



gracefellowship

Daniel: Thriving in Exile
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A Vision Beyond Understanding

I don't know if you're like me or not, but I love movies! And I'm the kind of guy who can be flipping through channels and see a movie I've watched 15 times before and yet will stop and watch it again! But sometimes we see movies that leave us at the end more confused than anything. Have you ever watched a movie that by the time it was over you had more questions than answers?

- Inception
- The Matrix
- Groundhog Day: Such a good movie- one of my favorites...but I have so many questions! Why did he keep waking up in the same day? How long was he there? Did everyone know they were experiencing the same day over and over or just him?
I'll probably go home and watch that this afternoon!

As we move into Daniel chapter 8 today we are going to find Daniel receive another vision from God. It's been 2 years since the vision we talked about last week; Daniel tells us this was in the third year of Belshazzar's reign. But at the end of the vision we are going to look at today here is what Daniel says:

:: Daniel 8:27

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

So, here is what we are going to see today. Daniel is going to have a vision of two animals fighting. These will correspond to two of the beasts from his vision in chapter 7. Then we are going to hear the interpretation of the vision as given by the angel Gabriel. Finally, we are going to see that Daniel doesn't fully understand what he saw or what is going to happen in the future.

Some of the events we are going to talk about today happen during the time period we call the intertestamental period. In other words, between the OT and the NT there are approximately 400 years of history the Bible doesn't address.

Daniel is living in the Babylonian kingdom, but there is about to be a transfer of power. The Persians will allow the Jewish people and other conquered people to return to their homeland as a gesture of good will and to garner their support in this new kingdom. And then Greece, under the leadership of Alexander the Great, will treat the people of God well when he conquers the globe. However, following Alexander a kingdom will rise that will dominate the people of God. These things unfold in the vision we will see today. Let's look at Daniel's vision together.

:: Daniel 8:1-14

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 it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great.

5 As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.

6 It came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage.

7 I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power.

8 The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the 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 commander of the army of the LORD; it took away the daily sacrifice from the LORD, and his sanctuary was thrown down.

12 Because of rebellion, the LORD's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. 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, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the LORD's people?"

14 He said to me, “It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.”

The Setting:

Daniel tells us this is a vision- perhaps different from the dream he had in chapter 7. He finds himself beside the citadel of Susa. This would have been strange within the Babylonian kingdom where Daniel was living because it was the capital of the Persian empire. God is showing Daniel where the kingdom is headed and that Babylon is going to fall to another power. Just like the dream of the statue Nebuchadnezzar had and the dream Daniel had, Babylon is going to fall to other nations.

The Animals:

Daniel sees two animals in his vision. Unlike the dream he had in Chapter 7, these are natural looking animals: a ram and a goat. But, just like his previous dream, these animals represent kingdoms that are coming to take the place of Babylon.

On the heads of the animals are horns.

The Ram has two horns, one longer than the other.

The Goat has a prominent horn that later breaks and four horns grow in its place. From one of the four horns a little horn grows up and grows in power, moving toward the south, the east and toward the Beautiful Land (Israel).

In the vision we see Daniel tell us that this horn does some things which appear supernatural:

10 It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth.

What in the world might that mean? It sounds very cosmic and supernatural, doesn't it? Does it mean this man somehow displaced angels and fought against them? In Genesis the covenant with Abraham is that he will have descendants as numerous as the stars. Then in Exodus we read that the people of God are sometimes called the army of the Lord, or the host of the Lord may be another way of saying that. So, this may simply mean that Antiochus went to war against the people of God and prevailed against them.

However, in any personal conflict there is a spiritual battle that is being waged in the cosmic realm we cannot see. In fact, we will get a personal glimpse into that reality when we study Daniel 10-11 in January after we take a break for our Christmas series.

In the NT we are told in Ephesians to put on God's armor so we can our stand against the devil's schemes. Paul tells us "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12)

We are also told this horn set himself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the LORD- God Himself- taking over the daily sacrifice and doing away with truth. He is literally going to go to the Temple in Jerusalem and take over the sacrificial system in a detestable way and finally end all sacrifices to God.

Then a question is asked, not by Daniel, but by one of the holy ones Daniel sees in his vision (an angel).

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, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the LORD’s people?”

14 He said to me, “It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.”

There are different ways to approach that number and people disagree about it all the time. In the interpretation we are not told specifically what it means, so I’m going to give you the ways of thinking about it. I won’t claim to know the exact meaning, because even looking back in history we can’t conclusively agree on what is meant here.

2300 evenings and mornings

First, this could simply mean after 2300 days this man’s rule will come to an end and the temple will be restored.

Second, there were evening and morning sacrifices, so if you take each sacrifice that could mean 1500 days with 2300 sacrifices- one in the evening, one in the morning.

What is most important to know is that after a period of suffering and injustice, God brought this wickedness to a close and the sanctuary was reconsecrated.

As we are working through this book of prophecy it’s important to learn something about Scripture: The interpretation of the Bible is not left up to us alone. When reading Scripture it is important to let the Bible interpret the Bible! Which is why we keep reading. In the middle of a crazy vision Daniel is not left to himself to interpret what he saw and make up an interpretation that suits him. We must also fight the urge to read Scripture and then make up an interpretation that is not supported by the rest of the Bible. Follow along with me as the interpretation is given.

