

Who is Daniel Chapter 8 Talking About?

Part 1: A Directional Dilemma

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I've decided I no longer believe some of the things I'm reading in my Bible. I used to, but I don't anymore. Now that I'm using some common sense, I'm unable to accept what I find there.

I can hear the collective gasp already – but as the Brits say, “Don't get your knickers in a twist.” I'm talking about the commentary notes at the bottom of the page. Many Bibles have them.

God's Word is divinely-inspired. It's 100% inerrant and complete – no questions there. But that standard does not apply to all the opinions which ordinary people have juxtaposed to those parts of the Bible that are actually “*God-breathed*” (2 Tim. 3:16). It's easy to forget that.

Too many of us check our brain at the door when we study the Word of God. The truth is we only partially study it. We are often reluctant to disagree with establishment views, especially if they are the written positions of reputable folks with last names like Ryrie, MacArthur, or Lindsell.

These are Godly men, but they *are* human – I don't think any of them would claim to be infallible. I believe they've done their best in providing service to God's Kingdom, but as long as they inhale this planet's air, they “*...see through a glass, darkly*” (1 Cor. 13:12) like the rest of us. Their knowledge now is still limited, and it's OK to challenge them the right way.

We know Paul as the human agent through which most books of the New Testament were authored. His pedigree and credentials were impeccable (2 Cor. 11:16-33). Certainly *he* was someone folks should have followed without question. But even Paul commended the Bereans of Macedonia when they “*...examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). The Bereans didn't take Paul's word for it - they compared what he had stated against what the Old Testament said.

Two important things happened in this process. First, the Bereans proved their own “nobility” by their choices. Their positive reception of Biblical truth was marked by fervent personal study. Second, Paul proved his credibility as a leader of the church and as an expositor of truth. *All* of his statements were supported by Scripture.

I need to be candid here. The more I study God's Word, the more I learn from it, and the more I grow in my faith, the more I doubt the credibility of Christians that miss the clear intentions of Scripture by such a wide margin. I am particularly troubled by those who dilute the significance of God's covenant with the Jewish people, those who awkwardly force future prophecies into past events - - and basically *anyone* who constructs ideas that are *not* supported by Scripture in order to avoid those which *are*.

It is difficult for me to appreciate some of the other good things these people might have to say when they are so willing to ignore or change entire portions of the Bible. I fear some of these folks have personal agendas that supersede their reverence for God's Word.

I read many online discussion forums on various topics of the Bible. When the intensity of these discussions escalates, someone always says something like, "There are different interpretations and we need to respect all of them," or, "We cannot be sure what the Scriptures are saying, so let's focus on getting along." A chorus of spineless agreement usually ensues.

Sometimes I want to puke. These "conciliatory" expressions are a common reaction to Biblical debate, but let's be honest – they are lukewarm responses more than not. Last time I looked, that's a temperature setting outside of God's affections (Revelation 3:15-16).

It's time for a reality check. It's a necessary assumption that the Bible always extols truth, right? Therefore, the Scriptures advance the need for proper understanding by their very nature. Since the Bible does not contradict itself, will we not contradict each other when we responsibly incorporate God's Word into our fellowship and interpret it as we ought to do.

Alternative explanations which steer us away from the intended message of the divine Word of God are neither correct nor are they worthy of our respect. The Bible says it is man's rules and teachings that always render our service to God ineffective (Matt. 15:9). It all goes to show we each have a significant responsibility – just like the Bereans - to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

That brings me full circle to my opening comments in this article.

As many of you know, I am teaching a class at my church on the book of Daniel. Those lessons are recorded and available at www.thewordwithsteve.com. Each Sunday, as I face a gymnasium full of people, I'm cognizant of the fact that there are many more folks I do not see who listen to these lessons online.

Some Sundays, my palms are clammy. I love public-speaking and I do a lot of it, so that's not the issue. Instead, I know I am facing an awesome responsibility. The charge to "*rightly divide*" (2 Tim. 2:15) the Word of God burdens me, and I fail to comprehend the casual way it's treated and taught in many churches today.

It was no small matter for me to wade into the murky text of Daniel 8:9-14, and it took me almost two months to teach these six verses. A chief problem I faced as I did so was the commentary notes at the bottom of that page in my Bible that said the "small horn" in this passage referred to Antiochus Epiphanes.

Now - who is that?

Antiochus Epiphanes was the eighth of roughly 30 rulers of the Seleucid dynasty which emerged following the demise of the Greek empire. He ruled from about 175BC to 164BC, and historians consistently mark him as an eccentric, impulsive, and dangerous despot.

