

Who is Daniel Chapter 8 Talking About?

Part 2: The Facts Don't Add Up

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In Part 1 of this series, I stated my disagreement with the argument that Daniel 8:9-14 is referring to Antiochus Epiphanes, the eighth ruler of the Seleucid dynasty from 175BC to 164BC. My position is an awkward one given that many reputable commentators and scholars claim that's who this passage is about.

I explained that we are all obligated to study the Scriptures for ourselves. This is the posture the Bible commends (Acts 17:11), and I feel it may be more necessary today than it's ever been.

A "directional dilemma" emerges with the assumption that Daniel 8:9-14 refers to Antiochus Epiphanes. Daniel 8:9 says this individual extends his conquests "*....to the south and to the east and towards the Beautiful Land.*" There is no part of Israel past or present that lies in that direction from the headquarters of the historic Seleucid dynasty in northern Syria.

Furthermore, Antiochus Epiphanes had unremarkable military campaigns in more *southwesterly and westerly* directions, and he didn't need to conquer Israel since he'd inherited it from his predecessor. If anything, he lost it by provoking the Maccabean revolt. These facts make it a tough sell to say Antiochus Epiphanes is the subject of this passage.

But this portion of Daniel aligns well with the premise that it's referring to the antichrist. Due to lands she will gain from wars she will yet be forced to fight, Israel is likely to extend her territory significantly in an eastern direction. This may take place soon as the Psalm 83 prophecy seems to suggest, and the results of that would conform to the land covenant God gave to Abraham.

With the antichrist in view, the explanation that Daniel received from Gabriel makes sense. It's one about "*....the distant future*" (Dan. 8:26), and it provides a strong clue that Israel will be a much larger nation going into the last seven years before Christ's return.

Given that Jordan is likely to be part of the territory Israel gains before the Tribulation according to Psalm 83, it explains why Jesus instructed a future Jewish remnant to "*....flee to the mountains*" (Matt. 24:15-22). It is territory they will own at that point, and they will be protected there (Dan. 11:41; Rev. 12:14-16).

At His Second Coming, Jesus first goes to Bozrah (Jordan) to defeat His enemies (Isaiah 63:1-6) and to rescue His faithful remnant. The blood stains He gets on His garments in that conflict are evident when He subsequently appears to fight the antichrist at the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:13-14).

Everything falls into place if we can accept the literal truth within each relevant passage in the greater context. It's only when we force our own interpretations upon the texts that confusion and questions arise.

There are more reasons why I believe Daniel 8:9-14 is not referring to Antiochus Epiphanes, and unlike the "directional dilemma" I've already unpacked, these reasons are more straightforward. They comprise a series of facts that don't add up if one believes Daniel chapter 8 is about this historical ruler.

To begin, there is a campaign against "*the host*" in Daniel 8:12, or as other translations put it, "*the heavenly army*." This specific group of individuals is mentioned alongside earthbound rituals like "*the daily sacrifices*" which reinforces the self-evident case that these are not angels.

This vulnerable group is fully subjected to the will of this leader, and this dynamic is repeated in Gabriel's explanation to Daniel (Dan. 8:24) where we find it being destroyed together with "*mighty men*" or "*powerful people*." Here, this same group is called "*holy people*," "*saints*," and "*God's people*." Whoever they are, they are seen as God's possession and they're marked by righteous character.

While many commentators point to the fact that Antiochus Epiphanes persecuted the Jews for roughly seven years, this is not sufficient logic to claim he is the fulfillment of the "small horn." Multiple passages in the Bible clearly state that the final antichrist will horribly persecute the Jews and will try to exterminate them, so that activity is not confined to Antiochus Epiphanes any more than it is with any other anti-Semitic despot.

Valid questions are raised if we assume that the descriptors of various translations like "*saints*," "*holy people*," "*God's people*," and "*the heavenly army*" are an exclusive reference to the Jews. This is not in conformity to common sense and the balance of God's Word. Given that the "*saints*" of Daniel chapter 7 are presented in context with the onset of the Millennial Kingdom, we can reasonably assume that the same term is used in chapter eight to refer to Jews *and* Gentiles who come to saving faith *after the rapture*.

Gabriel also explains in Daniel 8:25 that this "small horn" has a unique end; he "*....will be broken without human agency or human power*." What Gabriel is saying is this: the subject of Daniel 8:9-14 succumbs to some sort of supernatural intervention which brings this ruler's reign to an abrupt and unique end.

But we learned in Part 1 that it was natural causes that killed Antiochus Epiphanes. There are no records to suggest his death was anything apart from those events and processes which have always defined the human experience.

It is challenging to explain the plain language of Daniel 8:25 any other way than to say there is a supernatural event which directly results in this leader's demise. This conforms to the details of

the antichrist's end as Revelation 19:19-20 makes clear, but no other leader in history has had a similar fate.

Another reason why I believe Daniel 8:9-14 is not talking about Antiochus Epiphanes is the matter of timing. In Daniel 8:23 there is the point Gabriel makes which is stated, *"...in the latter part of their reign."* It is during the waning elements of an established ruling situation that this leader arises.

The problem is Antiochus Epiphanes did not come to power during the latter period of anything. He was the eighth ruler of about 30 that led the Seleucid Kingdom, so he didn't even reach the midpoint. If Daniel had envisioned Antiochus Epiphanes as the subject of this text and vision, Gabriel would have placed him instead "before the middle part of their rule."

