

Once Upon Elam

By Steve Schmutzer

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Two years ago, the adult Sunday school class I teach voted to start a new study in the book of Daniel. I was wrapping up a year-long study in Jude, and several options were under discussion for where we might go next.

As I recall, it was the Daniel option I was most anxious about. It is a pivotal book of the Bible insofar as prophetic issues are concerned. I knew it contained information that had elicited much debate among reputable scholars, and it would be no easy task to wade into this book's imposing content. A healthy part of me was quietly rooting for the class to pick an easier study.

No such luck.

Yesterday, I taught Lesson #100 in our study of "The Book of Daniel." We've just started chapter eight. At this pace, we'll finish this study roughly midway through President Trump's second term.

What a blessing this study in Daniel has become to me and to so many others! Though I've been teaching this class at my church for about ten years, this is the first study we've recorded and posted online. Those lesson audios are available at www.thewordwithsteve.com.

The first half of the book of Daniel is a truly inspiring character study. Daniel was chosen by God at a young age to be tested by profound trials, and to live a life of humility in a foreign and pagan land. I'm convinced we can all learn a great deal about character from Daniel's example.

It's the second half of Daniel that forms the bedrock of much of Biblical prophecy, and it presents the evident themes of Gentile empires, the antichrist, the Tribulation, Armageddon, the end of the world, and the Millennial Kingdom. Some not-so-evident prophetic themes may also be present including matters pertinent to the Nephilim, and possibly some references to UFOs.

I try not to be agenda-driven. While I have my own opinions based upon my years of reading and research, my goal with each lesson in this in-depth study of Daniel is to forthrightly present what I believe the text is telling us.

To do this, I must consider the totality of the Scriptures. It's easy to find one verse or phrase and camp on that to the exclusion of other passages that speak to the same subject. My intent in this study is to gather in the greater context of God's Word and present the collective view via the lens of the book of Daniel.

And so it was when I came to the little-understood province of Elam in the opening verses of Daniel chapter eight. This obscure bit of geography is located along and above the northeastern

edge of the Persian Gulf, and nearly all of Biblical Elam lies within modern-day Iran. In the time of Daniel chapter eight, Elam was part of the Babylonian empire's territory.

In this chapter, Daniel is transported in a vision to Elam. Physically, he is probably in Babylon as Daniel 8:27 suggests, but God supernaturally overcomes his senses and comprehensions and relocates them to the palace of Susa in Elam. Daniel's perception was his reality. He perceived himself to be in a place roughly 250 miles east of Babylon.

So what's the big deal with Elam? Well – plenty, in my personal opinion. God's sovereign plan concerning the Jews finds Elam taking center stage at several key points in the Scriptures. Starting with Daniel's second vision in chapter eight, a chronological outline of Elam's role with God's chosen people unfolds which can be stated as something like this:

God provides prophecies of persecution

Daniel's vision in Elam focuses on the empires of Persia and Greece as they relate to Israel. It was under Persian authority that the Jews returned to Israel and rebuilt their land and Jerusalem.

But it's within the details of the breakup of the Grecian empire that future persecution of the Jews is announced to Daniel. The Seleucid kingdom was a territory comprised of northern Syria and most of Persia. It emerged after the death of Alexander the Great and his empire's demise.

Daniel 8:9 indicates a future ruler would emerge from this specific region north of Israel to bring great trauma and persecution to the Jews. The surrounding text says this despot would desolate the temple and violate the sacrificial protocols. Most scholars are divided here – is this a reference to Antiochus Epiphanes, the eighth ruler of the Seleucid dynasty (175 BC – 164 BC), or is it an indication of issues still future to you and I? Is it a reference to the final antichrist?

For various reasons, I am of the opinion that this text is referring to the antichrist. I'll be unpacking my rationale in the next couple of lessons I teach, but that's not the point of this article. It was in Elam that *God provides prophecies of persecution* to Daniel.

God provides protection from predicament

Elam gains the spotlight again roughly 85 years or so after Daniel's second vision. Now, Xerxes, the Persian king has his main palace in Susa. His queen is Esther – yes, *the Jewish Esther!*

Here at the palace in Susa – in Elam - the riveting events of the book of Esther took place. Here is where human ambition and pride blended with hatred and fraud to incite a historic pogrom against God's chosen people. Here is where a dilemma arose that exceeded man's abilities to resolve. And here is where God masterfully moved the chess pieces and called "checkmate" on Satan's plan to destroy the Jews.

