

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to accept:

1. that God is also involved in the history of the world and the kingdoms of this world
2. that God intervenes in the history of the world when the kingdoms of this world have become anti-Christian
3. that the fourth continuous theme in the Bible is the triumph of God's kingdom

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is submitting to God and to all the events he allows in your life.

Theme: Worship God throughout your whole life

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

Daniel 6:1-5,10-11

¹ It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, ² with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a Day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

In his upstairs room Daniel kneeled before God as a gesture of complete submission and dependence. In his public function as administrator over satraps he distinguished himself from the others: he was trustworthy (faithful), neither corrupt nor negligent. The power of his public life lay in his private life, in the place of prayer. He worshipped God on his knees, because God was his real King. He worshipped God three times every Day with irreproachable behaviour. Worship is a daily as well as a fulltime occupation. Worship is walking with God (cf. Genesis 5:22; 6:9)!

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences) by again submitting himself to God as his real King and by submitting to the events God allows in his life.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: The kingdoms of the world

Read or explain in your own words.

1. Daniel and the writer of the book Daniel

Daniel lived during the exile in the 6th century B.C. in the Babylonian kingdom and the Medo-Persian kingdom.

The writer of the book Daniel lived during the Greek-Syrian kingdom under the oppression of king Antiochus Epiphanes in the 2nd century B.C. and probably in Judea.

2. The book Daniel is a backward looking prophecy

The book of Daniel is 'a prophecy', 'a proclamation' of God in the sense of 'a backward looking prophecy' instead of 'a forward looking prophecy'. It reveals the real and deepest significance of the events that have taken place in history in the past and are taking place in history in the present.

The purpose of the book is not to predict the future historical events, but rather to reveal *the significance* of historical events. The writer of the book Daniel presents a theology of the history of the kingdom of the world: God's perspective on the kingdoms (governments) of the world within history. Daniel's dreams are in part his reflection on events that happened in a particular segment of history, in the great empires (kingdoms of the world) from the time of the exile (597 B.C. (Daniel 1:1)

to the time the writer lives (about 164 B.C.). History becomes a means of revelation cast in the form of prophecy. The writer views history in the light of what God has said and done in the past and in the light of the word God is speaking now.¹

3. Overview of the book Daniel

Daniel chapter 1. In the history of the world God himself is the sovereign King. It is not king Nebuchadnezzar who plays the most significant role in international affairs, but the God of the Bible who delivered the exiles from Judea to him (Daniel 1:2a) and who equipped Daniel and his three friends with knowledge and understanding in order to serve in a foreign kingdom (Daniel 1:17).

Daniel chapter 2. In the history of the world it is God who sets up kings (governments), but also deposes them (Daniel 2:21)! When God's time has come to act, then the kingship or kingdom of God demands the destruction of the regimes or kingdoms of the world rather than acting through them.

Daniel chapter 3. In the history of the world believers, who refuse to make compromises with the kingdom of the world, are persecuted (Daniel 3:17-18; cf. 2 Timothy 3:12).

Daniel chapter 4. In the history of the world it is God who humbles proud kings (Daniel 4:33,37)

Daniel chapter 5. In the history of the world it is God who deposes arrogant kings that are hardened with pride and strips them of their glory (Daniel 5:20).

Daniel chapter 6. In the history of the world it is God who promotes dedicated believers (Daniel 6:25-28).

Daniel chapter 7. In every segment of the history of the world 'the four-empire scheme' represents 'the kingdom of the world'. God eventually dooms the anti-Christian tyrants of the kingdom of the world and gives the kingdom to the Representative of believers (Daniel 7:14,17-18,26-27).

Daniel chapter 8. In the history of the world the events have a definite end and every human power is ultimately destroyed (Daniel 8:23-25).

Daniel chapter 9. In the history of the world the symbols in the book of Daniel have repeated application. However, the definite end of all history has not yet dawned (Daniel 9:26-27)!

Daniel chapter 10-11. In the history of the world the people of God suffer due to the political and military successes and set-backs of ambitious rulers. But regardless the power of these rulers "they will stumble and fall, to be seen no more" (Daniel 11:31-32,19b)!

Daniel chapter 12. The backward looking prophecy of Daniel remains "closed up and sealed (hidden) until the time of the end" (Daniel 12:9-10). "The time of the end" will come at the appointed time (Daniel 11:35).