The bottom line is there is nothing pertaining to the notion of "the latter part" that has anything to do with Antiochus Epiphanes. His life and reign is unremarkable in such respects, and this is an issue which poses a problem to efforts to make Antiochus Epiphanes the subject of this passage.

One last problem with trying to force the life and events of Antiochus Epiphanes into Daniel 8:9-14 is the statement that this leader *"...magnified itself to be equal with the Commander (or Prince) of the host"* (Dan 8:11). Gabriel elaborates more on this fact in verse 25 where he explains, *"He will even oppose the Prince of princes."*

Some folks argue that coins which have been found from the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes and which read, "King Antiochus, God manifest," are proof that these Daniel passages are talking about this specific historical leader.

But it was not uncommon for rulers of that time to display extreme pride, and it was not unique to Antiochus Epiphanes that he considered himself divine. Other rulers from the Seleucid dynasty regarded themselves similarly, the same way ancient rulers from Egypt and Babylon also did.

If we dissect Gabriel's additional explanation in verse 25, challenges emerge if we try to argue that Antiochus Epiphanes was unique and extreme in his opposition to the "Prince of princes." It's a stretch to claim he deserves this special distinction the same way the antichrist does.

I believe it is arguments like these that refute the claim that Daniel 8:9-14 - and Gabriel's explanations in verses 23-25 - are referring to Antiochus Epiphanes. Although that interpretation was even presented in The Septuagint, it is little more than an early example of how errant commentators from all times have imposed past events onto future prophecies.

These interpretive dilemmas evaporate if one properly makes the antichrist the subject of these passages in Daniel chapter eight, and to start that process here, I want to take note of some general assessments.

The language and ideas which pertain to this diminutive “horn” of Daniel 8:9 closely parallel the language and ideas seen in Daniel Ch. 7, a portion of Scripture that most commentators argue is directed to the antichrist. In many cases, these are the same commentators that push the Antiochus Epiphanes interpretation for Daniel Ch. 8.

Here are three broad examples of this parallel dynamic:

First, the *descriptions* are much alike. We have “the little horn” of Daniel 7:8 which is very similar to the description of “the small horn” of Daniel 8:9. Whether one describes a zebra as “white with black stripes” or “black with white stripes,” the two descriptions are pretty much saying the same thing.

Second, there is the matter of this leader’s *development*. Daniel 7:8 describes the rise of a leader from a place “among other horns,” and this leader grows in power. Daniel 8:8-10 also describes a leader which emerges from a collection of horns. He too “grows in power.” The descriptions are similar.

Lastly, there is the issue of *demeanor*, and we find the “little horn” in Daniel 7:8 to be boastful and arrogant. Likewise, the “small horn” of Daniel 8:11 is described as “*magnifying itself*” and “*acting arrogantly*.” Again, we are seeing very similar concepts here in the behavior patterns of each horn.

Now I want to get more granular. The “little horn” in Daniel’s first vision in chapter 7 and the “small horn” in Daniel’s second vision in chapter 8 display a number of specific commonalities. In both quantity and quality, I feel these similarities graduate the matter to something more than coincidence:

- Both rulers are referred to by the same symbol—a horn (Daniel 7:8; 8:9). While the symbol of a “horn” is used in the Old Testament to denote power, strength, high position, and might, their close proximity and parallel criteria merit additional considerations.
- Both rulers live after the height of Grecian empire dominance and they reign during the very end of time (Daniel 7:25; 8:17).
- Both rulers begin their careers innocuously and become prominent through a gradual process (Daniel 7:8, 20; 8:9).
- Both rulers possess the power of senses and perception. This is noted in the “eyes and mouth” of Daniel 7:8, and the “stern face” of Daniel 8:23.
- Both rulers are marked for their pompousness, their arrogance, and their blasphemy (Daniel 7:8, 11, 20, 25; 8:11, 25).
- Both rulers conquer and destroy others successfully (Daniel 7:8, 20–21, 24; 8:9, 24–25).
- Both rulers are stated to persecute the “saints” (Daniel 7:21, 25; 8:24).
- Both rulers suffer a supernatural demise as expressed by divine descriptors and conditions (Daniel 7:9-11, 26; 8:25).

- Both rulers receive the most attention within each vision they are part of. This is noted by the proportions of the text and the focus of the angels' interpretations.
- Both rulers show up as being the final evil and despicable power within the structures of their respective visions.

"So what?" I can already hear some folks asking this question – and I have faced some who have. Some people really don't care whether or not the "little horn" is *this* ruler, or the "small horn" is *that* ruler, or whether this or that passage is about Antiochus Epiphanes or the antichrist or whomever.

It's folks like these that fail to grasp the importance of the prophetic Scriptures. Their bigger problem is they fall short of revering God's Word as they ought to. Being as God has placed all Scripture on an equal par (2 Tim. 3:16), it is dismissive attitudes like this that endanger one's spiritual welfare. Since Paul commended the Bereans for their due diligence with the Word of God, he would most assuredly hold accountable those who discount the themes that comprise one quarter of it.

The best way to understand prophecy is to study it in context with other portions of God's Word that speak to similar matters. The right interpretation is one which satisfies *all* of the issues which must be considered. This approach introduces clarity and minimizes confusion.

By comparing the details of Daniel chapters 7 and 8, a responsible assessment is permitted to speak. The result is we can see why the identification of the "small horn" in chapter 8 as Antiochus Epiphanes isn't a reasonable conclusion.