

DECEMBER 1

Welcome to December and heading down the home stretch of this year's reading of The One Year Bible. I think that calls for a gingerbread something.

Daniel 8

This vision was given to Daniel two years after the vision in chapter 7. Though it involves both Persia and Greece, the major revelation of this vision concerns the people of Israel as the time of the end approaches. Although everything revealed here will apply to the next century of trials for Daniel's people, it will mirror the time of the end before the Messiah establishes His reign on earth and Israel becomes a leader for the nations.

You'll find a chart, "A Comparison of Daniel 2; 7; and 8," at the end of this document.

Vs. 1-4 We'll see that the ram is Persia, the horns are the first two kings who served at the same time. Darius (representing the Medes) is the little horn and Cyrus (representing the Persians) is the big horn. By the time you get to Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah, you don't hear of the Medes anymore, but Persian kings were still named Darius and Ahasuerus in honor of those early leaders.

V. 2 So where was Daniel? In the vision, he was in Susa (in Iran), the capital of the Persian Empire. It was only about 150-200 miles directly east of Babylon. Daniel's description seems as if he was very familiar with the city. We know from Daniel 5, that Daniel was no longer working in the king's direct service but was totally forgotten. The king didn't know who Daniel was. My suggestion is that Daniel was sent out of Babylon, during the reign of Belshazzar, as a diplomat to Persia. He was still in the king's service, just out of sight and out of mind. During the conflict with the Persians he would have returned to the city of Babylon. This is all speculation, but it does make sense of some of the information.

Vs. 5-8 This is Greece and the mighty horn is Alexander the Great. The four horns are the four kings and kingdoms that rose after Alexander died at the age of 32.

Vs. 9-12 Here's that little horn again. Yesterday it was associated with the fourth kingdom, coming at the time of the end. Today we meet a king who foreshadows that coming king who will persecute the Jews and claim an authority above God. Oddly enough, the ruler from the Greeks who will arise is Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who we'll refer to as AE. He will foreshadow the antichrist (AC). It's only in English that the spellings of Antiochus and antichrist are so similar, but still, it is ironic.

V. 10 This is hard to understand. AE and the AC will both be given power over the people of Israel and especially over those who are following God. Since we haven't read Daniel 10 yet, we don't understand that behind the earthly warfare there is also an angelic warfare going on. The mention of stars can refer to angels. To see this connection of angels and stars, look at Revelation 1:20, and read Revelation 12:4 which is very parallel to this verse in Daniel. So then, with all of these words that can have double references, both the human and angelic aspects of this battle could be in view.

V. 11 The *Prince of the host* could be referring to the angelic representative for Israel.

V. 12 I think the *host* here is clearly referring to the people of Israel.

Vs. 13-14 Since offerings were offered evenings and mornings, this number should be divided in half, which makes it closer to 3.5 years. This was the length of time the temple was desecrated by AE during the time of the Maccabean revolt, and it is roughly the same amount of time it will be desecrated by the AC in the future.

Vs. 15-18 This is one of four places in the Bible where we meet Gabriel. He is here and in Daniel 9, and then we see him twice in Luke, announcing the births of John and Jesus.

V. 17 *The vision is for the time of the end*, but this information about the antichrist as seen in AE will also be a help to the Jews, led by the priest family of the Maccabeans who in 170 A.D. had to endure AE's madness. Hanukkah is the Jewish celebration of the Maccabeans rededicating the temple after AE desecrated it.

Vs. 19-26 Notice that Gabriel, in describing AE, doesn't go to the very last times historically, but rather to the end of this rogue Greek Empire. Actually AE was chased out of Egypt by the Romans, so this was, as v. 23 says, toward the end of these Greek kingdoms. When AE arrived in Jerusalem, he wanted Israel to be a buffer state against the Romans; but the Jews were always stubborn, so he went crazy. There was a massive persecution of the Jews with much killing and destruction.

What is to be noted here is the extreme arrogance of AE and his success against God's people. This example, and what we'll learn in chapter 10, will help the Jews living in the Tribulation understand what is happening to them and will give them strength to hold on. Actually too, those believers in the Tribulation will have the book of Revelation so they will fully understand why the persecution against them is so hard and so relentless.

V. 25 AE died of madness in Persia. At the end of the Tribulation, it will be Jesus, the Prince of Princes, who does away with the antichrist.

V. 27 Since Daniel had lived for God and for his people, I think it was the vision of this destruction of his people that made him sick. In this vision, too, what he couldn't understand or grasp was the spiritual overtone of this battle and the apparent victory given to the bad guys.

As disciples, we are following Christ in the harvest in the calm before the storm. The Bible says the clouds are gathering. Now is the time for us to be working.

1 John 2:1-17

Since this letter is written to believers, we need to understand John's warnings as trying to keep believers from becoming damaged on earth, and to motivate and help disciples to walk closely with the Lord.

Vs. 1-3 Notice this is addressed to all of the believers as *little children*.

