

Remember that Daniel was longing for the end of the exile and the restoration of Jerusalem!

While Daniel does not fully understand what is going on,

he clearly sees that all of this is going to take a long time!

When you are hoping for a quick and speedy end of all the difficulties you face

it may seem rather discouraging to hear that it will still be a long time yet!

What is Daniel 8 doing?

Daniel 8 is speaking to those who were trying to live out their faith

“under circumstances that would make it more and more difficult to do so.

They had to count on the sovereignty of God

to sustain them generation by generation, crisis by crisis.

They also had to trust the power of God to control the flow of world empires

as they rose and fell.” (Walton in Davis, 107)

And while Daniel 8 is speaking of one particular king –

and one particular episode in Israel’s history –

the principles remain true in every age.

1. The Vision of the Ram and the Goat (v1-14)

a. Susa and the Ram from the East with Two Horns (v1-4)

In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first. ² And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal. ³ I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. ⁴ I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

We are in the third year of Belshazzar – so we are back before the fall of Babylon.

And Daniel has a vision of Susa – in the province of Elam.

Now in the Persian era, Susa was detached from Elam and given its own province.

In fact, from the time of Cyrus until the Roman era,

everyone spoke of Susa as being part of “Susiana.”

It was only in the province of Elam during the Babylonian era and before.

In other words, only someone in the sixth century

would have said that Susa was in the province of Elam.

If (as some say) the book of Daniel was a 2nd century production,

it certainly has a first-hand knowledge of the 6th century!

And in his vision he sees a ram with two horns – one higher than the other.

We are told later that these are the kings of the Medes and Persians.

When Daniel sees this vision, the last king of the Medes (Astyges)
has just been dethroned by his grandson, Cyrus.
The joint power of the Medes and the Persians will prove to be too great for Babylon!

The ram comes charging westward and northward and southward.
If you look at a map, Susa is straight east from Babylon.
So if the Medo-Persian ram is charging westward – they will hit Babylon,
northward – they will hit Armenia
and southward – they will conquer the sea ports on the Persian Gulf.

And no one can restrain this ram.
The Persian empire becomes the most powerful empire in the world –
with the largest percentage of the human race
ever under one ruler.

But remember those words: “no one could rescue from his power”!
Because it can often appear that the powers of this age are indestructible.
For those of us who lived through the Cold War,
no one thought that the Soviet Union would just *collapse*!
In the same way, no one today would think that the United States could collapse!
But she will!

Every beast has its day!

By now we should have learned from Daniel that the kingdom is the Lord’s –
and he gives it to whom he wishes!
The Persians were indestructible – until their day had come.

But then the scene changes:

b. The Male Goat from the West with a Conspicuous Horn (v5-8)

⁵ *As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground.*

So fast will this goat be that his feet will not even touch the ground!
Alexander the Great will conquer the whole Persian empire in six years!
Alexander is the “conspicuous horn”!

And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. ⁶ He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath. ⁷ I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. ⁸ Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

But no sooner did Alexander conquer the whole Persian empire,
but he was broken – he died while still in his 30s – with no clear successor.

And so in his place there arose *four* conspicuous horns –
the Macedonian empire was divided between Alexander’s generals.

One took Macedonia and Greece.
Another took Thrace and Asia Minor.
Ptolemy took Egypt.
And Seleucus took Syria, Babylon, and Persia –
the largest empire of the four – but also the most difficult!

But the Seleucid dynasty flourished.
And after 150 years, there arose a little horn, named Antiochus Epiphanes:

c. The Little Horn Which Overthrew the Sanctuary (v9-12)

⁹ Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. ¹⁰ It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some^[a] of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. ¹¹ It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. ¹² And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression,^[b] and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper.

Notice the way in which the “little horn” is called “exceedingly great” (v9, v10, v11)

It grew exceedingly great
“toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land.”

The “glorious land” refers to Judah.

It grew great, even to the host of heaven.
After all, the cherubim were the guardians of the Most Holy Place.
So when it speaks of throwing some of the stars to the ground –
it is speaking of how the temple
was the place where earth and heaven meet.

It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host.

What on earth does that mean?!

Keep reading:

“And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, [from the Prince]
and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown.”

In other words, Antiochus will become “as great as God.”

And now you start to realize that this is ironic.

Antiochus Epiphanes will *claim* to be as great as the Prince of the host –
he will *claim* to be as great as God!

And as evidence, he will overthrow the sanctuary of the LORD!

Now just wait a moment!

In Daniel's day, there *was* no sanctuary!

But Daniel *knew* that the temple would be rebuilt (we'll see this in ch 9).

It would have been encouraging to hear that there *would be* a temple –

but then at the same time, discouraging to hear that it would be overthrown!

