

From Contamination to Purification



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 8, Dan. 2:38, Gen. 11:4, Leviticus 16, Heb. 9:23–28.*

Memory Text: “And he said to me, ‘For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed’” (*Daniel 8:14, NKJV*).

The vision reported in Daniel 8 was given to the prophet in 548 or 547 B.C., and it provides some significant clarifications about the judgment referred to in Daniel 7. Unlike the visions of Daniel 2 and 7, the vision of Daniel 8 leaves out Babylon and starts with Media-Persia, because at this time Babylon was in decline and the Persians were about to replace Babylon as the next world power. The vision of Daniel 8 parallels that of Daniel 7. The language and the symbols change in Daniel 8 because it brings into sharp focus the purification of the heavenly sanctuary in connection with the heavenly Day of Atonement. Thus the distinctive contribution of Daniel 8 lies in its focus on aspects of the heavenly sanctuary. Whereas Daniel 7 shows the heavenly tribunal and the Son of man receiving the kingdom, Daniel 8 shows the purification of the heavenly sanctuary. So, as the parallels between these two chapters indicate, the purification of the heavenly sanctuary depicted in Daniel 8 corresponds to the judgment scene of Daniel 7.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 29.

The Ram and the Goat

Read Daniel 8. What is this vision all about and how does it parallel what we have seen in Daniel 2 and 7?

As in Daniel 2 and 7, we are given here another vision of the rise and fall of world empires, though with a different kind of symbolism. This symbolism is directly related to God's sanctuary. In this case, the symbols of a ram and a goat are used because of their connection with the Day of Atonement sanctuary ritual, a time of judgment for ancient Israel. Rams and goats were used as sacrificial offerings in the sanctuary service. But only on the Day of Atonement are the two mentioned together. Hence, these two animals are intentionally chosen here to evoke the Day of Atonement, which is a major focus of the vision.

As the vision unfolds, Daniel sees a ram pushing in three different directions: westward, northward, and southward (*Dan. 8:4*). This triple movement indicates the expansion of this power: "so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great" (*Dan. 8:4, NKJV*). As the angel explains, the ram with two horns represents the Medo-Persian Empire (*Dan. 8:20*), and the three directions most likely literally pointed to the three major conquests of this world power.

Next, a goat emerges with a big horn, which represents the Greek Empire under the command of Alexander the Great (*Dan. 8:21*). That the goat moves "without touching the ground" (*Dan. 8:5, NKJV*) signifies that it is moving quickly. This symbolism conveys the rapidity of Alexander's conquest, which Daniel 7 presents as a winged leopard. But, as the prophecy indicates, when the goat "became strong, the large horn is broken" (*Dan. 8:8, NKJV*) and gives way to four horns, which extend to the four quadrants of the compass. This is fulfilled when Alexander dies in Babylon in June of 323 B.C., and his kingdom is divided among his four generals.

Between Daniel 2:38 and Daniel 8:20, 21, three of the four empires revealed in the visions have been named for us. How should this amazing fact help confirm the correctness of our interpretation of these prophecies?

The Rise of the Little Horn

Read Daniel 8:8–12 carefully. In which directions is this little horn moving, and why is this important to understand?

After depicting four horns spreading to the four winds of heaven, the biblical text says that from one arose a little horn. The question here is whether this horn or power comes from one of the four horns, which, as we saw yesterday, represent the four generals of Alexander—or one of the four winds. The grammatical structure of the text in the original language indicates that this horn comes from one of the four winds of heaven. And since this power arises after the Grecian Empire and its four offshoots, a common understanding is that this horn is Rome, first pagan and then papal. “This little horn represents Rome in both its phases, pagan and papal. Daniel saw Rome first in its pagan, imperial phase, warring against the Jewish people and the early Christians, and then in its papal phase, continuing down to our own day and into the future.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 841.

According to the biblical text, the little horn first undertook a horizontal movement and “grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land” (*Dan. 8:9, NKJV*). These three directions correspond to the three major areas that fell under the domination of pagan Rome.