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.

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 its 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, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise.

24 He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, 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, for it concerns the distant future.”

Interpreting the Vision:

- 1. The time of the end- This doesn't mean the end of all time, rather the end of the Jewish captivity when they will return home and what will happen to them there.**

This vision may have dual interpretation value. It is something that was in Daniel's future and our distant past. But this vision may also allude to things still to come at the very end of time. We will see the immediate interpretation for Daniel was the rise of two kingdoms, which for us have already come and gone.

2. The Ram and the Goat

In Daniel's dream from chapter 7 we are not told exactly what kingdoms the beasts represent. Here we are given the specifics of which kingdoms Daniel is seeing. It would have been difficult for Daniel to imagine the fall of Babylon, and yet God shows him who is coming to claim the power of this great nation.

The two-horned Ram = The kings of Media and Persia.

The two horns were not equal; one was larger than the other. Persia would become the dominant empire. And they led much differently than the Babylonians when they conquered people. The Persians allowed the Jewish people to return home after years in captivity, where Ezra and Nehemiah then helped rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

Persia's reign would last only so long before they would fall- and we are told the next kingdom rising to power is Greece.

The shaggy Goat = Greece.

We are told this goat has a large horn between his eyes and that it is the first King. This represents Alexander the Great (and while not the first ever king, the greatest of Greece's history). But then four horns emerge when the first is broken off. We know from history that when Alexander died his two children were killed and his empire was left to four generals who split the empire into smaller sections. The two most notable are the Ptolemies and Seleucids.

The angel then tells us what happens toward the end of their reigns. One specific king will arise who will once again go to war with the people of God and therefore with God Himself.

23 “In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise.

24 He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, 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.

Out of the Seleucid kingdom a man named Antiochus Epiphanes IV emerged to claim power. We are told several specific things about him:

- He would be a master of intrigue (a liar and deceiver- a master manipulator)
- He would become strong, but not by his own power (he was not first in line for the throne, but took over through military support). This could also mean that Satan was behind the actions of Antiochus as he worked in the cosmic realm to fight against God.
- He would cause astounding devastation (when Antiochus came against the Jews he slaughtered tens of thousands of Jewish people. Not only that, he brought an image of Zeus into the Temple and desecrated it by worshiping a false God. He also sacrificed pigs on the alter of the Temple, which were unclean and improper for sacrifice before he stopped the Jewish people from making sacrifices altogether.
- He would consider himself superior (not only to other men, but to God and would set himself up as a god)

Here is the final thing we learn about this king who goes against the people of God: he will be destroyed, but not by human power.

In other words, he didn't die at the hands of a man. We are told historically that when the Jews once again took Jerusalem out of his grasp that he laid on his bed, became ill and died.

So, what are we supposed to do with all this? If this has happened in the past where does it leave us today as followers of Jesus?

First, let's talk about suffering as Christians.

There is a time and purpose for suffering.

Sometimes it is due to the sin of our persecutors. Sometimes it is the result of our sin or someone in our faith community.

We are told in Daniel 8:12 that these things happened because of rebellion. We aren't told if they are the rebellious actions of the Greeks or the Jews, but there was a price to be paid because of sin.

Then there are also times God simply does not tell us the reason for our suffering.

Here is the hard truth. God allows His people to go through times of suffering. Think of Job. God never let him peek behind the scenes and find out why he was going through all he endured. But he gained a right sized view of God's glory through his trials.

Trials are meant to strengthen our faith.

:: **James 1:2-4**

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

I could read a dozen passages like that.

God does not owe us an explanation for our suffering, but He always has a reason and He always has an end.

In Daniel 8 we see that the allotted time for persecution was 2300 days. We talked about that earlier. For us, that end might be in this life as we endure a season of suffering and hardship or the life to come when God takes home through the gateway of death, but human authorities will not always have power over the people of God. The reason God allows those things in your life may not make sense to you, but you can know that God always has His glory and your good in mind as He takes you through the trials of life.

Here's the second thing we can take from this passage to help us live out our faith...

God is in control.

Daniel received this vision decades before they came to pass. God knows every detail of human history before it unfolds. God is not caught off guard by the things that happen in this world. No matter what comes our way, God is in control

and we can trust Him. He has even written your personal story before you were ever born.

:: Jeremiah 1:4-5

4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

:: Psalm 139:16

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Here’s the final thing for us to see today and apply to our lives.

After having the vision, Daniel went back to faithful service of the king.

This ties back into everything we have seen from the life of Daniel in the first 6 chapters of this book- in the middle of hardships, difficulty and exile from his home land, Daniel is always faithful and full of integrity.

After seeing this vision he is distraught, full of angst, and confused, but he serves God by being faithful in his day to day life to the position he holds- even in a pagan kingdom.

No matter what you are going through right now, the highest priority you have in life is faithful obedience to King Jesus. Daniel took a few sick days and then he got up and went about the king’s business! Maybe you’ve sidelined yourself for a period of time because you were angry that God was allowing you to go through some hard things. Maybe you’ve been calling in sick to kingdom work for a long time because you couldn’t understand why God would do some of the things He’s done in your life. It’s time to get back to work! If you need help doing that we would love to talk to you about dealing with the things you’ve gone through so you can get back up and reenter the service of our King.

- Pray