Antiochus Epiphanes gave himself divine-sounding titles such as *Theos Epiphanes* which means "God Manifest" in ancient Greek. This led some of his contemporaries to call him *Antiochus Epimanes*, or "The Mad One." It was a word play off of *Epiphanes*.

Antiochus Epiphanes was noted for his persecution of the Jews during the intertestamental period. He murdered over 40,000 of them in three days, he plundered their temple in Jerusalem, and he defiled it with unclean animals and the construction of a pagan altar. He so prohibited and penalized the religious practices and customs of the Jews that he spawned the revolt of the Maccabees.

Antiochus Epiphanes also waged military campaigns against Egypt in the south, and against the region of Cyprus. He had limited success in these efforts. While he had inherited the territory of the Jewish nation, "*the beautiful land*" (Dan. 8:9) from his predecessor, he lost control of it in the Jewish revolt.

Historians mostly agree that Antiochus Epiphanes died of some sort of incurable bowel infection. The records of this event are disgusting in their sordid detail, but it qualifies as a natural death the same way similar diagnoses and outcomes would qualify today.

An informal poll of my class revealed that most of their Bibles also said Daniel 8:9-14 was referring to Antiochus Epiphanes. This aligned with the majority of commentators I had found. It seemed to me that popular opinion was firmly entrenched in one direction.

However, I am *not* of the view that Daniel 8:9-14 is talking about Antiochus Epiphanes. Rather, I believe it is referring to the antichrist – that final apocalyptic tyrant which will traumatize the world and bring it to the brink of full ruin just before the return of Jesus Christ. I came to this position through my own study.

I believe my opinion draws from common sense while it also conforms to the literal interpretation of the text. Here is a key reason why I believe Daniel 8:9-14 is referring to the antichrist and not to Antiochus Epiphanes, and I call it "a directional dilemma."

Daniel 8:9 describes this ruler as waxing in power and territory "*....to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land.*" Northern Syria was the Seleucid dynasty's headquarters, and while one might argue that Israel lies south of that region (it's a bit southwest), it certainly doesn't lie anywhere east of it.

There's nothing southeast or east of the region of northern Syria that suggests anything pertinent to Israel. In those directions are Jordan and parts of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. These directions are a problem with respect to Dan. 8:9 and the territory of Israel both past and present.

A couple more problems emerge from the content of Daniel 8:9 if we assume Antiochus Epiphanes is the primary subject here. First - as noted, he inherited the territory of the Jewish nation; he did not have to conquer it. If anything, he lost it in the Maccabean revolt. This hardly conforms to the victorious overtures of this verse.

Secondly, Antiochus Epiphanes is marked for having a largely unsuccessful military career. His campaigns were marginal in their achievements. The most notable military campaigns he had were with Egypt and Cyprus, and those successes were “iffy” and short-lived. Besides, their directions are clearly *southwest* and *west* of northern Syria.

The bottom line is it’s hard to conform the specifics of Daniel 8:9 to the record of Antiochus Epiphanes. It’s also difficult to argue that Israel is southeast of northern Syria.

But now let’s take a different tack. Let’s assume for a moment that Daniel 8:9 is talking about the antichrist. Let’s also assume that the antichrist *does indeed* arise from somewhere within the region of ancient Assyria and northern Syria as multiple Biblical texts suggest (i.e. Isaiah 10:1-11:1, 14:24-27; Dan. 8:9; Micah 5:5-6; Zech. 10:10-12; Zeph. 2:12; et al.). If these two assumptions are true — then Daniel 8:9 is referring to a situation that is still future to you and I.

When Gabriel explains Daniel’s second vision to him, he tells Daniel four times that the elements of his vision are yet a long ways off. Gabriel says that “...*the vision concerns the time of the end*” (Dan. 8:17), that “...*it will happen later in the time of wrath*” (Dan. 8:19), that “...*the vision concerns the appointed time of the end*” (Dan. 8:19), and that “...*it concerns the distant future*” (Dan. 8:26). These points, together with others made in Daniel chapter 8, suggest that the main focus of Daniel’s vision is about the time of the Tribulation.

Well, what do we know of Israel’s territory during *that* time? I suppose there are several more articles worth writing to fully respond to that question, but I’ll give you my opinion now. I believe Israel may endure several major conflicts before the antichrist “...*confirms a covenant*” (Dan. 9:27) with her. By the time the Tribulation clock commences, Israel will be a much larger nation as a result of those prior wars.

Perhaps nobody has researched these pending conflicts and brought them to public attention better than Bill Salus, and I have provided a link to his website on my own. Bill Salus believes that Psalm 83 foretells one particular forthcoming war that Israel will be forced to fight against all her surrounding neighbors. Those neighbors are specified in Psalm 83 and it’s important to note that they either share a border with Israel or they are in very close proximity to the Jewish nation.