4. The time of the end in Daniel and in the New Testament

The vision in Daniel pointed to 'the time of the end' (Daniel 8:17) or 'the appointed time of the end' (Daniel 8:19). These words do NOT refer to the end-time (the absolute end of the history of the world)! They refer to the end of a particular period of oppression and the context speaks about the period in which the temple in Jerusalem was defiled. Then 'the time of God's wrath' against the oppressor would end (Daniel 8:19).

'The time of the end' in the New Testament is the period that stretches from the establishment of God's kingdom (at Christ's first coming) (cf. Mark 1:15; Matthew 12:28) to the complete perfection of God's kingdom (at Christ's second coming) (cf. Matthew 25:34).

'The last day' (Greek: he eschatos hemera) refers to:

- Christ's first coming (Hebrews 1:2; 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20)
- Pentecost (Acts 2:17)
- The whole New Testament period (2 Timothy 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:18)
- The resurrection of believers (John 6:39,44; 11:24)
- The last judgement (John 12:48)

The close of the Old Testament period of time is at Christ's first coming (Hebrews 1:2; 9:26). The close of the present New Testament period of time is at Christ's second coming (Matthew 13:29; 24:3; Ephesians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 10:11). Thus, 'the time of the end' or 'the last day' stretches from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. We are living in the last days!

The wicked will continue to be wicked and not understand these things until the end (Daniel 12:10), but the wise will be refined and understand these things until the time of the end (Daniel 11:35; cf. Revelation 22:11).

¹ John E. Goldingay, *Daniel, Word Biblical Commentary*, 1989, page 183.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: God's kingdom and the kingdoms of the world

- Day 1 Psalm 24:1-10
God's kingdom is God's sovereign kingship over all and everything
- Day 2 Isaiah 14:24-27
God is the almighty Ruler over the kingdoms on earth
- Day 3 Isaiah 31:1-3
All who rely on help from worldly kingdoms perish
- Day 4 Exodus 1:1-22
The kingdom of Egypt oppresses God's people (1527 B.C.)
- Day 5 Exodus 14:5-31
God punishes the kingdom of Egypt (1447 B.C.)
- Day 6 Isaiah 8:6-15
God uses the kingdom of Assyria as instrument to punish Israel (734 B.C.) (cf. Isaiah 10:5-19)
- Day 7 Isaiah 10:20-34
God punishes the mighty kingdom of Assyria (701 B.C.)
- Day 8 Isaiah 37:21-37.
An angel defeats the kingdom of Assyria
- Day 9 Isaiah 13:1-22
God uses the kingdom of Medo-Persia as instrument to punish the kingdom of Babylonia (538 B.C.)
- Day 10^{BS} Daniel 8:1-27
The kingdoms of the world in the light of the kingdom of God

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: The fourth continuous theme in the Bible: the triumph of God's kingdom

- What is the identity of the four kingdoms?
- What is the identity of the rock that was cut out, but not by human hands?
- What does the feet of iron mixed with clay symbolise?
- What is Daniel's theology of the history of the world?
- What does Daniel reveal about the coming kingdom of God?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following questions and record their answers:

- "In what respect should you change your view of the book of Daniel?"
- "In what respect would you modify your view of the history of the world?"

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S KINGDOM Daniel 2:44

In the time of those kings,
the God of heaven will set up a kingdom
that will never be destroyed,
nor will it be left to another people.
It will crush all those kingdoms
and bring them to an end,
but it will itself endure forever.

Daniel 2:44 (NIV)

3. Review of the Bible books

All 39 books of the Old Testament

5 books of the law:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

12 historical books (the early prophets):

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

5 poetical books:

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs.

5 major prophets (the latter prophets):

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel.

12 minor prophets (the latter prophets):

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: The kingdoms of the world in the light of God's kingdom

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step Bible Study method and study:

Daniel 8:1-27 (a revelation)

¹ In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me. ² In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal.

³ I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. ⁴ I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

⁵ As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. ⁶ He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at him in great rage. ⁷ I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him; the goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power. ⁸ The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

⁹ Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. ¹⁰ It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. ¹¹ It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host (Aramaic: he grew within the reach of the leader of the army); it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low. ¹² Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it (Aramaic: it -the army- was appointed over the daily sacrifice as a deed of transgression/rebellion). It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?"