As the little horn becomes the main player in the vision, its vertical expansion receives detailed attention. In this regard, the horn corresponds closely to the little horn of Daniel 7, as the following comparison shows: (1) Both horns are little in the beginning (*Dan. 7:8, 8:9*). (2) Both become great later on (*Dan. 7:20, 8:9*). (3) Both are persecuting powers (*Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:10, 24*). (4) Both are self-exalting and blasphemous (*Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; 8:10, 11, 25*). (5) Both target God’s people (*Dan. 7:25, 8:24*). (6) Both have aspects of their activity that are delineated by prophetic time (*Dan. 7:25; 8:13, 14*). (7) Both extend until the time of the end (*Dan. 7:25, 26; 8:17, 19*). (8) And both face supernatural destruction (*Dan. 7:11, 26; 8:25*). Last, because the little horn of Daniel 7 represents the papacy, the vertical expansion of the little horn in Daniel 8 must represent the same power. Thus, as in Daniel 2 and 7, the final main power is Rome, both pagan and papal.

The Attack on the Sanctuary

Read Daniel 8:10–12. What kind of activity is the little horn depicted as doing here?

In Daniel 8:10, the little horn attempts to replicate, at the spiritual level, the efforts of the builders of Babel (*Gen. 11:4*). The terms “host” and “stars” can designate God’s people in the Old Testament. Israel is designated the host or armies of the Lord (*Exod. 12:41*). Daniel also depicts God’s faithful people as shining like the stars (*Dan. 12:3*). This is obviously not a literal attack on the heavenly bodies, however, but a persecution of God’s people, whose “citizenship is in heaven” (*Phil. 3:20, NKJV*). Although thousands of Christians were murdered by pagan emperors, the focus now is on the vertical activities of the little horn. Thus the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy must be linked with papal Rome and its persecution through the ages.

Also, Daniel 8:11 talks about a “Prince,” who is elsewhere mentioned in Daniel as “Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25*), “Michael your prince” (*Dan. 10:21*), and “Michael” the “great prince” (*Dan. 12:1*). No one but Jesus Christ could be the referent of this expression. Jesus Christ is the Prince of the aforementioned “host” and our High Priest in heaven. Therefore, the papacy and the religious system it represents obfuscates and attempts to supersede the priestly role of Jesus.

In Daniel 8:11, the “daily sacrifice” is a reminder of what happened in the earthly sanctuary to designate the various and continual aspects of the ritual services—including sacrifices and intercession. It is through these services that sinners are forgiven and sins are dealt with in the tabernacle. This earthly system represents Christ’s intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. So, as the prophecy predicts, the papacy exchanges the intercession of Christ for the intercession of priests. By means of such counterfeit worship, the little horn takes away Christ’s intercessory ministry and symbolically casts down the place of Christ’s sanctuary.

“And he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered” (*Dan. 8:12, NKJV*). Jesus declares Himself to be the truth (*John 14:6*) and also points to the Word of God as truth (*John 17:17*). In contrast, the papacy prohibited the translation of the Bible into the language of the people, put the interpretation of the Bible under the authority of the church, and placed tradition, alongside the Bible, in theory, but, in practice, tradition is placed above the Bible as the supreme rule of faith.

What should this study tell us about how important the knowledge of biblical truth really is in contrast to human traditions?

The Cleansing of the Sanctuary

Read Daniel 8:14. What happens here?

After the devastating attack of the horn, the announcement is made that the sanctuary will be cleansed. In order to understand this message, we must bear in mind that the cleansing of the sanctuary mentioned in Daniel 8:14 corresponds to the judgment scene depicted in Daniel 7:9–14. And since that judgment takes place in heaven, the sanctuary must be located in heaven, too. Thus, while Daniel 7 portrays God’s intervention in and relationship with human affairs from a judicial perspective, Daniel 8 describes the same event from a sanctuary perspective.

The earthly sanctuary was modeled after its heavenly counterpart and served to illustrate the broad contours of the plan of salvation. Every day, sinners brought their sacrifices to the sanctuary, where the people were forgiven their confessed sins as the sins were, in a sense, transferred to the sanctuary. As a result, the sanctuary became contaminated. Therefore, a periodic process of purification was needed in order to cleanse the sanctuary from the sins recorded therein. It was called the Day of Atonement and took place once a year (*see Leviticus 16*).