Who was this Antiochus?

Antiochus IV was a Seleucid king who tried to conquer Egypt around 169 B.C.

He needed a lot of money –

so he sold the high priesthood in Jerusalem to the highest bidder.

You may recall that Moses said that a high priest would serve until his death.

The previous high priest *wasn't dead yet* –

so he and his supporters had attacked Jerusalem

in an attempt to restore the 'rightful' high priest.

Antiochus considered this as a revolution,

and so he suppressed the rebellion with a brutal blood bath,

and looted the temple for good measure!

But then the following year, his invasion of Egypt went badly

when the Romans showed up,

and warned that if he continued his attempt to conquer Egypt,

he would have to fight Rome as well.

The Romans had defeated Antiochus III in battle less than 20 years before,

so Antiochus IV realized that he couldn't win this one.

In fury he returned up the coast – past Jerusalem.

Until this point, Antiochus (and his predecessors)

had allowed the Jews to continue their own traditions,

but wherever they went, the Macedonian kings

sought to establish Greek language and culture.

The Greeks generally thought that everyone worshiped the same gods,

so Amon-Ra in Egypt was simply Zeus under a different name.

Likewise, Antiochus declared that Yahweh was simply Zeus

and ordered that sacrifices to Zeus be made in the temple in Jerusalem.

No longer would the Jews be allowed to practice the Sabbath or circumcision,

but all Jewish rituals would conform to Hellenistic standards.

“In every town in Judaea sacrifice was to be offered to the heathen gods.

Overseers were sent everywhere to see that the royal command was carried out...

Once a month a check was made, and whoever was found

with a scroll of the Torah

or had had a child circumcised,
was put to death...
[In] December 167 B.C., a heathen altar was built in Jerusalem...
and on 25 Kislev the first heathen sacrifice was offered on it.” (in Davis, 112)

Sinclair Ferguson notes that there is a regular three-fold pattern
that Satan always uses in his opposition to Christ and his kingdom:
Ending the daily sacrifices.
Overthrowing the place of the sanctuary
Throwing truth to the ground.

The sacrifices were the way in which God’s people dealt with sin and approached God.
Without the daily sacrifices,
sin was not forgiven, and God’s people could not come near their God.
Christ is our once-for-all sacrifice –
but we need to continually draw near to God *through him!*
And we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God.

The sanctuary was the *place* where God’s people met with God.
Antiochus defiled the sanctuary.
Now, in Christ, *you* (plural) are the temple of the Holy Spirit.
The church is the place where God meets with his people.
Yet Satan tries to convince people that they don’t need the church,
because if he can split the church apart,
then he can defile God’s holy temple.

And throwing truth to the ground –
well, there is nothing new there!
Satan continues to assault the church – seeking whom he may devour –
and so there will come many who try to lead the people of God astray.

In Antiochus’s day, it was the party of the Hellenists – later called the Sadducees
Jews who encouraged compromise,
and relaxed the rigor of the law
in order to gain power.

In our day there are also those who encourage us to “blend in” to our society –
so that we can be a “witness.”

But Daniel and his friends insisted on maintaining their “alien” status.
They were exiles – and they accepted that status.

But how long will the assault on the worship, the people, and the truth of God continue?

d. How Long? 2,300 Evening-Mornings (v13-14)

¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate,

and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?”¹⁴ And he said to me,^[c] “For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.”

Some say that the 2,300 evening-mornings could refer to 2,300 daily sacrifices (1,150 days) – although the desecration of the temple only lasted for less than 1,100 days. Others suggest that it means 2,300 days – which would be the approximate length of Antiochus’ persecution as a whole (six years and four months).

The fact that neither is precise – but both are plausible – inclines me to the view that both may well be intended!

But more importantly, the point is that it will be a long time.
Three years is a long time to go without the ability to worship God.
Six years is a long time to be under the oppression of a tyrant
who is deliberately trying to suppress the worship of your God!

But the point here is that these times of suffering and affliction are both serious and temporary.

2. The Interpretation (v15-26)

a. “The Vision Is for the Time of the End” (v15-17)

¹⁵ When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. ¹⁶ And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, “Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.” ¹⁷ So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, “Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end.”

So what do we make of all this?

Daniel, in the midst of his vision, very much wants to understand what he is seeing.
And he sees one having the appearance of a man –
Gabriel (the one who will later speak to Zechariah and Mary).
And Gabriel says first “that the vision is for the time of the end.”

God is telling his servant in advance,
so that the people of God will be prepared for that coming day.

b. The Medo-Persian Empire Shall Fall to the Greeks (v18-22)

¹⁸ And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up. ¹⁹ He said, “Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end. ²⁰ As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹ And the goat^[d] is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king.