¹⁴ He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and

mornings; then the sanctuary will be re-consecrated."

¹⁵ While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. ¹⁶ And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision."

¹⁷ As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end."

¹⁸ While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet.

¹⁹ He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end (Or: because the end will be at the appointed time).

²⁰ The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹ The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king. ²² The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power.

²³ "In the latter part of their reign (i.e. of the four kingdoms), when rebels have become completely wicked (Aramaic: 'when the rebels reach the full measure' or 'when their rule comes to an end'), a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. ²⁴ He will become very strong, but not by his own power (Aramaic: but without the power, that is, of his predecessor Alexander the Great). He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and (Aramaic: namely) the holy people. ²⁵ He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.

²⁶ "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision (Aramaic: lock this vision up), for it concerns the distant future."

²⁷ I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.

2. Emphasis

Daniel chapter 8 puts the history of the kingdom of the world in the light of God's supernatural reality, namely, God's kingdom (his sovereign power over all nations).

- A kingdom in the world which overthrows another kingdom in the world with violence makes a big mistake and will itself be destroyed. "All who draw

the sword will die by the sword” (Matthew 26:52)!

- A kingdom (government) in the world which uses violence (oppression and persecution) against God, God’s people (Israel during the Old Testament period and the Christian Church during the New Testament period) and their worship makes an even greater mistake and will be completely shattered! It will be smashed without human hands (Daniel 8:25)! Every attack against God’s people is an attack against God himself!
- Every human power is subject to limitations. The sins of the political authorities are also the cause of the fall of these authorities. This fact should encourage God’s people!

3. Explanation for the group leader²

Daniel himself lived in the Babylonian Empire and the Medo-Persian Empire in the period of the Babylonian exile (6th century B.C.).

The writer of the book of Daniel probably lived in Judea during the period of oppression under king Antiochus Epiphanes IV in the 2nd century B.C.

The book of Daniel is a backward looking prophecy, a proclamation of God revealing the deepest significance of historical events (just as Revelation 12:1-6).

Both forward looking prophecies and backward looking prophecies are inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

The purpose of the book of Daniel is *not* to predict future historical events, but rather *to reveal the significance of historical events*. The writer of the book of Daniel presents a theology of world history.

8:1-2. Daniel’s vision in Elam

“The third year of King Belshazzar’s reign” was 550/549 B.C. He reigned during the exile of Judah (Israel) to Babylon (605-538 B.C.). Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the first temple in 587 B.C. At this time there was yet no hope of returning from exile or the restoration of the temple. The second temple of Jerusalem was finally rebuilt after the exile in 516 B.C. during the reign of Darius I (521-486 B.C.) (Ezra 5:16).

Daniel chapters 7 to 12 is a backward looking prophecy and his vision is about the much later defilement and restoration (not rebuilding) of the second temple of Jerusalem under Antiochus in 167 B.C. That is why from

² A summary of Daniel chapter 8 of John E. Goldingay, *Daniel, Word Biblical Commentary*, 1989

the perspective of Daniel in the 6th century B.C. (Daniel 8:1) the vision (Daniel 8:6-14) had to remain ‘sealed’ (i.e. was not to be revealed). The vision did not have an application in the 6th century B.C.

Elam is situated between Babylon (Iraq) and Persia (Iran) and was a province of the Persian Empire. In the Jewish mind, Susa was the capital of the government (cf. Nehemiah 1:1; Esther 1:2). Ulai is the name of a water canal in the proximity of Susa.

8:3-4. The ram

‘The zodiac’ is the drawn figures in the belt of stars, about 8 degrees on each side of the sun’s apparent path among the stars during each year. ‘The ram’ is identified with Persia, because in the zodiac Persia falls under Aries (the figure of a ram, the first of the 12 signs of the zodiac). The two horns of the ram refer to Media (the shorter horn) and to Persia (the longer horn). Together they form the Medo-Persian Empire. In the Bible ‘a horn’ symbolises the ability to conquer (cf. 7:21; Zechariah 1:21; Revelation 5:6).

Verse 4 refers to the earlier victories of the Medo-Persian Empire under Cyrus in the east, the west (Asia Minor), the north (Babylonia) and the south (Egypt). “He became great” is a prelude to the later king (Antiochus) with ‘a mouth that spoke boastfully’ (Daniel 7:8).