Why should the heavenly sanctuary need cleansing? By analogy, we can say that the confessed sins of those who have accepted Jesus have been “transferred” to the heavenly sanctuary, just as the sins of the repentant Israelites were transferred to the earthly sanctuary. On the earthly Day of Atonement, numerous animals were slain, symbolizing the future death of Jesus, which is how sinners were able to stand in the Day of Atonement.

And just as that happened in the earthly Day of Atonement when the sanctuary was cleansed, how much more so in the heavenly, when Christ’s blood alone gets us through the judgment? The cleansing of the sanctuary, depicted in Daniel 8:14, is the heavenly counterpart of the earthly service, whose basic message is: as sinners, we need the blood of the Messiah to forgive us our sins and enable us to stand in judgment.

Read Hebrews 9:23–28. How do these verses reveal the salvation we have in Jesus through His sacrifice for us?

The Prophetic Timetable

Read Daniel 8:13. What is the question asked here, and how does it help us understand the answer in the next verse?

What is the timing of the 2,300 evenings and mornings? First, we must note that after Daniel is shown the ram and the goat, followed by the actions of and the damage caused by the little horn, the vision turns into a question in Daniel 8:13. This question is especially concerned with what will happen at the end of that prophetic period, as well as the duration of the entire vision. In addition, such a period cannot be limited only to the duration of the actions of the little horn, because the term *vision* includes everything from the ram to the actions of the little horn. So, this must be a long period of actual historical time.

To the question “How long shall be the vision” (ram [Media-Persia], goat [Greece], and the little horn and its actions [Rome, pagan and papal]), the other heavenly being replied: “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed” (*Dan. 8:14, NKJV*). As has already been noted, this period is so long because it begins during the time of the Medo-Persian Empire and extends through the timing of the Greek Empire and pagan and papal Rome, thousands of years. According to the historicist method of interpretation (see lesson 1), this prophetic period should be calculated on the basis of the year-day principle, which means that the 2,300 evenings and mornings correspond to a time span of 2,300 years. Otherwise, the 2,300 days would amount to a bit more than just six years, an impossibly short time for all the events of the vision. Hence, the year-day principle must be in effect.

Daniel 8 does not provide the information to allow us to calculate the beginning of this time period, which of course could establish its end. But Daniel 9 provides the crucial piece of information (see next week’s lesson).

The 2,300 years of this prophecy constitute the longest time prophecy in the Bible. Think of it: 2,300 years! That’s a long time, especially in comparison to how long we live now. How can this contrast help us learn to be patient with God and in our own anticipation of the timing of final events?

Further Thought: Below is a chart summarizing what we have looked at so far regarding the sequence of kingdoms depicted in Daniel 2, 7, and 8. What does this tell us about the cleansing of the sanctuary?

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8
Babylon	Babylon	—————
Media-Persia	Media-Persia	Media-Persia
Greece	Greece	Greece
Pagan Rome	Pagan Rome	Pagan Rome
Papal Rome	Papal Rome	Papal Rome
—————	Judgment in heaven	Cleansing of sanctuary
Second Coming	Second Coming	—————

As we can see here, there are parallels between the chapters. Not only are the nations depicted in parallel to each other, the judgment scene in Daniel 7—which arises after the 1,260 years (A.D. 538–1798) of papal Rome—directly parallels the cleansing of the sanctuary, which in Daniel 8 arises after Rome, as well. In short, this heavenly judgment in Daniel 7—the judgment that leads to the end of the world—is the same thing as the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. We are given here two different depictions of the same thing, and both occur after the 1,260-year period of persecution perpetrated by the little-horn power.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does the chart above show us that the cleansing of the sanctuary, the same thing as the judgment in Daniel 7, must occur sometime *after* the 1,260-year prophecy of the little horn—and yet before the establishing of God’s final kingdom?
- 2 The prophecy of Daniel 8 depicts history as something violent and full of evil. The two animals, symbolizing two world empires, fight each other (*Dan. 8:8–12*). The little-horn power that arises after them is a violent and persecuting power (*Dan. 8:23–25*). Thus, Scripture here makes no attempt to downplay the reality of suffering in this world. How should this help us learn to trust in God and His goodness, despite the reality of evil we see all around us?