V. 2 *Propitiation* means that God was completely "satisfied" by the sacrifice/payment of Jesus. Nothing more is needed.

Vs. 4-6 Both in John 14:21-23 and in John 15:1-8, there is a special relationship that is promised to those who walk closely with Jesus. It doesn't mean that a child who stays distant from his father is not a child, but it will influence how much benefit and closeness he receives from the relationship. Even what I was reading this morning, about Jesus acknowledging or denying His disciples before the angels of God, has to do with blessing and provision, not with salvation. If a person denies Jesus, Jesus doesn't need to help them (acknowledge them) because that person is helping himself, getting out of a tough jam by denying Jesus. If you acknowledge Jesus, He acknowledges you and sends help from the Father. It has to do with relationship, not salvation.

Vs. 7-11 Now John just mentioned the idea of keeping the commandments of Christ. If someone asked you what some of those commandments were, there are a few that should come right to the surface. Anyone who has had to work with Christians, encouraging them to work in the harvest, knows that working in the church is not easy. Loving one another is one of those major commandments that Jesus gave the night before He died. The commandment to love one another was prefaced by Jesus saying He was leaving, but sending us into the world as witnesses. He knew the world would hate us, yet we are to love one another as we bear witness to Him.

It needs to be emphasized that keeping His commandments will always be tied into the Great Commission and bearing witness for Christ. To live morally is the least we can do for what He's done for us. It is daring to die for Him in reaching out and making disciples, that puts us in the position of obeying His commands. For most people, being a Christian means staying away from sex and drugs and fun and trouble in general. We are to imitate our Savior and follow and obey the Father as He did. (John 14:13) And in joy, it led Jesus straight to the cross. Loving one another takes on a special, God intended meaning, when we are all risking our lives on earth to make Christ known. Without the mission and living as disciples, loving one another is just another flowery, religious thought.

Now, in John's Gospel, he says, *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.* (John 1:9) This light is Jesus. However, if you've been in church, you know that it is possible for born-again people not to like or love one another. Again, what John is saying here is that the proof of growing in Christ is loving one another. It is a sign of abiding in Christ. And if this abiding is the same as the context of John 15, this abiding is done by disciples in the harvest, living to bear fruit for Christ. When we forget Who saved us, where we are and why we are left here, all we have is a social organization called "church," in which we vie for position and recognition and where we demand that our needs be met. The church exists to carry a light into the harvest. In Christ, His salvation and mission binds us together.

Vs. 12-14 One way to try to understand this section is to understand that John is addressing everyone as *little children*, then everyone as *fathers*, and finally everyone as *young men*. John has already said in 2:1, that they are all *little children*. So, it seems to me that John was saying first that he was calling them *little children*, because they were innocent, like those who had just had their sins forgiven in Christ. He was saying they were like *fathers* in that they knew the Ancient of Days, understood His wisdom and could give perspective to life. And they were like *young men*, because they had fought and overcome the evil one by obeying God.

Then the next section of restatement adds a source or directive to what was said: *little children* are to grow to know the Father, *fathers* are to keep on doing the same thing, *and young men* are to be strong in the Word.

Vs. 15-17 It seems that this section is a warning. Being lured into these desires will keep them from the faith of a child, the perspective of a father, and the victory of a young man. Abiding in Christ, or not, is the point here.

This morning I was reading of Jesus warning His disciples in Luke 12:1-15. What is interesting is that His warning about hypocrisy only begins with *beware*, but when Jesus warns them against all aspects of coveting and possession in v. 15, He intensifies the warning by saying, ***Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness.*** Sometimes it is easier for us to see religious problems than for us to see the desires of our hearts that are consuming us. Just like the seed sown among thorns, believers get choked, their fruit does not mature and so they prove unfruitful. That choking was the result of cares and delights and desires. Living for those things describes a lot of people in a lot of churches. This is a good warning.

Psalm 120

Remember, a song of ascents was sung by the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the feasts, three times a year, preparing their hearts for worshipping God.

I would guess that this song (sort of an unusual song to read so it must have sounded great when sung) would have reflected a desire to dwell in the Lord's presence. *One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.* (Psalm 27:4)

V. 1 Not everyone went to the feasts. To do that, you had to leave your house, possessions, and property unguarded. You missed work. Eventually you were scorned and ridiculed for being faithful.

Vs. 2-7 This must have been the inner feelings of being scorned and ridiculed for coming to the feasts. Dwelling with the Lord, in peace in the inner man, is the hope of those who must live in a hostile, unbelieving part of the world. As disciples we work where human things are often out of control, where there are few choices, but we do have a choice where our heart dwells.

Proverbs 28:25-26

V. 25 As I've been reading about Jesus teaching His disciples not to have any anxiety about life or stuff, it not only shows you the trust that He wants His disciples to have; but that trust is the key to them being full of joy and having peace. Those who are content in Him and put their trust in Him bring that joy and trust with them wherever they go. They have it in the middle of chaos, because they have Him with them.

V. 26 This again has to do with trust. Notice in the second line the trust is in the Word (how else do we know God's wisdom?) and it leads to deliverance. This means that the person who trusts his own wisdom ends up in a trap.