8:5-8. The goat

‘The goat’ is identified with Syria (the Seleucid Empire, which was the continuation of the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great), because in the zodiac Syria falls under Capricorn (the figure of a goat, the tenth of the 12 signs of the zodiac). The prominent horn between his eyes, which looks like one horn when it is seen from the side, refers to Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.). “He came from the west (Greece) crossing the whole earth without touching the ground” (verse 5) refers to his blitzkrieg (cf. Cyrus in Isaiah 41:3). In just four years (334-331 B.C.) Alexander conquered this vast area and established the Greek Empire from Europe in the west to India in the east.

“At the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven” (verse 8). After the sudden death of Alexander, the Greek Empire was divided into four kingdoms: Thrace (part of East Europe and Turkey) in the north, Egypt in the south, Macedonia and Greece in the west and Syria in the east. The real heirs of Alexander were not his descendants, but his provincial governors (satraps) (Daniel 11:4): Ptolemy I (Soter) (323-305 B.C.) in Egypt, Antigonos in Turkey, Syria and the east and Seleucus I (Nicator) (312-281 B.C.) in Babylonia and later Syria. The Seleucid dynasty began in 312 B.C.

8:9-12. The oppression under the small horn

In verse 9 a small horn grew out of the Seleucid Empire and represents king Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) (175-163 B.C.). “He started small” – he was the youngest of his brothers and had no right to the throne. He was held hostage in Rome for a long time. In comparison to Alexander he was insignificant.

Nevertheless he fought successful wars against the east, against Egypt in the south and against ‘the Beautiful Land’ (Israel) (Daniel 11:16,41; Jeremiah 3:19a) with its ‘beautiful mountain (Zion) (Daniel 11:45), ‘a land flowing with milk and honey, most beautiful of all lands’ (Ezekiel 20:15).

In verse 10 he even attacked “the host of the heavens and threw some of the starry host down to the earth”. This is a reference to the believers among the Jews, in particular the priests who brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their (army) divisions (Exodus 6:26; Numbers 33:1). But because ‘the stars of God’ also refer to God’s army of angels (Isaiah 14:13), from God’s perspective Antiochus’ attack against the host of believers was also an attack against God and his heavenly host (army) of angels. The enemy ‘trampled’ on God’s servants and God’s truth.

In verse 11 ‘the Prince of the host’ may refer to the high priest assisted by his priests who had authority in religious matters in Jerusalem. But because the interpretation refers to the Prince of princes’ (Daniel 8:25), he rather refers to God himself, the highest leader in the heavenly army!

Antiochus’ attack was not against the national people of Israel, because many Jews were his collaborators. His attack was against God’s sanctuary and against *the believers* who worshipped in the sanctuary. His attack was not anti-Semitic, because from God’s perspective his attack was against God himself (cf. Daniel 10:13). Today we would call such an attack ‘anti-Christian’. Antiochus took arrogantly control of the temple in Jerusalem and of the people worshipping there (Daniel 11:36a). The function of controlling the temple and the people worshipping there does not belong to any earthly ruler, but only to the God of the Bible!

The temple at Jerusalem was not literally destroyed as it was during the Babylonian invasion in 587 B.C. and again by the Romans in 70 A.D. All the gold and jewels of the temple were stripped and looted, all the worshippers in the temple were driven away and the temple was defiled by heathen sacrifices. The sanctuary could no longer function as a place of worship of the One True and Living God!

In verse 12 Antiochus raised an army against the believers who worshipped the God of the Bible (cf. Daniel 11:31-32a). If the army in Daniel 8:10-11 refers to God’s earthly army of servants and God’s heavenly army of angels, then Antiochus’ army in Daniel 8:13 also refers to his earthly army of soldiers allied to its dark equivalent, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (cf. Daniel 10:13,20; Isaiah 24:21; Ephesians 6:12). An attack against God’s people and their worship of God is an attack against God himself!

Antiochus thought that “he could pluck the stars from the sky” (2 Maccabees 9:10). Since 169 B.C. coins carry the imprint of the head of Antiochus surrounded by stars and the inscription: ‘King Antiochus, an exceptional appearance of god’³.

‘The truth that was cast down to the ground’ (Daniel 8:12) refers to the Torah, the Old Testament Scriptures (the Bible). “And they cut in pieces, and burnt with fire the books of the law of God” (1 Maccabees 1:56).