It is in Elam that *God provides protection from predicament*. The gravity of the threat was so great, and the deliverance from that threat was so profound, that the Jews remember the events

of the book of Esther to this day. Every time the Jews celebrate the Feast of Purim, they remember the deliverance from their enemies – in Elam.

God provides permission after prayer

About 100 years after Daniel's second vision – roughly 20 years after the events of the book of Esther – the scene in Elam had changed a bit. The Persian empire was still in power, but there was a new king on the throne in Susa. Artaxerxes was his name, and Nehemiah, a Jew, was his cupbearer.

Nehemiah was a loyal advisor and trusted servant to the king, but like other Jews, Nehemiah's heart was most aligned with his homeland and his beloved city, Jerusalem. When he heard that the exiles in Judah "*...are in great trouble and disgrace (and) the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates burned with fire,*" the news overwhelmed him (Neh.1:3-4).

Nehemiah did what all of us should do when we are moved deeply in our spirit – he prayed with great endurance. Four months later, he found himself before the king, and the king perceived he was sad. He asked Nehemiah what was wrong. The situation was a dangerous moment for someone with Nehemiah's responsibilities.

But Nehemiah came clean with the king. He told Artaxerxes the reason for his sorrow. He also told the king what he really wanted: to turn in his resignation as cupbearer, to go to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the walls of the city.

Amazingly, the king endorsed Nehemiah's plan, and he gave Nehemiah his full support. This signature moment marked the beginning of Daniel's "seventy weeks" (Dan. 9:25).

The book of Nehemiah builds further on the truth that *God provides permission after prayer*. The Jewish people, under Nehemiah's leadership, were able to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and restore the remnant which had returned from exile in Babylon. The timetable for the end times had begun – and it had started in Elam!

God provides plans of pursuit

Before Daniel's ministry, there was Jeremiah's. Daniel recognized the divine intentions of God within Jeremiah's prophetic words (Dan. 9:2).

We can regard Jeremiah's words today the same way Daniel did then. Other passages in Jeremiah speak to events that are future to us. These prophecies concern a little-known part of the middle East once called – you got it – Elam! It's the same spot where God gave Daniel his second vision, where God used an unlikely queen to thwart an anti-semitic madman, and where God used a penitent cupbearer to start the clock ticking to the second coming of Christ.

The eyes of the world are on Elam these days, though most people simply refer to this area as "Iran." But it's in the territory of Elam where Iran has one of its most strategic nuclear assets –

the Bushehr nuclear plant. It's about ancient Elam that world leaders now debate, deride, and deceive each other.

For those who support facts over fiction, it's no secret that Iran is building nuclear weapons, and it's no surprise that Israel's recent spy mission showed the world Iran has lied. As globalist rhetoric drowns out common sense, Israel is being threatened with annihilation and will soon be forced to act in self-defense.

Jeremiah 49:34-38 specifies a disaster in Elam which suggests radiation fallout and which could be as little as days or weeks away. The entire passage suggests a humanitarian crisis is looming. But God has "*fierce anger*" on the leaders of Iran for their posture against His people, and buried within these few verses is God's commitment to "*...pursue them with the sword until I have made an end of them.*"

God's sovereign plan has always been to act in the most important needs of His chosen people. It was true in Daniel's time, and in Esther's and Nehemiah's too. Present events in Elam still reinforce this constant truth. We should not be unaware of what is happening in the bigger picture since *God provides plans of pursuit* in Jeremiah 49:34-38 which are there for us to read and understand.

God provides promises of prosperity

A time is coming when the fascinating and traumatic events of Elam will all be a distant memory. At that time – likely when the Lord sets up His Millennial reign – the Bible promises that those who had called Elam their home will return to it and receive great blessing.

At the tail end of the aforementioned verses of Jeremiah 49:34-38 is one more verse that closes out that chapter. It is God speaking, and in verse 39 He says, "*Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come....*" It's an assurance of great prosperity and spiritual blessing.

Elam will yet be a recipient of God's concern and compassion as *God provides promises of prosperity* for this little-understood part of the world. Because Elam, from antiquity, has been a pivot point for God's dealings with Israel, it fits directly into God's prophetic plan yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Meantime, as the world careens towards The Day of the Lord, current developments in Elam portend disaster and prophetic fulfillment. As Christians, we are reminded that we serve the One True God who "*....declares the end from the beginning* according to Isaiah 46:10.

These are indeed exciting times we live in. Even so – *Maranatha!*