The conditions for this Psalm 83 conflict are coming together quickly. I believe as Bill Salus does that Israel will have a resounding victory and will end up greatly expanding her physical territory as a result.

We can look to historical events as a case in point. As the Golan Heights were annexed by Israel after the Jewish nation was attacked in the 1967 war, so I believe Israel will gain much more land in the wake of her Psalm 83 victory. This dynamic conforms to the rules of war, and it is quite possible Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, and much of Syria will all become part of Israel.

You can see where this is going. The territory of Israel in the time of the antichrist is likely to be a much larger area than the diminutive piece of land it is today. If we can accept the straightforward ramifications of the Psalms 83 conflict, then a large part of the land which will be added to Israel's territory will extend east.

This will place much of Israel's territory directly *south* and *east* of present-day northern Syria. In that situation, the directional elements of Dan. 8:9 play out perfectly. It will be in these directions that a large part of "*...the Beautiful Land*" lies. It may be "beautiful" because Israel will rehabilitate it the same way she's done with the land she now has.

I can already hear the liberal critics howling, "How DARE you!" They are unhappy that I would suggest such an "outrageous" thing as this. They don't want to talk about national boundaries anymore. They also feel Israel is "illegally occupying" the land they're already in; they cannot stand any notion of Israel gaining more.

For those of us that still believe God's Word is the final authority, let's not forget that God gave Abraham very clear boundaries for his descendants back in Gen. 15:18-20. Furthermore, elements of that promise were reinforced multiple times (Exodus 23:31; Num. 34:6; Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:4; Ezek. 47:17-20, et al.), and it includes all the land Israel could add in the wake of the Psalms 83 victory – and *then* some! Liberal frothing aside, God will still have His way.

The Jordanian territory, in particular, dovetails with Jesus' instructions in Matthew 24:15-22 to a remnant of Jews in the future. He told them to "*...flee to the mountains*" when they see the abomination of desolation. His directive is aimed at protecting them from annihilation during the second half of the Tribulation, and all this plays out in prophetic detail in Revelation 12:14-16.

The question arises, "Which mountains are Jesus referring to?" and I believe the answer is found in a couple of passages. The first is Isaiah 63:1-6, and it is a prophecy of Jesus Christ returning from Bozrah. This is the region *in Jordan* where the ancient – and virtually impregnable - city of Petra is found. This passage in Isaiah describes our Lord's "*day of vengeance*," and His garments become stained with the blood of His enemies that He conquers there.

The second passage is Daniel 11:41 where we learn the area of Jordan uniquely escapes the antichrist as he "*...invades the Beautiful Land*." This region is protected from the antichrist during the Great Tribulation, and I believe it is because of the believing Jewish remnant which heeded Jesus Christ's instructions in Matt. 24:15-22 and found refuge there at Bozrah.

Now, work with me here as we apply some logic to this situation. If a future Jewish remnant flees to a secure hiding place in the mountains of Jordan at the midpoint of the Tribulation when every

nation will be set against them (Zech. 14:1-2), then it is most likely because that territory is *already* part of Israel in the first place! This conforms to territorial changes in that part of the world in the wake of the Psalm 83 war which would have already occurred.

The Lord supernaturally protects this remnant of faithful Jews as they flee to this desolate stronghold of theirs (Rev. 12:14-16). He continues to protect them in that place as the antichrist extends his military campaigns from northern Syria “...*south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land*” (Dan. 8:9; 11:41), which will then include the territory once known as Jordan.

When Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords, He *first* goes to Bozrah and violently conquers His enemies which have laid siege to this Jewish remnant (Isaiah 63:1-6). He will accomplish this task alone, and we read His garments become drenched in blood as a result.

I believe this explains why He’s “...*dressed in a robe dipped in blood*” (Rev. 19:13-14) when He *subsequently* appears with the armies of heaven to defeat the antichrist at the Battle of Armageddon. Jesus Christ will have already won one battle at Bozrah just before! Now, He is about to win the big finale.

It’s a fantastic sequence of events that makes perfect sense if we apply sound reasoning to the literal interpretation of Scripture. It’s also a picture that makes it exceedingly difficult to find Antiochus Epiphanes a part – even though the commentaries in many of our Bibles say otherwise.

In Part 2 of this series I will unpack at an additional list of reasons why Daniel 8:9-14 is not about Antiochus Epiphanes. I won’t get into the granular detail with that list as I have here with the directional dilemma of Dan. 8:9, but I feel this additional information will put the “nail in the coffin” for any notions that Daniel 8:9-14 is referring to a past individual.