The king of the kingdom of the world (i.e. Antiochus) is depicted as an animal (the goat, now with ‘the small horn’) that charged at the army (the believers), the temple (the place where they worshipped) and the truth (the Bible) in order to trample them with his feet.

This is also happening in our time.

A description of this oppression in
1 Maccabees 1:20-64

[20] After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred and forty-third year (169 B.C.). He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force.

[21] He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils.

[22] He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off.

[23] He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures which he found.

[24] Taking them all, he departed to his own land. He committed deeds of murder, and spoke with great arrogance.

[25] Israel mourned deeply in every community,

[26] rulers and elders groaned, maidens and young men became faint, the beauty of women faded.

³ Greek: *Basileus Antiochos Theos Epifanès*

[27] Every bridegroom took up the lament; she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning.

[28] Even the land shook for its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame.

[29] Two years later (167 B.C.) the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force.

[30] Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel.

[31] He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls.

[32] And they took captive the women and children, and seized the cattle.

[33] Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel.

[34] And they stationed there a sinful people, lawless men. These strengthened their position;

[35] they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great snare.

[36] It became an ambush against the sanctuary, an evil adversary of Israel continually.

[37] On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood; they even defiled the sanctuary.

[38] Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled; she became a dwelling of strangers; she became strange to her offspring, and her children forsook her.

[39] Her sanctuary became desolate as a desert; her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into a reproach, **her honour** into contempt.

[40] Her dishonour now grew as great as her glory; her exaltation was turned into mourning.

[41] Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people,

[42] and that each should give up his customs.

[43] All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath.

[44] And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land,

[45] to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts,

[46] to defile the sanctuary and the priests,

[47] to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals,

[48] and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane,

[49] so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances.

[50] "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."

[51] In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city.

[52] Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land;

[53] they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

[54] Now on the fifteenth Day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year (December 167 B.C.), they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah,

[55] and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets.

[56] The books of the law which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire.

[57] Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death.

[58] They kept using violence against Israel, against those found month after month in the cities.

[59] And on the twenty-fifth Day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar which was upon the altar of burnt offering.

[60] According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised,

[61] and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

[62] But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food.

[63] They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die.

[64] And very great wrath came upon Israel.

8:13-14. The duration of the period of oppression

'The holy ones' are members of God's heavenly army and they are discussing the meaning of the vision.

The words "How long?" originate from before the exile (Isaiah 6:11; Jeremiah 12:4). Compare the words: "How long?" in the Psalms that were written during the period of the exile (Psalm 74:10-11; 80:5).

The words: "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled?" refer to Zechariah 1:12 where the Angel of the LORD asks on behalf of God's people how long it would take to rebuild Jerusalem after the exile.

In verse 13 the question is how long it would take to end the period of oppression after the defilement of the temple. These later oppressions under Antiochus (about 171-164 B.C.) were regarded as a continuation of the oppression during the exile (605-538 B.C.).

‘The rebellion that causes desolation’ is a reference to the god Zeus⁴ which Antiochus erected in the sanctuary (temple) (2 Maccabees 6:2) on top of the altar in the temple (1 Maccabees 1:47).

While no one could save the ram from the power of the goat (Daniel 8:7), the God of the Bible would save and re-consecrate the temple and the genuine worship in the temple (Daniel 8:14)! The worship of the One True and Living God who revealed himself in the prophets of the Old Testament would finally triumph!

Verse 14 speaks of a period of ‘2300 evenings and mornings’ (1150 days) during which no daily sacrifices were offered in the temple. The heathen altar was erected on the 15th of the 9th month (Chislev) in the year 167 B.C. (1 Maccabees 1:54) and God’s altar was re-consecrated after 3 years and 10 days on the 25th of the 9th month in the year 164 B.C. (1 Maccabees 4:52-54). The orthodox ceremonies accompanying the sacrifices were probably terminated earlier. They were again restored at the re-consecration of the temple. The Jews calculated the period during which the temple was defiled to be ‘1150 days’.

In the Bible the number ‘3½ years’ is a symbolic indication of *a period of oppression* (cf. 1 Kings 17:1; Luke 4:25) and in Daniel 7:25 it indicates the period of oppression between the defilement of the temple (167 B.C.) and the death of Antiochus (163 B.C.) (1 Maccabees 6:16).

