certainly, Antiochus “magnified himself in his heart” and in the name he took for himself, Antiochus IV *Theos Epiphanes* (God manifest in the flesh—this is only true of Jesus Christ, 1 Timothy 3:16).

II. The Fall of the Second Persecuting Little Horn (Daniel 8:25-27).

A. Where the fall of Antiochus BEGINS and ENDS.

1. The fall of Antiochus BEGINS with his war against the Prince of princes (Daniel 8:25b).

a. Antiochus was not simply greedy for more power in his conquests of other

kingdoms, but turned his greed to be like Jehovah God and to force God's people to worship him and the gods of the Greeks, then the battle with the Lord Jesus (the Prince of princes) became a very personal battle to destroy the Lord, His Word, His doctrine, His worship, His temple, and His faithful people. Antiochus took it as a personal insult that God's faithful people would not obey him, submit to him, and worship him; and from that point on Antiochus was engaged in a personal crusade to destroy the Prince of princes (Jeremiah 10:7—King of nations; Revelation 1:5—Prince of the kings of the earth; Revelation 19:16—King of kings; Daniel 9:26—Messiah the Prince). The high priest is never called "the prince of princes" in Scripture, nor are there any examples of priests being called princes.

b. Like Belshazzar (Daniel 5) who personally warred against Jehovah by bringing out the holy vessels taken from God's temple in Jerusalem and mocking Jehovah God at a drunken party, so likewise did Antiochus Epiphanes personally war against Jehovah in the desecration of God's temple (2 Maccabees 6:4-6). To war against the Lord and His people is to fight a losing battle (as Belshazzar and Antiochus both learned). To treat with contempt that which God calls holy (as did Belshazzar and Antiochus) is to pick a fight with Almighty God. Antiochus lived to regret it. Let us battle the world, the flesh, and the devil with all that is in us. But let us not battle God over what He has brought into our lives by way of trials, afflictions, delays, and heartaches. It is not a battle that any of us can win. The sooner we submit to His lordship, the sooner we will find His holy joy, peace, and contentment.

2. The fall of Antiochus ENDS by being "broken without hand" (Daniel 8:25c).

a. Antiochus learned the hard way that it is futile to war against Messiah the Prince. The Roman emperor, Julian the Apostate, turned from Christianity to embark upon a war against Christ, and as he died from a battle wound, he cried out, "Thou hast won, O Galilean."

b. Likewise, it would seem that Antiochus had similar thoughts in his painful suffering at the time of his death. 2 Maccabees 9 speaks of God striking Antiochus with worms (like Herod in Acts 9). 1 Maccabees 6 states that he also died from depression over the victory of the Maccabees in defeating his general and rededicating the temple. Antiochus lost the war he fought against the Lord as will anyone else who does so (2 Maccabees 9:9-12). As Daniel 9:25c declares, Antiochus was "broken without hand" (without human hand, but by God's hand).

3. Gabriel tells Daniel that the vision is true (indeed it is), and that it is to be "shut up" or preserved for it shall not be fulfilled "for many days" (Daniel 8:26). It would yet be about 375 years until the fulfillment.

4. The impact of the vision and its interpretation was great upon Daniel (Daniel 8:27). May God so stir our hearts as we read it and hear it His Word that we would not be indifferent or apathetic to it, but would be thoroughly affected and changed by it. Daniel and others to whom he described it were unable to understand all the details. Let us not be discouraged when we likewise struggle to understand it all. God opens our mind as we love and obey what we do understand. It's not the parts of Scripture that I don't understand that I struggle with, but the parts that I do understand that convict me and humble me.

B. Application

1. God's longsuffering with sin will reach its fullness in a nation, in a church, in a family, and in individual lives. It's mistaken to think that God tolerates sin (closes His eye to it, sweeps it under the carpet, etc.). Toleration of evil is the promotion of evil which God does not do (and neither should we). Whereas God's longsuffering with evil should lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Let us not test God.

2. Proud rulers that make war against the Lord Jesus, the Prince of princes, will come face to face (now or at death) with the realization that they have lost (and will suffer for all eternity in hell). Let that also be a lesson to all who think they can win against Jesus Christ. Jesus reigns now and will conquer all His and our enemies. That is ever our hope (just as the Lord won against Antiochus and strengthened the few Maccabees to restore and rededicate the true religion). Jesus prevailed in making the capital of Antiochus

(Antioch) the base for Paul's missionary trips into Asia and Europe. Believers in Christ were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Jesus is King, but He is a Savior of infinite mercy. Come to Him and bow before Him in receiving Him as Savior and Lord. Stop fighting a battle you cannot win.

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