

So Antiochus went on the offensive. In one attack on Jerusalem, Antiochus had 40,000 Jews killed and 10,000 Jews carried into captivity. Antiochus stopped the daily sacrifices at the Temple, robbed the Temple treasures, installed a statue of Zeus in God's Temple, and sacrificed a pig on the altar. This terrible event came to be known as the "abomination of desolation." Antiochus tried to stop the practice of circumcision, which lies at the heart of Jewish religion, but without success. Antiochus ordered all copies of the Torah burned, and anyone found with a copy was put to death. Thus was "truth cast to the ground" (8:12) as foreseen in Daniel's vision.

But perhaps worst of all, Antiochus styled himself "Antiochus Epiphanes," which means "Antiochus the Magnificent" or "Antiochus the Glorious." Coins found from this era bear his likeness and the Greek phrase *Theos Epiphanes*: "God Manifest." Antiochus claimed to be God! This was too much for the Jews, who called him Antiochus Epimanes, a play on words meaning "Antiochus the Madman."

Verses 23-25 emphasize the evil nature of Antiochus, the "small horn." He is a "master of intrigue," which refers to an ability (possibly supernatural) to understand secret things. There is one theory that says Antiochus dabbled with things like sorcery and the occult. We are told that the small horn becomes strong "not by his own power," which fits Antiochus because he allied himself with the Romans. Antiochus needed the Roman army to consolidate his power; the Romans used their association with Antiochus to gain greater access to the Middle East. By his maltreatment of God's people and by his claim to be God, Antiochus made a direct attack on the "Prince of princes," a clear reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. For this madness, God struck Antiochus down at the height of his power.

The details of his death are chilling. After committing atrocities in Israel, Antiochus traveled east hoping to conquer more territory. While in Babylon he received word that the Jews, led by the heroic Judas Maccabaeus, had retaken Jerusalem, driven out the invaders, and started the process of cleansing the Temple. Antiochus turned and hurried back to Israel, intending to defeat the troublesome Jews once and for all, but a chariot crash left him gravely wounded. While recovering, Antiochus contracted a bowel disease that caused a terrible odor to surround him; one source even says that worms came out of his body as it rotted away. The life of Antiochus ended in a painful and wretched fashion, and history records his death as divine justice for his cruelty and blasphemy.

It's worth noting that many Christian commentators see the antichrist foreshadowed in the career of Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus becomes a type or a symbol of the antichrist who will arise just before the return of Christ. Imagine the vision of Daniel 8 as a light that shines from the foot of a statue of Antiochus Epiphanes: because the light shines from below, it leaves a huge shadow on the wall behind the statue. That shadowy outline marks the career of the future antichrist. The evil we saw with Antiochus, we can expect to see again when the antichrist comes – only worse!

We have this mental image of the antichrist as some kind of crazed, wild-eyed, unkempt lunatic from a horror movie with long stringy hair, an ax in one hand and a machine gun in the other. But the reality will be far different. The antichrist will appear to be the very leader the world has been seeking. He will probably be well-educated, urbane, witty, and charismatic. He will claim to have our best interests at heart, which is why the world will welcome him. The antichrist will be popular and his abilities will be extraordinary in every sense, but underneath he will be wholly and totally energized by evil. The antichrist is the ultimate "angel of light" masquerading for a time as a benevolent leader. Soon enough the truth will come out.

Once again, Daniel's vision leaves us feeling despondent and hopeless; even Daniel says, "I...was exhausted and lay ill for several days...I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond my understanding" (v. 27). But if we step back from the vision, a number of important lessons become obvious.

***God will fulfill this prophecy in time.*** This chapter records a remarkably detailed outline of ancient history that was meticulously fulfilled, demonstrating once again that the Word of God is true. Reading Daniel 8 ought to increase our confidence in the God who knows the future because it is God who ordained the future.

***We still stand in need of God's grace.*** The world likes to believe that "every day in every way things are getting better and better." While it is true that the last century has seen enormous technological progress, it is also true that more people died in more wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in any other century. We live daily with machines and gadgets that Daniel couldn't even dream about, but we haven't really made any moral progress at all. The human heart is still desperately wicked and in need of God's grace. The future reign of the antichrist will show us how evil humans can become when they are cut off completely from the grace of God. We

need God and God’s grace now more than ever. The good news is that God is still willing to give that grace to us.

***God is sovereign over all.*** When Nebuchadnezzar got too big for his britches, God made him eat grass like a cow for seven years. When Belshazzar arrogantly drank from the sacred cups, God struck him down that same night. God laid Antiochus Epiphanes low when he sought to replace God and oppress God’s people. Now the day is coming when God will assert God’s sovereignty once again. When the Antichrist reaches the zenith of his power, the heavens will open and Jesus Christ will descend in great power and great glory to defeat the antichrist once and for all. God is and always will be sovereign.

***Those who know the Lord have nothing to fear.*** The antichrist is coming, but we should not be afraid. We do not know when this evil ruler will appear, but his way is being paved by the prayers of foolish politicians who jumble together the religions of the world, and by those who want unity at all costs, and by those who seek to banish God from the public square in the name of tolerance. Make no mistake: the antichrist will come and life will get worse before it gets better. Now hear the good news: if we know the Lord, following Jesus Christ and living in The Spirit, we are joined with the One who is the ultimate victor in the battle between good and evil.

Christian Apologist Dave Hunt (1926-2013) put it this way: “The battle between Christ and Antichrist is fought to the finish in every human heart. We must know whose side we are on now. It will be too late to change sides at the second coming.”

In the end the question becomes very simple and very personal: Where do you stand? Are you on the side of God as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Each one of us must decide which side we are on, because in the end there is no room for neutrality. It is light or darkness, God or the Devil, Christ or the antichrist.

Take your stand with Jesus today. Pledge your allegiance to the One who died for you. Look to the cross. Lay claim to the promise of forgiveness and new life offered by God. Only those who stand with Christ will be safe in the days ahead. May each of us be found true to Christ no matter what the cost! Amen.

## Antiochus the Madman

Sunday, March 8, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

### ***Daniel 8:19-27***

The second half of the book of Daniel (Ch. 7-12) details four visions given to the prophet by God. In this second vision, Daniel sees a ram with two horns. The ram is attacked and defeated by a shaggy goat with one large horn. The goat’s horn breaks, only to be replaced by four other horns. A new and smaller horn grows up out of one of the horns. This “small horn” becomes powerful and conquers Israel, persecutes the Jews, pollutes God’s Temple, and curses God. The small horn considers himself a god and takes a stand against the Prince of princes. In the end, the small horn is destroyed by God (vv. 23-25).

The Angel Gabriel appears to interpret this vision, telling Daniel that the ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire and the goat represents the Greek Empire. The “big horn” will be the first ruler of the Greek empire, Alexander the Great. Alexander died young (age 33), and we know from history that his generals divided the Greek Empire into four parts: Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece. Successive wars among these four kingdoms (the four horns) kept the empire weak and allowed local strong men to rise in power and influence (the small horn).

As mysterious as that may sound, we know from history exactly who this “small horn” is: it was a ruler named Antiochus IV Epiphanes, one of the Seleucid rulers from the region of Syria. Antiochus reigned from 175-164 BC and he is remembered chiefly for his tyrannical persecution of the Jews. Antiochus tried to compel the Jews to adopt the Greek language and culture. Many Jews were willing to make various compromises because they were attracted to Greek culture - they wanted to be Greek on the outside and Jewish on the inside – but the majority of Jews would not give up their faith.