8:15-19. The angel Gabriel

In Daniel 7:9-10 it was God who appeared. And in Daniel 8:16 it was God who spoke. Compare the appearance of God in Ezekiel 1:27-28a. But in Daniel 8:15 ‘one who looked like a man’ is the angel Gabriel.

Daniel’s reaction was that he fell prostrate with his face bowed to the ground (cf. Joshua 5:14; Ezekiel 1:28b) – an acknowledgement that God’s messenger was standing in front of him.

Daniel lost consciousness or rather he fell into a deep sleep – a condition in which a person received a vision: Adam (Genesis 2:21), Abraham (Genesis 15:12); Saul and his soldiers (1 Samuel 26:12); and Job (Job 4:12-13). The touch of the angel woke him up (cf. Elijah in 1 Kings 19:5-7). The intention is to communicate that God’s Spirit made him stand up (cf. Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1:28-2:2).

⁴ *The Greek god Zeus Olympius was called ‘Lord of heaven’ (Hebrew: ba’al shamem), but Daniel gave him the nickname: ‘the rebellion that destroys and makes desolate’ (Hebrews: pasha shamem).*

8:17,19. The time of the end

The vision pointed to ‘the time of the end’ (Daniel 8:17) or ‘the appointed time of the end’ (Daniel 8:19). These words do NOT refer to the end-time (the absolute end of the history of the world)! They refer to the end of a particular period of oppression and the context speaks about the period in which the temple in Jerusalem was defiled.

Then ‘the time of God’s wrath’ would end (Daniel 8:19). In Zechariah 1:12 the period of the exile in Babylon was called ‘the seventy years in which God had been angry with Jerusalem and the towns of Judah’. The context in Zechariah shows that although Israel’s sin was the cause of God’s indignation, God’s wrath did not punish Israel any further.

Likewise, God’s wrath in 1 Maccabees 1:67 is the period in which Antiochus oppresses and mistreats the believers in Israel.

Daniel 9:24 reveals that the 70 years of exile (605-538 B.C.) would be extended seven times (cf. Leviticus 26:21) until the period of Antiochus (175-163 B.C.). Because this vision began with the Persian Empire we must consider *the period of God’s anger* as the whole period from the beginning of the exile to the end of the crises around Antiochus. The end of this period of oppression under Antiochus falls at the same time as the end of the four kingdoms that originated from the Greek Empire (Daniel 8:22-23). This end comes with the fall of Antiochus and the re-consecration of the temple. (Daniel 11:35). Thus, the end of the period of oppression (persecution) is *the end of God’s indignation*.

8:20-26. The explanation of the vision

God waits until the measure of the transgressors is full (8:23a)

“In the latter part of their reign, (i.e. of the four kingdoms) when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise.” (Aramaic: When rebels have reached the full measure or when their reign comes to an end, a ruthless king would arise.)”

According to 2 Maccabees 6:12-16 God disciplines his people (Israel) without waiting for Israel’s sin to reach the full measure, so that Israel would return to God and not be deserted for ever (cf. Hebrews 12:5-7,10-11).

In contrast, God is patient with the sins of the heathen nations (the four kingdoms) until their sins have reached the full measure. God desires to give the heathen a chance to repent (cf. Genesis 15:16; 2 Peter 3:9).

The initial successes of the ruthless king Antiochus (8:23b-25a)

He was ruthless, a contemptible person, a master of intrigue. He plotted, robbed and lied to his allies and succeeded in whatever he did (Daniel 11:21-23,24,27,32). He manipulated the high priesthood in Jerusalem (*read* 2 Maccabees 4:7-29). He would become strong, but not by his own power (cf. Revelation 13:2). He would not be as powerful as his predecessor, Alexander the Great. He caused astounding devastation and destroyed ‘the mighty men and (or: ‘that is’) the holy people” (i.e. the believers in Israel) (cf. Daniel 11:33-35; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1). In God’s eyes the believers are ‘saints’ and ‘mighty men’ and that is a bad sign for Antiochus.

Finally Antiochus is broken by the Prince of princes (8:25b)

‘The Prince of princes must be God himself. Antiochus represents the king of the kingdom of the world, that is, the governments in the world that oppose God and God’s people. By opposing God, Antiochus could not avoid bumping into God himself! It is then that God intervenes in human history and terminates his kingship (cf. 2:21)!