And Gabriel provides a brief summary of the history of the kingdom of Medo-Persia and Greece.
The Persian empire will fall to the king of Greece –

and his kingdom will be divided in four.
But the focus is on the “little horn”:

c. The King Who Will Rise Up against the Prince of Princes (v23-26)

²² As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his^[e] nation, but not with his power. ²³ And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise.

In terms of political history,

Antiochus Epiphanes is not one of the important kings!

Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Alexander, Ptolemy I –

all of these were far more important to world history than Antiochus Epiphanes!

But Antiochus would do something that no other king had ever done before him!

He would seek to completely eradicate the worship of Yahweh.

This is why Gabriel says “when the transgressors have reached their limit...”

If loving God is the greatest commandment,

then the refusal to love God is the greatest sin.

²⁴ His power shall be great—but not by his own power; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints.

While this describes Antiochus well, Sinclair Ferguson rightly notes

“that activity is the embryonic form of evil that all antichrists perpetrate
in one form or another.” (161)

John tells us in 1 John 2 that many antichrists have come – and will come.

Antiochus Epiphanes was one.

Nero was another.

Several Roman emperors would count – as well as several wicked popes.

Anyone who seeks to destroy the saints shares in the spirit of antichrist.

²⁵ By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand.

The historians tell us that Antiochus Epiphanes died of an exceedingly painful disease
as he returned home from Persia.

The wicked will always overstep themselves.

Remember what Gabriel said –

“at the latter end of their kingdom,

when the transgressors have reached their limits...”

This echoes what God had said to Abraham

about how he would give the Promised Land to Abraham's Seed,
when the wickedness of the Amorites was complete. (Gen 15:16)

Yes, we are still awaiting the *final* end.

But there have been many *ends* in history.

Many times God has said, "Enough."

Evil always overreaches.

It's part of the nature of evil to never be satisfied.

Alexander always wanted more.

So did Antiochus.

So did the Democrats when they were in power.

And now so do the Republicans when they are in power.

Every empire has fallen.

Don't be deceived, dear brothers and sister!

Don't think for a moment that the American empire is *good* for you!

Think of the ordinary people of Babylon during the Persian invasion.

Most of the ordinary people of Babylon lived through it –
and were just as well off (if not better) afterwards.

When Persia fell to Alexander,

daily life in Babylon continued without much confusion.

When the British empire fell, most Brits barely noticed.

Even your physical well-being does *not* depend on empires!

²⁶ *The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now.*"

In one sense, Daniel's vision was not *for him*.

It refers to many days from now.

It was given to Daniel

in order that the people of God might be prepared for the trouble ahead.

If you knew that *in your days* there would be peace and tranquility,

but that at some point in the distant future, there would be trouble ahead –
how would you respond?

I think that most of us would feel a little sorrow for our great-great-grandchildren,
and then breathe a sigh of relief and say, "At least it won't be me!"

Even the good king, Hezekiah, had that reaction!

But Daniel's reaction is different.

d. How Long? Daniel's Illness (v27)

²⁷ *And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.*

“I Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days.”

Daniel is depressed.

He is so overwhelmed by the vision

that he cannot get out of bed for days.

To you who are overwhelmed by the awfulness of life in this age, I say this:

You are right.

The nonstop assault on Jesus – on his people – on those made in the image of God

and the attempted eradication of the church of Jesus Christ

by the forces of antichrist

should make us sick!

How long, O Lord?!

How long, O Lord? Faithful and true, until you bring judgment on the wicked?

At the same time, until our Lord returns, we still have to live in this age!

And so we must be about the king's business.

I so *wish* that Daniel could have been talking about King Jesus' business!

But no, the king here is King Belshazzar.

I want you to think about how Daniel went about King Belshazzar's business.

Before Daniel ever saw the handwriting on the wall,

he had seen the vision of the Medo-Persian empire

destroying Babylon –

and then being destroyed by Alexander the Great.

He knew that he was serving a failed king

whose days were numbered.

But he went about the king's business –

because that is what God called him to do.

If you knew that Christ was going to return this Friday,

what would you do this week?

When someone asked John Wesley that question,

Wesley reached into his pocket and found his notebook where he kept his appointments,

and he read out the things that he had already planned to do.

Someone might say, “Oh that's all well and good for Wesley, he was a preacher!”

But while the particular duties of your call may differ from mine,
there's no difference with respect to the God who called us.
When Jesus returns, he expects to find you doing what he has called you to do!

If your job is to serve as an advisor to a wicked king,
then God expects you to do your job well until he relieves you of that duty!
And God expects you to help that king be a little less wicked!