Antiochus is destroyed, but not by human power. (cf. Daniel 2:34,45; 11:45)! The apocryphal books 1 and 2 Maccabees relate how Antiochus died during an unsuccessful military campaign against the Persians in 163 B.C.

Seal up the vision (8:26)

“Seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.” The word ‘to lock up, to keep secret’ is parallel with the word ‘to seal up’ in Daniel 12:4,9. According to this backward looking prophecy, Daniel received this vision during the 6th century B.C. (during the Medo-Persian Empire).

But the vision points to events in the 2nd century B.C. (the time in which the writer of the book Daniel lives). Thus this vision was sealed between the 6th and the 2nd century B.C. and that is why the readers of the book Daniel (in the 2nd century B.C. had previously not heard about this vision. ‘The distant future’ about which the vision speaks commences with the crises around Antiochus.

8:27. The effect of the vision of Daniel

Daniel was exhausted and lay sick for several days.

4. Application of the symbols in the vision

(1) *The symbols in the vision supersede the events during the time of the seer (the period of Antiochus)*

In the first vision in Daniel chapter 7 the symbols were indirect references to events in the history of the world. But in the second vision in Daniel chapter 8 the symbols are clear. Nevertheless in the explanation of the vision, these symbols refer to more than specific historical events. The symbols refer to ultimate events in the history of the world. *The ultimate events in the history of the world are not the end-time event, but are events in the history of the world when God intervenes!*

In the explanation these symbols refer only to the Medo-Persian Empire of Darius and Cyrus, the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great and the Seleucid-Syrian Empire of Antiochus. But *in the application these symbols supersede the events of the period of the seer.*

The message of the book of Daniel was first of all intended for the believers who lived during the time of the writer of the book of Daniel (2nd century B.C.)

But subsequently, the message of the book of Daniel is for believers who live throughout history, thus, also for Christians living today!

Rebellions against the God of the Bible and attacks against Jesus Christ and his temple (i.e. the Church and Christians) (John 2:19,21; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22) throughout the history of the world are also ultimate events (i.e. events in which God intervenes)! Christians today who live in such ultimate events (of oppression, persecution, discrimination and abuse) may believe and expect the end of these ultimate events, that is, they may expect that God will intervene!

(2) *The symbols in the vision have transcendental significance*

The events on earth have transcendental significance. Every time when evil people fill the measure of wickedness against God and his people (Daniel 8:23) and every time when the king of this world (the government) stands up against God and his people (e.g. the Christians) (8:24-25a), they too will be destroyed without human hands (Daniel 8:25b)! The fall of the king of the world is not simply the result of political and military factors on earth, but the result of God’s intervention in human history!

God's temple (e.g. the Church) and God's people (e.g. Christians) on earth are very significant for God, but Antiochus denied this. He had no eyes to see the spiritual reality! Antiochus (representing the governments of this world) and the people of this world (representing the non-Christians) do not understand that when God's people (i.e. Christians) suffer, the God of the Bible himself also suffers (Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13)!

Heaven and earth are NOT two completely disconnected and completely separate worlds. Heaven is involved in what happens on earth and earth must reckon with this reality!

(3) *The symbols and motives in these visions may be applied again and again*

Such ultimate events (as the oppression and persecution of Christians, which cause God to act) occur again and again in the history of this world. The Christians who live in that part of history may apply the message of the symbols in their own time.

'To fill the measure' (Daniel 8:23) is also a New Testament application with respect to the Jews and their religious leaders who kept on rejecting Jesus Christ (Matthew 23:31-32; 1 Thessalonians 2:16). It can also be applied with respect to the Church and Christians who turn their backs on Jesus Christ (Romans 11:20-22).

The vision of Daniel was not a call to arms against an enemy, but a call for Christians that are oppressed and persecuted to exercise faithfulness within their difficult situation and simultaneously a call to the oppressors and persecutors to repent and turn to the God of the Bible.

The description of the tyrant, Antiochus, is applicable to several political leaders in the history of the world. Antiochus is the symbol of the many antichrists in the history of the world (1 John 2:18). The attacks of these worldly kings and their governments against the Christian Church or individual Christians (Ephesians 2:19-22) is regarded as an attack on God himself! Ultimately God will see to it that these tyrants are broken and destroyed without human hands (or human plots)!

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.